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Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Hebrew Scriptures

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Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate an intentional placement of the book of Chronicles at the end of the Hebrew Bible in order for it to function as the theological summary of the Old Testament canon. An overview of a canonical approach to Scripture is given, starting with a proposed explanation for the final shape of the Hebrew Bible, namely that it is a composed theological book. External witnesses are examined, and each option for the books placement within these witnesses are evaluated. The internal evidence within the text itself is also evaluated in order to infer the intentions of the biblical authors. It is argued that both the external and internal evidence given for the placement of Chronicles are best explained in its theological function as the conclusion to the Hebrew Bible.

Keywords

Canon, Chronicles

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Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Hebrew Scriptures

Peter Shields

Biblical and Theological Studies

Introduction

The book of Chronicles is placed after the book of Kings in the English Bible. This placement follows the tradition of the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament. Many ancient and present-day readers have found the content of the book to be redundant; a collection of events that were appended to the book of Samuel and Kings because of their similarity in content. In the Septuagint, the title of the book is παραλειπομένων (the things left behind), which explains its position after Kings in this tradition. Because of its perceived insignificance, concluding that this book is simply “things left behind” is detrimental to the reader in attaining a proper understanding of the book of Chronicles. There are theological and eschatological themes within this book; themes that are not identified as being developed by an author if they are merely left over from Kings. They stand out with a proper understanding of the book’s rightful place at the end of the Hebrew Bible.

The function and theological significance of a book within the canon of Scripture is connected to its proximity to other books and their combined compositional structure and message. This is not suggesting that there is added significance to a book based on its position that was not intended by the author. Rather, an author is aware of his position in the canon and is writing in light of what was written before. This distinction is important because the order of the books within the Hebrew Bible is not merely a record of reception history, but rather a move of composition.¹ This paper seeks to demonstrate that the unique content of the book of Chronicles and its theological message, along with the external evidence of its position found in textual witnesses, are best explained by its intentional placement at the end of the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is important to lay the ground work for this thesis by overviewing the work that has already been done on this topic. This paper will provide an overview and brief history of the composition of the Hebrew Bible, a discussion of the shape of the Writings, an explanation for the two different placements of Chronicles within the Writings, a discussion of “mere” and “meant” contextuality, and a proposition in favor of “meant” contextuality.² The limits of this paper will prohibit a full discussion of every view on this subject. It is also pertinent to say that this paper is presenting an argument that is proposed to be most likely. I conceded that absolute certainty on the placement of Chronicles at the end of the Hebrew Bible cannot be decisively stated (which accounts for the many

¹ Within what is called reception history, faith communities would take the text of the Hebrew Bible and redact or shape the text in a way that highlighted the theology of the faith community. This paper will argue that this does not fully explain why there are many “final forms” of the Hebrew Bible. The text itself bears witness to intentional composition above the book level, making the canon a whole composition. The authors of the Bible were shaping the text. More on this below.

² The view of this paper is that the Hebrew Bible has a tripartite structure. This includes the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. This tripartite structure will be further explained below.

different positions on the subject), but I will argue that this conclusion best represents the evidence.

The Composition of the Hebrew Bible

To develop a case for the importance of this study, it is necessary that one understands the Hebrew Bible. Placing Chronicles at the end of the Writings (Ketuvim) is not only significant for one's understanding of the book itself, but the entirety of the Hebrew Bible as well (Tanak).³ The Hebrew Bible is a theological book; it is not merely a collection of books or a history of religion, but is a collection of books that have been put together to form a cohesive unit. The author's theological message drives the selection of material, making this more than a record of historical events. It is an interpretation of history that reveals a "messianic, eschatological, and faith oriented" theology.⁴ In his book, *Daniel in the Context of the Hebrew Bible*, Michael Shepherd explains that the Hebrew Bible was composed in a timeless manner.

It is designed to instruct future generations of readers in their faith. Thus, the task of interpretation is not limited to "what the text meant," as if the authors only intended their message for their generation. Nor does interpretation require an artificial process of updating ("what the text means"). Rather, the biblical authors encourage an approach that focuses on what the text has always meant. That is, the biblical compositions have been put together in such a way that their original meaning remains their relevant meaning.⁵

The meaning of each composition is also affected by intertextuality and compositional seams within the canon as a whole.⁶ Therefore, establishing the book of Chronicles as the conclusion to the Hebrew Bible has theological significance. As the conclusion to the Hebrew Bible, the book serves as a summary of the theological message that carries through the entire composition of the collection.

With this in mind, it is important to explore why there are different orders for the Hebrew Bible.⁷ It is also important to define what is meant by the term "canon". A presentation and defense for the tripartite structure of the Hebrew canon will also be helpful. Julius Steinberg and Timothy Stone have developed a resource that introduces this discussion well: their book, *The Shape of the Writings*.⁸ Their definition of 'canon' states that it "... is a fixed or delimited collection of texts received and recognized as sacred (authoritative) by a faith community."⁹ Steinberg and Stone also reference the work of Lee McDonald¹⁰ for a summary of scholarly approaches to the terms "canon", "canonical process", and "canonical consciousness".¹¹ One of the ways that scholars have

³ The Tanak is an acronym for the Hebrew Bible that describes its tripartite structure. The Torah (Law), the Nevi'im (Prophets), and the Ketuvim (Writings).

