TWO TESTAMENTS IN PARALLEL: THE INFLUENCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ON THE STRUCTURING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

GREGORY GOSWELL∗

The relation between the two Testaments continues to be an important field of scholarly exploration, and the present article is intended as a contribution to a greater elucidation of their multifaceted interdependence. The discussion is often focussed on uncovering OT motifs and themes that find further use and development in the NT,1 or the analysis of OT allusions and quotations to be found in the NT.2 These areas of scholarly effort, however, by no means exhaust the interconnections between the Testaments. My aim is to explore whether there are structural connections between the two canonical corpora, namely the question of a correlation and dependence between the macrostructural arrangement of the OT and that of the NT. Put more simply, is the order of the NT books influenced by the ordering of the books of the OT? If so, what are the implications for reading the Bible as one book? This is not an entirely new issue, but it is one that has not received the recognition and consideration it deserves.3

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to consider what status is to be given to the phenomenon of book order. The sequential ordering of the biblical books is part of the paratext of Scripture. The term “paratext” refers to elements that are adjoined to the text but are not part of the text per se.4 The scriptural paratext also includes features such as book titles and the internal partitioning of books (e.g. paragraphing and chapter breaks). The (differing) order of the biblical books is a paratextual phenomenon that cannot be put on the same level as the text itself. It is a post-authorial imposition on the text of Scripture, albeit an unavoidable one when texts of different origin are collected together in a canonical corpus. Where a biblical book is placed relative to other books inevitably influences a reader’s view of the book, on the supposition that juxtaposed books are related in some way and therefore illuminate each other. A prescribed order of books is a de facto

∗Gregory Goswell is lecturer in biblical studies (OT and Hebrew) at Presbyterian Theological Centre Sydney, 77 Shaftesbury Rd, Burwood NSW 2134, Australia.

1 For a helpful survey, see David L. Baker, Two Testaments, One Bible: The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments (3d ed.; Nottingham: Apollos, 2010).


interpretation of the text.\(^5\) It is, therefore, as part of the history of the interpretation of the Bible as one book (in two parts) that the issue of book order must be approached. A study of biblical book order uncovers an early stage in the reception history (Rezeptionsgeschichte) of Scripture, fossilizing as it does the insights and convictions of ancient readers within the synagogue and church. If the order of NT books has been influenced by the order of the OT books, it potentially gives access to how those responsible understood the books of the NT, and indeed, how they viewed the books of the OT.

I. A PARALLEL STRUCTURE TO THE GREEK OLD TESTAMENT?

The organization in the NT canon on the basis of genre is plain to see, with the books arranged in four generic groupings: Gospels, Acts, letters, and Revelation (apocalypse). According to David Trobisch, evidence for this is that the titles assigned to the NT books include a reference to their literary genre, though this is questionable in the case of the title “Revelation.”\(^6\) Trobisch attributes the familiar canonical order of the NT to an editorial desire to reflect the generic principle of ordering used in the Greek OT, with the majority Greek order exemplified by Codex Vaticanus (B 03).\(^7\) On this understanding, the Gospels correspond to the Pentateuch, Acts to the Historical Books, the Letters to the Poetic Books, and Revelation to the Prophetic Books. Roger Beckwith recognizes parallels, though he neglects to draw a connection between the Letters and the Poetic Books. Beckwith is cautious and does not posit a direct influence of either Testament on the other, given the variations in the Greek OT tradition.\(^8\) He is only willing to go as far as to say: “the Old Testament and New Testament lists seem to be the work of kindred minds.”\(^9\) He makes the point, for example, that the list (in Greek) of “the old books” (τῶν παλαιῶν βιβλίων) by Melito, Bishop of Sardis (c. AD 170) ends with the prophetic books followed by Esdras (= Ezra-Nehemiah).\(^10\) This order produces

---

\(^{5}\) Referring to paratextual features such as book titles and book order, Robert W. Wall states: “[A] variety of interpretive clues are added to the final form of the biblical canon to guide its faithful use”; see “The Canonical View,” in Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, eds., Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012) 111–30 (here 120; suspension points mine).


