

Paul’s “Cloak” and the Completion of the Tanakh

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The study of the canon of sacred Scripture in both the Tanakh (Hebrew Old Testament) and the Greek New Testament has produced sharp dispute within the academic community.¹ Our purpose here is not to resolve differences of opinion on this issue, but rather to explore implications of current research in the Word Count Project,² as it relates to the theme of this *Festschrift*—and to the life work of John Olley, who exemplifies the successful bridging of the world of academia and ministry within the Christian faith community. The thesis explored here is that the primary stimulus in the formation of the canon of both the Tanakh of Jewish tradition and the Greek New Testament in the Christian Bible takes place within the context of mission—and that it takes place primarily at the beginning of the historical process, rather than in the latter stages, in both instances. In particular, we posit the concept of “master editors” for both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

Formation of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) in Nascent Judaism

It is often assumed that the Tanakh achieved canonical acceptance among the Jews in a three-fold historical process: beginning ca. 400 B.C.E. with the Torah (Pentateuch), followed by the Prophets by ca. 200 B.C.E., and completed with the addition of the Writings by ca. 90–100 C.E. The acronym *TaNakh* reflects the popular understanding of this three stage canonical process.³ From this point of view, the earliest “Christians” in Jerusalem, as Messianic Jews, received a closed Old Testament canon consisting of 22 books, which Josephus describes as five books by Moses, thirteen by the prophets, and four other books of hymns and wisdom (*Against Apion* 1.8).⁴ This early “Jewish” concept

of the Tanakh played an important role in the shaping of the Greek New Testament as a completion of the Tanakh.

Josephus does not list the 22 books of the Tanakh as such, however, and there is no consensus within the scholarly community as to which four books constitute his third category.⁵ The most convincing identification of the books within his three divisions is found in Lightstone's discussion of the tripartite rabbinic Bible:⁶

I The Pentateuch (Torah [of Moses])—5 books

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

II The Prophets (*Nevi'im*)—10 books (8 in the older tradition)

The Former Prophets: 6 books (4 in the older tradition)

Joshua
Judges
1 Samuel {combined with 2 Samuel to form a single book}
2 Samuel
1 Kings {combined with 2 Kings to form a single book}
2 Kings

The Latter Prophets: 4 books

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
"The Twelve" [Minor Prophets] {as a single book}

III The Writings (*Kethuvim*)—9 books

Psalms
Proverbs
Job
"Five Scrolls" (*Megilloth*) {as a single book}
Daniel
Ezra
Nehemiah
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles

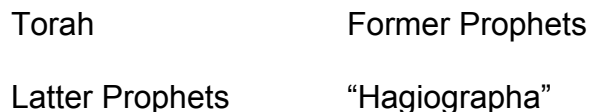
The four books in Josephus' third category are: Psalms, Proverbs, Job and the "Five Scrolls" (*Megilloth*—i.e., Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther).

The five "Festal Scrolls" are thus a single canonical category, much the same as the twelve "Minor Prophets." The "thirteen prophets" in Josephus' second category are three groups of four arranged around the book of Daniel:



Daniel is thus presented as a prophet who functions as a "bridge" connecting three groups of four books: the Former Prophets, the Latter Prophets, and the still "Later Prophets" (i.e., the "Work of the Chronicler").

David Noel Freedman makes a strong case for a "master editor" responsible for writing what he calls the "Primary History"—the Torah plus the Former Prophets.⁷ It is likely, however, that this "master editor" was responsible for the entire 17-book "Deuteronomistic Canon" within a four-part literary structure, which may be outlined in the form of a simple chiasm:



The term "Hagiographa" refers to the four books in the Tanakh, which, according to Josephus, "contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life" (*Against Apion* 1.8):

Psalms

Proverbs

Job

“Megilloth”

Evidence for Freedman’s conclusion is found in a series of episodes, which are distributed book by book through eight successive books in the Tanakh. This series of episodes chart the violation of the first nine of the Ten Commandments one by one, starting with the sin of national apostasy (the worship of the golden calf, Exodus 32), which violates the First and Second Commandments. The series concludes with the sin of bearing false witness (the Ninth Commandment) on the part of Jezebel in the story of Naboth’s vineyard in 1 Kings 21. Because covetousness lies behind all the crimes committed, each act implicitly breaks the Tenth Commandment as well.

