

What's in a Name? Book Titles in the Latter Prophets and Writings

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Abstract: This article completes a survey of Old Testament book titles, making use of the four possible functions of a title as differentiated by Gérard Genette. The books of the Latter Prophets and Writings were assigned titles that indicate that those responsible for the titles had reflected upon the form and content of the biblical books. The titles are in effect a commentary on the books. As such the titles assist, or in some cases hinder, the interpretive efforts of the reader. They are to be weighed and considered but certainly not ignored.

AN EARLIER ARTICLE SURVEYED the titles of the nine books that make up the Torah and Former Prophets.* In this article I complete the survey of the titles attached to the books of the Old Testament, attending to the Latter Prophets and Writings. As indicated in that earlier article, the titles assigned to literary works form one of a number of paratextual elements that frame or package the material comprising the text proper. It is only too easy for those who read (and even critically evaluate) texts to overlook the influence and relevance of the paratext to the reading process. With this in mind, Kevin Jackson has called paratextual elements such as book titles “invisible forms”. He bemoans the fact that they are often unacknowledged and unexamined.¹ The titles of the biblical books deserve and require critical readerly attention in their own right.

*See Gregory Goswell, “What’s in a Name? Book Titles in the Torah and Former Prophets”, *Pacifica* 20.1 (October, 2007) 262-77. Sections 1 and 2 of this survey, on the Torah and the Former Prophets, are contained in the first article. This present article includes section 3 and 4 on the Latter Prophets and Writings.

1. Kevin Jackson, *Invisible Forms: A Guide to Literary Curiosities* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999), see chapter 1 on titles.

G rard Genette has provided a useful interpretive grid for analysing the possible functions of any given book title.² One function is to identify or differentiate a work, another to indicate its general contents, a third to highlight it to the public, and a fourth to indicate its form or genre. These categories are a helpful starting point in critically examining the various titles given to biblical books. The primary and indispensable function of a title is to differentiate one literary work from others. A title enables a text to stand out from other texts (in both thought and communication). An arbitrary title would fulfil this function as effectively as one chosen after careful consideration of the text's content or form. An examination reveals that no book of the Bible was assigned an arbitrary title, even though some titles (e.g. Leviticus, Ecclesiastes) probably mean little or nothing to most modern readers. A second function of a title (as distinguished by Genette) is to suggest something about a book's contents or theme. Since no title can say everything that might be said about the subject of a text, a title may easily mislead readers as to what a text is about. (The title "Kings", for example, obscures the role played by prophets in the ordering of Southern and Northern kingdoms.) A third function is that of recommending a literary work to a potential readership. In this regard, the titles of biblical books (consistent with the commercial innocence of literary titles generally until about the start of the twentieth century) are not overtly promotional, with the exception of the "Song of Songs" (= The Greatest Song). The fourth function of a title is to classify a book according to its form or genre. Generic titles were common in the ancient world, and in the case of the Bible, titles such "Praises" (= Psalms) and Lamentations, fit under this functional category.

3. LATTER PROPHETS

The collection known as the "Latter Prophets" (*n b 'im  h r n im*) comprises four large books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, The Twelve). When these books are placed side-by-side, they give an impression of regular prophetic succession. Unlike the Former Prophets, whose books are named after main characters (e.g. Joshua, Samuel) or content (e.g., Judges, Kings), the books of the Latter Prophets are named after the prophetic mouthpiece used by the LORD (e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Joel).

The common titles of the separate books (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc.) are justified by the superscriptions that head most of them (e.g. Isa

2. G rard Genette, "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Summer 1988) 692-720.

1:1; Jer 1:1-3; Am 1:1). Codex Alexandrinus in its subscriptions to the three great prophetic books has "Isaiah the prophet" etc. (and for Ezekiel it takes this form for both the inscription and the subscription).³ The titles amount to abbreviations of long superscriptions and so do not give all the information that the superscriptions do (e.g. kings are mentioned by name in a number of the superscriptions but do not make it into the titles). The abbreviated titles imply "The *Book/Scroll* of Isaiah" or "Isaiah's message", etc.⁴ It cannot be said, however, that the figure of the prophet is prominent in most of the books so named. Isaiah features in his prophecy only in chapters 6-8, 20, 36-39. Jeremiah as a character is mainly found in Jeremiah chapters 26-29 and 32-44. His prophetic book provides a "biography of the word", not of Jeremiah himself, who is featured only as the bearer of the word, and who suffers because God's word is rejected. Ezekiel features in the prophecy named after him (e.g. his call in chapter 1 and his prophetic actions in chapters 4, 5 and 12), but in a way quite different from Jeremiah, whose ministry is very public. Ezekiel's apparent disconnection with his situation has led to scholarly debate over his location.⁵ The result is that Ezekiel as a character is not as prominent in the book named after him as is Jeremiah in his book. In Hosea 1-3 the pattern of Israel's history is reflected in the marriage relationship of Hosea and Gomer. Gomer's sin, punishment and restoration symbolise God's dealings with Israel. The prophet Amos only features in Am 7:10-17, a passage that is part of the larger theme of the silencing of the prophets (Am 2:12; 3:8; 5:13).⁶ The priest Amaziah urges Amos to flee to Judah and preach there (not in Bethel). The little prophecy of Jonah, by contrast, stands in reverse proportion to other prophetic books, being a narrative *about* the prophet, with the oracle of Jonah (3:4) limited to five words (in Hebrew). The prophet's own character and psychology are the focal point of the book. Jonah is a prophetic caricature or parody.⁷

3. A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (2 vols. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung 1935; two volumes in one 1979) 566, 656, 748, 770, 863.

