

AN 'EXTRAORDINARY FACT':<sup>1</sup>  
*TORAH AND TEMPLE* AND THE CONTOURS OF  
THE HEBREW CANON: PART 2

Stephen Dempster

**Summary**

*Part 1 reviewed recent studies that suggest the presence of significant editorial activity in the final form of the Hebrew Bible. It also presented evidence for such editorial activity in the first major division of the Hebrew Bible, the Torah. Part 2 now considers the second and third divisions of the canon, the Prophets and the Writings. Again, the themes of Torah and Temple, so prominent in the Torah, also provide a hermeneutical framework for these divisions. This editorial activity is also considered as internal evidence which can help determine the order of some of the books, particularly in the Writings.*

**VI. The Prophets.**

**1. Introduction**

The ending of Deuteronomy provides a key transition to the next section of the Canon, the Prophets, which continues these themes. Joshua 1:1-9 functions as an introduction to the book of Joshua but also to this section of the canon. The two-fold reference to the death of Moses (1:1, 2) not only continues Deuteronomy but also signifies the end of an era. The expression 'Moses, my servant' (מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי) occurs twice in this text (1:2, 7). The only other time this expression is used in the entire TaNaK is at the end of this section of the canon (Mal. 4:4 [3:22]).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Part 1 of this article appeared in *Tyndale Bulletin* 48.1 (1997).

<sup>2</sup>And thus a clear sign of the redactional nature of this material.

Joshua is now the focus of attention as the ‘minister of Moses’ (1:1). He, as the successor of the great prophet, is to lead Israel into the land the prophet could only survey from a distance. An old era has passed and a new one has come—that of the occupation of the land of promise. At the same time the introduction builds to a climax by pointing out that the success of the enterprise can only be guaranteed if the book of Moses’ Torah informs the heart and soul of Joshua’s character. Joshua, the new leader, who is to guide Israel into the new Garden of Eden, will only be successful if he preoccupies his mind with Torah. It is this word which will give him success (תשכיל, cf. Gn. 3:6):

Only be courageous and very strong, being careful to act in accordance with all the Torah that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful (תשכיל) wherever you go. This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful (תשכיל). (Jos. 1:7-8)

As far as the immediate context is concerned, Joshua is to preoccupy his mind with the book of the Torah in order to lead a successful conquest and to be assured of the divine presence. But from the larger perspective of canon, a deliberate editorial strategy is clearly discerned, which links up a new section of the canon with the old, while maintaining the priority of the old.<sup>3</sup> Now there is a ‘plumb-line’ which will measure Israelite leadership in the succeeding books. Obedience to Torah defines success or failure. Entrance into and

---

<sup>3</sup>Verses 7-8 along with ch. 23 are usually regarded as part of a redactional framework a Deuteronomistic historian has given to the early source material in Joshua. See M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien. Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im alten Testament* (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1957, 2nd ed.) 40-41. In light of the above arguments, the hypothetical existence of a Deuteronomistic history would certainly have to antedate Jos. 1:1-9 (see also below). Such a passage seems too strategically placed to be anything other than a canonical redaction marking the boundary between the Torah and the Prophets.

permanent settlement of Canaan/Eden depends on Torah-keeping. As cherubim with flaming swords bar the door to Eden because of disobedience (Gn. 3:24), a similar angelic figure with drawn sword will now lead Israel into Canaan because of meditation on the Torah (Jos. 5:13-15).

## 2. Content

The continuity of this section of the canon is clear. Every effort is made to pattern Joshua after Moses: he has received the Spirit of wisdom from Moses (Dt. 34:9), he has Mosaic authority (Jos. 1:16-18), he leads the people through a river on dry ground (Jos. 3-4), and he is told to remove his sandals before the revelation of an angel of God (Jos. 5:15). Moreover the Torah itself is absolutely essential for Israel's continued existence in the land. The Canaanites are to be 'banned' (חָרַם) from the land because of their sin. After initial forays in the land in which Israel learns the lessons of obedience and disobedience at Jericho and Ai, the nascent nation gathers at Shechem where the importance of Torah-keeping is stressed once again. Joshua is cast as the ideal leader, writing a copy of the Mosaic Torah on the stones so that the people, not just the leader, will be constantly reminded of the importance of Torah-keeping:<sup>4</sup>

And there, in the presence of the Israelites, he wrote on the stones a copy of the Torah of Moses which he had written... And afterwards he read all the words of the Torah, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the Torah. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded that Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel... (Jos. 8:32-35)

The divine word not only can create the world (Gn. 1); it can create a people, make them a nation and give them land (Jos. 1). Obedience to the divine word means the blessing of life in the land with the divine presence (Gn. 2, Jos. 1) or life outside the land with the divine absence

---

<sup>4</sup>See Dt. 17:18ff where the future Israelite king must write a copy of the Torah for his own personal welfare as leader of the nation.

(Gn. 3, Dt. 34).<sup>5</sup> None of the kings of Canaan can stand before obedient Israelites (Jos. 1:4, 12:9-24).

This second section of the canon is often treated as two separate units, the Former Prophets consisting of the history of Israel from the conquest to the exile (Joshua-2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets comprising the oracles of the prophets from Jeremiah to Malachi. Yet it is remarkable that this literature which is highly diverse from the point of view of genre (narrative prose versus mainly prophetic poetry) should be grouped together. The fact that there is a perfect symmetry of four books of historical narrative balancing four books of prophetic oracles shows the mind of a skilful canonical redaction, which suggests that these matching sets were intended to be read together.<sup>6</sup> And as Clements has observed, the historical books maintain a noteworthy silence about the lives and speeches of the latter prophets. Given the symmetry of this collection the omission is probably deliberate. The editors of this material used the Former Prophets to sketch a historical context for most of the Latter Prophets. By providing headings for the Latter Prophets, the editors helped to contextualise the prophets' messages in this historical framework.<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that there is editorial design in this material as has been ably shown by Collins.<sup>8</sup> The Moses-Joshua transition before the Former Prophets begin is paralleled by the Elijah-Elisha transition before the Latter Prophets commence. Both of the successors walk through a parted Jordan River, Joshua because he wears the mantle of

---

<sup>5</sup>Thus the Israelite failure to take Ai means a failure to possess the land. Joshua sees its true significance (Jos. 7:7-12).

<sup>6</sup>See especially D.N. Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) 41ff for a fuller exposition of this point. I think he weakens his argument (which I accept) by understanding the Former Prophets as originally part of a Primary History.

<sup>7</sup>J.W. Miller, *The Origins of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York: Paulist, 1994) 115: 'With these headings and editorial embellishments the editors of these books clearly indicated their intention that they be read and studied in close conjunction with the account of Israelite history in the prior volume.'

<sup>8</sup>T. Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetical Books* (The Biblical Seminar, 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 137.