\(^{10}\) Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 4.26.13–14. For comments on Melito’s list, see Martin Hengel, The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002) 60–63; E.
the structure: Torah-History-Wisdom-Prophecy-History, an arrangement that cannot be brought into alignment with the order of the NT. The list of Melito also exposes the error of thinking that Greek and Hebrew canonical lists are entirely unrelated to each other, for Western (Palestinian) Hebrew orders regularly close with Ezra-Nehemiah.\textsuperscript{11} In Sinaiticus (R 01) and Alexandrinus (A 02), the Poetic Books are placed last, so that the final section in these two Greek codices is not at all that different from the final section (Writings) in Hebrew canons. These are indicators that we are not to overlay the difference between the (relatively settled) Hebrew order and the (less uniform) Greek orders of the canonical books.\textsuperscript{12}

In a valuable discussion of the issue, Peter Brandt (dependent on Otto Kaiser) notes that Otto Eissfeldt was probably the first to allocate the division of the OT in its Septuagintal (LXX) arrangement into the three dimensions of time: past (historical books), present (poetic books) and future (prophetic books).\textsuperscript{13} Building on this insight, a number of scholars find a correlation between this tripartite chronological arrangement and the common ordering of the NT books. As an example, reference may be made to the following table of comparison found in the \textit{Introduction} by Erich Zenger:\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Torah</th>
<th>Gospels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Books of Wisdom</td>
<td>Apostolic Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Books of Prophecy</td>
<td>Revelation of John</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this scheme, the OT, like the NT, is understood to be a two-part structure, of which the first part constitutes a “foundation,” while the second part is arranged in three subsections, with the groups of books generating the temporal categories of past, present, and future. It is plain that a chronological principle is an important factor at work in shaping the macrostructure of both Testaments.\textsuperscript{15}

The parallel between Gospels and Pentateuch can be argued for on the basis of their common generic classification: the Gospels are composed as biographies of

---


\textsuperscript{14} Erich Zenger, \textit{Einleitung in das Alte Testament} (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1995) 34.

Jesus Christ, just as the Pentateuch can be seen as the biography of Moses, with Exodus–Deuteronomy framed by his birth and his death, and Genesis read as an “introduction.” The premier position given to the Gospels indicates that the life of Jesus Christ is viewed as foundational for Christian revelation, just as the revelation of God’s law framed by “the life of Moses” (De vita Mosis) forms the foundation of the rest of the OT. Something more than just chronological priority of the events recorded in the Gospels is involved. God’s act in Christ is the foundational saving event for Christians just as the exodus was for ancient Israel (cf. Luke 9:31: “his departure [τὴ ἐξοδον αὐτοῦ], which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem”), and therefore, the four Gospels are rightly put at the head of the NT. Compatible with this reading, Meredith G. Kline argued that the origin of the Gospel genre is to be found in the structuring of the book of Exodus. Few if any scholars have taken up his suggestion, but Kline is right to find a “Moses-mediator typology” in the evangelists’ portrayal of Jesus, dependent upon the Pentateuchal portrait of Moses.

The superscription of Matthew, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (on analogy with Gen 5:1 LXX), may be intended to cover no more than the genealogy (Matt 1:2–17), and the repetition (in reverse order) in 1:2–17 of the triad of names found in the opening line of the Gospel could be construed as evidence for limiting the intent of the superscription to this: Abraham (1:2), David (1:6), and Jesus, who is called the Christ (1:16). Davies and Allison, however, opt for the view of Matt 1:1 as the title for the entire Gospel, with the introductory use of βιβλιος γενεσεως (“The book of the genealogy”) intended to set the story of Jesus as a counterpart to another “history of origins,” the book of Genesis. If that is the intention, it signals that this book tells of the renewal of creation through the person and work of Jesus (cf. Matt 19:18). This makes Matthew a credible first book of the NT, but, as noted by J. Ramsey Michaels, the other three Gospels also open with reference to some kind of beginning, and so each in its own way recalls the first chapter of Genesis. The heading of the Gospel of Mark reads: “The beginning (αρχη) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Luke acknowledges his use of earlier traditions deriving from “those who from the beginning (απ’ αρχης) were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Lk 1:2). Finally, the opening of the Gospel of John is an unmis-

---

21 Their reasons are given in *Gospel According to Saint Matthew* 150–54.
takable echo of Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning [ἐν ἀρχῇ] was the Word”), and again the point may be the new creation made possible through Jesus Christ.

