

THE PENTATEUCHAL PRINCIPLE WITHIN THE CANONICAL PROCESS

DUANE L. CHRISTENSEN*

In an article published in 1981 Isaac Kikawada argued for a five-part, or what we designate here as pentateuchal, structural design for the book of Genesis on three successive levels: for Genesis 1–11, for Genesis as a whole, and for Genesis within the Pentateuch. In each instance the three central elements in his structural outline share a common theme, and the first and fifth elements form an inclusio. Kikawada cited a somewhat parallel situation in the book of Zephaniah, where Ivan Ball had earlier “shown that the Book of Zephaniah as a whole imitates the outline of a part of the book or that the organization of the book as a whole is found in miniature as a part of Zephaniah.”¹

This paper is an attempt to carry Kikawada’s insight further and to provide an explanation for what he intuited—namely, the basic structural principle of the canonical process within ancient Israel and early Christianity, which is pentateuchal in nature. In an earlier study I have attempted to sketch this process in broad outline in terms of categories taken from Jungian psychology.² Carl Jung was fascinated with the number four as a symbol of wholeness and a structuring principle within the psychic process for both the individual and the collective unconscious of a given people. He illustrated what he had in mind in terms of the four gospels in the NT, which display certain characteristic features—namely, a chiastic arrangement of the four parts and the principle of “three plus one” in the relationship of the parts.³ Thus for Jung, Matthew and John form a structural pair with Matthew as the gospel addressed to the Jews and John as the gospel of the Gentiles. Mark and Luke form another pair, with Mark as the gospel from the point of view of the apostle Peter and Luke as the gospel from the perspective of Paul. The “three plus one” structure is evident in the commonly accepted designation of the first three as the synoptic gospels set over against the gospel of John, which Jung called the “Gnostic Gospel.”

The structural features Jung had in mind are seen even more clearly in terms of the last four books of the Pentateuch, as I argued in my earlier

* Duane Christensen is professor of Old Testament and intercultural studies at Patten College, 2433 Coolidge Avenue, Oakland, CA 94601.

¹ I. M. Kikawada, “Genesis on Three Levels,” *AJBI* 7 (Tokyo: Yamamoto Shoten, 1981) 6.

² D. L. Christensen, “The Center of the First Testament within the Canonical Process,” *BTB* 23/2 (Summer 1993) 48–53.

³ See C. G. Jung, *Mandala Symbolism* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1959) 4, and elsewhere in his collected works.

paper. Here Exodus, Numbers and Leviticus form the three items with something in common, which earlier scholars have grouped with Genesis as the so-called Tetrateuch. This block of material is set over against the book of Deuteronomy as the second giving of the law of Moses shortly before his death and the entrance into the promised land under the leadership of Moses' successor Joshua. In mainstream Biblical scholarship the book of Deuteronomy has been singled out as an independent source, with the other three books in question made up of a mixture of the traditional sources J, E and P. The books of Exodus and Deuteronomy form a structural pair, with a curious nesting of parallel features: the birth of Moses (Exodus 1) and the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34), two Songs of Moses (Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32), two presentations of the ten commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5) followed by two law codes (Exodus 21–23 and Deuteronomy 12–26). And of course Leviticus and Numbers are parallel wilderness books that carry the story line from Mount Sinai (the covenant and giving of the law) to Mount Nebo with a renewal of the covenant and a second giving of the law that follows in the book of Deuteronomy.

The same structural features are seen in the shaping of the Former Prophets (Joshua through 2 Kings in the Masoretic tradition) and in the final canonical shaping of the structural frame around the original Torah (Exodus through Deuteronomy) and the Former Prophets—namely, the stories of the ancestors in Genesis 12–50 and the Latter Prophets—as I have shown in my earlier study. The “three plus one” structuring principle is particularly evident in these two parallel structures:

Ancestors = Abraham, Isaac and Jacob + Jacob's twelve sons
 Prophets = Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel + Book of the Twelve

The Book of the Twelve is the collection of the twelve so-called minor prophets. The structural pairing of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is common knowledge, whereas the structural pairing of Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve is the focus of attention in a Society of Biblical Literature consultation organized by John Watts.

