

APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE

How do we approach Scripture? How do we perceive Scripture? Do we see it in exactly the same way that the rest of the world sees it? Except for those of the second generation in the Church, most of us came into the Church from other groups, whether it be Catholic or Protestant. We have an understanding of the Bible based on that.

Within the Church we have very few who have come from any of the orthodox backgrounds such as Greek, Armenian or any of the eastern orthodox traditions, and we have very few Jews. But if we did, they would have brought different perceptions of Scripture with them.

As Mr Armstrong said, one of the greatest challenges of life is unlearning false teaching. You might say the whole history of the Church as it has been documented by Mr Armstrong carrying on down to this day, has been unlearning some of the false teachings that we brought with us – and learning the true approach of the Eternal.

This evening I want to look at this approach to Scripture and help you appreciate one of the approaches that exists within this world, and the problems that there are with it. I want to substitute for you a different approach to Scripture which will help you appreciate God's Word perhaps in a more dramatic way than you have ever appreciated before.

Diachronic

We have two approaches to Scripture. The first one is a “diachronic” approach. This is a term derived from the Greek language, combining the word *dia* with the word *chronus* or “chronic” as is created in the word “diachronic.” It is the addition of a preposition to a noun to create an adjective.

Simply, if one were to take the component parts of the word, the basic meaning of the word is “through” + “time.” For instance we have the word “diameter” which is the distance through the circle. We recognise *chronus* as being “time.” We have “chronometers.” So diachronic means “**through time.**”

The idea of diachronic is relating to, or dealing with phenomena as of language or culture, as they occur or change over a period of time. One is looking at something through a prism of time. There's a beginning and there's an end, and you are watching it unfold as it races towards the end.

Synchronic

The second idea is that of “synchronic.” It is not too different. Once again, the term *chronus* is there but it is preceded by the word *syn*. This is not the word “s-i-n,” in terms of falling short of God's revealed way of life, but a Greek preposition. Once again, it's a preposition plus a noun. In this case, the preposition means “with.” So it is “**with + time.**” Synchronic is concerned with events existing in a limited time period and ignoring historical antecedents.

How do we appreciate these two terms? Let's boil them down into a very brief sketch: “Diachronic” is concerned about time. It's literally like sitting down and watching a video. It has a start and it has a conclusion. You start at the beginning and you go to the end. If you

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come in half way through, you wonder what went before, and why are things a certain way:

- Why is this person doing that?
- Where did that idea come from?

There is a sense of continuity. It is like a movie or a video.

On the other hand synchronic does not involve the sense of movement. It's like looking at a work of art. Perhaps a better idea is that of making a montage. We take photographs or pieces and put them together to make a whole. The pieces relate to the whole picture. We are looking at an aspect of composition. You may take one of the pieces of art of one of the great "Masters." You look at the way in which various items within that piece of art are juxtaposed to other pieces within it. You take in the whole picture at one point in time.

As a piece of art, it may contain the idea of movement. There may be a sense of movement even though it is "still" art. There may still be the sense of movement there, but everything is related to one another in a very distinct manner.

So these are two different views of the Bible:

1. Diachronic: like a movie, continuous.

2. Synchronic: snapshot, composition.

How is the Bible seen? Is it seen as a diachronic movie type situation, or is it really synchronic? Mr Armstrong talked about God's plan in terms of a diachronic ideal. But when people look at the Bible in a diachronic view, they create problems. One of the great elements of criticism from the Enlightenment has been the deception that the Bible is a diachronic document. The ideas have been that it has been developmental. "It started very primitive."

If you get into theology and into Biblical studies, you find words being used that imply "developmental." For instance, if we talk about the Church in the first century, we may refer to it as being the "First Century Church," or the "Apostolic Church." But from a "developmental" point of view, it is called, the "Primitive Church." "It hasn't learned anything. They may have had Jesus Christ there with it, but it was primitive."

This implies that it became "sophisticated" a little later. "It got to have some knowledge."

It did get some knowledge – but not from the Bible! So even the choice of terms that people use have this idea of development. "This starts here, and it goes there, and it's constantly developing and growing like a plot in a movie."

In the 19th century with Darwinism, it found a real soul-mate in terms of the "study of religions." People started to study the way in which religions evolved. They studied the Old Testament in terms of evolution: "It started in the Garden of Eden, then this happened and that happened, and as you will see eventually, the priesthood got in charge of it, and that was the end of it." But it's all very developmental. It's all very evolutionary.

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One of the principal persons involved in this was a man called Julius Wellenhausen. He was a German scholar, and like many of these scholars, a man of no mean intellect. But sadly he lacked God's Spirit to guide the intellect. Wellenhausen developed what is referred to as the "Documentary Hypothesis."

Here is a picture of Wellenhausen. They didn't take very good photographs in the 19th century, so it is a little grainy.

The "Documentary Hypothesis" was the concept that the Old Testament had been written by various groups of people at different periods of time. If any of you have ever read or looked at commentaries on various parts of the Old Testament, especially the *Torah* you will come across people talking about the "J" Source, or the "E Source," etc.

The "J" source is the "Yahwist." In the 19th century it was "Jehovah," so it was "Jehovah's source." A lot of the Old Testament was seen as being the "J" source.



The older strand in the Old Testament was known as the "E" source. They divided these things up based upon what name of God was used. The Elohist used the word "Elohim." The Yahwist used the word "Yahweh."

If it said, "Yahweh-Elohim" they decided that the two had been stitched together.

Then there was the "D" source – the "Deuteronomist" – the person who wrote the book of Deuteronomy and books of that nature.

Finally there was the "P" source – the priests or the "Priestly" source.

Wellenhausen, although he was principally a historical critic, really gave rise to what is known as "Source Criticism." People go through and try to work out, "Which part of the Bible was written first?" They get their scissors out and start cutting the Bible up into little segments.

