

REVELATION



INSPIRATION



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TRANSLATION



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INTERPRETATION



APPLICATION



COMMUNICATION

THE WRITTEN WORD

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, July 26, 2009

The Old Testament Canon (pt. 2)

By 300 to 200 B.C. , the Old Testament canon was considered closed and its arrangement and order had taken shape.

IV. THE CLOSING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

- A. The testimony of the first century Jewish historian Josephus for the canon of Scripture is as follows: “For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another [as the Greeks have], but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to those books of our own nation, is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add anything to them, to take anything from them, or to make any change in them; but it becomes natural to all Jews, immediately and from their very birth, to esteem those books to contain divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”¹
- B. As to the comment of Josephus that there are only “twenty-two books, Gleason Archer writes, “This apparently involved the inclusion of Ruth with Judges and of Lamentations with Jeremiah. Yet essentially, whether thirty-nine books, or twenty-four, or twenty-two, the basic divisions of the Hebrew canon have remained the same.”²
- C. Dr. Archer elsewhere notes; “The earlier division [of the Old Testament books] consisted of the same content as the thirty-nine books [which we have], but arranged in only twenty-four books. This meant that I and II Samuel were counted as one book; likewise I and II Kings and I and II Chronicles. The twelve Minor Prophets were also counted as one book, and Ezra and Nehemiah formed a single unit.”³

V. THE ORDER OF THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS IN THE JEWISH CANON.

- A. According to the order of books as found in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), the order is as follows:
1. The Law (*Torah*; also called the Pentateuch): the five books of Moses;
 2. The Prophets (*Nebiim*) which included the “former” prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and the Kings), and the “latter” prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets from Hosea to Malachi);

3. The Writings (*Kethubim*; also called the Hagiographa) which included Ruth, the Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Lamentations and Daniel.
- B. In Josephus' reckoning, Judges and Ruth were one book, as also were 1 and 2 Samuel; 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Chronicles; Ezra and Nehemiah; Jeremiah and Lamentations; and the twelve Minor Prophets.⁴
- C. Five Old Testament books were combined together and read during the five great Jewish holidays (in a grouping called the Megilloth):
 1. Song of Songs at Passover;
 2. Ruth at Pentecost;
 3. Lamentations at Tisheah Beab (fast day in memory of the destruction of the first and second temples);
 4. Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles;
 5. Esther at Purim.
- D. The three-part division above matches the division our Lord gave of the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms in Luke 24:44.
- E. The arrangement we have in our English Bible is based on the arrangement of Jerome's Latin Vulgate (which included the Apochrypha).

VI. THE SYMMETRY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

John Lawrence noted the perfect symmetry of the thirty-nine books as they are arranged in our English Bible:

- A. THE BOOKS OF HISTORY (17) -- (The historical past)
 1. Law (5)
 2. History (12)
 - a. Pre-exile (9)
 - b. Post-exile (3).
- B. THE BOOKS OF EXPERIENCE (5) -- (The spiritual present)

"These books are international in scope because their truth does not change."
- C. THE BOOKS OF PROPHECY (17) -- (The prophetic future)
 1. Major prophets (5)
 2. Minor prophets (12)
 - a. Pre-exile (9)
 - b. Post-exile (3)⁵

¹Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1.8, 38-42; Ages Library.

²Gleason L. Archer, Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 68.

³Gleason L. Archer; cited in Rene Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 46n.

⁴Pache, p. 170.

⁵John W. Lawrence, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Portland, OR: Central Bible Church, 1973, 1982), p. 1.