⁴ Michael B. Shepherd, *Daniel in the context of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 2.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The book of the Twelve (The Minor Prophets is to be considered as one composition) is an example of this. The book is ordered, grouped, and textually linked intentionally to give the book an eschatological significance that affects modern readers. This is what makes the meaning of the text timeless.

⁷ Within textual witnesses, there are different traditions that present the Hebrew Bible with different orderings for each book within the collection.

⁸ Julius Steinberg and Timothy J. Stone. "The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity", *The Shape of the Writings*. (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 1-51.

⁹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰ Lee M. McDonald, *The Biblical Canon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007)

¹¹ Steinberg and Stone, "The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity", 4.

understood “canon” is by using this term to describe any book that carries authority in a faith community. This does not discriminate between books that were in the closed list or those that were outside the list. This view sees canon in two parts: “canon 1” is a group of authoritative books that includes both those that made it into “canon 2” (the Hebrew Bible), and those that were not included in canon 2 or the closed collection (1 Enoch or Ben Sira for example).¹² “When the collection is considered to be merely ‘Scripture’ (canon 1), it means that books can be added and taken away from the collection, since the borders are porous; when they turn into a canon, it means that no books can be taken out of the collection or added to it.”¹³ Another view that is expressed by Eugene Ulrich sees canon 1 as “the canonical process” and canon 2 as the final collection.¹⁴ Ulrich argues for a dichotomy between the entire compositional process and the finalization of the Hebrew Bible.

Both of these views understand that the composition and authorship of these books took place outside of the context of ‘canon 2’: the final collection of the Hebrew Bible. However, both views fail to recognize that the biblical authors did not write their own books within a vacuum. They wrote their books knowing that they were writing Scripture and were therefore adding to and interacting with a collection. The idea of intertextuality, the knowledge of previous Scripture, and especially the compositional seams that bind the books together, do not lend themselves to a dichotomy between the canonical process and the final form of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁵ It follows then, that these views understand that arranging these books into a formalized collection had to have occurred after the final composition of each individual book. “In other words... the fixing or scope of the canon is late, possibly very late, so its limits could not be organically connected to the formation of the literature as a collection.”¹⁶

Brevard Childs offers a better understanding of these textual features.¹⁷ For Childs, the Hebrew Bible already had a conceptual collection of books at the same time that authors were writing Scripture. “The Hebrew canon looks like a grove of trees that have grown up together in a complex symbiotic relationship (canon 1) until they finally reach maturity (canon 2).”¹⁸ As the books were individually written, they were understood as authoritative, and were at the same time “composed, redacted, and compiled” in terms of their relationship with each other as a collection.¹⁹ In this way, authors of biblical books wrote in light of previous Scripture bound within the collection that was recognized by the faith community. These books were then composed to fit together to form a singular unit with a unified theological message.²⁰

¹² Ibid. These books were considered authoritative, but the faith community did not include them in the closed list. In this way they did not see these as inspired texts, but they were helpful for understanding the inspired texts and were therefore considered to be important books for the community.

¹³ Ibid., 5.

¹⁴ Eugene Ulrich, “The Notion and Definition of Canon,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 31.

¹⁵ Biblical authors built upon the theology of the canon by quoting and developing the theology of previous Scripture. The Prophets quoted and built upon the theology of the Law, and the Writings built upon what the Prophets had spoken. The New Testament goes on to describe the theology of the OT by describing how Jesus is the Messiah.

¹⁶ Steinberg and Stone, “The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity”, 5.

¹⁷ Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979) 50-58

¹⁸ Steinberg and Stone, “The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity”, 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 9.

²⁰ These statements do concede that there were multiple editions of the final form of the Hebrew Bible for different communities of faith. What this paper seeks to demonstrate is that the explanation for

The composition of the Hebrew Bible was both intentional and organic. It would seem natural then, that a single version of the final form would arise. Unfortunately, there are witnesses to multiple orders of the canon, and many argue that this denies the conclusion that the Hebrew Bible was shaped intentionally. In the same way, the many witnesses to different orders complicate an argument for the existence of a tripartite canon. John Sailhamer is helpful in this discussion. He examines the external witnesses alongside the internal evidence within the text to recognize which order would best fit the intentions of the biblical authors.²¹ Sailhamer rightly identifies that the different orders are the result of theological viewpoints held by faith communities as they interacted with the text. "Canonical books took on varying compositional shapes that reflected theological viewpoints. Moreover, once established within a specific community OT texts began to take on essential characteristics of those communities in a way that stopped short of actual new composition. The result was the production of the Hebrew Tanak: The Law, the Prophets and the Writings."²² There are differences among the witnesses, and without exploring the internal textual evidence, one could argue that the difference could be simply attributed to reception history.²³ The shape of the Hebrew Bible is centered around two sets of seams: Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1, as well as Malachi 4 and Psalm 1.²⁴ These internal seams within the canon and the external witness to the shape of the Tanak as a tripartite work together, are a compelling explanation for the final form of the Hebrew Bible.

