

H2R P2 - What is the Bible?

E2: The Bible as Divine Literary Art

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Speakers in the audio file:

Jon Collins

Tim Mackie

E2: The Bible as Divine Literary Art

Jon: In this episode of The Bible Project podcast, Tim and I continue our discussion on the composition of the Bible, and what it means for this book to be God's divine word.

Tim: There's a tension here. The Bible emerged out of the history of Israel. But that also is met by another claim that the scriptural authors make about these writings themselves, that they are also a word from God. And so this fights us into the...you could call it the paradox or the unique category of the Scriptures. They claim to be a divine and human word at the same time.

Jon: We're going to go deep into the structure of the Bible from beginning to end, starting with the Old Testament, which is primarily the history of ancient Israel.

Tim: The Hebrew Bible is a minority report on the history of Israel told from the perspective of what during Israel's history before the exile was a minority group, prophets who believed that they were preserving the true heritage and history of Israel from Moses and that most of Israel had gone astray.

Jon: We then talk about the New Testament books and how the disciples of Jesus claim that Israel story was being continued with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. This is a great conclusion to our overview of what is the Bible, which is all being boiled down into a video that you could find on our YouTube channel. Thanks for joining in. Here we go.

So, in the last episode of the podcast, we talked about how the Bible is composed. We spend a lot of time talking about the difference between the Hebrew Bible, the Catholic Bible, Eastern Orthodox Bible, and the Protestant Bible. Then we talked about the Bible just as literature - what does it mean to be a book. We talked about different types of books.

Then we kind of created this metaphor as the Bible as an art project and spent time talking about the literary genius of the Bible. We talked about being people of the Book and how that's part of our Christian identity. Then I just started asking you questions about what are the implications of all this for how we teach kids the Bible. We had a little discussion on that.

So, in this last half of the conversation, what I'd like to do is walk through the whole Bible and talk about what's actually in it and the order of it, and give people a bird's eye view of that.

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Tim: Yeah, great. That's no small task to just wrap up it in one podcast episode. If readers of the English Bible you open up to your Old Testament but just go to the table contents at the beginning, you won't notice this, but there are four subsections to the Old Testament in the Christian Bible.

Jon: Like the Table of Contents won't break it up in those sections?

Tim: Yeah, it won't give you little spaces. It'll just be one long list of books going from Genesis all the way to Malachi.

Jon: But you could break them up into four sections?

Tim: Yeah. Historically, there's a logic to it, and it's pretty evident once you see it. The first section is the first five books sent somewhere in the early to 200 A.D has been called the Pentateuch, which means Penta and two classes of old Greek word for scroll. So the scroll of five.

Jon: So Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Those are the five?

Tim: You got it.

Jon: The Pentateuch?

Tim: That's right. They're connected with the figure of Moses in some way, traditionally. So that tells a story from creation to Abraham, to the exodus, to Israel at Mount Sinai going through the wilderness and getting ready to enter the promised land.

Jon: Lots of key stories there.

Tim: Yeah. And then it ends with the death of Moses. After that, comes another large block of books. The story just continues on, but in what you could call or has traditionally been called the history books. We go then into Joshua; he takes them into the promised land. The judges, that covers a period when Israel's in the land organized by tribes, but with no centralized governing structures or anything. No kinds.

Jon: And that's why these judge characters would—

Tim: They're like tribal chieftains who would arise to save them from the enemies.

Jon: I wish it was called enemy tribal chieftain instead of judges. It would make it a lot more interesting.

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Tim: I know. Judges, it doesn't work in English, because the word judges in English means a very specific thing that has no real correspondence to what the word means.

Jon: Why do we call them judges?

Tim: Oh, it's a very old English translation of those who brought order. Which is true, but they didn't do it by sitting in a seat with a robe. They were like—

Jon: Looking at some sort of constitution.

Tim: Yeah, they were tribal lawyers who saved the people.

Jon: What's the Hebrew word?

Tim: Shaphat.

Jon: Shaphat.

Tim: Shaphat, judges. And then, you get the short story of Ruth after Judges because the first line of Ruth is, "In the days when the judges were doing their thing."

Jon: Okay. So it fits in that time period.

Tim: Then comes 1 and 2 Samuel, which is oddly named because Samuel dies halfway at the end of 1 Samuel.

Jon: It's not really about Samuel. It's more about—

Tim: It's about David. It should be called 1 and 2 David.

Jon: King David as we know him.

Tim: There you go. King David, yeah.

Jon: So, this is when the history of Israel goes from being these tribes with tribal chieftains?

Tim: From a federation of tribes to a centralized monarchy. Big shift in the history of Israel. Then 1 and 2 Kings moves us on to Solomon. Then after his—

Jon: David's son.

Tim: David son. And then after he dies, there's a near Civil War, and then the tribes split. The tribes up in the north form independent kingdom. The tribes in the south

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centered in Jerusalem from the people of Judah. And then, they end up as two separate peoples coexisting in tension until 2nd Kings ends with Babylon coming to town and taking everybody out.

1 and 2 Chronicles kind of get a shaft because they just retell the story of Genesis to 2 Kings.

Jon: The whole history again?

Tim: The first word Chronicles is, "Adam." Then the last word of Chronicles is an announcement that the people can go back from exile in Babylon - go back to the land.

Jon: It's like you just read the whole story and now you are to read it again in brief.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. 1 and 2 Chronicles mostly is a retelling of 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. So you're like, "I just read this." But it's different. We'll talk about this. It's different in a really important way, but just slightly different. And so modern readers in this order you're...

[crosstalk 00:06:50]

Tim: Yeah, you skip it and go to Ezra-Nehemiah, is what most people do. Ezra-Nehemiah are one book in...Actually, they were one book even in early Jewish and Christian tradition. They were separated into two books in the medieval period. I should know why off the top my head but I don't know. It's not due to scroll length. There was another factor but I forgot what is.

Then Esther is a story set in Persia about a Jewish community leaving in Persia.

Jon: During the time of exile or during the time after the exile?

Tim: After exile. Exile is like a memory.

Jon: But there are still Jewish people living there?

Tim: But there's a community living there and it tells their story.

Jon: So that was the first two sections?

Tim: Two sections. Pentateuch and the history books.

Jon: That was all the history books, Joshua through Esther?

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Tim: Mm-hmm. Then you take a hard turn as you go down the table of contents, and you move into the books of poetry, is how this next section is organized. It's all the poetry books. So Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs.

Jon: I remember as a kid if you try to open your Bible right in the middle, it's usually Psalms. Usually, you land in Psalms.