4. 2 Chr 32:32 may refer to the canonical book of Isaiah under the fuller title "the Vision of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz" (cf. Isa 1:1). CD 7.10 names it "the words of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz" (cf. Florilegium 4Q174), though, like Mark 1:5; Luke 3:4; 4:17, 20; Acts 8:28, 30, these may not be strictly speaking titles.

5. See a recent review of the issue in John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Biblical and Judaic Studies from the University of California, San Diego 7; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000) 15-18. Kutsko insists on the Mesopotamian setting of the book.

6. P. R. Ackroyd, "A Judgment Narrative Between Kings and Chronicles? An Approach to Amos 7:9-17", in George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 71-87.

7. Robin Payne, "The Prophet Jonah: Reluctant Messenger and Intercessor", *ExpTim* 100 (1989) 131-134, with the book amounting to a manual on how *not* to be a prophet!

On the whole, then, we have little information about the prophets as people, and Joel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Malachi are names only. In the case of Malachi (Hebrew = “my messenger”) we may not even know that. The titles place the focus on the prophetic mouthpiece but the books are not reflective of a biographical interest *per se*, and with the exception of Jonah, they largely consist of an anthology of the oracles of the prophets.⁸

The failure of the brief titles to specify to whom the prophet speaks (whether to Judah, to Israel, or to the exiles) – information often contained in the superscription – is a feature that helps to universalise their message. With regard to the individuals whom the prophetic scrolls invoke as the eponyms, it is not necessarily the case that those who appended the prophets’ names to the respective books viewed the prophets as the authors of their books.⁹ The titles are not straightforward claims about authorship. Certainly the book of Jonah’s highly critical stance toward its protagonist tends to exclude him as a likely candidate for author.

In the Hebrew Bible the prophets Hosea to Malachi are combined together in one book as “The Twelve Prophets” (*tērē ‘āsār*). Consistent with this understanding, Epiphanius (*De Mensuris et Ponderibus* 23) transliterates in Greek letters the Hebrew title when referring to this part of the canon (*dathariasara*). As part of a review of Old Testament worthies, Sirach 49:10 mentions “the bones of the twelve prophets (*tōn dōdeka prophētōn*)”. This wording presumably reflects the view that the twelve prophetic books are a collection. This Hebrew designation also appears in the Babylonian Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b/15a). It is matched by the expression *dōdekaphēton* in the LXX (Vaticanus, Alexandrinus). Hosea-Malachi (note the divergence in the LXX order compared to the Hebrew) are in the subscriptions of the three Great Uncials numbered 1-12 (e.g. *Osēe a*),¹⁰ which suggests the unity of the twelve parts. Melito in his listing calls this book *Tōn dōdeka [prophētōn] en monobiblō* (“the Twelve [Prophets] in one book”).¹¹ Likewise, Jerome cites it (translating the Hebrew title in Roman script) as *thare asra (Prologus Galeatus)*.¹² Acts 7:42 refers to the Book of the Twelve under the title “the Book of the Prophets” (*en biblō tōn prophētōn*) in introducing a quotation from Amos 5:25-27.

8. N.B. Luke 3:4: “the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet” (cf. Luke 4:17, 20).

9. As Robert P. Markham assumes (“Ancient and Modern Titles of Books of the Bible”, *The Bible Translator* 18 [1967] 86-94, see p. 90).

10. See examples from Sinaiticus in H.J.M. Milne and T.C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938) Plates 2-3, 17-21.

11. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl. iv. 26*.

12. This is his head-piece (*Helmed Prologue*) to the Vulgate version of Samuel and Kings.

The Vulgate designates the Twelve *Prophetæ Minores*, represented in the English by the “Minor Prophets”. This common designation refers only to the relative brevity of the individual books, not to their importance. It probably derives from Augustine (*City of God* 18.29). In the Jewish canonical lists, the Twelve Prophets are always counted as one book. The limitation of their number to twelve (one prophet per tribe?) appears to express appropriate completeness: that is, there are twelve and no more, with this marking and asserting the end of biblical prophecy.¹³ Not only is Malachi the last canonical prophet, there is no expectation of any beyond him.

4. WRITINGS

The naming of the third part of the Hebrew canon, “the Writings” (*hakkētûbîm*) reflects its *disparate* contents, this group of books being the most diverse and heterogeneous of the three groupings in the Tanak in terms of form and content.¹⁴ The term “Hagiographa”, as an alternate name for the Writings, corresponds to the expression *kētûbê haqqôdes̄* (“The Holy Writings”) that was used by the Jews in antiquity for the books of the third division of their canon.¹⁵ A general expression like that also allows this section of the Hebrew canon to encompass works belonging to many genres.