The Ten Commandments constitute the essence of the covenant relationship established between God and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai. The pattern of defiance of that covenant led inexorably to the downfall of the nation, the destruction of their Temple in Jerusalem, and the banishment of survivors from the Promised Land. The message is clear to a community in the Babylonian Exile that their fate is not the result of God’s abandoning them. It is the consequence of their abandonment of God. The true people of God are those who maintain their covenant commitment by observing the Ten Commandments.

Genesis does not include an episode in this series because the covenant at Mount Sinai, in which the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments were given to Moses, takes place later—in the book of Exodus. Freedman identifies the “master editor” as the scribe Baruch, working together with his brother Seraiah, in the sixth century B.C.E. (see Jeremiah 32:12; 45:1–5; and 51:59–64).

I would add two items to Freedman's discovery about the canonical process. In the first place, the work of the "master editor" included the Latter Prophets as well as the Former Prophets, and also the "Hagiographa" (Psalms, Proverbs, Job and the *Megilloth*) as well. This "Hagiographa" was subsequently expanded into the fourth and concluding section of the Tanakh—the Writings (*Kethuvim*), which took place in the formation of the 22-book "Pentateuchal Canon" in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Moreover, the scribe Ezra takes his place within the list of "master editors" in the canonical process that produced the Tanakh of Jewish tradition (ca. 400 B.C.E.).

Second, I posit the nature of the editing process, which transformed sacred story into canonical Scripture, for Baruch and his brother Seraiah stand within a scribal family in ancient Israel that had mastered the ancient principles of numerical composition. Ezra, the scribe *par excellence* in ancient Israel, who was second only to Moses in importance among the Jews of antiquity, continued this same ancient practice.

The phenomenon of numerical composition is the determining factor in producing "canonical" (authoritative) texts in ancient Israel.⁸ By weaving the numerical value of the ineffable name YHWH into the fabric of the text, these works became symbolically the "word of God." The scribes of ancient Israel were trained in this method of literary composition, which survived well into the Common Era. And, as we will see below, Luke (working together with the apostle Paul) was a "master editor" within a modification of this same scribal tradition, in the composition of the *Completed Tanakh*—i.e., the Jewish Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) plus the Greek New Testament.

Completion of the Tanakh: The Addition of the Greek New Testament

Though there is virtual consensus among biblical scholars on the translation of the Greek word φαίλονην in 2 Tim 4:13 with the meaning "cloak" (i.e., a "thick, upper

garment” of some sort), truth is not measured by majority opinion. This term is a *hapax legomenon*—it appears only here in the Greek New Testament. In the great uncial texts of antiquity the term is spelled φελόνης. The common interpretation of the word as “cloak” in various translations of the New Testament (ancient and modern), which is taken from the Greek word φαινόνης (“cloak”), presumes a metathesis. The fact that such a metathesis did take place is demonstrated by the fact that the word φελόνι means “cloak” in modern Greek. The diminutive form φαιλόνιον, with a similar meaning, appears in Greek papyri of the second and third centuries C.E.⁹ In modern Greek, the word φαιλόνιον refers to the main outer vestment of an eastern orthodox priest.

Liddell and Scott do not list the word φαιλόνης as such; but under the word φαινόνης they cite the New Testament (presumably 2 Tim 4:13) with a note that “the forms φαιλόνης and φελόνης are dubious.”¹⁰ The use of the word φελόνι in modern Greek with the meaning “cloak” is not persuasive in terms of determining the meaning of the word in antiquity; for this usage can be explained from the common interpretation of the word φαιλόνην (or φελόνι) in the Greek New Testament. Moreover, the discussion of whether the term φαινόνης is a Latin loanword form *paenuula* (Hahn, Fraenkel, and Schwyzer), or whether the Latin *paenuula* is borrowed from an original Greek φαινόλα (Moulton and Milligan) is not relevant to our discussion here; for we are dealing with the word φαιλόνην and not the word φαινόνην.