Tim: Yeah, and it's a fat book.

Jon: Yeah, often times you get to it.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: So those are all books that are unified—

Tim: Those are all 99% written in poetry. Altogether, they're connected to David and Solomon, even though the books inside them...Well, less than half of the 150 Psalms are connected to David explicitly. There are all kinds of other people, authors mentioned.

Proverbs, it says proverbs of Solomon at the beginning, but then there are other authors mentioned in the book itself from different sections of the book. And Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Job is an anonymous work.

After the poetic books, then you get the 15 books of the prophets. The three big ones.

Jon: The biggies. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

Tim: Oh, excuse me. Sorry, I'm already skipping ahead. There are 17 books in this section.

Jon: 17 books in the section?

Tim: Yeah, totally. It's 15 books in the Jewish order.

Jon: We'll talk about the Jewish order.

Tim: We will in a second. You get the three big ones: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then to smaller one sandwiched in there. After Jeremiah is the Lamentations. And then after Ezekiel, comes Daniel. Then you get the 12 Minor Prophets in the Christian tradition.

Jon: They're minor because they're small?

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Tim: Because of the size of the books.

Jon: It's not a rank in the military?

Tim: No, there's nothing to do with their importance. These books are really important. That's the shape of the Christian Old Testament.

Jon: Christian Old Testament: Pentateuch, history, poetry, prophets. I just know as a kid becoming familiar with the Old Testament, you've got the Pentateuch, those are the really old stories. There's the history, that's where there's a lot of bloody weird crazy stuff.

Then the poetry, that's where we would get some of our worship songs. Then Proverbs was in there, so we get some wisdom. And then Ecclesiastes in there, that's a weird book that we kind of ignore. Then the prophets, it's just kind of like, "Yeah, good luck. During Christmas time, we'll pull some Isaiah out or something. But beyond that, we're just kind of like, this is some weird Hebrew poetry. We don't get it. Let's just move to the Gospels." That's my understanding of the Old Testament.

Tim: There you go. Here's interesting historical factoid. That order and arrangement of the Old Testament, the earliest witness we have to that type of order, hard evidence is in not a Hebrew Bible but a Greek Bible.

Jon: A Greek translation?

Tim: A Greek translation.

Jon: People who spoke Greek were like, "We want to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into our language."

Tim: That's right. "We speak Greek." It's a Christian manuscript produced by Christian scribes. It dates to the mid-300s.

Those are the earliest large whole Bible manuscripts date to the 300s. There are many manuscripts of individual books dated earlier, but of a whole thing together in Greek, the oldest one date to mid-300s. And it's in this order. So that's interesting.

From our vantage point, the earliest hard evidence for that order in an old Bible is 1,700 years old. Which is pretty old. It's pretty old. But the Old Testament's way older than that. And it wasn't written in Greek.

Jon: It wasn't written in Greek.

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Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And it wasn't a Christian document.

Tim: Correct. It's pre-Christian. So that's an interesting factoid. So layer on top of that another set of interesting facts.

When you look back at how Jesus himself referred to the Scriptures, which for him would have been Old Testament, he refers to it by sections. And when he does that, he doesn't talk about Pentateuch, history, poetry, prophets.

So the conclusion of the Gospel of Luke in the resurrection stories, where he appears and has that awesome Bible study with the disciples in the room, and he has fish with them, this is in Luke 24:44, he says, "Hey, guys. Listen, why are you surprised by everything that just happened over the weekend?"

Jon: "Because the dead guy is alive."

Tim: Yeah, yeah, totally. That's why they're surprised. But then he goes on to say, "Listen, this is what the Hebrew Scriptures have been pointing to all along." And he says, "This is what I told you when I was still with you: That everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms." Now, you could just take that as he's just picking out highlights.

Jon: He's just pulling out some of the highlights. The Old Testament highlights.

Tim: So the Law of Moses, I guess maybe it's talking about the laws of Mount Sinai, the prophets, of course, there's a bunch of them, and the Psalms. If you take the three words, law, prophets and Psalms in relation to your English Old Testament, it'll be just kind of picking out some different points in no particular order.

He left out the poetry books. The stories in Genesis don't seem really counted for. There's Joshua, Judges, you know, the history books. And you think, "Where are the history? They're not about predictions of the future." I'm just saying this is what will kind of go through your mind if what you have referenced to is just...

Jon: Jesus is just picking out the parts of the Old Testament that make you see his relevance. That's how it would seem.

Tim: Yeah, correct. That's one way to read what Jesus is doing there. However, reading it that way is really taking what he's saying out of context. It's assuming that the order

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that we have in our English Bibles is the order or arrangement of the Bible that Jesus had.

Jon: Which we know for a fact it wasn't.

Tim: We know for a fact that it wasn't. What we know is that the majority way that Jewish, pre Christian and even the earliest Christian, Jewish readers of the Hebrew Bible, the way they encountered the Bible, the way they thought about it was not in four sections, but actually in three sections of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. And we have abundant evidence for this in Jewish writings and authors contemporary with Jesus or before him.

So, for example, among the Second Temple Writings that made it into the Catholic Deuterocanon, there's a book called The Wisdom of Ben Sira. And there's a prologue to it. Ben Sera, his name is Yeshua - Jesus. The main wisdom and the book is by an old Sage name, Yeshua Ben Sira. But then his grandson wrote a little prologue, the beginning of the book.

He says, "Many great teachings have been given to us through the law, the prophets and the other writings that follow them. So, my grandfather, Yeshua devoted himself especially to the reading of the law, the prophets, and those other books of our ancestors."

When he thinks about the shape of the Hebrew Bible, he's got the same three-part shape that Jesus does. The Law, the Prophets, the other writings.

Jon: But Jesus doesn't say the other writings. He says Psalms.

Tim: He says Psalms. We'll talk about that. One of the Dead Sea Scrolls makes a reference to the whole of the Hebrew Bible and calls them the scrolls of Moses, the words of the Prophet, and the words of David. So again, we've got this law of Moses and prophets.

Jon: So they've been referred to so now so far as the other writings, the words of David?

Tim: The third section?

Jon: Yeah, the third section.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: The other writings, the words of David, or the Psalms.

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Tim: And just to cap it off, Philo, who lived down in Egypt who was a Jewish philosopher writing for a Greek audience, he was trying to get a hearing in the philosophical schools, Alexandria, Egypt as a Jewish philosopher.

