

One Book or Many?

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Is the Bible only one book, or is it several books? The answer is “yes” and “yes.” The Bible is indeed a single book, but in a sense, it is also an anthology of numerous “books.” Perhaps a look at the “structure” of the Bible might enable us to know better how to read, study, and understand it.

First, the Bible has two major sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. These are further composed of 66 subsections, also commonly called “books,” 39 of which are in the Old Testament and 27 of which are in the New Testament (all but 6 of these “books” are actually letters). Long after these documents were written (A.D. 16th century), men subdivided each of these 66 books into chapters and verses to facilitate finding given statements/passages.

Second, the Bible contains several literary types. The Old Testament contains books of law, history, poetry, and prophecy. The New Testament is made up of books of biography, history, letters, and prophecy. Many of the books partake of more than one literary type (e.g., the Old Testament books of law [Genesis–Deuteronomy] are also books of history).

Third, all of the Bible books are bound together not merely by their covers, but by their theme: Mankind sinned and thereby alienated himself from His holy Creator; he cannot effect reconciliation on his own, but God will send a Redeemer and Reconciler. John 3:16 aptly summarizes the Biblical theme:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life.

We may simply summarize the Bible as follows: Someone is coming (Genesis–Zechariah), Someone has come (Matthew–John), Someone is coming again (Acts–Revelation). The 39 Old Testament books point toward the material recorded in the New Testament. The New Testament writers frequently and constantly connect their material with Old Testament prophecy, promise, and history. The Bible must be seen as a unit.

Fourth, although about 40 men wrote down the words of the Bible, they claim the Holy Spirit as their source, and many and powerful evidences give full credence to their claim.

Fifth, the Old Testament law God gave to the Jews through Moses, while inspired, has had no authority for 20 centuries. Jesus fulfilled it (Mat. 5:17–18). He “hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:14). When He died, His New Testament became God’s

spiritual law (Heb. 9:15-17). It is impossible to understand and correctly apply the Bible apart from acknowledgment of this principle.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for and it appeared in the *Denton Record-Chronicle*, Denton, TX, April 15, 2011].

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