

“Greg Goswell’s book is an extremely fascinating read, bringing together many issues that interpreters simply take for granted but shouldn’t. He clearly shows that the company that books keep matters, and that the titles of books—as well as chapter divisions and verses—are not just decorations but provide hermeneutical guidance. Widely read and well-versed in biblical scholarship, Goswell writes in clear and direct prose. While I demur about some of his conclusions, I highly recommend this book for biblical students to add to their exegetical toolbox.”

STEPHEN G. DEMPSTER, emeritus professor
of religious studies, Crandall University

“Goswell has collated years of research and writing into this helpful and accessible volume that clearly demonstrates the importance of the Bible’s paratextual features and their significance for interpretation. *Text and Paratext* is the perfect starting point for further study in this important area of biblical studies.”

MILES V. VAN PELT, Alan Hayes Belcher, Jr. Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages and director of Summer Institute for Biblical Languages, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

“For years Goswell has been reflecting on the Christian canon and its significance for interpretation, and in this helpful primer, he shares a storehouse of canonical insights that aid our understanding of the Bible’s meaning. In *Text and Paratext*, he focuses on the shape of the canon (rather than the process by which it developed), and in each chapter, he offers hermeneutical implications arising from the collection, ordering, titles, and divisions within books found in the final form of the text. These textual characteristics, Goswell argues, are paratextual features which assist in interpretation because they function as a kind of implicit commentary upon the text of Scripture. Goswell’s work offers expert guidance for and generous invitation to appreciating the hermeneutical difference canon makes in hearing the Bible as the church’s book.”

DARIAN LOCKETT, professor of New Testament,
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“Greg Goswell has provided us with an excellent introduction to a paratextual approach of the two-testament Bible’s final form—an interpretive approach that he has helped pioneer in biblical studies. This is a clearly written and engaging book with pedagogical aids that are exceptionally student (and teacher) friendly. I am confident that his work will introduce readers to a fresh way of understanding the rhetorical design of the entire biblical canon by more carefully considering what is typically overlooked: the text’s paratextual elements—book titles, chapter divisions, the sequence of books within their canonical collections, and the intracanonical relations between them. This new learning will surely excite and inspire a deeper understanding of the Bible for use in the church’s worship and the academy’s instruction. I strongly encourage its use by clergy and faculty alike.”

ROBERT W. WALL, Paul T. Walls Professor Emeritus of Scripture and Wesleyan Studies, Seattle Pacific University and Seminary

“Most biblical readers value resources that help them understand the Scriptures but often take for granted the various interpretive aids that are already embedded in the Bibles they are reading. In this volume, Goswell explains the meaning and function of paratextual features such as the ordering of books in canonical collections, the titles given to individual works, and the subtle ways manuscripts and print editions mark and divide sections within biblical texts. Far from being beside the point, these features that are physically ‘beside the text’ have the potential to influence the way a reader approaches and navigates a passage of Scripture or a biblical book. Drawing on Goswell’s extensive scholarly work on these features, this volume is rich with analysis of ancient evidence, synthesis of contemporary scholarship, and reflective connections to biblical theology. Because of these factors, this volume itself would be an excellent paratextual resource to come alongside your study of God’s word.”

CHED SPELLMAN, associate professor of biblical and theological studies, Cedarville University; author, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible*

“What Goswell has done for biblical studies here amounts to the little child pointing out that the emperor is not wearing any clothes. For all the centuries of careful scholarship on the text of the Bible, the obvious but easily overlooked fact is that there are factors not in the text per se that pre-shape how we read and interpret the text before us. Kudos to Goswell for not only drawing our attention to these shaping factors but also how and why these influence our interpretations of the Bible: unnoticed but ubiquitous, unrecognized but crucially important.”

RAY LUBECK, professor of Old Testament, Multnomah University

“When we read the Bible we are generally not conscious of how we are influenced by features other than the text itself. Greg Goswell over many years has researched with much detail matters such as the order of the books of the Bible, the titles they are given, and the divisions into verses, paragraphs, and chapters—the paratextual elements. The breadth and depth of his careful research covering centuries of the Bible and its readership, both Jewish and Christian, makes him the right person to write this most helpful work. At last there is one book that brings the details together so clearly, respecting diverse understandings, along with questions encouraging further exploration.”

JOHN OLLEY, research fellow, Morling College

TEXT AND PARATEXT

**Book Order, Title,
and Division as Keys
to Biblical Interpretation**

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and Division as Keys
to Biblical Interpretation

GREGORY GOSWELL





Text and Paratext: Book Order, Title, and Division as Keys to Biblical Interpretation

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ABBREVIATIONS

1 Esd	1 Esdras
2 Bar	2 Baruch
2 Macc	2 Maccabees
4Q112	Daniel ^a
4Q174	Florilegium
4QMMT	4Q394–399
4Q51	Samuel ^a
A	<i>kephalaia</i> in Alexandrinus
AB	Anchor Bible
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
AG	Analecta Gorgiana
Ag. Ap.	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>
AJFS	<i>Australian Journal of French Studies</i>
Ant.	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
ArBib	The Aramaic Bible
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AV	Authorized Version
b.	Babylonian Talmud
B. Bat.	Baba Batra
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Ber.	Berakhot
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1983
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies

BJSUCSD	Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BO	Berit Olam
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
c.	circa
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
ch(s).	chapter(s)
CI	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
Colloq	<i>Colloquium</i>
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
Cons.	Augustine, <i>De consensu evangelistarum</i>
Contempl.	Philo, <i>On the Contemplative Life</i>
COT	Commentary on the Old Testament
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EC	<i>Early Christianity</i>
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
fig(s).	figure(s)
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments

Gk.	Greek
GNB	Good News Bible
GNC	Good News Commentary
GNS	<i>Good News Studies</i>
GNT ⁴	<i>The Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)</i>
Haer.	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i>
HAR	<i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
Heb.	Hebrew
Hen	<i>Henoch</i>
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
HS	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
ITS	Invitation to Theological Studies
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JESOT	<i>Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGRChJ	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
JTI	<i>Journal for Theological Interpretation</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
K	<i>kephalaia</i> in Sinaiticus
KJV	King James Version
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint

MasS	Masoretic Studies
MB	Manuscripta Biblica
Meg.	Megillah
MT	Masoretic Text
NA ²⁷	Aland, Barbara, et al., eds. <i>Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . 27th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIB	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to <i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NTM	New Testament Monographs
NTOA	<i>Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus</i>
NTR	New Testament Readings
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTSD	New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents
OBO	<i>Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis</i>
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
par(r).	parallel(s)
PAST	Pauline Studies
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> [= <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina</i>]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RTL	<i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>
RTR	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>

