

THE ORDER OF THE BOOKS IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

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The Bible as a literary work is made up of text and paratext. Paratext may be defined as everything in a text other than the words, that is to say, those elements that are adjoined to the text but are not part of the text itself if the “text” is limited strictly to the words. The paratext of Scripture embraces features such as the order of the biblical books, the names assigned to the different books, and the differing schemes of textual division within the books.¹ Since these elements are adjoined to the text, they have an influence on reading and interpretation. This study proceeds on the assumption that text and paratext (though conceptually differentiated) are for all practical purposes inseparable and have an important interrelationship that influences the reading process. I will examine one paratextual feature, namely, the order of the placement of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible. Where a biblical book is placed relative to other books influences, initially at least, a reader’s view of the book, raising expectations regarding the contents of the book.² A reader naturally assumes that material that is juxtaposed is in some way related in meaning. It is this habit that forms the basis of the following survey and analysis.

It would perhaps be helpful at this early juncture to explain what I am not doing in the present study. This is not a history of the formation of the canon of Scripture. There are many books and articles that attempt such a survey. Some of these have been used in the present study, though their research and conclusions have been put to a different use than that of plotting the historical genesis of the collection of books that now makes up the Hebrew Bible. This article is not an effort to justify the limits of the canon, nor does it seek to explain why some books were included (e.g. Esther, Ecclesiastes) or some excluded (e.g. Sirach) from the canon of Scripture. Nor is it an explanation of the genesis of alternative arrangements of the biblical books. I am not concerned with genetics but with the effect on the reader of

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¹ This is what an earlier scholar, C. D. Ginsburg, called “the outer form of the text,” as opposed to “the text itself.” See *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897; New York: Ktav, 1966) 1, 144. Ginsburg does not, however, deal with the question of the titles given to the biblical books. For an introduction to paratextual issues in general, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

² John H. Sailhamer calls this feature “con-textuality” (*Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995] 213).

the present arrangement of biblical books, however that arrangement may have been produced. I will seek to tease out hermeneutical implications of the canonical orders settled upon by different communities of faith. The aim is not to justify and promote a particular order of books, whether Jewish or Christian, as the exclusive basis for further study and thinking on the meaning of the biblical text. It is not necessary to decide upon any particular order of books, favouring it over other contending orders, for differing orders highlight different features of the books thus categorized, so that each order in its own way may be valid and useful to the reader.

I. CLASSIFYING BOOK ORDERS

The ordering of books can be classified according to a number of principles. These principles need not be mutually exclusive but one may reinforce another, and there may be more than one possible principle reflected in a particular order. Unless stated by the author or editor, it is left to the reader to surmise what rationale is at work in the ordering of the literary blocks that make up a larger whole. It is not necessary to know or decide how deliberative the process of ordering was,³ for the focus of this study is the effect on the reader of the order, not its historical production.⁴ It is not my aim to second-guess what was in the mind of those responsible for the ordering of the biblical books. The following are some possible principles of order as inferred by the reader after an examination of the biblical material:

- (1) Size of the book, e.g. the sequence: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Book of the Twelve (= Minor Prophets) in the Babylonian Talmud (*B. Bat.* 14b) may be arranged according to decreasing book length.
- (2) Chronological setting, e.g. Ruth 1:1 (“In the days when the judges ruled”) would seem to explain the LXX placement of this book following Judges, seeing that it is set in the same era of Israelite history.
- (3) Common authorship, either stated or assumed, e.g. Jeremiah-Lamentations in the LXX, though the text of Lamentations does not explicitly name Jeremiah as its author.
- (4) Storyline thread (e.g. Joshua–Kings), with successive books narrating what happened next, remembering, however, that it is the next significant thing that happened which is featured, not just the next thing, given the necessarily selective nature of narrative.
- (5) Genre, e.g. the bringing together of different books into a prophetic corpus, and the collecting together of Wisdom books (though a convincing definition of what is “wisdom” is notoriously difficult).

³ As noted by Sailhamer (*Introduction to Old Testament Theology* 214), con-textuality does not need to posit an intentional relative positioning of books.

⁴ For this reason we put to one side considerations such as the historical order of composition (if that could be discovered) or the history of the canonical acceptance of books, the second being the postulated basis of H. E. Ryle’s influential explanation of the tripartite Hebrew canon. See *The Canon of the Old Testament: An Essay on the Gradual Growth and Formation of the Hebrew Canon of Scripture* (London: Macmillan, 1892).

- (6) Thematic considerations, though any book is likely to have a number of major themes, so that alternative placements are possible on this basis, e.g. Proverbs followed by Ruth (*BHS*) with the figure of Ruth providing a real-life example of the “good wife” described in Prov 31:10–31.
- (7) Literary linkages, e.g. by means of catchwords, such as used in the Book of the Twelve (as Hosea–Malachi is viewed in the Hebrew canon).
- (8) Random and thus no discernable principle of order. There is a variety of canonical orders, even if some predominate, but there is probably no placement of any biblical book that is entirely fortuitous.

