

THE BIBLE AS A WHOLE

Our Bible consists of sixty-six component parts (or books). These are divided into two distinctive major collections, the Old Covenant Scriptures and the New Covenant Scriptures, or as we commonly know them, the Old and New Testaments. Each of these two testaments, the Old, consisting of thirty-nine books and the New, with twenty-seven, are found to be arranged in certain clearly homogeneous groups (or groups which are alike in nature). Careful investigation of these groups reveals the presence of a marvelous Divine design running through the whole. The books of the Bible are not simply a collection of writings. They are one book, one in the progressiveness of the revelation which they collectively unfold, one in the harmony of the structure which they collectively constitute, and one in the spiritual unity of the message which they collectively declare.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The First Seventeen Books

Take the Old Testament first; we start with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These obviously constitute a fivefold unity which marks them off as a separate group. They are all written by Moses. They are all historical. They have always been known as the Five Books of Moses or, the Pentateuch. As to their number, they are five. As to their nature, they are historical.

Next we come to Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Joshua to Esther are the twelve books which make up the second main group of books in the Old Testament. (We stop at Esther because in Job, we recognize a very different kind of literature.) Note the number and nature again. As to their number, they are twelve. As to their nature, they are again historical.

So then, the first stretch of our Old Testament consists of seventeen historical books, falling into a natural subdivision of five and twelve. There is a further subdivision in the twelve. The first nine (Joshua to II Chronicles) are records of Israel's occupancy of Canaan. While the last three (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) are concerned with the period after Israel's expulsion from the land and the repatriation of the "Remnant." The first seventeen historical books are really sub-divided into five (pre-Canaan), nine (in Canaan), and three (post Canaan).

The Middle Five

Next we find Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. After these five there is another natural break. Immediately following the Song of Solomon is the book of Isaiah, which is obviously introducing another and quite different set of writings, those of the prophets. There can be no doubt that Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon belongs together and make up a distinctive Old Testament group. The preceding seventeen books, as we have noted, are found to be historical, but these five are riot historical, they are individual and experiential. All of the foregoing seventeen historical books are national but, these five are not national, they are personal, they deal mainly with the problems of the individual human heart. Moreover, the preceding seventeen are all written in prose, whereas these five are poetry. So then, mark their number and nature. As to their number, they are five. As to their nature, they are experiential.

The Remaining Seventeen

Finally, we come to the remaining stretch of seventeen. This time it is the prophetic books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Obviously these seventeen belong together just as clearly as do the seventeen historical books. Just as we found the seventeen historical books sub-dividing themselves into five (Moses') and twelve (Joshua - Esther), so do we find it with these seventeen prophetic books. The first five are rightly termed the Major Prophets, while the remaining twelve, which were always classed together as one book in the Jewish Canon of the Old Testament (see Acts 7:42), are known as the Minor Prophets.

A brief study of these books will prove this is no artificial arrangement. It is in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel that we find the basic ethical features of all Old Testament prophecy and the comprehensive scheme of messianic prediction (see addendum on the Comprehensive Scheme at the end of this section). The twelve "minor" prophets, though they amplify various aspects, do not determine the main shape of messianic prophecy. They conform to the general frame already formed for us in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Nor let it be thought that the poetic diverge, "Lamentations," is merely an addendum to Jeremiah. For, not only does it have the marks of independence and separateness but, it also has a positional significance which we must not fail to note. It is the center-point of the Major Prophets. That is, it divides Isaiah and Jeremiah on the one hand from Ezekiel and Daniel on the other. In other words, it intersects between the greatest two of the pre-exile prophets and the greatest two of the post-exile prophets. It belongs there properly, because not only does it divide them positionally, it divides them historically. It monumentalizes that toweringly and tragically significant events which separates the pre-exile, from the post-exile prophets. Namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, the abortion of the Davidic dynasty, and the scattering of the covenant people in world-wide dispersion. From which, even yet, after 2,500 years they have not been regathered, although providently preserved as a distinct people.

Moreover, as the last twelve of the seventeen historical books further sub-divide themselves into nine and three, the first nine being pre-exilic and, the remaining three being post-exilic. So, is it with these twelve "minor" prophets, the first nine are all pre-exilic while the remaining three (Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) are post-exilic; and these two terminal trios, the last three historical books and the last three prophetic, have a reciprocal correspondence with each other.

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament then, fall into this orderly grouping of; seventeen historical, five experiential, and seventeen prophetic, with both the seventeen's sub-grouped into five, nine, and three. The five books which deal with the individual human heart placed right between the two seventeen's at the very heart of the Old Testament.

