

## THE MACRO-STRUCTURAL ROLE OF THE FORMER PROPHETS AND THE HISTORICAL BOOKS IN OLD TESTAMENT CANONS

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**Abstract:** *The Former Prophets (Hebrew canon) and Historical Books (Greek canon) play a key role in helping to fashion the disparate contents of the OT into a coordinated canonical collection that reveals the will of God for his people. The positioning of the Former Prophets after the Pentateuch suggests that it was read as historical examples of Israel's response (mostly negative) to the instruction given by Moses. The portrait provided by Samuel, Kings and Chronicles is of the prophets as envoys of God, and this prepares readers for the later prophetic books that record their oracles. A number of the psalm titles allude to trying events in the life of David as described in the books of Samuel, and Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah link the Psalter to David as the organizer of temple worship. The portrait of Solomon in 1 Kings enriches the reading of the three wisdom works linked to Solomon, namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.*

**Key words:** *canon, Former Prophets, Historical Books, Psalms, prophecy, wisdom*

In studying the OT as a canonical structure, my concern is not the *process* by which the biblical 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, my approach of taking the OT canon as an empirical datum will not be an uncritical exercise, for the canon has, in fact, assumed more than one shape in the Hebrew and Greek canonical traditions, and these traditions may be compared and contrasted.

In this article I argue that the Former Prophets (Hebrew canon) and Historical Books (Greek canon) play a central macro-structural role in the OT. These books continue the story of salvation begun in the Pentateuch as a foundational document, and they form the narrative framework for the prophetic books and wisdom books that follow.<sup>3</sup> The book of Acts plays a similar organizational role in

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

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon: Volume I: The Old Testament: Its Authority and Canonicity* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Richard Bauckham, "Reading Scripture as a Coherent Story," in Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, ed., *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 39: "Some books have no narra-

the NT canon.<sup>4</sup> Along these lines, repeated mention is made of the “law” (תורה) of Moses in the post-Pentateuchal books. Prophetic figures of the likes of Samuel, Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, and Elijah punctuate the narratives of Samuel and Kings. The figure of David as depicted in the book of Samuel provides an intra-canonical link to the Psalter (via the psalmic titles). As well, figures identified as “wise” such as Jonadab, Ahithophel, Hushai, and especially Solomon appear in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings. The noted features are enough to suggest that these narrational works play a role in assisting to mold the variegated contents of the OT into a coordinated canonical structure.

### I. AN INSIGHT OF AUTHORS OR READERS?

In postulating a unifying function for the Former Prophets or Historical Books as outlined in the preceding paragraph, the lack of exact fit between these books and the books that follow in the canon is one indicator among others that this macro-structural role is an insight garnered by readers rather than one necessarily devised and intended by the biblical authors themselves. For example, with regard to the mention of prophetic figures in Samuel and Kings, despite the obvious interest in prophecy, only Jonah (in one verse [2 Kgs 14:25]) and Isaiah (2 Kings 18–20) of the writing prophets make an appearance. The non-mention of the prophet Jeremiah in the account of the closing years of the kingdom of Judah in the final chapters of 2 Kings is especially surprising, though his absence is remedied by 2 Chronicles (35:25; 36:12, 21). There is really nothing to encourage the theory of Christopher Begg that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the perspective of the book of Kings and the teaching of the prophets preserved in the Latter Prophets (e.g. Amos and Micah were supposedly anti-cultic, whereas the author of Kings was not);<sup>5</sup> however, there is also no indication that the Historian wrote with the conscious aim of preparing his audience to interact with and benefit from their reading of the prophetic books.

Several of the *wise* figures in 2 Samuel use their cleverness in devious and unworthy ways (e.g. Ahithophel is on the side of Absalom), so that the David story from 2 Samuel 12 onwards is certainly not a blanket endorsement of the practition-

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tive material at all, but it is not difficult to see that the canon implicitly gives some nonnarrative books (e.g. Psalms, Lamentations) a narrative setting within the story told by the narrative books.”

<sup>4</sup> By analogy, the book of Acts continues the narration of salvation history begun in the Gospels and provides an historical and theological frame for reading the letters of Peter, John, James, and Paul. See Walter Vogels, “La Structure symétrique de la Bible chrétienne,” in J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge, eds., *The Biblical Canons* (BETL 163; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 298, 300.

<sup>5</sup> Pace Christopher T. Begg, “The Non-mention of Amos, Hosea and Micah in the Deuteronomistic History,” *BN* 32 (1986): 41–53; idem, “The Non-mention of Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk in the Deuteronomistic History,” *BN* 38/39 (1987): 19–25; idem, “A Biblical Mystery: The Absence of Jeremiah in the Deuteronomistic History,” *IBS* 7 (1985): 139–64; idem, “The Non-mention of Ezekiel in Deuteronomistic History, the Book of Jeremiah and the Chronistic History,” in Johan Lust, ed., *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (BETL 74; Leuven: Peeters, 1986), 340–43.

ers of wisdom in Israel,<sup>6</sup> though it should be noted that the wisdom books also warn against the *wrong* kind of human wisdom (e.g. Prov 26:12; 28:11, 26; Job 12:1; Eccl 12:12). A negative evaluation also applies to the second part of David's charge to Solomon on his ascending the throne (1 Kgs 2:5: "Moreover [דג]..."), wherein David urges him to take vengeance on Joab and Shimei, but to do so with ruthless cunning, finding a suitable occasion for taking revenge upon them ("according to your wisdom ... for you are a wise man"; 2:6, 9).<sup>7</sup> The implication is that this is not the best way for Solomon to consolidate his grip on royal power. Rather, it is the first part of David's advice to his son that shows him the right way forward, namely the path of undeviating loyalty to God (2:1–4). As well, Solomon's exceptional wisdom did not prevent him from being led astray by his foreign wives (1 Kings 11), and no allusion is made in the book of Kings to the three canonical compositions attributed to him in the works themselves (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs).<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that the ordering of books in the OT canon is an activity and achievement of ancient readers (mostly scribes and copyists), not of the biblical authors, it is still of great value and significance, for the act of putting the biblical books in canonical groupings provides a paratextual frame for the scriptural text, preserving for posterity the interpretive choices made by early readers that may assist the efforts of contemporary readers to interpret the text.<sup>9</sup> The clustering and juxtapositioning of books indicates that those responsible for the resultant order detected the presence of meaningful connections between the canonical works (e.g. similar or related themes, common genre). These insights are now encoded in the sequences of the different ancient canons and Bibles and may contribute to the reading of Scripture by later believing communities.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Iain W. Provan, "On 'Seeing' the Trees While Missing the Forest: The Wisdom of Characters and Readers in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings," in Edward Ball, ed., *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 153–73.

