

## What's in a Name? Book Titles in the Torah and Former Prophets

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**Abstract:** All the biblical books have received names, and these names guide or misguide the reader who seeks to make sense of what is read. Using the four possible functions of a title as posited by Gérard Genette, this article surveys and evaluates from a hermeneutical point of view the alternative names assigned to the nine books that make up the Torah and Former Prophets. The various titles influence reading and suggest ways of understanding the particular book. They are in effect a commentary upon the biblical text. In so far as a title highlights one feature of a book but ignores another (whether it focuses on form or content), no title is neutral nor can it simply be taken for granted. Titles are an element of the paratext of Scripture that fossilise alternative ways in which previous generations of readers have understood the text. They can also help to generate new and improved ways of reading an ancient text.

THIS ARTICLE DEALS WITH A FEATURE OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT *other than the words themselves*, an element adjoined to the text but not part of the text itself. "Paratext" is the term now used for such a feature. The titles assigned to the different books of Scripture are an element of paratext that we make use of virtually every time we refer to any given portion of Scripture. Knowingly or unknowingly these names influence our reading of the text. The title assigned to a work (either by author or editor) directly addresses the reader and exercises a powerful influence on its reception.<sup>1</sup> Since these elements are adjoined to the text, they have an influence on our interpretation of the text. That influence may be for good or for ill, for any given title may be appropriate or otherwise, and so for those who study, teach and preach Scripture, critical appraisal of

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1. Marie Maclean, "Pretexts and Paratexts: The Art of the Peripheral", *New Literary History* 22 (1991) 273-79, see pp. 274-5.

this aspect of the paratext of Scripture is in order. In the wider critical examination of literature, such a study comes under the heading of Titrology (French "titrologie").<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of possible functions of a title.<sup>3</sup> One is to identify or designate the work, another to indicate its general contents or theme, a third to highlight it to the public, and a fourth to indicate its form or genre. Only the first is unavoidable; the other functions are optional and additional.

1. Identification is in practice the first and main reason for naming a literary work, and a randomly chosen title is sufficient to fulfill this function, though it is unlikely that any Bible book received an arbitrary title. For most readers the names of the different Bible books usually serve no more profound purpose than that of mere identification, so that the particular book can be referred to in discussion or communication, or a quotation identified as to source.<sup>4</sup>
2. With regard to the second function, the relation between a title and the global content of a literary work is extremely variable, and so, for example, the prophet Samuel only features in 1 Samuel, not 2 Samuel, and then mainly in 1 Samuel 1-16. In regard to subject matter or theme, titles inevitably simplify and are highly selective. The title of a literary work is not necessarily applied by the author of the text, and in the case of the biblical books the presumption is that titles were not supplied by the authors. Evidence for this is, for example, the similarity between the superscriptions of the prophetic books (e.g. Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1).<sup>5</sup> Taking that for granted, it is at least possible to suspect or suggest that in some cases the title affixed to the text may be at variance with its content and message.
3. The title has potentially a wider audience than the text itself, because more people read (or have heard of) the title of a book

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2. See Gérard Genette, "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature", *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Summer 1988) 692-720; idem, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (tr. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 76-94.

3. For what follows, see Genette, "Structure and Functions", 708-9.

4. See Johannes Munck, "Evangelium Veritatis and Greek Usage as to Book Titles", *Studia Theologica* 17 (1963) 133-8, for a potted history of the provision of titles to early Greek works. Munck argues that titles (often derived from the opening words of the work) were intended to serve as a means of identification only. Titles were usually affixed by contemporaries or by posterity rather than by the author.

5. See Gene M. Tucker, "Prophetic Superscriptions and the Growth of a Canon", in George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (eds.), *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 56-70, with a survey of the variety of superscriptions before books of all types in the Old Testament given on p. 58.

than have necessarily read the book. Or else, having read part of the book, they may on that flimsy basis form an opinion of the book and may even influence the opinion of others in its regard.<sup>6</sup> The title “The Song of Songs” (= The Greatest Song) is a recommendation (or temptation) to the potential reader.

4. A fourth function is to indicate and assert<sup>7</sup> a work’s form (this may be a variation on the second function), e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Chronicles. If thematic (content) titles dominate the picture today,<sup>8</sup> classical usage was quite different, if not the reverse, with a preponderance of generic titles.

Whether intentional or not on the part of those who affixed a particular work’s title, the optional second function, the descriptive, is inescapable in practice, for the title is routinely seen as a key for interpretation of a literary work. In this article, due to limitations of space, I will survey only the nine books that make up the Torah and Former Prophets.