Moses and obeys the Torah, Elisha because he wears the mantle of Elijah—prophecy.<sup>9</sup> 'The later prophets of the biblical books [Jeremiah—Malachi] will be presented as successors to the Former Prophets, just as Elisha succeeded Elisha and like Elijah they will all be modelled on Moses.'<sup>10</sup> The first major 'conquest' for both Joshua and Elisha is at Jericho, Joshua to destroy and Elisha to heal.<sup>11</sup>

The beginning of the Latter Prophets continues this thematic unity by stressing once more the fundamental importance of the word of God. At the beginning of the Former Prophets, Joshua endowed with Moses's spirit was exhorted not to fear the Canaanites nor to let the Torah depart from his mouth. At the beginning of the Latter Prophets, Jeremiah is pictured in Mosaic terms and told not to fear but to speak the divine word that God has put in his mouth. From a redactional point of view this word that comes to Joshua at the beginning of the Former Prophets clearly casts him *and the subsequent Latter Prophets* as the successors to Moses in fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18. A comparison of the following verses demonstrates this:<sup>12</sup>

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their own people; I will put my words in his mouth (ונתתי דברי), and he will speak to them everything that I command him (Dt. 18:18)

...and you shall speak everything that I command you. ...now I have put my words in your mouth (נתתי דברי בפִּיךָ) (Je. 1:7, 9)

---

<sup>9</sup>1 Ki. 2.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Jos. 6; 2 Ki. 2:19-22.

<sup>12</sup>This would thus be evidence for an original order for the Latter Prophets: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Twelve. Sirach (48:22-49:12) seems to preserve early evidence for the following order: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Twelve. However, he seems to be following a chronological order rather than a canonical one as is evident in the entire context of chs. 44-50, which is a catalogue of Israel's heroes from the distant past from Enoch (44:16) to Simon (50:1-21).

But there is not just a formal symmetry in this canonical division and intentional editorial design; there is also a unity of theme. For too long this has not been appreciated and this explains why there are so many varying interpretations of the theme of the putative Deuteronomistic History.<sup>13</sup> It is certainly true that the entire Former Prophets seems like a long essay on the doctrine of the two ways—the way of life stemming from obedience and the way of death resulting from disobedience. This essay culminates in the expulsion of Israel from the land because of disobedience, the ultimate curse. But the Latter Prophets also reinforce this theme as they are described as constantly calling Israel back to the Torah in which her identity as the people of God is to be found. Their theme word is **שוב** —repentance.

Yet the themes of the Former and Latter prophets not only coincide with the stress on Torah; they equally stress Temple, going beyond the disobedience of the Torah and the curse that such sin entails. The one bright light is the Davidic covenant in the Former Prophets, the prophetic oracle to David, regarding the building of the Davidic house, which guarantees a future for Israel despite disobedience (2 Sa. 7). This hope, occurring at the mid-point of the Former Prophets, is maintained throughout 1-2 Kings, even at the end when the imprisoned Davidide, Jehoiachin, is shown compassion by a foreign ruler.<sup>14</sup> God is not finished with Israel.<sup>15</sup> He has every right to

---

<sup>13</sup>For various interpretations of the theme of this material see the survey by J.G. McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomistic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 78ff. Standard interpretations have been written by the following authors: M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*; G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1962) I:334-347; H.W. Wolff, 'Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks,' *ZAW* 73 (1961) 171-86; F.M. Cross, 'Themes of the Book of Kings,' in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Themes in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1973) 274-89.

<sup>14</sup>1 Ki. 11:12-13, 34-36; 15:4-5; 2 Ki. 25:27-30.

<sup>15</sup>Some scholars think that the reference to Jehoiachin is insignificant, but in light of the Davidic hope generated by the Davidic covenant (as von Rad has shown), this view seems rather short-sighted. See e.g., Cross, 'Themes of the Book of Kings', 276-277.

be but he is not because of David. There is hope even for dry bones scattered in the 'killing fields' of Babylon (Ezk. 37). But it should not be forgotten that this hope in the Davidic house is intimately associated with hope for the house which David desired to build—the Temple (2 Sa. 7:5ff). Messiah and Temple/Zion are so intimately associated that they are inextricable.

The Latter Prophets reinforce this theme. Judgment for Torah-violation is a reality but not the final one. This is a dominating leitmotif of the literature. Even for an Amos who utters his categorical 'No' to Israel with all the force of an earthquake (1:1-2), the fallen tent of David will rise from the ruins.<sup>16</sup> The prophets looked for a time beyond the disobedience and the exile, which became Israel's immediate destiny, to a final destiny when the Torah would be finally internalised in the heart of Israelites, and a new king—a Davidide—would preside over the land and the world forever.<sup>17</sup> And the midpoint in the Latter Prophets is the house which 'David' will build for God—the new temple (Ezk. 40-48). This Messianic impetus is particularly strong at the end of the prophetic collection in Haggai (2:2-23) and Zechariah (4:14). It is no accident that such books as well as Malachi (3:1ff) also mainly focus on the physical and spiritual restoration of the temple. These themes constituted an important part of that complex of eschatological events signified by the 'Day of the Lord.'

### 3. Conclusion

With the first eight chapters of Zechariah the second canonical division is approaching closure. Three supplements are added to this material, chapters 9-12, 12-14 of Zechariah and Malachi 1:1-4:3[3:21], each introduced by the formula: *מִשָּׁא דְּבַר יְהוָה* ('An oracle: the word of YHWH').<sup>18</sup> Toward the end of this canonical division there is

---

<sup>16</sup>Am. 9:11-12.

<sup>17</sup>The stress on David or Zion/Jerusalem is extremely pervasive: Is. 2:1-4; 9:7ff.; 11:1ff.; Je. 3:14-18; Ezk. 34:24; Ho. 3:5; Joel 3[4]:16-21; Am. 1:2; 9:11-12; Ob. 16-21; Mi. 4:1-3; Zp. 3:14-20; Hg. 2:2-23; Zc. 4:14.