<sup>7</sup> In the light of the "dissonant chord" sounded in 1 Kgs 2:5–9, Eric A. Seibert seeks to relieve the tension in David's portrait by arguing that these five verses are Solomonic propaganda placed on his lips; see *Subversive Scribes and the Solomonic Narrative: A Rereading of 1 Kings 1–11* (LHBOTS 436; New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 133–35. There is no need, however, to defend David's character to make sense of the text.

<sup>8</sup> See Prov 1:1; 10:1a; 25:1; and Song 1:1. Also, Ecclesiastes plainly alludes to Solomon, especially his wisdom, wealth and building projects (1:1, 12, 16; 2:3–9); see Tremper Longman III, "Qoheleth as Solomon: 'For What Can Anyone Who Comes after the King Do?'" in Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds., *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (LHBOTS 587; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 42–56.

<sup>9</sup> For biblical book order (fixed by use of the codex) and other paratextual features (e.g. paragramming) as reading aids, see Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (London: SPCK, 2017), 170–71, 192–93.

<sup>10</sup> Giving attention to paratextual elements like book order is an example of properly valuing the rich tradition of biblical interpretation of which we are the heirs. It recognizes that we are not the first generation of believers to make an effort to interpret and apply the Bible. 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.

## II. THE ARTISTRY OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE OT

Jack Miles views the arrangement of the contents of the Hebrew Bible in terms of artistry,<sup>11</sup> and along the same lines Roger Beckwith says that the “three sections of the canon are not historical accidents but works of art .... A logical motive is discernible in every detail of the distribution and arrangement.”<sup>12</sup> According to Yoram Hazony, Pentateuch and Former Prophets together make up the “Primary History,”<sup>13</sup> with Deuteronomy as the capstone of the arch of nine books, implying that Deuteronomy is the link between the four books on either side of it (see below). Next, there is an anthology of prophetic works, headed by three large works (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), and lastly, the Writings (in the majority order of Bibles in the Masoretic Hebrew tradition) is again headed by three substantial works (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job) followed by a miscellany of other books.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Hazony discerns imaginative patterns of artistic merit that exhibit balance and proportion in the arrangement of biblical books. In terms of artistry, in the Hebrew Bible there is also the symmetry of the four books of the “Former Prophets” (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) matched by the four books of the “Latter Prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Book of the Twelve [= Minor Prophets]).<sup>15</sup> These overlapping creative patterns suggest that there are significant connections between the Former Prophets and the books that precede and follow them in canonical order.

It is obvious that the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible was carefully constructed and makes a great deal of sense. This aesthetically pleasing achievement does not, however, prove the originality of this order, such that other (deviant) orders are demonstrated to be later disturbances of this artistic original (*pave* Beckwith). The imaginative power of art on the human mind potentially enables a new way of seeing,<sup>16</sup> and the different forms of the OT canon show that there is more than one insightful way of viewing its contents. For example, in the oldest of the extant medieval codices (i.e. Aleppo and Leningrad) Chronicles is situated at the head of the Writings, though the sequence with Chronicles at the end of the Writ-

<sup>11</sup> Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 15: “the order in which the books of the Bible appear—the order of the canon—is a crucial artistic consideration.”

<sup>12</sup> Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 165 (suspension points mine). Beckwith is thinking of the rabbinic order recorded in the Talmud (Bava Batra 14b).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. David N. Freedman, “Pentateuch,” *IDB* 3:712–13; idem, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 32: “the biblical text can easily appear to be a vast, rambling pastiche that, in terms of its form, is experienced by uninitiated readers as a work possessing neither order nor reason.” See also *Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, 35 (Figure 1).

<sup>15</sup> Early references to the canon count the Twelve (so-named) as one book, e.g. 4 Ezra 14:45; Josephus *Ap.* 1.38–41 (because of the number of OT books they count); Sir 49:10; Melito (recorded in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.13–14); and the Talmud (B. Bat. 14b).

<sup>16</sup> John Passmore, *Serious Art: A Study of the Concept in all the Major Arts* (London: Duckworth, 1991), 153.

ings became the norm in printed editions.<sup>17</sup> The obvious similarities of Chronicles to Kings (upon which it draws) means that at the beginning of Writings it plays the key role of helping to bridge Prophets and Writings. As well, Chronicles in first place, together with Ezra-Nehemiah at the end of the Writings, form an envelope around this canonical section, providing a unifying framework for the books enclosed by them.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the variety of orders found in the Greek (and Latin) OT canons, what we can say is that the books Genesis–Ruth are a set grouping (Octateuch);<sup>19</sup> Ruth is always placed after (or joined to) Judges (for the book is set “in the days when the judges ruled” [Ruth 1:1]); Chronicles almost always follows Kings; Lamentations, when separately listed, is placed after or near Jeremiah (on the assumption of their common authorship);<sup>20</sup> and Daniel is almost invariably put with prophetic books (due to the visions of Daniel 7–12). The effect of placing Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther after the book of Kings, rather than in the Writings, is that the history plotted in Joshua to Kings is extended into the post-exilic period, and it would be hard to deny that this way of organizing the books makes sense according to its own (more historically oriented) principles. There is, therefore, a logic to each arrangement of books,<sup>21</sup> and this precludes the idea that any one of the Hebrew or Greek ways of ordering the biblical books can be made the exclusive basis for an appreciation of the OT and the other canonical orders simply disregarded. In terms of interpretive method, the various ways of arranging the OT canonical books are best viewed as options favored by different ancient reading communities and now available to present-day readers for their pondering.

It can easily be overlooked that the books of the OT are presented to readers as parts of larger aggregations of books, and the placement of books in one of several literary corpora brings an influence to bear on how individual works are read.

<sup>17</sup> See the tables of Hebrew orders provided by L. B. Wolfenson, “Implications of the Place of the Book of Ruth in Editions, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament,” *HUCA* 1 (1924): 151–78, esp. 160–61; Michèle Dukan, *La Bible hébraïque: Les codices copiés en Orient et dans la zone séparée avant 1280* (Bibliologia 22; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 67; Peter Brandt, *Endgestalten des Kanons: Das Arrangement der Schriften Israels in der jüdischen und christlichen Bibel* (BBB 131; Berlin: Philo, 2001), 148–55.