What Kikawada intuited some years ago is the simple fact that Jung's model of quaternary structures must be carried one step further so far as the canonical process of sacred Scripture is concerned. Five parts constitute the “quintessential” structuring principle, not four. And when the process has proceeded to that level the canonical process itself is closed. Nothing further can be added within that particular canonical structure. In short, the title of Kikawada's seminal study can be expanded to that of “Genesis on Five Levels” as an instructive illustration of the pentateuchal principle within the canonical process in ancient Israel and early Christianity.

The five books of Moses are known as the Pentateuch, and the concept of pentateuchal structures elsewhere within the canon of sacred Scripture is nothing new. The book of Psalms is in five parts, each of which concludes with a special benediction. The fact that these five parts of the Psalter are pentateuchal in the sense that they are related to the five books of the Pen-

tateuch has been the focus of significant scholarly discussion.⁴ The so-called festal scrolls (*mēgillôt*) are five in number (Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther) and may also be seen as pentateuchal in structure in a somewhat different sense. Moreover a good many books in the Bible are arranged in a five-part (pentateuchal) structure, as I discovered some years ago in my own research in the book of Deuteronomy, which I have outlined as follows:⁵

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| A. The outer frame: part 1—a look backwards | Deuteronomy 1–3 |
| B. The inner frame: part 1—the great peroration | Deuteronomy 4–11 |
| X. The central core | Deuteronomy 12–26 |
| B'. The inner frame: part 2—the covenant ceremony | Deuteronomy 27–30 |
| A'. The outer frame: part 2—a look forward | Deuteronomy 31–34 |

Joshua is introduced in Deut 1:38 as the person Moses is to encourage as the new leader of God's people. Joshua appears once again in 3:21 as the one Yahweh has chosen. This transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua is the focus of attention in 3:23–29, but Joshua does not appear again in the book of Deuteronomy until the beginning of the second half of the outer frame, when Moses stands at the very end of his allotted 120 years (cf. 31:1; 34:7).

The connection between chaps. 11 and 27 in Deuteronomy is equally clear. The blessings and curses associated with Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal are introduced in the concluding transitional section of part 1 in the inner frame in 11:26–32. The concluding two verses in this section (vv. 31–32) restate the central theme of Deuteronomy as a whole: When you “cross over the Jordan to go in to possess the land, . . . be careful to do all the statutes and judgments I am giving you today.” The reader is invited to “cross over” in another sense to 27:1–13, where reference is made once again to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim and the blessings and curses—which are expanded in great detail (27:14–28:68).

The most obvious pentateuchal structure in the Bible is of course the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch):

- A. Genesis
- B. Exodus
- X. Leviticus
- B'. Numbers
- A'. Deuteronomy

In this structure the center is the book of Leviticus, which is somewhat briefer and more elusive or enigmatic in its meaning than the two wilderness books of Exodus and Numbers on either side of it. This observation suggests another feature of the canonical pentateuchal principle, in that the central element is often enigmatic in nature.

⁴ D. L. Christensen, “The Book of Psalms within the Canonical Process in Ancient Israel,” *JETS* 39/3 (September 1996) 421–432.

⁵ D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (WBC 6A; Dallas: Word, 1991) xli.

The structure of Genesis 1–11, which functions as the introduction to the Bible as a whole, illustrates rather well the pentateuchal structure within the canonical process:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| A. Creation (ending with the three sons of Adam) | Genesis 1–4 |
| B. Enoch | Genesis 5 |
| X. The sons of God and the daughters of <i>hā'ādām</i> | Gen 6:1–4 |
| B'. Noah | Gen 6:5–9:29 |
| A'. Dispersion (beginning with the three sons of Noah) | Genesis 10–11 |

The curious thing, as shown in the discussion to follow, is that this same five-part structuring principle seems to operate in turn at each successive level in the canonical process: for Genesis 1–11, for Genesis as a whole, for the entire Pentateuch, for the OT (the HB), and for the Christian Bible (OT plus NT).