The Shape of the Writings

Within the Hebrew Bible, the Writings (the last section of the tripartite canon) has been presented in many different orders among faith communities.²⁵ Witnesses to multiple orders come from Jewish, Greek, Latin, and Syriac traditions.²⁶ Steinberg and Stone correctly point out that all of the

these orders needs to extend beyond the theological beliefs of these faith communities. There is internal evidence that the authors of the biblical books composed the shape and order of the Hebrew Bible intentionally.

²¹ John H. Sailhamer. "Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible", in *Biblical theology: retrospect and prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 25-37.

²² *Ibid.*, 31.

²³ This proves that external evidence alone cannot determine the intended final form of the Hebrew Bible. Without examining the text in the Hebrew Bible, it would be impossible to prove that the biblical authors intended a specific ordering of the books. This paper disagrees with the conclusion made by Gregory Goswell about the placement of Chronicles. "The different canonical placements reflect post-authorial evaluations of the book and its contents. Each position has its rationale and potentially contributes to the understanding of readers. There is nothing to indicate that any one position is the earliest or best. In particular, there is no proof that the Chronicler composed his work to sum up and conclude the OT canon." Gregory Goswell. "Putting the Book of Chronicles in its Place." (*Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2, 2017), 283.

²⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), pp.239-352. Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1 connect the Law and the Prophets together. Deuteronomy anticipates the arrival of the "Prophet like Moses" and Joshua 1 introduces the wise man that meditates on the Scripture day and night. Malachi 4 and Psalm 1 connect the Prophets and the Writings together. Malachi 4 anticipates the coming of the Prophet Elijah and Psalm 1 quotes Joshua 1, again highlighting the wise man that meditates upon Scripture day and night.

²⁵ Steinberg and Stone, "The Historical Formation of the Writings in Antiquity", 5. "In the case of the Writings of the Jewish TaNaK, Bechwith and Brandt present about 30 orders without a grouped Megillot and about 90 orders that have the Megillot grouped."

²⁶ *Ibid.*

orders need to be considered for their theological implications. This is because it is no longer acceptable to assume that the Leningrad Codex is the standard for the order of the books within the Hebrew Bible.²⁷ They state that all orders should be considered, that the amount of orders should not dismiss the importance of them for theological study, and that equal status among the witnesses cannot be assumed.²⁸ With these considerations in mind, the final goal should be an attempt to find the “original” order of the Writings (the intentional order by the authors) or, to put it another way, the most reasonable explanation behind both the external and internal evidence. Steinberg and Stone assert this goal by giving two additional criteria for a study of certain orders of the Writings. “(First), not only should the rationale for the order be based on formal principles of chronology, genre, and authorship, etc., but it should presumably take content and theology into consideration. (Secondly), the order can be shown to have had a certain degree of prominence in the community of faith or some group of it.”²⁹ It is not possible to go into all the different orders in this essay, but a short study of two witnesses— tractate b. B. Bat. 14b and the Leningrad Codex— will be beneficial to this study.

Baba Batra (around 200 C.E) is one of the oldest Jewish witnesses that deals specifically with the order of biblical books. It agrees with the tripartite structure of the Hebrew Bible and appears to have had a strong influence on the other orders that are found in the Jewish tradition.³⁰ The order of the books within the Writings that are given in this witness are as follows: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra/Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The best explanation for this particular ordering is not one of historical or chronological interest, but of theological intentions. There are many different orders within other textual witnesses that take a similar shape, following a theological rationale.³¹

As mentioned before, for many scholars, the Leningrad Codex is the scholarly standard for the final form of the Hebrew Bible. The order of the books within the Writings in this witness is Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra/Nehemiah. This order is different from the Talmudic order (Baba Batra) in several ways, but the most outstanding difference is the placement of Ruth. This dramatically changes its theological thrust.³² Steinberg and Stone point out that the difference in the placement of Chronicles is not overly important because it would have a similar role at the beginning or the end. This paper argues that the theological thrust of the whole canon is affected by the placement of Chronicles at the end of the Writings. This study disagrees with Steinberg and Stone’s assessment. The book gives a

²⁷ Ibid. The Leningrad Codex has been considered the standard for establishing the text of the Hebrew Bible.

²⁸ Ibid.,35-36

²⁹ Ibid.,41

³⁰ Ibid.,41-42

³¹ Ibid., 47. Some orders place Ruth after Proverbs as the proper conclusion to the wisdom book. Other orders switch Job and Proverbs. Daniel and Esther are sometimes reversed. Most of the time, Chronicles is seen as an ending to the Writings, but other orders see it beginning this section. The reason that these orders are best explained by theological intentions is due to the intertextuality and composition of the books themselves when seen in this order. I am going to argue that Chronicles belongs at the end for similar reasons, but overall this approach allows for an appropriate understanding of the authors intentions and knowledge of his own place in the biblical world.