About 15 years ago, an academic in Yale on the east coast of America, wrote a book entitled, *The Book of J*. He went through the Old Testament and tried to cut out everything that was "Priestly," "Deuteronomist" or "Elohist." He ended up with *The Book of J* which he said was written by a woman, and that it was the most brilliant piece of literature around. "Source Criticism" has had some side effects.

Firstly, it undermined belief in the historical unity of the *Torah*. The *Torah* now "was just four different strands, four different people's ideas stitched together to make a good story." If you undermined belief in the historical unity of the *Torah*, obviously what goes out the window is the belief that it was divinely revealed to Moses upon Mount Sinai. "Who is Moses?"

As a result of this, two elements are attacked.

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1. The Torah

As one person said:

“After the spirit of the oldest men of God, Moses at the head of them, had been in a fashion, laid to sleep in institutions, it sought and found in the prophets a new opening.”

In other words, they despatched Moses and all the patriarchs. “They were now no longer of any credibility whatsoever.”

Now the focus was on the Prophets. The problem was, people are now looking at the Prophets without anything preceding them.

What were the Prophets prophesying about? What were they writing about? A vacuum? “They were just social activists of their day, trying to take care of the interests of people without any relationship to the law of God.”

And so the *Torah* was attacked.

2. The Temple

Why was the Temple attacked? “The priests were the last people to put their imprimature on the Old Testament.” In other words, “they manipulated it all to their own end.” So people came to see the “Priestly School” thus:

“Priestly school which established and regulated an elaborate cultus was a manifestation of the spiritual decadence and aridity ...”

... of the nation. This is where these ideas lead people to.

If you get rid of the law, if you get rid of the Temple, what are you left with? Nothing really!

Yet, if we look at the New Testament, if we look at what Jesus Christ says in the book of Matthew, if we look at what the apostle Paul says in the book of Romans, we get the idea that the law and the *Torah* have some meaning to them! We can look at what John says. We can look at what James says. We can look at what Peter says. Somehow they are still connected to the *Torah*.

And they are all very connected to the Temple! Jesus Christ said He was going to make the Temple a house of prayer for ALL nations! The Temple becomes a very important feature as far as the Church in the New Testament is concerned.

There is obviously something wrong with the way in which people approach the Bible.

“Deuteronomistic History” is another area of debate. One particular name here in the early 20th century was Martin Noth, another German. He wrote very much about “Deuteronomistic History.”

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Now, the current debate in terms of “Deuteronomistic History” is:

“Was the Deuteronomist pre or post exile?”

In other words, the current fad, the current idea that exists in the world of scholarship, is the fact that “the Bible was really written by people in the Persian period after they came back from the captivity, to justify the Jews being in Jerusalem.” They take it further. In some cases, they say they borrowed it from the Samaritans – which seems to go contrary to what Jesus Christ said in the New Testament.

Most people who study the Old Testament don’t study the New Testament. Mr Hulme has made that comment from time to time. When Mr Armstrong asked someone who wrote on the book of Romans, a question about the book of Corinthians, he said, “Well I haven’t studied that yet.” People get very narrow in their views. Over a period of time these ideas lead to some strange concepts.

Redaction Criticism

We have another form of criticism known as “Redaction Criticism.” This is the aspect of energy. “How did they make the name *Yahweh-Elohim*? How did that come about?” This is redaction. It is a question of editing. The question asked is, “Whose words are they?”

The end result is that people see the Bible as being the words of men, rather than the men simply being scribes for the Eternal! They don’t see men being servants of God in establishing the Bible. They rather see it as being the action of men doing what they were doing to manipulate, maybe control, have power over people. I think that the statement about the priesthood really sums it up very well.

Christianity, to a large extent, finds itself drawn into those ideas. “Christians,” as a rule, view the Bible as a diachronic document. They are supported in that by the arrangement of the Bible. The way in which the Bible is presented, leads people into that trap. What do I mean by that?

Let’s take the English Bible. Open it to the index. Probably most of you never look at the index, you know it so well. You know where all the books are. We teach young children the order of the books of the Bible. It is a good exercise for them. They learn where things are and they can locate them in the Bible.

But the order we have in the English Bible today is based on what we refer to as the *Septuagint* (the LXX). This was a Greek translation of the Old Testament, possibly started in the 3rd century before Christ. We really don’t know that much about it because what we know about the Septuagint is shrouded in mystery and fantasy. The oldest complete copy is in the 4th century CE: the Codex Sinaiticus, supposedly from the Septuagint. There are snippets of it around the place in the Dead Sea Scrolls but really the only material that we have of the Septuagint is 4th century CE.

Hellenistic Mindset

The order of the Septuagint very much followed a Hellenistic mindset. That mindset was a particular order: time, then subject.

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So we start at Genesis and we race all the way through the history of Israel into Kings, and then we have the duplication of Chronicles. Then we follow on with Esther through Ezra.

Basically everything is in a time-frame from the beginning in Genesis all the way through to Esther, the Persian period. “The restoration, the return from exile has come and Esther is sort of the end of the book.” There it is, in a snapshot for you: “You can start the video in Genesis 1:1 and read all the way through to the end of Esther, and you’ve got the whole history. It’s all laid out for you.”

Having got to Esther, we have to change gears, because then we get into the poetic books:

- Job
- Psalms
- Proverbs

Do we understand the relationship of those books? Which came first? Which was the oldest? People see Job as being back in the time of Egypt and the building of pyramids. “He is really old.”

Where does Proverbs come? Proverbs obviously comes after the Psalms because “the Psalms were written by David, Solomon’s father.” Therefore the Psalms have got to come before Proverbs. Then we have:

- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Solomon

It’s a very diachronic view. We are looking at the “Poetic Books” in the order they come in terms of the time frame, starting with Job and going through to the Song of Solomon. Once again, we have the diachronic view even in the poetic books.