The creation account, with the three sons of Adam (Cain, Abel and Seth), ends in death, division, and separate genealogies. The dispersion after the great flood begins with the presentation of the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham and Japheth), in which the genealogies of these sons constitute the very structure of the table of nations in Genesis 10.

The centrality of the enigmatic story of the “sons of God and daughters of *hā'ādām*” episode in Gen 6:1–4 is paralleled in the book of *Enoch*, in which the centrality of this same episode is so self-evident to the careful reader as to require little commentary. As Dan Olson has noted: “Virtually all of the material in 1 *Enoch* is related to one or another of two parallel themes: (1) the fall of the evil Watchers (a term referring to the so-called ‘sons of God’ in Gen 6:1–4); and (2) the ascension of righteous Enoch, his acquisition of wisdom, and the glorious future of all the righteous.”⁶

Olson found a third theme in the *Enoch* materials that focuses on Noah who is, like Enoch, an example of righteousness. The three themes of 1 *Enoch* are therefore the three themes of Genesis 1–11, bracketed by creation and dispersion, each of which is demarcated by the stories of three sons. The pairing of Enoch and Noah is justifiable in Genesis 1–11, despite the extremely brief notice given to Enoch in Genesis 5, by the fact that only these two men are said to have “walked with God” (Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9), a phrase that is much too powerful and suggestive to pass over lightly.

At the very center of the enigmatic story of the “sons of God and the daughters of *hā'ādām*” in 6:1–4 stands a single word in the Hebrew text, *bšgm*, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁷ The fact that the Hebrew consonants in this word appear with a different vowel in some manuscripts led to an important discovery—namely, that both readings are intended to be heard here at the level of a literary pun. On the one hand, we have reached a turning point in the narrative. God’s patience has run out “because of their going astray.” The great flood is a necessary consequence for human sin. At the

⁶ D. Olson, “The Biblical Center and the Canonical Process: Reflections on the ‘Pentateuchal’ Model and the Book of Enoch” (unpublished paper, May 21, 1993).

⁷ D. L. Christensen, “Janus Parallelism in Genesis 6:3,” *Hebrew Studies* 27 (1986) 20–24.

same time another message is carried on this same word, which may also be rendered as a connecting phrase, “*in that* he is flesh, and his days shall be 120 years.” But the question then almost leaps off the page: Of whom is the writer speaking? None of the ancestors to follow on the pages of the book of Genesis is limited to a life span of 120 years. And the only person in the entire HB to die at that age is Moses, a fact highlighted in the framing of the final section of the book of Deuteronomy (chaps. 31–34), at the conclusion of the Pentateuch (see Deut 31:2; 34:7).

Like Genesis 1–11, the structure of the book of Genesis as a whole is also in five parts, as Kikawada has shown.⁸

A. Primal history	Genesis 1–11
B. Abram/Abraham	Genesis 12–25
X. Isaac	[Genesis 18–35]
B'. Jacob/Israel	Genesis 25–35
A'. Joseph story	Genesis 36–50

Once again the center of this structure is much briefer and more difficult to isolate and describe than either the Abraham cycle or the Jacob cycle, which frame the somewhat elusive presentation of Isaac, who is so passive and his story so closely woven into that of Abraham and Jacob that one is hesitant to designate it either as an epic or a cycle in the way those terms are sometimes applied to the Abraham and Jacob accounts. Nonetheless the centrality of Isaac has not escaped notice even in antiquity. Almost two thousand years ago Philo of Alexandria saw Isaac as the central figure in the book of Genesis, and the influence of the *Akedah* (“binding” of Isaac, Genesis 22) on the NT is as undeniable as it is unspoken.⁹

Both Duane Garrett and Gary Rendsburg have located the center of Genesis in the Jacob cycle.¹⁰ Rendsburg analyzed this cycle and posited its center in the Haran episode (Genesis 29–32). This center is bracketed by two paired episodes in his analysis: the dream of the heavenly ladder at Bethel (28:10–22) and the wrestling match at Peniel (32:1–32). These mysterious passages also play an important role among those who produced the subsequent Enoch tradition—but in subtle and mysterious ways, as Olson has noted.