He refers to his Bible quite a bit. He refers to the shape of his Bible as the laws, the oracles given by inspiration through the prophets, and the Psalms, along with the other books whereby knowledge and piety are increased.

Jon: So he's got four categories there?

Tim: Well, the Law, The Oracles given to the Prophets, and the Psalms, and the other books.

Jon: Oh, as one thing?

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Psalms and other books.

Tim: Totally, yeah. Now, for this third section, we've got the law and the prophets. That's pretty clear.

Jon: It's become standard.

Tim: Standard. For another collection alongside those two, we've got Jesus says the Psalms, we've got the other books, we've got David, and we have the Psalms and the other books. So there's an awareness all through that the Hebrew Bible has this three-part shape, and that that third section is connected with David, namely, the Psalms. That's the only book in the writings.

Then when we look at the shape of the Bible transmitted through the history of Judaism, it has exactly that three-part shape as referred to by an acronym called to Tanak. T-A-N-A-K.

Jon: And that's an acronym?

Tim: It's an acronym. The T stands for "Torah," which corresponds to the Pentateuch - first five books. But then, interestingly—

Jon: So the Torah, which we've translated as law?

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Tim: That's right. Yeah. Which went into Greek and then into English as law. The Hebrew word refers...it's most basic meaning is teaching or instruction. Which laws can teach and instruct you, but so can a poem and so can a story.

Jon: Because a lot of the Torah, a lot of the first five books are stories.

Tim: The majority of it is story, the next highest majority is legal material laws, and then coming in third, there's actually quite a lot of poetry. All of those teach just in different ways.

So, you've got the Torah. That's the T of the Tanak. The N stands for the Hebrew word "Nevi'im," which is the Hebrew word "Prophet." The Torah, the Law, and the Prophets.

So in the English order prophets come last. But in Hebrew order, the prophets come after the Torah. And look at what's in the prophets. The first four books of the prophets are Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

Jon: Those are history books.

Tim: Yeah. Within our Christian English ordering, we think of those as history. In the Jewish tradition, those books are considered books of the prophets.

Jon: Because prophets in my mind were the poetry books of the crazy guys that talked about crazy things. But Joshua, Judges, those are stories about the history of Israel. Why do they consider those books as the Prophets?

Tim: So, a few things. One is the conviction that comes down through Jewish tradition that the whole of the Hebrew Bible is a prophetic work. It's the result and work of the prophets. And so what these books are, is it's Israel's history told from the point of view of the prophets.

Secondly, these books are actually about Israel's future. They are generating hope for the future by retelling the story of their past.

Jon: So it wasn't just the telling of history just for the sake of telling the history?

Tim: For archival sake. Actually, at multiple points in the Book of Kings, the author says, "Hey, listen, if you want the whole complete record of what Jeroboam or—

Jon: All the different battle.

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Tim: Yeah, go read...he calls it the annals of the kings. And he refers to those books constantly. So, what that tells you is that "Oh, the Book of Kings actually isn't primarily a historical Chronicle." He's drawn from historical Chronicles to create a prophetic work, namely a work that looks at Israel story from a divine point of view in order to generate wisdom, to teach wisdom to God's people, and to sustain hope for the future. And that hope for the future is all about the coming Kingdom of God and the Messianic King, especially in this reading order.

Jon: So they're considered books of the prophets because the shape of the history and the purpose of the telling of the history is to give you hope for the future, and to give you a perspective on why everything had happened in a particular way, and that was a unique perspective that the prophets gave us?

Tim: Yeah. The story arc of those four books: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, is we went into the land on the terms of the covenant that we made at Mount Sinai and we blew it big time. Our best kings blew it big time.

And where they land the whole ship into the ground, landed the people in exile in Babylon. But from there, there have been hints all the way along that, that's where the story was going. And also, that that wouldn't be the end of the story. That God was going to restore his people, bring them back from exile and fulfill His purposes.

Then what you get in the second part of the prophets are then what Christian typically call the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then the 12 Minor Prophets.

Jon: And they are the big. I told you, so.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And they're structured as 3 and 12. Three big ones and 12, which corresponds precisely to the story of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis.

Jon: Three patriarchs?

Tim: Three: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the 12. So, once again, it's uniting the past and the future hope that God's promises to those patriarchs before Israel even blew it is actually the only hope that there is for the future. And that's what the prophets go on to develop, is they retell in poetry how Israel land the ship into the ground, and that that's not the end of the story. They really developed the hope for God's kingdom, the day of the Lord for the coming Messiah, and Israel returning to its land so that the blessing of Abraham can come to all of the nation's. That's the Prophets.

Jon: So that's the Law and the Prophets.

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Tim: Yeah, the Law, and the Prophets.

Jon: So when Jesus says, "The Law and the prophets," he's referring to those?

Tim: He's referring to those two big blocks of the Hebrew Bible. Then, when Jesus says, "the Psalms," or when other Jewish authors say, "the other books," they're referring to a diverse third collection that begins with the Psalms. The Psalms is the first book of that collection. It's the K in the phrase Tanak, which means "Ketuvim."

Jon: And that means psalms?

Tim: Ketuvim means writings. Writings. Then the ordering of the writings in ancient Jewish manuscripts tends to differ internally, within. But it makes sense. There's no sequential narrative unifying them. But it does seem important and intentional that Psalms is that the beginning. It also seems intentional that in many Jewish orders that Chronicles is the final book of the Ketuvim. Which makes it the final book of the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: So, Chronicles is not a book of the prophets?

Tim: It's not among the Prophets, correct, though it has the same purpose. A couple things. First, we know Jesus referred to Psalm in Luke 24 - The Law, Prophets, and the Psalms. But also in a strange unexpected way, he also refers to the ending of the Ketuvim with Chronicles.

It's in a judgment oracle that he pronounces over Israel leaders. In Luke 11:51, he says, "Therefore, this generation," the generation of Israel's leaders that's rejecting him, he says, "This generation will be responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed from the beginning of the world from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zachariah who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary."

So it's interesting, just for starters, that he refers to Abel. Cain and Abel on page 4 of the Bible. He refers to him as a prophet, which is its own interesting rabbit hole to go down. But the first murder in the Bible is what he mentions. And then he mentioned the blood of Zachariah,

Jon: Who is a prophet?

Tim: Yeah, yeah, prophet and he's killed near the end of 2 Chronicles. Which if Jesus is working from the beginning to the end of Israel's history, Zachariah gets murdered in the middle of Israel's history. But that's because he's not thinking chronologically.

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He's thinking literarily. He's referring to the final section of the last book of the Hebrew Bible, which is Chronicles.