Psalms

The book of Psalms (Vulgate *Liber Psalmorum*) has the Hebrew title [sēp̄er] *tēhillîm*,¹⁶ that is “[book of] praises”), though the word occurs (in the singular) only once in a title to an individual psalm (Psalm 145 “Praise of David”). This is, however, a strategic placement. According to G.H. Wilson, Psalm 145 is the climax of the Psalter (followed only by a five-psalm doxology), and in this psalm the overall theology of the Psalter with its stress upon the kingship of God is mouthed by David himself (145:1: “I will extol thee, my God and King”).¹⁷ Philo and

13. See Edgar W. Conrad, “The End of Prophecy and the Appearance of Angels/Messengers in the Book of the Twelve”, *JSOT* 73 (1997) 65-79. It is not necessary to bolster this argument by postulating (on the basis of the similar formula at Zech 9:1; 12:1; Mal 1:1) that the Malachi section was artificially divided off from what precedes to achieve the required twelve sections.

14. A point made by David Noel Freedman, *The Unity of the Hebrew Bible* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) 75.

15. Harry M. Orlinsky, “Prolegomenon: The Masoretic Text: A Critical Evaluation”, in C. D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Ktav, 1966) XL.

16. The spelling *tēhillōt* is found in the medieval Jewish treatise *Adath Deborim*.

17. G. H. Wilson, “The Shape of the Book of Psalms”, *Interpretation* 46 (1992) 129-42, see p. 133.

Josephus use the Greek word *hymnoi*, apparently in reference to this book,¹⁸ and this could go back to *tēhillīm*. The title corresponds with its designation in the New Testament, the “book of psalms” (*biblos psalmōn*, Lk 20:42; Acts 1:20). Melito calls it *Psalmōn Dabid* (“The Psalms of David”), making the Davidic connection explicit.¹⁹ The LXX (Vaticanus, Sinaiticus) calls it *psalmoi*, which word in the Greek versions is used to render another Hebrew word, *mizmôr* (“song, melody”), found often in the titles of individual psalms (e.g. Psalms 47-51). This word in the plural makes the book an anthology of hymns to be sung to musical accompaniment. Praise may be the note upon which the Psalter ends (Psalms 146-150), but it is not an obvious name for the book when the reader commences, for the early psalms are for the most part laments (e.g. Psalms 3-7). The first four books within the Psalter end with short doxologies (41:13; 72:18-19; 89:52; 106:48), and the Psalter as a whole closes with five *Hallelujah* psalms (Psalms 146-150).²⁰

The title is also in some tension with the book’s setting among (other?) wisdom books and the positioning of Psalm 1 as an “introduction”, but it has the virtue of keeping alive the memory of its use in communal praise (as reflected in some Psalm titles).²¹ The Hebrew title *tēhillīm* emphasises the feature of praise that is found in almost all the psalms, even the psalms of lament (e.g. 3:3; 7:11), and requires that all the psalms be understood as praise, even those manifestly not songs of praise in any modern form-critical sense. Finally it is a faith statement to the effect that in the good purposes of God lament will give way to praise.²² Another English title, “Psalter”, comes from Codex Alexandrinus, which gives this book the title *psaltērion*,²³ meaning “stringed instrument”, on the assumption that the psalms are songs to be sung to the lyre. This word is used in the LXX Psalter to translate the Hebrew words *kinnôr* (LXX Pss 48:4 [Eng. 49:4], etc.) or *nēbel*, *nebel* (LXX Pss 32:2 [Eng. 33:2]; 56:8 [Eng. 57:8], etc.), and it is used

18. Philo, *On the Contemplative Life*, 25; Josephus, *Against Apion* I.38-41.

19. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.

20. For the significance of the Psalter ending with praise, see W. Brueggemann, “Bounded by Obedience and Praise: The Psalms as Canon”, *JSOT* 50 (1991) 63-92.

21. See Harry P. Nasuti’s discussion of the title, *Defining the Sacred Songs: Genre, Tradition and the Post-Critical Interpretation of the Psalms* (JSOTSup 218; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 194-96.

22. Another Hebrew (Mishnaic) title is *tēpillōt* (“Prayers”), and this is justified, not only by an examination of the content of many of the psalms wherein God is addressed but by the note at the end of Psalm 72 that seems to regard all the preceding compositions as prayers (*tēpillōt*). Psalms 17, 86, 90, 102 and 142 are designated in this manner by title.

23. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta*, vol. 2, p. 1. This is the name given in the Bryennios’ list, see J.-P. Audet, “A Hebrew-Aramaic List of the Books of the Old Testament in Greek Transcription”, *JTS NS* 1 (1950) 135-54, see p. 136.

in Psalm 151.2 (no MT equivalent). Such a naming also construes the Psalter as a book of praise.

