THE EXILE AND RETURN MODEL: A PROPOSAL FOR THE ORIGINAL MACROSTRUCTURE OF THE HEBREW CANON

HENDRIK J. KOOREVAAR[*]

I. INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF THE EXILE AND RETURN MODEL

This article deals with the structure of the Hebrew canon. In OT scholarship, the Torah Model has become highly influential. It is based on the division and order of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. At its seams the phenomenon of the Torah is visible (Josh 1:7–8, Mal 3:22, Psalm 1).[1] The present author has discussed this in a recent article, pointing out a number of this model's weaknesses.[2]

I propose that we examine another order, namely the authorized order in the Talmud, *B. Bat.* 14b–15a. This reveals a different model: I call it the "Exile and Return Model."

By "Exile and Return Model" we understand that structure of the canon of the OT in which the phenomenon of exile and return is present at the seams of the canon blocks. Further, the phenomenon is not only present at the seams, but even at the end of the canon, and, in essence, also at the beginning.

Because this model is based on the order of the Hebrew canon in the Talmud, we will examine the reasons for preferring this particular order. In this connection, we shall also examine the issue of the Henneateuch (Genesis-Kings) as a possible original first canon block. We will pose questions to Henneateuch as a main division that are similar to those we shall pose to the main division of the Torah Model. We will compare the ends and the beginnings of the canon blocks with each other. It will become apparent that the phenomenon of exile and return to "the Land" will emerge. We will work this out briefly from a theological point of view.

---

[*] Hendrik Koorevaar is professor of OT at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in St. Jansbergsesteenweg 97, 3001 Leuven, Belgium. Translation from Dutch into English by Annemarie van der Westhuysen.

[1] C. Dohmen and M. Oeming, *Biblischer Kanon, warum und wozu? Eine Kanontheologie* (QD 137; Freiburg: Herder, 1992) 54–97; J. H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to OT Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 239–52; E. Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1995) 24–26; Beat Weber, "Der Beitrag von Psalm 1 zu einer 'Theologie der Schrift,'" *Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie* 20 (2006) 83–113.

[2] H. J. Koorevaar, "The Torah Model as the Original Macrostructure of the Hebrew Canon: A Critical Evaluation," *ZAW* 122 (2010) 64–80.

II. THE ISSUE OF AN AUTHORITATIVE ORDER
AND DIVISION OF THE HEBREW CANON

Roger Beckwith has investigated the different orders of the Hebrew canon. Three factors played a role in the final form(s), historically in this order: literary, historical, and liturgical. The list given in the Talmud tract *B. Bat.* conforms to the features of the oldest factor, the literary one.[3]

Julius Steinberg has researched the composition of the *Ketuvim* in accordance with Jewish tradition.[4] He concludes,

> That BB 14b should be preferred above all the historically documented sequences of the *Ketuvim* cannot be inferred in such absolute terms. Based on content-related and theological criteria, one can, however, say that, based on internal evidence, the ideal order certainly closely approximates B. Bat 14b. Historically seen, the Talmudic order, or the ordering logic underlying it, has had a greater influence than may first appear.[5]

B. Bat. 14b–15a contains the order of the books of the *Nevi'im* (Prophets) and the *Ketuvim* (Writings), as the Rabbanan testified to it. The Rabbanan are the teachers of the law who represent the Pharisaic tradition in line with the teachings of Shammai and Hillel.[6] One can therefore speak of the official Jewish line, which traces its origins far back into history without pointing to an original starting point. That unnamed point of origin is, however, indirectly assumed to be original and authoritative.[7] This is reason enough to examine the theology of the structure and order of this testimony. *B. Bat.* concerns the division and order of the OT without the Torah, which is tacitly present as the foundation to which the Prophets and the Writings are attached. The Prophets start with Joshua and end with Malachi, while the Writings start with Ruth and end with Chronicles.

Now a strong movement in OT scholarship has regularly questioned the break between Deuteronomy and Joshua, and expressed doubts about the books of Joshua to Kings being included under the Prophets. All sorts of arguments can be made that indicate that there must have originally been a block consisting of the books Genesis to Kings.[8] In OT scholarship, that block is called the Henneateuch (nine books) or the (Great) Primary History.[9] I shall regularly refer to that block as

---

[3] R. Beckwith, *The OT Canon of the NT Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 210.

