

Rediscovering the Story of the Old Testament – Session 2 Lesson 1

The TaNaK

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Objective of Course

The objective of Session 2 of Rediscovering the Story of the Bible is to enable students to read the story of Jesus in the Old Testament more fully and richly and appreciate the beauty and complexity of the Old Testament writings. Students will be asked to select a favorite passage from the Old Testament and as we progress through the course, see how the concepts covered in each lesson add to their ability to read that passage.

Main Idea

Understanding the structure of the TNK (TaNaK)

Exercise

Understanding our context

Picture parents walking with their toddlers through a park on the way to a friend's house. The parents are focused on getting to their destination on time while the toddlers are distracted by tiny rocks and dandelions. Describe their different perspectives.

The Jewish perspectives of the TNK are different than the Christian perspective of the Old Testament.

Core questions

1. What are the main sections of the TNK and how was it organized?
2. How was the TNK produced?

Structure of the TNK

Major sections of the Protestant Bible

The Old and New Testaments are a collection of different writings from different authors. The **New** Testament writings were written in Greek and collected in a form called the **codex** which

resembles a modern-day book, whereas the **Old** Testament writings which were written primarily in Hebrew on **scrolls**.



Christians informally divide what they call the Old Testament into

- **Pentateuch** (Greek “five (books of the) law”)
- History
- Wisdom
- Prophets (major and minor)

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Major sections of the TNK

Jesus recognized that the Hebrew scriptures were arranged in three categories: the Law (**Torah**), the Prophets (**Nevi'im**) and the Writings (**Ketuvim**, aka the Psalms which is the first book of the Writings). This collection is named from the first Hebrew letters of each section, the **TaNaK**. The Prophets were divided into two categories: the **Former** Prophets (what the Christian Bible categorize at the History books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the **Latter** Prophets. The Writings section began with Psalms and ended with Chronicles.

Matt 23:34-35 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, so that upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel [the first prophet killed in Genesis] to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, [the last prophet killed in Chronicles] whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.”

Matt 5:17 “Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

Luke 24:44 Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

The Jews **divided** up the writings of the Old Testament in a **different** way than the Christians do. Writings we call 1 Kings and 2 Kings were combined into a **single** scroll. The same combining happens with the books of Samuel and Chronicles. The Hebrew Bible also combines **Ezra/Nehemiah** into a single book and the 12 minor prophets are all written on a single scroll.

In the Hebrew Bible, the writings are divided into 3 major groups. As such, that collection is referred to as the acronym TNK, pronounced as the TaNaK.

- **Torah** (instructions)
- **Nevi'im** (prophets)
- **Ketuvim** (writings)

Christians usually interpret “**Torah**” as law, but it has broader meaning than that. The broader meaning would be “**instruction**.” In fact, the majority of the Torah is not didactic laws, but rather stories which are meant to be instructive.

Many of the books that Christians refer to as “**history**” are called the **Prophets**. This perspective emphasizes that the “history” is more than “history,” rather the “history” has prophetic meaning. The Former Prophets are the prophets that worked before Israel went into exile. The individual writings of the Latter Prophets individual are very small and so, in the Hebrew Bible, the Latter Prophets are all combined into a single scroll called the “Twelve.”

The set of writings called the “Writings” is a collection of writings that are hard to **classify** by a single theme. The collection includes writings we would call books of wisdom, historical narrative, and prophecy. The “Megillot” (scrolls) refer to books that are read during Jewish **festivals**. Notice that this collection includes Chronicles. **Chronicles** records the material written in Samuel and Kings but is written from a priestly and historical perspective

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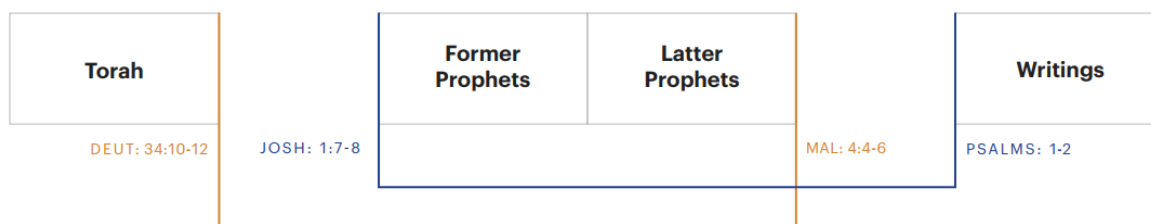
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TORAH - Instructions	Genesis - Exodus - Leviticus - Numbers - Deuteronomy
NEVI'IM — Prophets	<i>Former Prophets</i> Joshua - Judges - Samuel - Kings
	<i>Latter Prophets</i> Isaiah - Jeremiah - Ezekiel Hosea - Joel - Amos - Obadiah - Jonah - Micah Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah - Haggai Zechariah - Malachi
KETUVIM — Writings	Psalms - Proverbs – Job – [The <i>Megillot</i> : Ruth - Song of Songs – Ecclesiastes - Lamentations - Esther] – Daniel - Ezra/Nehemiah – Chronicles

The seams of the TNK

The 3 collections were designed to be combined in a particular order and were connected together in a particular way. These connection points could be called seams. The writings in the Hebrew Bible were written over a period of 1000 years and were organized into their final shape somewhere between the 3rd-2nd century BC. In the following statement Jesus alluded to the three-part structure of the Hebrew Bible and how the primary message of the Hebrew Bible was about Him.