It makes a profound difference whether one takes Isaac or Jacob as the true center of Genesis. Jacob struggles with God and attempts to see God, like Moses after him (Exod 33:18). In so doing Jacob becomes Israel. Popular etymologies of the word “Israel” in antiquity include both “he who struggles with God” and “a man seeing God.”¹¹ Jacob is wounded by his adversary in this encounter, which speaks to the profound mystery of Israel. Christians

⁸ I. M. Kikawada and A. Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Abingdon, 1985) 119–126.

⁹ The only explicit citation of the *Akedah* in the NT is in Heb 11:17 (cf. also Rom 8:32).

¹⁰ D. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Baker, 1991) 121–125; G. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Eisenbrauns, 1986) 53–69.

¹¹ See J. Z. Smith, “The Prayer of Joseph,” *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (ed. J. Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1968) 253–294.

through the ages, however, have been profoundly drawn to Isaac and the *Akedah* as an astounding foreshadowing of the mystery of Jesus Christ. By choosing the Jacob episode over that of Isaac in the *Akedah*, the book of *Enoch* remains a distinctively Jewish document.

The existence of repetitive motifs and recurring themes in the book of Genesis has been noted by many scholars through the years. Kikawada called specific attention to the work of Loren Fisher who claimed that there are threefold repetitions of the same theme and motifs in the Abraham, Jacob and Joseph cycles.¹² Fisher argued that the Canaanite epic of King Keret conforms to the same particular thematic pattern of what he designated as a patriarchal cycle.

Under Kikawada's supervision, Mary Streitwieser examined the patriarchs from the point of view of their wives and concluded that the Isaac narrative, though short, should constitute a full cycle.¹³ She also recognized that the wives of the three patriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel—are all imported from Mesopotamia, the land of ancestral origin. She observed that all three wives are barren and that only with divine intervention are all three made to bear children in order to implement the covenant of Abraham, the father of the multitude of nations. Streitwieser also noted that the Joseph cycle stands outside this repetitive pattern. Kikawada added the comment that the setting of the Joseph cycle is different from the patriarchal cycles in that "the backdrop for the main part of the Joseph Cycle is Egypt, whereas the orientation of the patriarchal cycles is decidedly toward the land of Canaan. Moreover, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob wander around the land, in contrast to Joseph, who once settled in Egypt becomes more of a stationary figure."¹⁴

Kikawada also called attention to a study by J. Muffs who observed that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are presented as noble warriors, which is not the case with Joseph. As Muffs put it:

The focus of the investigation will be the role of Abraham as a warrior, allied by pact with Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, who, with his troops restores not only the plundered goods of Lot, but those of his allies as well. Decisive in battle, yet noble in peace, Abraham refuses to take a share in the booty. . . . Each element in this section of the story has its exact counterpart in the laws of war and in the etiquette of booty restoration found sporadically in the international treaties preserved at Boghazkoi and Ugarit. The Israelite storyteller brings all these ancient laws of war and peace in his depiction of Abraham as the most noble of warriors. . . . Furthermore, a re-examination of the secular treaties between Isaac and Abimelek and Jacob and Laban, clearly points out that military activity following Near Eastern traditions of law and chivalry are a common, but often neglected, theme in the life of all the patriarchs as depicted by most of the tradents of the Book of Genesis.¹⁵

¹² L. Fisher, "The Patriarchal Cycle," *Orient and Occident* (ed. H. A. Hoffner; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1973) 59–65.