It appears that φαινόνην in 2 Tim 4:13 is a technical term that was not widely understood by those responsible for transmitting and translating the Greek New Testament, ancient and modern. Thus the fact that the Syriac Peshitta translates the term as “book-carrier” deserves a closer look, particularly when the second half of that verse describes its contents, namely “papyrus scrolls” (τά βιβλία) and “parchment

leaves” (τάς μεμβράνας). What we have here may be likened to the word “jacket” in English, which in addition to its primary meaning of “a short coat” designed to be placed around the upper part of the human body, is also used for purposes other than clothing, such as a life *jacket*, or even a book *jacket*—which is even used in reference to recordings, audio tapes, compact disks, and DVDs in the music industry.

When we encounter an unfamiliar word in any language, our first recourse in determining its meaning is its literary context. And here we encounter a problem so far as the traditional interpretation of the word φαινόλην is concerned. In Acts 28:30, we read that Paul “lived (in Rome) two whole years *at his own expense* and welcomed all who came to him.” Paul had the means to purchase a cloak in Rome to deal with the cold of winter, if he needed one. Why then would he send a message all the way to Asia Minor to obtain his cloak for the approaching winter season? And why did he not fetch this cloak earlier, when he was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea? Moreover, Paul had friends with him who would gladly have made that purchase for him locally in either instance. Paul’s request that Timothy do his “best to come before winter” (2 Tim 4:21) need not be interpreted as fear of the discomfort he would face shortly in a cold Roman prison. It is more likely that Paul’s concern here reflects his personal knowledge of the changing weather, which would make a sea voyage on Timothy’s part dangerous and cause him to delay his journey from Asia Minor to Rome. Paul’s recent experience in his sea voyage off the coast of Crete as the ship departed from Fair Havens on route to a better harbor at Phoenix, where they intended to wait out the winter weather, was fresh in his mind (see Acts 27). The adverse winds of the approaching winter season made that journey from Sidon, past Cyprus, and on to the island of Crete difficult. It was an early winter storm that drove the ship across the Mediterranean Sea to shipwreck on

Malta where Paul and Luke almost lost their lives. Paul knew that if Timothy did not come to Rome before winter, it would be a lengthy wait before Timothy and Mark could join Paul and Luke in their “canonical ministry” in Rome, which appears to have been focused on the formation of the Greek New Testament as a numerical composition.

In their study of the codex in antiquity, Roberts and Skeat reached the conclusion that the word *μεμβράνας* in 2 Tim 4:13 refers to parchment leaves with writing on both sides.¹¹ This particular text is apparently the oldest reference to a codex in antiquity. Every fragment of the Greek New Testament recovered from antiquity is written on a leaf from the pages of a codex. There are no surviving fragments of the Greek New Testament from scrolls; for from the very beginning, the New Testament as canonical Scripture was apparently written in the form of a codex. Moreover, it is possible that Paul and others in early Christianity are responsible for inventing the codex, in which pages were sewn together to form the first “books” in the way we think of them today. They did this to gain ready access to the content of the Scriptures in their apologetic activity as evangelists; for it is much easier to locate a specific text by turning the pages of a codex than by unrolling a ponderous scroll.

At the time 2 Tim 4:13 was written, there was no Greek word for a “book” in the way that word is used today. Our text suggests that the word *βιβλίον* refers specifically to a papyrus scroll, whereas the word *μεμβράνα* refers to the pages of a codex. On the other hand, the English word Bible, which is derived from the Greek word *βίβλος*, refers exclusively to a “codex-form” of a book; whereas in antiquity the *βιβλία* were in fact scrolls. It is easy to see the source of confusion here, and to understand why the translation of a technical term from the nascent book-making industry of antiquity as

“cloak” gained wide credence on the part of interpreters and translators of the Greek New Testament through the centuries.

The consequences are profound when the Greek text of 2 Tim 4:13 is properly interpreted; for it is a bit like putting on a new pair of glasses with the right prescription, which enable us to see more clearly at a glance what before was blurred and consequently misinterpreted. The Greek text of 2 Tim 4:10 can be read quite differently from the interpretation of the NRSV: “for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” If Demas deserted Paul at this point in time, how does one explain other references that present him as a loyal colleague of Paul? If these other texts refer to points in time prior to the presumed desertion of 2 Tim 4:10, there is no problem; but a close reading suggests that such is not the case.