Job

The book of Job (Vulgate *Liber Jobi*) matches its Hebrew name *ʿiyyôb*, referring not to the putative author of the work but to its main character, the long-suffering Job, who is a model of wisdom (Job 1:1: “one who feared God...”; cf. the motto of Proverbs, Prov 1:7). Job’s fascinating, at times hair-raising, speeches mean that his character is at the forefront of the reader’s attention, and so the book is no disembodied discussion of suffering and evil. The issue of the book is not the problem of suffering as such, for there is no mystery to Job’s suffering here. We know why he is suffering, the reader being privy to the behind-the-scenes glimpse provided by Job 1-2. Job is certainly not the typical sufferer. He is not “everyman” but a lone and remarkable individual (1:8; 2:3: “there is none like him on the earth”). Athalya Brenner stresses the superior piety of Job, with the cluster of superlatives and their triple repetition (1:1, 8; 2:3), making Job more piously righteous than any other individual in the Old Testament.²⁴ She sees this as an “unrealistic” element in his characterisation and points to the idealising use of sevens and threes in the book (e.g. 1:2, 3; 2:11, 13; 42:12-13) as confirming this evaluation. This does not, however, mean that Job must be a legendary figure. The reason for Job’s suffering is never the reason for anyone else’s,²⁵ for the behaviour of YHWH in Job 1-2, having a wager with Satan, is so unusual, that we are not to imagine that this is a “typical day in heaven” or that God is always doing things such as this. This does not suggest the non-existence of Job. Rather, it suggests that Job is a special case (though with broader application).

Proverbs

“Proverbs” (LXX *Paroimiai*;²⁶ Vulgate *Liber Proverbiorum*) corresponds to the Hebrew *mišlê*, (“Proverbs of [Solomon]”) as in the superscription (Prov 1:1), while the singular *māšāl* (“proverb”) is used in 1:6 along with a number of close synonyms. This title inevitably throws the emphasis on chapters 10-31 as the “body” of the book, with chapters 1-9 seen as introductory. Indeed it is of the final twenty-two chapters

24. “Job the Pious? The Characterization of Job in the Narrative Framework of the Book”, *JSOT* 43 (1989) 37-52, see pp. 41, 42.

25. D. J. A. Clines, “Deconstructing the Book of Job”, in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (ed. *idem*; JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 106-123.

26. Codex Alexandrinus gives the fuller title *Paroimiai Solomontos*, and Codex Sinaiticus adds *Solomontos* in the subscription (Milne and Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors*, Plate 4).

that we tend to think when the book of Proverbs (so-named) is mentioned. An acceptance of this title may, however, reverse the canonical focus, seeing that chapters 1-9 appear to serve as a hermeneutical guide to the rest of the book. That is, chapters 10-31 are meant to be read through the lens of chapters 1-9, thus placing a profound theological nuance on the individual proverbs, many of which make no reference to God.²⁷ This would caution the reader against making an in-principle division between “old wisdom” and Yahwistic piety in the book of Proverbs such as posited by William McKane.²⁸ Further to that, the inclusion of the name of Solomon in the title (as either author or collector or both) would suggest a religious orientation for the book as a whole, given the fact that this king’s supreme wisdom is depicted as God-given in 1 Kgs 3:3-14.²⁹

Ruth

The book named “Ruth” received this title (LXX *Routh*; MT *rûṭ*), despite the fact that the central character is Naomi. The book depicts Naomi’s crisis, moving from her emptiness (1:21) to her fullness (4:17). All the other characters – her husband, her sons, her two daughters-in-law, Boaz, even the son whom Ruth bears – stand in relation to Naomi (1:3, 5, 6; 2:1; 4:17). All this tends to focus the story from Naomi’s perspective.³⁰ Why, then, was it called “Ruth”? It is the figure of Ruth who captures the reader’s interest, because it is she who features in every scene in the book (except that at the city gate, and there she is the subject of conversation in that all-male situation). The theme of the book is the manner and method by which Naomi’s hopeless condition is reversed, but it is through loyal and active Ruth that the reversal is effected. This makes Ruth the *main* character (the main character does not need to be the central character) and so the book can be considered aptly named.

The Song of Songs

“The Song of Songs”, in Hebrew *šîr haššîrîm* (= the greatest song),³¹ would appear to be a recommendation of it as the song of supreme

27. The Hebrew (Mishnaic) title *sēp̄er ḥokmā* (“Book of Wisdom”) classifies Proverbs as within the genre of wisdom literature and perhaps identifies it as the apotheosis of wisdom thinking.

28. See his *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM, 1965).

29. Melito expands the title as *Solomontos Paroimiai, hē kai Sophia* (“The Proverbs of Solomon, which is also Wisdom”), *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.12-14.

30. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series 9; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983) 83-110.

31. Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (2nd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) §47.

beauty (*GNB* 1.1) or artistic merit (Genette's third function), and it takes the same form in the Latin (*Canticum Canticorum*).³² This coincides with the first verse of the book. The alternative English title "The Song of Solomon" (*AV, RV, NASB*), which amounts to a differently-worded abbreviation of the superscription, makes a Solomonic connection, and this links the song to other canonical wisdom productions such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (compare Prov 1:1 and Eccles 1:1). Within this cycle of love songs, Solomon is referred to in a simile (1:5: "like the curtains of Solomon"), in a mention of his vineyard (8:11-12), and more extensively in a description of his litter (3:6-11). He is not, however, the lover depicted, despite his considerable biblical reputation (or notoriety?) in this field (cf. 1 Kgs 11:1-3).