The arrangement of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible or OT varies between the Jewish and Christian communities who share it as Scripture. I will look at the Hebrew canon (adopted by the Jews) and in a future article on the Greek canon (adopted by the Christians). Both canons have the same books but not the same order in which books are placed. When required, I will take into consideration the books of the Apocrypha but will not discuss the related but separate issue of why some books were put in or left out.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF THE HEBREW CANON

The Hebrew Bible was given a tripartite structure.⁵ The first part (Torah) describes the making of a covenant between God and Israel. The second part (Prophets) offers historically specific instructions and warnings regarding Israel’s violation of provisions of the covenant. Putting books that Christians usually view as “Histories” (e.g. Samuel and Kings) in the same section as prophetic anthologies (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.) tends to make all these books prophetic in orientation, that is, they offer a critique of the behavior of God’s people according to divinely-instituted standards (see 1 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 17). This understanding of the books is supported by a cluster of references to God’s law at the beginning and end of the Former Prophets (e.g. Josh 1:8; 8:31, 32, 34; 2 Kgs 22:8, 11; 23:24, 25). So, too, the Latter Prophets start and close with references to the law (Isa 1:10; Mal 4:4 [Heb 3:22]).⁶ The third part (Writings) provides prudential wisdom for typical situations of life. The Writings, however, include not simply “wisdom texts” but what look like historiographic works, such as Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The tone of Chronicles differs from Kings by virtue of its tendency to extract a moral lesson from historical events (e.g. 2 Chr 15:1–7;

⁵ For what follows in this paragraph, see Charles Elliott Vernoff, “The Contemporary Study of Religion and the Academic Teaching of Judaism,” in *Studies in Judaism: Methodology in the Academic Teaching of Judaism* (ed. Zev Garber; Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986) 30–32.

⁶ See my article “The Hermeneutics of the Haftarat,” *TynBul* 58.1 (2007) 83–100. The pairing of Torah lessons and selections from the Former Prophets in synagogue readings suggests an understanding of Joshua–Kings as illustrating and applying the theology and ethics of the Pentateuch. So, too, the coordinating of Torah readings and excerpts from the Latter Prophets turns the prophets into preachers of the Law.

16:7–9, 12). This feature is often termed its doctrine of “immediate retribution,” with the achievements and disasters of each successive generation given an explanation.⁷ It is perhaps possible, then, to view Chronicles as a wisdom book.⁸ There is as well the wisdom theme of Daniel (e.g. Dan 1:4, 17, 20) and the obvious paradigmatic nature of the “tales from the Diaspora” in Daniel 1–6 and Esther. The stories of Daniel 1–6 can be viewed as designed to teach lessons such as adherence to Jewish dietary laws (a misunderstanding of Daniel 1), refusal to worship idols (again, probably a wrong reading of Daniel 3), loyalty to God, and recourse to prayer.⁹ The avoidance of any reference to God in Esther is probably deliberate, for the purpose of foregrounding the courage and intelligence of Esther as an example for Diaspora Jews to emulate.¹⁰ It could be argued that the whole of the Writings has been “sapientalized.”¹¹ This construal fits with the view of James A. Sanders that the Writings target the individual Jew’s personal worth and responsibility.¹²

In the ordering of the Hebrew canon, the Torah, or the Five Books of Moses, are foundational documents, the Prophets are placed at the center, and the Writings form the third and final division, which means that for the Jews the Bible is *Tanak*. This is an acronym for the T[orah] (תורה = Law), N[e]bi[im] (נביאים = Prophets) and K[etubim] (כתובים = Writings) with helping vowels. The concluding words of the Tanak, “Let him go up” (ויעל) (2 Chr 36:23), express the hope that God’s people will return and rebuilt the temple at a future time.¹³ The purposes of God avowedly await completion. A more ultimate return of the people of God is anticipated, for Chronicles was written long after a physical return had taken place (as plotted in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah).¹⁴ This is one of a number of indications that the different arrangements of the OT (Hebrew and Greek) are not to be construed as

⁷ See Raymond B. Dillard, “Reward and Punishment in Chronicles: The Theology of Immediate Retribution,” *WTJ* 46 (1984) 164–72.

⁸ See Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Wisdom in the Chronicler’s Work,” in Leo G. Perdue et al., (eds.), *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 19–30.

⁹ W. L. Humphreys, “A Life-Style for Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92 (1973) 211–23.

¹⁰ Sandra B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure* (SBLDS 44; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

¹¹ Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (London: SCM, 1992) 116.

¹² See “The Stabilization of the Tanak,” in Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson, eds., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, Volume 1: *The Ancient Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 225–49, esp. 246–48. It is not necessary, however, to understand, with Sanders, the canonical structuring of the Writings as dated so late that it reflects rabbinic Judaism as it emerged out of the failure of the Bar Kochba revolt in the mid-second century AD.

¹³ Contrary to Barry N. Olshen, this need not be equated with the vision and yearning of the modern Zionist movement (“The Return to Tanakh,” in *Approaches to Teaching the Hebrew Bible as Literature in Transition* [Approaches to Teaching World Literature 25; ed. Barry N. Olshen and Jael S. Feldman; New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989] 55).

¹⁴ See Craig A. Evans’s defense of the thesis of N. T. Wright about the pervasiveness of the idea of Israel’s continuing exile in the Jewish writings of the intertestamental and NT period (“Jesus and the Continuing Exile of Israel,” in C. C. Newman, ed., *Jesus and the Restoration of Israel* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999] 77–100).

polemical or sectarian.¹⁵ Such an ending could be viewed as requiring a sequel such as the one provided by the coming of Jesus Christ who viewed his death as the means of gathering God's people (John 10:16) and his resurrection as the raising up of the new temple (John 2:18–22).

In some quarters there is a lack of recognition that the (differing) order of the biblical books is a paratextual phenomenon that cannot be put on the same level as the text itself. Whatever order is adopted as a starting point, it is a reading strategy and must be viewed as such. A prescribed order of reading the biblical books is in effect an interpretation of the text. Sometimes this is lost sight of in the enthusiasm for erecting a theology of the OT based on the Hebrew Scriptures structured as Tanak, with the threefold canonical structure made determinative for OT theology.¹⁶

III. TORAH

The placement of the Torah first does not need to imply that the whole of the OT is turned into ethical instruction and no more, for the Pentateuch has the same primary position in the Christian Bible.¹⁷ The Pentateuch could hardly be put in any other position, for it recounts the origins of the world and of Israel, and by so doing provided a background for all that follows. In addition, the five books could not be put in any order other than the existing one, given the storyline that connects them,¹⁸ so that historical sequence would seem to explain the ordering of the five books.