Matthew has the structurally significant formula “When Jesus finished...” (Matt 7:28–29; 11:1; 13:53–58; 19:1; 26:1), which marks the close of this Gospel’s most striking feature: the Pentateuchal scheme of five great dominical discourses. The miracles of Jesus in Matthew 8–9 have significant connections with Mosaic signs and wonders (e.g. the removal of leprosy and the control of wind and sea). The mountain location of Matt 5:1–2 is more than a mundane geographical description; it is a Sinai allusion that has theological significance for the author of the first Gospel (cf. 4:8; 5:1; 8:1; 17:1; 21:1; 24:3; 28:16). Jesus is one who sits and teaches like Moses (23:1) and, indeed, is greater than Moses. Though the priority of Matthew in the common order of the four Gospels may well be due to its popularity in the early centuries (especially in the West), Matthew’s strong links with the Pentateuch show that it is appropriate for this book to stand at the head of the NT, laying the foundation of the teaching of Jesus, the Second Moses.

The Pentateuchal link may be most obvious in Matthew, but the other Gospels by no means fail to connect Jesus with the figure of Moses. For example, in Mark, the feeding of the 5000 (6:35–44) is prefaced by the comment that the crowds are “like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34). This expression recalls the leadership role of Moses in the wilderness (cf. Num 27:17) and the dominical feeding recapitulates the provision of manna. With regard to Luke, as noted by Darrel L. Bock, the book opens with the miraculous conception of Elizabeth that recalls the theme of the barren wife conceiving in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, notably the successive situations of Sarah (Genesis 18), Rebekah (Gen 25:21) and Rachel (Gen 30:22, 23). The scene of the transfiguration in Luke includes the divine command that Jesus’ disciples “listen to him” (αὐτοῦ ἀκούετε; Lk 9:35), and the wording is derived from the instruction about the prophet like Moses in LXX Deut 18:15. The presentation of the person and work of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel leads the author to show that the divine revelation in Jesus surpasses that provided

---

28 Bock, Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern 115.
by Moses in the law (e.g. John 1:17; 5:46; 6:32). In each Gospel, therefore, the Pentateuch provides an essential backdrop to the purposes of God that find their fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

More briefly, with regard to the postulated parallel between the ordering of the other books of the NT and the order found in the Greek OT, if the book of Acts is construed as a history of the early church, it corresponds to the history of Israel provided by Joshua–Esther. The General Letters and the Letters of Paul, like the Poetic Books, deal with ever-contemporary practical issues and dilemmas, and the ethical focus (e.g. Romans 12–15; Ephesians 4–6; 1 Peter) and wisdom content of the letters (e.g. James) provide support for the parallel being drawn. Finally, the book of Revelation, viewed as a prophecy (Rev 1:3: “the words of this prophecy”), draws much upon the Prophetic Books of the Old Testament (though it never actually quotes them).

Before we give wholehearted support to this scheme, it is well to note (following Brandt) that things are more complex than they at first appear. The table of Zenger has a four-part structure for the OT but there is (as much as) a five-part division in the NT, for the section designated “Apostolic Letters” conceals the bifurcation of this epistolary category into Pauline and General Epistles. The separation of Acts and Letters, while justified on the basis of the obvious generic differentiation, does not take into account the fact that in all Greek textual witnesses Acts prefaces the General Letters and these are considered a fixed and coherent canonical unit (Praxapostolos). This implies that “Acts found its significance as the context for understanding the non-Pauline apostolic witness.” The combining of Acts and General Letters in one unit does not fit the posited parallel of Acts with the Historical Books and the Letters with the Poetic Books. As well, the proposed chronological shift from Acts (past) to the Letters (present) is to some extent artificial, for Paul wrote most of his letters within the time and circumstances depicted in the second half of Acts. The only exceptions are the Pastorals, which should


31 Endgestalten des Kanons 359, n. 1720.


perhaps be dated after Paul’s release from his first Roman imprisonment. Finally, we could question the strength of the proposed correlation between the Letters and the Poetic Books, for the more likely parallel is Latter Prophets with Letters (see below). None of these considerations, however, disprove the thesis that the order of the Greek OT materially influenced the canonical order of the NT.