The LXX title (Vaticanus) is simply *Asma* ("Song"), and this is a generic designation, but Codex Sinaiticus has a more literal rendering of the Hebrew (*Asma asmatōn*).³³ The title in Vaticanus in failing to reflect the superlative sense in the superscription does not need to be understood as a downgrading of the book. The use of the singular in these titles does not support the modern supposition that the book is a cycle of (separate) love songs. Further, the wisdom connection (via Solomon's name) would imply that the Song is more than an effusive outpouring of sentiment but is a means of instruction (and warning), for example, the urging in the refrain-like verses at 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4 ("that you stir not up nor awaken love until it please").

Ecclesiastes

"Ecclesiastes" in Hebrew bears the title *qōheleṯ* ("Qoheleth"), drawn from the superscription in Eccles 1.1. The term is used in 1:1, 2, 7:27 and 12:8, 9, 10. It comes from the Hebrew root *qāhal* ("to collect or convoke") and appears to be the name of an office of some kind. In 1:1, 2, Qoheleth could be a proper name, but this could not be the case in 12:8 with its definite article (cf. LXX 7:27). The Hebrew participial form is an occupational designation, and 12:9 may imply "assembly of pupils", so Qoheleth has been rendered as "teacher", "preacher" (German *Prediger*), "philosopher"³⁴ (though these make no attempt to convey the meaning of the word in itself), "convener (congregation-leader)". Jerome interpreted this term in Latin as *concionator*, or "speaker before an

32. Likewise the usual German title, *Hohelied*.

33. Codex Alexandrinus has *Asmata* (*Asma* in subscript) *asmatōn* (Rahlfs [ed.], *Septuaginta*, 270 in second volume).

34. This is used in the text of the *GNB* (1:1, 12 etc.) but not as the title. Such a rendering reflects the contents of the book as the musings of a thoughtful person who was not satisfied with simplistic answers when wrestling with the problems of life.

assembly".³⁵ The English title "Ecclesiastes" is from the LXX *Ekklesiastēs* "member of the assembly", or "assembler (of proverbs)" as suggested by 12:9b, and this may be the best suggestion for what the Hebrew word means (though only a suggestion). The latter suggestion draws attention to the presence of proverbial material within the book (e.g. Eccl 7:1-13) and helps to relate Ecclesiastes to the book of Proverbs as a partner, not an opponent.

There are also "Solomon-like" descriptions (1:1, 12, 16; 2:4-11), though a claim to have wisdom "surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me" (1:16; 2:7, 9), sounds a little odd, seeing that Solomon was only preceded by *one* such king, David his father. It may, however, be a stock phrase that is not meant to be taken literally (cf. 1 Chr 29:25). It seems clear enough that the reader is at least meant to think of Solomon, the consummate wise king who had everything. Yet it has also been suggested that this first person narrative is in the form of a fictional autobiography – one can make a strong case for comparison with Akkadian fictional autobiographies.³⁶ The Solomonic connection (however this is understood) asserts that Ecclesiastes is *official* wisdom literature rather than "wisdom in revolt".³⁷ The writer is no iconoclast.

Lamentations

The book in Hebrew is named after its first word ^{ʿēkâ}, the characteristic lament "Ah, How!", which is found again in prominent position in Lam 2:1 and 4:1. The LXX, however, named it after its content, "Tears [of Jeremiah]" (*Thrēnoi*),³⁸ as did the Vulgate *Threni* ("Tears"), with the interpretation, "The lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet" (*Threni, id est lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae*), and the English AV title is derived from the Latin. The title in Latin (*Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetae*) is an authorship claim, reflecting the traditional assignment of the book to Jeremiah, which the Vulgate and hence the English versions followed. The book is appropriate to the image of the

35. Qoheleth Rabbah 1.2 adopted this explanation (referring to 1 Kgs 8:1: "Then Solomon assembled (*yaqhēi*) the elders of Israel...").

36. C.L. Seow, "Qohelet's Autobiography", in *Fortunate the Eyes that See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of his Seventieth Birthday* (eds. Astrid B. Beck et al; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 275-287.

37. Eric S. Christianson argues against the common supposition that the Solomonic "guise" is limited to the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes (*A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* [JSOTSup 280; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998] chapter 6).

38. In Vaticanus and Alexandrinus *ieremiou* ("of Jeremiah") is added as a subscript. This amounts to an abbreviation of the superscription added in the Greek version of Lamentations: "And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem laid waste, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lament [*ethrēnēsen ton thēnon touton*] over Jerusalem and said", cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 10.5.1 (or 10.78), Origen (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.25) and *Seder Olam Rabbah* 24.

suffering prophet as depicted in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was an acknowledged composer of laments (2 Chr 35:25: "Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah"). He was a prophet adept at mourning (Jer 9:1: "O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"). A verse like Lam 3:14 sounds like Jeremiah (cf. Jer 20:7), and the similarity of the suffering of the man in chapter 3 generally to Jeremiah is plain. We are on the lookout for such similarities, given the LXX placement of the book after Jeremiah. This book, like the prophecy of Jeremiah, helps the reader to a right understanding of the catastrophe that befell Jerusalem and is indeed a vindication of the teaching of that prophet who predicted the city's downfall. Epiphanius gave it the generic title *Kinōth*, which coincides with the Hebrew (Talmudic *Baba Bathra* 14b; *Adath Deborim*) title *qinōt* ("Dirges"). All the titles normally assigned obscure the (surprising) surge of hope that is found in the central part of the book (3:20-33).