## 1. TORAH

Torah is the overarching title for a five-book collection. Some would explain the division into five sections as simply due to practical necessity when writing on the scrolls of antiquity.<sup>9</sup> The Jewish name for the Pentateuch is *Chumash* (*ḥumāš* or *ḥummāš*), which recalls its five-book structure. The word *Chomesh* (*ḥōmeš* “a fifth”) is a way of referring to one of the five books of the Moses (also to one of the five books of Psalms),<sup>10</sup> and the Book of Exodus is called “the second fifth” (*ḥōmeš šēnē*).<sup>11</sup> Greenberg suggests that the largely arbitrary division of the whole is demonstrated by the fact that it is sometimes called “the five fifths of the Torah”,<sup>12</sup> which is equivalent to the Greek *hē*

6. Genette, “Structure and Functions”, 707.

7. Genette insists on the assertive nature of generic indications, see “Introduction to the Paratext”, *New Literary History* 22 (1991) 261-72, see p. 268.

8. See the survey of modern titles for biblical books provided in Robert P. Markham, “Ancient and Modern Titles of Books of the Bible: Part 2: Contemporary Scripture Titles”, *The Bible Translator* 18 (1967) 133-45, as well as the suggestions made by Basil Rebera for prophetic Old Testament titles (“Book Titles [2]: The Prophetic Books”, *The Bible Translator* 34 [1983] 231-5).

9. E.g. Moshe Greenberg, *Introduction to Hebrew* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1965) 175. The same explanation is offered by some for the 24 books of Homer’s *The Iliad* as representing an original division into 24 papyrus rolls as a physical necessity for the immense literary work.

10. *y. Meg.* III, 74a.

11. *Sot.* 36b.

12. E.g. the Hebrew Bible edited by Norman H. Snaith (London: The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1958).

*pentateuchos* [*biblos*] (“five roll [book]”), and whence our “Pentateuch”, through the Latinised version *pentateuchus* (*liber*). This is, however, questionable, and Rolf Rendtorff is one who insists that each of the five individual books has a more or less distinctive character of its own and that the division between them is by no means arbitrary.<sup>13</sup> For example, Genesis is structured by means of a repeated genealogical formula (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 11:27 etc.), which ties the various parts of this book into a unity and closes with the death of Joseph that in effect brings the patriarchal era to an end (cf. Exod 1:6). The rabbinic nomenclature may, however, be the remote origin and influence behind the titles in German Bibles, for example *Das erste Buch Mose* (“The First Book of Moses”).

Placing the first five books under the title of “Pentateuch” draws the reader’s attention to the five-book structure of this canonical division and would seem to assert the individuality of the books as well as their essential relation one to the other. Neither is to be ignored or compromised in a reading of the Pentateuch. The name “Torah” does not have to suggest that that Genesis-Deuteronomy contains nothing but legislation for the nation of Israel, though it does highlight the Sinaitic legal portions (e.g. Exodus 20-23; Leviticus; Numbers 1-9) that are given a central position in the Pentateuchal corpus. The word “law” (the usual English rendering) has a legalistic ring that is not present in the underlying Hebrew word, which is closer to “instruction”.<sup>14</sup> The book of Deuteronomy in its opening sentences classifies its contents in this way (cf. 1:5) and the description is broad enough to encompass the hortatory character of the final speeches of Moses. The word first used to designate Deuteronomy (cf. Josh 1:8: “this book of the law”) is reapplied to the Pentateuch as a whole. This suggests that all five books should be read through the theological lens provided by Deuteronomy.

### Genesis

Following the Ancient Near-Eastern custom,<sup>15</sup> the Hebrew titles of the first five books are incipits (openings), taken from the first (significant) word(s) of the books themselves, so that our “Genesis” is

13. *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (tr. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1985) 131.

14. Barnabas Lindars, S.S.F., “Torah in Deuteronomy”, in P.R. Ackroyd (ed.), *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968) 117-36, who emphasises the didactic character of the word Torah.

15. See W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) 32, 42-3, in which colophons refer to tablets by their first line of text. As well, the traditional titles given to the 54 synagogue reading portions (*parāṣā*) for the Pentateuch follow the same system, e.g. the second portion that begins at Gen 6:9 (“These are the generations of Noah...”) is named *noah* (“Noah”), and the third portion (Genesis 12-17) is entitled *lek- lēkā* (“Go!”).

named *bērešīt* ("In the beginning"). As a book of "beginnings" it is appropriately named, for it describes a series of starts: the origin of the earth, of humanity, and of Israel (in the persons of its patriarchal forebears), so that the title designates the general theme of the book. The Greek Bible (LXX) title of each book within the Pentateuch gives a rough characterisation of its content. In the present case the Hebrew and Greek (Genesis) (= "Origin") titles do not differ greatly. This is not the case for the other four books that make up the Pentateuch. The Greek title is an abbreviation of *Genesis kosmou*, "The Origin of the World" (the form in Alexandrinus<sup>16</sup>) and may be traced to the LXX rendering of Gen 2:4: "This is the book of the origin (*geneseōs*) of the heavens and the earth", with the same Greek word used to translate the Hebrew *tōlēdōt* ("generations, history") in the repeated genealogical formula. The names of four out of the first five books in the Greek Old Testament are in effect allusions to specific passages from the respective books.

