

How the Bible Came to Us Organization of the Bible's Old Testament

Who chose the books that make up the Old Testament? How was the Old Testament organized? One way to understand this is by examining four questions.

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God tells the nation of Israel that He determines who is a prophet and how they can discern who is genuine: 1) I will put My words in his mouth and he shall speak all that I command him (Deut 18:18), and 2) he who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak shall die (Deut 18:20).



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The Cyrus Cylinder records Cyrus' repatriating captured foreigners to their former lands and restoring their cults.

Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand, and to bring the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. (Ezra 7:14-18, NASB)

Notable in the Old Testament is the continuous history of God's covenant relationship with human beings. Each successive prophet wrote, in many cases, with a link to another to provide a continuous account of this prophetic history. For example:

Samuel and Kings are linked as a historical unit.

David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the Lord was moved by prayer for the land, and the plague was held back from Israel. (2 Sam 24:25, NASB)

Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. (1 Ki 1:1, NASB)

The book of Chronicles ends with the same two verses that Ezra-Nehemiah begins with.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah—the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up!'" (2 Chron 36:22-23, NASB)

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Originally the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), as seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls, was arranged in two divisions, **the Law** and **the Prophets**. By 400 A.D., the Hebrew Bible divided further with an additional division called **the Writings**.

The Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) contains the modern divisions of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings and contains the Old Testament in 24 books. The Hebrew Bible book titles contrasts sharply with the English version, because it names the books according to their first significant word; the English book titles were derived from the Greek translation of the rabbinical name for the book.

In contrast, the English version of the Old Testament contains 39 books. However, it is unknown how or why the English version arrived in this form. This chart compares the two Old Testaments and shows their differences in books and order:

| Hebrew (English Translation) | English Old Testament Book |
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| Torah (The Five Books of Moses) 1) B'er'ēshîth (In beginning) 2) Sh'eMōth (Names) 3) Wayyigrā (And He called) 4) B'e'mīdbar (In the wilderness) 5) D'evārîm (Words) | 1) Genesis 2) Exodus 3) Leviticus 4) Numbers 5) Deuteronomy |
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This class is perhaps best taught by using the questions and elaborating upon their answers. Reviewing selected biblical citations allows the student to see for himself what God said verses a statement by a teacher which could be seen as an opinion. The important takeaway is for the student to see that there was an objective basis of determining what qualified the authority of the Old Testament book not some subjective whim of a human editor.

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With its Hebrew titles, the following chart may be confusing to the student:

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2. The English Old Testament titles were based on the Greek translation of the rabbinical (Jewish teachers of the Law) titles in Hebrew.
3. The English Old Testament books further divide some of the Hebrew Bible’s books. The chart indicates which Hebrew books were divided further.

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