

Order of the Canon

1. Introduction

- a. "All Scripture..." but what is the all?
- b. There are multiple orders... suggests multiple reasons... is there a community/individual which has an order for a particular reason??? Messianic? Eschatological?
- c. Evidence from Christ would be strongest, most likely but...
- d. There should be external evidence
- e. Demonstrate that the traditional Hebrew order existed in 1st century or earlier

2. Extrnal evidnce

I. Ben Sira 180-175 B.C. *Wisdom of Ben Sira*

1) Lists out the "famous men."

"They include the following in order: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve tribes (all in Genesis); Joshua (in Exodus through Joshua) and Caleb (in Numbers through Joshua); "the judges"; Samuel, Nathan, David, Solomon (in the book of Samuel); Rehoboam, Jeroboam, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Josiah (in Kings); Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "the bones of the Twelve Prophets"; Zerubbabel and Jeshua (in Haggai and Zechariah as well as Ezra); and Nehemiah." ¹

- a. MT order but not LXX (no Boaz, Daniel... no consideration of Chronicles, Job, Psalms...)
- b. The way in which he speaks of the famous men suggests his readers are familiar with them. Pushes the dates back into the third century BC in all probability if not earlier.²

This gives us then an order approximating the order we have in the MT through the Law and the Prophets. We will continue to consider the first two sections as we also investigate the third section known as the Writings/Psalms.

We turn now to ascertain the third section known as the Writings.

II. We begin with Ben Sira's grandson who wrote a prologue for the document we just considered.

"Whereas many and great things have been delivered unto us by the Law and the Prophets and the others that have followed in their steps (δία του νομου και των προφητων και των αλλων των κατ' αυτους ηκολουθηκοτων) ...my grandfather Jesus, having much given himself to the reading of the

¹ Reddit, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 365–66.

² Ibid.

Law and the Prophets and the other Books of the Fathers (του νομου και των προφητων και των αλλων πατριων βιβλιων) and having gained great familiarity therein, was drawn on also himself to write somewhat pertaining to instruction and wisdom; in order that those who love learning, and are addicted to these things, might make progress much more by living according to the Law. Ye are entreated therefore to read with favour and attention, and to pardon us, if in any parts of what we have laboured to interpret, we may seem to fail in some of the phrases. For things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue: and not only these things, but also the Law itself and the Prophecies and the rest of the Books (αυτος ο νομος και αι προφηται και τα λοιπα των βιβλιων) have no small difference when they are spoken in their original language.”³

The result for Beckwith is as follows:

“It appears, then, that for his writer there are three groups of books which have a unique authority, and that his grandfather wrote only after gaining great familiarity with them, as their interpreter not as their rival. The translator explicitly distinguishes ‘these things’ (i.e. Ecclesiasticus, or uncanonical Hebrew compositions such as Ecclesiasticus) from ‘the Law itself and the Prophecies and the rest of the Books’. Moreover, he regards even Hagiographa as ‘ancestral’ (πατριων) books, long enough esteemed to have been translated into Greek, and their number as complete (‘the others that have followed in their steps’, *the* other Books of the fathers’, ‘*the* rest of the Books’). And not only does he state that in his own day there was this threefold canon, distinguished from all other writings, in which even the Hagiographa formed a closed collection of old books, but he implies that such was the case in his grandfather’s time also.”⁴

III. The New Testament

- 1) Luke 24:44 The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms.
 - a. Jesus uses what seems to be traditional titles for the 3 sections of Israel’s Scripture.
 - i. Not unusual to use the first in a sequence as a title in the Hebrew Bible, e.g. *bereshit*, *shemot*, etc.
- 2) Luke 11:51 “from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah” (see also Mt. 23:35)
 - a. Abel was the first murdered, Zechariah was the final one mentioned in the canon (2 Chron 24:21).
 - b. Zechariah was not the last prophet murdered historically (chronologically) speaking: Uriah was (Jer 26:20-23).
- 3) At least 12 occurrences in the Gospels, Acts, and Pauline Corpus of a title of “the Law and the Prophets” or “Moses and the Prophets.”

In summary, the words of Beckwith:

³ Jesus Ben Sira’s grandson

⁴ Beckwith *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 110 –11.