Esther

Naming the book "Esther" (Hebrew *ʾestēr*, cf. LXX *Esthēr*; Vulgate *Esther*) highlights the heroine of the book rather than sharing the attention between Esther and Mordecai (despite chapter 10 that depicts Mordecai in semi-royal terms).³⁹ The naming of the book is appropriate given the book's puncturing of male pride (e.g. 1:12, 22); Haman and Ahasuerus, in particular, are mercilessly mocked. The book generally is very positive about the role of women and undercuts male chauvinism.⁴⁰ Since it is Esther's initiative that is highlighted (e.g. 4:16), the book is aptly entitled "Esther".

In the book of Esther nothing is said concerning God's control of events. The reason for this silence is probably so that the roles of Mordecai, Esther and the other Jews might take centre stage. The omission of references to God is thus intentional and serves a function in the narrative. The book parades and applauds human initiative in a crisis. If Esther does not intercede with the king, help will surely come "from another quarter". This, in context, is *not* a veiled reference to God but draws a contrast with "in the king's palace" (4:13). If help is not forthcoming from inside the palace (through Esther), then help will come from outside the palace. The reader is meant to assume that the LORD is in control, given the fact that the book found a home in the

39. 2 Macc 15:35 refers to Purim as "Mordecai's day" (*tēs Mardochāi kēs hēmeras*), perhaps due to the prominence in 9:20-22 of Mordecai's letter, which contains instructions concerning the feast.

40. Bruce W. Jones, "Two Misconceptions about the Book of Esther", *CBQ* 39 (1977) 171-81.

canon. The narrator, however, is not interested in demonstrating to his audience God's control of history, as for instance the author of the book of Daniel clearly aims to do.

An alternative title for the book we know as "Esther" is found in the treatise *Adath Deborim* by Joseph of Constantinople (CE 1207), namely "Ahasuerus",⁴¹ which is presumably an excerpt from the opening words of the book: "In the days of Ahasuerus". The book opens with this king's marital problems, the disobedience of Queen Vashti and her deposition. This clears the way for Esther to enter court life as her replacement. The unrewarded service of Mordecai (2:19-23) at the end of the introductory exposition (his discovery of the eunuchs' plot against the king) will be crucial to the resolution of the plot's tension. The main action begins with the king's surprise elevation of Haman (3:1). After 2:21-23, it is expected that Mordecai would be promoted. This provokes a deadly conflict between these rival courtiers. The turning point of the plot is the king's sleepless night (6:1), when the king is reminded of Mordecai's unrewarded service and the downfall of Haman begins.⁴² There is a final reference to the fuller record of the reign of Ahasuerus in "the Book of the Chronicles of kings of Media and Persia" (10:2). The climactic placement of 10:2(-3) serves to highlight two earlier verses that mention the royal "Book of Chronicles" wherein are recorded the details of Mordecai's service to the king (2:23; 6:1). On this reading the canonical book amounts to an account of the reign of Ahasuerus (told from a certain viewpoint), the dominant narratorial concern being the welfare of the Jews in his kingdom, and the role played by Mordecai in serving both the Persian king and the Jewish people. It is not necessary for the reader to decide on the one-and-only-right title for the book (either Esther or Ahasuerus), for each title in its own way throws light on the book's contents.

Daniel

In the book of Daniel, so-named in the Hebrew Bible (*dāniyyē'ī*), Daniel's name quickly comes to prominence over the other three named youths in chapter 1, who nevertheless have a chapter of their own (Daniel 3). Daniel is named first in an alphabetical (in Hebrew) listing of

41. The text of this note is supplied by C. D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1897; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1966) 3, n.1, though the name *mēgīllat 'estēr* ("Scroll of Esther") (as also in *Baba Bathra* 15a) is used in the same discussion. Ginsburg reproduces the relevant passage provided by H.L. Strack, "Die biblischen und die massoretischen Handschriften zu Tschufut-Kale in der Krim", *Zeitschrift für die gesammte lutherische Theologie und Kirche* 36 (1875) 605.

42. Sandra Beth Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure* (SBLDS 44; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979) 108.

the four youths (1:6). He is the spokesman for the youths (1:8), and there is reference to his peculiar understanding of visions and dreams (1:17). The three friends play a subsidiary role in Daniel 2, being enlisted to pray along with Daniel (2:17), but are not mentioned at all in the court tales narrated in Daniel 4-6. As well, it is Daniel alone who is the recipient of visions in chapters 7-12, and most of Daniel 7-12 is written from the first-person perspective of Daniel. The book's title suggests perhaps that Daniel is to be seen as a prophetic mouthpiece just as other prophets have books named after them.⁴³ In this regard, the subscription in Alexandrinus reads "[the end of] Daniel the prophet". It could be argued that the title "Daniel" undermines the disclaimer of Daniel himself, who seeks to redirect attention to God (see 2:27-28). On the other hand, several chapters close with the notice of Daniel's promotion to a higher position of honour (see 1:19; 2:48-49; 5:29). Daniel was not averse to being rewarded and honoured for the service he rendered the foreign kings.