[4] J. Steinberg, *Die Ketuvim: Ihr Aufbau und ihre Botschaft* (BBB 152; Hamburg: Philo, 2006) 132–55.

[5] Ibid. 154–55.

[6] Ibid. 193–94.

[7] In *B. Bat.* 14b–15a, there are two testimonies from the Rabbanan. The first concerns the order and the second the authorship of the books of the canon. Now, we can have our doubts about their ideas on authorship. Does this mean that their testimony as to the order is also undermined? This concerns two different issues that need not have anything to do with each other.

[8] Steinberg, *Ketuvim* 465–68; S. Riecker, *Ein Priestervolk für alle Völker: Der Segensauftrag Israels für alle Nationen in der Tora und den Vorderen Propheten* (SBB 59; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2007) 26–28.

[9] D. N. Freedman, "Deuteronomic History," *IDBSup* 226.

the "Priest Canon." [10] We can also distinguish two sub-blocks: Genesis-Deuteronomy is known as the Torah, and Joshua-Kings can be called the "Demonstrated Torah." Due to their content, the books of the Torah enjoy a special status in Judaism and are treated as an independent unit. This causes a literary separation from the rest of the block. The remaining books of Joshua-Kings were added to the Writing Prophets in order to enlarge the Prophet block, and were classified under the name "Former Prophets." If we accept the idea of a Genesis-Kings block as held in OT scholarship, then the dividing line does not lie after Deuteronomy, but after Kings. The Prophet Canon thereby starts not with Joshua, but with the first writing prophet. According to the Talmud, this is not Isaiah, but Jeremiah. According to the same Talmud, the first book of the *Ketuvim* is not the Psalms, but Ruth. The internal dividing lines of the Hebrew canon lie between Kings and Jeremiah and between Malachi and Ruth. The Hebrew canon starts with Genesis and ends with Chronicles.

According to Steinberg, the difference in delineation between the first two parts of the canon is caused by a literarily-motivated canon structure, and one that is based on descending order of value.[11] This also occurs in the Talmud, in which the Torah assumes the first position, and the *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* together assume the second place. He presents this graphically as follows.

Chart 1
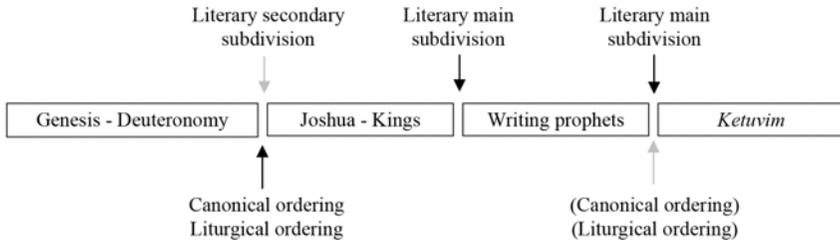
He is not convinced of the various attempts to give a literary motivation for dividing the canon into three blocks, namely into the *Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*. Regarding the block of the *Ketuvim* I will regularly refer to it as the "Wisdom Canon."[12]

What is assumed to be the original Hebrew canon consists of three blocks:
- Genesis-Kings (Priest Canon)
- Jeremiah-Malachi (Prophet Canon)
- Ruth-Chronicles (Wisdom Canon)

---

[10] O. H. Steck, *Der Abschluss der Prophetie im Alten Testament: Ein Versuch zur Frage der Vorgeschichte des Kanons* (Biblische-theologische Studien 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991) 145–46. Steck speaks of the "priestly accented complex Joshua to Kings" and about "the priestly reception of Joshua-Kings."

[11] Steinberg, *Ketuvim* 116–17.

[12] Ibid. 469–84 (4.2.2 *Chachamim*: Ruth bis Chronik und die weisheitlich-schriftgelehrte Sichtweise).

