

Introduction

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You have heard it said that our Bible contains sixty-six different books written by an unknown number of human authors in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) over a period of roughly fifteen hundred years with various and sometimes conflicting messages. But I say unto you that the Bible may also be understood as a single book by a single author containing both a unified message and a unified design (John 5:39, 45–47; Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; Acts 28:23, 31; Rom. 1:1–3; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:11). The Bible is like a large picture puzzle. Each puzzle piece (individual book) has its own unique shape and bears its own unique image. But these individual shapes were designed to fit together into something whole, and the image of the whole provides the context and makes sense of the smaller, individual images.

For this reason, it is helpful to understand that the Bible is *not* a love letter, a self-help guide, a history textbook, a story, a legal code, a collection of ancient letters, or a religious handbook, though these types of things certainly appear throughout the pages of the biblical text (diversity). Rather, altogether, the Bible is the record, the deposit, the testimony of God's good news in Jesus Christ (unity). It is a legal, objective, public document that describes and explains the covenantal relationship by which God has condescended and united himself first to this world and then to his people through Jesus Christ (function). And so, in order to understand the message of the Bible, we must labor to understand the *diversity* of its various parts, the *unity* of its overall message, and its *function* in the life of the people of God. It is vital that we work to understand this book, the whole of it, because the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles *and prophets*” (Eph. 2:20) and because this book is both living and life-giving (Ps. 119:25, 50; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 4:12).

Because of its age, and the various foreign cultural contexts out of which the Bible emerged, it is often difficult to understand the message of the Bible and its significance for thinking and living in the twenty-first century. For example, what does it mean that Jesus is our High Priest (Gen. 14:18; Num. 35:9–34; Hebrews 7–9), and why does that matter in a context where high priests are no longer a part of

everyday life? To complicate matters further, the Bible contains two different parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament, and at times these two parts appear to contradict each other. For example, which command should we follow, “an eye for an eye” (Ex. 21:24) or “turn the other cheek” (cf. Matt. 5:39)?

And so, before we turn to consider each of the individual books of the Old Testament in this introduction, it is important first to consider the message of the whole, which will ultimately make sense of the individual parts. When considering the whole, it is essential to begin with the entire Christian Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. It is especially important to understand how the apostolic testimony of the New Testament identifies and establishes the final meaning and design of the prophetic word contained in the Old Testament. This New Testament witness provides us with a unified conceptual framework by which we can comprehend the vast diversity presented to us in the pages of the the Old Testament.

The Old Testament is more complex, diverse, and removed from our modern contexts than the New Testament. Our English Bibles contain some thirty-nine books written by a number of different (identified and unidentified) authors between approximately 1400 and 400 BC. The Old Testament is also the larger of the two Testaments, constituting over three-quarters of the whole.¹ But we have not been left to our own devices when it comes to making sense of these ancient texts. The New Testament provides the final, authoritative context from which God’s people can rightly understand the message and design of the Old Testament. But this relationship is not unidirectional. The Old Testament provides the background and conceptual categories for understanding the message of the New Testament. These two Testaments, in all their diversity, are forever united as the Word of God, and what God has joined together, let not man separate.

What then does the New Testament teach us about the Old Testament, in terms of both its message and its design or function?² The answers to these questions are certainly debated, but a helpful place to begin appears in Acts 28. At the end of this chapter, Luke summarizes the apostle Paul’s two-year teaching curriculum as follows: “From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to *the kingdom of God* and trying to convince them about *Jesus* both from *the Law of Moses* and from *the Prophets*” (Acts 28:23; see also 28:30–31). If we pay attention, we will come to understand that Luke, through Paul, has provided us with the answers to two fundamental questions. First, what is the Old Testament about? And second, what is the design or function of the Old Testament?

According to Acts 28, Paul spent two years in Rome using the Old Testament to teach about Jesus and the kingdom of God. To this end, we contend that the Old

¹It is difficult to arrive at an exact percentage given the nature of counting Hebrew words. However, in the Hebrew Old Testament, there are approximately 473,020 words (including all prefixes with their own entry in the lexicon and pronominal suffixes) that appear in 23,213 verses. In the Greek New Testament, there are approximately 138,158 words that appear in 7,941 verses. By word count, therefore, the Hebrew Old Testament constitutes 77.3 percent of the Christian Bible. The Greek New Testament registers 22.7 percent. The word count in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) is higher than the original Hebrew and yields an even greater percentage for the Old Testament.

²A full answer to this question is well beyond the scope of this brief introductory chapter. The data provided here is limited to the scope and shape of this volume.

Testament—and the whole Bible, for that matter—is ultimately about Jesus and the kingdom of God. Jesus constitutes the sum and substance of the biblical message. He is God’s gospel and the *theological center* for the whole of the Christian Bible. He is the source and the unifying force that makes sense of all the diversity found in the biblical record. With Jesus as the theological center of the biblical message, the kingdom of God functions as the *thematic framework* for that message. This is the theme within which all other themes exist and are united. It is the realm of the prophet, priest, and king; the place of wisdom and the scribe; the world of the apostles, elders, and deacons. Every biblical theme is a kingdom-of-God theme. If Jesus as the theological center gives meaning to the biblical message, then the kingdom of God as the thematic framework provides the context for that message.

In addition to the message of the Old Testament, we also catch a glimpse of its design in the abbreviated designation, “the Law of Moses and . . . the Prophets” (Acts 28:23). A longer description appears in Luke 24:44, where Jesus refers to the Old Testament as “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Here Jesus is referring to the arrangement of the Old Testament in its original, threefold division: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. These divisions constitute the covenantal structure of the Old Testament in the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings). This Old Testament covenantal design also serves as the pattern after which the New Testament was constructed. Seeing and understanding this comprehensive canonical design will provide us with important contextual clues for how to read, understand, and properly apply the Old Testament in the church today.