<sup>18</sup> According to David N. Freedman, the major themes and emphases in the Chronicler’s work set the agenda of the Writings, see *Unity of the Hebrew Bible*, 77–78, 86–91; idem, “The Symmetry of the Hebrew Bible,” *JT* 46 (1992): 96.

<sup>19</sup> For the Greek canon, see H. B. Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek, Appendix: Containing the Letter of Aristaeus* (ed. H. St. J. Thackeray; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902; rev. R. R. Ottley; New York: Ktav, 1968), 201–2. For a listing of 212 Latin orders, see Samuel Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate: pendant les premiers siècles du moyen âge* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1976), 331–39.

<sup>20</sup> See Gregory Goswell, “Assigning the Book of Lamentations a Place in the Canon,” *JESOT* 4 (2015): 1–19.

<sup>21</sup> A recent parallel is found in the seven books of the Chronicles of Narnia, whose order of writing (and publication) differs from the temporal sequence of the fictional events in the books (notably, the premier position given to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Magician’s Nephew*, respectively). For arguments in favor of the first order for reasons of literary logic (e.g. the gradual unveiling of the figure of Aslan), see Leland Ryken and Marjorie Lamp Mead, *A Reader’s Guide through the Wardrobe: Exploring C. S. Lewis’s Classic Story* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 171–74; and Laura Miller, *The Magician’s Book: A Skeptic’s Adventures in Narnia* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2008), 17.

A key consideration with regard to Deuteronomy is whether it belongs (primarily) with the books that precede or the books that follow. Despite the strong ties between the books of Joshua and Deuteronomy,<sup>22</sup> in all ancient canon lists and Bibles there is a Pentateuch, not a Hexateuch (= six scrolls), even though this would appear to be a natural unit, running from the exodus to the entrance into the land (as in Deut 6:20–24; 26:5b–9),<sup>23</sup> or moving from the patriarchs to land possession (as in the speech of Josh 24:2–13).<sup>24</sup> Other scholars want to think in terms of a Tetrateuch (= four scrolls), for example Martin Noth, due to his failure to find Deuteronomistic material in Genesis-Numbers,<sup>25</sup> though scholarly evaluation of the supposed dearth of evidence is changing.<sup>26</sup> According to Noth's theory of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH), Deuteronomy 1–3 is an introduction to a canonical work encompassing Deuteronomy–2 Kings. The book of Joshua deals with the post-Moses situation (1:1: "After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD"), and the opening verse of Judges ("After the death of Joshua") implies continuity with the narrative in Joshua (cf. Judg 2:6–10). In the early chapters of 1 Samuel, it is still the *period* of the judges, with the age of kingship only really beginning with the regnal formula of Saul in 1 Sam 13:1. The narrative of Solomon's accession in 1 Kings 1–2 picks up certain themes and characters from 2 Samuel (e.g. Nathan, Bathsheba, Joab, and Shimei). In other words, narrational linkages do exist between these books, and, as such, Noth's claim of a unified historical narrative (his DtrH) is not outrageous.<sup>27</sup> His theory is, however, finally inadequate to explain the marked differences between the books, and it is necessary to insist on viewing the individual books as self-standing works.<sup>28</sup> Still other scholars want to think in terms of an

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<sup>22</sup> These are explored in Gordon J. Wenham, "The Deuteronomistic Theology of the Book of Joshua," *JBL* 90 (1971): 140–48; The themes in Joshua 1 with obvious links to the preceding book are holy war (vv. 2, 5, 9, 11, 14), the land (vv. 3, 4, 15), the unity of Israel (vv. 12–16), the role of Joshua (vv. 1–2, 5, 17), and the covenant (vv. 3, 7–8, 13, 17–18).

<sup>23</sup> The "short historical creed" in the latter Deuteronomistic passage is an important part of the argument of Gerhard von Rad in favour of a Hexateuch, see *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 3–13.

<sup>24</sup> See Thomas C. Römer and Marc Z. Brettler, "Deuteronomy 34 and the Case for a Persian Hexateuch," *JBL* 119 (2000): 401–19, for the argument that Joshua 24 was created by the Hexateuch redactor to summarise and conclude the larger work. However, Joshua 24 also looks forward, and its theocratic focus could be read as anticipating the problems caused by later kings; see Christoph Levin, *Die Verheissung des neuen Bundes in ihrem theologieggeschichtlichen Zusammenhang ausgelegt* (FRLANT 137; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 114–19.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; SPRT 5; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981); cf. Ivan Engnell, "The Pentateuch," in idem, *Critical Essays on the Old Testament* (trans. John T. Willis, with the collaboration of Helmer Ringgren; London: SPCK, 1970), 50–67.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch* (JSOTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 43–100; E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (WMANT 57; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984); Megan Warner, *Re-imagining Abraham: A Re-assessment of the Influence of Deuteronomism in Genesis* (OTS 72; Leiden: Brill, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 98. This is the English translation of part of *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1957).

<sup>28</sup> Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (OTS 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 363: "the unique character of each book prevents seeing the books of the dtr history as

Enneateuch (= nine scrolls), namely a grand historical work that stretches from Genesis to Kings, according to the arrangement of books found in the Hebrew Bible (in which the book of Ruth is found elsewhere).<sup>29</sup> With regard to the compositional and redactional theories briefly alluded to above, for my purposes it is suffice to note that the indecision among scholars regarding the exact status and role of Deuteronomy testifies to the real measure of continuity between the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, which I will now explore with a distinctly ethical focus.

### III. AN ETHICAL READING OF THE FORMER PROPHETS

The positioning of the Former Prophets *after* the Pentateuch implies that it was understood by its compilers as a collection of historical examples of Israel's response to the instruction given by Moses and the consequences of their obedience and disobedience. The study of OT ethics too often neglects the narrative sections of the OT, a fact bemoaned and addressed by Gordon Wenham.<sup>30</sup> A clustering of the noun "law/instruction" (תורה) in Joshua (1:8; 8:31, 32, 34; 22:5; 23:6; 24:26) and Kings (1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 10:31; 14:6; 17:13, 34, 37; 21:8; 22:8, 11; 23:24–25) forms an interpretive frame around the narrative of Joshua through Kings. More specifically, the books of the Former Prophets call for Torah piety in the opening of the frame and sketch the consequences of failure to exercise such piety at the close. The opening divine speech of Joshua 1 sets the tone for the book, stressing the need for "being careful to do according to all the law which Moses [God's] servant commanded" (1:7) and constant meditation was seen as essential to being "careful to do according to all that is written in it" (1:8). If this passage is viewed as the preface not just to the book of Joshua but to the canonical block as a whole, Josh 1:7–8 subordinates the books of the Former Prophets to the Mosaic Torah and, in effect, indicates that they serve as a commentary on it.<sup>31</sup>

Within this Torah framework, the Former Prophets depict events according to a rhythm of success and failure. The reader finds a glaring contrast between the

parts of one historical work. ... The individual books of the dt history are clearly unified units that do not reflect a comprehensive 'Geschichtswerk'."