If we look at the Prophets, we have historical ordering:

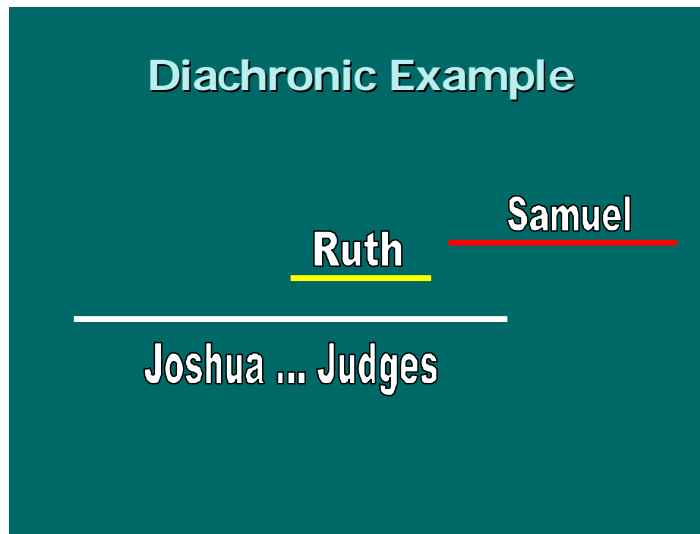
- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel

It is rather interesting because the placement of the Prophets is also diachronic. How do the “Christians” look at the Prophets? What is the purpose of the Prophets for the “Christian Church”?

They look at the Prophets, not in terms of looking back to Moses. They have them looking forward to Jesus Christ. “The only purpose for the Prophets is to justify Jesus Christ.” So the placing of the Prophets at the end of the Old Testament is creating a diachronic view, moving you forward into the New Testament, “where your attention really should be,” so they think. So there is a focus on the Messiah, and hence forward looking.

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Let's have a look at an example. Let's have a look at some of the books in the Former Prophets and see the way in which the diachronic works, and the questions and the conclusions that people come to as a result of that.



I have not drawn these lines to scale in any way whatsoever, but I am putting them in relationship to one another. We have a fairly long line which represents the period of time of Joshua and the Judges. What comes after the book of Judges in the English Bible? It's the book of Ruth. What is the time setting of the book of Ruth? It is sometime during the time of the Judges – towards the end of the period of time of the Judges.

What comes after Ruth? It is Samuel. When does Samuel begin? Clearly, Samuel has some area of overlap there as well, because Samuel is the last of the Judges. That's the arrangement that we have in the English Bible. What is the conclusion that people come to in terms of these books?

“The book of Ruth exists to justify the Davidic line. Ruth exists to introduce the Davidic line for the book of Samuel.”

But David doesn't become king until 2nd Samuel. The book of Ruth is wedged between Judges and Samuel. People read the last verse of Judges:

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel ...

... and say, “Aah! That's what the book of Ruth is about: the kings, the Davidic line.” They leap to these conclusions. “This is there to justify what is coming afterwards. It's a bridge. This is a little flashback to give us an idea of why what happens in Samuel occurs, and why David has to be the hero of the day.”

If you read through the book of Samuel, you find that the people want a king to be like the other nations. They want a king to lead them in war. So the Eternal tells Samuel to give them a king:

1 Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all

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that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.

What should that tell us about Judges 21:25? What was the lack of a king? It was an aspect of the relationship of people with their Maker, with the Eternal.

It is interesting to go through 1st Samuel and look at all the battles that Israel got involved in. The only battles they ever won were the ones that the Eternal allowed them to win! Every other battle, they lost. So it seemed as though the physical king didn't have anything to do with winning battles. The spiritual King had a lot to do with winning battles!

It is rather interesting to then put Judges and Samuel back to back, and start to read Samuel in the light of what Judges 21:25 says. The whole aspect of the kings takes on a very different light.

But these are conclusions that people come to as a result of viewing the Bible in a diachronic way.

Let's look at the aspect of the Bible as a synchronic document.

The very first thing you have to appreciate is that all parts interrelate. It is not development. These all have an immediate relationship to us. They all interrelate.

Position is very important. That holds true for the New Testament as much as the Old Testament.

A little over a decade ago, we went through an experience where people tried to make the book of Galatians have an even greater importance than it should have. The book of Galatians is most likely the very first epistle that the apostle Paul wrote. Whereabouts is it in his epistles? It is number four.

To make things worse, some people would say that 1st Thessalonians was the first epistle he wrote. Where is that? That's about seven epistles down the line.

In other words, the New Testament has not been put together in date order either.

In terms of the gospels, people say that Mark was the first gospel written. But it's not first in the New Testament. It comes after Matthew. There is a reason for Matthew to be first, because if you understand the Bible in the way in which it was put together, Matthew carries on from what was there before. If you read the Bible from that perspective, Matthew makes a whole lot more sense because you see the connection with what went before.

Mark, in fact, picks up on one of the very last verses in Matthew's gospel and develops that whole idea. Jesus Christ said to His disciples:

Matthew 28:18 (King James Version) And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

What is the gospel of Mark about? It is about who has the power! Then we find that

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Luke picks up on what Mark has, and the same with John. In other words, it's not a question of, "Who wrote first, and who wrote last?" It's a question of the way in which God wanted them to be placed to convey lessons, to convey instruction!