<sup>18</sup>See e.g., Zc. 9:1; 12:1; Mal. 1:1. For extremely speculative discussions of the editing of 'The Twelve' see K. Budde, 'Eine folgenschwere Redaktion des Zwölfprophetenbuchs,' *ZAW* 39 (1921) 218-29 and R.E. Wolfe, 'The Editing of the Book of the Twelve,' *ZAW* 53 (1935) 90-129. For more balanced work see Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, 59-87 and in particular J. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of the Twelve* (BZAW 218; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1993) 182ff.

a statement which explains the exile: the people did not listen to the Torah (first division) and the ‘words which the Lord of Hosts had sent... through the hand of the former prophets’ (= Latter Prophets: second division).<sup>19</sup> There is a clear awareness of two absolutely crucial forms of revelation the neglect of which caused exile and death: the Torah and now the Prophets viewed as a succession. From a canonical perspective this is extremely significant, coming near the end of the second section of the canon as ‘it specifically sets up a connection between Law and Prophets.’<sup>20</sup>

The supplements which follow stress for the most part eschatological themes associated with the Day of the Lord and an awareness of the cessation of prophecy, but in the final supplement, Malachi, these themes as well as the explicit connection between the Law and the Prophets are underscored. This particularly occurs in the pair of appendices which is added to Malachi as a redactional device to close not only the prophetic book, but the entire prophetic canon (4:4-6 [3:22-24]). Immediately before the redactional device, the judgment of the Day of the Lord is announced (Mal. 3:2ff, 16ff), which will be preceded by a messenger of the covenant who will prepare the way before the Lord comes to the temple (3:1). The prophet exhorts the people to keep the Torah for even though the wicked seem to prosper in the present they will not in the coming judgment. For some day the Lord will distinguish between the righteous (צדיק) and the wicked (רשע), and this act will determine the destiny of each. The righteous will experience the divine reward and the wicked will be burned up like chaff (קש).<sup>21</sup> This affirmation of the doctrine of the two ways which has been shown at the beginning and end of the Torah as well as the beginning of Joshua and throughout the Prophets is now placed in the eschatological context of the Day of the Lord.

---

<sup>19</sup>Zc. 7:11-12.

<sup>20</sup>Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, 80.

<sup>21</sup>Mal. 3:18-19.

The two appendices which follow (4:4 [3:22], 5-6 [23-24]) are normally regarded as secondary because they are written in a quite different style from the rest of Malachi:

Remember the Torah of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. (4:4 [3:22])

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. (4:5-6 [3:23-24])

The audience is to remember the Torah of Moses, the servant of the Lord, just as Joshua was to remember it at the beginning of the conquest. As noted earlier, the reference to 'Moses, my servant' ( מֹשֶׁה (עַבְדִּי) only occurs in three places in the Bible, here and at the beginning of Joshua, a passage in which the hand of the same editor is surely to be detected (1:2, 7). 'Moses, my servant' recalls the author of the first section of the canon, the one who knew the Lord face-to-face, and whose authority was therefore supreme.

This reference to the Torah at the end of the Prophets clearly is not an arbitrary matter.<sup>22</sup> It is a contextualising redaction which ensures that the canonical division of the Prophets is not the Torah's rival but its complement.<sup>23</sup>

In the second appendix, there is a reference to a prophet like Moses. Elijah received a revelation of the Lord on the same mountain

---

<sup>22</sup>There are those who argue that this material comes from Malachi; others claim that it serves to conclude the Twelve. For the various views see e.g., P.A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 163-64, 337-38. Clearly W. Rudolph is correct in attributing these verses to an editor of the entire prophetic canon: *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8, Sacharja 9-14, Maleachi* (Gutersloh: Mohn, 1976) 290ff; see also Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 204ff.

<sup>23</sup>See B.S. Childs, 'The Canonical Shape of the Prophetic Literature,' in J.L. Mays and P.J. Achtemeier, (eds.), *Interpreting the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 46: 'The canonical effect of the first appendix of Malachi [vs. 4] testifies that the law and the prophets are not to be heard as rivals but as an essential unity within the one divine purpose.'

as did Moses. Like Moses, Elijah's departure from this life was unique. As Moses was associated with Torah and is mentioned at the end of the Torah to bring closure, Elijah is associated with the dawn of classical prophecy and is mentioned to bring closure to this canonical division. It is no accident that these two figures are brought together to underline the importance of both canonical divisions: the prophetic canon as well as the Torah of Moses.

And yet the reference to Moses at the end of the Torah although closing it, keeps the hope for further revelation alive. This is far more explicit with the appendix to the prophets. One receives the impression that the era of prophetic revelation is also over and one must await a new dawn of prophecy when the prophet like Moses will return and bring about reconciliation between members of the Israelite community. But for now the prophetic canon is closed. It awaits Elijah to open it up again. Perhaps there is also the implication that before Elijah comes the prophets—The Prophets—will help Israel keep the focus on the Law and bring about repentance.

The reference to Elijah contains an ominous threat, which again links the ending of this section of the canon with its beginning in Joshua. The land will be smitten with a ban (חרם) if there is no reconciliation between parents and their children. At the end of this canonical division Israel is reminded that it will experience the same treatment as the Canaanites did at the beginning of the canonical division (Joshua) if repentance does not occur.<sup>24</sup> Israel will be 'banned' from the land and thus driven from the presence of God.

Thus the second section of the canon closes with a retrospective look stressing the themes of Torah and Temple, divine word and presence. There is expectation of a prophet who will come and purify the Israelites and the temple before the Lord will come to this same temple in his saving and judging presence.

---

<sup>24</sup>In addition to Mal. 4:4 [3:24], the noun form 'ban' (חרם) occurs in the following places in the Latter Prophets: Is. 34:5; 43:28; Ezk. 44:29; Zc. 14:11. In contrast there are 13 references in Joshua.

## VII. The Writings.

### 1. Prolegomena

In discussing the redaction of the third section of the Canon, there is a significant problem. This section is notorious for variation in the arrangement of the books of which it is comprised. Childs makes the following conclusion based on this observation:

A brief glance at the great variation in the order of the books of the Writings indicates the degree of fluidity within the canonical division. The printed editions of the Hebrew Bible follow the sequence of the German and French manuscripts: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Five Megilloth, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. However, the Talmudic order of Baba Bathra (13b, 14b-15a) begins with Ruth—probably because of the Davidic genealogy—and isolates Esther from the other Megilloth. The relation of Job to Proverbs fluctuates among the various Jewish traditions as does also Daniel's relation to Esther. The book of Chronicles usually follows Ezra-Nehemiah, concluding the list, except in the Masoretic and Spanish orders in which Chronicles begins the sequence by also preceding the Psalter... the sequence of the books within the canonical division had little significance and no normative order was ever established by the synagogue.<sup>25</sup>

It is certainly a fact that there was less stability in the textual history of the third division of the canon.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, this textual fluidity does

---

<sup>25</sup>B.S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 502-503. See also I. Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah* (SBLMS 5; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980) 31: 'The invention of printing made it much easier to maintain a uniform biblical tradition and the majority of printed editions differ very little from each other.'