³² Ibid., 49. Ruth being placed before Psalms gives the Writings and the book of Psalms a Davidic foundation, whereas the placement of Ruth after Proverbs gives the reader the practical example of the virtuous woman.

positive outlook and drives the reader towards an eschatological hope, whereas placing Ezra-Nehemiah at the end would have the opposite effect.

Both of these orders are important because of their historicity and perceived prominence over other traditions. That being stated, these orders are not to be examined or judged based on the external evidence alone. Although there are theological decisions witnessed in these different orders, the validity of these theological decisions must be weighed by the meaning of the texts themselves. Finding the “right” order for the books within the Writings is inconclusive because of the amount of witnesses. However, Sailhamer notes that “two final shapes of the Tanak appear to emerge. One concludes with Ezra/Nehemiah... the other closes with the book of Chronicles.”³³ It is here that this study finds its purpose; to show that Chronicles finds its theological home at the end of the Writings.

Placing Chronicles at the End of the Writings

The book of Chronicles has been witnessed in three different locations: after Kings, at the head of the Writings, or at the end of the Writings of the Hebrew Bible.³⁴ As has been previously stated, the English Bible places the book after Kings, but this view will not be dealt with here. It has been concluded that two forms of the Hebrew Bible have emerged, placing the book of Chronicles at either the beginning or the end of the Writings.

To determine the best placement for Chronicles, there are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration. First, it is important to understand the implications that each placement has on the theology of the book by itself. Second, it is necessary to evaluate how the placement of this book affects the theological thrusts of the other books within the Writings. Third, it is important to understand the theological thrust of the Hebrew Bible as a whole depending on which book concludes the collection of Ezra/Nehemiah or Chronicles. These three factors deal more with the internal evidence (the biblical author’s intentions) of the Hebrew Bible itself, and so, many scholars disagree on the internal connections that are being made on a literary level. The following arguments are an attempt to determine the most plausible explanation for the placement of the book.

The Theology of Chronicles

The content of the book of Chronicles pulls from Samuel and Kings in a way that can appear redundant on the surface. Why did the Chronicler find it necessary to recount these events if they are already written down in other Scripture? In his commentary on the book of Chronicles, Sailhamer addresses this question with two observations.³⁵ “The first is that the writer wanted to give his readers another version of those events... by providing a second picture of Israel’s history, therefore, a fuller appreciation and understanding of those events is given by the chronicler.”³⁶ This is similar to the idea of the four gospels in the New Testament being four separate portraits of Jesus Christ. This gives the reader a fuller understanding of his person and work here on earth.³⁷ The second observation that Sailhamer gives is that the Chronicler is not simply retelling the history of

³³ John H. Sailhamer. “Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible”, 36.

³⁴ Gregory Goswell. “Putting the Book of Chronicles in its Place.” (*Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2: 2017), 283.

³⁵ John Sailhamer. 1983. *First and second Chronicles*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9

Israel, rather he is interpreting it. Therefore, he has written a commentary on the history of Israel.³⁸ Sailhamer asserts that the goal of the Chronicler is to retell the history of Israel selectively which provides a different perspective and theological message.³⁹

Biblical authors are purposely selective in their material for theological reasons. In the gospel of John, the apostle is very forthcoming in his method and purpose for writing his gospel. First of all, the apostle is selective in his material: "Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25).⁴⁰ Second, John chooses his material for a purpose: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:30-31). In the same way, the Chronicler is writing with a purpose and selectively interpreting historical events. In doing so, the message of Chronicles has three main points of emphasis: David and the establishment of his Davidic Dynasty through covenant, the temple and Jerusalem, and the universal significance of both the Davidic king and the influence of the temple.⁴¹

As part of the author's selectivity, the Chronicler focuses on the Kings of Judah, leaving the history of the kings in the northern kingdom unmentioned. Genesis 49:10 says that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him." The Hebrew Bible in its entirety traces the line of the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15) while also describing the seed as one who would bless the nations and possess the gates of his enemies (Gen 22:17). He would be a king from the line of Judah (Gen 17:6; Gen 49:8-12; Num 24:15-19). The Chronicler traces this line to David, who represents the ideal king before God. The Psalms and the Prophets equate the Davidic King with the Messiah. David rightly understood the importance of maintaining proper worship of YHWH in Israel and made a tabernacle for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem (1 Chron 15:1). He laid the foundation for worship by establishing the temple singers and organized temple service (1 Chron 16:4-42) and established the throne of David in 1 Chronicles 17:7-15. David wanted to build the temple for the Ark, but God said that his son, Solomon, would accomplish this task and that his kingdom would be established forever (vv 12-14). David anticipated that this covenant would reach beyond his son and continue into the future: "You have also spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come, and have shown me future generations, O LORD God! (v 17). David also understood that Israel was called out of Egypt, elected by God to be a blessing to the nations (vv 21-27). The election of Israel and the election of the House of David are part of God's universal plan to bring all people to worship himself.⁴²

The covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai gives the backdrop for the evaluation of the king. For the Chronicler, the act of obedience and trust in God and his law is of utmost importance.⁴³ The covenant was given with the condition that the people obeyed and trusted God with all their heart, soul, and mind. As the Chronicler assesses the Davidic kings of Israel, the anticipation of the

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

⁴¹ Hendrik Koorevaar, "Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Old Testament Canon", *The Shape of the Writings*, 218.