Genesis (followed by Exodus) can be conceived as the introduction to the story of Israel proper which begins in Exodus. It is a family history, but the emphasis on progeny prepares us for the great nation the family has become by Exodus (Exod 1:7). The Sinai events are preceded and succeeded by an account of the wilderness wanderings which lead the people from Egypt to Sinai and from Sinai to the edge of the Promised Land (Exodus 15–18; Numbers 10–21). The effect of this is to centralise the book of Leviticus, as suggested by Joseph Blenkinsopp,¹⁹ and to place its theology of holiness at

¹⁵ As does, for instance, Rolf Rendtorff ("Jews and Christians: Seeing the Prophets Differently," *BibRev* 19/1 [2003] 25–31, 54).

¹⁶ Stephen G. Dempster comes close to doing this, see *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (NSBT 15; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003).

¹⁷ So too in the New Testament, "law" can be used as a synecdoche to mean Scripture as a whole without any legalist nuance, see John 10:34, 12:34, 15:25, Rom 3:19, and 1 Cor 14:21, wherein non-Pentateuchal texts are cited and dubbed "law."

¹⁸ Though note the list of Melito, Bishop of Sardis (died c. AD 190), who gives the order of the books as Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.13–14). This may be an accidental transposition, for the setting of Leviticus is Mount Sinai (25.1; 26.46; 27.34), so that it must precede Numbers.

¹⁹ *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 45–47, 134–35, and it has been put forward that the overall structuring of the Pentateuch is chiasmic (see Mark S. Smith, "Matters of Space and Time in Exodus and Numbers," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* [ed. C. R. Seitz and K. Greene-McCreight; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999] 182–207; S. Dean McBride, Jr., "Perspective and Context in the Study of Pentateuchal Legislation," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honour of Gene M. Tucker* [ed. J. L. Mays et al.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995] 53–57).

the heart of the Pentateuch. There is an effective pairing of Leviticus and Numbers, so that Numbers does physically what Leviticus does theologically, namely it effects a connection between Sinai and the Holy Land. Dennis T. Olson proposes that Numbers has a bipartite structure, and that there is a shift of focus from the old generation who experienced the exodus and Sinai (chaps. 1–15) to the new generation who replaced the old in the desert forty years later (chaps. 26–36).²⁰ The beginning of each section is signalled by the two census reports in Numbers 1 and 26.²¹ There is an implied ethic based on the theological difference between the disobedience of the old generation and the obedience of the new. Deuteronomy (following Numbers) picks this up and makes substantial homiletical use of the idea of successive generations.

Deuteronomy is set off sharply from the preceding books by its style, which is that of a series of speeches or sermons by Moses to Israel. It homiletically recapitulates the Sinai law in preparation for entering the Promised Land. Deuteronomy's position at the close of the Torah gives a lively interpretation of the law. The law's continuing relevance is stressed (e.g. Deut 5:2–3: “[The LORD God made a covenant] with us, all of us, here, alive, this day” [a literal rendering of the original], where Moses addresses the second generation of Israelites as if they saw what their fathers did at Horeb some forty years earlier). Another example of the Deuteronomic merging of the generations is 29:14–15 [Heb 13–14], where future generations are thought of as participants in the covenant on an equal footing with the contemporary generation addressed by Moses (“Nor is it with you only that I make this sworn covenant, but with him who is not here with us this day”). Deuteronomy is the link between the Torah and the rest of the OT, not simply with Joshua–Kings, and so, for example, the prophecy of Malachi makes extensive use of Deuteronomy.²²

IV. PROPHETS

The four books of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) match in number the four books of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve [= Minor Prophets]). The Masoretic Text (MT) follows a generally chronological scheme, namely Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, with the catch-all collection of Twelve Prophets at the end. Certainly the ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are to be dated later than those of the other prophets. There are other orders attested for the Latter Prophets, notably that in the Babylonian Talmud: Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve. A tradition in the Babylonian Talmudic tractate *Baba Bathra* (14b) reads: “Our rabbis taught that the

²⁰ *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (Brown Judaic Studies 71; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

²¹ Also, Rolf P. Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 380–88.

²² Malachi's Deuteronomic theology provides the prophetic platform for the Ezra–Nehemiah reforms that were soon to occur (W. J. Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra–Nehemiah Reforms,” *RTR* 35 [1976] 42–52).

order of the prophets is Joshua and Judges, Samuel and Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve. . . . The order of the Writings is Ruth and the Book of Psalms and Job and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra[-Nehemiah] and Chronicles.²³ It is a *baraita* originating in the Tannaic period (pre-AD 200).²⁴ What we note in the *Baba Bathra* list is the pairing of the prophetic books (a feature not usually commented upon nor represented in translations), which could be justified in the following terms. Joshua and Judges both concern the conquest and its aftermath, with the notice of the death of Joshua repeated in Judg 2:6–10 (cf. Josh 24:29–31; Judg 1:1). The connection of Samuel and Kings need hardly be argued for, since their linkage in the Greek Bible as Kingdoms 1–4 shows that many ancient readers saw their obvious relation one with the other as a history of kingship (from rise to demise). The books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel belong together as collections of oracles from contemporary prophets. The relation between Isaiah and the Twelve may be due to the similarity of their superscriptions (Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1, both of which have “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”)²⁵ and the fact that some of the earlier and the larger sections of the Twelve (Hosea, Amos, Micah) are other eighth-century prophets.²⁶ As well as that, both books begin with prophecies set in the era of Assyrian ascendancy and end with a future restoration in the Persian period.