<sup>26</sup>See also R.T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and its Background in Early Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985) 181-82: 'This stability of order is a relatively modern phenomenon, and owes a good deal to the invention of printing. It was preceded by an era of fluidity among Jews (the chief guardians of the Hebrew Bible) and among Christians (the chief guardians of the Greek). In Jewish and Hebrew sources, it is true, the five books of the Law always appear in their natural chronological order, and likewise the first four books of the Prophets; these are invariably the historical books Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, which continue the historical sequence from the point where the Law leaves it. But the remaining books of the Prophets—the oracular books—

not mean that there is no access to evidence which could help reconstruct an original order for the Writings, at least for the beginning and ending of this canonical division. In fact there is important evidence for this division originally beginning with the Psalter and ending with Chronicles.<sup>27</sup> It is clear from a study of the literary evidence that Ezra-Nehemiah was intended as a sequel to Chronicles as the former follows the latter chronologically. The literary connection is also clear as the decree of Cyrus at the beginning of Ezra (1:1-4) repeats the abbreviated decree at the end of Chronicles (2 Ch. 36:22-23) and adds more information. The most likely reason this abbreviated decree is placed at the end of Chronicles is to signal

---

have in the Jewish and Hebrew sources no settled order; which is likewise the case for the Hagiographa.’

<sup>27</sup>The external evidence is strongly in favour of understanding that the earliest form of the canon began its third division with the Psalter. Consider the New Testament evidence in Lk. 24:44 where the reference to the Psalms probably refers to the first book of the third section and by extension the remainder of the books. In addition Jesus’ remark in Lk. 11:51 (*cf.* Mt. 23:35) is strong evidence for understanding Chronicles as the last book of the canon. The baraita in *Baba Bathra* 14b, which lists Ruth as beginning the third division followed by the Psalms, would conform to this pattern if Ruth is seen as a type of short preface to the Psalter introducing David (Beckwith). Josephus’ third section of the canon probably also begins with the Psalms (*Against Apion*, I:37-42). Philo (*De Vita Contemplativa*, 25) also seems to refer to the Psalms as beginning a third section of the canon. See also 2 Mac. 2:13-15. There is also a new piece of important evidence to consider in a Halakhic Letter from Qumran where the canon of scripture is referred to twice, once as ‘...the book] of Moses and in the words of the Prophe]ts...’ and also as ‘...in the book of Moses [and in the words of the Pro]phets and in Davi[d...] from generation to generation.’ Although J.J. Collins (*The Star and the Sceptre* [New York: Doubleday, 1995] 21-22) tries to subsume the reference to David under the Prophets, this seems to be understating the evidence. ‘David’ more appropriately introduces the third section of the canon. This letter has been dated to the mid-second century BC by L. Schiffman: *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls. The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia/Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1994) 83-95.

the correct chronological order that obtains between the two books. The movement of Ezra-Nehemiah to a different position would have necessitated this reference.<sup>28</sup> But the 'signal' did more than serve this technical function. The decree also serves as an *inclusio* device to bind the two books together, with the decree of Cyrus beginning Ezra-Nehemiah and ending Chronicles. It also serves as an *inclusio* device for the entire content of the canon as theologically significant words (עֲלָה, פִּקֹּד) at the end of the first book of the canon are repeated at the end of the last book of the canon.<sup>29</sup> After the last such word is used in Chronicles (עֲלָה), there is no need to continue the decree.

Moreover, Ruth was probably placed at the beginning of the Writings as a preface to the Psalter since its goal is the announcement of the birth of David at the end of the book (4:17). Appended to this notice has been a genealogy (4:18-22) extracted from the book of Chronicles (1 Ch. 2:9-15), which points to a redactional linking of the first book in this canonical division with the last book. It would also indicate a redactional bond between Ruth and the next book in the sequence, the book of David (Psalms). In virtually all other arrangements of the Writings, Ruth comprises one of the Megilloth, reflecting a desire to place these books together for the purposes of liturgy. This is obviously a much later development.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>It could also be the case that technical reasons have caused this phenomenon. In other words, Chronicles filled an entire scroll and a 'catch-line' was added to its ending to ensure its connection to the second scroll of Ezra-Nehemiah. (Assuming that they were written by the same author; so M. Haran, 'Explaining the Identical Lines at the End of Chronicles and the Beginning of Ezra,' *Bible Review* 3 [1986] 18-20.) This would seem to be all the more necessary if the original order had been changed. The consensus of scholarly opinion has shifted against the view that Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah were written by the same hand. See H.G.M. Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 5-82. The view that the material from Ezra was simply copied and added to Chronicles to give the book a 'happy ending' is highly questionable. See J.R. Porter, 'Old Testament Historiography,' in G.W. Anderson (ed.), *Tradition and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979) 153.

<sup>29</sup>See below.

<sup>30</sup>Wolfenson, 'Implications of the Book of Ruth,' 162ff.

## 2. Introduction

The book of Ruth and the two psalms of the Psalter provide the introduction to the Writings. The use of *Bethlehem* in the opening scene in Ruth is innocent enough (1:1, 2, 22) but in the wider context of the canon it is a lightning rod for Messianic hope. In the Former Prophets Bethlehem is David's birthplace (1 Sa. 16:4) and the place where he was first anointed to be king and in the Latter Prophets it is the birthplace of the future king who will rule Israel and whose glory will extend 'unto the ends of the earth' (אַפְסֵי אֶרֶץ, Mi. 5:1-3; cf. 1 Sa. 2:10). The emphasis on *redemption* in the book of Ruth is confined to a time in the period of Judges in which a member of a tribe of Judah redeems his relative's estate by marrying a Gentile. But in light of the genealogy appended to the end of the book and thus in the wider context of the canon, it is the Davidic house which is seen to be involved and this house not only has national redemptive significance but universal import. Moreover the genealogy appended to the book shows clearly the present purpose of the book, to highlight David and his significance. It seems very much like a canonical redaction which is used to introduce the author of the Psalter, the first major book to follow. Consequently, Ruth can function, as Beckwith has maintained, as a preface to the Psalter. But it can also function as a preface to the third division and it thus would indicate that David and the Davidic house will now occupy 'centre stage' in the canon.

It is no accident that the 'book of David'—the Psalter—follows, and its initial two psalms have a strategic canonical function, further anchoring the Davidic hope in the Torah and the Prophets. As many commentators have observed, Psalms 1 and 2 are marked by certain formal traits, conspicuously lacking titles and linked together by certain phrases.<sup>31</sup> Most scholars see the Psalms functioning as an introduction to the Psalter. But if the wider canonical context is

---

<sup>31</sup>The first psalm opens with 'Blessed is the man' and the second closes with 'Blessed are all those who trust in him.' In both psalms there is a stress on meditation. The godly meditate on the Torah (1:2) while the nations meditate on vanity (2:1). The way of the wicked perish (1:6) while the kings are told not to rebel against the Messiah lest they perish in the way (2:12).

considered, the psalms are surely nothing less than contextualising redactions for the third section of the canon. They both stress fundamental themes of the preceding sections: Torah and Temple/Messiah.