¹³ In a term paper she wrote for Kikawada in 1973 at the University of California, Berkeley; see Kikawada, "Genesis on Three Levels" 6.

¹⁴ Kikawada, "Genesis on Three Levels" 7.

¹⁵ J. Muffs, "Abraham the Noble Warrior," *Abstracts: The Sixth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1973); see Kikawada, "Genesis on Three Levels" 7–8.

In light of the arguments of both Muffs and Streitwieser, Kikawada concluded that the three central sections of Genesis (the narratives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) share much in common. These three patriarchal cycles constitute a literary whole “whose theological significance rests upon the covenant of circumcision established in the righteous and perfect Abraham, which are enclosed by the Primaeval and Joseph Cycles.”¹⁶

The correspondence between the primeval history (Genesis 1–11) and the Joseph story (Genesis 36–50) was demonstrated by Kikawada on several grounds. In the first place the setting of both is not oriented to the land of Canaan as such. Both are placed in a foreign setting: the former in Mesopotamia, the latter in Egypt. Secondly, he noted two significant correspondences in vocabulary “that are exclusively found in the Primaeval History and the Joseph Cycles.”¹⁷ The phrase *rwḥ ʾlhym*, “the wind/spirit of God,” appears in the story of creation at the very outset: “And the earth was *thw wbhww*, and the *rwḥ ʾlhym* was hovering over the face of the waters.” In the Joseph narrative the phrase appears once again in a speech of Pharaoh extolling the wisdom of Joseph: “And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find a man like this in whom is the *rwḥ ʾlhym*?’” (Gen 41:7). The second peculiar repetition in vocabulary is a formulaic expression with the verb to see: *rʾy* plus *ky ṭwb*, “that it was good” (or “how good”). As Kikawada noted, this formula appears six times in the first chapter of Genesis and only four times elsewhere: (1) in the story of Adam and Eve (3:6): “And the woman saw how good the tree was for food, . . . And she took of its fruit and she ate”; (2) in 6:2, where “the sons of the gods saw the daughters of *hʾdm* how good they were”; (3) in the dream of the butler and the baker at 40:16: “When the chief baker saw how good the interpretation was, he said to Joseph, ‘I also had a dream’”; (4) in the Blessing of Jacob in the passage dealing with Issachar: “He saw the resting place how good it was” (49:15). It was this observation that should have alerted Kikawada to explore in greater detail the curious function of the strange passage on the sons of God and the daughters of *hʾdm* in 6:1–4.

An earlier study by Bruce Dahlberg lends still further support to the parallel nature of Genesis 1–11 and the Joseph narrative in Genesis 36–50 in terms of thematic inclusions.¹⁸ Kikawada added to these his observations on the conclusion of the two cycles—that is, at 11:31–32 and 50:22–26. In both we find that (1) the patriarch Abram/Abraham is introduced (in the latter, Abraham is accompanied by Isaac and Jacob), (2) the entrance into the promised land is referred to with a hopeful note, (3) a person dies, (4) the narrative looks forward to the yet unfinished business that lies ahead, and (5) there is a brief chronological reference.¹⁹

Kikawada has demonstrated the pentateuchal principle for Genesis 1–11, the book of Genesis, and Genesis within the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch). The next step in the development of the pentateuchal structure

¹⁶ Kikawada, “Genesis on Three Levels” 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ B. Dahlberg, “On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis,” *TD* 24 (1976) 360–367.