THE THEOLOGICAL CENTER: JESUS

Jesus is the theological center of the Old Testament. This means that the person and work of Jesus as presented in the New Testament (including his birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and return) constitute the singular reality that unifies and explains everything that appears in the Old Testament. It is perhaps clear to us that Jesus is the theological center of, or at least the central figure in, the New Testament. But both Jesus and the apostles also understood the theological center of the Old Testament to be the same as that of the New Testament.³ The Old Testament is the shadow, and Jesus is the reality (Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1). Consider how the apostle Paul chose to begin his letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh.
(Rom. 1:1–3)

³Contra Marshall, who is representative of a large portion of evangelicalism: “It follows that the OT can hardly be called ‘a book about Jesus’ as if he were the principal subject. Where there is a future hope, it is centered on God himself and in some places on a messianic figure who is not identified. Jesus is not explicitly present.” I. Howard Marshall, “Jesus Christ,” *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 594.

In 1:1, Paul identifies himself as an apostle and states that he has been “set apart” for the good news or the “gospel of God.” Then, in 1:2–3, Paul identifies the source and the content of this gospel. It is important to recognize that this gospel was not something new but something “promised beforehand.” Following this statement about the gospel promised beforehand are three prepositional phrases that may change the way in which you think about the Old Testament. This gospel came (1) *through* his prophets, (2) *in* the holy Scriptures, and was (3) *concerning* his Son. The three prepositional phrases in 1:2–3 identify (1) the vehicle of gospel revelation, (2) the location of gospel revelation, and (3) the content of gospel revelation.

Paul states that the gospel promised beforehand came through the prophets, who functioned as the authorial instruments of God’s Old Testament, covenantal revelation. Additionally, this revelation was deposited in, and constituted for Paul, the holy Scriptures. At this point it is important to remember that when someone like Paul mentions the Scriptures in the New Testament, he is referring back to the Old Testament. Thus, for Paul, the Old Testament is fundamentally the gospel promised beforehand. The last prepositional phrase in this series identifies the content of this Old Testament gospel revelation as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In other words, the Old Testament, which came through the prophets, is the gospel promised beforehand because it has as its subject Jesus Christ, not only as the eternal Son of God but also as the offspring of David “according to the flesh” (1:3).

Paul’s assertions concerning the nature and content of Old Testament revelation are supported by statements Jesus made that have been recorded in the Gospels. The first one appears in Luke 24:25–27 (see also 24:44–45). After rising from the dead, Jesus appeared on the road to Emmaus to instruct two very confused disciples:

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Consider that these two disciples were rebuked as “foolish” and “slow of heart” because they did not believe that the Old Testament testified to the person and work of Jesus. Three times in these few verses the word “all” is used to describe the comprehensive nature of this reality—*all* that the prophets have spoken, *all* the Prophets, and *all* the Scriptures. And then, once again, we encounter a prepositional phrase that identifies the content of this prophetic revelation in “all the Scriptures”: Jesus said that all the Scriptures contain “the things *concerning himself*.” In other words, Jesus tells us that he is the unifying principle, or theological center, of the Old Testament.

It is not difficult to understand what Jesus is saying here. However, for most of us, like the disciples to whom Jesus was speaking, it is difficult to believe and understand how this reality works throughout the whole of the Old Testament with all its various and diverse parts. Alec Motyer puts it this way:

The great Lord Jesus came from outside and voluntarily and deliberately attached himself to the Old Testament, affirmed it to be the word of God and set himself, at cost, to fulfill it (Mt. 26:51–54). This fact of facts cuts the ground from under any suspicion that the *doctrine* of biblical authority rests on a circular argument such as, “I believe the Bible to be authoritative because the Bible says it is authoritative.” Not so! It was Jesus who came “from outside” as the incarnate Son of God, Jesus who was raised from the dead as the Son of God with power, who chose to validate the Old Testament in retrospect and the New Testament in prospect, and who himself is the grand theme of the “story-line” of both Testaments, the focal-point giving coherence to the total “picture” in all its complexities. . . . He is the climax as well as the substance and centre of the whole. In him all God’s promises are yea and amen (2 Cor. 1:20).⁴

The encounter on the road to Emmaus was not the first time that Jesus had made such a bold and clear statement about the nature and content of the Old Testament. In a speech directed against those who opposed him before his death, Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). Once again, we are instructed by Jesus in the New Testament that those who “search” and study the Old Testament must understand that these Scriptures “bear witness” (μαρτυρέω) to Jesus. This is the very same thing that the author of the book of Hebrews states after a lengthy rehearsal of Old Testament history in Hebrews 11—including Abel, Abraham, Moses, the people of Israel, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. These people are called “a great cloud of witnesses” (μαρτύρων) in Hebrews 12:1. Notice that these men and women are *not* called a “great cloud of examples” but rather witnesses, who testify or bear witness to the person and work of Jesus and who call us not to imitate them but rather to fix our eyes *with them* on “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (12:2).

The testimony of Jesus and the New Testament is clear. Jesus is the theological center of the Old Testament. He is the unity that makes sense of all the diverse material encountered in the Old Testament Scriptures. We will discover that as “the first” and “the last” (Isa. 44:6) and as the Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), Jesus is the second Adam, the seed of the woman, the offspring of Abraham, the Ruler from Judah, faithful Israel, the Mediator of a better covenant, our eternal High Priest, the Judge who saves once and for all, the heir of David, the Prophet like Moses, the Wisdom of God, the incarnate Word of God. He was not joking when he declared of himself, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). We will never fully understand the Old Testament if we refuse to fix our eyes on Jesus when we read these Scriptures.

Goldsworthy is correct when he argues,

The hub of the church and of the life of the believer is Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord. He is not only the hermeneutical center of the whole Bible, but, according to the biblical testimony, he gives ultimate meaning to every fact in the

⁴ Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996), 21–22.

universe. He is thus the hermeneutical principle of all reality . . . providing the center that holds it all together.⁵

Goldsworthy moves beyond understanding Jesus as the theological center for just the Old Testament or for the Bible as a whole. He extends this principle to include all reality, including “every fact in the universe.” In order to begin to understand the Old Testament, or the Bible, or life in general, we must first assess our view of the person and work of Jesus as presented in Scripture. Perhaps our inability to comprehend the fullness and unity of the inspired Word of God stems from our anemic estimation of the incarnate Word of God (John 1:1–3, 14).