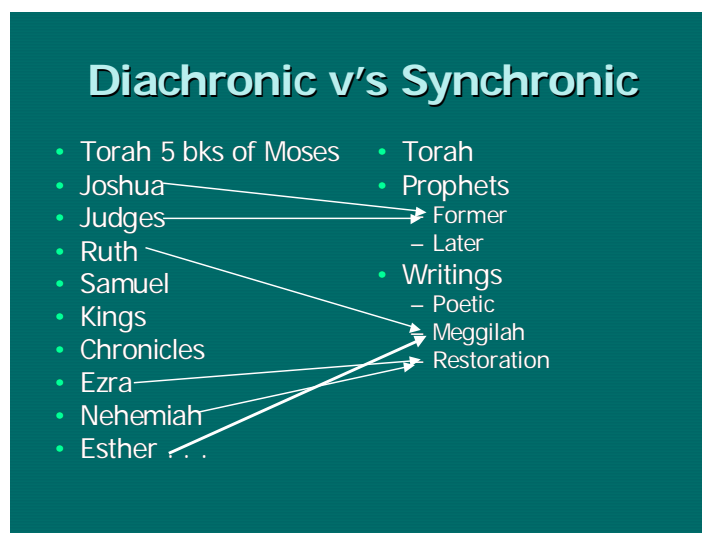
So you don't go and read the book of Galatians by itself in a vacuum. You read it in light of what Paul has already said beforehand. If you go back into 1st Corinthians, he is talking about "keeping the Feast." So how can you throw the law out of the window in an earlier book? It doesn't make sense. In Romans, he talks about how the law is spiritual. So the law can't be thrown out.

In other words, parts interrelate to one another, and one book has got to be read in the light of what had been before, and what is around it. It has got to be read in terms of the entire Bible. Position is important in order to understand things. That holds true of the New Testament as much as the Old Testament.

What part of the Bible do Joshua and Judges represent? They are part of what is referred to as the Former Prophets. They are part of the Prophets. They are coupled with Samuel and Kings for a very specific purpose – and it's not just a history lesson.

The arrangement and the juxtaposition of those books differs from the English Bible. Let's look at the Bible in terms of the diachronic and synchronic views:

If we look at the Bible diachronically, we have the five books of Moses followed by Joshua, Judges, Ruth, the two Books of Samuel, the two Books of Kings, the two Books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther: in other words, from Genesis to the return from exile.



If we look at the Bible synchronically, we have the *Torah* to begin with, but then we move into the "Prophets." The Prophets are divided into the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The "Writings" are the next section, divided into the Poetic, the *Meggillah*, and the Restoration sections.

We find that all of a sudden Joshua is part of the Former Prophets along with Judges. Ruth disappears into the *Meggillah*. She takes a totally different order in the Bible altogether.

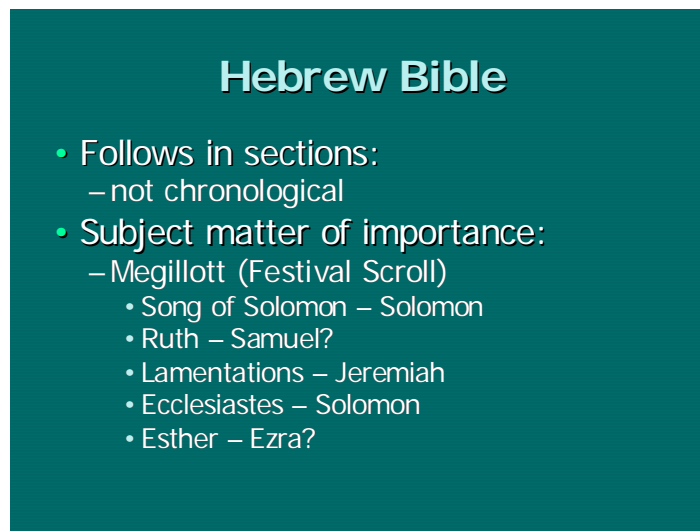
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Ezra is part of the Restoration books, together with Nehemiah, but Esther disappears into the *Megillah* as well. The book of Chronicles disappears into the Restoration Books as well.

So the ordering is totally different than the English Bible. A different emphasis is being provided here. If we look at the Hebrew Bible we find that it follows in sections. Chronology is not the important criteria. Yes, Genesis comes before Exodus, which comes before Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. You might say that there is a certain element of chronology there.

But subject matter is of greater importance. The teaching becomes of greater importance than the chronology. If you want an example of this, look at the *Megillah* (the Festival Scroll.)

The first book in it is the Song of Solomon, written by Solomon. The next book is Ruth, possibly written by Samuel. We have taken a step back in time. Then we jump forward to the book of Lamentations written by Jeremiah, and we step back yet again to Solomon with the book of Ecclesiastes, and then we end with Esther written possibly by Ezra. So in terms of chronology we are doing a “Texas Two-Step” backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.



Hebrew Bible

- Follows in sections:
 - not chronological
- Subject matter of importance:
 - Megillott (Festival Scroll)
 - Song of Solomon – Solomon
 - Ruth – Samuel?
 - Lamentations – Jeremiah
 - Ecclesiastes – Solomon
 - Esther – Ezra?

The chronology, the timing of who wrote what and when is not the important thing. There is a greater purpose being played out in terms of the location of the books. We are looking at the divisions within the *Tanakh*, the parts of the Old Testament.

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ appears to His disciples in Jerusalem. Those who met Him on the road to Emmaus had come back to Jerusalem bursting with the details of what had happened. Jesus Christ appears in their midst. They were frightened ...

***Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.
45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,***

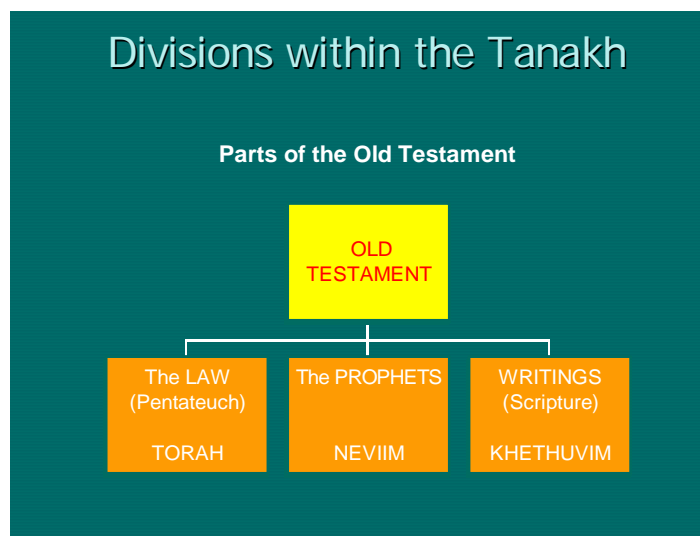
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What did He open understanding to? It was:

- the Law of Moses
- the Prophets and
- the Psalms.