As Joshua deliberately continues themes present at the end of Deuteronomy, namely the death of Moses, the succession of Joshua and the occupation of the land, Psalm 1 intentionally reinforces a central theme of Malachi. There could not be a more salient distinction drawn between two ways, not here called the blessing and the curse of Deuteronomy but the way of the righteous (רשע) and the way of the wicked (צדיק). The righteous will be like a tree planted by streams of water, continually bearing fruit. The wicked will be like chaff (*cf.* Mal. 4:1 [3:19]), which is here driven away by the wind of judgment instead of being burned up with fire (Ps. 1:4).

Yet more important is the activity of the righteous. They are so fruitful and blessed with life because they meditate day and night on Yahweh's Torah. Here there is a move beyond uniting the beginning of the Writings with the end of the Prophets; there is an explicit connection made with the beginning of the Prophets. As Joshua is to meditate on the Torah day and night in order to have success and lead Israel east into the fertile land of promise, so the individual Israelite is to do the same thing and be planted in the land like a fruitful Edenic tree, near nourishing water. The parallels are impossible to miss and clearly demonstrate a deliberate editorial strategy at work:

Only be courageous and very strong, being careful to act in accordance with all the Torah that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you *may be successful wherever you walk*. This book of the Torah shall not depart from your mouth, *but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful.* (Jos. 1:7-8)

Happy is the man *who does not walk* according to the advice of the wicked, or set foot in the *way* of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the Torah of the LORD, *and on his law he meditates day and night*. He will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which produces its fruit in its season and whose leaves do not wither. In everything that he does *he prospers*. (Ps. 1:1-3)

As there were links to Genesis at the beginning of the second division of the canon when Israel is allowed access to the land guarded by his angel, the links are forged at the beginnings of the Writings. The Torah-filled person will be like a tree, continually bearing fruit, planted by streams of water. There is an allusion to the Garden of Eden, with the trees, rivers of water and fertility. There is also a reference to the eschatological river in Ezekiel which will flow out of the temple in Jerusalem ensuring the fertility of the trees on its banks.<sup>32</sup> For the present this eschatological experience of God's presence, which returns the individual to the pristine beginnings, can be had by meditating on the Torah day and night. What an amazing statement of the value of canon!

But there is a further Psalm which helps contextualise the Writings. As the first psalm stresses the importance of Torah meditation, the second stresses the importance of meditation on the Prophets. The second psalm focuses on the central theme of the Prophets, the significance of the Davidic house, not only for the land of Palestine but also for the nations. Since the nations meditate on vanity (לְאֲמִים יִהְיוּ רִיקִים, v. 1) and not on the Lord's decree, they rebel against the Lord's Anointed (v. 2). The fact that no one could stand before God's newly designated leader in Canaan (Jos. 1:5; 12:9-24) mocks the attempt of the kings of the earth to stand before the Lord's freshly anointed king (v. 1). The nations are regarded as coming under the authority not of Joshua now, but God's Messiah, regarded as the adopted son of God, who reigns from Zion, 'my holy mountain'

---

<sup>32</sup>Note in Gn. 2 that the tree of life is mentioned first and then the rivers of water (2:9ff). See also Ezk. 47:1ff and note the similar phraseology to Ps. 1 in Ezk. 47:12: לֹא יִבֹּל עֲלֵהוּ ('their leaves will not wither'). See particularly J.A. Soggin, 'Zum ersten Psalm', *TZ* 23 (1967) 81-96.

(הַר קְדֻשִׁי, v. 6), whose dominion extends to the 'ends of the earth' (אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ, v. 8). Both of these expressions carry a heavy 'Messianic payload' in the Prophets, which indicate the origin and scope of Messianic rule.<sup>33</sup> The temple will be the focal point of the world in which Messianic installation will take place and from which Messianic rule will extend. It is not just the Canaanites who must submit, but the entire world. Not to submit means eschatological judgment. The nations can only avoid judgment by not meditating on vanity and by paying attention (הַשְׂכִּילוּ, 2:10 *cf.* Jos. 1:8, Gn. 3:6) to the decree of the Lord.

This decree (2:7) is essentially a quotation from the Prophets, cast in poetic form, which functions as the central theme of that literature, namely the oracle given to David by Nathan regarding the king's dynasty:

He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. (2 Sa. 7:13-14a)<sup>34</sup>

You are my son; today I have begotten you. (Ps. 2:7)

In addition the corollary motifs of the centrality of Zion and the universal dominion of the Lord over the entire earth represent the Latter Prophets' explication and expansion of this theme.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. Content

The material in this division of the canon is much more diverse than the previous divisions and has been called, as noted, 'the most amorphous of canonical divisions in the Hebrew Bible.'<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the focus on David in the book of Ruth whose origins are traced from the Law to the Prophets, and the focus on the Law and the Prophets in the initial pair of Psalms in the Psalter greatly support

---

<sup>33</sup>See particularly the following places: 1 Sa. 2:10; Mi. 5:3; Is. 11:9; 65:25.

<sup>34</sup>Note especially G. Jones, 'The Decree of Yahweh (Ps. II 7)' *VT* 15 (1965) 336-44, who demonstrates the close relationship between 2 Sa. 7 and Ps. 2.

<sup>35</sup>Is. 2:1-4; 9:6ff.; 11:1ff.; Je. 3:14-18; Ezk. 34:24; Ho. 3:5; Jo. 4:16-21; Am. 9:11-15; Mi. 4:1-3; Zp. 3:14-20; Hg. 2:23; Zc. 4: 14.

<sup>36</sup>See D.F. Morgan, *Between Text and Community: The Writings in Canonical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990) ix.

a recent study that shows the Writings as basically a commentary on or dialogue with these two canonical divisions.<sup>37</sup> Ruth and Psalms 1-2 serve as a hermeneutical grid through which to interpret the subsequent mass of information contained in the Writings. David has not been any 'Judah come lately'; he is the goal of the canon.

Yet the Torah does not in any way lose its significance. In fact it lends its authoritative stamp to the new division as it did to the Prophets. David's book is structured into five books just like the Torah. This is certainly not by accident but is an intentional parallel to the Torah. This five-fold structuring of the first book of the Writings helps set the authoritative tone of not only the Psalter but the material it introduces.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the hermeneutical function of the Psalm dominating the last portion of the Psalter, Psalm 119, which is a celebration of the Torah as nothing less than the giver of life, is a reminder of the critical importance of Torah.

The wisdom literature uses different categories, the 'wise' and the 'foolish,' but in each the stress on the two ways of Psalm 1 is highlighted. Proverbs and the Song of Songs could be said to celebrate the blessing while Job and Ecclesiastes focus on the curse.<sup>39</sup> Whether the accessibility of knowledge of the world is affirmed as in Proverbs or questioned as in Ecclesiastes or Job, the important matter is the Fear of the Lord (Pr. 1:7; 3:5-7; 9:10, 11; Jb. 28:28) and the keeping of his commandments (Ec. 12:13-14). This is clearly 'the end of the matter.' These texts placed at significant junctures within their larger contexts reflect an editorial strategy that indisputably links wisdom literature to the Torah. As Brueggemann has noted, wisdom literature has been Torah-ized.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>See the remarks of E. Jacob, 'Principe canonique et formation de l'Ancien Testament,' *SVT* (1975) 111.

