

Introduction to the Survey of the Old Testament

1A. A Reading Chronology (or a reading pattern)

It is easy to remember the four topical divisions of the OT that we have inherited from the LXX: law, history, poetry, and prophecy (the LXX is the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the OT compiled by Jews in Egypt between 250 and 100 B.C.).

The law of course refers to the five books of Moses, also called the Pentateuch. History references Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther. The poetic books are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. Prophecy is divided into major and minor prophets. From this base, it is a quick step to memorizing the books of the OT in order as we have them in our English Bibles.

More important than memorizing the books of the Bible is a working knowledge of the historical context of each book that paves the way for intelligent reading in the broadest sense. This involves an understanding of the relationship between the books of the OT. Ideally, a chronological relationship, one that is different from the arrangement descended from the LXX, would give us the broad context that would helpfully cue us in as readers.

But there are problems here with an exact chronological relationship.

1) We have difficulty determining the date of writing and the authorship of some books (Who wrote the book of Job? Who wrote Chronicles?).

2) Some books develop a history that is early though the written account is much later. For example, the character Job lives in patriarchal times but some things indicate that the author lived during the days of the Israelite kingdom other things argue a much earlier date of composition (Dillard, 201). Similarly, the writer/narrator of Chronicles lived after 539 while most of his narrative took place before 586. Notably, Chronicles could be covered with Samuel and Kings per the parallel sections, but it might be best covered in the post-exilic period (after 539) to give another look at the Kingdom from a post-exilic perspective.

3) Books that are extensively or fully historical are not classified with the historical books (as the five books of Moses).

4) The order of the minor prophets is clearly out of historical sequence while most of them explicitly date their prophecies and thus cue us in historically. Still some cannot be precisely dated.

5) It is difficult, if not impossible, to diverge from the force of long established habit (of reading the OT in the pattern of our English Bibles: law, history, poetry, and prophecy).

We cannot give a simple historical chronology for the OT but we can give an *arrangement for reading purposes* that takes the following principle into account: We can place the books into the history of the OT by their historical content rather than by date of writing (Job with Genesis; the prophets by the time they say they prophesied regardless as to when they were actually written).

Within the above constraint and with some loose ends, a rough and ready chronological unfolding of the contents of the books of the OT can be constructed as an arrangement for intelligent reading in broad historical context.

The following arrangement can serve as the precise order in which we read or it can serve as a contextual guide if we read in the established order of our English Bibles. As a contextual guide, we can refer to this arrangement as an aid in historically locating the book we are reading.

2A. A framework for the reading pattern

We can put the arrangement for reading purposes into the framework of a brief 8-part sketch of OT history:

EARLY BEGINNINGS TO MOSES
MOSES TO JOSHUA
JOSHUA TO THE MONARCHY
MONARCHY (Saul, David, Solomon) TO THE DIVIDED KINGDOM
DIVIDED KINGDOM TO ASSYRIAN EXILE IN 722
JUDAIC KINGDOM TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE IN 586
BABYLONIAN EXILE TO THE RETURN IN 539
RETURN TO THE END OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (539-)

3A. The reading pattern coordinated with the 8-part sketch of OT history

EARLY BEGINNINGS TO MOSES

Genesis
Job

MOSES TO JOSHUA

Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

JOSHUA TO THE MONARCHY

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel 1-8

MONARCHY (Saul, David, Solomon) TO THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

1 Sa 9.1-2 Sa to 1 Ki 11.43 [Saul, David, Solomon]
1 Chronicles [life and death of David]
2 Chronicles 1-9 [life and death of Solomon]
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Songs

DIVIDED KINGDOM TO ASSYRIAN EXILE IN 722 (931-722, Merrill, *HSOT*, 29)

1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17
2 Chronicles 10-28
Amos
Jonah
Isaiah
Hosea
Micah

JUDAIC KINGDOM TO THE BABYLONIAN EXILE IN 586 (722-586)

2 Kings 18-25
2 Chronicles 29-36
Joel
Nahum
Zephaniah
Habbakuk
Jeremiah

BABYLONIAN EXILE TO THE RETURN IN 539 (586-539)