So the blood of the prophets from the first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible, that's what he's doing in that. So he refers to Psalms as the first book, the law of the prophets and the Psalm. And then he refers to Chronicles as the conclusion of the Scriptures.

Jon: Is the Ketuvim have been kind of like junk drawer a little bit? Because it's not as much a unifying factor as the law. The Torah is all the books of Moses. Then you've got the prophetic books, it's history and the prophets. But then you've got this eclectic group. You've gotten Psalms, which is poetry, Job, poetry, Proverbs are proverbs, ancient Wisdom. Then in here is Ruth, which is history.

Tim: A section from earlier in Israel story.

Jon: Yeah. Song of Songs is like romance poetry.

Tim: Yeah, right.

Jon: Ecclesiastes is poetry. So we've got mostly poetry and some wisdom.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Okay. I can get down with that. Then Lamentations, more poetry. But now we've got more history and history and history.

Tim: Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and...

Jon: Then there's random book, which is like a The Chronicles is all the history again?

Tim: Yeah. Right. At a first glance, it looks like the kitchen junk drawer, but remember literary genius.

Jon: There's no junk drawer.

Tim: There's not one word in this whole thing that's unintentionally placed. Before we come back to what the Ketuvim is and represents, we got to back up. This is a collection of scrolls. In Hebrew Bible, they didn't have books.

Jon: Yeah, it wasn't bound together.

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- Tim: So this is a collection of scrolls that is being viewed and referred to as a unified three-part whole. And all these different authors, all these different sectors of Judaism; Jesus up in Galilee, Dead Sea Scrolls, former priest by the Dead Sea, you have a wisdom teacher in Jerusalem. You have all these different Jewish philosophers down in Egypt, and they all have this sense of a three-part shape to the Bible, even though they've only ever encountered it in the form of an individual scroll.
- Jon: That's good to think about. That's helpful for me. Because they never had everything bound together, so they never had someone go, "Hey, let's go through the table of context together."
- Tim: The books that we know of today it's an invention of the Roman period.
- Jon: The Codex?
- Tim: Post Christian. Yeah, it's called the Codex.
- Jon: So, they had these really long scrolls and they would roll them up—
- Tim: If you've ever seen the Dead Sea Scrolls, that's great representative example. They're made of animal skin, parchment leather for the most part.
- Jon: These long leather animal skin scrolls?
- Tim: Scrolls.
- Jon: Would they be stitched together or something like that?
- Tim: Yeah, stitched?
- Jon: Okay. Then they'd roll them up, and one book would be on there, or would a book be broken up to many scrolls?
- Tim: It depends. Mostly it would be the individual books of the Hebrew Bible corresponded to a scroll.
- Jon: A single scroll?
- Tim: Yeah. You don't get all the books of the five books of the Torah on single scrolls until a later period in Judaism. And you call it a Torah scroll.
- Jon: So I'm imagining as an ancient Jew, and I have access to a collection of scrolls—

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- Tim: Which would be not very many people. It would be like your synagogue.
- Jon: Yeah, not very many people.
- Tim: Your synagogue.
- Jon: And you got to put them in some sort of order. And traditionally, people are like, 'Okay, these five scrolls, this is a set, this is a collection, and that's the Torah. And then these...' How many are in the center section? 17 you said?
- Tim: It's 4 plus 15 days.
- Jon: So you'd have this collection of 19 scrolls?
- Tim: Actually, sorry. The minor prophets were always connected on one scroll.
- Jon: Oh, okay. So it'd only be—
- Tim: The four scrolls of the prophets. Sorry. Let's see. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, would each be one. And then it would be four more: Isaiah. Jeremiah. Ezekiel, and the 12. Eight scrolls.
- Jon: So you'd have these five scrolls—
- Tim: Five scrolls. Then eight scrolls are the first.
- Jon: You'd have eight scrolls and you'd call them prophets, and then you'd have this collection of other scrolls and you'd call them the Ketuvim, the writings?
- Tim: Yeah.
- Jon: That tradition of how they are placed together and thought of together as a collection was passed on to you. It's not like written in a table of contents or anything?
- Tim: Correct.
- Jon: That's how you think of this collection of scrolls??
- Tim: Yes, yes.
- Jon: And all three sets together to you are your ancient scriptures?

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Tim: Yeah, that's the idea. So rabbit hole goes a little deeper. If you wanted to create some kind of system, some kind of inter cross-referencing linking system to help create sequence and order out of that, and you're working with the technology of scrolls, where is an editor who wants to bring coherence to this big collection most likely to do their work?

It's fairly obvious if you work with scroll technology because you open it up, and it's either the beginning, or you've read it all the way through, and the outer leaf is the end.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: So if you look at the beginnings, and the first words and the last words of all the books of the Hebrew Bible, you'll start to notice things that are really interesting. You'll start to notice what look like little editorial linking reference notices.

If you look at the first lines of all the books of the Torah, they're all interlinked together. And if you look at the last lines, at the books of the Torah, or in the last chapter of all the books of the Torah, you'll see that there are these little referencing mechanisms that either link back to the first line of the book, or that get you ready to read the next line of the opening scroll.

Jon: What would be an example of that?

Tim: One example is, the book of Exodus opens up with, "these are the names of the sons of Jacob that went down and Israel." And it gives you a list. But you've read that list before. You just read it a couple chapters ago near the ending of the book of Genesis.

So the beginning of Exodus actually picks up and condenses a whole section out of the ending of Genesis and makes it the beginning of the story of Exodus. So it's a way of connecting the ending of Genesis in the beginning of the next scroll.

Jon: So you're saying very likely the scroll of Exodus could have not had that and someone with access to that scroll said, "You know, I want to make this really fit more fluidly from Genesis to Exodus. So I'm going to rewrite and paraphrase the ending of Genesis and I'm going to put it here at the beginning of the scroll because I have some room?"

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Tim: Yeah, totally. You can see this everywhere. All the books of the Prophets begin with little superscription headings that are all cross-referencing different moments in the book of Kings. Verbatim - just lifted phrases right out of the book of Kings.

So every book of the Prophets in some way is being linked back. It's like hyperlinks. You know, like webpage, it's hyperlinking you back into the story of the prophets; Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings that you just read. There's intelligent life here at work in this three-part shape. So, the books are all kind of linked together that way, but—

Jon: I guess to take a step back, because this is a new thought for me and for many people group of the Bible or become familiar with Bible in some way, is that this collection of books in my imagination was always just handed down from this God in this form through different people at different points in history. But it was like "Here's the book of Exodus completed. Here's the book of whatever Minor Prophet in its completion." And then that was with fidelity copied over and over and over, and never changed.