Ezra-Nehemiah

The title of "Ezra-Nehemiah" subverts the ideology of the book that would focus on the part played by the people, so that the title is antithetic to the work.⁴⁴ In *Baba Bathra* 15a Ezra-Nehemiah (named 'ezrā', "Ezra") is considered to be one book, so too by Josephus (*Contra Apionem* i.8), Melito of Sardis (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* iv.26) and Jerome (*Prologus Galeatus*). The division into two parts is found first at the time of Origen (AD 185-253), with the reason that Neh 1:1 seems to mark an entirely new beginning ("The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah"). However, literary and theological features demonstrate the unity of the larger work,⁴⁵ so that the phrase at Neh 1:1 is to be understood as the heading for the second half of a united work.⁴⁶ In a Hebrew manuscript of 1448 the division into two books was introduced, and this has been retained in modern Hebrew Bibles. In the 1518 folio edition of Bomberg

43. N.B. 4QFlorilegium column 2 line 3 reads: "As is written in the book of the prophet Daniel", which is identical in form to the way in which it earlier refers to the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel; see John M. Allegro, *Qumrân Cave 4.1 (4Q158-4Q186)* (DJD V; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 53-54.

44. Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (SBLMS 36; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

45. See my unpublished MTh thesis, *A Discourse-Orientated Analysis of Ezra-Nehemiah* (Australian College of Theology, 1992).

46. 2 Macc 2:13-15 appears to refer to the two parts of this work, namely "the memoirs of Nehemiah" (*tois hupommēmatismois tois kata ton Neemian*) and "letters of kings about votive offerings" (*epistolās basilēōn peri anathematōn*). The reverse order (Nehemiah-Ezra) and the individual naming of the two parts (the letters alluded to must be Ezra 6:3-12; 7:12-26) are perhaps due to the fact that 2 Maccabees 2 refers to the activity and role of Nehemiah in collecting books together.

the beginning of Nehemiah is indicated by the numeral i., but the running title, "Ezra", is carried on. In the quarto edition of 1521, we find the marginal note at Nehemiah 1, *sēp̄er nēḥemyā* ("The Book of Nehemiah"), but still the running title for the second half of the book is 'ezrā' ("Ezra").⁴⁷ Even in modern Hebrew Bibles the Masoretic notes at the end of the Nehemiah list the middle verse as Neh 3:32. The Vulgate calls Nehemiah the second book of Ezra (*liber secundus Esdrae*). In the LXX editions of Swete and Rahlfs the two are united under the title *Esdras B*, the Ezra and Nehemiah parts being chapters 1-10 and 11-23 respectively.⁴⁸ Either title directs undue attention to the figure of Ezra, who does, however, feature in both parts of the united work (Ezra 7-10; Nehemiah 8; 12:36). Both in Ezra 9 (v.1) and in Nehemiah 8 (v.1) it is the people who take the initiative and urge Ezra to act. The title, then, is a misnomer. I will make no suggestion as to a better name, but it needs one that reflects that the main character of the book is the people, given the many lists of names and genealogies within it (e.g. Ezra 2; Nehemiah 3, 7) and the fact that it ends with the failure of the people to reform themselves as they pledged they would do (Neh 13:4-31, cf. Nehemiah 10). The achievements narrated in the book are those of the people themselves and the final failure is attributed to them as well.

Chronicles

Chronicles (Vulgate *Liber Chronicorum*) gives the same meaning as the Hebrew *sēp̄er dibrē hayyāmim* ["the book of the events/accounts of the days"],⁴⁹ hence "annals" or "chronicles", and it chronicles a history that stretches from Adam (1 Chr 1:1) to the establishment of the Persian Empire (2 Chr 36:20). *Adath Deborahim* uses the alternative title *ādām sēt ʿenōš* ("Adam, Seth, Enosh"), being the first three words of 1 Chronicles 1:1, which title would alert the reader to the universal history provided in this work, with the point made that world history finds its divinely-intended culmination in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (2 Chr 36:22-23). This title leads the reader to view the book as recapitulating biblical history and providing a parallel to the "Primary History" (Genesis through Kings). As seen from 1 Chr 27:24, the term

47. G. F. Moore, "The Vulgate Chapters and Numbered Verses in the Hebrew Bible", in Sid Z. Leiman (ed.), *The Canon and Masorah of the Hebrew Bible: An Introductory Reader* (New York: Ktav, 1974) 815-820, see p. 816.