<sup>39</sup>For a suggestive analysis of the wisdom literature according to these categories, see J. Goldingay, 'The "Salvation History" Perspective and the "Wisdom" Perspective within the Context of Biblical Theology,' *EQ* 51 (1979) 194-207.

<sup>40</sup>See W. Brueggemann, *The Creative Word. Canon as a Model for Biblical Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 106ff.

Books like Lamentations clearly concentrate on the curse for the violation of the Torah, while Esther, Daniel, and Ezra-Nehemiah confront the population with the importance of maintaining Jewish identity in a foreign land and resisting assimilation to the surrounding pagan culture (whether in exile or at home). This is done by the keeping of the law, as the latter books make quite clear. Only the one true God may be worshipped.

But it is the theme of David and the Davidic House which moves to the forefront in this canonical division. Ruth of course ensures this with its focus on David as the goal of the genealogy which began in the Torah. The new Torah of the Psalter which follows is essentially David's book. The majority of the Psalms are Davidic, reflecting the importance of the Messiah, the son of God who will reign over the nations. Psalm 72 celebrates this rule at the end of a Davidic collection. At the end of the third section, Psalm 89 poses the problem this theme presents, as the embarrassing contradiction between Israel's experience and Nathan's dynastic oracle (2 Sa. 7:14; Pss. 2:7; 89:4-5) is emphasized. As Wilson has clearly shown, the fourth book of the Psalter, Psalms 90-106, is a direct answer to this question. The eschatological kingship of Yahweh over the universe is a fact that the worshipper must not ignore. In Wilson's view this section is the editorial centre of the Psalter.<sup>41</sup>

The king, who is the 'son of David' is regarded as not only Israel's hope but also her source of wisdom in the wisdom literature (Pr. 1:1; Ec. 1:1). In Job, the canonical context has clarified the nature of the hope of this suffering Gentile, which is focused on a 'redeemer' (גֹּאֲלִי, 19:26), the theme introduced at the beginning of this canonical division. The Song of Songs is about a royal marriage of David's son, Solomon (Ct. 1:1). The book of Daniel, with unparalleled power, shows that God's coming kingdom will destroy all competitors. They will disintegrate into chaff picked up and blown away by the wind (Dn. 2:35, *cf.* Ps. 1:4; 2:9). The kingdoms of the earth will be given to the Son of Man (Dn. 7:13-15), perhaps to be

---

<sup>41</sup>See G. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) 215.

identified with the Anointed One (9:25) who will return to Yahweh's Holy Hill (9:26, cf. 9:16, 20). The allusions to Psalm 2 are compelling.

#### 4. Conclusion

By the end of this canonical division, this theme of Messiah/ Temple reaches a climax in the book that is chosen to complete not only this division but the entire canon itself. Chronicles may not supply the most natural chronological closure, coming as it does *after* Ezra-Nehemiah, but it is extremely appropriate nonetheless.<sup>42</sup> It serves to tie the third division of the canon together with its echo of the Davidic genealogy contained in Ruth. Moreover, it links the entire canon together: Chronicles and Genesis almost function as book-ends for the Scriptures. Chronicles returns the reader to the first book of the canon by beginning with Adam and providing a laconic summary of Israelite history from creation to Cyrus's decree;<sup>43</sup> this decree itself opens up the possibility of a new creation by the divine word, since Cyrus is simply fulfilling the prophetic word uttered by Jeremiah (Je. 25:1-14). Note also the endings of Genesis and Chronicles where the same key verbs are used, פקד ('come to') and עלה ('go up'):<sup>44</sup>

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die; but God will surely come (פקד יפקד) to you, and bring you up (והעלה) out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'When God comes (פקד יפקד) to you, you shall carry up (והעלתם) my bones from here.' (Gn. 50:24-25)

---

<sup>42</sup>See Beckwith, *Old Testament Canon*, 159, 179 n. 121.

<sup>43</sup>See Beckwith's, *Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, 158: 'The reason why Chronicles is placed in the Hagiographa are probably the genealogy from Adam onwards with which it begins and the brief account of the return from the Exile with which it ends. These enable it to stand at the end of the canon as a recapitulation of the whole biblical story from the Creation to the return.' A standard answer that Chronicles was canonised after Ezra-Nehemiah ignores these important links. See for this view F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1988) 30-31.

<sup>44</sup>See N. Sarna, 'Bible', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* III: 832.

Thus says Cyrus the king of Persia: the LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged (פקד) me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up (ויעל) (2 Ch. 36:23)

Thus the first and the last books of the canon begin and end with similar themes.

The Messianic theme also reaches a climax in the concluding book of the canon. The ten chapter genealogy with which Chronicles begins culminates in David! If this does not reflect a Messianic hope (Ps. 2:7), then nothing does.<sup>45</sup> Almost all history is regarded as a footnote to David.<sup>46</sup> As von Rad has aptly remarked: 'The Chronicler's account starts with David. This at the same time gives the keynote of the most important theme in the whole work, for what does it contain apart from David?'<sup>47</sup> It is as if the goal of the extensive genealogies in Genesis has been finally attained.<sup>48</sup> This is what history has been waiting for—the seed which will bring about universal blessing (Gn. 3:15; 12:1-3).

The stress, however, on the Messianic theme does not contradict Torah; in fact the former is enhanced by the latter. When

---

<sup>45</sup>Cf. J.D. Newsome, Jr., 'Toward a New Understanding of the Chronicler and His Purpose,' *JBL* 94 [1975] 209, on the Chronicler's report of the Nathan oracle in 1 Ch. 17:13-14: 'The boldness of this proclamation, which announces the perpetual viability of a political dynasty long since defunct is remarkable!'. See also Jacob, 'Principe canonique,' 112. The attempt by some scholars to downplay this messianic thrust is bewildering. See among others S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and its Place in Biblical Thought* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989) 493-504.

<sup>46</sup>Everything before David is preliminary and handled in a footnote. It is as though the whole universe has been waiting for this moment': W. Brueggemann, *David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 100.

<sup>47</sup>*Old Testament Theology*, 350.

<sup>48</sup>Note the important point made by Hess when comparing biblical genealogies in Genesis with ancient near eastern counterparts. The latter are oriented to the past and trace the ancestors of individuals and groups while the former have a future orientation, pushing the reader forward to future descendants. See R.S. Hess, 'The Genealogies of Genesis and Comparative Literature,' *Biblica* 70 (1989) 241-54.