V. FORMER PROPHETS

With regard to the paratextual phenomenon of the order of the four books as self-standing literary blocks, their arrangement according to storyline thread does not mean that this way of sequencing the biblical material is “natural” or “neutral.” Their enjambment affects the interpretation of the individual books. So, for example, with Judges following Joshua, the period of the judges is made to appear (by way of contrast with the obedient generation of Joshua’s day) even darker than it might otherwise appear (Judg 2:10). The refrain in the final chapters of Judges is often viewed as recommending kingship to overcome the inadequacies of the period (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).²⁷ It is not, however, that simple. Jotham’s parable is unflattering both to Abimelech and to kingship as a model of rule (9:8–15:

²³ My translation.

²⁴ For the text, see *Baba Bathra* (Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud; ed. I. Epstein; New Edition in Two Volumes I; London: Soncino, 1976).

²⁵ Noted by Julio Trebolle-Barrera, “Qumran Evidence for a Biblical Standard Text and for Non-Standard and Parabiblical Texts,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context* (ed. Timothy H. Lim et al.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000) 95.

²⁶ For studies of the relation between Isaiah (viewed as a prophetic anthology) and the Twelve, see Erich Bosshard, “Beobachtungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch,” *BN* 40 (1987) 30–62 and Edgar W. Conrad, “Reading Isaiah and the Twelve as Prophetic Books,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition, Volume One* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; VTS 70,1; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 3–17.

²⁷ William J. Dumbrell calls into question the traditional interpretation of Judg 21:25 (“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes”: The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered,” *JSOT* 25 [1983] 23–33).

“Reign over us”), and at the heart of the book of Judges is Gideon’s principled rejection of the offer of kingship as theologically illegitimate (8:22–23).²⁸ Certainly Abimelech’s Canaanite-style kingship over Shechem (Judges 9) is no recommendation of the institution. However, with the book of Samuel following, an absolute rejection of human kingship in Israel is not possible, though that is the first reaction of Samuel *the judge* (1 Samuel 8). David is not idealized in Samuel (certainly not in 2 Samuel 11–20), but he becomes a pious model against which later Judean kings are measured in the book of Kings (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:3; 11:4; 2 Kgs 14:3; 18:3). This has often caused readers of Samuel to take insufficient notice of the nuanced portrait of Davidic kingship in the person of the founder of the dynasty. On the other hand, after the parading of David’s failures in the second half of 2 Samuel, the reader is not surprised to find in Kings a (largely) negative view of monarchy in Judah and Israel.

VI. LATTER PROPHETS

A number of prophetic books have superscriptions relating to kings that are mentioned in the book of Kings, helping to bind together and coordinate the Former and Latter Prophets (e.g. Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1). This, in part, compensates for the virtual non-mention of the writing prophets in the book of Kings. Isaiah (in 2 Kings 18–20) and Jonah (only one verse refers to him, namely 2 Kgs 14:25) are the only writing prophets mentioned. The juxtaposing of Kings and Isaiah, or Kings and Jeremiah (see below), does not encourage the theory that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the perspective of Kings and teaching of the prophets as recorded in the Latter Prophets.²⁹ 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39, as synoptic passages, justify the juxtaposition of Kings and Isaiah in the MT and help to unite the larger canonical structure. The sequence of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve in *Baba Bathra* 14b³⁰ may be arranged in descending order according to length,³¹ or in accordance with an alternate understanding of chronological order,³² for the latter part of Isaiah (mentioning Cyrus) and Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi concern events that post-date Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That is not the explanation of the order supplied by the rabbinic discussion recorded in *Baba Bathra* itself. *Baba Bathra* explains (*post factum*) that Kings ends with destruction (חורבנא) and Jeremiah is all destruction, Ezekiel

²⁸ Barnabas Lindars, “Gideon and Kingship,” *JTS* 16 (1965) 315–26.

²⁹ Pace Christopher T. Begg, “The Non-mention of Amos, Hosea and Micah in the Deuteronomistic History,” *BN* 32 (1986) 41–53; idem, “The Non-mention of Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk in the Deuteronomistic History,” *BN* 38–39 (1987) 19–25; idem, “A Biblical Mystery: The Absence of Jeremiah in the Deuteronomistic History,” *IBS* 7 (1985) 139–64; idem, “The Non-mention of Ezekiel in Deuteronomistic History, the Book of Jeremiah and the Chronistic History,” in *Ezekiel and His book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (BETL 74; ed. Johan Lust; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1986) 340–43.

³⁰ See Treballe-Barrera, “Qumran Evidence” 94–95, for other texts that reflect the order: Jeremiah-Ezekiel-Isaiah.

³¹ This is the view of Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* 162.

³² Treballe-Barrera, “Qumran Evidence” 98.

commences with destruction and ends with consolation (נחמתא), and Isaiah is full of consolation, so that “destruction is next to destruction and consolation is next to consolation.” The suggestion is, then, that thematic considerations predominate, so that, for example, the juxtapositioning of Kings and Jeremiah is due to their common theme of judgment and the disaster of exile. The placement of Jeremiah after Kings provides a prophetic explanation of the demise of the nation as plotted in 2 Kings 23–25. In addition, the positioning of Jeremiah immediately after Kings is appropriate in light of the fact that Jeremiah 52 is drawn from, and adapts, 2 Kings 25, so that these are additional synoptic passages. What is more, the oracles of Jeremiah are set in the closing years of the Kingdom of Judah, which is what the final chapters of Kings describe.³³ This ordering of the books gives an increasingly hopeful prospect, given the extensive promises of restoration in Isaiah 40–66.³⁴

The MT order (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve Prophets) is plainly chronological.³⁵ Ezekiel was the younger contemporary of Jeremiah, and therefore Ezekiel’s prophetic book follows that of Jeremiah. There is a fuller discussion of the exile and the hope for the nation beyond it in the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36–48) relative to Jeremiah (largely limited to Jeremiah 30–33). The historical progression is also indicated by the different schemes of dating used in the two books. In the book of Ezekiel the prophecies are often dated according to the years of Jehoiachin’s exile (Ezek 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; etc.), whereas in the book of Jeremiah a number of the prophecies are dated according to the year of a reigning Judean king, often Zedekiah (Jer 25:1; 26:1; 27:1; 32:1; etc.). The placing of these four prophetic books side by side gives the impression of a divinely provided succession of prophets, matching the succession of kings described in the book of Kings.