The terms used to signify these three blocks are not of decisive importance to the Exile and Return Model, which also functions without these titles. They are, however, useful from a didactic point of view, where the offices of the three bearers of authority are enumerated in this order: judges, priest, prophets, and prophets.[13]

III. STRUCTURAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF THE CANON BLOCKS

We shall first examine the seams of the canon blocks. The macro-canonical dividing lines underscore the existence of three large canon blocks. Each block is a literary creation in itself with a beginning and an end. At the same time, boundary-transcending links have been constructed between these blocks. After that, we shall examine the arches between the beginning and the end of each canon block. In addition, we shall compare the beginnings of all of the canon blocks with each other. Then we shall also compare the ends of the canon blocks with each other. Finally, we shall compare the ends of all of the canon blocks with each other from the point of view of systematic corollary. All these steps were also applied to the Torah Model in whole or in part.[14] The objective of this section is to examine both the dividing lines and the various arch connections to see whether there are any content-related connections. If there are, then we can see whether a single content-related theme emerges or whether several emerge. After that, we hope to gain insight into the theological value of that theme or themes.

1. *The macro-canonical dividing lines and their transitions.*

a. *Between Kings and Jeremiah.* Kings, the last book of the Priest Canon, ends in 2 Kgs 24:17–25:30 with the fall of Jerusalem and the pardoning of the Judean king Jehoiachin while in exile in Babylon. Jeremiah, the first book of the Prophet Canon starts with two parts in chap. 1. Jeremiah 1:1–3 is the heading of the book, with information about the kings of Judah who governed in the time Jeremiah prophesied. This heading ends with the words, "until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month." The last part is: until the גְּלוֹת (*exile*) of Jerusalem. It is the qal infinitive construct of גָּלָה (*to go into exile*).[15] The word "exile" occurs at the beginning of Jeremiah and sets the tone for the book. The noun is גָּלוּת (*exile*). This word occurs in the term "Exile and Return Model." The next passage (Jer 1:4–19) concerns Jeremiah's calling, with the concrete threat that the kingdoms of the North would "set

---

[13] Jer 18:18 and Ezek 7:26. We can see the background in Deut 16:18–18:22, where the offices of the three bearers of authority are enumerated, in the order: judges, priests, and prophets. See also Steinberg, *Ketuvim* 463–84 (4.2 Drei Kanonteile und drei Sichtweisen der Hebräischen Bibel).

[14] Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* 24–26; Weber, "Der Beitrag von Psalm 1 zu einer 'Theologie der Schrift'" 83–113, esp. p. 104. Both Josh 1:7–8 at the beginning of the *Nevi'im* and Ps 1:2 at the beginning of the *Ketuvim* speak about *murmured reciting* (הגה) of the Law. He does not draw a link with the beginning of the first canon block, the Torah.

[15] H.–J. Zobel, "גָּלָה," in *TDOT* 2:476–88. See in particular pp. 478–79: II. Secular Usage, 1. *As a Term Meaning "To Be Away," "Lead Away."*

up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem" (Jer 1:15–16). This is the judgment by YHWH, and it means the downfall of Jerusalem and the state of Judah. The book of Jeremiah thereby picks up where the book of Kings leaves off: the fall of Jerusalem. In Kings, the fall was already a fact; in Jeremiah, we take a step back in time and the fall is predicted in a word from God. This produces the effect of the Prophet Canon acting as a prophetic background to the end of the Priest Canon.

b. *Between Malachi and Ruth.* The historical order of these books is reversed. Ruth lived more than six hundred years before Malachi. The book of Malachi warns at the end that YHWH will strike the land with a curse (Mal 3:23–24). This presupposes the fall of the land of Judah to foreign powers, and implies that the population can expect to be exiled. At the beginning of the book of Ruth, a Judean goes into "voluntary" exile due to a famine (Ruth 1:1). The famine indicates God's judgment as one of a range of possible judgments, of which the final judgment is exile (Lev 26:14–39, esp. vv. 32–33; Deut 28:15–68, esp. vv. 22–23, 36–42). The subject of exile is thereby placed at the beginning of the Wisdom Canon, with the gruesome aspect of death in the country of exile, as demonstrated by Elimelech and his two sons. The connection between Malachi and Ruth is made through the *subject*, and not through redactional intervention. Ruth could have been consciously placed next to Malachi due to content-related commonalities at the end of one book and the beginning of the other.