David passes the mantle of leadership to his son Solomon, the language is borrowed from Moses' last words to Joshua (1 Ch. 22:13; cf. 29:23; 2 Ch. 7:11). All the kings that are evaluated are Davidic and those that merit approbation attempt to reform the nation on the basis of the Torah. Hezekiah is regarded as a king who kept the Torah and commandment with all his heart; he therefore experienced prosperity in every thing he did (2 Ch. 31:21; 32:30). The prophetic word has similar authority: before a battle against the enemy the people are told to believe the words of the prophets and experience prosperity (2 Ch. 20:20). The people's success is the result of obedience to the divine word, much like the behaviour urged in Genesis 2, Deuteronomy 30 and 32, Joshua 1, Malachi 4:4-6 [3:22-24] and in particular Psalm 1.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast the nation has experienced failure and the ultimate judgment by acting like the scornful wicked of Psalm 1. *This attitude to the divine word is the explanation for the exile of the people and the destruction of the temple:*

The LORD, the God of their fathers sent to them persistently by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling-place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD against his people became so great that there was no remedy. (2 Ch. 36:15-16)

The words of the divine messengers of God and his prophets met scorn and ridicule.<sup>50</sup> As if to stress this point the judgment has a finality which is regarded as a particular fulfilment of the divine word,

---

<sup>49</sup>Cf. Childs, *Introduction*, 644: 'The author was attempting to interpret to the restored community in Jerusalem the history of Israel as an eternal covenant between God and David which demanded an obedient response to the divine law. On the basis of past history he sought repeatedly to draw the lesson that Israel prospered when obedient but courted God's wrath and the destruction of the nation through disobedience.'

<sup>50</sup>Could this three-fold rejection of the divine word refer obliquely to the rejection of material found in all three sections of the canon? It is tempting to understand it in this way, especially in a chapter which closes the entire canon. Cf. Zc. 7:7-12 near the end of the second division, where a two-fold rejection of the divine word clearly refers to the Torah and Prophets.

a word expressed in the Torah and the Prophets. The people are exiled in order that the land can have seventy years of sabbatical rest in order to fulfil the prophetic word of Jeremiah (25:11-14) and Leviticus (26:34ff). The canon has come full circle. The world which began with Sabbath rest ends with Sabbath rest—before a new beginning.

For this reason, the appending of most of the decree of Cyrus to the end of Chronicles not only ensures a proper chronological reading of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah but also serves to provide a note of real hope at the end of the canon—the possibility of a new beginning. It would appear that all the kingdoms of the earth belong now to a foreign king. The holy hill of Zion is an ash heap while the focal point of the world is Babylon. The ending of this section of the canon seems to contradict its beginning (Ps. 2). Yet the attachment of the decree of Cyrus demonstrates that it is the *divine word* that is still in control of history—all these things have happened to stress the fulfilment of the prophetic word. The 'God of the heavens' is in charge and is working out his will through Cyrus his servant, who has paid attention and been wise (Ps. 2:10). The temple will be built and the rule of God will once again go out from Zion.

Israel, then, like Adam and Eve, lies East of Eden, far off in Babylon. But the barriers have been torn down. The flaming sword has been sheathed (Gn. 3) or perhaps it will fall on David's house (1 Ch. 21). Israel is invited by a pagan king to 'go up' (וַיַּעַל) to the garden and experience the divine presence. The rest of Cyrus' decree (Ez. 1:3b-4) is unnecessary since this theologically charged word, וַיַּעַל, stresses the new beginning in a profound way. When the temple is rebuilt the waters of life will trickle out of it and become a mighty river giving life to trees planted beside it (Torah meditators!) and finally even to the Dead Sea (Gn. 2; Ps. 1; Ezk. 47). That stream will be nothing less than the presence of the Lord himself teaching *Torah* (Mal. 3:1; Is. 2:1-4).<sup>51</sup> The first command provided light for the

---

<sup>51</sup>In many of the best Tiberian manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible Chronicles begins the third section of the canon, and its ending (Cyrus's decree) is often printed alongside the first psalm of the Psalter, which has been displaced into second position in the canonical order of the Writings. The hermeneutical significance of this move is clear. Happy is the one who walks in the way of the Lord, which means going back to Jerusalem to engage in his work, which will call for a promulgation of and meditation on the Torah. See J.A. Sanders, 'Canon' (*ABD* I:846). The same point is made more effectively with Chronicles at the ending of the canon. 'Going up' to Jerusalem entails going in the way of the righteous, *i.e.*, going to study Torah. But it also means, as noted, going up to Eden.

world; so does the last. The goal of creation is communion. This presupposes both Torah and Temple/Messiah.

### **VIII. The Larger Picture: More Extraordinary Facts**

There are more extraordinary facts that emerge when the global picture of the canon is seen. When the beginnings of the canonical divisions are considered, there are some interesting patterns that emerge. The word of God which creates the world in Genesis 1, can create a nation in Joshua 1 and an individual in Psalm 1. Similarly the beginning of Joshua with the conquest of the land of Canaan is an anticipation of the divine rule of the world by the Messiah at the beginnings of the Writings (Ps. 2) which will restore the original condition of paradise (Gn. 1).

The eschatological stress can be seen from another vantage point by considering the ending of the canonical divisions. The Torah concludes with the towering figure of Moses whose unique stature not only stresses the authority of the Torah but invites anticipation of an eschatological figure like him. The Prophets close with the eschatological figure of Elijah, whose coming is announced to prepare the way of the Lord. The Writings conclude with Jeremiah's word to build the temple, giving renewed life to the Davidic hope. There is an inner canonical movement from Moses to Elijah to David.

The importance of David for the eschatological hope can be seen from another perspective. If, as Freedman has observed, it is legitimate to divide the canon into two almost equal halves with the first half comprising the Torah and the Former Prophets and the second the Latter Prophets and the Writings, the endings of each coincide by putting the stress on David's 'house.' The first ends with a foreign king's offer of hope to Jehoiachin, a Davidide, languishing in

a Babylonian prison, as he is elevated to a position above all other kings in Babylon (2 Ki. 25:27-30). God still continues to build a house—a dynasty for David (2 Sa. 7:11). The second half ends with a foreign king's offer of hope to the Jewish community languishing in Babylon, to build the temple back in Zion (2 Ch. 36:22-23). 'David' will still build a house for God—a temple (2 Sa. 7:12-13). There has been disaster to be sure but the Messianic promise is alive and well.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly both of these almost equal divisions have beginnings which stress the power of the divine word, first through the creative acts in Genesis 1 and then the divine acts of planting and building in Genesis 2 (2:8, 22). When the second division begins, the sin of the people has resulted in this powerful word becoming a destructive force but afterwards it will become a creative force. Jeremiah's commission is 'to uproot and to smash, to destroy and tear down' but also 'to build and to plant' (Je. 1:10). At the end of the canon, after the destruction (2 Ch. 36:19), the building begins (2 Ch. 36:23).<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, Jeremiah begins the second division and he also concludes it (Je. 1:1; 2 Ch. 36:22).