II. A PARALLEL STRUCTURE TO THE HEBREW BIBLE?

A comparison can also be made between the order of books of the NT and that found in the Hebrew Bible (Torah-Prophets-Writings), and Christopher R. Seitz has suggested that the tripartite Hebrew canon has influenced the shape of the NT canon. He posits that the relation of Deuteronomy to the preceding books is analogous to John’s relationship to the Synoptics. Seitz likens the interconnected character of the Book of the Twelve (= Minor Prophets) to the Pauline corpus, and he views Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles and Revelation as standing in parallel to the Writings. More recently, Seitz has repeated (but not elaborated) his suggestion that it would be fruitful to compare the function of John in the Gospel collection with the role of Deuteronomy in its final location within the Pentateuch and the canonical shaping of the Book of the Twelve with the Pauline Letter collection. His comments do not cover all of the NT, but they are sufficient to indicate that this could be a viable alternate thesis with regard to the influence of the structure of the OT on the ordering of the NT. A table of comparison can be drawn up as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Torah</th>
<th>Gospels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former Prophets</td>
<td>Acts of the Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter Prophets</td>
<td>Apostolic Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writings (esp. Daniel)</td>
<td>Revelation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The generic principle is not quite so dominant in the Hebrew Bible as it is in the Greek canon, for the second division (Prophets) combines books largely consisting of narrative (Former Prophets) with books that are anthologies of prophetic oracles (Latter Prophets), and the third division (Writings) has a catch-all character for it is generically diverse to a remarkable degree (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Daniel, Chronicles). If the Hebrew Bible was the model upon which the structure of the NT was based, the Gospels match the Pentateuch, and Acts is in parallel with the


38 The odd one out is the book of Jonah, a narrative about a prophet.
narratives of the Former Prophets. Duane L. Christiansen views the NT as modelled (consciously or unconsciously) on the OT, but for him, the Gospels plus Acts are seen as a five-book “New Torah.”

If Acts is connected to the Catholic Letters (Praxapostolos) rather than with the preceding Gospels, then Acts–Letters parallel the Former and Latter Prophets. This finds support in the formal and thematic similarities between Acts and Former Prophets. For example, the book of Joshua opens with the affirmation of Joshua as Moses’ replacement, and Acts starts with the question of a replacement for Judas (and it turns out to be Matthias). Likewise, the end of the Former Prophets (the release of Jehoiachin from prison in 2 Kgs 25:27–30) could be compared with the closing scene of Acts (the relative freedom of prisoner Paul in Rome in Acts 28:17–31), the theme of both sections being that of divine judgment on the Jewish nation and the open question of its future.

The Letters bear a relation to the Latter Prophets (cf. Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Jeremiah 29), for as in the recorded oracles of the prophets, in the Letters the faults of God’s people are exposed and corrected. Revelation with its special dependence upon Daniel could be seen as parallel to the Writings (which includes Daniel), though its relation to the rest of the Writings is less obvious.

Building on his theory of the symmetry of the Hebrew Bible (excluding Daniel), D. N. Freedman suggested that the NT was constructed in much the same way: with Synoptic Gospels and Acts (John excluded) equivalent to the “Primary History” (= Pentateuch and Former Prophets), Pauline Epistles matching the Latter Prophets, and the rest of the books of the NT (John, Revelation and Catholic Epistles) corresponding to the Writings, but the adjustments of NT book order required to support Freedman’s scheme make it less than convincing. My main point, however, is that a credible case can be made that either order of OT books (Greek or Hebrew canons) could have influenced the arrangement of the NT.