Early references to the canon count the Twelve (so-named) as one book.³⁶ The order of the books within the Twelve remains constant in the Masoretic tradition,³⁷ though the order of the books in the Major Prophets varies considerably within Jewish lists. The evidence of the Qumran fragments of the Minor Prophets indicates that these twelve prophetic books were copied together in ancient times.³⁸ The order within the Twelve may well be intended to be roughly chronological,³⁹ though the dating of several of these

³³ Edgar Conrad views 2 Kings followed by Jeremiah as appropriate, given that prophecy’s Deuteronomistic style (*Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism* [JSOTSup 376; London: T & T Clark, 2003] 51).

³⁴ The discussion in *B. Bat.* 14b views Isaiah as “full of consolation” (כוליה נחמתא) rather than only ending with consolation (as Ezekiel does).

³⁵ The account of famous men in Sir 48:22–26, 49:1–10 follows this sequence.

³⁶ 4 Ezra 14:45 and Josephus, *Ap.* 1.38–41 (because of the number of OT books they count); also Sir 49:10 (c. 200 BC) and the Talmud (*B. Bat.* 14b/15a).

³⁷ The LXX order is Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, etc.

³⁸ 4QXII^a, 4QXII^b, 4QXII^c, 4QXII^e, 4QXII^f, MurXII and 8HevXIIgr. This list is provided in James VanderKam and Peter Flint, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance for Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus and Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2002) 138–39. Only 4QXII^a diverges from the MT order (Zechariah–Malachi–Jonah).

³⁹ In *B. Bat.* 14b, the arrangement of the books with Hosea in premier position is explicitly said to be chronological, in that Hos 1:2 (תחלת דברי-יהוה ברושע) is understood to mean that God spoke first to Hosea (cf. the RSV rendering).

books is strongly debated (e.g. Joel and Obadiah). The explanation of their placement among the eighth-century prophets may be due to a desire to have an alternation of prophets who ministered in Israel and Judah: Hosea (Israel), Joel (Judah), Amos (Israel), Obadiah (Judah), Jonah (Israel), and Micah (Judah).⁴⁰ Such a schematic ordering encourages a hermeneutic that reads the prophetic threats and promises as applying to both kingdoms and, even more widely, to God's people generally, regardless of time and place. The order is locked in by means of catchwords between the twelve books/sections.⁴¹

The order within the Twelve gives no more than a rough approximation to the order of their real dates, with a basic twofold division into Assyrian (Hosea to Zephaniah) and Persian periods (Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).⁴² Amos should be dated before Hosea, for example, seeing that the superscription of Amos only mentions Uzziah, whereas Hos 1:1 also lists the three subsequent Judean kings. Hosea may stand at the head because of its size and because it is theologically formative.⁴³ It lays down the dynamics of the covenant relationship, so that Hosea 1–3 serves to introduce the leading themes of the Twelve as a unit. The story of Hosea 1–3 is one of covenant infidelity and punishment, followed by restoration. As such, it provides a summary of the message of the Twelve, not just the Hosean part of it. There is no chronological data supplied by Joel to explain its placement between Hosea and Amos.

It must, then, be considerations of content that dictated Joel's position before Amos and not knowledge of the book's date of composition.⁴⁴ Joel widens the indictment of sin to include a general denunciation of the nations (e.g. Joel 3:1–8 [Heb 4:1–8]), and without Joel the detailed critique of foreign powers in Amos 1–2 (with Israel and Judah demoted to foreign nation status because of their sin) would appear to be a radical shift. On the other hand, Amos 9:11–15 eases the transition to Obadiah, with Obadiah expanding on the mention of Edom in Amos 9:12.⁴⁵ This relieves the perceived problem of the authenticity of the final oracle (Amos 9:11–15), for a sudden change from judgment to salvation (and the pattern of judgment capped by salvation) is just what the reader expects given the wider patterning within the Twelve. The problem is created by the wish to root the oracle in the psychological life of the prophet, something the book of Amos itself does not encourage, given

⁴⁰ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. L. G. Perdue, B. Scott, and W. Wiseman; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993) 34.

⁴¹ James D. Nogalski emphasizes the use of "catchwords" between the twelve prophets in explaining the present order of the books (*Literary Precursors to the Book of the Twelve* [BZAW 217; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993] 12–19).

⁴² Edgar W. Conrad, "The End of Prophecy and the Appearance of Angels/Messengers in the Book of the Twelve," *JSOT* 73 (1997) 65–79.

⁴³ The suggestion is that of Paul R. House (*The Unity of the Twelve* [Sheffield: Almond, 1990] 74–76). In what follows I acknowledge my dependence on House.

⁴⁴ The transition between Joel and Amos is assisted by the fact that Amos echoes Joel twice (Amos 1:2 sounds like Joel 3:16a [Heb 4:16a]; Amos 9:13b sounds like Joel 3:18a [Heb 4:18a]).