## IX. Concluding Reflections on the Extraordinary Fact

I cannot help but conclude that the above evidence points to an editing of the biblical literature very much aware of its nature as scripture and

---

<sup>52</sup>Sanders perceptively sees the hope at the end of the 'Deuteronomistic History' and the book of Chronicles but he fails to understand the material from the larger canonical framework. Consequently he argues that 'The Deuteronomic hope for revival of the Davidic dynasty in 2 Kings is transformed by the Chronicler into the hope of the resurrection of the Temple...' (*Torah and Canon* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972] 110). Note also what happens when such boundary texts as Gn. 3:15, 2 Ki. 25:27-30, Je. 1:10 and 2 Ch. 36:23 are heard in dialogue with each other.

<sup>53</sup>Note also how the ending of the first division links up with the beginning of the second division through the dating formula. The fall of Jerusalem is dated to the eleventh year of Zedekiah in 2 Ki. 25:2 and this marks the end of Jeremiah's ministry in Je. 1:3. Note the similar verbal formulas in each (2 Ki. 25:6; Je. 1:16) and, of course, the fact that the judgment described in 2 Ki. 25 has not been an accident of history but has been clearly predicted in Je. 1:13-17.

its boundaries. Through the arrangement of the books and the use of important transitional reflections, there is a 'definitive shape' placed on the tradition, a shape which organises and unifies the material and invests it with meaning. The meaning stresses the importance of the word of God, a word with life and death significance.<sup>54</sup> The same words that created the world (Gn. 1) can be meditated upon day and night to create a nation (Jos. 1) and they can also create an individual who does the same (Ps. 1). Conversely disobedience of the divine word brings curse (Gn. 3) to Adam and Eve and their progeny, to Israel in Canaan (Jos. 7) and to the wicked (Ps. 1:1, 6) and the nations who choose to meditate on emptiness (Ps. 2:1; *cf.* Dt. 32:47). This stress on the critical importance of the divine word betrays the understanding which the canonical editors had for this literature.<sup>55</sup> In my judgment this seriously calls into question the view that the notion of a canon of Scripture belongs to the later period of Judaism.<sup>56</sup> There is no reason why the canonisation process should not have been completed by the time of the Maccabees, as other recent studies have argued. Also, the modern suggestion that the canon represents the human response to divine revelation is seriously at odds with the

---

<sup>54</sup>Note Sanders' connection of the words of Torah with life itself: *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 23.

<sup>55</sup>These authoritative statements should not be viewed as an alien imposition on the content of scripture but rather as continuous with the biblical material itself. The ceremonies at Sinai (Ex. 20-24), Shechem (Jos. 8), Josiah's reform (2 Ki. 22) and Ezra's promulgation of the Law (Ne. 8-9) occur at different stages of Israelite history and all testify to the centrality and importance of God's words as well as the consequences of obedience and disobedience. *Cf.* S.Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1976) 24: 'According to the biblical evidence, the Israelite notion of canonicity begins with the appearance of canonical laws. Laws are authoritative for all generations.' See also the important treatment by M.G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) and most recently some of the ancient near eastern parallels noted by R.I. Vasholz, *The Old Testament Canon in the Old Testament Church: The Internal Rationale for Old Testament Canonicity* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies #7; Lewiston: Mellen, 1990).

<sup>56</sup>See *e.g.*, J. Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 35ff. In fact the Maccabean period provides an ideal *Sitz im Leben* for the selection of Chronicles to close the canon.

viewpoint represented in this editing.<sup>57</sup> As far as this editing is concerned, the canon is divine revelation.

The texts stress repeatedly the importance of studying the words of the canon, particularly the Torah. This strongly suggests that the canon is closed, to be opened sometime in the future. In the meantime the study of its contents contains the secret of living. This 'wisdom' emphasis supports the results of other biblical scholars who have noted its importance in the organisation of certain sections of the canon.<sup>58</sup> Moreover there seems to be a movement in the canon which not only points back to Torah but also points forward to Temple/Messiah. With the addition of the third section of the canon, David certainly occupies 'centre stage.' It is tempting to reconstruct a Mount of Transfiguration in the Hebrew Bible, in which Moses and Elijah converse with David! At any rate, the recent evidence of 4QMMT in which the canon is referred to with the synonymous expressions, 'The Book of Moses [and the words of the Pr]ophets and of Davi[d]' and '[the Book] of Moses and [the words of the Prophe]ts', may offer external support for the view that the third canonical division is centred on David.<sup>59</sup>

The evidence also suggests that there are internal criteria available by which one can evaluate the various forms of the canon, and determine an original form, namely the redactional material which suggests an awareness of the limits of canon extending back to the end of the biblical period itself: Deuteronomy 34, Joshua 1:1-9; Malachi 4:4-6 [3:22-24], Ruth 4:18-22, Psalms 1-2, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23. This evidence conforms to the Jewish canon described in *Baba Bathra* 14b.

---

<sup>57</sup>See for example the statements by Sanders ('Canon,' 838, 848): 'Whereas the Koran is viewed in Islam as a direct revelation from God, the Jewish and Christian canons are viewed as human testimonies to God's revelation'; and 'Canons, precisely because they are human responses to divine revelation, of necessity reflect the ambiguity of reality.'

<sup>58</sup>See G. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct* (BZAW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980) and J.H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology. A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>59</sup>See above n. 30. I thus take this reference to David to mean more than just the author of many of the psalms in the Psalter and a few other books in the collection. 'David' would mean the subject of many of the writings.

These above considerations lead one to infer quite a different understanding of the canon and the process of canonisation than that to which biblical scholars have been accustomed, as a series of conciliar decisions which determined rather arbitrarily the books to be included or excluded. One can meaningfully speak of a redaction of the canon at the end of the biblical period despite the scholarly consensus of the last century. The canon, as Beckwith has ably demonstrated, is a work of art in its internal arrangement of books; but its final shape also provides a theological/hermeneutical lens through which to view its message.<sup>60</sup> This message not only stresses the divine origin of the scriptures and their importance as an object of meditation but it also has a clear Messianic thrust.<sup>61</sup> This is truly, to use Sarna's phrase again, one 'extraordinary fact.'

---

<sup>60</sup>So Childs, 'Childs versus Barr,' *Interpretation* 43 (1989) 69: 'The canonical shaping provided larger contexts for interpretation, established the semantic level and left important structural and material keys for understanding.'

<sup>61</sup>See Lk. 24:27, 44. *Cf.* the typical view that the shape of Septuagint (in some arrangements) with the prophets at the end and the law at the beginning reflects eschatological concerns and the tri-partite structure of the Hebrew canon with its concentric patterning stresses ethics. See *e.g.*, J. Barton, *Oracles of God. Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (Oxford: OUP, 1986) 21ff.