



WRIGHT TRACK MINISTRIES

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WRIGHT TRACK VIRTUAL UNIVERSITY

WTVU Bible Lesson #3

Section 1

Lesson Objectives:

1. Familiarize the student with the structure of the Bible by means of a basic overview and survey of the Bible.

Survey of the Bible...

The Bible is one divinely unified book. The Bible has two basic divisions, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 books and was written in Hebrew with a few portions in Ezra and Daniel written in Aramaic. The New Testament contains 27 books and was written in Greek. Lets take a look at the basic structural divisions of our Bible. If you are not familiar with it, you will find that the **Bible** is quite a **library** in and of itself!

[Old Testament](#) | [Intertestamental Period](#) | [New Testament](#) | [After the New Testament](#)

The Old Testament

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The first division of the Old Testament is known as "the Pentateuch", "The Law of Moses", "The Law", or "The Torah" as Jewish people today call it. It contains the first 5 books of the Bible, **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy**. In these books we are taken from creation to the end of the wilderness wanderings of the Children of Israel and their preparation to go into the promised land. The time covered is from eternity past to about 1400 B.C.

We start in eternity past and pick up at the point when God in his infinite wisdom begins creation. But did you realize that even though that Genesis 1:1 is the first verse in the Bible this is not the earliest activities of God we know about? We learn the origins of the universe, the earth, life on earth and man. We see the downfall of man and the promise of a Redeemer. We go through the flood with Noah and are introduced to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph the lineage through which Jesus will come. We see the patience and love God shows to Abraham and his descendents to fulfill His promise. We find the story of Moses, the plagues and Pharaoh. The " Ten Commandments" and " The Law" are recorded here. Here are written the foundations of the sacrificial system that were a shadow of things to come.

The second division of the Old Testament is known as the "Historical Books." This division of the Old Testament contains 12 books. Beginning with **Joshua** and ending with **Esther**, these books take us from the entry of Israel into the Promised Land to the decline, division, and captivity of both Israel and Judah and to the restoration of a remnant under Ezra and Nehemiah. In these books we find the stories of the lives of Judges, Kings, Prophets and other great leaders as well as villains.

This section of the Bible covers a thousand years of history. In these books we learn about the Israelite leaders from Joshua to Ezra and Nehemiah. We have the exploits of the Judges of Israel like Shamgar who alone killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad. The famous strongman Samson, who with his bare hands, tore a huge gate from the stone wall of a city and carried it to the top of a nearby hill. In this sacred collection of books you will find the stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha and others. During this era we find the unfolding of the monarchy in Israel. We have the stories of the lives of several generations of Kings from the Royal House of David. These books cover the times from about 1400 B.C. to about 430 B.C.

The third division of the Old Testament is referred to by some as "The Poetical Books" or "Wisdom Literature". It contains 5 books which are **Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon**. These are examples of Hebrew Poetry, Music, and Wisdom. You have here the book of Job which Bible scholars have found predates Abraham. You will find the Psalms of King David as well as the writings of King Solomon. Take note that the Bible is not in strict chronological order.

In the book of Job we have an amazing story of a man that showed his faithfulness to God irregardless of circumstances. Job is perhaps earlier in time than Moses or even Abraham. The book of Psalms contains some of the most beautiful and beloved chapters in the Bible. This is a wonderful collection of 150 inspired songs. This was the Hymnal of the Old Testament saints. You'll find great wisdom in Proverbs and philosophical reflection Ecclesiastes. The Song of Solomon speaks of the happiness and sanctity of wedded love. The beauty and majesty of these books is unsurpassed.

The fourth division of the Old Testament is known as the "Major Prophets." This division contains 5 books. The books are **Isaiah,**

Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. These books contain a wealth of prophecies that concern the coming Messiah, the nation of Israel, the Millennium, the end of the world, and many other subjects. These prophecies also speak of the love, power, sovereignty, and desire of God to save the lost. The time of these writings are from about 740 B.C. to about 600 B.C. Some of these writings were penned in Israel and some were written in Babylon.

Isaiah prophesied of the virgin birth and of many facts about the death and resurrection of Christ. We have a glimpse of the throne room of God in the beginning of this sacred book. Jeremiah and Lamentations show us warning against sin and God's judgment, justice and mercy. We also find many prophecies that were fulfilled and some to yet come to pass. The prophet Ezekiel is known for his Vision of the Flying Wheel and is probably one of the most obedient prophets by example in the Bible. Ezekiel employed acting and pantomime in his messages. In Daniel we have many amazing prophecies and the well known stories of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego and Daniel and the Lion's den.

The fifth division of the Old Testament and also the last is known as the "Minor Prophets." They are not referred to as minor because they are less important than the major ones. They are called minor because they are shorter books. There are 12 books in this section. They begin with **Hosea** and end with **Malachi**. These books are often neglected but they contain a wealth of prophecy and information that can truly be a blessing to the Christian. These prophetic messages are still timely and relevant. Amos is known as the prophet against social injustice. Who hasn't heard the story of Jonah and the whale (great fish!) Zechariah shows us many glimpses into the future with its Revelation like imagery. You say you haven't read any of them? What are you going to say to Habakkuk or Zephaniah when you see one of them in Heaven and he asks you, "What did **you** think about **my book**?" These books were written from about 750 B.C. to about 450 B.C.