THE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK: THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The kingdom of God (also construed as the kingdom of heaven) constitutes the thematic framework for the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. This is the theme that comprehends and encompasses every other theme encountered in the Scriptures, from creation to new creation—including covenant, law, prophet, priest, king, redemption, wisdom, war, the nations, inheritance, divine presence, idolatry, clothing, judgment, salvation, faith, hope, love, and any of the many other themes that cut across the pages of the Bible.⁶ These are all kingdom-of-God themes. This framework extends to the outer limits of the canonical corpus. It unites, coheres, stabilizes, and shapes all other biblical themes and concepts.

The beginning of Jesus’s preaching ministry in the Gospel of Mark is described in this way: “Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God is at hand*; repent and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14–15). During the forty-day span between Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, Luke summarizes the final days of Jesus’s teaching ministry in the same way, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and *speaking about the kingdom of God*” (Acts 1:3). From beginning to end, the message of Jesus about himself is described as the kingdom of God (heaven).⁷ For three months, Paul taught in the synagogue at Ephesus, “reasoning and persuading them about *the kingdom of God*” (Acts 19:8). And later, for two whole years, Paul resided in Rome, “proclaiming *the kingdom of God* and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:31). Here we come to understand that Jesus and the apostles used the designation *kingdom of God* (or *heaven*) to summarize the content of their teaching and preaching ministries, and the book from which they taught was the Old Testament (cf. Acts 28:23).

John Bright captures the significance of this theme when he writes,

⁵ Graeme L. Goldsworthy, “Biblical Theology as the Heartbeat of Effective Ministry,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 284.

⁶ For a preliminary treatment of a variety of biblical themes, see *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 365–863.

⁷ This overarching theme for the Christian Bible is explicitly mentioned ninety-eight times in the New Testament. Of these ninety-eight occurrences, eighty-four (or 85 percent) occur in the Gospels.

For the concept of the Kingdom of God involves, in a real sense, the total message of the Bible. Not only does it loom large in the teaching of Jesus; it is to be found, in one form or another, through the length and breadth of the Bible—at least if we may view it through the eyes of the New Testament faith—from Abraham, who set out to seek “the city . . . whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10; cf. Gen. 12:1ff.), until the New Testament closes with “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:2). To grasp what is meant by the Kingdom of God is to come very close to the heart of the Bible’s gospel of salvation.⁸

In the same way, Walther Eichrodt, in his two-volume *Old Testament Theology* from the 1960s, recognized the significance of this theme for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments when he wrote, “that which binds together indivisibly the two realms of the Old and New Testaments . . . is the irruption of the Kingdom of God into this world and its establishment here.”⁹

When it comes to understanding Jesus as the theological center of the Bible, we begin to recognize that the Old Testament makes sense only in light of his birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, ascension, and return. And the theme of the kingdom of God gives the context for this theological center and comes to expression in the Old Testament through what is commonly called *redemptive history*.¹⁰ This is the organic, progressive movement of God’s covenantal activity across time, from the creation of the universe in Genesis 1–2 to the new creation in Revelation 21–22. God’s kingdom unfolds throughout the pages of Scripture from age to age and from epoch to epoch. It begins with creation and the fall (Genesis 1–3), declines in judgment with the flood and Babel (Genesis 4–11), picks up with the patriarchs (Genesis 12–50), builds to the nation of Israel in the wilderness (Exodus–Deuteronomy), and then climaxes in the occupation of the land under Joshua, the judges, and the Davidic dynasty in the land of promise (Joshua–Kings). But just as soon as God had given David rest from his enemies and established his dynasty and the temple in Jerusalem was completed, the infidelity of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 11) marked the beginning of Israel’s decline into a divided kingdom and then into exile. Aspects of the exile are captured by some of the writing prophets and in books like Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra–Nehemiah in the Writings. The Hebrew Old Testament concludes with unfulfilled expectations concerning the promised return from exile (Ezra 1:1–4; 2 Chron. 36:22–23; cf. Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:6–9), causing us to wait for the arrival of the true King of the kingdom of God in the New Testament (cf. Mark 1:14–15).

⁸ John Bright, *The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and Its Meaning for the Church* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 7.

⁹ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:26.

¹⁰ In addition to *redemptive history*, designations such as *salvation history*, *metanarrative*, or the German *Heilsgeschichte* are used to refer to the progressive, historical development and presentation of the biblical materials. However, it may be more accurate to employ the designation *covenantal history*, since this is the reality that motivates and shapes the presentation of history across the pages of Scripture, particularly in the categories of covenant prologue, covenant renewal, and covenant lawsuit (cf. the book of Genesis, esp. 15:7; Ex. 20:2; Deut. 1:9–3:29; Josh. 24:2–13; Judg. 6:7–10; 1 Sam. 12:6–12; Psalms 78; 105; 106; Neh. 9:5b–37; Acts 7; Hebrews 11).

THE COVENANTAL STRUCTURE: LAW, PROPHETS, AND WRITINGS

Having considered that the Old Testament is about Jesus and his kingdom, how then does the Bible work? One way to think about how to answer this important question relates to the shape or the final form of the Old Testament. Earlier we compared the Bible to a picture puzzle and indicated that the individual shapes and pieces of the puzzle find their ultimate meaning in their connection and contribution to the whole. An individual puzzle piece, by itself, has its own unique image and shape capable of description and analysis. But it is not until that individual piece is set into the context of the whole puzzle that we can understand its significance and contribution to the whole. The same can be said for the Old Testament. Each individual book in each individual section in each of the two Testaments maintains its own individual shape (structure) and image (meaning). But it is not until we understand the position of each book in the context of the whole Old Testament or Bible that we come to discover its full and final significance.¹¹

The book of Ruth serves as a good example of this reality.¹² In our English Bibles, the book of Ruth follows the book of Judges. Its placement there is based on the chronological note that appears at the beginning of the book: “*In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab*” (Ruth 1:1). According to the Babylonian Talmud,¹³ however, the book of Ruth is located at the beginning of the Writings, the third section of the Hebrew Bible, just before the book of Psalms. Its position in this ordering appears to be based upon the genealogy at the end of the book (4:18–22), where Boaz (Ruth’s husband) is listed as the great-grandfather of David, whom the Babylonian Talmud identifies as the author/collector of the Psalms. Yet in the final form of the Hebrew Bible, the one still in print today, the book of Ruth appears just after the book of Proverbs. Its position here is both theologically and pedagogically motivated. Proverbs 31 concludes with the famous oracle taught to King Lemuel by his mother, the oracle of the “excellent wife” (Prov. 31:10–31).¹⁴ The designation “excellent wife” appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible, twice in Proverbs (12:4; 31:10) and once in Ruth (3:11). Ruth is the only actual (rather than ideal) woman in Scripture ever to receive this special designation. And so, based upon its position after Proverbs, it appears that Ruth is intended to function as the illustration of the ideal woman presented in Proverbs 31.