S	numbered chapters in Sinaiticus
Sanh.	Sanhedrin
SANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testaments
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
sg.	singular
SHS	Scripture and Hermeneutics Series
Sir	Sirach or Ecclesiasticus
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SR	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
ST	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
STI	Studies in Theological Interpretation
SymS	Symposium Series
TBS	Tools for Biblical Study
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
Tob	Tobit
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
V	numbered chapters in Vaticanus
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
y.	Jerusalem Talmud
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

THIS THING CALLED PARATEXT

A common experience of students of the Bible is that they continue to make discoveries even in well-known passages. The cry is: “Why have I never noticed that before?” Something may not be noticed—even if it is staring us in the face—until it is pointed out. There are features in every Bible that many readers have never noticed, or if they have noticed them, they have not seen their relevance for interpretation. Some of these neglected features come under the heading of “paratext.”¹ 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 “text” is limited strictly to the words.² 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. Since these elements are adjoined to the text and frame the text, whether a reader notices or not, they have an influence on reading and may assist (or sometimes hinder) the interpretation of the text of Scripture.

THERE IS MORE IN THE BIBLE THAN JUST THE WORDS!

The biblical paratext is not part of the text as such. Since the paratext does not derive from the work of the original prophetic or apostolic authors, we are allowed to agree or disagree with the prompts provided. For example, the presumption is that titles of the biblical books were not supplied by their

1. The term was coined by Gérard Genette. See Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

2. See Martin Wallraff and Patrick Andrist, “Paratexts of the Bible: A New Research Project on Greek Textual Transmission,” *EC* 6 (2015): 239: “All contents in biblical manuscripts except the biblical text itself are *a priori* paratexts.”

authors. Evidence for this, for instance, is the similarity of the names given to the Gospels (“The Gospel according to [name of the reputed author]”), which suggests that these titles were not affixed by their authors at the point of composition but were added by those who brought the four Gospels together as a collection. Accepting this, it is at least possible to suspect that in some cases the title affixed to a text may be at variance with its content and message.

Of course, it is impossible in a study such as this to ignore the text itself, and it is not my plan to do so, for text and paratext, though conceptually differentiated, are for all practical purposes inseparable and have an important interrelationship that influences reading. It is not my intention, however, to downgrade the status of the revered text of Scripture by placing it on a par with the paratext of Scripture. It must be asserted that there is a fundamental distinction between text and paratext, the first derived from the authors of the Bible and the second placed as a frame around the text by later readers.³ The ordering of the books is a paratextual phenomenon that should not be put on the same level of authority as the text itself, for it is readers rather than authors who are responsible for it.⁴ The biblical authors generated the text and are the *makers* of meaning,⁵ whereas readers, by putting the books in a particular canonical order, or affixing a title to a book, or dividing it into paragraphs, provide a paratextual frame for the text, reflecting their *understanding* of the meaning of the text.⁶ The placing of the books in a certain order is a postauthorial imposition on the text of Scripture—albeit an inescapable one when texts of diverse origin are assembled in a literary corpus—as is the layout of the text (e.g., how much text is on each page). That being

3. See the address to readers by Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: Second Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth, 1986), 269: “Thus, with our taste to guide us, we shall venture beyond the particular book in search of qualities that group books together; we shall give them names and thus frame a rule that brings order into our perceptions.”

4. See Graham A. Cole, “Why a Book? Why This Book? Why the Particular Order within This Book? Some Theological Reflections on the Canon,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 473, 475–76.

5. This is the case irrespective of the precise compositional history of a work (e.g., the possibility of multiple authors, editions, and stages of redaction).

6. See Ched Spellman, *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon*, NTM 34 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 109–10: “Where an individual writing is positioned in relation to other writings in a collection (either materially or conceptually) has significant hermeneutical ramifications.”

the case, a text cannot be without a paratext,⁷ but their inseparability does not mean that they are not distinct in origin and function.

Not all scholars accept that the distinction between text and paratext is as absolute as I am indicating.⁸ However, there is a clear demarcation between the two, both in concept and practice. For example, Hendrik Koorevaar wants to blur the distinction in the interest of arguing in favor of “an original and authoritative order in the Hebrew canon,”⁹ and he has in mind the order found in the Talmud (b. B. Bat. 14b). Particularly significant for Koorevaar is the final placement of Chronicles in the Talmudic listing of books in the Writings, which he sees as a canon-conscious move by the biblical author. Koorevaar claims that the Chronicler specifically wrote his book to close the whole canon and so it would be a retrograde step to place it in any other position.¹⁰ It cannot be denied that Chronicles in final position makes a great deal of sense, especially when the book is viewed as a summary of the period from creation to the decree of Cyrus.¹¹ However, its position at the *start* of the Writings in early Hebrew Bibles (Aleppo and Leningrad) also makes sense but has a *different* sense. With its glowing portraits of David and Solomon, Chronicles in premier position helps to draw attention to the fact (presumably noted by early readers) that many of the books in this third canonical section have either a liturgical or wisdom orientation. As well, given its similarities with the book of Kings, on which it draws, Chronicles at the start of the Writings also helps to bridge the canonical sections Prophets and Writings. In sum, there is no evidence that the Chronicler when composing

7. There are, however, paratexts without texts. See Gregory Goswell, “Titles without Texts: What the Lost Books of the Bible Tell Us about the Books We Have,” *Colloq* 41 (2009): 73–93.

8. Hendrik J. Koorevaar specifically critiques my viewpoint in “The Torah Model as Original Macrostructure of the Hebrew Canon: A Critical Evaluation,” *ZAW* 122 (2010): 64–66.

9. Koorevaar, “Torah Model,” 66.

10. Koorevaar, “Torah Model,” 79: “The book of Chronicles can be considered to be just such a paratextual passage.” For his detailed argument, see Koorevaar, “Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Old Testament Canon,” in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, *Siphrut* 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 207–36.

11. This was noticed as early as Jerome in his introduction to Chronicles in the Vulgate. He speaks of the summative character of the book: “All the teaching of Scripture is contained in this book” (*quod omnis eruditio Scripturarum in hoc libro continetur*). See *Praefationes Sancti Hieronymi in Liber Paralipomenon*, in *Biblia Sacra, Iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem*, vol. 7, *Verba Dierum* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1948), 9.

his work had any particular canonical position in view, and the distinction between text and paratext remains intact.¹²

EVERY BIBLE IS A STUDY BIBLE

In this book, I make no pretense to look at every alternative order for the biblical books, or to collate all the names ever used for the different biblical books, or to comment on every alternative division of the text. Instead, this book is put forward as a contribution to what I hope will be an ongoing examination of the effect of paratextual elements on the reading of the biblical text. Too often a vast array of information is assembled,¹³ but there is little or no discussion of possible hermeneutical implications. A standard feature of Old Testament and New Testament commentaries is an introductory section on the title and canonicity of the book under discussion, but it is seldom that the information gleaned is thought to throw light on the meaning of the text. Commentaries routinely present a suggested outline of the biblical book's contents, but this is almost always done without mentioning historical schemes of divisions (e.g., the chapters or paragraphs in ancient manuscripts). Nor do commentators usually explain and justify the textual divisions they suggest. The paratext of Scripture may reveal or hide, make plain or obscure, clarify or make opaque the meaning of the text, as *commentary* always has the potential of doing, and for this reason it deserves and demands critical evaluation.