c. *The subdivision between Deuteronomy and Joshua.* Essentially, the Exile and Return Model does not have to deal with this break, because it is not of a primary but of a secondary nature. As the break is so deeply entrenched in tradition, however, it is interesting to examine it to see whether it too can make a contribution to supporting the model. Deuteronomy 34 deals with the death of Moses and the assessment of his life. He hoped to be allowed to enter the land, but did not receive permission from YHWH (Deut 34:1–9). Israel had previously lived in Egypt due to a "voluntary" exile as a result of a famine in Canaan. However, the famine served a divine purpose in the context of salvation and liberation (Gen 15:13–16; 45:5–8; 46:2–4). Israel now returns and arrives at the border. Moses dies at the border and therefore remains in exile. He may only see the land. Joshua, however, may enter the land. The book of Joshua starts with the instruction by YHWH to Joshua to cross the border, the River Jordan (Josh 1:1–9), thereby starting the entry to the land; the return journey has thus achieved its objective. "They shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen 15:16). This secondary break also conforms to the values of the Exile and Return Model.

2. *The macro-canonical arches.* We shall examine the beginnings and ends of the canon blocks. In doing so, we would like to see which messages emerge when we lay them next to each other. The canonical final redaction could have consciously intended this. I call the connections macro-canonical arches. The following connecting arches are striking from a macro-literary point of view. The differences between these three literary arch options can be explained by means of a play on words: *en*closure (beginning and end), *dis*closure (beginning), and closure (end).

a. *The macro-canonical arches for enclosure: connections between the beginning and end of each canon block individually.*

i. *The Genesis-Kings arch.* In Genesis 1–2, man appears on earth, and God places him in the Garden of Eden. The subject of man's presence on earth is thereby introduced here. When the first human beings have to leave the garden due to disobedience of God's command in Genesis 3, in essence they go into exile (and with them all of humanity). The expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the first basic problem of humanity. In Genesis 3, the big theological theme of exile emerges for the first time. Is there no way of returning anymore?[16] The blocking of access to the tree of life (with death resulting) is humanity's second basic problem. Adam dies and has to leave the earth (Gen 5:5). There are two phases: leaving the Garden of Eden (alive) and leaving the earth (dead). Is that the final word for Adam and the rest of humanity, and is that the end of the story? The book of Genesis ends with the wider perspective of the return to the land of Canaan. Jacob's body is carried back to Canaan for burial, and Joseph, who went to Egypt after having been kidnapped and sold as a slave, wants to return to the land of Canaan as an embalmed body in a coffin when the entire nation of Israel returns in the future (Gen 50:24–26). How does this fit in relation to the beginning of the book of Genesis? It seems that Genesis forms a model on a macro-canonical level for the idea of exile and return.[17]

The book of Kings ends in 2 Kings 25 with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, and the exile of the nation of Judah to Babylon. It concludes with the pardoning of king Jehoiachin in Babylon (2 Kgs 25:27–30). He is released from prison, but there is no question of returning to Canaan. This indicates a certain mercifulness in the captors, and could represent the first step towards return from exile.[18] Now king Jehoiachin is the legal heir to the throne of David. He is the leader of Israel, the priestly nation to all other nations (Exod 19:5–6). The messianic role to all the earth continues to play a role in the background (Psalm 2). Adam stands at the beginning and is the "natural" leader of all of humanity and of the entire earth. Both Adam and Jehoiachin are forced to abandon their royal position and go into exile. And there they will also die. What kind of

---

[16] Genesis 1–2 is the starting point or point of departure. That point of departure is the placing of man on earth by God the Creator (Gen 1:26–28) and the placing of man in the Garden of Eden by YHWH God (Gen 2:7, 15, 21–23). Before the disobedience (exile), man had the duty of tilling the Garden and taking care of it, and (from it) of filling the whole earth and subduing it (Gen 1:28; 2:15). In a synthetic reading of Genesis 1–2, the Garden of Eden is the "home country" and "home base." It is from this home base that the colonization command concerning the rest of the earth must be carried out. After the disobedience, the whole world was still accessible, but the original homeland was no longer open to humanity. The term "Exile and Return" presupposes an original place for humanity which it leaves and to which it can return. According to the first book, Genesis, this is the Garden of Eden.