III. TWO READINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

If the analysis of the two alternatives offered above is accepted, and neither alternative is given absolute priority over the other, the posited macrostructural parallel between the Testaments, in effect, produces two different (though compatible) readings of the NT. The discernment of relations between blocks of biblical


41 Dempster also makes the connection with Daniel (Dominion and Dynasty 234); see G. K. Beale, The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 1984); Steve Moyise, The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 45–63.


books in the two Testaments opens up “intracanonical conversations” between these collections that potentially throw light upon their content and guide their application to individual believers and the Christian community. Depending on the comparisons drawn (e.g. comparing Apostolic Letters with the Latter Prophets of the Hebrew canon, or with the Poetic Books of the Greek canon), different themes or features are highlighted. The parallel between the Pentateuch and the four-part Gospel collection is unaffected by privileging either the Greek or Hebrew arrangement of the OT books, and so I will not add to the extensive discussion provided above.

If the book of Acts is viewed as parallel to the Historical Books of the Greek canon (Joshua–Esther), the potted summaries of OT history provided by the speech of Stephen (Acts 7) and the complementary speech of Paul (Acts 13) bear an obvious relation to the (largely) negative historical surveys found in the equivalent OT corpus (cf. Judges 5; 1 Samuel 12; 2 Kings 17; Nehemiah 9). This suggests that the events of Acts are a continuation of the history of God’s purposes for Israel described in the Historical Books and now come to fulfilment in Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit in the church. The demise of the Israelite kingdom plotted in the Historical Books begins to be repaired through the Gospel mission recounted in the book of Acts (NB Acts 1:6). The suggested parallel also gives prominence to the theme of Jewish rejection of the Gospel and its messengers found in Acts, consistent with Paul’s climactic use of Isaiah 6 in Acts 28 (28:25: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: …”). The rejection of Jesus (and subsequently of the apostles) is in accord with the pattern set by the earlier rejection of the prophets (NB Acts 7:52: “Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?”). In the books of Samuel and Kings, prophetic figures become a regular feature of the narrative, and Kings may be analysed in terms of the repeated pattern of confrontations between kings and prophets. The final judgment of the two kingdoms is due to their rejection of the message brought by “my/his [God’s] servants the prophets” (2 Kgs 17:13, 23; cf. Ezra 9:10, 11; Neh 9:26). Read against the background of the Historical Books, the activ-

44 The expression is that of Wall, “Canonical View” 117.
46 Acts 1:6 does not need to be read in narrowly nationalistic terms (cf. Luke 2:38; 24:21), for in 1:7–8 Jesus affirms the disciples’ concern and clarifies how God’s kingdom will be restored (with Israel given an important place within it), see Alan J. Thompson, The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan (NSBT 27; Nottingham: Apollos, 2011) 103–8. The kingdom theme in Acts is highlighted by the fact that the book begins and ends (inclusio) with twin references to the kingdom (1:3, 6; 28:23, 31).
ities of Stephen, Philip, Peter, and Paul are seen to be in the context of Jewish opposition.48

Significantly, several of the 42 numbered chapter divisions found in the first half of Acts in Codex Sinaiticus highlight the opposition experienced by Stephen, Philip, and Paul.49 A new chapter, for example, begins at Acts 6:9 (ch. 18), the point at which opposition to Stephen emerges, and not earlier at 6:1 or 6:8. There are also headings (κεφάλαια) in the form of 27 running titles (τίτλοι) at the top of columns throughout the book of Acts in Sinaiticus. The 6th heading “The things concerning Saul” is connected to 9:22, rather than to 9:1. This may be because, as in the case of Stephen, it is the opposition experienced by Saul that is of interest to those responsible for the headings. Stephen and Philip can be viewed as precursors of Saul: both Stephen and Saul are persecuted (headings 3 and 6) and both Philip and Saul are troubled by a magician (headings 4 and 10). Headings 24–26 specifically label (and thus highlight) Paul’s apologetic speeches before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. Given that the latter chapters of Acts are dominated by Paul standing before governors and kings (Acts 24–26; cf. 9:15, 16), it is no exaggeration to suggest that Paul’s suffering (and incarceration) is viewed as fundamental to his vocation and, indeed, to the presentation of the book as a whole.50