Is this accident or design? Consider it: over thirty writers contributed to the Old Testament, spaced out over twelve hundred years, writing in different places, to different parties, for different purposes. Little dreaming that their writings besides being preserved through generation were eventually to be compiled into that systematic plurality in unity which we now find in the Old Testament. When we reflect on this, surely we cannot be wrong in thinking that behind the human writers there must have been a controlling Divine design.

Addendum: Comprehensive Scheme

As we noted earlier it is in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel that we find the basic ethical features of all Old Testament prophecy and, the comprehensive scheme of messianic prediction. In Isaiah, the coming Messiah is seen both as the Suffering Savior and, as the Victorious Sovereign who reigns in World Empire. In Jeremiah, where we also have Jehovah's full case against Israel. He is the righteous "Branch" of David and, the Ultimate Restorer of the judged and dispersed people. In Ezekiel, looking beyond intermediate judgments, we see Him as the perfect Shepherd-King in whose glorious reign the ideal temple of the future is erected In Daniel, who gives us the most particularized program of times and events in their successive order, we see the Messiah "cut off" without throne or kingdom, yet standing up at last as Universal Emperor on the ruins of the crashed Gentile world-system.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Gospels and Acts

We turn to the New Testament now; and here we find equal order, with equally evident design. First, we have Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. These are the only historical books of the New Testament, and are foundational to everything which follows, and therefore, stand together. Note their number and their nature. As to their number, they are five. As to their nature, they are historical.

Christian Church Epistles

Next, come a group which just as plainly coheres as one subsidiary whole. It is that group of epistles which are all addressed to Christian churches: Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I & II Thessalonians. Note their number and their nature. As to their number, they are nine. As to their nature, they are doctrinal.

Pastoral Epistles

Then come four epistles which are another little group in themselves, namely: I & II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. These four are not written to Christian churches. They are pastoral and personal.

Hebrew Christian Epistles

Finally, we have another group of nine, that is, Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, I, II, and III John, Jude and Revelation (which is really an epistle of our Lord Himself; see the opening verse). These nine are not addressed to Christian churches as the other nine are; and indeed, there is nothing in any of them about the church mystical either. The first of them (Hebrews) is obviously addressed to the Hebrew nation as such. James, likewise, is addressed to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Peter addresses his writings to “the Sojourners of the Dispersion” (Jews of the Dispersion). There is no need to go into further details to show that these nine epistles, Hebrews to the Revelation, are distinctively Hebrew in their standpoint and atmosphere and, are rightly called the “Hebrew Christian Epistles.”

A Wonderful Archway

Our New Testament consists of five historical books, making a solid, five-fold slab of basic fact beneath our feet. Then rising on each side, like two beautiful pillars, the nine Christian Church Epistles and the nine Hebrew Christian Epistles. These two wonderful pillars are connected and arched by the Four Pastoral Epistles, the whole making a wonderful archway into saving truth and everlasting blessedness. A study of the comparative and contrastive parallels between the nine fold groups of the epistles, as well as, the different book groups, reveals the presence of a plan and a design which, when we follow it through in detail eliminates, by an overwhelming abundance of evidence, all possibility of its being mere coincidence. This proves beyond all shadow of doubt that it is indeed the word of the living God.

OLD TESTAMENT

GENESIS
EXODUS
LEVITICUS
NUMBERS
DEUTERONOMY

JOSHUA
JUDGES
RUTH
1 SAMUEL
2 SAMUEL
1 KINGS
2 KINGS
1 CHRONICLES
2 CHRONICLES

EZRA
NEHEMIAH
ESTHER

JOB
PSALMS
PROVERBS
ECCLESIASTES
SONG OF SONGS

ISAIAH
JEREMIAH
LAMENTATION
EZEKIEL
DANIEL
HOSEA
JOEL
AMOS
OBADIAH
JONAH
MICHA
NAHUM
HABAXKUK
ZEPHANIAH

HAGGI
ZACHARIAH
MALACHI

New Testament

MATTHEW

MARK

LUKE

JOHN

ACTS

ROMANS

1 CORINTHIANS

2 CORINTHIANS

GALATIANS

EPHESIANS

PHILIPPIANS

COLOSSIANS

1 THESSALONIANS

2 THESSALONIANS

1 TIMOTHY

2 TIMOTHY

TITUS

PHILEMON

HEBREWS

JAMES

1 PETER

2 PETER

1 JOHN

2 JOHN

3 JOHN

JUDE

REVELATION