The approach I take is in the context of a general movement in biblical studies in recent years away from a focus on genetics, that is, critical theories of the origin and composition of books (e.g., source criticism or redaction criticism), and toward *final form*, that is to say, a study of the Bible in the form in which we have it in our hands. There is as well a new interest in and respect for the insights of ancient readers, whether Jewish (e.g., Rashi) or Christian (e.g., Augustine). Some of the earliest stages of the long history of biblical interpretation are preserved in the paratextual features studied in this volume, and my focus is on how the three elements of the paratext

12. For an extensive defense of the distinction between text and paratext, see Gregory Goswell, "Should the Church Be Committed to a Particular Order of the Old Testament Canon?," *HBT* 40 (2018): 17–40.

13. E.g., the work on the names of the NT books by H. F. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments I. Teil Untersuchungen I. Abteilung die Textzeugen* (Berlin: Arthur Glaue, 1902).

of Scripture—book order, book titles, and internal divisions within books—may assist the reader in interpreting the sacred text. Giving attention to these paratextual elements is an example of properly valuing the rich tradition of biblical interpretation of which contemporary readers are the heirs. Exegetical humility demands that modern readers give consideration to how earlier generations of believers read the Scriptures.¹⁴ Such an approach recognizes that we are not the first generation of believers to make an effort to interpret and apply the Bible.¹⁵

THE FOCUS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The focus is not the *process* by which the canon developed, but the present *shape* of the canon, irrespective of the stages of its formation and the complexities of how the canon as we know it came to be.¹⁶ Though it is right and proper to attempt to trace the history of the canon, many aspects of that process are hidden from view and will remain a matter of conjecture.¹⁷ On the other hand, my approach of taking the biblical canon as an empirical datum will not be an uncritical exercise, for the biblical canon has in fact assumed more than one shape, and one can compare and contrast these diverse canonical traditions. Likewise, more than one title has been given to the same Bible book, and individual books have been internally partitioned according to various schemes, and I will examine and evaluate examples of such variations in the chapters that follow.

This book is not an effort to justify the limits of the canon, nor does it seek to explain why some unusual books were included in the canon (e.g., Esther, Ecclesiastes) or some popular books excluded (e.g., Shepherd of Hermas, Epistle of Barnabas). Nor is it an explanation of the historical process by which canonical arrangements of the books came into being (e.g., the role of the codex in the production of the four-Gospel collection). Instead, I will

14. David P. Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed Light on Old Texts* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

15. For an attempt to provide a theological basis for such an approach, see Stephen R. Holmes, *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 1–36.

16. For the distinction, see, e.g., Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education*, 2nd ed., rev. Amy Erickson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 1–10. Brueggemann, however, favors process over final shape.

17. See, e.g., Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, vol. 1, *The Old Testament: Its Authority and Canonicity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

seek to tease out the hermeneutical implications of the different canonical orders settled on by different communities of faith.

My aim is not to justify and promote a particular order of books as the exclusive basis for study and thinking on the meaning of the biblical text. It is not necessary to decide on any particular order of books, favoring it over other contending orders, for differing orders highlight different features of the books thus categorized, so that each order of books in its own way may be valid and useful to the reader. Likewise, though at times I will express a judgment as to the felicity of a particular name assigned to a biblical book, I do not argue that there is an exclusively *right* name for any one book. No title will say all that could be said about the contents of the book to which it is attached. Nor is there only one acceptable way of dividing up the text of a book, though some schemes of division (e.g., where a chapter break is placed) may be better than others in elucidating the structure of particular biblical books. Alternative schemes of internal division may each have a logic and justification and therefore throw light on the text, though that is not to suggest that the reader is allowed to divide a text into sections according to whim.

I make no claim to be able to get into the heads of those responsible for the alternative orders of the canonical books, the names of the books, and the divisions within the books, or to infallibly know what they intended and what motivated their particular choices. Robert Darnton warns against assuming that texts have “always worked on the sensibilities of readers in the same way.”¹⁸ We cannot recapture the inner experience of ancient readers and know what they thought about what they read and why they thought that way. However, on the assumption that books that are juxtaposed are connected in some way (e.g., a similar genre or featuring related themes), a study of book order preserved in canon lists and early Bibles,¹⁹ or of the titles affixed to the books, or of the ways in which the books were subdivided provides clues as to how early readers responded to sacred texts.

The paratext of Scripture is to be viewed as implicit commentary on the text. The different orders, book names, and divisions within books provide suggestions to the reader regarding the meaning of the text. There is no

18. Robert Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009), 201; Darnton, “First Steps towards a History of Reading,” *AJFS* 23 (1986): 5–30.

19. See Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade, *The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity: Texts and Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

suggestion that meaning is reader-dependent; rather, those who read scriptural texts *seek* meaning, and the paratext of Scripture can provide valuable clues, suggesting as it does ways of seeing the text. It does so by fossilizing and preserving for posterity alternative ways in which previous generations of readers have understood the text, and so it can also help to generate new and improved ways of reading.

With regard to the status that is to be given to paratextual elements, it is best to view them as ways of construing the text. An element of accident, tradition, and even prejudice may well have gone into the process that produced the paratext of Scripture, yet it still has an influence on the modern reader, who can scarcely conceive of the text without such features. We would be surprised to find a modern book without a title, or a book without chapters or paragraphs. The order of the biblical books, their titles, and their internal divisions provide a built-in commentary on the text. These paratextual elements have the heuristic value of starting points for interpretation. By means of a consideration of paratextual elements, the reader will be helped to see new insights into the meaning of the sacred text.

PART I



CANONICAL STRUCTURE

1

THE STRUCTURE OF THE HEBREW CANON

INTRODUCTION

The order of the books of the Old Testament in the Hebrew and Greek canons is different, and this chapter will explore the implications of the two ways of ordering. Where a biblical book is placed relative to other books influences the reading of a book on the assumption that material that is juxtaposed is related in meaning in some way. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader's evaluation of a book is affected by the company it keeps in the library of Scripture. More than one organizing principle may lie behind the ordering of books in the Hebrew Bible.