In Col 4:14, Demas appears in association with Luke, Aristarchus *and Mark* (4:10), Jesus Justus (4:11), and Epaphras (4:12). From this passage, it appears that Mark, Aristarchus, and Jesus Justus were Jews (cf. 4:11); but Demas, Epaphras, and Luke were Gentiles. Demas is also mentioned in Philemon 24, in company with Epaphras, Aristarchus, Luke—and *once again Mark*—among those present with Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. In 2 Tim 4:9–13, Demas has parted company with Paul—*before the arrival of Mark*; for Demas departed for Thessalonica, and Luke alone remained with Paul in Rome (4:11). In other words, Aristarchus, Epaphras, and the others—including *Mark*—have not yet arrived in Rome. Timothy is instructed to *bring Mark* with him when he comes to join forces with Paul and Luke (2 Tim 4:11), and Mark is present with Demas in both of these references. If the supposed “desertion” of Demas took place before Mark’s arrival in Rome, it was resolved rather quickly; for Demas is present in Rome with Paul, Mark, and the others at the time the letters to the Colossians

and to Philemon were written. Both of these letters were written while Paul was in prison in Rome—in the company of Mark.

Numerous scholars call attention to the fact that the description of Demas as “in love with this present world” is eschatological language. Moreover, it should be noted that Demas went to Thessalonica; and the subject of 2 Thessalonians, in particular, is the matter of eschatology. 1 Thessalonians presents the “second coming” of Jesus as imminent, and the author’s concern is to prepare the church for this approaching day of the Lord (1 Thes 4:13–5:11). In sharp contrast, the author of 2 Thessalonians is taking pains to refute the idea that Jesus’ return is near by reminding the church of a number of events that must precede it (2:1–12). The author draws on a rich reservoir of apocalyptic tradition to show that the church’s present affliction will be reversed on the day of the Lord (1:5–10). Since that climactic day has not yet arrived (2:1–12), actions in the present circumstances continue to be important (2:15–3:16).

Though many scholars conclude that Paul is not the author of 2 Thessalonians, it is possible to read this letter as an attempt on Paul’s part to clarify his earlier discussion on matters of eschatology. The content of this letter may also be interpreted as an attempt on Paul’s part to restore Demas as a colleague, after his departure for Thessalonica, when he was not yet ready to accept Paul’s teaching on the subject of eschatology that projected certain events into the more distant future.

In the middle of the first century C.E. there was widespread belief in the approaching dawn of a new age among both Christians and Jews throughout the Roman Empire. And for many, including Paul, the year 63 C.E. was a cardinal year in prophetic expectation. According to Wacholder, a new sabbatical cycle of seven years in the Jewish calendar commenced in the fall of that year.¹² For Jews, the sabbatical

cycles were important prophetic indicators. The book of Daniel posits seventy sabbatical cycles of seven years until the Kingdom of God would arrive on earth. Daniel divided those 490 years into a period of 49 years (seven times the seven-year sabbatical cycle), another 434 years (62 x 7 sabbatical cycles), and a final seven-year period that is divided into two parts of 3½ years each. Regardless of what the author of Daniel may have originally meant, many in the first century believed that the “seventieth week of years” in Daniel’s prophecy was near at hand. They specifically thought that it would coincide with the sabbatical cycle scheduled to begin in 63 C.E. and to end in 70 C.E. These final seven years of Daniel’s prophecy were thought to embrace a period of great trouble for Israel, the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple. The conclusion of the seven years was expected to witness the advent of the messianic Kingdom of God. For Paul and others, this meant that Jesus would return at this time to begin his millennial reign as king in Jerusalem.

Paul believed that the glorious return of Christ would be an occasion when “the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thes 4:16–17). These words were apparently written around 50 C.E. Some years later Paul elaborated on his eschatological beliefs in greater detail to the church at Corinth:

“But each in his own order. Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when (Christ) hands over the kingdom of God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last

enemy to be destroyed is death . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:23–28).

Paul was so certain of the soon arrival of God’s kingdom that he told the Romans that “Satan would be crushed under their feet very soon” (Rom 16:20).