Other Hebrew titles (Mishnaic)<sup>17</sup> for this book are the "Book of Creation" (*sēper yēšīrā*) and the "Book of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob". The first title throws emphasis on the "Primeval History" (Genesis 1-11) and the second on the main part of the book (Genesis 12-50). Comparable titles found in medieval manuscripts are *sēper bēri'at hā'ōlām* ("The Book of the Creation of the World")<sup>18</sup> and *sēper ma'āšā(h) bēre'šīt* ("The Book of the Formation of the Beginning").<sup>19</sup> Another title is *sēper hayyāsār* ("The Book of the Upright [Ones]"),<sup>20</sup> referring to the patriarchs. It seems almost inevitable that a title will refer to (and so highlight) either one or other of the quite different halves of this canonical book. The two major blocks of material, that together make up the book of Genesis (chapters 1-11, 12-50), are vitally related, and Genesis 12, at the joint of these two blocks, is the linchpin and key chapter of Genesis. After dealing with world events (chapters 1-11), one man, Abram, is chosen by God (chapter 12). The promises to Abram in Genesis 12 are God's answer to the problems of Genesis 1-11.

16. A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1935; two volumes in one 1979) 1; H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus* (London: British Museum, 1938), Plate 10.

17. Supplied by H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament: An Essay on the Gradual Growth and Formation of the Hebrew Canon of Scripture* (London: Macmillan, 1892) 294.

18. Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989) xiii.

19. 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 Publishing House, 1966) xix.

20. *y. Meg.* 3.1 (74a); *Sot.* 1.10 (17c); *Gen. Rab.* 3.5.

## Exodus

“Exodus” in the Hebrew canon is named (*wē’ēlle[h]*) *šēmōt*, i.e., “[Now these are] the names of”, a reference to the names of the twelve sons of Jacob, though these twelve names are not particularly used in the book. This is, however, the start of the “real” Old Testament in that it is here that the twelve-tribal nation of Israel is produced (see Exod 1:7) and the family of Jacob becomes “the people of Israel” (1:9).<sup>21</sup> The rest of the Old Testament is the story of this nation. The LXX title is *Exodos*, referring to “The Going Out [from Egypt]”, and the fuller form of the title is found in Alexandrinus (*exodos Aiguptō*). The subscription in Alexandrinus takes the form of “The exodus of the sons of Israel from Egypt”.<sup>22</sup> This tries to summarise the content of the book and thus is a second function title, though it refers only to the material up to chapter 14 (or maybe chapter 18). The word appears in LXX 19:1 (*tēs exodoi*) when the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai,<sup>23</sup> which can be viewed as the immediate goal of the deliverance (cf. Exod 3:12), and 19:4 could be read as a poetic summarising of the events in the preceding eighteen chapters. The Greek title is presumably an allusion to 19:1. Inevitably this title throws the weight onto the first half of the book, yet the Sinai goal is perhaps even more important, with its covenant making (Exodus 19-24) and provision for the on-going worship of God (Exodus 25-31, 35-40).<sup>24</sup>

## Leviticus

“Leviticus” in Hebrew is titled *wayyiqra’* (“Then he [Yhwh] called”) and this amounts to a generic description of the book as (divine) speeches (Genette’s fourth function). The title is extracted from the first verse of the book (“Then he called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting”). This title gives no clue as to the content of the speeches which it heads. The LXX title is *Leuitikon* (in Vaticanus and Alexandrinus), an adjective modifying the word *biblion*, and thus: “Levitical [and priestly] book/matters”. On one level, the title is not an obvious one, seeing that the word “levites” (sing. *leueitēs*) is only found

21. This is the first application of the word “people” (‘am) to Israel in the Old Testament.

22. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta*, 86, 158.

23. Philo uses the title *hē exagōgē*, likewise meaning “The Going Out” (H. E. Ryle, *Philo and Holy Scripture* [London: Macmillan, 1895] xx-xxiv, cited by Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985] 246).

24. See Graham Davies, “The Theology of Exodus”, in Edward Ball (ed.), *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in Honour of Ronald E. Clements* (JSOTSup 300; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999) 137-52.

in Lev 25:32-33 (twice in each verse), and it occurs much more frequently in Numbers and Deuteronomy. But the priests arose from the tribe of Levi, and "Aaron and his sons" feature prominently in Leviticus.<sup>25</sup> The Vulgate designates it simply as *Leviticus*, a title that summarises the content of the speeches with their cultic orientation (Genette's second function). The Hebrew (Mishnaic) titles "Book of Priests" (*sēper kōhānim*) and "Book of Offerings" (*sēper qorbānōt*) are likewise second function titles that characterise the contents of the book as taken up with regulations for worship. As such, this book could be viewed as the heart of the Pentateuch, given that the Israelites were delivered from slavery in Egypt so that they might "serve [worship]" YHWH (Exod 3:12, 18).