¹⁹ Kikawada, “Genesis on Three Levels” 9.

within the canonical process is that of the entire OT, with the book of Daniel in the central position:

A. Torah	Pentateuch
B. Former Prophets	Joshua through Kings
X. Daniel	
B'. Latter Prophets	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve
A'. Writings	Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, festal scrolls, Ezra-Nehemiah

The centrality of Daniel is in part based on its chameleon-like ability to join itself to different subgroupings in the OT in that it functions as a bridge between the prophetic literature, the wisdom literature, and narrative history. This conclusion is also suggested by the curious symmetry in word-count noted by David Noel Freedman,²⁰ who dismissed Daniel as “late” and therefore irrelevant because it spoils his scheme somewhat. By putting Daniel at the center we once again find the familiar short and enigmatic core with a most remarkable symmetry in word-count as follows:

A. Torah	80,000] 150,000
B. Former Prophets	70,000	
X. Daniel	5,000	
B'. Latter Prophets	72,000] 150,000
A'. Writings	78,000	

Though the book of Daniel is much shorter than the other four items in this pentateuchal structure, it is still so large and complex in itself that one is compelled to search for a center within the center. For the ancient Enochic thinkers, this center was the son-of-man vision of Daniel 7.²¹ Nonetheless a strong case can be made for the desecration of the vessels of the temple on the part of Belshazzar in Dan 5:1–4 as the structural center:

A. Nebuchadnezzar's initial desecration of the temple	1:1–2
B. Daniel and his three friends faithfully observe the Torah	1:3–21
C. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue and the four kingdoms	2:1–48
D. Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace	3:1–30
E. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree and his madness	4:1–37
X. Belshazzar desecrates the vessels of the temple	5:1–4
E'. The handwriting on the wall and Belshazzar's death	5:5–30
D'. Daniel in the lion's den	6:1–28
C'. Daniel's dream of the four beasts	7:1–28
B'. Daniel's visions	8:1–12:4
A'. The final desecration of the temple	12:5–13

²⁰ D. N. Freedman, “The Undiscovered Symmetry of the Bible,” *Bible Review* 10/1 (February 1994) 34–41.

²¹ I owe this observation to D. Olson.

One of the beauties of symmetric analyses of texts is that plumbing the text for psychologically-felt patterns does not make it necessary to insist on any one model to the exclusion of all others. A work as artistically rich and subtle as the book of Daniel may well display more than one overall pattern, depending on the questions put to the text. If the Enochians find a different center here, there is still no reason to conclude that one is right and the other wrong. They are simply different ways of looking at the same text.

It is also possible to see the book of Daniel as the joining together of two parallel pentateuchal structures as follows:

A. Nebuchadnezzar's desecration of the temple	1:1-2	
B. Daniel and his three friends observe the Torah	1:3-21	
X. Nebuchadnezzar's dream: the four kingdoms	2:1-48	
B'. Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace	3:1-30	
A'. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree and his madness	4:1-37	
A. Belshazzar desecrates the vessels of the temple	5:1-30	
B. Daniel in the lion's den	6:1-28	
X. Daniel's dream of the four beasts	7:1-28	
B'. Daniel's visions of the future	8:1-12:4	
A'. The final desecration of the temple	12:5-13	

In this analysis the parallel centers are an apocalyptic vision of the four kingdoms, to be climaxed by the kingdom of God. Such a reading is in agreement with both that of the ancient Enochic thinkers and the apocalyptic worldview of early Christians who read the book of Daniel as the prophetic announcement of the kingdom of God that Jesus brought to fulfillment.

The structural pairing of the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets is obvious. In Jewish tradition this huge block of tradition, which constitutes roughly one half of the HB in length, is called simply the *Nēbi'im* ("Prophets").

Though the structural pairing of the Torah and the Writings is less obvious, it can also be demonstrated in a number of different ways. The relation of the book of Psalms to the Torah is discussed above, and the books of Job and Proverbs have strong ties to the Pentateuch, as I have argued elsewhere.²² The work of the Chronicler carries the story line back to Adam for a fresh retelling of the sacred story so as to order the spiritual life of the restored community of faith around the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most interesting observation in the curious symmetry of word-count, along the lines of what Freedman has seen, is that of the pentateuchal structure of the Bible as a whole:

A. Primary history	150,000	} 222,000
B. Latter Prophets	72,000	
X. Daniel	5,000	
B'. Writings (without Esther)	75,000	} 222,000
A'. NT	147,000	

²² D. L. Christensen, "Job and the Age of the Patriarchs in Old Testament Narrative," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 13/3 (1986) 225-228; cf. also *Bible 101: God's Story in Human History* (BIBAL, forthcoming), chap. 2 (section on "The Writings and the Completion of the First Testament").