Because as soon as you start introducing this idea of, "Well, actually, there was an editors and he put in a new introduction," that's just not a category of the how the Bible was formed.

Tim: Okay. Let's talk about that for a second. So two things. One, there's nothing in the Bible that claims that these books were written all, as complete first editions, as individual works. They were only brought together once they were each completed on their own. There's nothing in the Bible that claims that.

Second, there's nothing in the history of human writing that tells us that that's how books were actually produced. Even in the modern period, that's not how books are produced.

Jon: But if it's going to be a book like God's going to give you because He wants you to know the truth about reality, you think He would do it that way?

Tim: Why? Why do you think He...why?

Jon: Just be a lot cleaner.

Tim: According to whom?

Jon: Well, I could think about it. Like, if I wanted to document—

Tim: I am thinking about it.

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Jon: If wanted to document that told me with accuracy and fidelity what life was really about, and I wanted to know with absolute certainty that this came from God, then it seems like, if I was God, I would go. "Okay, I'll give them something foolproof. I'm going to give them something just completed. Right off the bat, here it is in its completion. There's no evolution of this. It's going to predict things in the future so specifically, and accurately and completely," and then no one can ever argue and be like, "Wow, yeah, maybe Joe wrote this. No, how would Joe have written this?" Then it becomes foolproof.

I feel like as I'm saying that it's obvious that's not what we have, but it's kind of what I think I expected to find.

Tim: Interesting.

Jon: When we talk about all these prophecies that Jesus fulfilled or all these prophecies that are going to be fulfilled, that was always a proof like, obviously, this is divine because, look, who can predict the future. How is it possible that these 500 prophecies were fulfilled? Of course, it's a divine book. And so that's just kind of my category of this is what a book that came from God look like.

Tim: Man, it's a big, big conversation. That mindset is the modern Western construct that imposing on to the Bible standards of certainty. And it's imposing on the Bible a view of what's Christians are called inspiration, meaning how human authors were used by God to write these books. It's imposing a view of inspiration onto the Bible that you don't actually find in the Bible. Because the Bible contains all kinds of records about the origins of its writings.

Jeremiah 36, as one example. Jeremiah senses God calling him to collect all of these poems and essays and prophecies over a period of 20 years and put them together into a scroll. So he doesn't do it himself. He hires a professional scribe to do it. And how long did that take? I can't even imagine. I only have seven years' worth of sermons, and the thought of compiling all those together, shish.

So he does it. Baruch does it. This guy's name is Baruch. Then he gives it to the kings and priests and they burn it. The contents make them so angry.

So then he senses God calling him to make another edition. This is all in Jeremiah chapter 36. So they make a second edition. And the last line of the chapter is, "Baruch wrote down all the words and put it all down." And then the last line is, "And many similar words were added to them." So you're like, "Wait, addition to Jeremiah is longer than edition one. What does that mean similar words?"

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Jon: Yeah, what does that mean?

Tim: Exactly. Yeah, exactly. There's like eight different interpretations of what that could mean. Is there extra poetry of Jeremiah that he forgot to include in Edition One? Is it Baruch's poetry? Is it someone else's that was related to the same themes? It also is maddeningly ambiguous.

But it at least tells us that this book went through multiple editions and a process of expansion through those editions. And you can see that in the book of Proverbs. It says proverbs of Solomon at the beginning, but you finished the book and pay attention to the headings of different little collections, and you've also got in their sayings of the wise, you have the sayings of Solomon, the men that Hezekiah put in the book 200 years later after Solomon.

And then the book concludes with a collection of riddles from a guy named Agur, who we have no idea who he is. It's not a Hebrew name, and then from a non-Israelite king named Lemuel. But it's actually wisdom that his mother taught him, we are told.

Jon: So someone collected this all together?

Tim: Clearly, someone long after Solomon collected.

Jon: I think we talked about this when we were talking about the Proverbs and I was wrestling through the same thing, which is, "That's not the clean version of Divine Scripture that I have with some guy going 'I'm going to collect a bunch of really cool riddles and sayings from Israelites, non-Israelites, put them altogether.'" I mean, let's not go down this rabbit hole.

Tim: Here's what's at the root. This is important. I don't think we've talked about this before. Underneath that modern construct of a Bible like golden tablets dropped out of heaven, is a view of how God works in the world by His Spirit. Namely, that if God is at work in the world, it means that humans are not.

Jon: Yeah, they are bypassed.

Tim: Or if humans are involved, it's just incidental. Like their brains were zapped, and they just were writing out these scrolls in a trance not understanding anything. But underneath that is this idea that if humans are at work, God is not at work. If God is at work, then humans either aren't involved, or they're only incidentally involved.

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And that is completely foreign to the view of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit in the Bible.

Jon: It just makes things a lot messier.

Tim: Yes, totally. It means God has chosen to work in human history through humans. And it's the same issue with the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus didn't drop out of heaven, speaking alien. He was born and he grew up speaking Aramaic. You know?

Jon: Yeah. No one would have understood him.

Tim: Yeah. But somehow we expect the Bible to have dropped out of the sky almost like independent of its origins. And we expected to have been written and produced in a way that is unlike any other way the books were produced in that time period. Again, I think we're imposing a strange and foreign set of assumptions on the Bible there.

Jon: Okay. Well, that rattles the brain.

Tim: It's a new paradigm that's based in actual historical evidence.

Jon: What makes it I think uncomfortable is that then the question becomes, well, if a biblical book can be edited and that was divinely inspired editing...

Tim: That's part of how God...The end result is that God speaks to his people through these writing. And these writings have come about through all kinds of different ways.

Jon: ...then when is that complete? When is that process complete? From our point of view, now, we look back and we say, "This is complete. Don't mess with it."

Tim: Yeah, the Final Edition.

Jon: We've we finalized it. So was that—

Tim: When's the final edition?

Jon: When was the final edition? And was that final edition God's final edition?

Tim: Establishing what the wording of the final edition is, is the goal of a whole field of biblical scholarship called textual criticism. I fell in love with this field. I wrote my dissertation on a niche topic within this field because it involves ancient Hebrew

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manuscripts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, ancient Greek manuscripts, ancient Aramaic. It's so awesome.

The Bible's textual history is public - open the lots of historical investigation. There are no secrets here. And it's complex. It's not simple. But once you waded through all of it, we know the Bible's text history and we can with reasonable confidence say we have a firm grip on what the basic final edition was of the Bible. But it's taken a lot of work.