### Numbers

Numbers (Vulgate *Numeri*) shows that the Hebrew title is not necessarily the first word but instead what was seen as the first *significant* word *bēmīdbar* ("in the wilderness of"), the opening words being: "YHWH spoke to Moses *in the wilderness* of Sinai". Perhaps the first word *wayēdabbēr* ("Then he spoke") was too similar to the opening of the previous book (and the following book for that matter). Certainly divine speeches in Numbers do not play the prominent part they do in Leviticus. The Hebrew title serves to foreground the years of testing in the wilderness that make up the central section of the book (chapters 11-21). It is these chapters that give the book its separate identity compared to the books on either side of it, for Numbers 1-10 shares the same location as Exodus (chapters 19-40) and the events told in Numbers 22-36 are situated "in the plains of Moab" just as is Deuteronomy. The LXX title *arithmoîn* Vaticanus and Alexandrinus, or "Numbers [of the census of Israel]", serves to highlight the census lists of the two generations (chapters 1, 26)<sup>26</sup> that are seen by Dennis T. Olsen as the key to the book's organisational structure,<sup>27</sup> so that an exegetical insight is provided by the Septuagintal title.<sup>28</sup> The comparison and contrast of the

25. See also the evaluation of John Ellington, "Translating Old Testament Book Titles", *The Bible Translator* 34 (1983) 227.

26. The word *arithmos* is found in LXX Num 1:2 and 14 times in total in Numbers 1 (vv.2, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42).

27. *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (Brown Judaic Studies 71; Chico CA: Scholars, 1985).

28. Origen (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25) transliterates a Hebrew title *Ammes phekōdeim* (= *hōmes piqqūdim* "fifth of the musters"; cf. the Mishnaic title *sēper piqqūdim* [Sot. 36<sup>b</sup>]; *hōmes happiqqūdim* [Yoma 7.1.a.e.]), but the Mishnah also calls it *sēper mispārim* "Book of Numbers"; see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica, 1996) 1169. These point to the same feature highlighted by the LXX title.

two generations – their differing character and fate – are central to the implied message of the book concerning the requirement of faithfulness to inherit the promises.

### Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy (Vulgate *Deuteronomium*) is given the Hebrew title (*wē'ēlle[h] had) dēbārīm* (“[Now these are the] words”) because the book consists of speeches of a hortatory character by Moses. This “fourth function” title highlights the form in which divine revelation comes.<sup>29</sup> The LXX title *Deuteronomion* (Vaticanus, Alexandrinus) is usually explained as referring to the “Second [i.e. repetition by Moses before his death of the] Law”.<sup>30</sup> It is dependent on Deut 17:18 (*mišnē[h]hattôrâ hazzō[ʾ]t*), which the LXX rendered: “this second law”, whereas the Hebrew text really means “a copy of this law” (RSV). The LXX translation would require the demonstrative adjective *hazze(h)* (masculine singular) for *hazzō[ʾ]t* (feminine singular).

The Latinised forms of the five Pentateuchal titles have come into English through the Vulgate, which was the Bible of the Western Church for a thousand years. The English title of Deuteronomy, at least as commonly interpreted, namely as a second body of laws different and distinct from those given at Sinai, reflects the hermeneutical problem of the relation between the laws as expounded in Deuteronomy and earlier forms promulgated at Sinai. The title (if understood in this way) would seem to encourage what has been a preoccupation of both traditional Jewish exegesis and modern critical analysis. The first is harmonistic and the second tends to exploit differences, and both have failed in a positive theological appreciation of Deuteronomy. More recent commentaries signal a new and more fruitful approach.<sup>31</sup>

It is not clear, however, that the LXX translators necessarily mean “Second Law”. Rashi understands it to mean “two Torah scrolls” (*štē siprê tôrâ*), one to be placed in the king’s treasure house and one to carry around for consultation.<sup>32</sup> Seeing that the king in Deuteronomy is

29. P. C. Craigie draws attention to the importance of the Hebrew title as a self-description of the book as “a report of words which were spoken” (*The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976] 17, 18).

30. The Hebrew (Mishnaic) title “Book of Reiteration” (*sēper mišnâ*) comes close to the LXX title and is derived from the wording of Deut 17:18, but another title, “Book of Reproofs” (*sēper tôkâhôt*) reflects the admonitory tone of Moses’ speeches in Deuteronomy. The same kind of alternative namings is found in Philo: *hē Epinomis* (“the Appendix to the Law”) and *ta Protreptika, hai Paraineseis* (“the Exhortations”).

31. E.g. Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990) and J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002).