THE TRIPARTITE STRUCTURE OF THE HEBREW CANON

Where a biblical book is placed relative to other books in the canon influences a reader's view of the book: what to expect and what the book may be about.¹ In this chapter I seek to tease out some of the implications of the canonical orders settled on by different communities of faith and discern how book order feeds into interpretation.² The aim is not to justify and promote a particular order of books, for the Hebrew and Greek orders may both contain valuable insights. The ordering of books can be classified according to

1. John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 216: "A book's order within a canonical list no doubt played a role in determining its meaning. If nothing more, it was a reflection of the book's relationship to other books in the list."

2. For an earlier version of material in this chapter, see Gregory Goswell, "The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible," *JETS* 51 (2008): 673–88. Used with permission.

a number of principles (e.g., their size, story line, or similar themes). These principles need not be mutually exclusive, for there may be more than one possible principle reflected in a particular order. In the case of the Bible, it is left to the reader to surmise what rationale is at work in the ordering of the books and literary blocks that make up the larger whole.

The arrangement of the books that make up the Old Testament varies between the Jewish and Christian communities, who share it as Scripture. In this chapter, I will look at the Hebrew canon (adopted by the Jews), and in the next chapter I will examine the Greek canon (preserved by the Christian church). Both canons basically have the same books but not the same order in which books are placed. The typical order of books in the Hebrew Bible is as follows:

Torah

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

Prophets

Former Prophets

- Joshua
- Judges
- Samuel
- Kings

Latter Prophets

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel

The Twelve (= Minor Prophets)

Writings

Psalms

Job

Proverbs

Megilloth

- Ruth
- Song of Songs
- Ecclesiastes
- Lamentations
- Esther

Daniel

Ezra-Nehemiah

Chronicles

Commonly rehearsed arguments that the New Testament itself bears witness to the existence of the tripartite configuration of Old Testament books (e.g., Luke 11:51; 24:44) do not carry conviction.³ Even if, for argument's sake, these passages did provide evidence of its existence at this early stage, neither Jesus nor the apostles are on record mandating the use of this particular order of books in preference to other canonical orders. Some Christian scholars have accepted arguments for the temporal (and therefore theological) priority of the Hebrew order and have used this order as the basis for reading the Old Testament, viewing it as the *right* way of doing things.⁴ Of course, this is not a *wrong* way of proceeding, unless it is thought to be the *only* way of approaching the interpretation of the Old Testament books. When this is done, it gives one particular way of ordering the books undue influence over interpretation and forecloses other possible and legitimate

3. For details, see Goswell, "Should the Church Be," 24–26.

4. E.g., Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 55–56; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Leicester: Apollos, 2003); Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton, TBS 7 (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 4–6.

interpretive options. In other words, we should give serious consideration to both the Hebrew and the Greek way of ordering the books of the Old Testament, for both may throw light on the meaning of the text of Scripture.

The Hebrew Bible was given a tripartite structure (Tanak). Tanak is an acronym for the Torah (= Law), Nevi'im (= Prophets), and Ketuvim (= Writings) with helping vowels, these being the three canonical sections of the Hebrew Scriptures.⁵ The first part (Torah) describes the making of a covenant between God and Israel. The second part (Prophets) offers 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 Sam 12; 2 Kgs 17). The placement of Joshua–Kings after the Torah 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. 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; 8:31–34; 2 Kgs 22:8, 11; 23:24–25). Likewise, the Latter Prophets (MT) start and close with references to the law (Isa 1:10; Mal 4:4).

The third part of the canon (Writings) provides prudential wisdom for typical situations of life. The Writings, however, do not simply include wisdom texts (e.g., Job, Proverbs) but also what look like historical works (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; 16:7–9, 12).⁶ It is perhaps possible, on that basis, to view Chronicles as a wisdom book of sorts.⁷ There is, as well, the wisdom theme of

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

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

7. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Wisdom in the Chronicler's Work," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 19–30.

Daniel (e.g., Dan 1:4, 17, 20; 11:33, 35) and the exemplary behavior of the Jewish heroes in the “tales from the diaspora” in Daniel 1–6 and Esther.⁸ Features such as these lead Brevard Childs to suggest that the whole of the Writings has been “sapientalized.”⁹ What Childs means is that the Writings as a whole provide a view on life that reflects wisdom ways of thinking, and its books are distinctly ethical in orientation.

THE TORAH

The placement of the Torah first does not need to imply that the Old Testament is turned into ethical instruction and no more, for the Pentateuch has the same primary position in the Christian Bible.¹⁰ Indeed, 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 provides the background for all that follows. Many key biblical themes receive an initial airing in the Pentateuch.

Moreover, the five books could not be put in any other order than the one they are in, given the story line that connects them, so that historical sequence explains the ordering of these five books.

Genesis can be conceived as the introduction to the story of Israel proper, which begins in Exodus. It is a family history of the forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, etc.), but the emphasis on progeny prepares the reader for the great nation that the family has become by the start of 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 then from Sinai to the edge of the promised land (Exod 15–18; Num 10–21), and this places Leviticus and its theology of holiness at the heart of the Pentateuch. The books Leviticus and Numbers form a pair, for Numbers does *physically* what Leviticus does theologically; it forges a link between Sinai and the Holy Land, for in Numbers the people travel from the holy mountain to the border of the land. In Numbers the old generation, who experienced the exodus and

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

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

10. So, too, in the NT, “law” (*nomos*) 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; 1 Cor 14:21, wherein non-Pentateuchal texts are cited and dubbed “law.”

Sinai encounter with God (chs. 1–25), is replaced by a new generation in the desert forty years later (chs. 26–36).

Deuteronomy picks up and makes substantial homiletical use of the idea of the linkages between 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 (Deut 1:1). It homiletically recapitulates the divine instructions received at Sinai 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]), for 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, 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 as well as with him who stands here with us this day before the LORD our God” [RSV]). In effect, all future generations are addressed by Moses. On that basis, Deuteronomy is the link between the Torah and the rest of the Old Testament, not simply with Joshua–Kings, and so, for example, the prophecy of Malachi makes extensive use of Deuteronomy.¹¹

THE PROPHETS

The four books of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) precede and match in number the four books of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve [= Minor Prophets]).¹² The Masoretic Text (MT) follows a generally chronological scheme, the order of books being Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, with the catchall collection of Twelve Prophets at the end. Certainly, the ministries of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in the Persian period are to be dated later than those of the other prophets. There are other orders attested for the Latter Prophets, notably