¹¹ For more on this topic see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, TBS 7 (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 1–8, 717–39, and Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 15–43.

¹² For a superb treatment of this topic, see Stephen G. Dempster, “A Wandering Moabite: Ruth—A Book in Search of a Canonical Home,” in *The Shape of the Writings*, ed. Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone, with the assistance of Rachel Stone, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 16 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 87–118.

¹³ *Baba Bathra* 14b in the Babylonian Talmud represents the oldest known rabbinical order. It dates from between the third and sixth centuries AD. In this listing, the placement of books corresponds closely to the arrangement that appears in the current printed edition of the Hebrew Bible, with only two exceptions: Isaiah in the Latter Prophets and Ruth in the Writings. The position of the book of Ruth is described in *Baba Bathra* 14b, “The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Prophets, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the Scroll of Esther, Ezra and Chronicles. Now on the view that Job lived in the days of Moses, should not the book of Job come first?—We do not begin with a record of suffering. But Ruth also is a record of suffering?—It is a suffering with a sequel [of happiness], as R. Johanan said: Why was her name called Ruth?—Because there issued from her David who replenished the Holy One, blessed be He, with hymns and praises.”

¹⁴ The Hebrew expression אִשָּׁה חַיִּיל is translated in various ways, such as “excellent wife” (ESV, NASB), “wife of noble character” (NIV), and “virtuous woman” (KJV).

At this point we are not interested in defending one position against another. Rather, the point is to illustrate that the position of a book in the Bible can impact how we interpret it. Is the book of Ruth a chronological footnote to the book of Judges, a geneological introduction to David—the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1)—or the narrative illustration of the excellent wife? The position of the puzzle piece matters. It shapes how we interact with both its message and its function. For this reason, it is worth taking a moment to briefly describe the final form of the Hebrew Old Testament and to defend our preference for treating the books of the Old Testament in this order, as they have been listed in the table of contents.

The arrangement of the books in our English Old Testament differs slightly from the arrangement of the books in our Hebrew Old Testament. It is important to note, however, that the English Old Testament and the Hebrew Old Testament contain the same books. They are simply grouped and arranged in different ways.

In the English Bible, the books of the Old Testament are arranged by genre, chronology, and authorship. As table 1 (p. 32) illustrates, the English Old Testament contains four main sections in which the books are grouped (more or less) according to their basic genre: law, history, poetry, and prophecy. The books in each of these sections are further positioned based on issues of chronology and authorship. For example, the five books of the Pentateuch were written by Moses (authorship) and appear in chronological order. The so-called Historical Books also appear in roughly chronological order. In the Poetical Books, those associated with Solomon are grouped together (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs), and the placement of Lamentations after Jeremiah is motivated by the tradition that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, even though the author is technically anonymous.

The arrangement of the books in the English Old Testament has come down to us from the Latin translation of the Bible called the Vulgate (ca. 400 AD). This Latin translation was used in the church prior to the emergence of English Bible translations during the Reformation. The arrangement of the books in the Vulgate may have been adopted from an older Greek translation called the Septuagint, but this is difficult to determine with certainty.¹⁵

In contrast, the Hebrew Bible includes three major sections: Law, Prophets, and Writings. These divisions predate the time of Christ, and it appears that he was familiar with them in his own day when he referred to the Old Testament in Luke 24:44 as “the *Law of Moses* and the *Prophets* and the *Psalms*.”¹⁶ Another possible clue appears in Matthew 23:35 (cf. Luke 11:51), where Jesus refers to the blood of two martyrs, “from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah.” It

¹⁵For more on the structure and design of the Old Testament, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (1985; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 15–51; Andrew E. Steinmann, *The Oracles of God: The Old Testament Canon* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2000); Greg Goswell, “The Order of the Books in the Hebrew Bible,” *JETS* 51, no. 4 (2008): 673–88; and Goswell, “The Order of the Books in the Greek Old Testament,” *JETS* 52, no. 3 (2009): 449–66.

¹⁶The designation *Psalms* for the third section represents the Jewish practice of naming the whole of something after what appears first in it. For example, the book of Exodus in Hebrew is called “these are the names” because those are the first words in the book. Today, we call this third section the “Writings.” It is not uncommon in some circles to refer to the Hebrew Old Testament (or the English translations of it) as the “Tanak.” This designation comes from putting together the first letters of each of the Hebrew names for these three sections: *torah*, *nevi'im*, and *kethuvim*.

English Bible Order	Hebrew Bible Order	
Pentateuch	Law	
Genesis	Genesis	
Exodus	Exodus	
Leviticus	Leviticus	
Numbers	Numbers	
Deuteronomy	Deuteronomy	
Historical Books	Prophets	
Joshua	Joshua	<i>Former Prophets</i>
Judges	Judges	
Ruth	Samuel	
1–2 Samuel	Kings	
1–2 Kings		
1–2 Chronicles	Isaiah	<i>Latter Prophets</i>
Ezra	Jeremiah	
Nehemiah	Ezekiel	
Esther	Book of the Twelve	
Poetry	Writings	
Job	Psalms	<i>Life in the Land</i>
Psalms	Job	
Proverbs	Proverbs	
Ecclesiastes	Ruth	
Song of Songs	Song of Songs	
	Ecclesiastes	
Prophets		
Isaiah	Lamentations	<i>Life in Exile</i>
Jeremiah	Esther	
Lamentations	Daniel	
Ezekiel	Ezra	
Daniel	Nehemiah	
The Twelve Minor Prophets	Chronicles	

Table 1

has been recognized that this is not a strictly chronological reference but rather a canonical reference. Abel is the martyr who appears in the first book of the Old Testament (Genesis 4), and Zechariah is the martyr who appears in the last book (2 Chronicles 24). Together, these two references by Jesus suggest that the Old Testament in his time contained three (not four) divisions, beginning with Genesis and ending with Chronicles (not Malachi). As indicated earlier, the way in which books are arranged can impact their interpretation. And so we must consider the implications for the arrangement of the Old Testament in the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings and how that arrangement relates to the New Testament. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate that relationship by suggesting a covenantal arrangement for the Christian Bible.