32. However Rashi in his comments on Lev 25:1 and Num 29:12 refers to Deuteronomy under the name “The Repetition of the Torah” (*mišnē[h] tôrâ*), because it repeats (with

portrayed as a model citizen, it is not an inappropriate passage to highlight. The king sets an example in the habitual reading of the law (cf. Josh 1:8), doing what all Israelites should be doing (see Deut 6:7-9; 11:18-21). The king is engrossed in the habitual study of the law “that he may learn to fear the LORD his God”, which is a Deuteronomic virtue (cf. 4:10; 5:26 [29]; 6:2; 14:23) and a positive formulation of the First Commandment (6:13; 10:20). In this way the Deuteronomic ethic of obedience is to be modeled by the king. One purpose of the king’s daily regimen of Torah study is to ensure that his heart will not be exalted above those of his kin (17:20a).<sup>33</sup> The king as the first citizen, the first among equals (8:14), is to view his subjects as “his brothers” (17:20; cf. v.15 above), and the regulations for the king, like much Deuteronomic legislation, aims to guard against apostasy and idolatry (“that he may not turn aside from the commandment”; cf. 5:29 [32]; 17:11). The incentive, “that he may prolong his days”, is a typical Deuteronomic promise (4:26, 40), now applied and adapted to the situation of the king (“that he may prolong his days over his kingdom, he and his sons amid Israel”). This text also anticipates the transformation of Moses’ speeches into book form. By making the king the book’s archetypal reader, “Moses’ speech projects its own reception – via the representivity of an exceptional reader”.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. FORMER PROPHETS

The books Joshua to Kings in the Hebrew canon (Ruth not included) are called “Former Prophets” (*nēbî ʾimrî ʾšōnîm*), perhaps because the viewpoint taken of the history narrated is to a large extent that of the early prophets.<sup>35</sup> The history recounted becomes the basis for prophetic appeals to covenant loyalty. Reference is made to a *series* of prophets, e.g. Deborah (Judg 4:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:20), Nathan (2 Sam 7:2; 12:1),

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variations) laws given earlier at Sinai. The Semitic equivalent of *Deuteronomion* is found in the Qumran Cave 4 Catena, where the work is called “the Book of the Second Law” (John M. Allegro, *Qumrân Cave 4.1 [4Q158-4Q186]* [DJD V; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968] 68). Jubilees 6:22 speaks of “the Book of the First law” (Exodus? Leviticus?) as containing the law of Pentecost. Deuteronomy is probably being spoken of in CD 5:2 as “the sealed book of the law” that lay unopened for many years in the ark (of the covenant), for a quotation from Deut 17:17 precedes this reference. If 2 Kgs 23:2 and 2 Chron 34:30 do refer to Deuteronomy, it is there called “the Book of the Covenant”. Joshua 1:8 etc. call it “the Book of the Law” (certainly the language of Josh 1.6 is strongly reminiscent of Deut 5:23; 17:20; 31:29).

33. See Gary N. Knoppers, “The Deuteronomist and the Deuteronomic Law of the King: A Reexamination of a Relationship”, *ZAW* 108 (1996) 329-46, see p. 330.

34. J.-P. Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (Biblical Interpretation Series 14; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 79; see all of pp. 78-83.

35. Josephus, *Ap.* 1.38-41.

Gad (24:11), Ahijah (1 Kgs 11:29). The writing of these four anonymous books was early ascribed to prophetic figures: Joshua; Samuel, who was regarded as the author of Judges and the book which bears his name; and Jeremiah, to whom the book of Kings was attributed.<sup>36</sup> Joshua's speeches in Joshua 23-24 could justify his wearing the prophetic mantle. Samuel is depicted as the last of the judges (1 Sam 7:15) and shows the judge's aversion to the institution of kingship (1 Sam 8:6; cf. Judg 8:23). Later he shows the prophet's predilection to countenance and control kingship (1 Samuel 12). The synoptic passage Jeremiah 52 (adapted from 2 Kings 24-25) draws a connection between Jeremiah and Kings and compensates for the non-mention of Jeremiah in Kings. These four books are regularly in English referred to as "Histories" for they are part of the sequential history recounted by the books Joshua – Esther in the Greek canon.

#### Joshua

The titles Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings give the Former Prophets a leadership focus that is not at all inappropriate.<sup>37</sup> The book divisions at significant deaths (Josh 1:1; Judg 1:1; 2 Sam 1:1; 2 Kgs 1:1) have the same effect. The title "Joshua" (LXX *Iêsous*; Vulgate *Liber Josue*; Heb. *yêhôshua*<sup>38</sup>) obviously enough refers to the main character and leader, who is mentioned in the first verse (Josh 1:1). The title implies that this is a book *about* Joshua and need not be taken as meaning that it was written by Joshua. Codex Alexandrinus gives this book a fuller title (and subscription) "Jesus son of Nun" (*Iêsous huios Nauê*),<sup>38</sup> and Melito has *Iêsous Nauê*.<sup>39</sup> After the description of his commissioning (Josh 1:1-9), the book is demarcated by an *inclusio* formed by speeches made by and to Joshua in the remainder of chapter 1 and in the final two chapters (23-24). Joshua 1-6 comprise a Joshua "apology" (cf. 6:27), accrediting him as the God-appointed successor to Moses.<sup>40</sup> Following that, Joshua leads in the conquest (chapters 7-12) and divides the land (chapters 13-21). All these features serve to highlight the leadership issue, as does the death notice with which the book starts: "After the death of Moses". The book closes with the recording of the death of Joshua (24.29-30), together with two other important burials.