Jon: And what do we mean by Final Edition?

Tim: Well, it's complicated.

Jon: It sounds complicated.

Tim: It is. It's complicated because it's all about, "Well, what text manuscript witnesses do we have?" We have some from the Medieval period that have been really important, we have the Dead Sea Scrolls, we have ancient Greek translations—

Jon: Because those were final at that time in history.

Tim: Yeah, totally. And to all of this, I'm a follower of Jesus. So what I'm interested in is the Tanak that Jesus read. The only reason, me as a Scottish Gentile, Portland skateboarder on the other part of the planet is once agreed the Hebrew Bible 2000 years later. It's not because I just find it interesting. It's because I follow Jesus. And he said these books bear witness to him.

Jon: So you're most interested in what was the Bible Jesus read?

Tim: As a Christian, I want to know and get in touch with the Bible Jesus read. Which wasn't in English, and wasn't in Greek, though knowing Greek and the Greek translations is really important for uncovering the history of the Bible. But I want to read the Bible Jesus read as close as I can.

There's a line that Jesus says to some Jewish leaders that he's an argument within the gospel of John. He says to them, "You guys are experts in the scriptures. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life." Then he says, "These are the scriptures that bear witness to me." In one verse, I think you have a nutshell of getting the horse first, and then the cart.

In Jesus' mind, the reason the scriptures are a Divine Word is not because you are being invited to a personal relationship with the book. You're invited to have a

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personal living connection to Jesus, the Risen Messiah. And the reason I read the Bible is because it's a divine and human word that points me to Jesus.

It points forward from the Old Testament. And then, for the New Testament, it points me backward. And it all centers on the person of Jesus. It puts Jesus, the living Jesus, who I don't know apart from the Bible, but at the same time, the Jesus that I know is the Jesus represented for me in the pages of Scripture. But at the same time, Jesus isn't the Bible.

The Bible is a literary text that tells me and points me to an actual person who has a close connection to these texts, but isn't the same thing. He's a person. Just like I could read your biography, but I'm sitting across the table right now talking to you. And you are not the same thing as the book that could be written about you.

Jon: But once I'm dead, that's all we're going to have.

Tim: Well, you would need to be the Son of God so Spirit could be present with this as I read the book.

Jon: And that's the difference between me and Jesus.

Tim: That's the difference. That's right. So the focus on what it means that "the scriptures are inspired" or a "divine and human word" doesn't mean that they weren't produced through normal human processes. What it means is that the message that these books communicate is a message God wants his people to hear that points them to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And you're right. I've been living in this paradigm for a long time, but I went through a paradigm shift to get to this space. And every time I teach through the shape of the Tanak, this is exactly the conversation that comes up. Every time I've talked about the composition and unity of the Tanak, it raises this very question.

Jon: It's like, "Wait a second. You're shattering from categories I was holding."

Tim: So that's how we got here.

Jon: That's how we got here.

Tim: The editorial unity of the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: To finish off this conversation on the Old Testament then, we Christians, Protestants, and Catholic call it the Old Testament. In Hebrew, it was just the scriptures.

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Tim: The Bible, the Scriptures.

Jon: And it also referred to as the Tanak because that's an acronym for the three parts? TNK.

Tim: Correct. Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim.

Jon: Nevi'im, Ketuvim. I remember in college learning this for the first time. Not really digging really into it, but kind of hearing, "Oh, that's a different Hebrew ordering. I didn't really understand it, but I knew of it because I wasn't as geeky as you. I remember thinking to myself, "Well, is it important that I read the Hebrew ordering of the Old Testament? Is there something more spiritual or is that more biblical?"

Tim: Yeah, it's interesting. I've had a hard time over the years trying to find a fair way to talk about this. The two orders, the English ordering, there's a logic to it. You tell the basic story of Israel, you have the poetry and wisdom Israel, and you have the prophets. Like a ski jump at the end of a steep hill. The prophets launch you off into the future hope of the Messiah, the kingdom of God.

Jon: Makes sense.

Tim: The Tanak also launches you into the hope of the Messiah and the kingdom of God, but in a different way. That hope is emphasized actually from the beginning. And then, the prophets as a whole to have their own ski jump, and then the writings themselves are a whole ski jump.

The three-part shape, we haven't talked about this, but the three-part editorial unity is itself designed at every step to pitch you forward in the future hope for the Messiah and the coming kingdom of God. And it's because the ordering of the books highlights those ski jumps in a way that the English ordering doesn't highlight.

It has to do with how the ending of Deuteronomy and the beginning of Joshua work together. And those would be beginnings and endings of scrolls.

Jon: Which is the same in our tradition.

Tim: It is the same in ours. And if you pay attention, you'll notice something there. But what's going on there as the scholars call it the literary seam between the Torah and the prophets, is directly connected to the literary seam between the prophets and the writings - the Nevi'im and Ketuvim.

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If you go read the final paragraph of Deuteronomy and then go read the final paragraph of the prophets, which is Malachi, you'll notice editorial electricity connecting those two. Then if you read the opening of the prophets, the first lines of the scroll the prophets, and then the first line of the first scroll of the writings, the Psalms, you'll see editorial electricity.

All those passages are talking to each other. They are a part of the editorial unification of the whole Hebrew Bible. All of these passages are about immersing yourself in the scriptures as you're waiting the future coming day of the Lord, you're awaiting the future prophets who are going to bring the day of Lord. And what's the day of the Lord on into the Psalms? It's all about the coming messianic Son of David who will bring the kingdom of God.

So the three-part shape of the Tanak is pre Christian, and it's messianic. It's future pointing. And that's exactly why Jesus says what he says, "Didn't I tell you? Everything had to be fulfilled. Those written in the Torah, in the prophets, and in the Psalms."

Jesus read his Bible as the Tanak as a big neon sign pointing to the future hope of the Messiah and the kingdom of God. And that's what he came to fulfill. So, I think reading the Bible in Tanak order is an important practice that Christians ought to recover.

And you can do this. You can go to your bookstore. Well, most people don't have bookstores. Go to Amazon bookstore, and go look for the Jewish publication societies version of the English translation of the Bible. It's called Tanak. It's actually called to Tanak, T-A-N-A-K. You can get it for like 12 bucks on Amazon.

Jon: Does Zondervan or anyone bind Old Testament and New Testament together?

Tim: There are no Christian publishers that publish in English translation of Tanak.

Jon: None? Zero?