	Law	Prophets	Writings	
Covenant Prologue	Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Samuel Kings	Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve	Psalms Job Proverbs Ruth Song of Songs Ecclesiastes
Genesis				
	Matthew Mark Luke John	The Acts of the Apostles	Paul's Epistles Hebrews James	Lamentations Esther Daniel Ezra Nehemiah Chronicles 1, 2 Peter 1, 2, 3 John Jude
	Covenant	Covenant History	Covenant Life	Covenant Epilogue
				Revelation

Figure 1

Figure 1 endeavors to display the canonical construction of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, in the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings. The Old Testament is shaded in gray, signifying shadows of the realities (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1), and the bulk of it appears in the upper register of blocks. The New Testament appears in white, with the bulk of it showing up in the lower register of blocks. Genesis and Revelation serve as bookends to the whole. The labels appearing with the descriptor *covenant* serve to explain the nature of each of the major divisions. The books of the Law are the *covenant* books. The Prophets contain what will later be described as *covenant history*, and the Writings cover issues related to *covenant life*. In other words, the categories of Law, Prophets, and Writings are covenantal in nature.¹⁷ The Bible, as a covenantal document, is also covenantal in its construction and design.¹⁸ The image of the picture puzzle that

¹⁷According to Rendtorff, “One might venture to say: in the first part of the canon *God acts*, in the second *God speaks*, and in the third part of the canon *people speak* to God and of God.” *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 6. Dempster proposes that the arrangement of the Hebrew Bible grants readers a “comprehensive narrative framework” with poetic commentary. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 22. The works of Rendtorff and Dempster are outstanding in their attempts to characterize the significance of the final form of the Hebrew Bible and its significance for interpretation (macrocanonical hermeneutics). However, the categories of acting and speaking (Rendtorff) and narrative and commentary (Dempster) are both comprehended by the covenantal arrangement proposed here.

¹⁸Horton rightly argues that the “particular architectural structure that we believe the Scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant. It is not simply the concept of the covenant, but the concrete existence of God’s covenantal dealings in our

makes sense of the individual puzzle pieces, both in terms of placement and function, is *covenant*. The significance of the covenantal design for the Old Testament is reflected in the fact that the New Testament appears to have been arranged in the same way, as a mirror reflecting the Old Testament. And so the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings) apply equally to the Old and New Testaments in each of their respective sections, as indicated in figure 1. It will be helpful to briefly consider how each of these sections work in both Testaments.

Covenant Prologue and Epilogue

The books of Genesis and Revelation are set apart in the Christian Bible as covenant prologue and covenant epilogue, the introduction and the conclusion to the whole. Though written at different times by different human authors from different cultures and in different languages, these two books were designed to fit together and shape the message of the Christian Bible. Every promise and covenant established in the book of Genesis (creation, redemption, Noah, Abraham) finds its fulfillment and consummation in the book of Revelation.

The close literary and theological relationship that these two books share (*protology* and *eschatology*) is demonstrated by the way in which Genesis begins and Revelation ends. This relationship is expressed through the literary device of chiasm, which also serves secondarily as a literary *inclusio* for the whole of the Bible. This chiasm is displayed in the following outline:

- a Creation of heaven and earth (Genesis 1–2)
- b Marriage covenant: Adam and Eve—the bride comes to a garden-sanctuary from which rivers of water flow for the nations (Genesis 2)
- c Satan’s destruction promised (Genesis 3)
- c’ Satan’s destruction accomplished (Revelation 20)
- b’ Marriage covenant: Lamb and bride—the bride comes to a city-sanctuary from which rivers of water flow for the nations (Revelation 21)
- a’ Creation of new heaven and earth (Revelation 21–22)

By beginning and ending in the same way (but in reverse!), the Bible exhibits a remarkable level of unity in both design and purpose. This reality illustrates the role of a single divine author working in conjunction with numerous human instruments who participated in the writing process. This chiasm also appears to function as a canonical *inclusio*,¹⁹ providing internal evidence for a closed canon.

history that provides the context within which we recognize the unity of Scripture amid its remarkable diversity.” Horton also contends that this “framework is largely hidden from view” but perhaps we are now beginning to recognize this grand covenantal framework. Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 13. Kline has argued that “biblical canonicity shows itself from its inception to be of the lineage of covenantal canonicity” and that “because Scripture is covenant, biblical canonicity, from beginning to end, belongs at the formal literary level to the more broadly attested category of authoritative treaty words. All Scripture is covenantal, and the canonicity of all Scripture is covenantal. Biblical canon is covenantal canon.” Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1989), 37, 75.

¹⁹*Inclusio* is a literary device used to mark the beginning and end of something by way of repetition. Examples appear in many of the so-called *hallelujah psalms* (e.g., Psalms 106; 113; 117:1–2; 135; 146–150).

Law: Covenant

There are four covenant books in the Old Testament (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)²⁰ and four covenant books in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). In each Testament, the covenant books are framed by the birth and the death of the covenant mediator and contain the accounts of their lives and teachings in the context of covenant administration. In the Old Testament, the framing is comprehensive, beginning with the birth of Moses in Exodus 2 and concluding with his death in Deuteronomy 34. In the New Testament, the framing appears within each individual book (distributive). For example, in Matthew the birth of Jesus is recorded in chapter 1 and his death in chapter 27. This pattern is variously repeated in the other Gospels.

