

The Christian Old Testament

(Note that, throughout this article, the term “Christian Old Testament” or merely “Old Testament” is used to refer to the 46 book Old Testament of the Catholic Bible, not the 39 book Old Testament of Protestant Bibles which contains the same material as the 24 book Tanakh, but arranged differently with some books counted together as one. It is also very important to realize that while the Septuagint canon is nearer the Old Testament canon than it is the Tanakh canon, the Septuagint and the Old Testament are not precisely the same.)

The 46 book Christian Old Testament is based on the Greek Septuagint, *not* the canonized Tanakh (which was not canonized until the end of the first or perhaps even into the second century AD). Not only are many of the books which appear in the Tanakh as single books considered to be multiple books (for example, the Minor Prophets are considered twelve books in the Christian Old Testament and one book in the Jewish Nevi'im section of the Tanakh, and books which come in two “parts” - such as Chronicles – in the Old Testament are counted as a single book in the Tanakh) but the Old Testament contains additional material. It contains seven books which do not appear in any form in the Tanakh and additional material for two of the Tanakh's books (Daniel and Esther). All of this material appeared in the Septuagint, although – as mentioned above – the Septuagint did contain additional material which was *not* canonized by the Christians. This process of canonization of the Old Testament is discussed in more depth in its own article.

One of the most interesting things about the distinction between the Christian Old Testament (46 books), the Tanakh (24 books) and the non-Catholic Old Testament (39 books containing precisely the same material as the Tanakh, but simply divided up into more books) is that the order of the books differs between them. The order of the books of the two versions of the Christian Old Testament (the original, 46 book, canon and the post-Reformation, 39 book, canon) is generally the same (although there are sometimes differences which occur as a result of the caprice or desires of publishers). The main difference in order is found between the Tanakh and the Old Testaments.

The Major Divisions of the Old Testament

Like the Tanakh, the Old Testament is divided into sections. The first is the Law or Pentateuch – this is identical to the Torah in terms of the material it contains. The second section is the Historical books – these contain history. The third section is the Wisdom books – books such as Psalms, Proverbs and Wisdom. The final section is the Prophets, containing prophetic writings.

It may seem that it would be easy to align the sections in this method of dividing up the Jewish Scriptures with the three-fold division of the Tanakh (with the Law matching with the Torah, the Prophets with Nevi'im and the Historical and Wisdom books matching with the Ketuvim) it is not that simple. There are a number of the Prophets which appear in the Ketuvim, not the Nevi'im, and a number of the Historical books which appear in the Nevi'im, not the Ketuvim. There is, however, a certain degree of correspondence between the Nevi'im and the Prophets, and the Ketuvim and the Historical and Wisdom books.

However, there is a difference in the ordering of these sections – the Prophets occur at the end of the Old Testament, while the Nevi'im occur in the middle of the Tanakh. As discussed in the article on the Tanakh, the placing of the Ketuvim at the end of the Tanakh (especially with the presence of the end of the book of Chronicles) can be argued to lead to a certain sort of Jewish nationalism and Zionism.

In the Old Testament, the Pentateuch is placed first as the foundation of the Jewish Covenant (upon which the new and everlasting covenant is based) followed by the Historical books (which provide the history of the Jewish people) and thence by the Wisdom books which come out of this covenantal history. The Prophets (which is a wider definition than the Jewish understanding of

Nevi'im) occur at the end of the Old Testament as they provide a bridge to Christ; the Prophets are, in the main, pointing towards the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The New Testament is concerned solely with the new and everlasting covenant and its founder, Jesus Christ, and so the Prophets exist as a bridge between the two testaments.

It is strongly recommended that a study is made of the differences between the Nevi'im and the Prophets and the Ketuvim and the Historical & Wisdom books in order to correctly grasp this distinction between Christian and Jewish thought.