[17] Cf. Thomas Römer, "La fin du livre de la Genèse et la fin des livres des Rois: ouvertures vers la Diaspora: Quelques remarques sur le Pentateuque, l'Hexateuque et l'Ennéateuque," in *L'Ecrit et l'Esprit: Etudes d'histoire du texte et de théologie biblique en hommage à Adrian Schenker* (ed. D. Böhler, I. Himbaza, and P. Hugo; OBO 214; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005) 285–94.

[18] Cf. the temple prayer by Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:44–51.

effect does the arch connection between Adam and Jehoiachin have? They can be seen as representative for all of humanity and for the entire nation of Israel respectively. Regarding Jehoiachin, his release from prison in Babylon represented the first light regarding the return of God's people Israel from exile to Canaan. Does this also apply in retrospect for Adam and all of humanity? In this case, the Land of Canaan parallels the Garden of Eden, and both function *pars pro toto* for the whole earth.

ii. *The Jeremiah-Malachi arch.* At the beginning of the book of Jeremiah, Jerusalem is threatened with invasion by an enemy from the north, Babylon (Jer 1:10; 13–16). At the end of Malachi, YHWH threatens Judah with exile (Mal 3:23–24). The Prophet Canon therefore starts and ends with a threat of exile.[19] At the beginning of Jeremiah, Judah had not yet experienced the fall of Jerusalem. In Malachi, Judah had already had the experience of exile and return. The connection with Jeremiah lends force to a new threat of another exile.

iii. *The Ruth-Chronicles arch.* Ruth starts with a famine that has led Elimelech and his family to leave the land of Judah and to enter into "voluntary" exile in the land of Moab (Ruth 1:1–5). This ends in the death of Elimelech and both his sons. The book of Chronicles ends with the instruction from the Persian king Cyrus to the nation of YHWH, which finds itself in exile, to go to Judah. YHWH has given Cyrus all the kingdoms of the earth, and has appointed him to build a temple for him in Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:22–23). The beginning and the end of the Wisdom Canon are connected to each other by the subject of exile and return. In both cases, it is not exile that is the end, but return.

b. *The sub-arches within the first canon block.*

i. *The first sub-arch: Genesis-Deuteronomy (Adam-Moses).* We do not repeat the previous section on Adam, but examine his relation to Moses. Adam was the leader of humanity, and Moses the leader of the priestly nation of Israel, with a priestly duty to all nations. Moses was entitled to the land of Canaan based on a promise, but he lost that right (Deut 34:4; 32:48–52), although he was allowed to see the land from a distance (Deut 34:1–3). In looking, he saw both the land east of the Jordan, where he was already, and the land of Canaan, in which he was to have no part. But why was he allowed to see it? Was it to taunt him? Or did Moses receive this view in the light of a bigger context?[20] We can draw an arch from Moses to Adam. Adam, too, lost his entitlement to the Garden of Eden and the earth. If we place Adam side by side with Moses, we see that there is a framework on which the lack of any hope in Genesis 3 gains a perspective. The subject of exile is present at the beginning and the end of the Torah. The return to the land failed in the case of Moses, but just

---

[19] A similar argument can be made about the beginning of the book of Isaiah and the end of the book of Malachi. Cf. Zenger, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* 24–26. He does not do this directly, but does refer to (a) the beginning of the Latter Prophets (Isaiah 1–2) and to (b) the end of the Prophet corpus (Mal 3:13–21, 22–24). With regard to the aspect of "going into exile," the book of Jeremiah as a whole bears this stamp. This is less the case with the book of Isaiah. Jeremiah experiences the moment of exile in person, while Isaiah does not.

[20] Heb 11:13 may refer to this. The OT believers in Hebrews 11 died, "without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them *from a distance*."

before his death, God does show him the prospect of the land. This is something new. This is an elevation of the hope of return beyond the border of death. This elevation is present, but exactly what it implies is not described.