In this structure Daniel remains at the center of the Bible and forms a bridge between the Prophets and the Writings. In the book of Daniel we encounter the full blast of the apocalyptic age. The endtime has come with a crisis of unimaginable proportions, for the very root and foundation of human existence are shaken to the core. The NT forms an *inclusio* with the primary history (Genesis through 2 Kings). The narrative story line of the primary history carries the epic account from creation to the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylonia in about 560 BC. The NT picks up the story with the birth of Jesus and continues the epic account to the very end of days depicted earlier in the apocalyptic visions of the book of Daniel.

The book of Esther apparently did not achieve full canonicity until the time of Jerome (about AD 380), as I have argued elsewhere.²³ Esther is omitted in the canonical lists of Melito (third century), Athanasius (about 326), Gregory of Nazianzus (about 370), and the anonymous writer of the *Synopsis Scripturae Sacrae* (contemporary with Athanasius). Moreover there is no agreement within the other early lists as to where Esther belongs, when it is included. It was the delayed inclusion of Esther in the canon that broke up the category of the festal scrolls, which resulted in the distribution of these books within the canon and effectively replaced the concept of a 22-book canon of the OT with the 24-book canon of Talmudic tradition. Without Esther the word-count for the Writings plus the NT is 222,000, which is virtually identical to that of the primary history plus the Latter Prophets in the OT.

Freedman has posited a somewhat different picture of the formation of the NT in terms of symmetry in word-count. He sees the equivalent of the primary history of the HB in the NT combination of the three synoptic gospels and the book of Acts. The first three gospels share a good deal of common material and have significant literary connections with each other. Though there is strong minority opinion to the contrary, it is commonly agreed in the mainstream of Biblical scholarship that the gospels of Matthew and Luke are dependent on Mark for a substantial part of their contents. Moreover these three gospels share substantial other materials that many scholars conclude are derived from a hypothetical Q source. The result, for Freedman, is a block of narrative material that consists of the synoptic gospels along with the continuation of Luke in the book of Acts. This material constitutes what he calls the primary history of the NT. While the gospel of John is normally placed between Luke and Acts, no one doubts that Acts is in fact the continuation of Luke, as the author of Luke-Acts points out explicitly in the opening verses of Acts.

This combination of the gospels and Acts, like the primary history in the OT, constitutes almost exactly one half of the total number of words in the larger work. In both cases the primary history consists of 49 percent of the total length of each testament. In the primary history of the NT the natural literary division comes after Matthew and Mark, with the second unit—Luke-Acts—constituting the largest continuous narrative in the entire work.

²³ D. L. Christensen, "Josephus and the Twenty-two-book Canon of Sacred Scripture," *JETS* 29 (1986) 37–46.

For the rest of the NT Freedman finds the next corpus in the Pauline epistles, including both the so-called authentic epistles universally attributed to the apostle himself and those traditionally assigned to Paul even if the authorship is disputed (such as the book of Hebrews). Altogether Freedman sees fourteen epistles traditionally assigned to Paul, with a word-count of approximately 40,000, which is identical to that of Luke-Acts. This symmetry corresponds to that between the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets of the HB (the OT).

Freedman sees the remaining books of the NT as part of what he calls the “catch-all Writings” of the HB. This section is dominated by writings attributed to the apostle John, including his gospel, his three epistles, and the book of Revelation. Like the Chronicler’s work in the Writings of the OT, the gospel of John reaches back to the very beginning of Genesis and presents itself as a parallel to that of the primary history. If in addition the gospel of John is linked with the book of Revelation at the end of the NT we see a pattern of envelope construction much like that of the Chronicler’s work in the Writings of the OT. In that instance the Writings begin with Chronicles and end with Ezra-Nehemiah (taken as a single book). These two books form an envelope around the rest of the Writings. In like manner John’s gospel and the book of Revelation form an envelope around what Freedman calls the general or catholic epistles (including those of John) and in some respects around the whole of the NT extending from creation to the *eschaton* itself.