In addition to the larger, structural relationships that exist between the covenant books of the Old and New Testaments, numerous internal elements also connect these books. For example, both Moses and Jesus share a birth narrative where they are born under the threat of death by a foreign ruler and must flee into Egypt to escape (cf. Exodus 1; Matthew 2). Additionally, both men deliver the law from a mountain, experience transfigurations, perform miracles, and suffer under the constant rebellion of their people as covenant mediators. In many ways, the gospel narratives of the New Testament work to portray Jesus as a second Moses figure.²¹

In addition to these major features of correspondence, there are also important aspects of discontinuity. For example, in Exodus 32:30–34, Moses offers up to the Lord his life on behalf of the people of Israel because their sin had provoked the threat of death. However, this act of substitution is denied to Moses. But when it comes to Jesus under the new covenant, his request to circumvent this path to salvation is denied (cf. Matt. 26:39), and he becomes the ultimate substitute for the people of God, bearing the curse of their sin by his own death. Another example includes the way in which these covenant narratives end. In the old covenant, the narrative ends with the death of the covenant mediator, Moses. With Jesus in the new covenant, however, the death of the covenant mediator is not the final word. Each of the new covenant narratives climaxes in Jesus's victory over death by way of resurrection. It is important to understand that these instances of discontinuity do not sever the relationship between the covenant books in the Old and New Testaments. Rather, they were designed to highlight the person and work of Jesus by way of contrast as the Mediator of a better covenant (cf. Heb. 3:3; 7:22).

²⁰Though a part of the Pentateuch with Exodus–Deuteronomy, the book of Genesis has been set apart from the other books in this canonical section (the Law). At the literary level, this division is achieved by means of poetic intrusion and type-scene. The book of Genesis ends with the poetic blessing of the twelve patriarchs by Jacob in Genesis 49 (poetic intrusion) and then the death of the blesser in Genesis 50 (type-scene). This literary combination is repeated at the end of Deuteronomy with the poetic blessing of the twelve tribes (patriarchs) by Moses in Deuteronomy 33 followed by the account of his death in Deuteronomy 34. In this way, the Law or Pentateuch is shown to have two parts: (1) Genesis and (2) Exodus–Deuteronomy. Thus, the identification of Genesis as a distinct covenant prologue is grounded in the literary construction of the Law.

²¹See Kline, “The Old Testament Origins of the Gospel Genre,” in *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 172–203, and Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 137–290.

Prophets: Covenant History

The books of the Prophets contain the history of God's people living under his covenant administrations and the prophetic interpretation of that history. In the Old Testament, the Prophets appear in two sections, the Former and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets consist of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books record the history of God's old covenant people and their tenure in the Land of Promise, from occupation in Joshua to exile in Kings. The material presented in this history is characterized by descriptions of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises and Israel's infidelity to that covenant. This aspect of God's faithfulness to the covenant functions as the literary frame for the Former Prophets and, as such, is programmatic for the interpretation of this material, as the following two texts from the first and last books of the Former Prophets demonstrate:

Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Josh. 21:45)

Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant. (1 Kings 8:56)

The corresponding themes of God's faithfulness and Israel's infidelity already appear in Deuteronomy 29–31, which serves as the blueprint for the material presented in the Former Prophets. Here the pattern of occupation (Deut. 30:15–16; 31:13, 20), infidelity (29:25–26; 31:16, 20–21, 27–29), exile (29:27–28; 30:17–18; 31:17–18), and return (30:1–10) is established as the prophetic preword that shapes the characterization of Israel in the Former Prophets.

The so-called Latter Prophets consist of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (i.e., what English Bibles often call the Minor Prophets).²² At one level, this material constitutes the authorized, inspired, prophetic interpretation of Israel's history under the covenant. "Thus," as Rendtorff observes, "the prophetic word becomes a commentary on the history of Israel in the time of the kings."²³ Once again, this material shines a spotlight on God's faithfulness to his covenant, on Israel's infidelity that resulted in their expulsion from the land, and on the hope of a return from exile and the restoration of covenant blessing.

The latter prophets were called to serve as God's covenant officials, as covenant lawyers prosecuting the Lord's covenant lawsuit against his unfaithful people, Israel. In other words, the latter prophets function as the Lord's prosecuting attorneys. The Law (Exodus–Deuteronomy) contains the covenant regulations that stipulate and govern the life of the people of God. It represents the standard by which they were to live. The Former Prophets (Joshua–Kings) provide the historical evidence that documents the Lord's faithfulness to the covenant along with Israel's pervasive

²²The Book of the Twelve is counted as a single book in the Hebrew Bible, much like Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles are each counted as a single book.

²³Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 7.

infidelity. These realities not only shape the content presented in those sections but aid in our understanding of how to use it in teaching and preaching.

Just as Deuteronomy 29–31 serves as the programmatic blueprint for the material that appears in the Former Prophets, so Deuteronomy 32 serves the same function for the Latter Prophets. Deuteronomy 32, the song of Yahweh, appears in the form of a covenant lawsuit²⁴ and represents the preliminary, prophetic witness against the people of God for their infidelity. It also establishes the literary and theological content of the Latter Prophets. In other words, Deuteronomy 32 represents the interpretive lens through which to understand and interpret Isaiah through Malachi. It is no accident that the song of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 32 and the entire corpus of prophetic literature both begin (cf. Isa. 1:2) with the call of heaven and earth to bear witness against Israel in the execution of Yahweh’s lawsuit against his people. This song of witness includes a testimony of Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness (Deut. 32:3–4, 7–14), Israel’s infidelity (32:5, 15–18), judgment or the enactment of covenant curses (32:19–25), and then a surprising reversal where the lawsuit is “broken” and God’s people are restored (32:36–43). This restoration takes place through an act of atonement by which the Lord “takes vengeance on his enemies” and “makes atonement for his land and people” (32:43, my trans.). It is this same pattern of judgment and restoration that the Latter Prophets exemplify in their anticipation of new covenant realities.