11. William J. Dumbrell, “Malachi and the Ezra-Nehemiah Reforms,” *RTR* 35 (1976): 42–52.

12. Early references to the canon count the Twelve (so named) as one book, e.g., 4 Ezra 14.45; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 1.38–41 (because of the number of books they count); Sir 49:10; Melito (recorded in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.13–14), and the Talmud (B. Bat. 14b).

that found in a tradition preserved in the Babylonian Talmud tractate Baba Batra (14b), which reads: “Our rabbis taught that the 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” (my translation). It is a baraita, a quotation of earlier rabbinic sources in the Tannaitic period (pre-AD 200).¹³

The sequence of four books in the Latter Prophets in Baba Batra 14b may be ordered according to decreasing length, a common mode of ordering in the biblical canon.¹⁴ Or it may reflect an alternate method of computing chronological order,¹⁵ noting that the latter part of the scroll of Isaiah foresees certain postexilic developments (mentioning Cyrus) and Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi concern events that postdate Jeremiah and Ezekiel.¹⁶ The placing of these mostly prophetic anthologies (Jonah being the exception) side by side does not ignore, therefore, the historic settings of the ministries of the prophets, yet it also brings to the fore the relation of the prophets with one another, suggesting that the message of each prophet should be read in the context of the Latter Prophets as a canonical corpus, such that their mutual interaction is vital for correct interpretation.

A noticeable feature of the Talmudic listing is the *pairing* of the prophetic books.¹⁷ The Baba Batra pairing of books (e.g., Joshua and Judges) is attested in the earliest printed versions of the Talmud from the Soncino-Pesaro edition of the 1510s onward, but the conjunctive *waw* is absent in all the medieval manuscripts, which leads to the conclusion that this is an editorial (and interpretive) insertion into the Talmudic text, and thus it is not represented

13. I. Epstein, ed., *Baba Bathra*, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, new ed., vol. 1 (London: Soncino, 1976).

14. This is the view of Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 162.

15. Louis Jacobs, *Structure and Form in the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35.

16. Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading the Latter Prophets: Toward a New Canonical Criticism*, JSOTSup 376 (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 77–78. The discussion in Baba Batra itself suggests yet another explanation of the order (see below).

17. As commented on by Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 156–57.

in recent English editions.¹⁸ However, this way of reading this order of books could be justified in the following terms.

Joshua and Judges concern the conquest and its aftermath, with repeated notice of the death of the hero Joshua (Josh 24:29–31; Judg 1:1; 2:6–10). The connection of Samuel and Kings needs hardly to be argued, since their linkage in the Greek Bible as Kingdoms 1–4 shows that many ancient readers saw their obvious relation with each other as a history of kingship from its rise to its demise. The books 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,”¹⁹ and some of the earlier and the larger sections of the Twelve (Hosea, Amos, Micah) are other eighth-century prophets. Also relevant is that both books near their end depict the prospect of universal pilgrimage to Zion (Isa 66:23; Zech 14:16). A further link between Isaiah and the Twelve is the synoptic passages about “the mountain of the house of the LORD” in Isa 2:2–4 and Mic 4:1–3. In addition, like the Book of the Twelve, the scroll of Isaiah begins with prophecies set in the era of Assyrian ascendancy (Isa 1–39) and ends with material about a projected restoration of the nation in the Persian period (Isa 40–66, mentioning Cyrus).

THE FORMER PROPHETS

With regard to the paratextual phenomenon of the order of the four books as self-standing literary blocks, their arrangement according to story line does not mean that this way of sequencing the biblical material is *natural* or *neutral*, for their enjambment still affects the interpretation of the individual books. For example, with Judges following Joshua, the period of the judges is made to appear even darker than it might have otherwise (Judg 2:10), given the contrast with the obedient generation of Joshua’s day. The refrain in the final chapters of Judges (“In those days there was no king ...”) is often viewed as recommending kingship as a way of overcoming the inadequacies of the

18. See, e.g., Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Talmud of Babylonia: An American Translation, XXII.A: Tractate Baba Batra, Chapters 1–2*, BJS 239 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 69.

19. 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 with Graeme Auld, Larry W. Hurtado, and Alison Jack (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 95.

period (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).²⁰ It is not, however, that simple, for the books that follow Judges show that most of the kings were unfaithful, such that Gideon's adverse reaction to the suggestion that he rule over Israel is shown to be justified (Judg 8:22–23).²¹

With the book of Samuel following Judges, an absolute rejection of human kingship in Israel is also not possible, though that is the first reaction of Samuel *the judge* (1 Sam 8). David is not idealized in Samuel (esp. 2 Sam 12–20) but 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).²² This has sometimes 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.

What I am seeking to illustrate is that the evaluation of individual biblical books must take into account their canonical setting, especially the interaction of neighboring books.

THE LATTER PROPHETS

A number of prophetic books have superscriptions relating to kings who are mentioned by name 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 nonmention of the writing prophets in the book of Kings. Isaiah (2 Kgs 18–20) and Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25) are the only writing prophets mentioned in Kings. The Former Prophets, and Kings in particular, supply a narrative framework for the compilations of oracles by prophets that follow (starting either with Isaiah [MT] or Jeremiah [Baba Batra]). The synoptic passages, 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39, justify the juxtapositioning of Kings and Isaiah in the MT, and the two books assist to

20. William J. Dumbrell calls into question the traditional interpretation of Judg 21:25; see Dumbrell, "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," *JOT* 25 (1983): 23–33.

21. For more, see Gregory Goswell, "The Attitude to Kingship in the Book of Judges," *TJ* 40 (2019): 3–18.

22. See Gregory Goswell, "King and Cultus: The Image of David in the Book of Kings," *JESOT* 5.2 (2016–2017): 167–86.

unite the larger canonical structure dominated by prophecy.²³ These synoptic passages represent an important turning point in their respective books when the fate of the Davidic house is announced (2 Kgs 20:16–18; Isa 39:5–7), either leading to an account of the final years of that house (2 Kgs 21–25) or precipitating a major thematic shift to an exclusive focus on divine kingship (Isa 40–66). These perspectives can be viewed as complementary, the one providing the historical record of the end of the house of David (Kings) and the other the theocratic framework within which to understand it, the higher and permanent kingship of YHWH (Isaiah).