Tim: Zero. There are some modern Jewish translations of the Old and New Testaments, and they'll organize it that way, but they're very obscure publishers or they're not mainstream at all. And I get it. For the major publishers, there's no money.

Jon: Wait. There some niche publishers who might do it?

Tim: Yeah. Hold on. Here we go. A Messianic Jewish scholar named David Stern, who through a small press called Lederer Messianic Publications, published English of the

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Tanak and of the B'rit Hadashah, which is Hebrew for New Testament. You can get it on Amazon, Kindle for 12 bucks or Paperback for 30 bucks or 20 bucks. It's called The Complete Jewish Bible.

Jon: What translation is he using?

Tim: In the Complete Jewish Bible.

Jon: Yeah. The Complete Jewish Bible shows the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation, in a unified Jewish book meant for everyone, Jew and Non-Jew. This text refers to the bonded leather edition.

Tim: It's cool because he gives you the Hebrew names of Old Testament characters. So that way they don't get butchered as they do in most English translations. Like James in the New Testament is Yacob.

Jon: So it's just a completely different translation?

Tim: Yeah, it might be his own translation.

Jon: I think it is.

Tim: Yeah. He's highly acclaimed English translation.

Jon: Oh, interesting.

Tim: Yeah. There you go.

Jon: For followers of Yeshua, this is a good translation that deserves its spot on your study shelf along with your NIV, NASB.

Tim: Yeah, it's awesome. You won't read the Bible the same way. It'll really transform how you read the Bible.

Jon: All right, cool. Next, we'll talk about the New Testament.

Tim: Yeah.

[00:54:38]

Jon: That's the Tanak. Let's just talk about the makeup of the New Testament really quick.

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Tim: We're talking about 27 books that all emerged out of the events ignited by Jesus of Nazareth. And they are all written by Israelites Jews who became disciples of Jesus.

Jon: During the Second Temple?

Tim: During the late Second Temple period. Then as the Jesus movement spread, after his death and resurrection, certain circle that Jesus appointed became figures he called the apostles. And then the books of the New Testament all stem from that circle of apostles. Most were written by the apostles or some were commissioned by or originated from, even if they weren't written by the apostle themselves.

So you have four accounts of the life of Jesus connected to the apostles Peter, Matthew—

Jon: Which one is Peter connected to?

Tim: The gospel of Mark. Matthew for Matthew. The Gospel of Luke, it's tricky. Many people associate it with the circle of Paul because we know Luke was a co-worker of Paul's. And then John.

Then after the four accounts of Jesus, you get the book of Acts, which is also from the same author as the Gospel according to Luke, which ends with Paul spreading the gospel all the way to Rome. Then you get a collection of Paul's 13 letters addressed to seven churches total. It's interesting. The first one being Rome.

You finish Acts, which has Paul in Rome, and then you turn the page, and it is Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

Jon: Which is one of his oldest letters?

Tim: Yeah, that's right. It's written later in his career.

Jon: Oh, and so interesting fact is these letters are ordered by their length, right?

Tim: They're ordered by their length, not by their dates. That's why Philemon is last.

Jon: And Matthew is first.

Tim: Yeah. Actually, I have some homework to do on the ordering of collection of Pauline letters. That ordering obscures some interesting relationships. It makes you think that Romans is this first when, in fact, it's one of the latest, most mature expressions of his entire theology.

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Jon: But it's longest.

Tim: It's the longest. As far as we can tell, 1st Thessalonians for complex reasons seems to be the earliest letter of Paul. And also there's an important relationship for example between Colossians and Philemon. I think they're meant to be read back to back as connected because they refer to all the same people.

Jon: It goes to Ephesians, Colossians?

Tim: But instead it's...Yeah.

Jon: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians.

Tim: Correct, yes.

Jon: Can we go through those really quick. Since we're talking about ordering, what's the tradition of ordering of the gospel?

Tim: Oh, yeah, boy. I have more homework to do there too. I know, the ordering of Matthew as the first of the four is pretty old. And by old, I mean maybe to the mid-100s or so when our first evidence before being written and collected together.

But historically, the consensus position in the New Testament scholarship that I think is right is that the Gospel of Mark is the oldest. The first. And that Matthew and Luke both drew upon Mark as one of their sources because they knew that it came from the testimony of Peter. Then John stands last in terms of the four to be written. But they're all written before the end of the first century.

Jon: So they're ordered Matthew first?

Tim: Oh, yeah. Here's my hunch. And my hunch is more like I've heard some other scholars say. Matthew is easily the most accessible and it's the version of Jesus's life that's mostly designed to be taught in a local church community. I learned this from experience because I did it.

Jon: That's right.

Tim: And actually, part of the reason why I advocated for taking a year and a half for Sunday in the local church where I contribute to the teaching was, Matthew designed this to be a gospel that is taught for living community. That's why he's gathered all of Jesus's teachings that are scattered in different places in Mark. But in

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Matthew is organized them all into five really nice blocks of Jesus's teaching. He's super methodical how he stages the four-story forward.

So Matthew is an excellent Gospel to teach a whole church through if you want to orient them to the complete story and teachings of Jesus.

Jon: It's more complete?

Tim: Yeah. By complete, I just mean Matthews trying to give you a well-rounded full-orbed presentation of Jesus in a methodical way in terms of how he's designed the story with story and then blocks of teaching, more narrative, more blocks of teaching.

Jon: So we don't really know why they were ordered that way? There was not simple like, "Well, it goes in order of length like the epistles.

Tim: No, it's not an order of length. I've got in my Amazon wish list two big treatments on the formation of the for gospel canon. A lot of it has to do with our manuscript evidence.

Jon: Because it is weird that Luke wouldn't come last and match Acts.

Tim: I know. Luke obviously wrote to works that go together. But at some point, early church communities viewed there was a greater value in seeing Luke as part of this four-part collection of the Gospels than the two-part volume Luke, Acts.

Jon: Because it could have easily been Matthew, Mark, John, and then Luke, Acts. But that's not.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. And because Matthew, Mark, and Luke have a unique relationship because they drew upon common source material, they have been preserved as a triad.

Jon: Got it. And then we get to Paul's letters. We talked about those. Then there are more letters after that.

Tim: Then it's the...what do you do? The top 10 list of the apostles. So it's Peter, and then John. Peter has two letters written to...a circular letters to many different church communities. Then you have John's, three letter - 1st, 2nd 3rd John, 1st of which is the longest. 1st John is not even a letter at all. It's an early Christian sermon.

Jon: Are those in order of length or date or anything?

