

LECTURE 18a: OT WRITINGS—
The Old Covenant *Enjoyed*
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I. Introduction

- A. Purpose:** To show God’s covenant people how to live faithfully in all of life’s circumstances as they hope in God’s faithfulness to fulfill all his kingdom promises.
- B. Two Central Questions:**
1. *In the Commentary:* How did following Yahweh affect the lives of the remnant throughout the history of the covenant?
 2. *In the Narrative History:* How should Israel’s history be understood by those who truly put their hope in God?
- C. The Time of Writing and Shaping:** from Moses (mid-2nd millennium) to the post-exilic, 2nd temple period (mid-1st millennium)

II. Questions of Sequence:**A. Various Arrangements of the Writings**

1. *Baba Bathra* 14b (perhaps dated as early as 2nd century B.C.; found in *Babylonian Talmud*): Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles.¹
2. *Tiberian masoretic codices* like the Aleppo Codex (A.D. 930) and Leningrad Codex (A.D. 1008) + several Spanish compilations: Chronicles, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah
3. *Ashkenazi codices* (from medieval Germany):
 - a. The poetic books: Psalms, Job, Proverbs
 - i. Sometimes Job and Proverbs are reversed
 - ii. Called the “books of truth,” based on an acronym drawn from the titles in Hebrew: תהלים (Psalms), משלי (Proverbs), איוב (Job) yields אמת, “truth.”
 - b. The five scrolls: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther
 - i. Five short books grouped together in Jewish tradition.
 - ii. Sometimes grouped in the order they are used in the liturgical year:
 - (1) Song of Songs (the Sabbath of the Passover)
 - (2) Ruth (before the Torah reading the morning of the Feast of Weeks)
 - (3) Lamentations (the 9th of Ab, commemorating the destruction of the 1st and 2nd temples)
 - (4) Ecclesiastes (the Sabbath of the Feast of Tabernacles)
 - (5) Esther (Purim)
 - c. The history: Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles
 - i. All narrative written from the perspective of the exile and beyond.

¹ *Baba Bathra* 14b is a baraita, which is an ancient tradition found in the Babylonian Talmud (ca. A.D. 500) that dates from around the time of the Mishnah but was not included in it. Roger Beckwith provides a complete evaluation of the textual data and posits that the arrangement of biblical books in *Baba Bathra* 14b most likely originated from a list drawn up by Judas Maccabaeus around 164 B.C. (see 2 Macc. 2:14–15) (*The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 121–27, 152–53, 198). For a popular-level, succinct summary of Beckwith’s conclusions, see his “The Canon of Scripture,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 27–34.

- ii. Daniel and Ezra-Nehemiah have the only substantial Aramaic sections in the Old Testament.
 - iii. The last verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22–23) and the first verses of Ezra (1:1–3) are almost identical.
- B. Paul House** follows the canonical order of the *BHS*, which, while employing the text of the Leningrad Codex, places Chronicles last as in *Baba Bathra* and the Ashkenazi codices. House suggests that each book in the Writings shows a different aspect of *how to live* by portraying how faith in Yahweh affected the daily lives of Old Testament saints (*Old Testament Survey*, 267). He offers the following synopses for each book (268–355):
1. Psalms—How to worship
 2. Job—How to struggle with doubt
 3. Proverbs—How to develop wisdom
 4. Ruth—How to survive personal difficulties
 5. Song of Songs—How to enjoy love
 6. Ecclesiastes—How to search for meaning in life
 7. Lamentations—How to mourn national tragedies
 8. Esther—How to survive in exile
 9. Daniel—How to maintain distinctive faith in exile
 10. Ezra-Nehemiah—How to rebuild a nation
 11. Chronicles—How to view the past
- C.** Building off the arguments supplied by Frank Beckwith and Stephen Dempster, **DeRouchie** follows the order found in the *Baba Bathra* 14b–15a because it is the oldest list, because all the other lists can be explained as secondary, and because its arrangement is the most theologically Messianic in orientation, thus heightening anticipation for the NT and supporting the highly Christo-centric interpretation of the OT by NT authors.
1. Introductory comments:
 - a. Like the Prophets, the Writings distinguish “commentary” and “narrative history,” but here the history ends the section, probably to allow the Old Testament to begin with creation and to end with the anticipation of return.
 - b. In contrast to the Prophets, the commentary and history are both primarily anticipatory rather than reflective, focusing on kingdom hope through the Messiah rather than addressing sin.
 - c. The “Former Writings” or commentary portion has all books arranged in order of length from longest to shortest. There are two exceptions to this basic rule, both driven by theological purposes:
 - i. Ruth stands as the prelude to Psalms, providing a narrative bridge via analogy from an age of exile into hope.
 - ii. Lamentations is actually a little longer than the Song of Songs (2011 words vs. 1662 words). Its placement after the Song was likely driven by some of the following desires:
 - (1) To keep together the three books traditionally assigned to Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs),
 - (2) To allow the Old Testament’s commentary section (the Latter Prophets and Former Writings) to begin and end with books assigned to the prophet Jeremiah, and
 - (3) To provide a transition at the end of the commentary section back into the exilic context departed from at the end of 2 Kings.

2. Proposed organizational framework and message:
 - a. *Former Writings (Anticipatory Commentary on an Age of Life)*
 - i. *Ruth*: Prelude Affirming the Kingdom Hope of Yahweh's Redeeming Grace through the Line of David
 - ii. *Psalms*: Hope for Those Delighting in and Submitting to God's Kingship by Walking, Waiting, and Worshipping in Light of the Messiah
 - iii. *Job*: Hope for Those Fearing God for Who He Is, Not for What He Gives or Takes Away
 - iv. *Proverbs*: Hope for Those Acting Wisely—Who Fear God, Turn from Evil, and Live in Light of the Future
 - v. *Ecclesiastes*: Hope for Those Fearing and Following God in Pleasure and Pain Despite Life's Enigmas
 - vi. *Song of Songs*: Hope for Those Celebrating Human Sexuality in the Context of Marriage
 - vii. *Lamentations*: Hope for Those Remaining Confident in God's Reign and Faithfulness to His Own
 - b. *Latter Writings (Anticipatory Narrative on an Age of Life)*
 - i. *Daniel*: The Promise of God's Universal Kingdom Reiterated
 - ii. *Esther*: The Preservation of God's Kingdom People Realized
 - iii. *Ezra-Nehemiah*: The Restoration of God's Kingdom People and Land Foreshadowed
 - iv. *1–2 Chronicles*: Yahweh's Universal Kingship and Kingdom Promises Affirmed