... the three-fold division of the Old Testament. So there is the Law (*Torah*) – sometimes referred to by Protestants as the *Pentateuch* (the five books), the Prophets, and the Psalms. Today we refer to the Psalms, not by the first book in the section, but by the term “Writings.”

It’s from these three parts that the term “Tanakh” is drawn as an acronym. The “T” is derived from *Torah*.



The “N” is derived from *Neviim* (meaning “the prophets”)

The “KH” is derived from the *Khethuvim* which is “the Writings”.

TANAKH - an acronym

- ☞ T for TORAH
- ☞ N for NEVIIM
- ☞ Kh for KHETHUVIM

In the Old Testament times, Hebrew did not have vowels. We have added vowels, and so we have the word *Tanakh*. The term *Tanakh* describes the Scriptures in their three-fold composition.

We have the *Torah* (the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.) The word *Torah* comes from “instruction.” It’s a much more encompassing word than “law.” The term “law” is a very limited view of

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what the instruction was.

We only have to look at the five books of Moses, and we see biography, narrative, prophecy, instruction, genealogies, law, statutes and judgments. Almost every form of writing that exists in the entirety of the Bible is included in the first five books. So the term “law” is a very, very narrow view of what it is about. It is used by Protestants in a similar way that academics will use the word “primitive” in terms of the early Church. It is belittling in its own way. You might say that it is a put down.

The New Testament uses the term *nomos* which, in the Greek, means “law.” The problem is that people use the Greek meaning of the word rather than what the writers of the New Testament were trying to convey.

What’s a word they could use? In Greek, the word *Torah* has a much greater meaning

Torah (The Law)

- ☞ Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- ☞ The Books of Moses
- ☞ Hebrew “TORAH” = instruction
- ☞ Covers from creation to the death of Moses

than the word *nomos* does. When the writers use the word *nomos* in Greek in the New Testament, they weren’t necessarily using the Greek limits of the word. You might say that they were modifying the word to have an understanding that related to the Scriptures.

So this covers the period of time from the creation to the death of Moses. There is a certain element of progression there, but it is one section of Scripture which, as we will see, is very foundational.

“Genesis” comes from the Greek, meaning “beginning.” The Hebrew word *B’reshith* means “at the start.” So it starts from the creation and continues to the death of Jacob in Egypt.

The book of Genesis is then replicated in part in the Psalms. What is the first book of Psalms about? It is about the beginning! It is about the law of God.

The *Torah* of God is extolled in other parts of the Psalms as well. Psalms 1-41 relate to Genesis.

We could go through all five books of the Law and look at them from that particular aspect.

The LAW: part 1: GENESIS

- ☞ Genesis = Greek ‘beginning’
- ☞ B’reshith = Hebrew ‘at the start’
- ☞ creation to the death of Jacob in Egypt
- ☞ Psalms 1 - 41: the ‘Genesis’ psalms

But let’s look at the “Prophets.” As I’ve mentioned, we have the Former Prophets and

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The Prophets

- ☞ the Former Prophets
- ☞ the Latter Prophets
 - ☞ the Major Prophets
 - ☞ the Minor Prophets – the Twelve
- ☞ N.B. 'the Prophets' contains some surprise books -- and leaves out some books you may think should be here!

we have the Latter Prophets. The Latter Prophets are comprised of the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets (the twelve).

The Prophets contain some surprise books – in that they leave out some of the books that Protestants, Catholics and Greek Orthodox people would expect to be in “the Prophets.”

In the Former Prophets we have Joshua and Judges, which was originally one book on two scrolls.

Then we have the “Book of Kings,” not 1st and 2nd Samuel, 1st and 2nd Kings. It was simply the “Book of Kings,” one book written on four scrolls. There is a limit to how large

The PROPHETS: part 1: the Former Prophets

- ☞ (a) Joshua + Judges (one book, two scrolls)
- ☞ (b) KINGS: I & II Samuel, I & II Kings (one book, four scrolls)

you can make a scroll. It's a question of how many lambs' skins you can join together and then roll up, or how many sheets of papyrus you can glue together roll up and keep effectively.

Then we have the Latter Prophets. We have the Major Prophets of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. And we have the Minor Prophets, but you will note that Lamentations and Daniel are not included. They are included among the prophetic section of the English Bible, but they are not included in the Prophets' section of the

The PROPHETS: part 2a: the Latter Prophets

- ☞ the 'MAJOR' Prophets
 - ☞ Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
 - ☞ (note that Lamentations and Daniel are *not* included)
- ☞ the 'Minor' Prophets
 - ☞ The Twelve – one scroll

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Scriptures. All twelve of the Minor Prophets are put on one scroll. So in the Latter Prophets there are four scrolls.

Then we have the Writings. We have an acronym: YMET which, in Hebrew, means “truth.” That is made from the first three books of the Writings.

They appear in the order of Psalms, Proverbs and Job. The Writings start with the Poetic Books of Psalms Proverbs and Job. The first three letters of those books stands for “Truth.”

Then we have the *Megillot* (the Festival Scroll) containing the five books for the Festivals.

The Song of Songs (Solomon) is read at Passover.