In Jesus' time, the TaNaK was not collected into one binder as our modern books are but were written in scrolls. This arrangement was recognized even though scrolls could not be physically bound together. The three-part shape of the Hebrew Bible isn't simply a matter of arrangement. Rather, the books themselves have been designed to fit into this particular shape. If you look at the editorial seams of the major sections (remember the technology was papyrus or leather scrolls), you'll find intentional design clues at the beginning and ending of these sections.



Seam #1: The final sentences of the Torah and opening sentences of the Prophets:

- The end of Deuteronomy anticipates the coming of a Moses like prophet – one who never came as of the time of the edit.
- The beginning of Joshua was chosen to lead the people and was supposed to meditate on the Torah day and night.

Seam #2: The final sentences of the Prophets and the opening sentences of the Writings

- The end of the Prophets look back at Moses and foretells the coming a prophet who will turn the heart of the parents and their children.
- The beginning of the Ketuvim talks about people whose hearts have turned, those whose hearts have not, and the One who will judge them on the Day of the Lord

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The Composite Unity of the Hebrew Bible

In the following statement, Jesus alluded to the three-part structure of the Hebrew Bible and how the primary message of the Hebrew Bible was about Him.

Luke 24:44 “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Torah of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.”

[NOTE: The primary message of the Bible is about Jesus, but that is not where the conversation/controversy tends to go.]

Jesus also alluded to the structure of the Hebrew Bible when he mentioned Abel and Zechariah as the first and last prophets who were martyred.

Luke 11:51 “Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel [Gen 4] to the blood of Zechariah, [2 Chr 24] who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.”

- The end of the Torah and the end of the Prophets connect through Moses.
- The beginning of the Prophets and the beginning of the Ketuvim connects through the promise of the ministry of Joshua and the failure of ministry of Joshua.

The Minority Report and the Forming of Israel

Forming the nation

These three passages tell us about how the Bible came into existence:

- 1) Exodus 17:14 The story of how God has rescued and formed a people
- 2) Exodus 24:1-4 After receiving the commandments and telling the people. Moses wrote them down
- 3) Deuteronomy 31:7-9,19-24 Just prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses writes warnings to the Israelites.

These examples tell of God’s covenant, human failure, and divine faithfulness. These narratives show us particular times that Moses is recording the scripture. We’re observing sort of the ongoing development of the scrolls of what we call “the scriptures.”

Exodus 17:14 - ¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.”

Exodus 24:1-4 - Then the Lord said to Moses, “Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, ² but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him.” ³ When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the Lord has said we will do.” ⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:7-9 - ⁷ Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as

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their inheritance. ⁸ The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” ⁹ So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the Levitical priests, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:19-24 - ¹⁹ “Now write down this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. ²⁰ When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their ancestors, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. ²¹ And when many disasters and calamities come on them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath.” ²² So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites. ²³ The Lord gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: “Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you.” ²⁴ After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end,

Deuteronomy 34:9-12 ⁹ Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit^[b] of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ¹¹ who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹² For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

In this last example in Deuteronomy, the narrative talks about Moses **writing down** this song, but what we also see is someone else **writing about** Moses writing down these texts. So there's this layer of we're seeing this record of these scrolls that are then grafted into what then becomes the whole of these scrolls that's then called Deuteronomy later.

Isaiah 8:15-17 Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.” Bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God’s instruction among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the descendants of Jacob. will put my trust in him.

In Isaiah 8, we see how Isaiah passed on his writing to his disciples.

In the Psalms, we see some **headings** written over individual Psalms and sometimes over sections of Psalms that identify who wrote the Psalms and other background information. These indicate that the Psalms were **collected** and **maintained** by this minority group associated with the prophets.

These clues tell us that the Biblical writings are **multi-layered** and that they came into existence in multiple **stages** through this group that stems back to Moses. We see in the example above that the prophets had **groups** assembled around them who recorded and preserved the prophetic writings from one generation to the next. The biblical books don't make an attempt identify the small group of people who carried out this task. But these people **edited** and **compiled** the writings we call scripture. This “minority group” were trained to read and write. It was a professional class.

Another interesting detail about the Old Testament is that the writings were not flattering about either the Israelites or their leaders. Writings like this don't usually survive because people usually would not want these unflattering passages to be written by them.

So altogether, these and other clues indicate that there was a minority group within Israel that wrote and maintained the Old Testament writings. The writings were passed along by one prophet and his students

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to the next prophet and his students. This tradition may well have continued with the writings produced in the New Testament era.

These writings were not hidden away but were known the people. We see evidence of this in the New Testament. During the birth narratives of Jesus, we see evidence in the songs of Mary and Zechariah and the greetings of Simeon and Anna who were waiting and ready for the coming of the Messiah.