The New Testament includes a single book addressing *covenant history*, the book of Acts. This book also contains the account of the initial history of God’s people under the new covenant, along with the prophetic-apostolic interpretation of that history.²⁵ If in the Former Prophets the goal of God’s people was to occupy the land and establish God’s name in Jerusalem (cf. Deut. 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2), then that goal is reversed in the book of Acts, where God’s people are directed to move out from Jerusalem, to Judea, and then to the ends of the world in order to bear witness to God’s name among all the nations.

Though not its own discrete unit like the Latter Prophets, the book of Acts contains within itself several programmatic speeches that function as the prophetic-apostolic interpretation of the history that is recorded in this book. Major examples include the speech of Peter in Acts 2, the speech of Stephen in Acts 7, and the speech of Paul in Acts 13. It is also worth mentioning that Stephen’s speech functions as the final covenant lawsuit in the Bible. It was here that the Jewish religious leadership (the

²⁴The form of the covenant lawsuit is derived from the covenant form itself: identification of the judge, testimony of innocence, indictments, witnesses, judgment, and call to repentance. For more on this topic, see Herbert B. Huffmon, “The Covenant Lawsuit in the Prophets,” *JBL* 78, no. 4 (1959): 285–95; James Limburg, “The Root ריב and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches,” *JBL* 88, no. 3 (1969): 291–304; G. E. Mendenhall, “Samuel’s ‘Broken Rib’: Deuteronomy 32.1–43,” in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, ed. James W. Flanagan and Anita Weisbrod Robinson (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 63–73; Kirsten Nielsen, *Yahweh as Prosecutor and Judge: An Investigation of the Prophetic Lawsuit (Rib-Pattern)*, trans. by F. Cryer, *JSOTSup* 9 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); G. Ernest Wright, “The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenberg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 26–46.

²⁵In addition to the more general contours of covenantal function and content, additional elements may serve to connect this corpus of biblical literature. One such example may be the correspondence between the narrative account of Achan and his family in Joshua 7 and that of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. In both instances, the covenant ethic of the kingdom is displayed in the deaths of the covenant violators.

Sanhedrin) received the same declaration of judgment that fell upon the wilderness generation after worshipping the golden calf: “stiff-necked” (cf. Ex. 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; Acts 7:51). These were the people who failed to enter into God’s rest and possess his promises because of their unbelief, and so they perished in the wilderness. Stephen pronounces the same judgment upon the Sanhedrin. Then, by way of martyrdom, Stephen is identified with the prophets whom their fathers persecuted in the very same way (Acts 7:51–53, 59–60). Though slightly different in design, the Former and Latter Prophets occupy the same category of *covenant history* and share the same function as the book of Acts, the *covenant history* book of the New Testament.

Writings: Covenant Life

The books in this third and final category of the covenantal Canon are those labeled as *covenant life*. These books teach us how to think and live by faith in light of the covenant to which we belong. These are the more “practical” books in the Bible, and they include some of the more popular books used for preaching and teaching in the church today.

There are twelve books in this final section of the Hebrew Old Testament, Psalms through Chronicles. These books appear to have been arranged in two subsections: those that pertain to life in the land (Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes) and those that pertain to life in exile (Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Chronicles). The sequence within which many of these books appear may be motivated by the pedagogical principle of exposition and illustration. For example, the most common type of psalm in the book of Psalms is the lament, and so Job follows as the illustration of what it looks like to experience suffering in life and to express that suffering through lamentation. Or consider the fact that the wisdom narrative of Ruth follows Proverbs 31, the exposition of the “excellent wife.” The only historical woman in the Bible to receive this explicit designation is Ruth, the illustration of the “excellent wife.” It may also be significant that the Song of Songs appears in conjunction with Proverbs 31 and the book of Ruth. In fact, it will be argued later that the Song of Songs functions as the counterpart to Proverbs 31 in terms of its basic function for training in wisdom. This subsection in the Writings concludes with Ecclesiastes, perhaps explaining the “vanity” or folly of a life without wisdom, a life lived “under the sun,” meaning “without God.”

The second subsection in the Writings (*covenant life*) begins with the book of Lamentations, which calls for God’s people in exile to a life of faithfulness by waiting and hoping for the salvation of the Lord (cf. Lam. 3:25–31). Lamentations is then followed by the books of Esther and Daniel, containing the accounts of two people who lived faithfully in exile under the most difficult and challenging of circumstances. Esther and Daniel serve as examples for God’s people, illustrating what it looks like to live a life of faith in exile, as aliens and strangers on the earth (cf. Heb. 11:13; 1 Pet. 2:11).

This section in the Old Testament concludes with Ezra–Nehemiah and Chronicles.

These books have been arranged in such a way as to characterize Israel's return from exile as falling short of the anticipated prophetic restoration (e.g., Ezra 3:12; Hag. 2:6–9). From the decree of Cyrus in Ezra 1:1–4 to the decree of Cyrus in 2 Chronicles 36:22–23, the promised return from exile did not exhibit the full restoration of the temple or the Davidic dynasty. And so the genealogies of Chronicles begin the search for the Davidic king from the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 2–4) and the Aaronic priest from the tribe of Levi (1 Chronicles 6). This book also highlights the work of planning and building the First Temple (1 Chronicles 22–2 Chronicles 7) and the celebration of the Passover that would anticipate a new exodus (2 Chronicles 30, 35), led by someone who would go up before God's people in a new conquest (2 Chron. 36:23).

It is not until we encounter the genealogies of the New Testament, in Matthew and Luke, that the genealogies of Chronicles find their expected fulfillment in the person of Jesus. He is the Davidic King from the tribe of Judah (e.g., Matt. 1:1; 12:23; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8), the eternal High Priest (e.g., Heb. 5:1–10), the Passover Lamb (John 1:29, 36), the new exodus (Luke 9:31), and the One who will lead God's people in the final battle of conquest (Revelation 19). In many ways, the book of Chronicles functions like the book of Revelation, bringing the whole of God's Old Testament Word into sharp focus by highlighting important people, institutions, and themes. It serves as the ideal canonical hinge connecting the Old and New Testaments. Like the book of Genesis, it begins with Adam and includes important genealogies. But it is the only other book in the Christian Bible besides Matthew to begin with a genealogy. There is little doubt that the book of Chronicles serves as the perfect conclusion to the Old Testament Scriptures (cf. Luke 11:51), anticipating that which would soon transpire in the opening Gospel accounts of the New Testament and beyond.

