

EWC Bible Basics

Introduction to the Bible

BY LISA EL-RAMEY

If you are like me, you enjoy having some structure and guidance when you begin something new. If you are new to the Bible, it may be helpful to have a guide before you pick that giant book up and feel immediately overwhelmed. Even if you have experience and knowledge of the Bible, a quick reference guide can be helpful.

In short, the Bible is a compilation of many books. Take a quick look at the way those books are structured to better understand how and where to begin your Bible reading journey.

The Bible is broken into two components, the Old and the New Testament. Prior to the New Testament there was no “Bible”. Jesus’s “Bible” would have been the Old Testament. The New Testament is comprised of the life, teachings and actions of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Christians study the Bible because we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament is 39 books. These are divided into four main sections.

- Pentateuch
- Historical
- Poetry & Wisdom
- Prophecy

Prophetic Books are further broken down into Major Prophets and Minor Prophets.

Beginning with the Pentateuch (the Torah/Law), these are the first five books of the Bible. It is believed these are primarily authored by Moses. Written more than 3,000 years ago, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, contain God’s dealings with humankind from the creation of the world to the death of Moses. It combines poetry, prose and law in a chronological drama spanning thousands of years.

These are followed by the historical books. The 12 books that make up this segment tell the story of the Israelites experience with the Promised Land, each other, and more importantly, with their God. This begins with the death of Moses on Mt. Nebo just outside the Promised land and Joshua having been chosen to lead the people into that promised land. This covers the time period from approximately 1400 - 400 BC

The poetry and wisdom books are comprised of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. These beautifully written works are timeless handbooks of life. The themes range from praise and prayer, guidance for holy lives, our relationship with God and our relationships with each other.

Lastly, the prophetic books record the ministries of the prophets. These prophets from God were sent to encourage, warn, and guide his people. Broken down into major and minor prophets, the designation of major or minor is based on the length of the books. The Old Testament prophets brought the word of God to the people and they intercede on behalf of the people before God.

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NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament consists of 27 books. These are divided into Gospels and Acts and Epistles and Revelation.

Beginning with the arrival of Jesus Christ, the Gospels narrate the life of Christ and Acts tells the story of the first Christians. This is followed by the 21 epistles. The epistles are letters from the early church leaders to churches and believers explaining the effects of Jesus' ministry, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the spread of the gospel. 13 of these letters are written by the apostle Paul (Romans through Philemon). The remaining 8 (Hebrews through Jude) are written by other apostles or early church leaders.

The book of Revelation is a type of writing known as apocalyptic literature. Apocalyptic literature reveals God's plans that were hidden to humanity and conveyed through signs, symbols, dreams, and visions. The book is clear on three points:

- Christ is coming back and will judge humanity.
- The powers of evil are doomed before Christ.
- God promises a wonderful future for all who believe in Christ

Armed with some knowledge of the basic structure of the Bible's books and information in each book, here is a some other helpful information.

While there are page numbers in the Bible, most references are to book, chapter, and possibly, verse. In the upper, outer corners of the pages one will see the book and chapter the page contains. As an example, the New Living Translation Bible (NLT Thinline Reference Tyndale House Publishers), when opened to page 244, the left upper page has 1 Samuel 4 and the upper right page has 1 Samuel 6. It should be noted that the left hand page actually contains the remainder of 1 Samuel 3, but the reference at the top of the page lets the reader know where the beginning of the chapter is (in this case chapter 4).

Bible quotes will be followed by the name of the book, a reference to the chapter(s) and lastly the verse(s). It is common to see this information along with the version of the Bible the quote is taken from. For example:

"For this is how God loved the world. He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" John 3:16 NLT

This is a well known quote from the Book of John (New Testament), is from Chapter 3, and is verse 16. This is quoted from the New Living Translation. In this version of the Bible, quotes from Jesus are printed in red ink.

Through this referencing system it is quite easy to look up any Bible reference. Bibles usually have an index at the front to guide readers to the first page of a book.

Now that you know a little more about the structure and how to navigate the Bible, the next step of your Christian journey is to find a version of the Bible you can best understand. This may seem like an odd statement, but I grew up with the Kings James Version. Believe me,

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this is the same as reading Shakespeare or Chaucer and unless you are a fan of 14-16 century english this is NOT the version you want to pick up! There are many great contemporary Bibles and many online sources of Bibles that are free. I would suggest you do some Bible searches for the American Standard, English Standard, New International etc. In addition to versions with contemporary language, there are Bibles that are color coded, have study references, maps, visual overviews, and apps! Too many to list here for sure, but know there is one that is perfect for you.

I hope you find this short introduction to the Bible helpful and I wish you the very best on the greatest journey you will ever undertake. No matter if you have taken Christ as your Savior or you even consider yourself a Christian, the Bible is the greatest book on human history and behavior ever written. Whatever you are going through, your experience is not unique. The Bible offers comfort and guidance for every human circumstance and as you begin your journey, you will gain greater benefit if you ask God for direction.

REFERENCES:

Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996, 2004, 2015 Tyndale House Foundation

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