⁴⁵ Note how similar Obad 19a is to Amos 9:12a, with the verb "possess" (שׁוּר) found in both cases.

the minimal information provided regarding Amos (7:10–17),⁴⁶ or by the desire to ground it in a particular historical context, where critical scholars think that a message of hope is not appropriate due to the continued covenant unfaithfulness of the contemporary generation. When it is noted that this anthology of Amos's message is a booklet within the larger structure of the Twelve, his message makes eminent sense, for, like that of most of the prophets, it is a mixture of threat and promise.

Taking into consideration the order within the Twelve is hermeneutically productive; why, for example, does Jonah follow Obadiah? The enjambement suggests that Jonah wants to treat Nineveh in the same way that Edom had Israel as portrayed in Obadiah. What is said about Edom in Obad 10–14 describes Jonah's attitude perfectly. He sits outside the city, waiting and hoping for Nineveh's obliteration. Jonah the Hebrew (Jonah 1:9) begins to look like an Edomite (Jonah 4:5).⁴⁷ Also, the Jonah section continues the theme of the relation of Israel and the nations that began in Joel 3:9–21 (Heb 4:9–21) and was elaborated in Amos 1–2 and Obadiah. The description of the response of fasting and repentance by Ninevites (Jonah 3) is reminiscent of Joel 1:13–14 and 2:15–16, which call for fasting and sackcloth by Israelites. It could be argued that Nineveh is a moral example for Jerusalem! From its position after Obadiah, Jonah acts as a counterfoil in its (more generous) attitude to the nations. The message of the book of Jonah will continue to baffle us until we are willing to consider its canonical context.⁴⁸ It stands between Obadiah and Micah, and such paratextual considerations shape the reader's understanding of the text, not a hypothetical historical reconstruction (e.g. that of combating the restrictiveness of the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms⁴⁹). Micah's place after Jonah is appropriate in that it explains how sinful Israel could be destroyed by Assyria, which itself had received a reprieve from judgment because it repented.⁵⁰ The Micah section (Mic 5:5–6), however, anticipates Assyria's subjugation by Judean shepherds, and Nahum in turn portrays the eventual punishment of Nineveh, which is now the proper object of God's wrath (Nah 3:18–19). Habakkuk is set in the context of the looming Babylonian crisis. The breadth of the devastation described in Zephaniah (e.g. Zeph 1:2–3) makes it a fitting climax for the first nine prophecies of the Twelve that focus upon judgment, but it also introduces the restoration focus of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi, with Zeph 3:9–20 containing God's promise to restore the fortunes of Zion.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Even this section does not have any demonstrable biographical interest as such, rather it contributes to the Amosean theme of the attempted silencing of God's prophets (cf. Amos 2:12; 5:13).

⁴⁷ This is the interpretation proffered by House (*The Unity of the Twelve* 83).

⁴⁸ A point also made by John F. A. Sawyer, "A Change of Emphasis in the Study of the Prophets," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (ed. Richard Coggins; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 242. See also Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 146–49.

⁴⁹ See the rebuttal of the usual critical theory by R. E. Clements, "The Purpose of the Book of Jonah," *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974* (VTS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 16–28.

⁵⁰ Elmer Dyck, "Jonah among the Prophets: A Study in Canonical Context," *JETS* 33 (1990) 72.

⁵¹ See Nogalski, *Literary Precursors* 201–15.

VII. WRITINGS

In placing the Writings after the Prophets, Marvin A. Sweeney views the Tanak as portraying the rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the Jewish community as a fulfilment of the hope of the prophets in the post-exilic period.⁵² If this arrangement of the books is doing this, it is at variance with the contents of the books themselves. The Tanak is complete in and of itself, insofar as it does not constitute a component of a larger body of Scripture (it is not “OT,” for it has no NT), but it is clear that the story of God’s purposes for Israel has not come to a final resolution. The story is a torso. The Tanak presents a national organisation based on temple and Mosaic law that was disrupted at the end of the monarchical period, only to be restored in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah,⁵³ but the restoration was far from complete. It is not true that the Tanak, ending with Chronicles, brings total closure, for it ends on a note of expectation (2 Chr 36:23: “Let him go up”). According to the final books of the Tanak, the nation is still in exile (e.g. Neh 9:32, which speaks of their continued hardship “until this day”; in Neh 9:36, there is the complaint to God by those who have returned to Jerusalem: “we are slaves”).

Given this presentation, Ezra 1:1 (“that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished”) must be understood as a partial fulfilment only. Ezra-Nehemiah shows the failure of God’s people to reform themselves, ending, as it does, with the depressing account of the recurrence of problems (the final placement of Neh 13:4–31 demonstrates the people’s inability to keep their pledge in Neh 10:28–39). The glorious visions of the prophets have not yet been fulfilled. Contrary to John H. Sailhamer,⁵⁴ I am not convinced that ending the Tanak with Ezra-Nehemiah rather than Chronicles, as in the Leningrad and Aleppo codices,⁵⁵ makes a material difference in that both books show that the people of God are still in exile. The sweeping historical review provided by the penitential prayer of Nehemiah 9 makes depressing reading. Given that Chronicles was written long after the temple was rebuilt (c. 400 BC),⁵⁶ that is, it was authored later than the Ezra-Nehemiah era,⁵⁷ while Ezra-Nehemiah depicts a physical return from exile, Chronicles grapples with the mystery that despite that return, Israel is still

⁵² “Tanak versus Old Testament: Concerning the Foundation for a Jewish Theology of the Bible,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T. C. Sun and Keith L. Eades with James M. Robinson and Garth I. Moller; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 353–72, esp. p. 359.

⁵³ The view expressed in Sweeney, “Tanak versus Old Testament,” 366.

⁵⁴ “Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 34–36.

⁵⁵ See *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (eds. David Noel Freedman et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); *The Aleppo Codex: Part One: Plates* (ed. Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1976).

⁵⁶ For this dating, see Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1993) 3–28.