The sequence of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve in Baba Batra 14b may be in descending order according to length,²⁴ or in accordance with an alternate understanding of chronological order,²⁵ for the latter part of the prophecy of Isaiah (mentioning Cyrus) and Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi concern events that postdate Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That is not the explanation of the order supplied by the rabbinic discussion recorded in Baba Batra itself. Baba Batra explains that Kings ends with destruction (*ḥorbana*²) and Jeremiah is all destruction, Ezekiel commences with destruction and ends with consolation (*naḥmata*³), and Isaiah is full of consolation, so that “destruction is next to destruction and consolation is next to consolation” (b. B. Bat. 14b). The suggestion is, then, that thematic considerations predominate, so that, for example, the placing of Kings and Jeremiah side by side 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. Moreover, the position of Jeremiah immediately after Kings is appropriate seeing that Jeremiah 52 is drawn from (and adapts) 2 Kings 24–25, so that these are synoptic passages. In addition, the oracles of Jeremiah are set in the closing years of the kingdom of Judah, which is what the final chapters of Kings describe. The effect of the order in

23. See Christopher R. Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 90–91, 106, for a brief survey of crosslinks between the books that make up the prophetic section of the Hebrew canon.

24. The view of Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 162.

25. Treballe-Barrera, “Qumran Evidence,” 98.

Baba Batra is to give the prophetic books an increasingly hopeful prospect, due to the extensive promises of restoration in Isaiah 40–66.²⁶

The four Hebrew book titles “Joshua,” “Judges,” “Samuel,” and “Kings” give the Former Prophets a distinct focus on leadership. The focus on kings and prophets in the book of Kings is therefore in line with the thematic orientation of the canonical grouping of which it is the climax. Kings plots the failure of the institution of kingship, both in Israel and Judah, with most kings failing to reflect the prototype of a good king provided by David. Consistent with this focus on kings, the prophets are styled as the critics of kings, and the ruin of the nation is blamed on the kings. With Jeremiah as the head book of the Latter Prophets (b. B. Bat. 14b), the interest in kings and prophets is picked up, for the prophet Jeremiah himself is a severe critic of contemporary kings (esp. chs. 21–23).²⁷

The MT order (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Twelve Prophets) is chronological.²⁸ 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 (Ezek 36–48) relative to Jeremiah (largely limited to Jer 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 generation by generation, matching the succession of monarchs described in the book of Kings.

The order of the books in the Twelve (= Minor Prophets) is set in the Masoretic tradition,²⁹ though the order of the books in the Major Prophets varies considerably in Jewish lists. The evidence of the Qumran fragments

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

27. A. Graeme Auld, *Kings without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible’s Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 168.

28. The account of famous men in Sir 48:22–26; 49:1–10 follows this sequence, as noted by Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 80–81.

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

of the Minor Prophets indicates that these twelve prophetic booklets were copied together on one scroll in ancient times. The order within the Twelve may well be intended to be chronological,³⁰ though the dating of several of these books is strongly debated (esp. Joel and Obadiah). 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).³¹ Part of the explanation of the order may be a desire to achieve an alternation of prophets who ministered in Israel and Judah: Hosea (Israel), Joel (Judah), Amos (Israel), Obadiah (Judah), Jonah (Israel), and Micah (Judah).³² According to C. F. Keil, this oscillating north/south sequence may continue a little further in the Book of the Twelve if Nahum were shown to be a northerner and Habakkuk a southerner.³³ This geographical schema encourages a hermeneutic that reads the prophetic threats and promises in the various booklets that make up the Twelve as applying to *both* kingdoms and, even more widely, to God's people generally, irrespective of time and location. In other words, this schematic arrangement encourages a theological synthesizing of the messages of individual prophets such that they are shown to have universal implications and applications.

Amos should be dated before Hosea, for example, seeing that the superscription of Amos only mentions Uzziah, whereas Hosea 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.³⁴ It lays down the dynamics of the

30. 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 is understood to mean that God spoke *first* to Hosea ("When the LORD first spoke through Hosea"). See also Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 1, *Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, BO (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), xxvii–xxviii.

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

32. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve," in Perdue, Scott, and Wiseman, *In Search of Wisdom*, 34. The idea goes back to C. F. Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, trans. J. Martin, COT 10 (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 3.

33. The gentilic adjective "the Elkoshite" attached to the name of Nahum presumably refers to his hometown of Elkosh (Nah 1:1), whose location is unknown, but is possibly a village in Galilee (= Capernaum, meaning "the city of Nahum"), and the anti-Nineveh orientation of his prophecy is consistent with a concern about the threat that Assyria posed to northern Israel (though Nah 1:15 addresses Judah). The prophet Habakkuk is occupied with the Chaldean threat to Judah (1:6) and so presumably is to be classified as a southern prophet.

34. The suggestion is that of Paul R. House, *The Unity of the Twelve*, JSOTSup 97 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 74–76. In this and the following paragraph, I acknowledge my dependence on House.

covenant relationship, such that Hosea 1–3 functions 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, and it can be viewed as providing a summary of the message of the Twelve as a whole. 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.³⁵ Joel widens the indictment of sin found in Hosea to include a general denunciation of the nations (e.g., Joel 3:1–8), which helps to prepare for the critique of various foreign powers in Amos 1–2. On the other hand, Amos 9:11–15 eases the transition to Obadiah, with Obadiah’s largely anti-Edom message expanding on the mention of Edom in Amos 9:12.³⁶

Not all scholars would read the Book of the Twelve as a literary corpus and interpret its component parts on this basis (e.g., Ehud Ben Zvi), but taking into consideration the order of books in the Twelve is hermeneutically productive and theologically important.³⁷ It assists the interpretation of the individual books and also enriches our understanding of their theology. For example, an eschatological context is provided for the Jonah narrative by the preceding book of Obadiah (e.g., v. 15: “For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations” [RSV]) and by the pervasive theme of the day of the Lord in the Twelve. The Jonah section continues the theme of the relation of Israel and the nations that begins in Joel 3:9–21 and is elaborated in Amos 1–2 and Obadiah. In the LXX, the order of Obadiah followed by Jonah is the same as the MT, suggesting this sequence is of special significance in reading. 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 the donning of sackcloth by Israelites. The response of the sailors and Ninevites is to be read within the wider “nations” theme in the Twelve, in which the end-time conversion of the nations is a leading feature (e.g., Zeph 2:11; 3:9; Mal 1:11).

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

36. Note how similar Obad 19a is to Amos 9:12a, with the verb “possess” (*yāraš*) found in both cases.

37. Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets*, STI (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 219. See Ehud Ben Zvi, “Is the Twelve Hypothesis Likely from an Ancient Readers’ Perspective?,” in *Two Sides of a Coin: Juxtaposing Views on Interpreting the Book of the Twelve/the Twelve Prophetic Books*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and James D. Nogalski, AG 201 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2009), 47–96. Ben Zvi rejects the sequential reading of the Twelve (53).

