

BEFORE JESUS

the story of God and Israel, all of it leaning forward

written in the light of what happened

AFTER

LAW Genesis to Deuteronomy	HISTORY Joshua to Esther	POETRY & WISDOM Job to Song of Songs	PROPHETS Isaiah to Malachi	GOSPELS Matthew to John	ACTS	LETTERS Romans to Jude	REV.
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Widths show **share of words**: roughly three quarters of the Bible was written before Jesus arrived.

66 books · 39 before the join · middle chapter: **Psalm 117** · open it dead in the middle and you land in the Psalms

THE JOIN. Malachi ends, Matthew begins. Everything to the left is **before**: you are standing before the person this whole library is waiting for. The border sign is a **warning sign, not a no-entry sign**: ancient world, different people. Slow down and read differently.

THE OLD TESTAMENT · BEFORE THE JOIN

Law

Genesis · Exodus · Leviticus · Numbers · Deuteronomy

The founding story, and the covenant rules given to ancient Israel. Genesis 1 is arguing with Babylon's gods, not with science.

Read it like a founding charter: ask what it meant to them before what it means to you.

History

Joshua · Judges · Ruth · Samuel · Kings · Chronicles · Ezra · Nehemiah · Esther

The nation's story told warts and all: kings, failures, exile, return. The Bible describing something is not the Bible endorsing it.

Read it like a documentary: follow the story, don't copy the characters.

Poetry & Wisdom

Job · Psalms · Proverbs · Ecclesiastes · Song of Songs

Songs, prayers and sayings. "The stars fought" is a lyric, not a news report. Proverbs describe how life usually works, not guarantees.

Read it like a song book: images and repetition, a few at a time, not twenty in a row.

Prophets

Isaiah to Malachi (17 books)

God's messengers speaking into specific kings, crises and moments. Every one of them is addressing something happening right then, and pointing forward.

Read it like urgent open letters to a nation: ask who, when and why first.

THE NEW TESTAMENT · AFTER THE JOIN

Eyewitness accounts

Matthew · Mark · Luke · John

Four accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, built on the people who were there. Luke even opens by telling you his method.

Read it like testimony: reports that something happened. New to the Bible? Start here.

The investigative report

Acts

Luke's carefully researched second volume: what happened next, as the news about Jesus spread from one city to an empire.

Read it like a news feature with a travel diary inside it.

Management reports

Romans to Jude (21 letters)

Letters to young churches about how they were going at living out the commands of Jesus. Corinth was a mess, so Corinthians is about the mess.

Read it like someone else's mail: ask what was going on before you ask what it means for you.

One wild vision

Revelation

Picture-language written to persecuted churches: hope in symbols, for people who needed courage more than a calendar.

Read it like resistance poetry: symbols carrying hope, not a timetable to decode.

THE NUMBER ONE RULE

Context is to the Bible what location is to real estate.

Where a verse lives decides what it means. And the fence: context tells you what a page **meant**. It doesn't cancel what it **means**.

THE TWO QUESTIONS, EVERY TIME

1. **Where am I?** Find the join. Before Jesus or after? If it's before, you're in the long corridor that runs towards him: read patiently.

2. **What am I holding?** Find your shelf above. A law, a story, a song, a letter? Then read it the way that kind of writing asks to be read.

IF YOU HIT A WALL

■ **Stuck in Leviticus?** You're reading a legal code, not a story. Normal. Jump to Joshua, or rest in a psalm.

■ **A verse on a poster?** Back up two verses and read the paragraph. The real promise is usually better.

■ **Something sounds strange?** Check the shelf. A song isn't a report, and a law for ancient Israel isn't a text to you.

NEW? START HERE

Ten minutes a day, five days.

Day one: Genesis 1. Then Luke, an eyewitness-built account, a chapter at a time.

Ask the two questions out loud, read with your answers in view, and notice what changes.

Why read it at all? Something happened. These are the documents that report it.

Northside Community Church | Book Club: How To Read It | August 2026

Two questions. Where am I? What am I holding?