The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Letter of James express similar belief in the imminence of Christ’s return. Hebrews speaks of “these last days” (1:2), “the end of the age” (9:26), the day of reckoning is “approaching” (10:25), for “in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay” (10:37). James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred in the spring of 62 C.E. in Jerusalem. In his letter, he told his readers that it was “the last days” and that they should be patient “until the coming of the Lord . . . for the coming of the Lord is near” (Jas 5:3, 7, 8). The apostle John was no less urgent in his appeal that the end of the age was near: “Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). The return of Christ in that generation seemed an assured thing because Jesus himself was thought to have taught it: “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place” (Matt 24:34). Jesus told his disciples that some of them would not die before they would “see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom” (Matt 15:27–28).

In popular belief, however, two important events had to take place before the last sabbatical period of Daniel’s prophecy could begin. Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed first, according to Dan 8:26–27. Moreover, the Roman Empire had to be overthrown; for there was hardly a prophetic interpreter at that time who did not consider the Roman Empire to be the “iron legs” of the Babylonian image in Daniel 2.

The “iron legs” would break into ten divisions, some strong as iron and others weak as miry clay. In 63 C.E., when the new sabbatical cycle began, those “iron legs” were as strong as ever.

Instead of a world war starting between East and West in 63 C.E., followed by a revolt of the various kingdoms within the Roman dominion, to fulfill what Christians thought to be Christ’s prophecies (Matt 24:6–7), the opposite occurred. Rome was stronger than ever. With the passing of that year, Paul concluded that the “iron legs” of Rome were going to remain in power for a long time to come. Paul realized that the prophesied ten kings, and the “little horn,” were not going to appear at that time in the first century. Not long afterwards, Peter also became convinced that much time was still left in world history before the second coming of Jesus would take place. That’s what Peter has in mind when he says that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.

By the end of the year 63 C.E. (if not earlier), it was obvious to Paul (and soon to Peter and John as well) that it was necessary to establish an authoritative body of sacred writings for use in the Christian community until those end-time events would actually take place. It is reasonable to assume that Paul and Luke took a significant step to that end some years earlier by editing eight of Paul’s letters, together with the Gospel of Luke, in a form that parallels the Writings of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible), as a fifth and concluding segment of the canon of sacred Scripture.

Torah—five books of Moses:	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Former Prophets—four books	Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings
Latter Prophets—four books	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, “The Twelve” (Minor Prophets)
Former (Hebrew) Writings	9 books (arranged in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern)
Latter (Greek) Writings	9 books (arranged in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern)

The first edition of the Latter (Apostolic) Writings, which were intended to be canonical Scripture from the outset, were structured in a 4 + 1 + 4 pattern as follows.

Romans	1 Corinthians	Timothy	1 Thessalonians
Gospel of Luke			
2 Corinthians	Galatians	2 Thessalonians	Titus

Eight letters of Paul are arranged in two groups of four, with the Gospel of Luke in the center. Each of these sub-groups is structured in the form of a simple chiasm.

The arrangement of the “Latter (Apostolic) Greek Writings” in the first stage of the canonical process that ultimately produced the “Completed Tanakh” reflects the structure of the “Former (Hebrew) Writings,” which may be outlined as follows:

Psalms	Job	Ezra	Nehemiah
Daniel			
Proverbs	<i>Megilloth</i>	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles

The term *Megilloth* refers to the five “Festal Scrolls” (Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentation and Esther). In this structure, Daniel is a connecting bridge between two groups of four books, each of which appears in the form of a simple chiasm.

Paul was apparently already at work in the canonical process before he made his fateful journey to Jerusalem (ca. 58 C.E.); for he states that he left his “book-carrier” (φαιλόνην) and its contents with Carpus at Troas (2 Tim 4:11–13; cf. Acts 20:5). Luke apparently first met Paul in Troas on an earlier occasion before they sailed from Asia Minor to Neapolis, the port city of Philippi in Macedonia (Acts 16:11–12). Luke is

apparently the “man from Macedonia” that Paul saw in a vision (Acts 16:8–9), as C. Peter Wagner argues;¹³ for the account in Acts 16:11–12 marks the beginning of the “we-sections” in the book of Acts, which indicate the sections of that book where Luke himself was actually present in the narrative he has written.

Luke, who resided in Philippi, was apparently already working with Paul on canonical matters before the two of them set sail for Troas on route to Jerusalem in ca. 58 C.E. (Acts 20:5). They left their manuscripts with Carpus in Troas for safe-keeping. Together, Luke and Paul produced what we call here the “Latter (Apostolic) Writings,” which were apparently conceived from the outset as a fifth and concluding section of the Tanakh.