If, on the other hand, Acts-Epistles is viewed as a parallel structure to the Former and Latter Prophets of the Hebrew canon, the role of Acts is seen a little differently, namely as providing an interpretive framework for the letters that follow.51 One effect would be to highlight the teaching content of the speeches in Acts, for example the addresses by Peter and James at the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15:7–11, 13–21, respectively) and Paul’s farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17–35).52 The resolution of potential tension in Acts 15 between Paul’s Gentile mission and the Jewish mission of James and Peter sets the context for the apostolic witness of the letters that follow. The order of the General Letters may be modelled on the order of the three “pillars” (James, Cephas [= Peter] and John) in Gal 2:9 (another account of the Acts 15 meeting).53 On the other hand, Robert W. Wall argues that the decisive role played by James at the conference in Acts 15 (James has the last say) best explains the placement of the Letter of James

51 Cf. Kline, Structure of Biblical Authority 72.
52 Alan Thompson gives a helpful analysis of the speeches of Acts that in total take up about a third of the book, showing that this action-packed book is also full of teaching (Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus 88–101).
as the “frontpiece” of the Catholic Epistle collection. The mission activities of Peter and John in Palestine (but not elsewhere) receive brief mention in Acts 8:14–25 and 9:32–11:18, though nothing is said of James venturing beyond Jerusalem. The letters connected to the three “pillars” are directed to the Jewish-Christian Diaspora. This is explicit in the addressees in Jam 1:1 and 1 Pet 1:1, and the Jewish provenance of the Johannine letters is widely accepted. Likewise, the churches planted by Paul in Acts receive letters from the same apostle in the adjoining epistolary section of the canon (e.g. Thessalonica, Corinth, Philippi). In this way, Acts provides the background to help situate individual Pauline letters in their time and location within the apostolic mission to the Gentiles.

Though Acts makes no allusion to Paul writing letters, the juxtapositioning of Acts and Letters would appear to assert that the missionary Paul of Acts is the same Paul who wrote the letters. Some scholars have found what they view as evidence that certain Pauline letters were used by the author of Acts. The failure of the author of Acts to mention that Paul wrote letters, or to quote from any of his extant letters, is best seen as an indication that Acts and Apostolic Letters need each other and are meant to be read together to provide a paradigmatic picture of early Christianity. Likewise, though the Former Prophets feature prophetic figures (especially in Samuel and Kings), they make virtually no mention of the Writing Prophets, the only exceptions being Jonah (a bare mention in 2 Kgs 14:25) and Isaiah (2 Kings 18–20, a synoptic passage with Isaiah 36–39). The canonical pro-pinquity of Former and Latter Prophets, their balanced structure as two four-book groupings, the classifying of all eight books as prophetic, and the lack of substantial overlap between the two main parts, are best viewed as indicating that those responsible for constructing the canon in this way intended that the Former and

56 Colossians is the sole exception, the explanation being that the church in Colossae was not founded by Paul (Col 2:1).
Latter Prophets be read together, with the book of Kings providing a historical framework for the oracles of the Latter Prophets.

In the usual sequence, the Pauline letters are ranked according their decreasing length. This was a common principle of book order in the ancient world, and the sequence of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and the Twelve in the rabbinic baraita found in the Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 14b (pre-AD 200) may also be arranged on the basis of descending order according to length. Though the position of Romans at the head of the Pauline corpus is due to the mechanical principle of length, it is also the most treatise-like of Paul’s letters and functions as a theological introduction and framework for the Pauline corpus it fronts. The same applies to the position of the prophetic booklet Hosea at the head of the book of the Twelve. Amos is probably to be dated before Hosea, seeing that the superscription of Amos only mentions Uzziah (Amos 1:1), whereas Hos 1:1 also lists the three subsequent Judean kings. As suggested by Paul R. House, Hosea may stand at the head because of its greater size and because it is theologically comprehensive. It lays down the dynamics of the covenant relationship, so that Hosea 1–3 function to introduce and summarize the leading themes of the Twelve as a unit (covenant infidelity, subsequent punishment, and final restoration).