36. *b. B. Bat.* 14b/15a.

37. See Mark A. O'Brien, "The 'Deuteronomistic History' as a Story of Israel's Leaders", *ABR* 37 (1989) 14-34.

38. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta*, 354, 405.

39. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.26.

40. See Dennis J. McCarthy, "The Theology of Leadership in Joshua 1-9", *Bib* 52 (1971) 165-75.

The title foregrounds the role of Joshua but alternative titles could have suggested other foci. Joshua 10:13 makes mention of a certain "Book of Jashar" (RSV *sēper hayyāsār*), which is also quoted from in 2 Sam 1:18. This now lost book appears to be a collection of odes in praise of the exploits of select Israelite heroes. The RSV renders it as a proper name ("Jashar"), which, if related to "Jeshurun" (*yēšurūn*), a poetic name for Israel (Deut 32:15; 33:26-27), suggests some kind of national epic celebrating the acts of the incomparable God of Israel. Equally probable is the suggestion that it means "the upright [one]" (RSV margin), perhaps to be construed as a collective: "the Book of Heroes" (Moffatt translation). The book called the "Book of the Wars of the LORD" (Num 21:14) could possibly be the same book under a different title.<sup>41</sup> Seeing that the book of Joshua attributes Israelite military success to God's blessing (e.g. 1:9, 15, 17), a title might have been chosen that highlights that rather than the human instrument YHWH chose to use in the conquest of Canaan.

### Judges

"Judges" (LXX *Kritai*; Vulgate *Liber Judicum*), which reflects the Hebrew name *šōpēṭîm*, is set in the post-Joshua situation (cf. Judg 1:1; 2:6-10). The title makes the stories of the judges, six major and six minor (chapters 3-16), the highlighted feature (2:16). In this way, the main focus in the book of Judges is upon leadership.<sup>42</sup> The English word "judge" suggests a *legal* figure, but the Hebrew word indicates the more general role of "leader". The judges were not primarily concerned with legal matters but were fundamentally saviour figures.<sup>43</sup>

It is not at all clear that the book is endorsing the yet-to-be-inaugurated institution of kingship (despite the common construal given to 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).<sup>44</sup> The incident of Gideon's ephod (8.22-27) makes an important theological point: the leaders are offering Gideon dynastic kingship and a hereditary line is proposed (8:22), but

41. LXX 3 Reg 8:53 (not in MT) refers to "a book of song" (= Heb *šir*), which Wellhausen suggested was a corruption from *Jashar* (J.A. Montgomery, *The Books of Kings* [ICC; ed. H. S. Gehman; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1951] 191).

42. Philo (*Conf.* 128) calls Judges "the Book of Judging" (*hē tōn krimatōn biblos*). Beckwith suggests that this title may be on the analogy of "the Book of Reigns" that Philo mentions in section 149 of the same work; for this reference, see Ryle, *The Canon of the Old Testament*, 294.

43. A. Malamat, "Charismatic Leadership in the Book of Judges", in F. M. Cross et al (eds.), *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1976) 152-68.

44. W. J. Dumbrell, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes": The Purpose of the Book of Judges Reconsidered", *JSOT* 25 (1983) 23-33.

Gideon *verbally* rejects the role of king, viewing it as theologically illegitimate (8:23). Hence this verse is best seen as summarising the anti-royal ideology of the book. The unity of Israel and its twelve-tribal structure remains intact (just!) at the end of the period (Judges 19-21), so that the institution of judgeship is shown to be functional. There is no implication in the presentation of the book that the newfangled institution of kingship would be any better at solving the problems of the nation than the well-tried office of the judge.