“If in Jesus’ day it was an accepted fact that the last book of the canon was Chronicles, just as the first book was Genesis, then this confirms that the traditional order was already in existence, and was more generally followed than any one order has been since. For if the first and last books were settled, in accordance with the traditional order, the natural inference is that the intervening books were also settled, in accordance with the traditional order, and that consequently the canon was closed.”⁵

We must arrive at the conclusion that for Jesus, according to Luke, there was a tradition with Psalms at the beginning and Chronicles at the end of the canon.

IV. Baba Bathra, 2nd cent BC⁶

- 1) It is a tradition... assumes that there has been this order for a possible lengthy period.
- 2) Order of the Prophets
 - a. “Our Rabbis taught: the order of the Prophets is Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the twelve Minor Prophets. Let us examine this...Isaiah was prior [probably meaning chronologically prior] to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Then why should not Isaiah be placed first?...Because the book of Kings ends with a record of destruction and Jeremiah speaks through of destruction and Ezekiel commences with destruction and ends with consolation and Isaiah is full of consolation; therefore we put destruction next to destruction and consolation next to consolation.

Don’t forget that Jeremiah ends with a chapter from 2nd Kings so there would be reason for close association.

3) Order of the Writings

“The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the book of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles.”⁷

- a. Chronicles is at the end
- b. Alternatives for Ruth and its association with David

V) Other Ancient Texts

⁵ Ibid, 222.

⁶ Ibid, 198; see also, McDonald, *The Biblical Canon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 164, who gives the approximate date of 70 BC–200 CE.

⁷ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Bava Batra* 14B–15A, taken from McDonald, 163.

1) Philo-20 B.C. -50 C.E. “(the) Laws, and (the) Oracles given by inspiration through (the) Prophets and (the) Psalms and the other books whereby knowledge and piety are increased and completed...”⁸

- a. refers here to all of the Writings because of later appeals to Job and Proverbs as Scripture
- b. similar to Ben Sira’s grandson and Jesus

2) Mishnah

a. ‘The Book of Ezra, if it comes out (of the Temple), makes the hands unclean; and not the Book of Ezra alone, but the Prophets and the Fifts. But another book makes the hands unclean if it is brought in there’ (Tos. Kelim B.M. 5.8).’

‘If it (viz. the Book of Esther) is written (in a copy of) the Fifts, they do not read publicly in it’ (Jer. Megillah 2.3).

‘In a scroll of the Law, the space of two finger-breadths must be left (between columns), but in scrolls of the Prophets and in scrolls of the Fifts the space of one thumb-breadth. In the lower margin of a scroll of the Law the space of a hand-breadth is left, and in the upper margin two-thirds of a hand-breadth, but in scrolls of the Prophets and the Fifts three finger-breadths in the lower margin and two finger-breadths in the upper’ (Sepher Torah 2.3.f. Also Sopherim 2.4, which gives the same rules almost *verbatim*).

These ancient texts are using “Fifts” as a title for the Hagiographa. The “Fifts” is referring to the Psalms for the 5 books of the Psalms. This demonstrates again that the third section is known as the Psalms.

3) Jerome who follows a Hebrew tradition also has a tri-partite canon.

4) *Against Apion*—Josephus

a. ‘Of these, five are the books of Moses, comprising the laws and *the traditional history from the birth of man down to Moses’s death. This period falls only a little short of 3,000 years. From the death of Moses down to Artaxerxes who followed Xerxes as king of Persia, the prophets after Moses wrote the events of their own times in thirteen books.* The remaining four books containing hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. *From Artaxerxes down to our time, the complete history has been written, but has not been deemed worthy of like trust with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of the prophets.*’⁹

b. Josephus lists no order

⁸ Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* quoted in Beckwith, 117.

⁹ Josephus, *Against Apion*, quoted in Beckwith, 124–25.

- c. From his own descriptions of the sections, one can see the historical concerns.
- d. Beckwith's summary of Josephus
 - i. From this it is quite clear that Josephus regards the first two sections of his canon as historical, and the third section as non-historical works. The distribution is therefore, in all probability, the historian's own. On the principle that all the biblical writers are, in one sense or another, prophets, and that (as he says in this very passage) historiography was in biblical times a prophetic prerogative, he has transferred the narrative books in the Hagiographa to join those in the Prophets and has arranged the combined collection in chronological order. The only books which he has left in the Hagiographa are those which do not contain narrative material.¹⁰

Internal evidence

I. Amos to Obadiah

NASB reflecting MT

English translation of LXX

Acts 15:16

Amos 9:11-12 ¹¹ "In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, And wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins And rebuild it as in the days of old; ¹² That they may possess the remnant of Edom And all the nations who are called by My name," Declares the LORD who does this.