Paul wrote letters to seven churches, Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica (just as John did in Revelation 2–3), and there are seven Catholic Epistles (one by James, two by Peter, three by John, and one by Jude). The numerical schematization (seven = totality) has been taken as indicating that the (mostly) apostolic instructions on local issues contained in these letters are departicularized and are now applicable in all times and places. Similarly, the commonly assigned titles of the separate books of the Latter Prophets (e.g. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Malachi) amount to abbreviations of much longer superscriptions, and so do not give all the information that the superscriptions do. The failure of the brief titles to specify to whom the prophet speak (whether to Judah, to Israel, or to the exiles), which information is often in the superscription from which the

---

61 Only Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi take the reader beyond the point reached in 2 Kings 25.
62 Subsidiary factors are the separation of letters to churches and letters to individuals, and letters to the same church/individual are placed together.
65 The Unity of the Twelve (Sheffield: Almond, 1990) 74–76.
67 This was a patristic argument that Paul’s letters were for the ecclesia catholica, see Krister Stendahl, “The Apocalypse of John and the Epistles of Paul in the Muratorian Fragment,” in Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper (ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder; London: SCM, 1962) 239–45. The argument assumes the exclusion of Hebrews. If Hebrews is included in the Pauline canon, then Paul’s letters number 14 (2x7), and the point can still be made.
title is extracted (cf. Isa 1:1; Ezek 1:1–3; Am 1:1), is a feature that helps to universalize their message. Both in the case of the Letters and of the Latter Prophets, the canonical presentation no longer views their contents as tied to the original occasion or audience. As well, if the Pauline corpus is read in the light of the Latter Prophets, the reader is alerted to the nature of the Apostle’s conversion and commissioning on the Damascus Road as a prophetic call (Gal 1:15; cf. Jer 1:4, 5), to possible use by him of prophetic modes of speech when denouncing and correcting the faults of his addressees, and to the eschatological character of his proclamation (e.g. Gal 1:4; 1 Thess 1:10).

On the other hand, if the NT is viewed as patterned on the Greek OT, the Letters (General and Pauline), on analogy with the Poetic Books, deal with current issues and perennial concerns and have a distinctly ethical orientation. This reading can be justified by the ethical second half of many Pauline letters (e.g. Romans 12–15; Ephesians 4–6; Colossians 3–4). Taking Ephesians as an example, in the fourth-century system of capitulation found in Vaticanus, a chapter division is placed at Eph 4:1 (= chap. 72). At this point the tenor of the letter changes from doctrinal teaching to paraenesis. This produces a basic two-part division of the letter into doctrine (chaps. 1–3) and ethics (chaps. 4–6). This does not mean that doctrine and ethics can be neatly separated, as is made immediately clear, with the apostle in 4:1 urging his readers “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called.” The logical connector in 4:1 (“therefore” [GÌF]) makes the same point, and it is found a number of times at the beginning of the hortatory second-part of Pauline letters (cf. Rom 12:1; 1 Thess 4:1; Col 2:12 or 3:5). Another chapter division is placed at Eph 5:15 (chap. 74). This chapter continues as far as 6:9 inclusive and contains instructions about Christian behaviour. The opening verse (5:15) uses the metaphor of the ethical “walk” (“Look carefully then how you walk”), with this being the final use of what is a key word in the letter (I>JBI:MçR) (found at 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). The capitulation in Vaticanus effectively highlights this theme, for the occurrence of this term coincides with several of the chapter divisions (4:1, 17; 5:15 [chaps. 72–74]). This ancient scheme of division throws the

---


74 As well, Eph 2:10 is close to the start of the second chapter division at 2:8 (chap. 71).
weight upon the ethics of Paul and reminds the reader that the apostle did not teach doctrine for its own sake.

Two further examples that justify connecting the Letters with the Poetic Books of the Greek OT are 1 Peter and James, for the suggested connection illuminates the contents of the letters. 1 Peter is in large measure a homily based on Psalm 34, which is quoted at length in 1 Pet 3:10–12 (cf. LXX Ps 34:13–17).\(^75\) James is categorized by the assigned title as a letter written to diaspora Jewish-Christians (jas 1:1).\(^76\) The pervasive wisdom content of James (e.g. 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, …”) draws extensively upon Proverbs and other wisdom material (canonical and intertestamental), all filtered through the teaching of Jesus.\(^77\)