⁴² Ibid, 219.

⁴³ John Sailhamer. *First and Second Chronicles*, 11-12.

Messiah is seen in his focus on their works and their adherence to the Law. Obedience would bring about the covenant blessings and disobedience would bring about curses and eventual exile. Much of this evaluation was focused on the king's ability to maintain proper worship within the temple.

The temple itself is given much attention including its preparation, its building, and its dedication (1 Chron 15:1-17:27; 21:18-26:32; 28:1-29:19; 2 Chron 2:1-8:2). The theology of the temple is tied to its significance and is seen in the prayer of Solomon during its dedication (2 Chron 6:12-42). Anyone who prayed towards the temple, including the foreigner, would be heard by YHWH. The temple is the symbol of God's dwelling with mankind on the earth and serves as a means of drawing the nations to himself through the testimony of his people Israel (1 Chron 16:8-36). The temple was one step closer to the original state of God dwelling among man in Eden (Gen 3:8; 2 Chron 7:1-3). The establishment of the temple and its continued use for worship was a result of the covenant relationship between Israel and YHWH.⁴⁴ The Prophets described a renewed Eden where the nations would come and eternally dwell in God's presence, and the building of the temple as a step towards this restoration. Chronicles emphasizes the importance of the temple and the implications of its building, its destruction, and the command to rebuild it (2 Chron 2:5; 36:23). Namely, the fact that God keeps his promise to be with his people in spite of their rebellion.

The beginning and the end of the book of Chronicles gives the book a universal focus in that Israel's election and task are within the context of God's plan for all humanity. The book begins with Adam and ends with Cyrus, the Persian king. Adam and Eve were to be God's co-regents over all the earth, holding the offices of both priest and king. Adam's line is traced through to David (1 Chron 1:1-9:44), showing the thread of Messianic hope and expectation that is woven throughout the entire story of the Hebrew Bible. At the beginning of the book, the foundation of Israel's story and its kings is the creation of mankind. At the end of the book, "Israel is interrelated with all the kingdoms on earth over which YHWH has given Cyrus the right to rule."⁴⁵ Cyrus, under the direction of YHWH, commissions the work for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple where YHWH is to be worshiped (2 Chron 36:23). These two bookends frame Chronicles with a universal theme. "As the people of YHWH, Israel along with David and the temple have universal implications: their horizon is all of humanity."⁴⁶

Throughout the book, the expectation for the Messiah is seen in the evaluation of the Davidic king as each generation passes. The Davidic king was to bring the nations of the earth together to worship YHWH. "The Davidic king (Abraham's seed) is to reign in Jerusalem, the presence of God is to be manifest in the Temple, and there the covenant people are to worship Him."⁴⁷ Even after the exile, the decree of Cyrus gives the reader hope that God will bring about his purposes through the Davidic King. The decree, although already recorded at the end of Ezra/Nehemiah, is shortened and intentionally left without a historical fulfilment (2 Chron 36:22-23). This gives the passage an eschatological reading.

These three themes, namely, the Davidic king, the temple, and their universal purpose, are helpful in understanding the theology of Chronicles as Messianic, eschatological, and faith-oriented. These theological frames point to the Chronicler's intent in writing his book: to close the Hebrew Bible. If the order of the books within the Hebrew Bible begins with Genesis and ends with Ezra-Nehemiah

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hendrik Koorevaar, *Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Old Testament Canon*, 221.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ John Sailhamer. *First and Second Chronicles*, 12

(the order presented within Baba Batra), then the Chronicler appears to understand this order within his own work. Beginning with Adam and ending with Cyrus, “he recalls the beginning of the canon (Genesis) in his introduction and recalls the beginning of the last book of the canon (Ezra-Nehemiah) in his conclusion. This expresses his awareness of the whole Old Testament that comes before; he uses the summarizing method of “beginning and ending,” presenting a concluding interpretive key to all that precedes.”⁴⁸ The Chronicler understood an order to the canon where Genesis came first, and Ezra-Nehemiah came last. As seen in the organization of his material, he writes to close the canon by following the book of Ezra-Nehemiah.⁴⁹

The Theology of the Writings and the Hebrew Bible

With the possibility of Chronicles serving as either the beginning or the end of the Writings, it is important to understand the implications of these placements on the other books within the Writings. If Chronicles is placed at the beginning of the Writings, two theological shifts potentially take place; The Psalms is no longer the first book and is affected by the placement of Chronicles, and Ezra/Nehemiah now serves as the final book of the Writings.⁵⁰ The theological implications on the book of Psalms changes if Chronicles precedes it. The emphasis of the line of David and the hope in rebuilding the place of worship would affect the reading of the Psalms. However, the book of Psalms has a significant role as the first book of the Writings, being a part of the strategic seam tying the Prophets and the Writings together.⁵¹ Psalm 1:1-3 and Malachi 4:4-6 act as a literary seam that tie these two sections of the Hebrew Bible together, echoing the seam between the Law and the Prophets (Deut. 34:9-12 and Josh. 1:5-9).⁵² These strategic seams are composed literary connections that tie the entire canon (Law, Prophets, and the Writings) together. If Chronicles is placed before Psalms at the head of the Writings, then this strategic seam is lost. The book of Ezra-Nehemiah being placed at the end of the Writings would also change the theological thrust of the entire Hebrew Bible, ending in the failure of the people to keep the covenant and the need for the coming of the New. It is clear then, that the placement of the book of Chronicles not only affects the shape of the Writings, but the shape and theology of the Hebrew Bible as well.