In the New Testament, the Epistles (Romans–Jude) serve the same basic covenantal function as the Old Testament Writings. They were designed to train God's people for life in the new covenant, both in terms of how we think (theology) and how we live (ethics). Paul's epistles serve as a good example. They are commonly divided into two main parts, the indicative and the imperative. In the first part (indicative), Paul describes the theological implications of the new covenant in light of the person and work of Christ (e.g., Romans 1–11). In the second part (imperative), Paul describes the practical or ethical implications of life in the new covenant. This method of presentation is not unfamiliar to Old Testament Wisdom Literature, a school of thought in which Paul was trained as a Pharisee. In the book of Proverbs, for example, the first section (Proverbs 1–9) presents readers with a theology of wisdom in opposition to folly. In the second section (Proverbs 10–31), readers encounter the practical or ethical implications of the life of wisdom. Based on the observations presented here, it seems reasonable to conclude that the correspondence between the *covenant life* books in the Old and New Testaments are intentional and provide readers with a macrocanonical hermeneutical lens through which to understand and apply this material appropriately in the life of the church.

CONCLUSION

We have come to understand that the Bible has (1) a theological center, (2) a thematic framework, and (3) a covenantal structure. This threefold perspective for biblical theology provides unity and comprehends diversity. When asked about the Bible's content, we can answer with confidence that it is about *Jesus and the kingdom of God*. When asked about the nature of the Bible, or how it works, our answer is simple: it works covenantally in the categories of *covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings), for both the Old and New Testaments.²⁶

In this introductory chapter, we have labored to describe the larger biblical context that will help to make sense of each individual Old Testament book studied in the subsequent chapters, intentionally following the ordering of the books presented in the Hebrew Old Testament. This is the older tradition, and it is the tradition validated by Jesus and the authors of the New Testament. We have also seen that the New Testament books have been grouped and arranged after the pattern of the Hebrew arrangement for Old Testament books, *not* the English Bible arrangement! Thus, the construction of the Christian Bible in its macrocanonical structure exhibits an “intelligent design” that points to its ultimate, divine author and shapes the ultimate meaning or message of the one book.

This macrocanonical context helps us to understand the big picture, how the Old and New Testaments fit together and how the parts of each Testament relate to each other. It also shapes how we might interpret and apply each of the different books in each of the different sections in each of the different Testaments.²⁷

We have also observed how Genesis and Chronicles fit together as the beginning and end of the Hebrew Old Testament. Both books begin with the figure of Adam and contain important genealogical lists that work to trace and identify the conquering, messianic seed of the woman that would fulfill all the covenantal promises of God and promote the consummation of the kingdom of God. But Chronicles also fits together with Matthew, the first book of the New Testament. These are the only two books in the Christian Bible that begin with genealogies, and the sought-after king and priest of Chronicles is found only in the arrival of the genealogical presentation of Jesus in the New Testament.

It may also be worth noting that the three sections of the Hebrew Old Testament—*covenant* (Law), *covenant history* (Prophets), and *covenant life* (Writings)—are glued together at the seams.²⁸ For example, the Old Testament Prophets and Writings begin with statements that express their dependence upon the Law by uniquely highlighting the protological importance of meditation on the “law of the LORD”

²⁶ So Rendtorff argues, “Thus the variety of voices within the Hebrew Bible gains its quite specific structure through the arrangement of the canon.” *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 8.

²⁷ Dempster similarly explains that “canonization provides a literary context for all the texts, creating one Text from many. The fact that the Hebrew canon is structured in terms of a narrative sequence with commentary means that canonization does not ‘flatten’ the text into a one-dimensional uniformity; rather, it provides for evolution, diversity and growth within an overarching framework in which the various parts can be related to the literary whole.” *Dominion and Dynasty*, 42–43.

²⁸ Dempster has noted, “Moreover, the final compilers of the biblical text ensured that the text was to be understood as a unity. There are not only major groupings of books, but editorial ‘splices’ that join the major groupings of the books with each other. Therefore, both theological and literary points are made simultaneously.” *Dominion and Dynasty*, 32.

“day and night” (cf. Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2). Additionally, the Law and the Prophets also conclude with the expectation of a prophet like unto but greater than Moses and Elijah (cf. Deut 34:10–12; Mal. 4:4–6; Matt. 17:3–4; Mark 9:4–5; Luke 9:30–33). This covenantal-canonical glue provides evidence that this arrangement is not accidental but intentional, instructional, and hermeneutical. The Prophets and the Writings are grounded in the Law, or covenant documents, but this material is also eschatological in nature, striving to identify the ultimate Prophet who will usher in the day of the Lord.

Finally, it is important to understand that this arrangement is ultimately christological. Jesus is the seed of the woman who has come to crush the seed of the serpent, and he is the offspring of Abraham who fulfills every covenantal promise (Genesis; *covenant prologue*). Jesus is also the better covenant Mediator, the true and better Temple, and the true and better sacrifice. Jesus came to keep and fulfill the law of God (Exodus–Deuteronomy; *covenant*). Jesus Christ is the true and better Israel who was totally and completely obedient to the law of Moses, earning the righteousness that we could not earn for ourselves. He is the seed of David, according to the flesh, the King of the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ is also the true and better Prophet. Not only did he execute the ultimate prophetic lawsuit, but he bore its punishment for those who would receive his earned righteousness. He was not bound by the Old Testament prophetic messenger formula, “Thus says the Lord,” but rather, spoke as Yahweh himself, “truly, truly I say to you” (Joshua–Malachi; *covenant history*). Jesus Christ is the true and better Wisdom, the ultimate praise of God, the very Wisdom of God (Psalms–Chronicles; *covenant life*). He is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). If you would understand the Old Testament, you must come to embrace Jesus, his kingdom, and the covenantal nature of his Word and work.

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