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Tim: Oh, it's not self-evident what the order of writing was. Lots of different views on that.

Jon: But they are in order of length?

Tim: They are in order of length, yeah.

Jon: Long, medium, short.

Tim: Yeah, correct. And you have the letter of James, Jesus' brother. Although there are some people think that it's from James who was one of the 12 sons of Zebedee. But the majority position I think it's more likely is that it's Jesus' brother. Then the next letter is Jacob. No, excuse me. James

Jon: James is also more literally Jacob.

Tim: Jacob, yeah. Sorry, his Hebrew name's Jacob.

Jon: Yacob.

Tim: Then Jude is also Jesus' brother. He wasn't one of the circles of the 12 but we know that Jesus' brothers became missionaries and church leaders after him. Paul mentions that in his 1st letter to the Corinthians. We're not going in order here. Then canonical order.

Then we also have one anonymous early Christian sermon in the New Testament, a letter form, which is Hebrews. Which has traditionally for some amount of church history was associated with Paul. And even in some early manuscript was included within the Paul's letter collection.

Jon: Canonically goes—

Tim: So the order of the New Testament letters then goes from the letters of Paul, then to Hebrews, then to James.

Jon: The anonymous letter.

Tim: Yeah, anonymous letters. Two letters of Peter, three letters of John, one letter of Jude.

Jon: Those are the those are the epistles?

Tim: Those letters of the New Testament.

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Jon: And is there any reason why they were ordered that way that you know of?

Tim: I mean, it makes sense for Paul that Paul's correspondence that rose to the surface, the ones that went viral that that would be collected. And then you have his hit list, James, Peter, John. Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples. Then you have James and Jude, two of his brothers. So you've got this pretty complete representation of the apostles and the leaders closest to the apostles.

Jon: Why did Hebrews right in the mix?

Tim: Hebrews is self-aware as being a document that comes from a disciple of the apostles. In chapter 1, he talks about, "Listen, we are those who have heard from those who heard the Lord."

And so the author, pastor, I call him, the pastor of Hebrews is writing to a church community, Messianic Jewish community that he's scared is going abandon faith in Jesus. And so he leverages the teaching of the apostles. It's what he says in the sermon's opening. We don't know. Hebrews is really interesting.

But again, this is getting into the history of the canon, for how these letters rose to the top was not through getting voted by councils. It was through the growth of the Jesus movement and what letters and literature stemming from the apostles went viral and rose to the top.

And Hebrews was among that list, even though it wasn't directly authored by an apostle - at least it doesn't claim that in the document itself like Paul's letters do, or Peter's - but it does claim to be passing on the teachings of the original apostles. And so it rose to the top. And it's powerful. Hebrews is powerful.

Jon: So that's the punch. Then this all ends with Revelation.

Tim: Yeah. Jewish Christian Apocalypse.

Jon: A Jewish Christian apocalypse.

Tim: Or a Christian Jew who wrote an apocalypse.

Jon: And then apocalypse, we know what those are from other books in the Old Testament, right?

Tim: They are parts of the books of the prophet in the Hebrew Bible that communicate through at the Prophet having a fantastic dream or vision, and then he meets some

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kind of mediator, usually angelic type figure who explains what the meaning of his dream or vision is. Ezekiel has one of those, Isaiah, Zachariah.

And so in Second Temple Judaism, that media - let's think back to the analogy of the arc project - that would be one of the ways that—

Jon: That might be spoken word.

Tim: Yeah, little-spoken word. It was like, "Oh, this is one of the apocalyptic section of there's a dream or vision and it gets explained." So then, out of that, in the amazingly productive literature of the Second Temple Jewish communities around Jerusalem, there were produced whole books that were apocalypses.

The most significant ones throughout history have been a book called "Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch," are the most significant ones. And they read very much like the New Testament book of Revelation. Prophet has a dream or a vision, fantastic symbol, and then they're interpreted and made relevant to the community the author wants to write to.

And so what we have in Revelation is John. And whether that's the apostle John, or whether it's a Jewish Christian prophet who traveled around the seven churches that he writes to, but he's not an apostle.

Jon: Oh, we don't know for sure?

Tim: There are strong arguments on either side. But yeah, he had a series of dreams or visions and then composed all of them together into this incredibly profound, and sophisticated literary work that he calls the revelation of Jesus.

That also emerges out of the life of the early church, just like all the other letters do, but he's aware of himself speaking to the whole community of Jesus' followers all over the world. And he's trying to motivate them towards faithfulness in light of the coming persecution. He knows is on the horizon.

Jon: That makes sense that this one's last because it talks very specifically about the end of the age.

Tim: Yeah, apocalypse is by nature, the Prophet would have a dream or vision and it would give them...scholars talk about two dimensions that are opened up for the prophet. One is vertical.

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Usually, there's a heavenly Throne Room, the prophet has a vision of God's throne. And so it gives them this heavenly vantage point on current events in history. But then it also gives them a horizontal viewpoint of able to view the present moment in light of the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises, which is the return of the Messiah, the Kingdom of God, heaven on earth reunited, evil vanquished forever.

And so apocalypses give a heavenly vantage point on history viewing current events in light of history its final outcome in the kingdom of God. It's obviously fitting that the Revelation is capstone of the Christian Bible because it's about how the story ends and therefore how to live in the present in light of the story's end.

So there's a question, "Was Jonah aware of himself as writing the final book of the Bible?" But I mean, that technical is called an anachronism because even the collection of all those 27 writings wasn't all together in one place yet. They all were in existence by then and they were being read, but not everybody had all of Paul's letters yet. They were still getting circulated around.

It took another period of time for these 27 work stemming from the circle of the apostles to become universally acknowledged and recognized as Holy Scripture.

Jon: Which is a story for another time.

Tim: Which is the story for another time. But that's the shape of the Bible.

Jon: That's it for our discussion on what the Bible is. You could find the video we made on this topic. It's on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/thebibleproject. It's also on our website, thebibleproject.com.

Coming up next on the podcast is going to be a discussion on the Holy Spirit. Tim and I had a lot of fun going through the theme of God's Spirit to the narrative arc of Scripture and seeing how instrumental God's Holy Spirit is to the Christian life.

So make sure to subscribe to this podcast, if you haven't, so that you can get that episode when it comes out. And it will also be our next theme video on our YouTube channel and on our website. Say hi to us on Twitter, on Facebook, on YouTube. And if you like this podcast, please give it a review. It helps a lot in the exposure of this project. Thanks so much for being a part of this with us.