Between the Testaments...

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The period between the testaments lasted about 400 years. They are referred to by some as the "400 Silent Years" or "The Intertestamental Period". During this time there were no prophets sent to Israel and the Jews gradually began to believe that there would be no more prophets. Remember that Israel was divided into 2 kingdoms. Most of the nation was in captivity because they had rejected God. A remnant was living in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, a prince from King David's family lineage. This occupation was allowed by the permission of the Persian King Cyrus and was continued through his predecessors. The situation may have seemed less than ideal for Israel, but God was at work in the world. He was still in control.

Many things happened between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New Testament. World powers had risen and fallen. Some nations were destroyed never to rise again. God had miraculously preserved Israel and the writings of the Old Testament through these times of war, destruction, power struggles and upheaval. This is nothing short of a miracle in itself. God protected and preserved His People and His Word. The following are the six eras of history that the Jews at Jerusalem survived from the close of the book of Malachi to the birth of Christ.

The Persian Era: 398 - 336 B.C.

The Greek Era: 336 - 323 B.C.

The Egyptian Era: 323 - 198 B.C.

The Syrian Era: 198 - 165 B.C.

The Maccabean Era: 165 - 163 B.C.

The Roman Era: 63 - 4 B.C.

As the New Testament opens, things are very different politically, socially, and in the religious world of the Jewish people. We find Israel as a provincial territory under Roman rule. Herod the Great is now the king. The Romans had appointed his grandfather, Antipas as governor of Idumaea. After this, Herod's father Antipater was made procurator of Judea by Julius Caesar. Finally, Marc Antony appointed Herod as the Tetrarch of Galilee. Israel was ruled by a politically appointed King who was partly Jewish but more properly an Edomite.

Galatians 4:4 "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,"

During this Intertestamental Period, God had been busy renovating the political system of the world to make it ready for His Son and more suitable for the spreading of the Gospel. A system of Roman roads now ties the Roman Empire together. Travel between countries was now possible due to Rome's conquests, government, and a relative peace in these times. Greek had become a universal language for business, trade, and philosophical exchanges. The Old Testament had been translated into Greek and circulated. God had set the stage for the greatest drama in the history of the universe!

In the religious world we see the introduction of the Sanhedrin, Scribes, Sadducees, and the Pharisees. The Pharisees were a sect that started out as what we would call conservatives. They were devoted to the keeping of the Law. They separated themselves from people who they considered to be unclean. This eventually led to not just following the Law but, their own interpretations and ideas became and of equal importance to observe. The Pharisees followed the letter of the Law but totally lost the Spirit of the Law. They became a group that considered themselves better than everyone else and to be God's favorite and most righteous people. They were the inventors of the "Holier than Thou" attitude.

The Scribes were ones who copied the Law and the Sacred Scriptures. They were Rabbis and Lawyers and Judges and were often in the company of the aristocrats of the Jewish people and were very close to the Sanhedrin. The once noble scribe like Ezra on the Old Testament had degenerated into a position of corruption. Their training usually began at age 14 and would go in some cases to the age of 30. They were highly respected and many were among the wealthiest and most respected in Israel. They suffered from the opinion that

their superior knowledge made them better than the average person.

The Sadducees, the wealthy aristocrats, originally in political and practical dealings with the Syrians relied more on worldly prudence than belief in the God. The Sadducees were a sect that did not accept anything other than the five books of Moses. They were second in popularity to the Pharisees. They did not accept any doctrines that were not found in the Law. They rejected things such as angels, demons and the resurrection. They too were self-serving and self-justifying.

The Sanhedrin was the ruling body of the Religion of the Jewish Religion. It was presided over by the High Priest who was now appointed by a Roman official. The rest of this body was made up of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. There were 70 members in the Sanhedrin. This seems to a dim reflection of the tribunal of 70 Moses appointed to help him with matters during the wilderness wanderings. It is interesting to notice that the 70 Moses appointed seems to have disappeared in the book of Joshua and resurfaced in the New Testament.

If have ever been curious about the books written during this time, they do have some historical value such as the book of 1 Maccabees but the Jews rejected them as being inspired scripture. There were too many problems associated with them be considered a part of Jewish Scripture. For instance, if a book conflicted with the teachings laid down in the Law of Moses, the Jews rejected it. The conservative Jewish scholars of Jesus' day did not accept them. If they were to be accepted, I am sure Jesus would have made an issue out of it. Also the Apostle Paul made no use of them. If you have ever wondered if should we take these books to be "Sacred Scripture" with the other books of the Bible Jesus didn't think so and neither did Paul. I am more than satisfied with their opinion on this matter.

