



Unlocking the Bible (2)



WHAT IS THE BIBLE? How is it made up?

The Bible, as we have it, has a purpose. It is a collection of people's experiences of God, preserved so *"that you might believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that, believing, you might have life in His name"*. It also has a structure. Appreciating that structure helps us to understand its message.

It has two Testaments, the Old and the New. The Old comprises 39 books in three consecutive sections. The first 17, from Genesis to Esther, tell the story of God's special people in the land which they had been given. God said, *"They shall be my people and I will be their God"*. As such, they were to worship God, follow and reflect His ways and be a living experiment of godly living in the world. That story spans about a thousand successful years from Abraham to David and Solomon, by which time they had their land, the Law the Temple and a strong tradition.

No wonder that these experiences were expressed in the second section: the 5 books of Experience, from Job to Song of Solomon.

But that was short lived. Despite having all the outward trappings, they neglected their privileged position. In short, they did not *'love the Lord your God with all your heart'* and certainly did not *'love your neighbour as yourself'*.

It was during this latter period that the prophets appeared, and in 17 books they denounce this neglect and social injustice, warning that punishment would follow and redemption made possible through a Saviour.

That Saviour appears in the New Testament, which is in two main sections.

The first, the Four Gospels, tell the story of Jesus from four different angles. In spite of perceived differences, there is agreement on: His sinless life, His death and His resurrection. His was more than a life: He came on a mission. And accomplished it.

The second, from Acts to Revelation, contains the story and correspondence of that group who did believe in Him, who found that *'Christ in you is the hope of glory'*, demonstrated *'a more excellent way'* and spread their message across the then-known world.

Two things can be said about that structure.

In the first place, the OT is 39 books, 1 book short of 40, the ideal total number. The potential is not fulfilled: it fell short. Yet it was fulfilled in the coming of Jesus, Who transformed many lives. They, then, became the early church.

No amount of effort based on knowledge will transform us; only genuine trust in the Saviour sent by God to do *"what the Law could not do."*

Secondly, each of these three parts can be represented as arrows.



- The OT points us to Christ,
- the Four Gospels portray Him,
- and the rest of the NT shows the transforming effect of His indwelling in the lives of believers.

That transformation, and the story began in the NT, is ongoing today!