<sup>29</sup> See Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Siphrut 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 16–49; idem, "Une grande historiographie allant de Genèse à 2 Rois a-t-elle un jour existé?," in Thomas Römer and Konrad Schmid, eds., *Les dernières rédactions du Pentateuque, de l'Hexateuque et de l'Ennéateuque* (BETL 203; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), 35–45; Christoph Levin, "On the Cohesion and Separation of Books within the Enneateuch," in Thomas B. Dozeman, Thomas Römer, and Konrad Schmid, eds., *Pentateuch, Hexateuch or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (SBLAIL 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 127–54.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000). Wenham mainly deals with the narratives of Genesis and Judges. See also Bruce C. Birch, "Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address," in Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen and Robert R. Wilson, eds., *Canon, Theology and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 75–91; and A. J. Culp, *Puzzling Portraits: Seeing the Old Testament's Confusing Characters as Ethical Models* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013). For this paragraph and the next, I acknowledge my dependence on Arie C. Leder, "Paradise Lost: Reading the Former Prophets by the Rivers of Babylon," *CTJ* 37 (2002): 9–27.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 384–85.

obedience of the generation of Joshua (the book of Joshua) and the disobedience of the generations that followed (the book of Judges). Israel's commitment to God's instruction (Josh 24:18, 22, 31) collapses under the death of Joshua and his generation (Judg 2:10). A similar pattern is evident in Samuel and Kings, so that the more hopeful book of Samuel is followed by the depressing picture of the book of Kings. It does not seem that the fidelity of God's people can last for more than a generation (David/Solomon, Hezekiah/Manasseh). On this reading, the Former Prophets as a canonical unit serves to dramatize Torah piety, with the literary grouping explaining the successes and failures of the nation in terms of its observance or violation of God's law. It records the dissonance between the hopeful prospects of the nation of Israel in Joshua and Samuel and its failure such as indicated by Judg 2:10–23, 2 Kgs 17:7–23; and 21:1–18. A sense of the unity of the story of God's dealings with his people (often with a focus on their failings) is provided by a number of summaries of past events given in the historical books (Josh 24:2–13; Judg 11:14–27; 1 Sam 12:6–13; Neh 9:6–37), which are supplemented by the summaries found in other books (e.g. Deut 6:20–24; 26:5–9; Pss 78; 105; 106; 135:8–12; 136; Ezekiel 20).<sup>32</sup>

An ethical reading of the Former Prophets finds support when it is noted that the Hebrew Bible puts books that Christians usually view as “Histories” (e.g. Samuel and Kings) in the same canonical section (Prophets) as the prophetic anthologies (Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.), and this makes all these books prophetic in orientation, namely, they offer a critique of the behavior of God's people according to divinely instituted standards (the values derived from the law of Moses). The pairing of Torah lessons (*Sedarim*) and selections from the Former and Latter Prophets (*Haftarah*) in the later scheme of synagogue readings also suggests an understanding of Joshua–Kings as illustrating and applying the teaching of the Pentateuch and turns the writing prophets into preachers of the Law.<sup>33</sup>

A historical principle is reflected in the classifying of Joshua–Esther in the Greek tradition as “Histories,” but the periodization is still in terms of the ups and down of God's dealings with a wayward people based on their response to his instructions. The book of Joshua ends with warnings (Joshua 23–24). This is followed by the cycle of infidelity plotted in Judges 2–3 and illustrated in the rest of the book. The people reject God in asking for a king (1 Samuel 8). David is shown to have feet of clay (2 Samuel 11–20). With only a few exceptions, the kings of Judah and Israel are reprobates, and the final paragraph of 2 Kings (25:27–30) gives no prospect of a revival of the house of David (agreeing with Noth's minimalist reading).<sup>34</sup> The presentation of Chronicles is little different in this regard and closes with the decline of the Davidic house and the position of Cyrus as world ruler (2

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<sup>32</sup> See John H. Choi, *Traditions at Odds: The Reception of the Pentateuch in Biblical and Second Temple Period Literature* (LHBOIS 518; New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 117–46.

<sup>33</sup> For details, see Gregory Goswell, “The Hermeneutics of the Haftarah,” *TynBul* 58 (2007): 83–100.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Jeremy Schipper, “‘Significant Resonances’ with Mephibosheth in 2 Kings 25:27–30: A Response to Donald F. Murray,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 521–29.



Chr 36:22–23).<sup>35</sup> Ezra-Nehemiah ends with the failure of God's people to do what they pledged (Neh 13:4–31). The upshot is that in the Former Prophets of the Hebrew Bible and in the Histories of the Greek OT, the recorded persons and events are evaluated in terms of the standards contained in the divine instructions given to Israel through Moses.

A challenge to such a reading is the alternate approach taken, for example, by Daniel Friedmann,<sup>36</sup> a legal expert, who compares biblical justice and morality with a wide range of other types of ancient law and modern laws in several jurisdictions (England, the United States, and Israel). His focus is biblical *stories*, as opposed to biblical law codes. In a short introduction, he reveals his adherence to the schema of Wellhausen,<sup>37</sup> claiming that we know little about the binding laws in biblical times. He accepts a Josianic dating for Deuteronomy, with other legal codes to be dated subsequent to that time. On the basis of this critical position, Friedmann emphasizes the turn to moral preaching by Amos and the prophets who followed him. The same evolutionary mentality is seen in his comment that only in Jer 7:31 is human sacrifice totally banned. He traces the occurrence of deceit as a feature in many biblical tales, with a prohibition in law of fraud not evident (so Friedmann) in the stories of the Torah and Former Prophets, so that the implicit ethic of these stories is different from (and even contradictory to) the ethical system in the Mosaic Law (Lev 19:33; 25:13–17). He argues that in the stories the deceiver (e.g. Jacob and Samson [his riddle]) is often successful. Only with the prophets was deceit viewed as wrong (e.g. Amos 8:4–6). According to him, the prophets brought with them a new moral seriousness.