The New Testament

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The first division of the New Testament is known as the "Gospels." The Gospels are the four books of **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**. Here we have four biographies of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The books bear the names of their respective authors. Each book captures a unique perspective on the life of Jesus for us. There are just a few weeks of his three year ministry recorded in these books and yet they have changed the world. It is interesting to note the apostle John's opinion on this in the last verse of his gospel in John 21:25 "And I suppose that if all the other things Jesus did were written down, the whole world could not contain the books." This book was written about 90 A.D. These books cover a time span from about 4 B.C. to 30 A.D. If you are wondering why 4 B.C., it's a long story but let's just say that a monk in the middle ages missed a few years in his calculations and when the official calendar was set, well it is off a few years. Remember this has absolutely no bearing in the Bible's accuracy or trustworthiness. The Gospels were written between 50 and 90 A.D.

The second section of the New Testament is the "Historical Section." It is made up of the **Book of Acts**. This book is a continuation of Luke's Gospel written to a man named Theophilus whose name literally means "friend of God" The Book of Acts takes us from the ascension of Jesus, through the birth and growth of the Church. It introduces us to the first recorded Christian martyr in the person of Stephen. We see the life and conversion of Saul of Tarsus who we know better as St. Paul, and the spread of the Church throughout the Roman Empire. It is here we find that the Gospel "approved for Gentile consumption" through the story of Cornelius and Peter. The time covered here is from about 30 A.D. to 60 A.D. The church grows from a small insignificant Jewish sect isolated to a few towns in a Roman occupied area to living growing movement across an entire empire.

The third section of the New Testament is known as "The Letters of Paul" or "Pauline Epistles". There are 13 books in this section of the New Testament beginning with **Romans** and ending with **Philemon**. From this we can see that St. Paul wrote nearly half of the books of the New Testament. We have books to both churches and to individuals. The time of these writings range from about 48 A.D. to 60 A.D. Here we have some of the most powerful doctrinal writings in the Bible. You will find letters to individual people like Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Paul's correspondence to individual churches such as to the church in Corinth and letters to entire regions like to the letter to the Galatians can be found here.

The fourth section of the New Testament is known as the "General Epistles." These 8 books start with **Hebrews** and end with the book of **Jude**. Here we have writings to the Church in general. You will find the writings of Peter, Jude, James, and John. Some these books introduce us to warnings of things that were beginning to creep into the Church. We are warned about false doctrines and false teachers. We are told of the necessity of loving one another, the Supremacy of Christ, and how a Christian should act in the Church and society. You also have the last writings of these men of God to the Church. These books were written from about 65 - 95 A.D.

The fifth section of the New Testament is the book of **Revelation**. While in exile on a Sunday morning on the Isle of Patmos, the Apostle John received this Revelation of the end times. John saw Jesus and was given a warning to the Seven Churches in Asia and then was shown the events that would lead up to the final defeat of Satan and sin. Here we learn of the New Heavens and the New Earth and of an eternity with God in Heaven. Regardless of the view you may have on the overall interpretation of Revelation, remember this. Satan and his followers loose and God wins forever. This book was written about 90 A.D. It covers from 90 A.D. to Eternity.

For another look at a survey of the Bible try a [Whirlwind Tour of the Bible](#). This humorous online survey will be a good review for you on this portion of this lesson.

After the New Testament...

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By the close of the first century, all of the New Testament books had been written. God had given us all that we needed for our New Testament. There were some writings after the close of the New Testament. You will find these works referred to as the Apocryphal or Deuterocanonical Books. Books such as the "Acts of Peter "and "The Gospel of Thomas" and several others were soundly rejected by the early church fathers for some of the same types reasons that the Jewish people rejected the writings that came about during the Intertestamental Period.

These writings introduce doctrines that find no support in the other books of New Testament. For example, in the book "The Acts of Peter and the Apostles" (This supposedly takes place after Jesus has ascended into heaven.) (This supposedly takes place after Jesus has ascended into heaven after His resurrection.)

While on a journey, the Apostles sailed to a city named Habitation. (By the way, there is no record of a city by this name ever existing) The Apostles meet up with Jesus there, who has disguised himself as a merchant named Lithagoel who is selling expensive pearls. Later, Jesus changes into a physician and later after this reveals himself as a Jesus. He then gives them a "magic powder" to enable them to heal people. The disciples then become greatly concerned and very worried about going around healing people because no one has trained them to be doctors...

This is just one example of the ridiculous type of stories that these books contain. These books were written anywhere from about 100 A.D. to 325 A.D. Besides containing information that is incredulous, many of these books contain heretical material and were used by some to try to introduce false doctrines into the church.. This is why the early church fathers rejected them and they never made it past the first screening. Remember, don't let anyone tell you that there have been lost books of the Bible found. They were never lost. We have known about them all along.

For those of you who are interested in the history of the Bible and how it came to us in it's present day form, follow this link [How the Bible came to us](#). These are very good articles on the subject.

Assignment

Memorize the divisions of the Old Testament and the New Testament , the books in each one along with the time period they cover. This will be a great help to you in your study and handling of the Bible.

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