⁵⁷ Is this one reason that Chronicles follows Ezra-Nehemiah in the majority Hebrew ordering of the books?

theologically in exile, still poised on the eve of the definitive return.⁵⁸ The Chronicler looks for a more ultimate return, with the result that the Hebrew canon ends on an eschatological note.⁵⁹ As well, Daniel 9 reinterprets Jeremiah's prophecy of a return after seventy years (Dan 9:2) in terms of the much more extended seventy weeks of years (9:24), so that the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy is projected beyond the mundane return from Babylonian captivity in the years following 586 BC.

The order of the individual books within the Writings greatly fluctuates in the Jewish tradition.⁶⁰ According to the Babylonian Talmud (*B. Bat.* 14b), the book of Ruth comes at the beginning of the Writings, maybe because the events narrated belong to the time of the judges.⁶¹ In that *baraita*, the relevant listing is "Ruth and Psalms and Job and Proverbs" (coupled together in the way indicated), so that this is a four-book mini-collection, with Ruth (ending with the genealogy of David) positioned as a preface to Psalms⁶² and Psalms-Job-Proverbs forming a tripartite wisdom collection. "Qoheleth" is next in line, unconnected by the copula to books either before or after it (though it is strategically placed between books also viewed as Solomonic compositions⁶³). Then we find three pairs of books, namely "Song of Songs and Lamentations" (a genre grouping of songs: romantic and mournful?), "Daniel and Esther" (both court tales wherein the safety of Jews are under threat), and lastly "Ezra(-Nehemiah) and Chronicles" (with their obvious similarities). In some medieval manuscripts, Chronicles comes at the beginning of the Writings,⁶⁴ however, the present sequence became established in the printed editions: at the beginning is the group of "three great writings" (Babylonian Talmud, *Ber.* 57b), Psalms, Job, and Proverbs in order of decreasing length.⁶⁵ In all the varying sequences for Writings, Psalms, Job, and Proverbs are always found together, either in that order or as Psalms-Proverbs-Job.

⁵⁸ W. Johnstone, "Guilt and Atonement: The Theme of 1 and 2 Chronicles," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane* (eds. J. D. Martin and P. R. Davies; JSOTSup 42; Sheffield: SAP, 1986) 113–38.

⁵⁹ W. Johnstone, "Hope of Jubilee: The Last Word in the Hebrew Bible," *EQ* 72 (2000) 307–14.

⁶⁰ See the tabulation of eleven alternate orders provided by Ginsburg (*Introduction*, 7).

⁶¹ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (tr. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1985) 245.

⁶² The *baraita* also stresses the connection of Ruth (רות) with her offspring David, who was responsible for the Psalter.

⁶³ As noted by Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs* (AB 7c; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977) 18.

⁶⁴ This is the tradition contained in the medieval treatise *Adath Deborah*, which says that this position is to be favoured and represents the Western/Palestinian practice (על תקדן ארץ ישראל) as opposed to Eastern/Babylonian practice (אנשי ארץ שנער) which places either Chronicles or Esther at the end. The text of this note is supplied by Ginsburg, *Introduction*, 3 n. 1. Ginsburg reproduces the relevant passage provided by H. L. Strack, "Die biblischen und die massoretischen Handschriften zu Tschufut-Kale in der Krim," *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 36 (1875) 605.

⁶⁵ Beckwith sees considerations of size as the dominating factor in the order of books (excluding the Former Prophets) in the *Baba Bathra* listing (*The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* 160–62). The *baraita* implies that the order of the Writings is meant to be chronological (when authored) with the exception of Job, so that Sweeney is mistaken in thinking that a chronological principle is only reflected in the ordering of the Greek OT.

The little group of *Megillot* (מגילות “scrolls”) are placed next, and finally Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles. The Writings as a disparate group of books are given a measure of cohesion by the clumping of books with perceived similarities. Either positioning of Chronicles, at the beginning or end of the Writings, could be justified,⁶⁶ for Chronicles as a world history (beginning as it does with Adam) makes an appropriate closure for the whole canon which begins with Genesis, while its obvious similarities to Kings (upon which it draws), means that at the beginning of the Writings it helps to bridge Prophets and Writings.

The liturgical character of the *Megillot* is an appropriate arrangement in a section leading up to the book of Chronicles (or beginning with Chronicles as in Aleppensis and Leningradensis) and consists of five festal scrolls. The five scrolls are connected to the five main festivals (following the festal order, assuming the year starts with the month Nisan): Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Weeks), Lamentations (the ninth of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Tabernacles or Booths), and Esther (Purim). The reading of Song of Songs at Passover, suggests that the song is viewed as an expression of God’s love for Israel.⁶⁷ Ruth read at Weeks, during the wheat harvest, picks up on the barley and wheat harvests featured in the book. Lamentations is viewed as a response to the destruction of Solomon’s temple on the ninth of Ab. Reading Ecclesiastes at Tabernacles (Booths) reminds the people of the difficulties of their forefathers in the wilderness, and reflects upon the futility of life in general, and Esther is the story behind the feast of Purim.

In the order of books Proverbs, Ruth, and Song of Songs (*BHS*), both Ruth and Song of Songs develop the picture of the virtuous and assertive woman pictured in Proverbs 31,⁶⁸ and the woman is the main speaker in the song.⁶⁹ When followed by Song of Songs, the romance aspect of the book of Ruth is highlighted. Then Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther follow in that order. The liturgical rationale of the *Megillot* is further suggested by the fact that it is placed directly after the Pentateuch in the editions of the Hebrew Bible in the 15th and 16th centuries,⁷⁰ for the Pentateuch and the *Megillot* are the only portions read in their entirety in the lectionary of the synagogue.