The strategic position of the last book of the Hebrew Bible lies in its ability to bookend and emphasize the overall theological message of the entire collection. The Hebrew Bible itself is more than a collection of books; it unifies these books into one. Stephen Dempster describes the collection as a composition. “The more wide-angle lens of the literary scholar allows one to see the intention of the editors of the Bible in their activity of combing the many sources into one literary

⁴⁸ Hendrik Koorevaar, *Chronicles as the Intended Conclusion to the Old Testament Canon*, 207.

⁴⁹ Ibid. This understanding of the material does assume the tripartite form of the Hebrew Bible, with Ezra/Nehemiah being a part of the Ketuvim.

⁵⁰ It could be argued that this doesn't change the theological thrust of the last book, but if in fact Ezra/Nehemiah is the last book of the canon intentionally, the effects push over to the overall message of the entire Hebrew Bible.

⁵¹ John H. Sailhamer. “Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible”, 32. This also assumes that Ruth does not open the Writings, which has not been addressed in this particular paper. For more on this, see L. B. Wolfson "Implications of the place of the book of Ruth in editions, manuscripts, and canon of the Old Testament." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 1, 151-178.

⁵² Deuteronomy 34:9-12 anticipates the coming of another prophet like Moses while identifying Joshua as one full of wisdom. Joshua 1:5-9 describes the wise man as one who meditates upon Scripture day and night. Psalm 1:1-3 cites Joshua 1, also describing the wise man as one who meditates upon the Law day and night. Malachi 4:4-6 anticipates the coming of the prophet Elijah. Both of these seams have similar themes and act as a bridge from one section of the Hebrew Bible to the next, tying the entire collection together as one composition.

work. The Bible is consequently viewed not so much as a library or a large anthology but as one text, with a beginning and an end... Once read as a whole, the larger structure of the Tanak, or the Hebrew Bible, therefore provides a sort of wide-angle lens through which its contents can be viewed.⁵³ Genesis being at the beginning and Chronicles being at the end provides “the visual field of focus for the Tanak”.⁵⁴ Genesis and Chronicles focus on the same themes, following the seed of Eve through Abraham, Judah, and David, anticipating the Messiah.⁵⁵ Having these two books at either end of the canon gives the whole book a Messianic frame as it ends with the eschatological hope that the Messiah is still to come.

Another point to consider is the effect that placing the book of Chronicles at the end has on the book of Daniel. David Noel Freedman has pointed out that the interpretation of Daniel 9 is different if Ezra-Nehemiah closes the Hebrew Bible instead of Chronicles.⁵⁶ If Ezra-Nehemiah is last, “the edict of Cyrus identifies the historical return under Ezra and Nehemiah as the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s vision of seventy years. It is as if Daniel 9, and its view of seventy weeks of years, were nowhere in sight.”⁵⁷ Sailhamer also points out that with Chronicles placed at the end, a “conscious effort” is made to have the very last words of the Bible be the decree of Cyrus.⁵⁸ In this way, the Chronicler has left out a historical fulfillment of the prophesy in Jeremiah and Daniel, which allows for a Messianic reading of all three texts. This agrees with the Hebrew text that is behind the Septuagint version of Jeremiah, and with the interpretation of these texts in the New Testament.⁵⁹ Overall, the internal evidence of the Hebrew Bible, the Writings, and the book of Chronicles itself, is best explained by the strategic placement of the book at the end of the Hebrew Bible.

“Mere” and “Meant” Contextuality⁶⁰

Thus far, this study has argued that the placement of Chronicles at the end of the Hebrew Bible was intentional. Arguments against this thesis have stated that, one, there is no conclusive evidence externally or internally for the location of the book, and two, that the multiple orders of the Writings are merely records of reception history. For the most part, scholars agree that the placement of books inside the canon shape the theological meaning of each book in light of the whole. However, some scholars do not argue for a correct order of the canon. Instead, they argue for the importance of viewing every possibility and appreciating the different theological meanings that each order offers.

The difference between the view that this study argues for and the opposing view outlined above is their understanding of contextuality. “Mere” contextuality acknowledges that the placement of

⁵³ Stephen Dempster. “Geography and Genealogy, Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible”, in *Biblical theology: retrospect and prospect*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press; Leicester, England: Apollos, 2002), 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 68

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 73

⁵⁶ David Noel Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Vintage, 1993)

⁵⁷ John H. Sailhamer. “Biblical Theology and the Composition of the Hebrew Bible”, 35.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 36. The Hebrew text behind the Septuagint version of Jeremiah never identifies the “enemy from the North” as Babylon, leaving room for an interpretation that anticipates an eschatological enemy rather than one fulfilled in history.