Friedmann's evaluation depends upon the supposition that the lack of explicit condemnation in the stories amounts to tacit approval. He ignores that fact that both Jacob and Samson ultimately paid a high price for their deceitful ways. Friedmann also does not take sufficient account of the non-didacticism of biblical narrative. In the story of the old prophet in 1 Kings 13, the narrator supplies no motive for the deception, and Friedmann takes that to mean that motive is morally irrelevant in such stories.<sup>38</sup> He fails to see that biblical narration is marked by understatement and terseness. Friedmann asserts that marriage laws were not operative in David's time, for even as the king he would not be free to disregard them in marrying Bathsheba. Likewise, the incest laws, if in operation, would not have been flouted by Absalom (2 Sam 16:20–22). The strange legalities of the book of Ruth are used by Friedmann to assert that there is a glaring discrepancy between morality and custom as depicted in biblical narrative and the system of law laid down in the Pentateuch.

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<sup>35</sup> William Riley, *King and Cultus in Chronicles: Worship and the Reinterpretation of History* (JSOTSup 160; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 149–55.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel Friedmann, *To Kill and Take Possession: Law, Morality, and Society in Biblical Stories* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Friedmann, *To Kill and Take Possession*, 1–6.

<sup>38</sup> Friedmann, *To Kill and Take Possession*, 112–27.

Friedmann critiques the attempt of later Jewish Midrash and Haggadah to narrow the gap between the stories and the moral outlook of Pentateuchal law. His thesis is that the law was not in operation in biblical times, but an alternate (and better) explanation is that it was not woodenly applied in the post-biblical fashion. In addition, it is a misunderstanding to view the law as offering a *total* legal system. For example, Friedmann assumes that Deut 24:1–4 was the total divorce law, so that Michal's return to David would be wrong if that law was in operation (2 Sam 3:12–16). Friedmann's solution is always to argue that the law did not obtain in that day or that other laws and customs prevailed. To my mind it is wrong to assume that the legal provisions of the Torah are comprehensive.

Moreover, the disobedience of God's people in the Former Prophets predominantly takes the form of the worship of "other gods," which picks up a key concern in the hortatory speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy (e.g. 7:4; 13:2, 6, 13 [Heb. 3, 7, 14]), and so represents a valid reading of the ethics of the Pentateuch mediated via Deuteronomy. The concluding speeches of Joshua are along this line (Josh 23:7, 16; 24:15, 20, 23), and the failure of the tribes in the period of the judges took an identical form (e.g. Judg 2:11–13, 17, 19; 3:6; 1 Sam 7:3). By contrast, despite the extremity of being driven to Philistia by the persecution of Saul (1 Sam 27:1), in that foreign land where other gods are worshipped, David does not succumb to the temptation to "serve other gods" (26:19). In the book of Kings, the prototype of a good king is provided by David, with subsequent kings portrayed and evaluated (positively or negatively) "through the lens of the prototype."<sup>39</sup> The good kings are those who are like David, while the bad kings are those who are not.<sup>40</sup>

The first example is Solomon, whose foreign wives lead him astray, such that he goes after "other gods" (1 Kgs 11:1–8). He is condemned in these terms: "So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done" (11:6; cf. 11:33b: "[not] keeping my statutes and ordinances, as David his father did"). The crucial action for which Solomon is condemned is his worship of other gods (11:33a), which is opposed to the true Yahwistic worship associated with the Jerusalem temple. The inverse of Davidic-style obedience is specified in a warning to Solomon in these terms: "but if you ... go and serve other gods and worship them" (9:6). On this basis, it can be said that in Kings, obedience to God is narrowly defined as the avoidance of the worship of "other gods" (cf. 11:4–6, 9–10, 33). In summary, the course of Israelite history is explained by obedience and disobedience to Deuteronomic law, and the law is viewed as having on-going relevance.

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<sup>39</sup> Alison L. Joseph, *Portrait of the Kings: The Davidic Prototype in Deuteronomistic Poetics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 55; cf. Gerhard von Rad, "The Deuteronomistic Theology of History in the Books of Kings," in idem, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (trans. David Stalker; SBT 9; London: SCM, 1953), 88: "[David] is the king after the heart of the Deuteronomist. He is the prototype of the perfectly obedient anointed, and therefore the model for all succeeding kings in Jerusalem."

<sup>40</sup> Joseph, *Portrait of the Kings*, 58.

## IV. THE FORMER AND LATTER PROPHETS

In terms of titology, the books Joshua to Kings in the Hebrew canon (Ruth not included) are called “Former Prophets,” perhaps because the viewpoint taken of the history narrated is to a large extent that of the early prophets.<sup>41</sup> According to John Barton, the four books were designated prophecy because, though narrative, they are paradigmatic, and in that sense predictive of God’s ongoing dealings with his people, namely they “are an expression of the eternal shape of God’s purpose for his people: a pattern of his chastisement and consolation.”<sup>42</sup> The history recounted becomes the basis for prophetic appeals to covenant loyalty in the prophetic books that follow. In the stories, reference is made to a *series* of prophets, for example, Deborah (Judg 4:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:20), Nathan (2 Sam 7:2; 12:1), Gad (2 Sam 24:11) and Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:29),<sup>43</sup> though only in the books of Samuel and Kings do prophetic figures become a regular feature of the narrative, and it is only in the book of Kings that the confrontation between prophets and kings is central to the theology of the narrative.<sup>44</sup> So, too, the prediction-fulfilment formula is only really prominent in the book of Kings (e.g. 1 Kgs 2:27; 12:15; 2 Kgs 9:36; 10:17; 23:16). On the other hand, several prophetic books have superscriptions that list the names of kings mentioned in the book of Kings (e.g. Uzziah, Hezekiah), and this, in part, offsets the virtual absence of the “classical prophets” in Kings and helps to bind together and coordinate the Former and Latter Prophets (e.g. Isa 1:1; Hos 1:1; Amos 1:1).<sup>45</sup> The synoptic passages 2 Kings 18–20 and Isaiah 36–39 record the interaction of Hezekiah and Isaiah and this is a significant link between the book of Kings and the prophetic books.<sup>46</sup> Another synoptic passage, Jeremiah 52 (adapted from 2 Kings 24–25) draws a connection between Jeremiah and Kings.