The Gospel of Luke played a central role in the second stage of the canonical process that produced the “Completed Tanakh” as well, this time as the central book in what eventually becomes a “New Torah”—the four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. This second stage in the canonical process took place in Jerusalem (ca. 58–60), while Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea, with Luke at work in the Church of Jerusalem. That work continued two years later in Rome where Paul was a prisoner and Luke was with him (ca. 60–62).¹⁴

The third stage in the canonical process that produced the Greek New Testament was apparently launched by Luke when he “edited” a copy of the Epistle to the Hebrews, which he then sent to Paul in Rome, as he waited for Timothy to join him (Heb 13:22–23). Timothy did not come in time and Luke went on to Rome alone—to continue his canonical activity with Paul (ca. 61–62 C.E.). In the meantime, Paul invited Timothy to join him and Luke and to bring the manuscripts Paul and Luke had left in Troas (cf. Acts 20:5); and, perhaps more importantly, to bring Mark with him (2 Tim

4:11–13). When Mark and Timothy arrived in Rome, the Gospel of Mark became the center around which the Gospel of Matthew and a revised edition of the Gospel of Luke were edited in what we now call the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). This three-part literary work was conceived from the outset as an integral part of a “New Torah,” which was made up of four Gospels (including John) and Acts of the Apostles (written by Luke). At this point in time (ca. 62 C.E.), the “New Testament” of the *Completed Tanakh* was conceived as a 22-book counterpart to the 22-book canon of the Tanakh, as subsequently described by Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.8).

The martyrdom of James, the brother of Jesus and head of the church in Jerusalem, in the spring of 62 C.E. served as a catalyst to speed up the canonical activity in Rome. Peter joined Mark, Luke and the others. The subsequent martyrdom of both Paul and Peter in Rome some time after the great fire of 64 C.E. left only the apostle John among the four original “pillars” of the early Christian Church (Peter, John, James the brother of Jesus, and Paul). John lived on through the Jewish Revolt and destruction of Jerusalem (66–70 C.E.), and beyond to the end of the reign of Domitian (81–96 C.E.).

It was John and his followers who produced a 49-book canon of the “Completed Tanakh,” in which the four Gospels and Acts of the Apostles function as a “New Torah” connecting the two testaments, each of which is made up of 22 books. Though the nature of the conceptual design of 49 books structured around a “New Torah” was forgotten in the subsequent life of the expanding Christian Church in a non-Jewish environment within the Roman Empire, the design itself survives in popular tradition. It is seen in the traditional order of the 22 (or 24) books in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)

within Jewish tradition, and in the popular order of the 27 books of the New Testament as we now have it.

Conclusion: The Concept of a “Master Editor” of Each Testament

Labuschagne has shown that the Hebrew Scriptures are numerical compositions in the sense that the numbers 17 and 26, which are associated with the divine name YHWH, are consciously woven into the fabric of the Hebrew text so as to make it symbolically the “Word of God.”¹⁵ The book of Deuteronomy illustrates this phenomenon.¹⁶ In terms of word-count, multiples of the numbers 17 and 26 appear in ten of the eleven *Parashot* (weekly portions in the lectionary cycle), and in various larger combinations of these literary units.¹⁷ The total number of words in Deuteronomy was carefully contrived to be exactly **14,300** words (= **26** x 10 x 55). The central core of Deuteronomy (chs. 12–25) is an expansion of the Ten Commandments, which are called the “ten words” and the name of the book itself in Hebrew is “These are the words.” The number 55 is triangular 10 (i.e., the sum of the digits one through ten). The total word-count is thus a theological statement about the book itself, declaring that these words, which are based on the Ten Commandments, are the words of YHWH.