Freedman argues that just as the Torah was pulled out of the primary history in the OT, so the gospels were pulled out of the primary history of the NT. But the gospels are intended for a very different purpose. By putting the gospel of John between Luke and Acts, the message is clear: The four gospels are first. The intention is to stress the importance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. He is the central figure of the NT. Luke’s objective in the composition of Luke-Acts is slightly different. He intended to show how the Christian movement started in Jerusalem and ended in Rome.

A less convincing aspect of Freedman’s arguments is the exclusion of 2 Peter, 2 John and 3 John so as to end up with a canon of 24 books that total 144,000 words. He notes that the number of the saved of the twelve tribes in the book of Revelation is 144,000 and suggests that there is a correlation between the number of words in the NT and this sacred number in the book of Revelation: in Matthew and Mark, 32,000; in Luke and Acts, 40,000, for a total of 72,000; in the Pauline corpus, 40,000; in the Johannine corpus and the other apostolic writings, 32,000, again for a total of 72,000 words and a grand total of 144,000 words. The reason for this symmetry, in Freedman’s opinion, is to establish the NT as authoritative Scripture just like the OT. Using the OT as the model, the early Christian community arranged the materials in an order that achieves the same kind of symmetry. Freedman sees this as a conscious effort to establish the authority of the NT, which took place sometime about the middle of the second century AD.

There is a simpler way of seeing the structure of the two testaments, which is based on the 22-book canon of the OT as described by Josephus: five books of Moses, plus 13 “prophets” and four “hagiographa”—that is, $5 + 17 = 22$.

This 22-book canon of the OT was not invented by Josephus. The structure was already an ancient one for him and probably served in turn as a pattern for the formation of the NT in the emerging canon of the Christian Bible, as follows:

		Exodus	Numbers	
	Genesis	Leviticus	Deuteronomy	
Joshua	Samuel		Isaiah	Ezekiel
Judges	Kings		Jeremiah	The Twelve
		Daniel		
Psalms	Proverbs		Chronicles	Nehemiah
Job	<i>Męgillôt</i>		Ezra	Maccabees
	Matthew	Luke		
			Acts of the Apostles	
	Mark	John		
Romans	2 Corinthians		Philippians	1 Thessalonians
1 Corinthians	Galatians		Colossians	2 Thessalonians
		Ephesians		
1 Timothy	Titus		Hebrews	1 Peter
2 Timothy	Philemon		James	2 Peter
	1 John	3 John		
			Revelation	
	2 John	Jude		

From a structural point of view, the four gospels plus Acts stand in the center of this canon as a kind of “New Torah.” The resultant canonical structure is:

$$(5 + 17) + 5 + (17 + 5) = 22 + 5 + 22 = 49 \text{ books } (= 7^2)$$

Since this New Torah (the gospels plus Acts) constitutes the fulfillment of the OT it stands between the two halves of the Christian Bible, belonging to both—each of which is made up of 27 books. In one sense, then, one can argue that Jesus, together with the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, is the center of the Bible in its present canonical form. This conclusion is somewhat similar to that reached by Norbert Lohfink who commented that, at least in one sense, “the sole inspired ‘author’ of the Old Testament was Jesus, and certain figures of the primitive Church.”²⁴

Another curious observation is in order: The gospels and Acts are as much a part of the OT as they are of the NT. They stand between the testaments and belong to both. The gospels plus Acts, then, constitute a New Torah (the Christian Pentateuch), which completes the OT by fulfilling the canonical structures that shape that body of literature.

²⁴ N. Lohfink, “The Inerrancy of Scripture,” *The Inerrancy of Scripture and Other Essays* (Berkeley: BIBAL, 1992) 39.