As noted already, these four books are regularly in English referred to as “Histories” for they are part of the sequential history recounted by the books from Joshua to Esther in the Greek canon, and situated in this canonical grouping, Ezra-Nehemiah also makes mention of the work of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1–2; 6:14). Chronicles (following straight after Kings in the Greek Bible) often refers to (now lost) works by prophets and seers (e.g. 1 Chr 29:29; 2 Chr

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Josephus, *Ap.* 1.38–41. This is explicit in Chronicles, see Gregory Goswell, “Putting the Book of Chronicles in its Place,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 286–89.

<sup>42</sup> John Barton, “The Law and the Prophets: Who Are the Prophets?,” in idem, *The Old Testament: Canon, Literature and Theology: Collected Essays of John Barton* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 13.

<sup>43</sup> A large amount of space in the book of Kings is devoted to stories about Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17–2 Kings 13).

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Victor H. Matthews, “Kings of Israel: A Question of Crime and Punishment,” in David J. Hull, ed., *SBL 1988 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 517–26.

<sup>45</sup> Gene M. Tucker, “Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of a Canon,” in George W. Coats and Burke O. Long, eds., *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 56–70; John D. W. Watts, “Superscriptions and Incipits in the Book of the Twelve,” in James D. Nogalski and Marvin A. Sweeney, eds., *Reading and Hearing the Book of the Twelve* (SBL Symposium Series 15; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 110–24.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Thomas Römer, “From Deuteronomistic History to Nebiim and Torah,” in Innocent Himbaza, ed., *Making the Biblical Text: Textual Studies in the Hebrew and Greek Bible* (OBO 275; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2015), 12.

9:29).<sup>47</sup> The Chronicler depicts prophets as “men of letters”<sup>48</sup> and informs his readers that the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz wrote the rest of the deeds of Uzziah (2 Chr 26:22) and that “the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel” (2 Chr 32:32) included a fuller account of Hezekiah’s reign (32:32).<sup>49</sup> Finally, a lost book called “the laments” (הקִינֹת) is said to contain Jeremiah’s lament for Josiah (2 Chr 35:25), implying that Jeremiah, as a recognized composer of laments, may be the author of the canonical book of Lamentations (which is not to be confused with the book alluded to in 2 Chronicles 35). The RSV translation “uttered a lament” could just as easily mean “*composed* a lament,”<sup>50</sup> which was then written down (perhaps by Baruch, his scribe) in “the [book of] Laments,” and that, I suggest, is the meaning. In other words, the Chronicler depicts Isaiah and Jeremiah as prophetic authors, so that this comes close to alluding to the canonical prophetic books. The picture provided by Samuel, Kings and Chronicles is of the prophets as accredited representatives of God, whose word makes and breaks kings and whose predictions are always fulfilled.<sup>51</sup> This would lead readers to treat with reverence the prophetic books that mainly consist of their oracles.

## V. THE HISTORICAL BOOKS AND THE PSALTER

The numbering of the verses in many of the titled psalms is different between the Hebrew and the English texts, usually a difference of one, seeing that the title is assigned a number in the Hebrew text (e.g. the title of Psalm 3 [“A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son”] is 3:1 in the Hebrew text). If the title is particularly long (e.g. Psalm 51), the numbering of the verses will differ by two. Despite considerable variation in the Psalter in the manuscript tradition,<sup>52</sup> there is no evidence that the psalms ever lacked titles, and so the titles are to be viewed as *text* rather than as paratext. The tendency in more recent Bible versions is to put the titles in smaller type (e.g. NASB, RSV, NIV), and this is unfortunate, for it gives the impression that they are (dispensable) notes appended to the text proper. Certainly, there is no justification for their wholesale removal by the NEB editors. The num-

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<sup>47</sup> Gregory Goswell, “Titles without Texts: What the Lost Books of the Bible Tell Us about the Books We Have,” *Colloq* 41 (2009): 73–93; Noel K. Weeks, *Sources and Authors: Assumptions in the Study of Hebrew Bible Narrative* (PHSC 12; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), 218–30.

<sup>48</sup> Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 230.

<sup>49</sup> This is not the canonical book, despite its similar designation (cf. Isa 1:1).

<sup>50</sup> The verb is a denominative Po’el קָן (BDB 884: “chant a *qināh*”).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Thomas Römer, “The Case of the Book of Kings,” in Diana V. Edelman, ed., *Deuteronomy—Kings as Emerging Authoritative Books: A Conversation* (SBL Ancient Near East Monographs 6; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 187–201, esp. 196: “The book of Kings constructs a prophetic authority that is ranked above royal authority.” Cf. Ehud Ben Zvi, “‘The Prophets’: References to Generic Prophets and Their Role in the Construction of the Image of the ‘Prophets of Old’ within the Postmonarchic Readership/s of the Book of Kings,” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 555–67.

<sup>52</sup> See William Yarchin, “Is There an Authoritative Shape for the Book of Psalms? Profiling the Manuscripts of the Hebrew Psalter,” *RB* 122 (2015): 355–70.

bering of the titles in the Hebrew text reflects the view that the title is integral to the poetic piece.<sup>53</sup> If so, a title like that at the head of Psalm 3 suggests that the psalm be read in the context of the canonical life of David, especially as represented in the books of Samuel. These psalms are presented as composed by David on certain occasions when he was in danger (mostly from Saul or Absalom), so that David becomes the pious model for readers to follow in their own situations of need. The canonical titles amount to a system of cross-references between the Psalter and the books of Samuel, so that the psalms are understood as the prayers of David in times of stress rather than as set liturgical pieces used to accompany the sacrifices in the temple.

The psalm titles in the MT assign 73 psalms to David (לְדָוִד),<sup>54</sup> and the titles are to be understood as a hermeneutical prompt as well as a historical claim.<sup>55</sup> There is no reason they cannot be both. The “to David” (לְדָוִד) formula is probably a claim to authorship, viewing the preposition in the expression as a *lamed auctoris*.<sup>56</sup> This is obviously the case in Psalm 18, for the superscription reads: “A psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who addressed the words of this song to the LORD,” and the title is joined to the body of the psalm by the words “and he said” (וַיֹּאמֶר). Some thirteen psalms in their titles make reference to the life of David (Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142), and the best-known example is the title of Psalm 51, which relates that penitential psalm to the sin of David with Bathsheba. The David connection is to be taken seriously and allowed to have an impact on reading.<sup>57</sup> This strategy implies that the shorter titles that just have “To David” are to be interpreted in the context of the longer titles that point to particular occasions in David’s story, namely these Davidic psalms, too, can be studied with the same assumptions as the psalms with specific settings.