ii. *The second sub-arch: Joshua-Kings (Joshua-Jehoiachin).* We do not repeat the previous section on Jehoiachin, but we examine him in connection with Joshua. Both Joshua and Jehoiachin are leaders of the priestly nation of Israel. The sub-block of Joshua-Kings (the Demonstrated Torah) starts and ends *outside* the land. Life in the land is wedged between the two. Joshua found himself outside the land and moved into it; Jehoiachin found himself in the land, and moved out of it. Joshua received the command to enter the land with Israel. Joshua was the leader (Josh 1:1–2). Jehoiachin was also the leader. He was forced to leave the land, and all of Judah followed him. The section ends with Jehoiachin's release from prison. By drawing a connection between the end and the beginning, Jehoiachin's exile is better understood in the light of Joshua. Israel should be in the land and should aim to return to the land.

c. *The larger arches from the end of the canon to the beginning of the two preceding canon blocks.*

i. *The Chronicles-Jeremiah arch.* Second Chronicles 36:22–23 contains the proclamation by Cyrus, the king of Persia, to his entire kingdom. He summons the Jewish nation to return to Judah from exile and to rebuild the temple. According to v. 22, this is the fulfillment of Jeremiah's words. Now, it is precisely Jeremiah that is found at the beginning of the Prophet Canon. This allows for a macro-structural arch from the end of the Wisdom Canon to Jeremiah at the beginning of the Prophet Canon. We do not repeat the earlier contribution on Cyrus and Jeremiah, but relate the two to each other. In Jeremiah 1, God calls "all the families of the kingdom of the north" to set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem (Jer 1:13–16). This means disaster and God's judgment. In Chronicles, God has given Cyrus power over "all the kingdoms of the earth," and that means return and reconstruction.

ii. *The Chronicles-Genesis arch.* The book Chronicles starts with Adam and thus has the arch Adam-Cyrus (1 Chr 1:1 ⇔ 2 Chr 36:22–23). The internal arch in Chronicles forms a model for the external arch to Genesis.[21] Adam is featured precisely at the beginning of the Priest Canon. Adam and Cyrus are both world rulers. God has given Adam the command to rule over the whole earth (Gen 1:28). To Cyrus, God has given all the kingdoms of the earth (2 Chr 36:23). Adam is at the beginning of an open career; Cyrus is in the middle of his career. Will they succeed in carrying out the command that God has given them? In Adam's case, it ends in exile from the Garden of Eden, and the blockade by the cherubim and the flaming sword מִקֶּדֶם לְ (*on the east side of*) the Garden (Gen 3:24). His son Cain had to move even further away, away from Yʜᴡʜ's presence, to the land of Nod, קִדְמַת־עֵדֶן (*east of Eden*) (Gen 4:16). Cyrus opens the way for a return to the land of Judah. He was

---

[21] Cf. G. Hepner, "Israelites Should Conquer Israel: The Hidden Polemic of the First Creation Narrative," *RB* 113 (2006) 161–80.

someone called by God for the task, and as it turns out, was מִמִּזְרָח (*from the east*) (compare Isa 44:28 with Isa 41:2).

If we examine the enclosing arch in the third canon block, then it becomes evident that Chronicles is a concluding book that not only casts its net to the beginning of the Wisdom Canon (Ruth), but also to the beginning of the Prophet Canon (Jeremiah) and the beginning of the Priest Canon (Genesis). Adam with the genealogies at the beginning of Chronicles, and Jeremiah with Cyrus at the end of Chronicles point to the fact that the book was also designed to realize a single, large-scale theological canon structure.[22]

d. *The macro-canonical arches of disclosure: connections between the starting points of the three canon blocks taken together.* We shall only discuss these connections briefly, as each beginning has already been discussed. Due to the new connections, a new dynamic is created. This concerns the beginning of Genesis, the beginning of Joshua (secondary), the beginning of Jeremiah and the beginning of Ruth. In Genesis, Adam appears, but, due to his disobedience to God's command, must leave the Garden, and finally life itself. The return route is blocked. Through Joshua, the nation of Israel may enter the land of Canaan, where the patriarchs lived as strangers and aliens. In Jeremiah, God speaks his judgment over Israel, saying that the land will be conquered by enemies. In Ruth, an Israelite family enters a "voluntary" exile, but the father and the two sons die in Moab during the time of exile. In comparing the starting points with each other, the emphasis comes to lie on going into exile, and the aspect of return from exile is absent—except in the case of Joshua. However, from a macro-structural point of view, Joshua is the introduction of a secondary block, and not a main block.

