

Duane Christensen <dlc@bibal.net>

“FROM SACRED STORY TO CANONICAL TEXT: THE FORMATION OF THE BIBLE”

Duane L. Christensen
Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA

It is often assumed that the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) 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 (*Nevi'im*) by ca. 200 B.C.E., and completed with the addition of the Writings (*Kethuvim*) by ca. 90–100 C.E. 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 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 as canonical Scripture.

Josephus describes the canon of the Tanakh as consisting of twenty-two books: five books by Moses, thirteen by the prophets, and four other books of hymns and wisdom (*Against Apion* 1.8). The four books in Josephus’ third category are identified in the light of Jack Lightstone’s discussion of the tripartite rabbinic Masoretic Bible of the medieval period. Lightstone posits the so-called Festal Scrolls (the *Megilloth*) as a single canonical category, much the same as the Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets).

David Noel Freedman makes a strong case for a “master editor” responsible for writing what he calls the “Primary History” (the Torah and the Former Prophets). This paper modifies Freedman’s thesis to include an earlier version of the entire three-part canon described by Josephus. Moreover, we posit the nature of the editing process that transformed sacred story into canonical Scripture, in the hands of Baruch and Seraiah in the Babylonian Exile (and Ezra later in the canonical process), which focuses on the symbolic use of the divine-name numbers 17 and 26.

In like manner, this paper posits Luke as the “master editor” of the Greek New Testament, which was written as a conscious attempt to “complete” the Tanakh in the second half of the first century C.E. The arguments presented in this paper are based on specific data, which has emerged in recent months in the “Word Count Project” (see www.bibal.net).