<sup>53</sup> For the antiquity of the titles, see Roger T. Beckwith, “The Early History of the Psalter,” *TynBul* 46 (1995): 1–27.

<sup>54</sup> The LXX attributes a further 14 psalms to David. With regard to the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), a title is added to Psalm 33 (“A Psalm by David. A Song [לְדָוִד שִׁיר מִזְמוֹר]”) in 4Q98 (= 4QP8<sup>a</sup>), one of very few untitled psalms in MT Book I, but such additions are rare in the DSS, and more usually the psalmic title is simply preserved, e.g. the titles of Psalms 18 and 51 in 4Q85 (= 4QP8<sup>c</sup>). The evidence disallows the view that the titles reflect (uncontrolled) *exegetical* activity; cf. Eugene Ulrich et al., eds., *Qumran Cave 4. XI Psalms to Chronicles* (DJD 16; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> See Brevard S. Childs, “Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis,” *JSS* 16 (1971): 137–50; E. Słomovic, “Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms,” *ZAW* 91 (1979): 350–80; Martin Kleer, “*Der liebliche Sänger der Psalmen Israels*”: *Untersuchungen zu David als Dichter und Beter der Psalmen* (BBB 108; Bodenheim: Philo, 1996), 78–86. For these scholars, the figure of David functions as what Alan Cooper calls a “productive interpretive strategy” but is not necessarily a genuine historical connection; see “The Life and Times of King David According to the Book of Psalms,” in R. E. Friedman, ed., *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism* (HSS 26; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 125.

<sup>56</sup> While accepting that the preposition ל can have a range of meanings, Vivian L. Johnson argues that it is best to understand the Davidic psalms as put in the mouth of David and imagined as uttered by him, see *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms* (LHBOTS 505; New York: T&T Clark International, 2009), 4–6.

<sup>57</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985), 198.

In line with the work of scholars who read the Psalter as a wisdom work,<sup>58</sup> the thirteen psalms with historical allusions to events in David's life in their titles as a grouping connect the Psalter to the wisdom theme in the books of Samuel, which is especially evident in the two periods of David's life to which most of the titles allude, when David was a fugitive from Saul and Absalom. In 2 Samuel, for instance, the turning point in the narrative of Absalom's rebellion is David's plea that God would "turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (15:31), which God answers by means of the specious advice given by Hushai (17:14b). When that advice is accepted, the rebel cause is as good as lost, such that Ahithophel tidied up his affairs and committed suicide (17:23).<sup>59</sup> Norman Whybray emphasises the wisdom features of the chapters,<sup>60</sup> notable examples being the counsel of Jonadab (13:3–5), and the involvement of the wise women of Tekoa (ch. 14) and Abel (ch. 20), but Whybray fails to note that several of these *wise* figures are depreciated, and there is a heavy dose of irony in the manipulative compliment made to David about him possessing "wisdom like that of the angel of God [to know] everything that happens on the earth" (14:20), for subsequent events call into question David's reputed wisdom (e.g. his recall of Absalom).<sup>61</sup> The David story from 2 Samuel 12 onwards puts human wisdom under a cloud.

In the more positive handling of the wisdom theme in 1 Samuel, David does not act from expedience but twice spares Saul's life, relying on God to deal with his enemy (quoting a proverb in 1 Sam 24:13). Saul admits that David is in the right and predicts his ultimate success, and Saul confesses that he himself has "played the fool" (26:21 root סכל). Likewise, in David's psalm of rescue (2 Samuel 22 [// Psalm 18]) and "the last words of David" (2 Sam 23:1–7), which may be compared to the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32) and Moses's final speech (Deuteronomy 33),<sup>62</sup> David speaks as a prophet and wise man,<sup>63</sup> who acknowledges that it was God who delivered him from all his troubles, and he is confident that God will cause him and his house to prosper, in contrast to the fate of the wicked. This does not turn the books of Samuel, in part or in whole, into wisdom literature, but it does show that their story can be viewed from a wisdom perspective, and this contributes to a reading of the Psalter within a wider canonical setting.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Wisdom Psalms and the Shaping of the Hebrew Psalter," in Randall A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow and Rodney A. Werline, eds., *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 144–60; Gerald H. Wilson, "Shaping the Psalter: A Consideration of Editorial Linkage in the Book of Psalms," in J. Clinton McCann Jr., ed., *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 72–82, esp. 78–81.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978), 108–10.

<sup>60</sup> *The Succession Narrative* (SBT 22; London: SCM, 1968).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Robert P. Gordon, "A House Divided: Wisdom in Old Testament Narrative Tradition," in John Day, Robert P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson, eds., *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97–98.

<sup>62</sup> Kleer, "Der liebliche Sanger," 70–74.

<sup>63</sup> As also noted in *ibid.*, 75–77.

A different (but compatible) rationale appears to be at work in the ordering of the biblical books found in codices Aleppo and Leningrad, which place Chronicles at the head of the Writings, with the Psalter following it. In its retelling of Israelite history, Chronicles presents David as the founder of the Jerusalem cult and organizer of temple worship (esp. 1 Chronicles 13–16; 23–26), so that placing Psalms after it makes perfect sense.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, providing a further example of an OT synoptic passage, there is the psalmic material recorded in the Chronicler's version of the account of the transfer for the ark to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 16 // Pss 105:1–15; 96:1–14; 106:1, 47–48). The intra-canonical link between Chronicles and Psalms is still intact when Chronicles is found among the Historical Books of the Greek canon, and the association between the Histories and the Psalter is reinforced by the presence of Ezra-Nehemiah alongside Chronicles. In Ezra-Nehemiah, the figure of David is recalled several times in his role as organizer of cultic worship (Ezra 3:10; 8:20; Neh 11:23; 12:24, 36, 45, 46), and Solomon once joins him in this role (Neh 12:45; cf. 2 Chr 8:14). These liturgical activities can involve the singing of psalms (e.g. Ezra 3:11), and the expression “according to the directions of David” (3:10 RSV) may refer to the use of compositions by David from the book of Psalms.<sup>65</sup> The singing or chanting could have been antiphonal, for the Hebrew expression “sang responsively” (RSV יָעֲנֶוּ) can mean that, with the quoted words of Ezra 3:11 being the refrain between the verses sung in the style of Psalm 136. The refrain was the same sung at the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chr 5:13; 7:3, 6) and serves in both texts to epitomise temple praise.