In that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek *me*, saith the Lord who does all these things.

Acts 15:16-18 ¹⁶ 'after these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, ¹⁷ so that the rest of mankind may seek the lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,' ¹⁸ says the Lord, who makes these things known from long ago.

- a. Association between the books such as Edom, possess; cf. Nolgaski's catchwords
- b. MT order in contrast to LXX order
 MT=H, J, A, O...
 LXX=H, A, M, J, O...

The concern in the LXX order is clearly historical/chronological but the LXX translation above reflects the linguistic "stitching," i.e. the association between Amos and Obadiah that can be seen in the MT

¹⁰ Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon*, 125.

order. This suggests that the order was original even though in the LXX, there has been a reordering after the translation had long since been done.

- c. Shepherd, “Where the Masoretic Text has יִרְשׁוּ (“they may possess”), the Septuagint reflects יִדְרְשׁוּ (“they may seek”); and where the Masoretic Text has אֲדוֹם (“Edom”), the Septuagint reflects אָדָם (“mankind”). Thus, even though the great Septuagint codices have the order Amos-Micah-Joel-Obadiah-Jonah, the Greek text here presupposes the Amos-Obadiah sequence of the Masoretic Text...¹¹
- d. Nolgalski’s catchwords
- e. Sailhamer on the ending of Amos, “At that time [restoration of the House of David, ie. Davidic Covenant] Israel would “possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name.” (9:12) What this meant within the immediate context is that the nations, here pictured as Edom, would one day be a part of God’s kingdom. Edom was characteristically used to represent the “nations” in the OT because the spelling of the name *Edom* in Hebrew is virtually identical to the Hebrew word for “nations.” For Israel to possess the nations is the same as for the nations “to seek” the Lord.”¹²

Sailhamer on the sequential Obadiah, “On that day the nation of Israel will turn the tables on Edom and conquer them. This will be a fulfillment of the prophecy of Balaam in Num 24:18 and will thus signal the coming of the messianic age. In the logic of the imagery of this book, the picture of Israel’s conquering Edom is taken to mean that Edom, and thus all “nations” [because of Edom meaning adam, ie. Humanity] will, in that day, become a part of God’s kingdom. When the Deliverer who rules on Mount Zion governs the mountains of Edom, it will mean that Edom will have become a part of God’s kingdom.”¹³

II. Proverbs-Ruth

1. End of Proverbs

- i. Oracle in contrast to proverb
- ii. Acrostic poem centered around “virtuous women”
- iii. Chiastically centered upon husband in the gates.

2. Ruth

- i. So now when we come to the book of Ruth we are quite prepared to notice any woman. Especially such a woman that is described in the same manner as the Proverbs 31 woman.
- ii. Intertextual allusions between Proverbs 31 and Ruth

¹¹ Michael B. Shepherd, “Compositional Analysis of the Twelve,” ZAW 4, 2007.

¹² John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 419.

¹³ *Ibid.* 420

“Woman of character” – only found here in Proverbs 31:10 (and 12:4) and in Ruth 3:11 – spoken by Boaz

“deserves to be praised” Prov 31:28-29, 30, 31, Ruth is praised in 2:11, 3:11 and then praised highly in ch 4

“known for Hesed” in Prov 31:26, Ruth 3:10

III. Dan, Ezra/Nehemiah, Chronicles

1) All three books deal with the Edict of Cyrus

1. Why does the author of Chronicles appear to cut off a portion of the edict if not for the sake of his message?

2) Why is Chronicles at the end when Ezra/Nehemiah comes after?

Bob Cole states, “The anachronistic sequence of Ezra/Neh-Chron indicates that for the canonizer the return under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah has not really ended the exile. Chronicles concludes the entire canon with a hoped for fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy awaiting arrival of the builder of the temple.”¹⁴

IV. The seams of the Tripartite division

1. Deut 34-Josh 1

2. Deut 34-Mal

3. Josh 1-Psalm 1

4. Mal-Psalm 1

¹⁴ Class notes, Spring 2009, SEBTS.