

## The Hebrew Bible

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### Origin

The story of the Hebrew Bible is the story of God speaking to His people by His holy prophets. First, Moses the Prophet wrote the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, entitled the Torah. Throughout these books, God instructs him to write down specific things in a book (Ex 17:14; 34:27; 24:4-7; 34:28; Nu 33:2; Dt 31:9, 22, 24). Before his death, Moses instructed Joshua to “Take this book of the Torah and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God so that it may remain there as a witness against you” (Dt 31:26). After the death of Moses, the Lord charged Joshua to meditate on the book of Moses day and night so that he might obey all that is written in them (Josh 1:8).

Afterwards, other prophets like Joshua, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel read the books of Moses, spoke to the people on behalf of the LORD, and wrote down things down as God led. Along the way, kingly prophets such as David and Solomon meditated on the books of Moses and wrote down psalms and wisdom. Finally, the Lord exiled Israel for breaking the covenant just as Moses prophesized before his death. Other prophets arose, such as Daniel and Ezra and were found in exile, reading the books of Moses and Jeremiah, seeking to live faithfully in light of God’s instructions, and recording as the Lord directed them. As they were allowed to return to the land and begin rebuilding the city, Ezra, the skilled scribe and priest, wrote Chronicles – the last book the Hebrew Bible. All along the way God spoke by His holy prophets and led them to write down certain things in a book for future generations.

In Chronicles, Ezra recounted the books that had been written before him, going all the way back to Adam and tracking his genealogy to David. He then recounted the narrative of the Judean kings from David unto the Babylonian Captivity and Cyrus’ decree to allow Israel to return from exile. By writing the book of Chronicles, Ezra effectively closed the canon of God’s revelation and Israel entered the period of God’s silence because there was no prophet after Ezra. Evidence for this dead period can be found in 1 Maccabees and the Dead Sea Manual of Discipline. 1 Maccabees 9:27 recognizes that the prophets had ceased and 1 Maccabees 4:46 records the Jewish leaders’ decision to abstain from rebuilding the temple mount “until the coming of a prophet.” The Dead Sea Manual of Discipline also looks forward to the “coming of a prophet...” So, in the second temple period, faithful Jews are found reading their Hebrew Bibles and waiting for a prophet to arise that they might hear God speak again. They were waiting for a voice to cry out in the wilderness to prepare the way for a new exodus (Is 40:3).

### Structure & Ordering

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections: the Torah/Law, Prophets, and Writings. These divisions most likely reflect the handiwork of Ezra. Historically, the first reference to the tripartite structure occurred around 130 BC when Ben Sira’s grandson wrote a prologue to his work, *Ecclesiasticus*. In the prologue, he referred to the Hebrew Bible as “the Law, the Prophets, and the other writings of our fathers (vv.8-10). The second reference comes from the Qumran

Community. In the 4QMMT, the author refers to the Hebrew Bible as “the book of Moses, the books of the prophets, and David.” The reference to David here seems to be a reference to David’s majority authorship of the Psalms, which begin the third section of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, Jesus himself says “All things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Lk 24:44). In this quote, Jesus refers to the tripartite division of the Hebrew Bible to claim that it is all about Him. He used the Psalms in a similar manner as 4QMMT used David. Both of these references refer to the first book of the section in order to refer to the whole. Thus, it should be concluded that the tripartite structure of the Hebrew Bible goes back to at least the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC – if not all the way back to Ezra.

<u>Torah</u>	<u>Prophets</u>	<u>Writings</u>
Genesis	Joshua	Psalms
Exodus	Judges	Job
Leviticus	Samuel (1&2 Samuel)	Proverbs
Numbers	Kings (1&2 Kings)	Ruth
Deuteronomy	Isaiah	Song of Songs
	Jeremiah	Qohelet (Eccl.)
	Ezekiel	Lamentations
	Book of the Twelve	Esther
	(Hosea, Joel, Amos,	Daniel
	Obadiah, Jonah, Micah,	Ezra-Nehemiah
	Nahum, Habakkuk,	Chronicles (1&2
	Zephaniah, Haggai,	Chronicles)
	Zechariah, Malachi)	

In terms of ordering, the first section contains the books of Moses – Genesis to Deuteronomy. All these books are authored by Moses and are referred to as the Torah or Law; however, some modern scholars call it the Pentateuch. These five books make of the heart of the Hebrew Bible.

The second section is entitled the *Nevi'im*, which is the Hebrew word for prophets. It contains the Former Prophets, which are the books we tend to think of as historical writings: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. In the Hebrew Bible, Samuel and Kings are each one book, not two – like in our English Bibles. The Latter Prophets consist of our traditional prophet books: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of the Twelve (the minor prophets). It is important to understand that all these books are considered prophets in the Hebrew Bible. As for this

ordering, it should be noted that some of our historical sources disagree with the ordering of the Latter Prophets above.

The third section is the *Ketuvim*, which means writings. As for the ordering of these books, it should be noted that our historical Hebrew sources all disagree on the exact order. The Babylonian Talmud, Masoretic Text, and Rabbinical all have different books that begin the section. The Talmudic order begins with Ruth, the Masoretic text begins with Chronicles, while the Rabbinic order begins with Psalms. The Rabbinic order seems to be correct here because of the previous referents to “David” and the “Psalms” as the head the section, which all pre-date these three sources. Internal evidence seems to accord with this fact because Psalm 1 parallels the first chapter of Joshua with a call to meditate on the Torah day and night.

Some orderings also place Proverbs before Job and SOS before Ruth. Nevertheless, the ordering above is the most plausible ordering because of internal evidence. Psalms, Job, and Proverbs are grouped together because they are all wisdom literature. Job is placed before Proverbs to prepare the reader for the general maxims in Proverbs. Ruth is placed after Proverbs because Boaz calls her a “virtuous woman” (Ru 3:11), which is the exact Hebrew phrase in Prov 31:10 to begin the depiction of the Proverbs 31 woman. Thus, Ruth is the enfleshment of the Proverbs 31 woman. Song of Songs continues this picture using Solomon’s bride. Qohelet/Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, and Esther are linked to Ruth and Song of Songs by the main character of each of these books being a feminine pronoun in Hebrew. Moreover, Daniel hooks to Esther as one also living in exile. He is reading the Torah and the Prophets – particularly Jeremiah and awaiting the new exodus. Ezra-Nehemiah picture the physical return of some Israelites and the rebuilding of the second temple, but the Lord never comes to dwell in it. Something is missing! Thus, Ezra writes Chronicles to summarize the Hebrew Bible, track the lineage of the Messiah, and to point the people to wait for the Messiah to come who will bring restoration. This is the message of the Hebrew Bible.