e. *The macro-canonical arches of closure: connections between the ends of the three canon blocks taken together.* These connections shall briefly be discussed, since each end has already been discussed. Because of the new connections, a new dynamic is created. This concerns the end of Deuteronomy (secondary), the end of Kings, the end of Malachi, and the end of Chronicles. At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses is standing at the border of the Promised Land; he may see it, but he may not enter it. He dies there, at the border. Israel does have the option of entering the land, but this is only indirectly stated (Deut 34:1–3). At the end of Kings, the Davidic king Jehoiachin goes to Babylon under forced exile, and is later freed from prison by the Chaldean king Evil-Merodach. There is no direct statement indicating the prospect of return. At the end of Malachi, Israel receives the warning that the country will be sentenced to exile. At the end of Chronicles, the Persian king Cyrus gives the command to the nation of Israel to return to the land and to rebuild the temple. Both exile and return are present in the concluding passages. Deuteronomy testifies to a failed return for the leader of the nation of Israel. Because this break is secondary, I am hesitant to give it much weight in the line of development. An additional interesting development becomes evident through the comparison of the end

---

[22] Cf. H. J. Koorevaar, "Die Chronik als intendierter Abschluß des alttestamentlichen Kanons," *Jahrbuch für Evangelische Theologie* 11 (1997) 42–76.

of Kings, the end of the first canon block, and the end of Chronicles, the end of
the third and last canon block. The heathen king Evil-Merodach gives the king of
Judah permission to leave prison, but not to return to the land; the heathen king
Cyrus does give the people of Israel permission to return. With the former king, the
initial step is taken towards the return; with the latter, the return actually takes place.
Between the end of the first block and the end of the third block, is the end of the
second block, however: the warning is expressed through Malachi. Israel could just
as easily lose everything again. From a historical point of view, this is the final end-
ing, but from a literary point of view, it is the penultimate ending. The command to
return to the land is the final word, thereby concluding the canon.

IV. THE THEOLOGY OF EXILE AND RETURN

The subject of exile and return is present very strongly, both at *all seams within*
the canon, and also *at the beginning* and *at the end* of the canon. In this connection,
exile is not only a forced exile due to a military enemy, but can also be "voluntary"
due to famine. The famine in the time of Jacob was a legal reason to move to
Egypt in exile. This move fits into the divine plan (Gen 15:13–16) and ends with
the preserving of life (Gen 45:11; 47:12; 50:20). The exile of Elimelech to Moab
due to a famine in Israel in Ruth 1:1 must have been an illegal exile, because it end-
ed in death for him and his sons. The famine there indirectly indicates God's judg-
ment over Israel as it was at that time (Lev 26:20, 26; Deut 28:23, 30–31, 33, 38–40,
42–43). The other exiles were a form of judgment by God by means of the military
power of an enemy (2 Kgs 25:27–30; Jeremiah 1; Mal 3:23–24). This applies both
to the exile to Babylon that was actually experienced and to a second exile for Ju-
dah sometime in the future due to an enemy that is as yet unknown, after the return
from the first exile (Mal 3:23–24).

We have already seen that there are three big canon blocks, each based on a
different type of office, namely priest, prophet and judge. The literary dividing lines
between all three of these "task" blocks are simultaneously characterized by a mes-
sage at a theological level. It cannot be said that on one side of each of these divid-
ing lines is exile and on the other side return. The literary gap underscores and
deepens a theological message of exile and return *together*.

Exile and return together form one of the most important theological sub-
jects of the OT. They are linked with God's judgment over man due to his aban-
donment of God's way, and with the return to God and his will. At the beginning,
with the banishment from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, the subject of exile
applies to all of humanity. From Gen 11:27 and the rest of the OT, the subject of
exile and return applies to the people of the covenant, Israel. Humanity as a whole
and the nation of Israel are linked together macro-theologically. Adam and his exile
function paradigmatically for Israel and its possible exile. Israel's return to the land
can then also be seen as a paradigm for the return of Adam as representative of all
humanity. The question in this connection is: return to what? Return to the Garden
of Eden, or return to the earth as a prospect of rising above death?

V. SUMMARY AND DEEPENING

I draw the following conclusions.