In the case of Revelation, its title “Revelation” (Ἀποκάλυψις) is an incipit, taken from the first Greek word in the book (1:1: “The revelation of Jesus Christ”), with Rev 1:1–2 amounting to a superscription for the book. The sense of the opening words is that this writing contains “the revelation from Jesus Christ,”\(^78\) who is the mediator of God’s revelation to believers (via his angel and his servant John). The title “Revelation” (or Apocalypse) was later viewed as a genre designation, and indeed it has given its name to a genre (apocalyptic), but in the book itself this is the only time the term is used. John is not describing his composition as belonging to the literary type called “apocalypse,” nor does it appear that non-canonical apocalyptic works (mostly to be found in the Pseudepigrapha) are the context within which the writer wishes his own work to be interpreted.\(^79\) It is likely that Ἀποκάλυψις is an allusion to Daniel 2 (LXX/Theodotion), wherein the verb ἀποκαλύπτω (“to reveal”) is used up to six times.\(^80\) The writer of Revelation draws heavily upon Daniel,\(^81\) which in the Hebrew canon is situated near the end of the Writings. As well, the temple theme, an important one in Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles,\(^82\) is another link between Revelation and the last books in the Write-


\(^76\) For the genre of James, see Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Der Jakobusbrief im Licht frühjüdischer Diasporabriefe,” *NTS* 44 (1998) 420–43. Niebuhr interprets James within the diaspora letter tradition of Jeremiah 29, the Epistle of Jeremiah, 2 Maccabees 1–2, and 2 Baruch 78–86.


\(^78\) David E. Aune argues that Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ is a subjective genitive, with this interpretation supported by the succeeding clause “which God gave him” (Revelation 1–5 [WBC 52a; Dallas: Word, 1997] 6); cf. Tobias Nicklas, “The Words of the Prophecy of this Book: Playing with Scriptural Authority in the Book of Revelation,” in *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (ed. Mladen Popović; JSSup 141; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 309–26 (here 318).


\(^81\) For a summary, see Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 306–28.

The important theme of praising God in Revelation is clearly influenced by one of the most significant books in the Writings, the Psalter (e.g. Rev 4:8, 11; 5:8–10; 11:17–18; 15:3–4). A number of scholars have explored the relation of the Psalms to apocalyptic ways of thinking, two examples (provided by Susan Gillingham) being: the depiction of throne scenes (e.g. Revelation 4–5; cf. Dan 7:9–10, 13–14; Ps 82:1), and the motif of divine victory over beasts in the sea (e.g. Revelation 13; cf. Dan 7:1–12; Ps 74:13–14).

The dependence of Revelation upon a wide range of OT prophetic works is brought to the reader’s attention if the final position of Revelation in the NT is viewed as parallel to the Prophetic Books of the Greek OT. Within the book itself, this writing of John is termed a prophecy (Rev 1:3: “the words of the prophecy”). The similarly worded 22:7, 10, 18 (“the words of the prophecy of this book”) and 22:19 (“the words of the book of this prophecy”) with 1:3 form an inclusio around the book as a whole. As well, the verb “to prophesy” (προφητεύω) is used in Rev 10:11 to describe the writer’s task: “Then I was told, ‘You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’” Other passages of relevance to the evaluation of the author as a prophet include Rev 1:1, 10; 4:1–2; 17:3; 19:10; 21:10; 22:9. These refer either to his Spirit-endowment or to him under the (usually) prophetic title of “servant”. There is no actual quotation from the OT prophets in Revelation (nor of any OT book for that matter), but prophetic images, allusions and phraseology form the warp and woof of the work.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In this study of the macrostructure of the two Testaments and of the possible dependence of the order of the books of the NT on the order of the books in the OT, I have sought to give due recognition to book order as a paratextual phenomenon. This precludes the idea that one or other of the OT books (whether the Greek or Hebrew canon) can be given absolute priority over the other, or that either order can dictate the meaning of the NT. I have argued that either OT order could have influenced the structure of the NT, the result being that the structure of the NT

---

parallels that of the OT. If the fit is not exact, the explanation may lie in the fluidity of the Hebrew and Greek OT canons (greater in the second case than the first). Both OT orders, each in its own way, throw light on how those responsible for the ordering of the NT understood the books that make up the NT (and also how they viewed the OT). Alternate connections between canonical blocks of books suggest different (though not contradictory) perspectives, and the differences are most noticeable when it comes to the interpretation of the Apostolic Letters, namely whether they are to be read against the background of the Poetic Books or the Latter Prophets.