⁶⁰ Ched Spellman uses these designators to describe the impact of reading a text in light of its surroundings. These categories are helpful for this discussion. Ched E. Spellman. *Toward a Canon-Conscious Reading of the Bible: Exploring the History and Hermeneutics of the Canon*. (Sheffield Phoenix Press Ltd, 2014).

books within a collection affects the meaning. The reader is aware of material that has come before and reads the current material in light of that information. When reading any other book, the reader may find a title, a table of contents, chapter titles, and subheadings as aids to understanding the book. This is the idea of the paratext, as explained by Gerard Genette:

The literary work consists, exhaustively or essentially, of a text, that is to say (a very minimal definition) in a more or less lengthy sequence of verbal utterances more or less containing meaning. But this text rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. One does not always know if one should consider that they belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to present it.⁶¹

“Mere” contextuality includes all these elements but does not recognize them as intended by the author of the book. “Meant” contextuality looks at the features of the text as an intentional organization of the material that aids the author’s message. The fact that contextuality as a phenomenon is unavoidable is crucial to this part of the discussion, and the reader should evaluate the material based on the location of that material.

Edmon Gallagher, in his article, “The End of the Bible?”⁶² concedes that the message of Chronicles would give warrant to its placement at the end of the Hebrew Bible but claims that the internal and external evidence is not conclusive. Gallagher does not believe external evidence can place Chronicles at the end of the Hebrew Bible before the rabbinic period.⁶³ He works through the external evidence that places Chronicles at the end and finds that it is inconclusive, as this study has also shown. However, this study disagrees with Gallagher’s conclusion. He argues that because both the internal and external evidence are inconclusive on their own, this position is not the best possible explanation (as seen above). Gallagher sees “mere” contextuality as a better way of explaining the theological implications that come with the location of Chronicles. He believes that the book’s placement was not designed.

Gregory Goswell holds a very similar position to Gallagher, adding that the existence of other orders within different faith communities is simply a record of their theological ideas.⁶⁴

The book of Chronicles is found in more than one position in ancient canons of Scripture (Hebrew and Greek). The different canonical placements reflect post-authorial evaluations of the book and its contents. Each position has its rationale and potentially contributes to the understanding of readers. There is nothing to indicate that any one position is the earliest or best. In particular, there is no proof that the Chronicler composed his work to sum up and conclude the OT canon... The positioning of a canonical book relative to other books is by no means value-neutral and reflects a construal of the book by ancient readers. In other words, it preserves evidence of the early history of interpretation of the book. The alternate placements of the book of Chronicles reveal that the compilers of these canons viewed its theological and historical meanings in different ways.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Genette Gérard "Introduction to the Paratext." *New Literary History* no. 2 (1991): 26.

⁶² Edmon L. Gallagher. "The End of the Bible? The position of Chronicles in the Canon." *Tyndale Bulletin* 65 (2014), 181-199.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Gregory Goswell. "Putting the Book of Chronicles in its Place." *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 60, no. 2: (2015) 283.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Goswell also argues that Chronicles would not change the theological message of the Hebrew Bible when compared to the three other witnesses to the end of the canon.⁶⁶ The four different traditions conclude the Hebrew Bible with either Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Daniel, or Malachi, all of which lead to an “eschatological bridge to the NT.”⁶⁷

For those who push back on the thesis of this paper, most would align with what Gallagher and Goswell say. The paratext affects the meaning of each book within the collection of the Hebrew Bible. The question then is this: If the meaning of the book is determined or shaped by its placement within the collection, are there multiple meanings of these books due to the fact that there are multiple orders? It appears that both Goswell and Gallagher take more of a postmodern approach to the question of order within the Hebrew Bible. They identify that there could be theological significance to the placement of the books within the collection, but ultimately, the authors did not place them intentionally. The decision is left to the reader. This conclusion is problematic and does not take into consideration the intended meaning of the author, or their understanding of the canon as a whole.

An Argument for Meant Contextuality

Contextuality, as shown above, is a feature of the Hebrew Bible. If contextuality contributes to the theological message of the collection, it would follow that the order of the books matter. Certain texts were left out of the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and the books that were included were composed and redacted to fit within the whole. In this sense, it only follows that the Hebrew Bible contains “meant” contextuality. Hendrik Koorevaar argues that the paratext and the text must both be taken together when reading and interpreting the Scripture.⁶⁸ He says that the “Scripture embraces features such as the order of the biblical books, the names assigned to different books, and the differing schemes of textual division within these books.”⁶⁹ Because these elements are tied to the actual text, they influence the reader in his or her interpretation of the text. “The text and paratext are for all practical purposes inseparable and have an important interrelationship that influences the reading processes.”⁷⁰ He goes on to explain that there are some texts within the Hebrew Bible that appear to have been added later to form the collection into a single book (the work of an author/composer). For Koorevaar, the very existence of an author/composer who compiles and redacts the books presupposes a “right order”. The very act of this process shows the intention of setting the correct order for the books.