### Samuel

The book of Samuel (Vulgate *Liber Samuelis*) coincides with the Hebrew naming of the book (*šēmū'ēl*) after the *first* of three major characters, Samuel, Saul and David, whose interconnected lives and fates are recounted. A partial climax is found in Samuel's (supposed) farewell speech in 1 Samuel 12, but Samuel is not accepting retirement (see 12:23). He has important roles in 1 Samuel 13, 15 and 16, and he is mentioned again in 19:18-24. His death notice comes only in 25:1, and even then he returns one more time (in 1 Samuel 28). Samuel has in effect superintended the career of Saul from its beginning to its end. Samuel is not featured at all in 2 Samuel, but his epochal role in anointing Saul and David is justification enough for the book to be named after him.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, A.F. Campbell sees the book(s) of Samuel as being about David and orientated toward David (and his dynasty) from the beginning, and it is true that Samuel is less visible after he has anointed David, so that Campbell asserts that "Samuel's life-work is finished by 1 Sam 16:13".<sup>46</sup> If that is accepted, a more appropriate title for the book would be "David". This possibility may have been excluded by the fact that "David" was early used as a way of referring to the Book of Psalms.<sup>47</sup> An alternative viewpoint is provided by Diana Vikander Edelman, who understands 1 Samuel as a "narrative about Saul".<sup>48</sup> Perhaps nothing is to be gained by adjudicating what is likely to be a perennial dispute among scholars, for the good reason that there is a special interest within the book in the persons and personal characteristics of all three protagonists.

45. The suggestion made by Stanley D. Walters is that the title Samuel is a hermeneutical guide, alerting the reader to the prophetic outlook of the narrative ("Reading Samuel to Hear God", *CTJ* 37 [2002] 62-81), so that "Royal ideology must be subservient to prophetic ideology" (p. 68).

46. *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 25.

47. E.g. 2 Macc 2:13-15, Heb 4:7, and 4QMMT as reconstructed in E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, *Qumrân Cave 4.V: Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (DJJD X; Oxford: Clarendon, 1984) 59.

48. *King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* (JSOTSup 121; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991) 11.

Notice of a significant death (2 Sam 1:1: "After the death of Saul"; cf. Josh 1:1; Judg 1:1) is the trigger for the division of the larger book into two (1 and 2 Samuel) in the LXX.<sup>49</sup> It marks the beginning of the new era of David, and yet it breaks the "rise of David" sequence (1 Samuel 16 – 2 Samuel 5) and the spectre of the house of Saul hangs over David throughout 2 Samuel in the persons of Ishbosheth, Michal, Mephibosheth (and Ziba), Absalom (who seeks David's life), and Shimei. It is not clear that the book's partition can be justified. Viewing 1 Samuel 31 as an endpoint, however, turns 1 Samuel 931 into a story about Saul and not a section detailing the rise of David (that does not end until 2 Samuel 5). With regard to the division into the two books of Samuel, in the folio Bomberg edition of 1518 the numeration of the chapters begins anew at 2 Samuel 1 (and at 2 Kings 1, Nehemiah 1 and 2 Chronicles 1), but the division is not recognised in the text itself (with separate book titles).<sup>50</sup> The book's name, together with the point at which the unified book is divided (the changeover of Saul to David), highlights the leadership issue. The alternative names given in the Greek (and Latin) tradition, the (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>) books of "Reigns" or "Kingdoms", is approved by some commentators as "more apposite".<sup>51</sup> This title highlights the transition to kingship that is plotted in the book(s) and throws the focus upon Saul and David as the first two kings. It does not have to be understood as a blanket endorsement of kingship as a divine institution for the present or the future. It more likely looks back (without nostalgia) to a bygone age when kings reigned in Judah and Israel. 1 and 2 Samuel operate as a theological endorsement of human kingship that was rejected during the period of the judges, and yet the book is alive to the dangers of this institution.

### Kings

The book of Kings (Vulgate *Liber Regum*) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> books of Kingdoms in the LXX (*basileiōn*) and Vulgate (*Regnorum*), corresponding to the Hebrew title *mēlākîm* ("Kings"). In the 1518 folio edition of the Bomberg Rabbinical Bible the book is not divided but there is a marginal note (in Hebrew) at 2 Kings 1: "Here the Greeks and Latins begin the Fourth Book of Kings". In the quarto edition of 1521, there is at 2 Kings 1

49. According to R. K. Harrison, "In both Greek and Latin Bibles Samuel and Kings were regarded as one continuous history, divided for convenience into four sections" (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [London: Tyndale, 1969] 719). We cannot follow him in his estimation of the divisions as arbitrary.

50. 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) 816.

51. E.g. Ralph W. Klein, *First Samuel* (WBC 10; Waco: TX: Word Books, 1983) xxv.

the marginal note "Book Four".<sup>52</sup> The evident relation of Samuel and Kings is signalled in the LXX, and following that, in the Latin Bible, by their counting Samuel and Kings as four books of "Kingdoms". The change from "Kingdoms" to "Kings" is found in Vulgate editions (*Liber Regum tertius et quartus*) and has been followed by most English versions. In the first two chapters, aged David dies (1 Kgs 1:1: "Now King David was old, gone in years"),<sup>53</sup> so that it begins virtually "after the death of David" (cf. 1 Kings 2:10-12) and is occupied with the reigns of the kings of both Judah and Israel in the post-David era.