The Cyrus decree provides an *inclusio* around Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles in that order (Ezra 1:1–4; 2 Chr 36:22–23). After the people focus of Ezra-Nehemiah with its many lists of names (e.g. Ezra 2, 8; Nehemiah 3, 7), the reader meets the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9, though H. G. M. Williamson gets the better of the earlier scholarly consensus that subsumed both books

⁶⁶ See Japhet, *I and II Chronicles* 2.

⁶⁷ There is a long and distinguished history of this interpretation both within Judaism and in the church. More than merely human sexual love may be in view, see Mark W. Elliot, “Ethics and Aesthetics in the Song of Songs,” *TynBul* 45 (1994) 137–52.

⁶⁸ Cf. Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 2.

⁶⁹ See the statistics provided by Athalya Brenner, “Women Poets and Authors,” in *The Feminine Companion to the Song of Songs* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 88.

⁷⁰ For details, see Ginsburg, *Introduction* 3–4; L. B. Wolfenson, “Implications of the Place of the Book of Ruth in Editions, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 1 (1924) 151–78, esp. p. 155, n. 13.

under the common authorship of the Chronicler.⁷¹ Instead of being at the end of the Writings as in the standard editions, Chronicles in the oldest extant medieval codices (i.e. Aleppo and Leningrad) is at the beginning of the whole unit, so that with Ezra-Nehemiah it forms an envelope around the Writings, providing a unifying and ordering framework for them. According to David Noel Freedman,⁷² the major themes and emphases in the Chronicler's work are exemplified in the other associated works. David and Solomon are prominent in Chronicles and so there is in the Writings a heavy concentration of works connected with or attributed to the house of David. The books that follow Chronicles, that is, the Psalms⁷³ and Proverbs, are directly connected with the founding dynasts, David and Solomon. Chronicles followed by Psalms gives the poetic pieces of the Psalter a liturgical setting in the musical cult (re)-organized by David (cf. 1 Chronicles 23–27; 2 Chr 7:6; 8:14; 23:18; 29:25–30; 35:15), and a number of psalmic titles help to cement such a connection (e.g. the titles of Psalms 42–50, 62).⁷⁴ Ruth may be treated as a “Davidic biography,” since Ruth and Boaz are the great-grandparents of David (Ruth 4:18–22). Song of Songs (e.g. 3:11) and Qoheleth (read as royal autobiography⁷⁵) each have connections with Solomon. The liturgical role of the *Megillot* also suits the Chronicles frame. Esther provides a happy ending to the *Megillot*, especially when read after the tragic expressions of Lamentations. Daniel is in this position because of the court tales (Daniel 1–6) that connect with similar tales in Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah.⁷⁶ Daniel following Esther (in the Talmud the order is reversed) provides a theological explanation for the confidence expressed in the book of Esther concerning the survival of the Jewish race, with the lesson of that book put in the mouth of Zeresh, the wife of Haman the archenemy of the Jews (Esth 6:13: “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him”).

VIII. CONCLUSION

With regard to the order(s) of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible, the following may be said by way of summary. The ordering of books according to storyline would seem to explain the sequence of books in the Pentateuch

⁷¹ *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 1–70. Whenever the two books are placed side-by-side in Hebrew orders, Ezra-Nehemiah is followed by Chronicles, which would discourage an understanding that interprets them in terms of chronological continuity and theological homogeneity.

⁷² *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991); idem, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” *ST* 46 (1992) 96.

⁷³ There is psalmic material in Chronicles, most notably 1 Chr 16:7–36, which shows close relation to Psalms 96, 105 and 106.

⁷⁴ David L. Petersen, “Portraits of David: Canonical and Otherwise,” *Int* 40 (1986) 149–51.

⁷⁵ Y. V. Koh argues for the pervasiveness of the royal voice throughout Qoheleth, not just in 1:12–2:26 (*Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qoheleth* [BZAW 369; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006]). The book reflects the tradition of royal wisdom that Solomon represents.

⁷⁶ Note also the presence of the name Mordecai among the leaders of the returning caravan in Ezra 2:2 (Neh 7:7).

and the Former Prophets. The books of the Latter Prophets also are ordered according to chronology, whether the sequence is Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve, or Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve. The highs and lows of the covenant relationship between God and Israel are thereby plotted through time. The order of books in the Writings may in part reflect (presumed) order of composition, with Davidic and Solomonic works at the beginning and Persian period compositions at the end (Esther onwards). It is not true, therefore, that only the Greek OT has a dominating historical principle.

The placement of Joshua–Kings after the Torah and in the section labelled “Former Prophets” suggests an understanding of these four books as illustrating and applying the teaching of the Pentateuch, and so, too, the prophets whose oracles are recorded in the Latter Prophets are viewed as preachers of the Law.

The reader also perceives that the grouping of books according to common genre explains the enjambment of Psalms–Job–Proverbs and this has the effect of declaring the Psalter to be a wisdom book. So, too, juxtaposing Daniel–Esther–Ezra/Nehemiah suggests that all three books are being read as court tales. Thematic considerations explain those lists that put Ruth before Psalms or have Ruth following Proverbs, and the pairing of Ecclesiastes with Lamentations or of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The fact that there are alternative orders reminds the reader that book order is a paratextual feature, and that different orders suggest alternative ways of reading the same book.

The placement of either Chronicles (1 Chronicles 1–9) or Ezra–Nehemiah (Nehemiah 9) at the close of the Hebrew Bible implies that these books recapitulate and evaluate (from certain viewpoints) the entire sweep of biblical history. In almost every case, the location of a biblical book relative to other canonical books, whether in terms of the grouping in which it is placed, or the book(s) that follow or precede it, has hermeneutical significance for the reader who seeks meaning in the text. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader’s evaluation of a book is affected by the company it keeps in the collected library of Scripture.