(1) The Exile and Return Model is an alternative to the Torah Model. It is based on two pillars:

a. The order of the books in the Hebrew canon in the Talmud, the authorized order of Judaism.

b. Moving the break after Deuteronomy to after Kings. This is done based on the observation in OT scholarship that the series of books starting with Genesis does not end in Deuteronomy, but continues to Kings.

The Hebrew canon consists of three blocks. The first block is Genesis-Kings, and is known as the "Henneateuch" (nine books) in OT scholarship. It can also be called "the Great Primary History" or the Priest Canon. The second block is the Prophet Canon. It consists of the Writing Prophets, starting with Jeremiah and ending with Malachi. The third block is the *Ketuvim* or Wisdom Canon. It starts with Ruth and ends with Chronicles.

(2) The subject of exile and return is present at the seams between the three canon blocks, but also at the beginning and the end of the canon.

The first dividing line is between Kings and Jeremiah. Towards the end of Kings, the temple in Jerusalem is destroyed, and the people are forced into exile in Babylon. At the end, the Judean king Jehoiachin is released from prison, but not allowed to return to Judah. At the beginning of Jeremiah, Judah is told that Jerusalem will be conquered (and exile actually happened according to the subscript).

The second dividing line is between Malachi and Ruth. At the end of Malachi, sometime after the return from exile in Babylon, the return of the prophet Elijah is predicted. His return is to prevent the land from being struck with banishment, and therefore exile. At the beginning of Ruth, a Judean goes into "voluntary" exile to Moab due to a famine. This ends in his death and that of his two sons. His wife returns, taking with her the Moabitess Ruth, her daughter-in-law.

The subject is also present at the subdivision between Deuteronomy and Joshua. Moses is not allowed to enter the land of Canaan, but God allows him to see it before he dies. Joshua and Israel do actually enter the land.

The canon has an *inclusio* that reaches from the beginning of Genesis, the first book, to the end of Chronicles, the last book. Chronicles ends with the verdict of the Persian king Cyrus, who testifies that YHWH has given him all the kingdoms on earth. He tells the people of Judah to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. Genesis starts with the creation of Adam and his wife, who are instructed by God to rule over all the earth.

(3) Exile and return together form one of the central theological themes in the OT. The death penalty handed out to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and the exiling of the first human being from the Garden of Eden is linked to the breaking of God's will. From Gen 11:27 the subject of exile and return is linked with the covenant people Israel in the land of Canaan. Humanity and Israel are macro-theologically linked to each other. Adam and his exile function paradigmatically for Israel and its possible exile. Israel's return to the land could then be considered a

paradigm for Adam's return as a representative of all humanity. The question in this regard, however, is, return to what? Return to the Garden of Eden, or return to the earth as a perspective of overcoming death?

(4) We can indicate the above results in a graphic model using the following letters: A = Arrival, E = Exile, TE = Threatened Exile, VE = Voluntary Exile, VR = Voluntary Return.

Chart 2

Priest Canon				Prophet Canon				Wisdom Canon	
1:1- 2:3	Genesis - Kings	II 25: 27-30	1: 1-19	Jeremiah - Malachi	3: 22-24	1: 1-5	Ruth - Chronicles	II 36: 22-23
A		E	TE		TE	VE		VR

There appears to be a theological development. The Priest Canon starts with the arrival (A) of man on earth and ends in exile from the land (E). The Prophet Canon starts with a threat of exile (TE) and *also ends* with a threat of exile (TE). The Wisdom Canon starts with a "voluntary" exile (VE) and ends in a "voluntary" return (VR). In the Priest Canon, the emphasis lies on the historic/factual aspect, in the Prophet Canon on the prophetic threatening/warning aspect and in the Wisdom Canon on the voluntary, autonomous aspect. Now in the book of Ruth, Naomi did not have to return to the land, but she did so anyway. In doing so, she provided an example of a voluntary return at the beginning of the Wisdom Canon. Her return ended in blessing, a blessing on a worldwide scale: David and his messianic kingship. The call to return at the end of Chronicles, at the end of the Wisdom Canon, thereby has an encouraging example at the beginning of the Wisdom Canon. Would Israel's return to the land from exile in Babylon also bring about a blessing on a worldwide scale?