The division between the books of Samuel and Kings is not arbitrary, since 2 Samuel 21-24 reviews the flow of the preceding narrative.<sup>54</sup> Leonhard Rost's theory of the "Succession Narrative" that sees that narrative including and climaxing with 1 Kings 1-2 has to be rejected as not giving enough credence to the canonical boundary between the books of Samuel and Kings. The LXX division (and that of the Vulgate following it) is at 2 Kings 1:1 ("After the death of Ahab"). This evil king is described in superlative terms (1 Kgs 16:30: "Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of Yhwh more than all that were before him"), so that after the death of the *worst* Northern king there is perhaps hope for the nation. It may thus be viewed as a favourable turning-point.<sup>55</sup> All this construes the book as one chronicling the reigns of successive kings.<sup>56</sup> Yet the prophets are equally prominent (or nearly so) in the book of Kings so-named. There is a series of named prophets (e.g., Nathan, Gad, Abijah), and the book may be analysed in terms of the repeated pattern of confrontations between kings and prophets.<sup>57</sup> The central positioning of and space devoted to the Elijah-Elisha narratives (1 Kings 17 – 2 Kings 13) highlights their importance within the book as a whole. The placement of Joshua-Kings under the heading "Former Prophets" (*nēbî'îm rîl' ]sōnîm*) goes some way toward redressing the balance. The transition between 1 Kings and 2 Kings is also close to the point where the prophetic succession of Elijah to Elisha is effected (2

52. Moore, "The Vulgate Chapters", 816.

53. Origen (*apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.25) transliterates the title *Ouammelech Dabid*, i.e., the first two words of 1 Kings 1:1 (*wēhammelek dāwīd*), but then translates it: "that is, the kingdom of David" (*hoper estī basileia Dabid*) but Jerome has *Malachim* (*Prologus Galeatus*) and Epiphanius *dmalachei* (construct plural), which reflect the MT title.

54. B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979) 273-5.

55. T. R. Hobbs, "2 Kings 1 and 2: Their Unity and Purpose", *Sciences Religieuses/ Studies in Religion* 13 (1984) 327-34, see p. 334.

56. The titles for the sources used confirm such an orientation: e.g., "Book of the Acts [*dibrē*] of Solomon" (1 Kgs 11:41), "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" (1 Kgs 14:19), "Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" (2 Kgs 8:23).

57. E.g. Victor H. Matthews, "Kings of Israel: A Question of Crime and Punishment", in *SBL 1988 Seminar Papers* (ed. David J. Hull; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988) 517-26.

Kings 2).<sup>58</sup> The expression in 2 Macc 2:13-15, “the books about kings and prophets” (*ta peri tōn basileōn kai prophētōn*), probably refers to Samuel and Kings. All in all, a more apt title would be “Of Kings and Prophets”.<sup>59</sup>

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the material marshalled in this article that the title given to a biblical book fulfils certain functions and that titles constrain interpretation. Gérard Genette has provided a useful interpretive grid in analysing the possible functions of any given book title, and I have sought to apply his postulated four functions to the specialised topic of the titles assigned to biblical books.

The basic (and minimal) function of a title is that of identification and so also of differentiation of one book from another. In practice, however, no biblical book title merely functions as an identification tag.

A second function is to indicate a book’s general contents, and this clearly has hermeneutical implications. The titles of the Pentateuchal books in the Greek canon (*Genesis, Exodos* etc.) suggest what the different books are about but do not always adequately sum up their global contents. The titles of the books that make up the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) foreground the issue of leadership within the four books. The title “Kings” obscures the vital role of the prophets in the presentation of the canonical book.

A third possible function of a title is to highlight it to the public, but none of the titles of the nine books I have surveyed appears to be chosen as a recommendation of the book to its potential readership. Nor would any of the titles prejudice a reader against the books as worthy of consideration.

A fourth function is to indicate a book’s form or genre, and the titles of many biblical books fall under this category, e.g. Chronicles (or Diaries), Praises (= Psalms), Proverbs, Lamentations. Among the books surveyed in this article, the Hebrew title of the fifth book of the Torah (*wē’ēlle[h] had dēbārīm* (“[Now these are the] words”)) classifies it as a book of speeches.

A title may throw light on a work or it may obscure its message (not least because it cannot say all that could be said). It is best to view the titles of the biblical books as *commentary* on the text, and like all

58. R. P. Carroll, “The Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel”, *VT* 19 (1969) 400-15.

59. A similar title is used by A. F. Campbell for the book *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth Century Document (1 Samuel 1 - 2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS 17; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1986).

commentary, the title imposed on a literary work is to be neither lightly discarded nor readily accepted, but weighed and tested. Titles in general are, then, a strong way of shaping the interpretation of texts, and hence the importance of our consideration of the issue in relation to the biblical text. In a future article I will deal with the titles assigned to the books that make up the Latter Prophets and the Writings.