48. In title in Codex Alexandrinus is *Esras B hiercus* ("Ezra B priest").

49. Origen records the title *Dabrē jamen* and Jerome has *Dabre Ajamim*; see David Goodblatt, "Audet's 'Hebrew-Aramaic' List of the Books of the OT Revisited", *JBL* 101 (1982) 75-78, who argues (p. 78) that the titles on the list are actually Hebrew ones.

dibrê hayyāmimis is used in the sense of (royal) annals (cf. Esth 2:23; 6:1; 10:2; Neh 12:23), so this is a fourth function title.⁵⁰

The LXX calls them “[The books] of the things left out” (“Omissions”) (*Paraleipomenōn*), with the name apparently displaying the LXX translators’ conception of the work. This is reflected in the alternative Latin naming *Liber Paralipomenon*.⁵¹ It refers to the fact that in a number of passages Chronicles supplements the account of the history in Samuel and Kings. Such a name is clearly misleading, for it obscures the fact that Chronicles also repeats much material and eliminates other material from Samuel and Kings and, more importantly, it fails to do justice to the Chronicler’s own positive purpose in writing, which determined his selection and ordering of material. No doubt the influence of this misnomer in the LXX and the Vulgate on the Christian church has contributed significantly to the undervaluing and subsequent neglect of this book until comparatively recent times.

Another ancient title given to the book in the Babylonian Talmud is “the book of the genealogies” (*sēpēr yōhāsīn*),⁵² which inevitably draws attention to the extensive genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9 as a distinctive feature of the book. Though unattractive to the modern reader, these chapters serve as an introduction to the total story as involving all 12 tribes. A more expansive title is given in Alexandrinus (in both the inscriptions and the subscriptions of the divided book), “the things omitted regarding the kings of Judah” (*Paraleipomenōn [ton] Basileōn iouda*),⁵³ and those texts of the Peshitta that follow Alexandrinus have as their inscription: “the book of Chronicles, namely, the book remembering the days of the kings of Judah”.⁵⁴ This alerts the reader to the different presentation of Chronicles relative to Kings, in that Chronicles only traces the line of Southern kings. It would be wrong, however, to see the Chronicler as uninterested in the North, for North/South interchanges are highlighted, namely when the Northerners come to the South to worship and when royal reforms

50. For an extensive recent discussion, see Gary N. Knoppers and Paul B. Harvey Jr., “Omitted and Remaining Matters: On the Names given to the Book of Chronicles in Antiquity”, *JBL* 121/1 (2002) 227-43.

51. Jerome (*Prologus Galeatus*) suggested that a more representative title would be *Chronicon totius divinae historiae* (“a chronicle of the whole of sacred history”), expressive of the universal scope of the work (*Patrologia Latina* [ed. Migne] XXVIII, col. 554). It may have been Jerome’s influence that caused “Chronicles” to be taken up as a title (the suggestion is that of Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, 1).

52. *B. Pesah* 62b.

53. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, 752, 811, 873.

54. W. E. Barnes, *An Apparatus Criticus to Chronicles in the Peshitta Version with a Discussion of the Value of Codex Ambrosianus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897) 1; W. Bacher, “Der Name der Bücher der Chronik in der Septuaginta”, *ZAW* 15 (1895) 306-307.

include areas of the North (e.g. 2 Chr 11:13-17; 15:8-15; 19:4). In this way the reunion of all God's people, North and South, is anticipated. Chronicles is not to be viewed simply as a history of the Southern Kingdom.

CONCLUSIONS

With regard to Genette's four functions that a title may fulfil, the following (incomplete) categorisation of the titles of the Old Testament books may be presented. The basic (and minimal) function of identification and so also of differentiation of one book from another is seen in the titles of the different prophetic books (Isaiah, Jeremiah etc.), for they tell us little about their content.

A second function is to indicate a book's general contents, and this clearly has hermeneutical implications. A title such as Ezra-Nehemiah (placing focus upon the nation's leaders) is unfortunate, for it sits in tension with the book's contents. The titles assigned the prophetic books (e.g. Isaiah, Micah) perhaps mislead the reader into thinking that the persona of the prophet will be strongly featured. The titles of Esther and Ruth accurately suggest that a female protagonist is central to the book's presentation.

A third possible function of a title is to highlight it to the public. Thus the title "Song of Songs" (= The Greatest Song) is a recommendation of the book to its potential readership. By way of contrast, "Omissions" (the Greek title of Chronicles) is in part responsible for the scholarly neglect suffered by Chronicles relative to Kings until recent years.

A fourth function is to indicate a book's form or genre, and as is true of ancient titles generally, those of many biblical books fall under this category, e.g. Praises (= Psalms) and Proverbs. In both cases they suggest a way of understanding the book. For example, the title "Proverbs" throws the weight upon Proverbs 10-31, while the title of "Psalms" highlights the fact that virtually all the psalms have an element of praise.

It is clear, then, that the title assigned to a biblical book deserves serious consideration when its meaning is being sought. Even though a discussion of the title(s) assigned to a book is a regular feature of biblical commentaries (usually on the opening page of introductory comments), the discussion is usually brief and seldom reflects an awareness of the hermeneutical implications of this paratextual element. Subtly or overtly a title shapes the expectations of readers. Any title may inform or misinform the reader who seeks to make sense of what is read. For this reason, deliberate scrutiny of the titles of biblical books and the exercise of discernment is required of those who read and comment upon Scripture.