## VI. THE REIGN OF SOLOMON AND THE WORDS OF THE WISE

As noted above, the portrait of Solomon as the consummate wise king found in Kings and to a lesser extent in Chronicles (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:12, 28; 4:29–31 [Heb. 5:9–11]; 10:8; 2 Chr 10:22–23) makes no mention of the three works linked to his name in the OT canon, namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. In an attempt to fill this gap, rabbinic lore claimed that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs in his youth, he wrote Proverbs in his maturity, and when he became old he wrote Ecclesiastes.<sup>66</sup> Whatever the plausibility of this theory, presumably one generated by scrutiny of the contents of the three books, it only underscores the fact that the OT historical books do not as such depict Solomon as the author of wisdom literature found elsewhere in the canon. That does not mean, however, that the intra-canonical link is fanciful and unsustainable, and I will now seek to demonstrate that the postulated connection enriches the reading of these wisdom books.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. J. S. McIvor, *The Targum of Chronicles: Translated, with Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Aramaic Bible 19; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 13: “the position of Chronicles just before Psalms in the St. Petersburg Codex [= Leningrad B19a] may have been because Chronicles, in which David plays such a leading role, was regarded as a good introduction to the book attributed to him” (addition mine).

<sup>65</sup> According to the commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah attributed to Rashi.

<sup>66</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; trans. Henrietta Szold; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911), 6:301–2. See the evaluation provided by Thomas M. Bolin, *Ecclesiastes and the Riddle of Authorship* (Bible World; New York: Routledge, 2017), 20–35.

The book of Proverbs is attributed to Solomon as author or collector or both (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), and this is in accord with what is said in 1 Kgs 4:32 (Heb. 5:12), namely that “[Solomon] also uttered three thousand proverbs.” In other words, the writer of Kings depicts Solomon as a prodigious composer of proverbs, though it is not said that these were written down for posterity. In the same passage, the author of Kings recognizes the internationalism of wisdom, for he praises Solomon for possessing wisdom that “surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kgs 4:30 [Heb. 5:10]). Solomon is compared favorably with other apparently well-known savants from outside Israel, some of whom are named (e.g. “Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol”), and the queen of Sheba also acknowledges his supreme wisdom (1 Kgs 10:1, 3, 7–8). The comparison with extra-Israelite wisdom assumes a basic *similarity* between the two, without denying Israelite distinctives (e.g. the fear of YHWH), and in line with this, the book of Proverbs includes material from extra-Israelite sources (e.g. Prov 31:1: “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him”).

Within the cycle of love songs that make up Song of Songs, Solomon is mentioned by name in the superscription (1:1: “The Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s [אֲשֶׁר לְשֹׁלֹמֹה]”), in the simile “like the curtains of Solomon” (1:5), in a description of his opulent litter on his wedding day (3:6–11), and in an allusion to his extensive vineyard (8:11–12). Solomon is probably not, however, the shepherd-lover depicted in the poems, though having numerous wives and concubines would have contributed to his romantic fame and suggested that he was well equipped to compose such a passionate work (1 Kgs 11:3). In a final summary of what the songs are about, the reader is taught a lesson about the awesome power of romantic love (Song 8:6–7).<sup>67</sup> Though not an application made in the Song of Songs itself, it is not without significance that in the story of Solomon told in the book of Kings, it was his attachment to his foreign wives (“Solomon clung [דָּבַק] to these in love”) that brought him down (11:1–8), such that in Neh 13:26, the fate of Solomon becomes an object lesson in a post-exilic sermon on the danger of entanglement with foreign wives.

The so-called “king fiction” in Ecclesiastes plainly alludes to Solomon (1:1, 12, 16; 2:3–9), but most scholars think that the thematic connection is discarded after 2:26. Eric S. Christianson disputes the common supposition that the Solomonic “guise” is limited to the first two chapters of the book,<sup>68</sup> showing that the book as a whole can be understood as written from a Solomonic perspective, and on that understanding, the intra-canonical link to the biblical portrait of Solomon materially contributes to the interpretation of Ecclesiastes. Y. V. Koh also argues for “the pervasiveness of the royal voice” throughout the book,<sup>69</sup> but, unlike Christianson, does not view the book of Ecclesiastes as aimed at debunking the wisdom of

<sup>67</sup> Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 196.

<sup>68</sup> *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), chap. 6 (pp. 128–72).

<sup>69</sup> *Royal Autobiography in the Book of Qobeleth* (BZAW 369; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 71.



Qoheleth, and this interpretation is in accord with the more positive portrayal of Solomon in Chronicles (esp. 2 Chronicles 9).<sup>70</sup> In addition, as explained by Koh, “Solomon’s reputation as Israel’s wise king *par excellence* would lend support and authority to Qoheleth’s pessimistic conclusions,”<sup>71</sup> since he had the wisdom and wealth to do a thorough investigation, namely, he did not get the results he did (his failed search) because of any lack in insight or affluence.<sup>72</sup> Qoheleth has tested everything in a way that other people, with their more limited intellectual and material resources, would not be able to attempt. His conclusions are that humans cannot master life (1:15), human wisdom is limited (1:18), and indulging in pleasure cannot lead to permanent gain (2:2, 11).

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

The sequencing and aggregation of the OT books reflects the interpretive judgments of ancient readers and provides an evaluative frame for the scriptural text that may assist the efforts of modern readers to interpret the text. In that regard, the Former Prophets (Hebrew canon) and Historical Books (Greek canon) play a key macro-structural role, helping weld together the books of the OT into a unified canonical collection. The positioning of the Former Prophets implies that it was read by those who assembled the corpus as a collection of historical examples of Israel’s response to the instruction given by Moses in the Pentateuch (and especially Deuteronomy). The picture provided by Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles is of the prophets as representatives of God, a portrait that would encourage readers to treat with reverence the later prophetic books that are for the most part anthologies of their oracles. A number of the psalm titles are, in effect, cross-references to events in the life of David in the books of Samuel, such that the psalms are understood as the prayers of David in times of stress. Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah also link the Psalter to David, but in this case, as the founder and organiser of temple worship. Finally, the portrait of wise Solomon in Kings contributes to a richer reading of the three wisdom works ascribed to Solomon, namely Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs. The implication of the intra-canonical linkages is that the multitude of perspectives and emphases found in the different biblical books are finally compatible and together present a unified message.

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gary N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 136.

<sup>71</sup> Koh, *Royal Autobiography*, 192.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Longman, “Qoheleth as Solomon,” 52.