The WRITINGS: part 1:
-the TRUTH

☞ YMET = Hebrew ‘Truth’: another acronym, made from:

- Y for YOOB (Job)
- M for MASHALI (Proverbs)
- T for TEHILLIM (‘Praise-hymns’, that is, Psalms)

☞ appear in the order:
Psalms, Proverbs, Job

The Writings: part 2:
the MEGILLOT

☞ Five books for FESTIVALS

- ☞ (a) SONG of SONGS (Passover)
- ☞ (b) RUTH (Pentecost)
- ☞ (c) LAMENTATIONS (9th AV)
- ☞ (d) ECCLESIASTES (Tabernacles)
- ☞ (e) ESTHER (Purim)

The Book of Ruth is read at Pentecost.

Lamentations is read on the 9th and 10th Ab, the time of the destruction of the Temple.

Ecclesiastes is read at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Esther is read at Purim on the 14th Adar, the month before Passover.

Once again, the order of these books is dictated by which Holy Day they are related to. It’s not a matter of who wrote them. We will come back to the difference in time of writing in due course.

Lamentations, which we normally see in terms of prophetic material, is here amongst the Festivals. Ecclesiastes which is otherwise in the Poetic Books is here in the Festivals.

Ruth, which is supposed to justify the kingship is now related to the Feast of Pentecost. So it’s not the Davidic line that we have to get all caught up about, and the kingship and the desire for a physical king that the book of Ruth exists for. There are greater lessons in terms of Pentecost that need to be explored and appreciated.

Finally we have the Restoration Books (three books):

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- Daniel
- Ezra-Nehemiah
- Chronicles

Surprise, surprise, Chronicles ends the Scriptures which is why Matthew begins the New Testament! Matthew's gospel is literally structured. He starts with a chronology and ends with a universal commission. The themes that Chronicles explores are themes that the Eternal has inspired Matthew to recount of what Jesus Christ taught. So one person reading Chronicles and then reading Matthew, would immediately make the connection that these interrelate. These aren't separate. These interrelate.

So in the entirety of the Tanakh, we have 22 books – and there are 22 letters in the Hebrew *alef-bet* from which we get “alphabet.”

One of those things that is seldom appreciated is that the early Hebrew alphabet really became the foundation for ALL of the phonetic alphabets that exist in the world today: through the Phoenician, into the Greek alphabet, the Roman alphabet and the Cyrillic alphabet. All of these phonetic alphabets really date back to what is referred to today as *Paleo Hebraic*.

The Tanakh

- ☞ 22 books (also 22 letters in Hebrew **alef-bet**)
- ☞ same books as ours, but different order and distribution:
- ☞ **LAW + PROPHETS + WRITINGS**
- ☞ (sometimes Writings are called **SCRIPTURES**, sometimes **PSALMS**)

Over the past few years, it has been rather interesting to see that the whole concept of the origin of the alphabet has changed. People used to think that the alphabet was started in the likes of Syria and the Levant with Egyptian influence.

They have just recently found some very early alphabet phonetic writing in Egypt. Now they are saying that it actually started in Egypt but from Semitic input, or in other words, Hebrew input!

The whole aspect of writing as we have it today, as opposed to the syllogistic form of writing of the hieroglyphics and so forth, literally came from Egypt, probably with the Israelites – through Mount Sinai and into the rest of the world. So even this aspect of alphabet came from the *alef-bet* of the Hebrew alphabet. So there are 22 books relating to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. They are the same books as ours, but in a different order and distribution.

So the Law, the Prophets and the Writings become the fundamental things, fundamental building blocks. As you will appreciate, sometimes the Writings are called “Scriptures,” and sometimes “Psalms.”

What are the essential differences from the English? Firstly, the sections build on one another. You don't just have the Writings by themselves. The Writings relate to what is the

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section before, which relates to the section before that.

So you must have the *Torah* to understand the Prophets. If you don't have the *Torah* you don't understand what the Prophets are doing, what they are talking about. And you have to have the Former Prophets in order to understand the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) exist to provide a context for the teaching of the Latter Prophets. It's not just history for the sake of history. It's not just a "history channel" regurgitating things in another way.

Differences from English

- Sections build on one another
- Must have Torah to understand the Prophets
- Must have Former Prophets to understand the Latter Prophets
- Must have Torah and Prophets to understand the Writings

This is God laying a foundation so that you have an understanding. You have got a frame of reference with which to read what comes subsequently. Everything has to interrelate. Everything is in a place in the picture so that you go from one thing to the next, and see this in relation to that.

You have to have the *Torah* and the Prophets to understand the Writings. Because the Writings are about people who are in harmony with their Creator. What are the Psalms about? They are about praising God, about appreciating Him for who He is and what He can do. The Psalms are not necessarily about the wicked. They get a mention here and there, but they get a mention in terms of contrast with the person who has a right relationship with God.

You can go through the entirety of the Writings and they are about people having a right relationship with God, a right relationship with God that is perceived in terms of the *Torah* and the prophetic sections that went before. To look at it graphically, the *Torah* is the foundation. On top of that is built the Prophets, and above that comes the Writings. It is all dependent one upon the other. Then you could overlay the New Testament in terms of that as well. You could look at the Writings of the New Testament.



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Let's compare the two views: the English/Greek diachronic view and the Hebrew synchronic view.

One is dependent upon time, then subject. The other is subject, then possibly time. There are different priorities. One is concerned about chronology. The other is concerned about teaching. One is concerned about history. The other is about instruction.

Compare

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| • English/Greek | • Hebrew |
| – Time then subject | – Subject then time possibly |
| – Chronological | – Teaching |
| – Historical | – Instructive |
| – No sense of dependency of sections | – Total Dependency upon what went before |

In terms of the diachronic, there is only a LIMITED sense of dependency of sections. "It's just a video and it's evolving." whereas in the synchronic, there is a TOTAL dependency on what went before.

If you try to read the book of Esther without having a very firm foundation in the *Torah* you will wonder what it is all about. That's what you find in most Commentaries. "What's it all about? We don't understand." Yet it has instructive teaching.