Daniel
Obadiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel

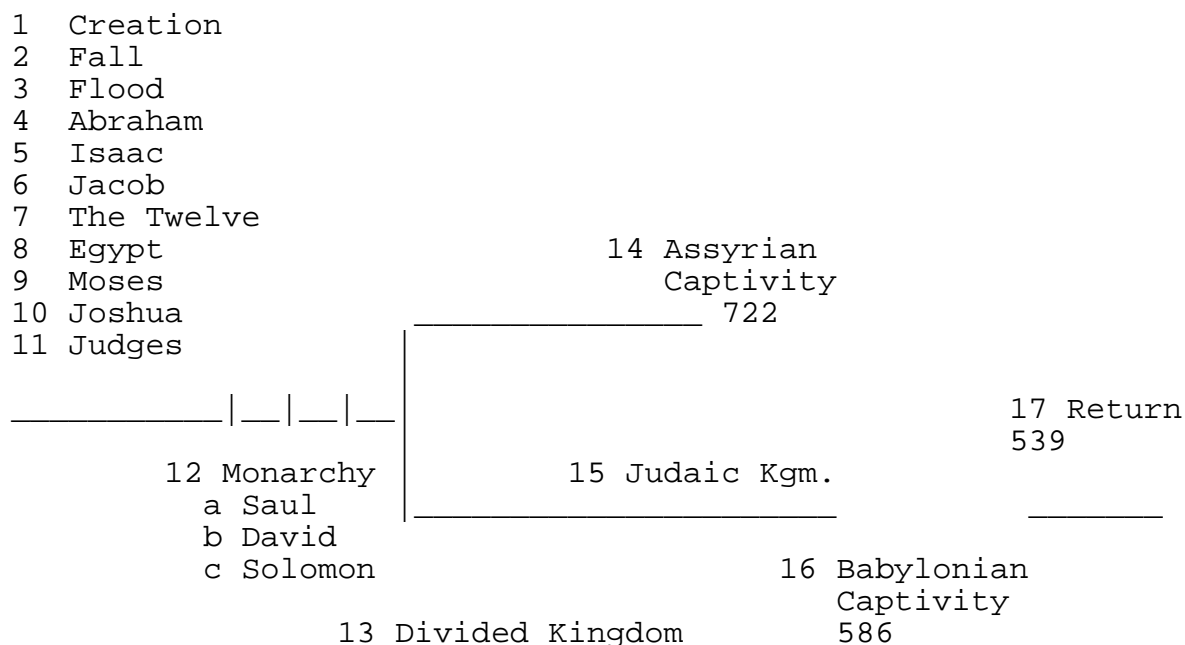
RETURN TO THE END OF THE OLD TESTAMENT (539-)

Chronicles (1 & 2, a postexilic unit)
Ezra-Nehemiah
Haggai
Zechariah
Esther
Malachi

For example: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel

From this arrangement, Isaiah prophesies before the Assyrian Exile.
Jeremiah prophesies after the Assyrian Exile and before the Babylonian Exile.
Ezekiel and Daniel give their prophecies during the Babylonian Exile before the return.

4A. The brief sketch of OT history visualized



4A. Theme

The theme of the OT is the covenant giving and keeping action of the Creator on behalf of man His image bearer through which He is working out His purposes for His own glory in historical stages that display His love, wisdom, goodness, justice, grace and mercy.

In one word, "promise" summarizes Genesis to Malachi. In the idea of covenant-promise the diverse OT elements of hope all come together (such as the anticipation of Messiah, the coming of the kingdom, the coming of a new day).

This theme statement goes against the grain of many scholars who claim that it is impossible to accurately formulate a single theme of the OT that takes in its rich diversity. The basis for this theme statement includes some key NT texts and this may be why many object (they oppose or neglect reading the OT as Christians in light of the coming of Christ). Some key NT texts are:

Luke 22.20 the new covenant now implying the old covenant anticipation
 Hebrews 13.20 the eternal covenant indicating what old & new realize
 Hebrews 4.1-4 promise from the beginning is realized through history

Suggested Reading

1 Corinthians 10.1-13

Summary graph:

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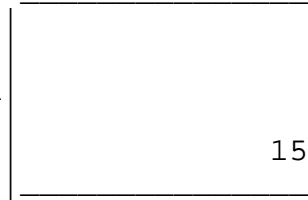


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