This would mean that there is such a thing as an original or authoritative order in the Hebrew canon. After all, a number of added texts not only belong to the specific book, but have an added value that is only apparent at one particular place in the canon and not another. When these books are moved to another position in the order, this value is lost. ... Because of (these added texts), the

⁶⁶ Gregory Goswell. "Having the last say: the end of the OT." *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society* 58, (2015), 15-30. When looking at the other possible options for the ending of the Hebrew Bible (Ezra-Nehemiah), Goswell does not see any significant changes in the theological thrust of the whole collection. This paper argues that the overall message of hope is replaced with Israel's failure if Ezra-Nehemiah were to end the Hebrew Bible in place of Chronicles.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Hendrik J. Koorevaar, “The Torah Model as Original Macrostructure of the Hebrew Canon: A Critical Evaluation”, *ZAW* 122 (2010): 64-80

⁶⁹ Ibid, 64.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 64.

sequential order and subdivisions belong to the text of the canon itself and are of primary importance.”⁷¹

Koorevaar goes on to argue that there may be value in seeking the theological implications of different orders that are found among witnesses, but he draws attention to the fact that these different orders “belong to the interpretative history of the canon, but not to the canon itself.”⁷² He goes on to argue that various orders follow a basic structure. Koorevaar disagrees with the “Torah model”—the model that is supported in this study—but does find evidence to conclude that the Hebrew Bible must have an intentional order within its collection of books. The very nature of paratextual features and their effect on interpretation and meaning almost require it.

It has been conceded above that the “original” order is almost impossible to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt, but the order is important. It benefits the reader to find the best possible explanation for the final form of the Hebrew Bible.⁷³ Koorevaar points out that theological meaning lies behind the composition of the whole collection. To take a book outside its place within in the canon is synonymous with taking any text out of its original context, which changes its theological interpretation. Placing Chronicles at the end of the collection is intentional and has theological meaning in light of the of biblical material that precedes it. If it is true that a biblical reader is able to examine the potential meaning of a book by accepting multiple orders for the Hebrew Bible, then the final form of the Hebrew Bible and its overall theological message becomes irrelevant. The message is now being interpreted by a foreign concept that is being thrust upon the text by the reader. This denies the Bible the right to determine its own context and structure by which the reader encounters the Bible’s theology.

Conclusion

This study has sought to present both the external and internal evidence of a “right” order to the Hebrew Bible, specifically by focusing on Chronicles, its place in the Writings, and its role as the conclusion to the Hebrew Scriptures. Below is a brief summary of the main points within this study.

The Composition of the Hebrew Bible was a process that included each author’s recognition of a select group of texts with a distinct order. They understood the book’s place amongst the other books and their material was further redacted to fit together as a compositional unit. This presentation of composition presupposes a conceptual canon which eventually grew into the final tripartite form of the Hebrew Bible. The final text exists in a composed and theologically significant order.

Two witnesses to the shape of the Writings (The Leningrad Codex and Baba Batra) provide two different orders of the Writings. L.C. places Chronicles at the beginning and B.B. places the book at the end, which demonstrate a set of theological decisions made by a faith community. These witnesses show that among faith communities, the order mattered because of its theological significance.

⁷¹ Ibid, 66.

⁷² Ibid, 66.

⁷³ For some, the idea of an authoritative or “right order” interferes with the doctrine of Scripture. To say that the order is authoritative and meant by the author/composer of the Tanak would mean that the order is inspired. A full argument is not given in this essay. It is fair to say that the doctrine of Scripture as Scripture itself testifies does not seem to limit the inspiration of the text to the “original” manuscripts.

The external evidence alone cannot decisively place Chronicles at the end of the canon, rather internal evidence within the book itself must be examined. The material that the Chronicler presents within the book is best explained if the author intends for his writing to close the Hebrew Bible. The book's placement implies theological thrust of both the Writing's section and the entire Hebrew Bible. Placing Chronicles at the beginning or at the end of the Writings has effects on the way a reader understands the Psalms. The book that closes the canon (Ezra/Nehemiah or Chronicles being the last book) affects the theological trajectory of the Hebrew Bible. The seams that tie the entire canon together (Duet. 34-Josh. 1, Mal. 3-Ps. 1) are disrupted if the book is placed before the book of Psalms.

Opposing views argue that the different orders of the books are records of reception history among faith communities and do not find conclusive evidence for the location of Chronicles. In this case, they concede that there are theological implications for the location of books within the canon (mere contextuality), but do not see a fixed order. Order within the Hebrew Bible has theological significance. The composition of the Hebrew Bible found its shape through intentional redaction and organization that gave it its theological meaning. This implies meant contextuality.

As has been mentioned earlier, the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible should involve the pursuit of the best explanation for the external and internal evidence of the order. Chronicles as the end of the Hebrew Bible leaves the reader with an eschatological and messianic hope that is meant to strengthen their faith. "Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him. Let him go up."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ 2 Chronicles 36:23

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