

The structure of a book, meaning how its author organizes the text and material to best accomplish the book's purpose, informs its reader. Structure can have both large scale and small scale. The large-scale structure of some of the Bible's books is clear, such as those, like the book of Acts, that follow events in chronological order. If you know the author is tracing events chronologically in connected sequence, then you expect to evaluate passages for their chronological relationship and continuity or discontinuity. But not all Bible books are chronological. Some skip ahead and then circle back. Reading those books assuming chronological order can confuse the reader. Other books are chronological only in part while organizing other parts thematically. Some books have no chronology, only thematic structure.

Even within these large scales, though, authors may also be organizing material in small-scale ways. Authors may move back and forth between poetry and prose, each such movement cluing the reader to a shift in the author's intention. Authors may shift from figure-centered narratives to event-centered narratives in which the figures are less significant. Bible authors also often use shifts in locale, such as from northern to southern kingdom or from Israel to enemy of Israel, to structure narratives and clue the reader to significant shifts in meaning. Multiple different large-scale and small-scale structures, shifting back and forth across books and within books, can make reading the Bible more difficult than reading simpler works. Recognizing those shifts can also make reading the Bible far more rewarding.