

# 1. Introduction

## I. The Canon

In interpreting any portion of Scripture, it is vital to interpret the text in light of its place in the canon, i.e. to interpret it canonically. The *canon* is the collection of books that is recognized by the community as authoritative Scripture: both the books and the order in which they are arranged.

### A. The Canon of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew canon contains 24 books in 3 sections. The colloquial Hebrew name for the Hebrew Bible is *Tanakh* (תנ"ך), an acronym devised from the initial Hebrew characters of the three sections.

תּוֹרָה <i>Torah</i> (5) Law	נְבִיאִים <i>Nevi'im</i> (8) Prophets		כְּתוּבִים <i>Ketuvim</i> (11) Writings
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Samuel Kings	Isaiah Jeremiah Ezekiel The Twelve (1): Hosea, Joel, Amos Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah	Psalms Proverbs Job <i>Megillot</i> /The Scrolls (5): Song, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther Daniel Ezra-Nehemiah Chronicles

The Septuagint (LXX, Greek translation of Hebrew Bible, ca. 250-150 BC) rearranged books chronologically into a canon of 39 books. Vulgate (Latin) and English followed. The 39 books are informally divided into four sections.

Pentateuch (5)	Historical (12)	Wisdom (5)	Prophets (17)
Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Joshua Judges Ruth 1 & 2 Samuel 1 & 2 Kings 1 & 2 Chronicles Ezra Nehemiah Esther	Job Psalms Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Songs/Solomon	Isaiah Jeremiah Lamentations Ezekiel Daniel Minor Prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah

### B. The Primary History

The Torah and the Former Prophets form a continuous 9-volume history of Israel, stretching from Creation to Exile: the Primary History. Deuteronomy is the key book, serving as the hinge between two halves of this history:

#### 1. Torah

Deuteronomy is the climax of the Torah, known in English as the Pentateuch (Gk *penta* = five). Moses

addresses the second generation of Israelites gathered on the plains of Moab immediately before his death and Israel’s entrance into the Land. In these speeches he summarizes God’s dealings with and expectations of his people.

**2. Deuteronomic History**

Joshua–Kings give the history of Israel’s history in the Land, from its entrance under Joshua to its exit into Exile. Included in the prophets because they give a prophetic reading of Israel’s history: history as evaluated by God’s spokesmen, the prophets. The standard for evaluation is Deuteronomy. Hence, this history is called the Deuteronomic History, assembled by the implied author the Deuteronomic Historian (aka the Deuteronomist).

**C. Chronicles**

A century after the exile the Chronicler retold Israel’s history from Saul to the exile, focusing on the southern kingdom Judah, and magnifying God’s faithfulness. At six key moments he inserted a song: הודו ליהוה כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו “Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his loyal love (*hesed*) endures forever.”

**II. The Structure of Genesis**

Divided into ten accounts, each with the heading אלה תולדות... *’élleh tôlédôt*), lit. “these are the generations (*toledot*)” (from the root ילד *yald*, “bear, bring forth, beget”). Each account gives a “family history.” The first five accounts cover primeval history; the second five cover the patriarchal history .

Genesis	תולדות... ...the generations of...	the generations of...
2:4–4:26	אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם	the heavens and the earth when they were created
5:1–6:8	זה ספר תולדת אדם	Adam
6:9–9:29	אלה תולדת נח	Noah
10:1–11:9	ואלה תולדת בני-נח	the sons of Noah
11:10-26	אלה תולדת שם	Shem
11:27–25:11	ואלה תולדת תרח	Terah
25:12-18	ואלה תולדת ישמעאל	Ishmael
25:19–35:29	ואלה תולדת יצחק	Isaac
36:1–37:1	ואלה תולדות עשו	Esau
37:2–50:26	אלה תולדות יעקב	Jacob

The *toledot* of X tells the story of X’s descendants, not of X himself; e.g. the *toledot* of Adam gives the story of Adam’s descendants, not of Adam himself; the *toledot* of Terah gives the Abraham story.

Gen 1:1–2:3 is set apart from the rest of the book as a Prologue.

**Who wrote Genesis?**

Liberal View: Documentary Hypothesis: JEDP

Conservative View: Moses for the Israelites prior to their entry into the Promised Land.