This leads us to some questions:

For whom was the Bible written? When all is said and done, Moses lived a long time before Ezra, yet Moses and Ezra were involved in writing the Scriptures. So who were the Scriptures written for? Were they written for the patriarchs? Were they written for the prophets? Were they written for Israel, or the apostles? Were they written for the Church?

The answer is interesting. Look at the patriarchs. Did Abraham need the Bible? Abraham knew of the New Jerusalem without the book of Revelation! Yet we have to wait until the book of Revelation to find out about the New Jerusalem. He found out about it sometime very early between Genesis 12 and Genesis 22. But we don't read about it there.

Yet God very clearly revealed His plan and His purpose to Abraham. Abraham did not need the Bible to have a relationship with the Eternal. It was a very personal relationship, a one-on-one relationship. It was a very different relationship to that which we have today.

Did he do the same things we do? I am sure he did. We can settle on that when he is resurrected. We can discuss it with him.

What about Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? Their understanding of God's purpose and God's plan of salvation was complete. It was adequate for them to have the relationship with the Eternal that they needed to have. So the Bible wasn't written for them. They didn't need the whole book.

What about the prophets? These were mighty, powerful men of God. There's quite a collection of them. But notice what the apostle Peter says:

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1 Peter 1:10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,

11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

It's a little reminiscent of Daniel asking Michael:

Daniel 12:8 Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?"

9 And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.

"You will go and stand in your time. Your position is secured. You don't have to understand this." Daniel was writing down things without really comprehending the full import of what he was writing down. So you might say the Old Testament Scriptures weren't written for the prophets.

What about Israel? The Jews to this day keep the Scriptures, but let's look at an interesting Scripture. The Sadducees had come along with a fancy question because they had heard the way in which Jesus had put the Pharisees in their place and they thought, "Whoopee! Let's have a try." You would think that they would have been smarter, but they came along and asked:

Mark 12:19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother.

20 "Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring.

21 "And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise.

22 "So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also.

23 "Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife."

24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?

So here were intelligent individuals who could probably recite the majority of the Old Testament Scriptures from heart. For literally years, their whole education had been in these books. They had all 22 of them. Yet Jesus Christ said to them, "You don't understand the Scriptures. You may keep them. You may recite them. You may read them, but you don't understand them." So you might say that the Scriptures were not written for Israel as a physical nation.

What about the apostles? Do they fare any better?

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

We've looked at the three-fold section of Scriptures. Notice:

45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

So we can see that these Scriptures exist for someone whose mind has been opened!

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

What about the Church? The apostle Paul talked about how Jews and Gentiles have been made one. He said:

***Ephesians 2:19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,***

"We are a household. We are built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone." He is talking about what we euphemistically refer to as the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was written by the prophets. That's why the Jews, to this day, don't accept the apocryphal books such as Ben Sirach, Maccabees, Tobit and so forth, because, according to Josephus, they were considered to have been written, "after the spirit of prophecy had been taken from Israel."

So one of the criteria for a book to be part of Scripture was that it had to be written by a prophet! The Jews knew WHEN the spirit of prophecy was, in fact, taken. It is telling!

Who was responsible for recording what we call the New Testament? It was the apostles, or the amanuenses of the apostles. We have references from the end of the first century from Papias, talking about how Mark wrote down what Peter had taught. He did it on Peter's behalf, just as we find that Peter used Sylvanus to write his letter:

1 Peter 5:12 By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

Paul used various people such as Timothy to write letters for him. He would dictate and give the material that was to go in the letter, and Luke or someone else would record it.

It is the same with Luke's gospel. According to Papias, Luke's gospel was written on behalf of Paul.

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We might say that the entirety of the New Testament was written by the apostles. “The foundation of the apostles and prophets” are the two sections of God’s Word. They don’t exist in opposition to one another.

So we might say that Scripture is written for the Church. It is to be viewed as a whole. It’s not that, “This part is irrelevant today.” It is to be viewed as a whole – in its entirety.

A couple of years ago we asked the Young Adults to compare the first chapters of Genesis with the book of Revelation. They found that the very themes that the Eternal introduces in the first few chapters in Genesis, also appear again in the last few chapters of Revelation. It sort of comes back to the beginning again. It sort of envelops the whole book.

Each and every one of us probably have, on occasion, studied things throughout God’s Word and we find that there’s a consistency of these ideas throughout God’s Word. The Scripture is to be viewed as a whole. It is to be viewed synchronically, not diachronically.

We know there is movement within it. We know God’s plan. But there is nowhere in the book where you can go through and find one particular book or one particular chapter that lists ALL the plan of God. You have to have the whole book to do that. You have to have Genesis through to Revelation to come to understand the plan of God. Literally every book adds something to the picture. So it is to be viewed as a whole.

It is to be read in context of itself. As we have often said, the Bible INTERPRETS itself. If you want to understand something in the Bible, what does the Bible say about it? That’s the starting point to understand it. Scripture is, above all else, profitable for us in every way, as Paul says:

***2 Timothy 3:15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,
17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.***

Paul told Timothy to abide in those things.

So if we come back to the Former Prophets, we can look specifically at Joshua and Judges.

What is the role of the Former Prophets? Is it just an historical account? That’s the way in which the vast majority of the “Christian” world sees it. They see it as being no more than an historical account. Then they argue as to whether it is history or not, about whether it can be relied upon.

Role of Former Prophets?

- Lay a foundation for the “latter prophets”, based upon what the people did with the Torah.
- Covenant: Prophets like a prosecuting attorney, bringing a charge against the people for their lawless behaviour.

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In reality, the role of the Former Prophets is to lay a foundation for the Latter Prophets – based upon what the people did with the *Torah*, how they lived their lives in relation to the *Torah* and the consequences of that. Then the prophets could provide their prophecy.

Very much tucked into Joshua and Judges is another aspect that ties it back to the *Torah*. That is the aspect of the covenant. The covenant then is a motif (a recurring theme) that goes right into the very heart of the Prophets. The prophets were like Prosecuting Attorneys, bringing a charge against the people for their lawless behaviour, about how they were conducting themselves in light of the covenant relationship.