Something similar is found in the book of “The Twelve” (minor prophets), where the total word-count of **14,352** (= **26** x 12 x 23) underscores the nature of this composite work, suggesting that the weaving together of these twelve parts into a single book bears witness to the glory of YHWH.¹⁸ Though study of word-count in the Greek New Testament has scarcely begun, it is already clear that Paul’s Letter to the Galatians displays a similar phenomenon with a total word-count of **2210** (= **26** x **17** x 5).¹⁹

It is too early to explain in detail the nature of the numerical composition of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament. From the outset, God appointed the people of Israel to be a “light to the nations.” As the book of Jonah suggests, Israel accepted her missionary role only with great reluctance. Within the context of the Babylonian Exile, the brothers Baruch and Seraiah appear to have played the role of “master editors” of at least the Torah and the Former Prophets, as David Noel Freedman has shown. It is my personal opinion that their role in the “editing” process of the Tanakh included the whole of the so-called “Deuteronomic Canon” (the 17-book canon of the 6th century B.C.E.)²⁰ Ezra subsequently expanded this work to form the “Pentateuchal Canon” of 22 books, which remains the official canon of sacred Scripture within Judaism. The memory of the numerical composition of the Tanakh survived into the Common Era. The apostle Paul understood that sacred literature is symbolically transformed into canonical Scripture by weaving the divine name into the fabric of the text in terms of word-count in the time-honored principles of numerical composition. Within the context of the Paul’s missionary journeys, Luke emerged as Paul’s compatriot, and ultimately the successor of Baruch, Seraiah and Ezra before him in the distant past—as “master editor” of the Greek New Testament, which constitutes the fifth and concluding section of the *Completed Tanakh*.

¹ For a thorough discussion of the issues, see *The Canon Debate*, eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

² See our website, www.bibal.net.

³ The word *TaNakh* is an acronym, formed from the initial letters of its three parts: Pentateuch (*Torah*), Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and Writings (*Kethuvim*).

⁴ See Josephus’ description of the canon in *Against Apion* 1.8: “We have not a countless number of books, discordant and arrayed, against each other; but only two and twenty books . . . and of these, five belong to Moses, which contain both the laws and the history of the generations of men until his death . . .

From the death of Moses, moreover, until the reign of Artaxerxes king of the Persians after Xerxes, the prophets who followed Moses have described the things which were done during the age of each one respectively, in thirteen books. The remaining four contain hymns to God, and rules of life for men.”

⁵ See Duane L. Christensen, “Josephus and the Twenty-Two-Book Canon of Sacred Scripture,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 (1986), pp. 37–46.

⁶ Jack N. Lightstone, “The Rabbis’ Bible: The Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Early Rabbinic Guild,” in *The Canon Debate* (2002), p. 171.

⁷ David Noel Freedman, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering the Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (Doubleday, 2000).

⁸ See “The Numerical Composition of the Tanakh,” in *Explosion of the Canon: The Greek New Testament in Early Church History* (BIBAL Press, 2004), pp. 20–24.

⁹ See Oxyrhynchus Papyri [933, 30]; Griech. Pap. zu Giessen [12,4]; and in *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Museen zu Berlin* [816, 24].

¹⁰ Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1874), p. 1589.

¹¹ See C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London, 1983); and T. C. Skeat, “Especially the Parchments’: A Note on 2 Timothy iv. 13,” *JTS* n.s. 30 (1979), pp. 173–77.

¹² Ben Zion Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” *HUCA* 44 (1973), pp. 153–96.

¹³ C. Peter Wagner, *Blazing the Way: Book 3, Acts 15–28* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books), pp. 55–58.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of this stage in the canonical process, see Duane L. Christensen, *Explosion of the Canon: The Greek New Testament in Early Church History* (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press), pp. 57–76.

¹⁵ Casper J. Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets of the Bible: Rediscovering the Bible Codes* (BIBAL Press, 2000). See also his website, www.labuschagne.net.

¹⁶ See Duane L. Christensen, “Deuteronomy as a Numerical Composition,” in *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, Word Biblical Commentary 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), pp. ci–cvii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. cv–cvi.

¹⁸ The numbers 23 and 32 are associated with the Hebrew word for “glory,” as shown by C. J. Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets* (2000), pp. 121–27. The details of this numerical structure of the Book of the Twelve will appear in my commentary on Nahum in the Anchor Bible Commentary. A preliminary study of the numerical structure of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Haggai will appear shortly in my commentary in the NIBCOT series. See “Word-Count in the Book of the Twelve—Progress Report,” on the website www.bibal.net.

¹⁹ *Explosion of the Canon*, pp. 137–40.

²⁰ *Explosion of the Canon*, pp. 14–17.