This helps to explain why nothing is said in Jonah about these gentile converts having to become Jews to be acceptable to God (e.g., circumcision, food laws, Sabbath), for they prefigure the treatment of the nations in the end time. The canonical placement of Jonah by ancient scribal readers is a prompt for the narrative to be interpreted in this setting.³⁸

Alan Cooper goes as far as to say that Jonah was “never intended to be read apart from that canonical context. An intertextual reading of the book is, therefore, both valid and necessary.”³⁹ The message of Jonah will continue to baffle interpreters until they are willing to consider its canonical context.⁴⁰ The book of Jonah stands between Obadiah and Micah, and the paratextual considerations discussed above should shape the reader’s understanding of the text, not a hypothetical reconstruction of its situation and purpose (e.g., that it was written to combat the ethnic restrictiveness of the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms).⁴¹

Micah’s place after Jonah is appropriate in that it explains how sinful Israel could be destroyed by Assyria, which itself had evaded judgment by repenting.⁴² The prophecy of Micah, however, anticipates Assyria’s subjugation by Judean shepherds (Mic 5:5–6), and Nahum in turn portrays the eventual punishment of Nineveh, which plainly deserves God’s wrath (Nah 3:18–19). With the removal of Assyria, Habakkuk is set in the context of the looming Babylonian crisis (Hab 1:6). The cosmic 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 on the theme of judgment, but it also introduces the restoration focus of Haggai-Zechariah-Malachi, with

38. Gregory Goswell, “Jonah among the Twelve Prophets,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 283–99.

39. Alan Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice: The Significance of the Book of Jonah,” in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image, and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 144 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 159. Cooper has in mind its setting within the Hosea–Nahum sequence, which he views as concerned with the Assyrian crisis.

40. 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.

41. See the rebuttal of the usual critical theory by R. E. Clements, “The Purpose of the Book of Jonah,” in *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974*, ed. J. A. Emerton et al., VTSup 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 16–28.

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

Zephaniah 3:9–20 containing God’s promise to restore the fortunes of Zion (3:20: “At that time I will bring you home” [RSV]).⁴³

THE WRITINGS

In placing the Writings after Prophets, Marvin A. Sweeney views the Tanak as portraying the rebuilt temple and restored Jewish community in the postexilic period as a fulfillment of the hope of the prophets.⁴⁴ If the arrangement of the books *were* doing this, it would be at variance with the *contents* of the books. In the eyes of the Jews, 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 “Old Testament,” for it has no New Testament. However, the story of God’s purposes is far from complete, for the restoration described in Ezra-Nehemiah is disappointing. It is not true that the Tanak, ending with Chronicles, has no sense of incompleteness, for it ends on a note of expectation; we are waiting for God’s people to return to Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:23: “Let him go up”). According to the final books of the Tanak, the nation is still oppressed; for example, Nehemiah 9:32 speaks of their continued hardship “until this day,” and in Nehemiah 9:36 there is the complaint to God by those who have returned to Jerusalem (“we are slaves”). The sweeping historical review provided by the penitential prayer of Nehemiah 9 makes depressing reading. Likewise, 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).

Contrary to John H. Sailhamer,⁴⁵ I am not convinced that ending the Tanak with Ezra-Nehemiah rather than Chronicles, as in the Leningrad and Aleppo codices, makes a material difference, for both books show that the people

43. Byron G. Curtis, “The Zion-Daughter Oracles: Evidence on the Identity and Ideology of the Late Redactors of the Book of the Twelve,” in *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve*, ed. James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, SymS 15 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 182. Zeph 3:14–20, bridges “the gap from the preexilic prophets to the restorationist prophets.”

44. Marvin A. Sweeney, “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), 359.

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

of God are still in exile. Chronicles was written long after the temple was rebuilt (c. 400 BC).⁴⁶ It was authored later than the Ezra-Nehemiah period. Ezra-Nehemiah depicts a physical return from exile, whereas Chronicles grapples with the mystery that despite the return described in the book of Ezra-Nehemiah, Israel is still awaiting the definitive return of the people of God as predicted by the prophets.⁴⁷ The Chronicler looks for a more ultimate return, when all God's people will be gathered into God's final kingdom, with the result that the Hebrew canon closing with Chronicles ends on an eschatological note.⁴⁸ In addition, Daniel 9 reinterprets Jeremiah's prophecy of a return from exile after seventy years (Dan 9:2) in terms of the much more extended "seventy weeks" (9:24), so that the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy is projected to an indefinite time period far beyond the return of some exiles to Palestine from Babylon in the years following 586 BC.

The order of the individual books within the Writings greatly fluctuates in the Jewish tradition.⁴⁹ 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 (Ruth 1:1).⁵⁰ 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 Psalms, 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 compositions.⁵¹ Then, we find three *pairs* of books, "Song of Songs and Lamentations" (a genre grouping of songs: romantic and mournful), "Daniel and Esther" (both court tales wherein the safety of Jews is under

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

47. William Johnstone, "Guilt and Atonement: The Theme of 1 and 2 Chronicles," in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honour of William McKane*, ed. J. D. Martin and P. R. Davies, JSOTSup 42 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1986), 113-38.

48. William Johnstone, "Hope of Jubilee: The Last Word in the Hebrew Bible," *EvQ* 72 (2000): 307-14.

49. See the tabulation of eleven alternate orders provided by Christian D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1966), 7.

50. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1985), 245.

51. Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, AB 7C (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 18.

threat), and last, “Ezra(-Nehemiah) and Chronicles” (with their obvious similarities).

In some medieval manuscripts Chronicles comes at the beginning of the Writings; however, the present sequence became established in printed editions of the Bible. In Hebrew Bibles, at the beginning of the Writings is the group of “three great writings” (b. Ber. 57b), Psalms, Job, and Proverbs, in order of decreasing length.⁵² In all the varying sequences for Writings, Psalms, Job, and Proverbs are always found together, either in that order or as Psalms-Proverbs-Job. The little group of Megilloth (meaning “scrolls”) is placed next, and finally Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The Writings as a disparate group of books is given a measure of cohesion by the clumping of books with perceived similarities into the three units as specified above. Either positioning of Chronicles—at the beginning or end of the Writings—could be justified,⁵³ for Chronicles as a world history (beginning, as it does, with Adam [1 Chr 1:1]) makes an appropriate closure for the canon, which begins with Genesis, while its obvious similarities to Kings (on which it draws) means that at the beginning of Writings it helps to bridge Prophets and Writings.

The order of the five books of the Megilloth in the Leningrad Codex (B 19^A), which is the base of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, and in Sephardic codices, appears to be based on traditional notions of chronology: Ruth, Song of Songs (written by a young Solomon?), Ecclesiastes (written by Solomon when he was old?), Lamentations, and Esther.⁵⁴ It is usually said that these five books are grouped together for liturgical reasons, due to their public reading at the five main annual festivals, but this rationale has been questioned by Timothy Stone, who argues that the process was the reverse: It

52. Beckwith sees considerations of size as the dominating factor in the order of books (excluding the Former Prophets) in the Baba Batra listing (*Old Testament Canon*, 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.

53. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 2.

54. There is, however, some minor variability in the codices. See the tables provided by Michèle Dukan, *La Bible hébraïque: Les codices copiés en Orient et dans la zone séfarade avant 1280*, *Bibliologia* 22 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 67; Peter Brandt, *Endgestalten des Kanons: Das Arrangement der Schriften Israels in der jüdischen und christlichen Bibel*, BBB 131 (Berlin: Philo, 2001), 148–71. The Aleppo Codex appears to have the same order as the Leningrad Codex, but due to damage, leaves are missing after several words in Song 3:11a. On Ecclesiastes, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), 6:301–2.

was because of the existence of the five-book grouping that Ruth, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes, in particular, began to be read at feasts, following the example of the obvious fit of Esther with Purim (see Esth 9).⁵⁵ Certainly, the link of Ruth with the Feast of Weeks, Song of Songs with Passover, and Ecclesiastes with Booths (Tabernacles) is not strong and could be viewed as manufactured.⁵⁶

In other Hebrew Bibles, especially those used by Ashkenazic Jews, the order of the Megilloth reflects the sequence of the annual cycle of the major Jewish festivals (assuming the year starts with the month of Nisan [= March-April]): Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Weeks), Lamentations (Ninth of Ab), Ecclesiastes (Booths), and Esther (Purim).⁵⁷ The reading of the Song of Songs at Passover suggests that the song is viewed as an expression of God's love for Israel.⁵⁸ Ruth, read at the Feast of Weeks, during the wheat harvest, picks up the mention of the barley and wheat harvests in the book. Lamentations can be viewed as a response to the destruction of Solomon's temple on the ninth of the month of Ab. Reading Ecclesiastes at Tabernacles (Booths) reminds the people of the difficulties of their forefathers in the wilderness and reflects on the futility of life in general, and, most obvious of all, Esther is the rescue 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, and the woman is the main speaker in the song.⁵⁹ 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 use of the Megilloth is further supported by the fact that it is placed directly after the Pentateuch in the editions of the Hebrew Bible in

55. Timothy H. Stone, *The Compilational History of the Megilloth: Canon, Contoured Intertextuality and Meaning in the Writings*, FAT 2/59 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 105-11.

56. See Peter S. Knobel, *The Targum of Qohelet: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes*, ArBib 15 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 4-5.

57. L. B. Wolfenson, "Implications of the Place of the Book of Ruth in Editions, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament," *HUCA* 1 (1924): 157.

58. There is a long and distinguished history of this interpretation both in Judaism and 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.

59. See Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 2; and see the statistics provided by Athalya Brenner, "Women Poets and Authors," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 88.

the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries,⁶⁰ for the Pentateuch and the Megilloth are the only portions read in their entirety in the lectionary of the synagogue.

The Cyrus decree brackets the books of 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; Neh 3; 7), the reader meets the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9, though H. G. M. Williamson has successfully debunked the earlier scholarly consensus that subsumed both books under the common authorship of the Chronicler.⁶¹ 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. Ezra 1 is not to be read as just picking up the story line from 2 Chronicles 36. Nor does the presence of some common themes (e.g., temple, priests) mean that the author of Ezra-Nehemiah and the Chronicler have identical theologies. Instead of being at the end of the Writings as in the standard editions, Chronicles in the oldest medieval codices (Aleppo and Leningrad) is at the beginning of the whole unit, so that with Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles forms an envelope around the Writings, providing a unifying and ordering framework for them.

According to David Noel Freedman, the major themes and emphases in the Chronicler's work are exemplified in the other associated works.⁶² 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 two books that follow Chronicles, Psalms and Proverbs, are directly connected with the founding dynasts, David and Solomon.⁶³ Chronicles followed by Psalms gives the poetic pieces of the Psalter a liturgical setting in the musical cultus organized by David (see 1 Chr 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 Pss 42–50; 62).⁶⁴ The book of Ruth may be treated as part

60. For details, see Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition*, 3–4; Wolfenson, "Implications of the Place," 155 n. 13.

61. H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1–70.

62. David Noel Freedman, "The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible," *ST* 46 (1992): 96.

63. There is psalmic material in Chronicles, most notably 1 Chr 16:7–36, which shows close relation to Pss 96; 105–6.

64. David L. Petersen, "Portraits of David: Canonical and Otherwise," *Int* 40 (1986): 130–42.

of the prehistory of David, since Ruth and Boaz are the great-grandparents of David (Ruth 4:18–22). The Song of Songs (e.g., 3:11) and Qoheleth (read as royal autobiography; e.g., 1:1, 12) both have connections with Solomon. The rescue story in Esther provides a happy ending to the Megilloth, especially when read after Lamentations. Daniel is in this position because of the court tales (Dan 1–6) that connect with tales of a similar character in Esther and Ezra-Nehemiah. 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 in the genocidal crisis depicted in the book (Esth 6:13).

CHAPTER 1 IN SUMMARY

With regard to the orders of the books that make up the Hebrew Bible, the following may be said by way of summary. The ordering of books according to story line would seem to explain the sequence of books in the Pentateuch 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 (MT), or Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve (b. B. Bat. 14b). In these prophetic books the highs and lows of the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel are plotted through time. The order in the Writings may in part reflect the presumed order of composition, with Davidic and Solomonic works at the beginning and Persian-period compositions at the end (Esther onward). It is not true, therefore, that only the Greek Old Testament is shaped by a historical principle.⁶⁵ In almost every case, the location of a book relative to other books in the Hebrew canon, whether in terms of the grouping in which it is placed or the books that follow or precede it, has hermeneutical significance. Therefore, a consideration of book order can assist in the process of interpretation and an appreciation of the contents of Scripture.

65. See the next chapter.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING THE ORDER OF THE HEBREW CANON

1. Alternative canonical orders remind the reader that book order is a paratextual feature, and different orders suggest alternative (but often compatible) ways of reading the same book.
2. One of the features to notice when studying any biblical book is its position in the canon of the Old Testament. In which canonical section is it placed? What are its canonical neighbors?
3. When a book has more than one location in the Hebrew and Greek canonical traditions (e.g., Ruth, Daniel), explore what possible light this may shed on its contents, for more than one significant theme or genre may be present in the book, explaining its different locations.
4. Explore how neighboring books in the canon interact and behave as *conversation partners*, leading to a richer understanding of the meaning of the individual books (e.g., when Esther is put beside Daniel).
5. An Old Testament canon ending with either Ezra-Nehemiah or Chronicles shows that God's purposes await completion, for both arrangements prepare for the culmination of salvation history plotted in the New Testament.