Where is the covenant relationship established? It is in the book of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy: in the *Torah*!

That then carries on into the New Testament, because what else do the prophets do? They talk about the covenant being internalised. How was the covenant going to be internalised? It was through the Messiah, through Jesus Christ giving people a new heart on which the Law of God could be written.

So the prophets are not just looking forward to Christ. They are looking back. They are looking both ways at the same time. Unfortunately the world only likes to look one way. But God demands that we look both ways: forward and back.

We used to talk about “duality” in Scripture. Duality has a lot more application in Scripture than perhaps we ever appreciated. Everything about the Scriptures requires that we look back to learn the lessons of the past, and, at the same time, look forward to the future. Maybe that is why God gave us two eyes – to be able to see both ways!

The aspect of the covenant is a major focus of the Former Prophets, tying it into the *Torah* on the one hand, and into the Latter Prophets as they come.

So what do we have with the Former Prophets? It is history. There’s a historical account. We know that the Israelites crossed the River Jordan. We know that Jericho, Ai and various other cities fell and were destroyed. Joshua died. Caleb died. Other people arose and other things of that nature.

But it is history in what form? It is not the form of history that people want! If we get into the Latter Prophets and the book of Jeremiah, all the Commentators get so upset because the book of Jeremiah is not chronological! They get themselves in a knot over it!

Chronology is not necessarily the thing that God is interested in. There is a greater lesson. People should get chronology out of their mind, and read the book for what it says, and come to understand what Jeremiah is SAYING, rather than being concerned about “the first year of Josiah,” as opposed to “the tenth year of Zedekiah,” and “the first year of Jehoiakim,” and the fact that Jeremiah jumps all over the place in terms of time.

If they were concerned about the MESSAGE of Jeremiah, they may learn something! But they want everything in a chronological timeline so that they can try to “make history out of it.”

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History is written from many perspectives. Oftentimes history is written from the perspective of the victor.

Here is a beautiful, black basalt stele that is in the British Museum. It came from Assyria. It is a stele of Shalmaneser.

On the second row on the right side, there is a portrayal of Jehu presenting tribute to Shalmaneser. How do we know that that is what it is? The cuneiform writing that runs between the various pictograms explains that.

This particular account is not mentioned in the Bible. We find no reference in the Bible to Jehu paying tribute to Shalmaneser. Why?

Everyone accepts this stele as being authentic. Yet things get written by people who THINK that that's the way it is. Does this represent Shalmaneser's desire, that all nations pay tribute to him? Or was this carved by some individual in Shalmaneser's reign who was trying to butter up Shalmaneser to make him think how great he was, and that all of these nations were coming and paying tribute to him?



Was it intentionally left out of the Bible because the Bible didn't want to recognise Shalmaneser's greatness? Shalmaneser gets a fairly good "press" in the Bible.

The Bible is, ultimately speaking, the Word of God. It's not a history book written to human specifications – which change! What people consider history today in the academic world, is very different than what was considered history in the 1950s. The criteria has changed.

People get caught up in this aspect of the Bible being history. Why? Because they look upon it diachronically. That's all they see it as: to be studied as a history book.

The Bible, ultimately speaking, is the Word of God. It's His perspective of what was happening – and the lessons He wants us to learn from it.

A lot more happened than is included in the Bible. The Bible tells us on various occasions, "If you want to learn more about this ... go and look in the *Book of Jasher*," or, "Go and look in the *Book of Gad*," or, "Go and look in the *Records of the Kings*." It tells us to go elsewhere to look for the extra details, because it is not interested in giving all the DETAILS.

The Eternal is giving us His perspective, a limited view of what has happened – for a particular purpose, because He wants us to be able to put it together with the aid of His Spirit.

So we will conclude with a question: what is YOUR approach to Scripture? Is it a diachronic approach, where, like most of the rest of the "Christian" world, various parts of the Scripture have no relevance to you whatsoever?

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Or is every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God of import to you, and do you read it to try to understand and learn the lessons that God has there for you, to develop a relationship with God, to develop a relationship with His Son Jesus Christ?

Oftentimes if we read things in the way in which God put them together in the first place, rather than reading things in isolation, they can mean a lot more to us.

I have used the example from time to time of the Book of Job. What is it about? Protestants have said it is about “self-righteousness” because they get to the end of the Book of Esther and suddenly here is the Book of Job sitting by itself before the Book of Psalms.

But in the Scriptures, the Book of Job comes after the Book of Proverbs. I wonder if part of the lesson of the Book of Job is the fact that it is a case study for you and me to appreciate what the Book of Proverbs is talking about, because the Book of Proverbs talks about knowledge, wisdom and understanding. “Wisdom is the principle thing.”

What was it that Job attained at the end of the book? Could you say that he attained wisdom? He was a man who had a knowledge of God and he had a certain level of understanding of God. But at the end of the day, he had the wisdom of God!

In many ways, the Book of Job is a case study in what the Book of Proverbs is all about. That makes it a little more real, because none of us ever want to think of ourselves as being self-righteous. Does anyone like to think of themselves that way? But we all want to have some wisdom! And here’s a man who went through some very hard knocks to develop wisdom. It put him back in a right relationship with God, and all of a sudden the book takes on a new dimension.

If you put the book of Matthew after the Book of Chronicles, then the genealogy at the beginning of *Matthew* takes on a new sense. “What is it doing, emulating the Book of Chronicles?” “What’s the tie here?”

It is very instructive, very important that we bear these things in mind, that we read these things, that we understand these things and that we see things relating together.

We end up with the big picture of what God is doing! We don’t just have a fleeting scene in front of our eyes. We see the reality of what it is that God is doing, by being able to see all the parts of the jigsaw puzzle put together in a complete picture, so that we can appreciate it. ❖