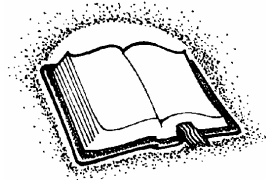


# Unlocking the Bible (4)



## INTRODUCING THE OLD TESTAMENT: Structure and purpose

Last time we saw that the Bible introduces us to an active, powerful, and benevolent God Who brings order out of chaos. The books of the Old Testament then go on to show how that continuing process works out in practice.

But, before going on to look at the detail of that process in each book, it is worth reminding ourselves of the structure of the Old Testament, for it helps in eventually being able to appreciate the nature and purpose of each book within a context.

There are three kinds of books in the OT, arranged in three sections:

### History

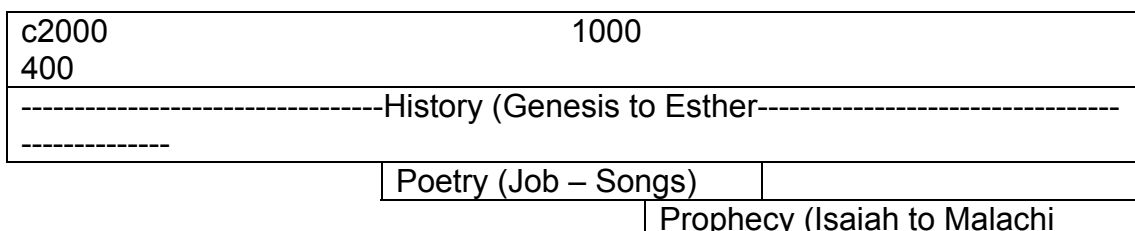
The majority, from Genesis to Esther, are history, recording the life experiences of the people of God, and the many ways that they came to learn about God's dealings with them. It is the story section that shows How they lived. It covers a period of about 2000 years from the time of Abraham to the end of the OT story 400 years or so before the coming of Christ.

### Poetry

The second section (Job to Song of Solomon) is poetry, whether in drama form, as in Job, or wisdom, as in Proverbs. These are five books of expression. (Job to Song of Solomon). They occur half way along the story and tell us something of How the people felt. The psalms of David, in particular, reflect something of the joy of proving God in the ordinary circumstances of life. Surely, that is not better expressed anywhere than in the 23rd psalm with its assurance that *The Lord is my Shepherd*.

### Prophecy

The remaining section – Isaiah to Malachi - is taken up with prophecy, coinciding with the 1000 year period after the reign of David, as recorded in the books of Kings and Chronicles – not the most inspiring of periods. It was a time when they were intent on abandoning God, neglecting all that the Temple stood for and adopting the practices of the neighbouring nations. That is why the prophets were sent to warn them to repent, return to the Lord and experience His deliverance – something they failed to do. So this section can be summarised as How they failed.



It shows that life is lived all the time; it is automatic. But, how it is lived gives rise either to causes for encouragement and praise; or for rebuke and restoration.

Next we will begin looking at each book in turn.