

This new abridged edition of my book *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (1985) brings the insights and perspectives of that larger book to a new audience by means of a clear and concise abridgement, made even more accessible by the addition of updated resources for students and instructors.

For more than two decades, *The Hebrew Bible* has filled an urgent need: to acquaint beginning students with the explosion of new methods of inquiry that have revolutionized biblical studies. It shows how the newer approaches supplement and enrich—rather than negate or displace—the traditional historical-critical methods and theories that have dominated the field since the rise of biblical criticism two hundred years ago. The sea change in Hebrew Bible studies that I described in *The Hebrew Bible* continues to be the dominant reality in biblical interpretation.

Although the newer literary methods and their counterparts in the social sciences have by now become fully recognized instruments in biblical studies, their full impact has yet to penetrate newly published or recently revised introductions to the Hebrew Bible. In my judgment, none has offered as sustained a use of socioliterary methods as the present work—reason enough to present this new and abridged edition in a format suited to a new generation of biblical students and scholars.

My approach in *The Hebrew Bible: A Brief Socio-Literary Introduction* is to describe how the new literary and social-scientific methods, in concert with older historical-critical methods, apply to each of the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible and to each historical period in ancient Israel from its inception through the Hellenistic era. In the conclusion, I sum up the status of Hebrew Bible studies with the help of a comprehensive chart (also available on the companion Web site) that displays the interrelated social, literary, and theological sectors of ancient Israel's manifold corporate life as these gave rise to the Hebrew Bible.

That I have succeeded in making the new methodological situation in Hebrew Bible studies intelligible to two generations of students has been gratifyingly attested by younger scholars who have told me that, in the course of their doctoral studies, they used my text as a framework

or template for plotting the range of methods they needed to take into account in preparation for their comprehensive exams. Later, as instructors in biblical studies, they found the same overview of the field useful in organizing their own courses and preparing syllabi. In a sense, they were using my work as a scholar's and teacher's handbook for orientation amid the rapidly changing discipline of biblical studies.

Of course biblical studies have not stood still since *The Hebrew Bible* was first published. Not only is there the ongoing flow of work in all the established older and newer modes of study—for instance, in ideological criticism and feminist criticism—but additional methods have arisen that further complicate the organization and advancement of biblical studies. Some of these emerge out of existing literary or social critical methods, while others have more independent origins. Examples of more recent cutting-edge methods are narrative criticism, new historicism, dialogical criticism, postcolonial criticism, deconstruction, cultural studies, and psychological criticism.

Sometimes this array of emerging methods is referred to under the blanket term “postmodernism.” All have been inspired and fueled by paradigm shifts and methodological departures that have swept over the scientific disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences. Readings on these more recent methodological contenders are listed in the topical bibliography under “Methodology in Hebrew Bible Studies.”

Indeed, so pervasive are the paradigm shifts in mainstream Hebrew Bible studies that long-cherished views of the formation of the biblical text have been called into radical question. Notably, the hypothesis that the Pentateuch consists of four primary sources (J, E, D, and P) composed over several centuries of time has been widely dismissed as invalid or indemonstrable. I retain these source divisions in this new abridgement for two reasons: (1) the four-source Pentateuchal hypothesis is the cornerstone of past critical study of the Hebrew Bible and the necessary point of departure for considering alternative hypotheses; (2) to date, no alternative hypothesis for explaining the composition of the Pentateuch, which nearly everyone agrees must be understood as a compilation of earlier materials, has won anything like a consensus among scholars.

Similarly, the application of newer literary-critical methods to the prophetic books has thrown into question the trustworthiness of the historical claims made within the writings attributed to the named prophets. In the extreme form of this argument, a prophet such as Amos or Isaiah may be construed as no more than a literary construct with little or no reference to an actual historical figure or to the events recited or alluded to in his writings. Granted the tempering effects of these warnings against a positivist reading of the prophets, it is my contention that new developments in historiography and in social-scientific criticism warrant a continued serious regard for a substantial historical core to these admittedly redacted writings.

In addition, a highly charged debate swirls around the scope and structure—and for some scholars, the very existence—of the united monarchy of Israel. This debate hinges on the disputed dating of archaeological evidence, on notions of state formation, and on the perceived hyperbole of the biblical accounts of the reigns of David and Solomon. While there is wide agreement that the initial stage in Israelite state formation was more rudimentary than a superficial reading of Samuel through Kings suggests, the complex issues entailed in discerning that first step to statehood remain far from resolved.

Compared to some other introductions, including my own earlier work *A Light to the Nations: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), this volume gives greater attention to the exilic and postexilic periods. Neglect of the later biblical era can be seen as a peculiarly Christian, even specifically Protestant, bias uncritically reflected in the work of many non-Jewish biblical scholars. The increasingly ecumenical character of biblical scholarship has helped to correct the blind spots of any single tradition and thus to sharpen the tools we can now bring collegially to bear upon these texts.

This textbook is organized in four parts. Part I sets forth contextual knowledge for approaching the Hebrew Bible: the history of its interpretation, the biblical world, and the literary history of the Hebrew Bible. Parts II–IV present the biblical literature in sequence according to its sociohistorical settings. A prologue to each of the last three parts discusses the sources of our knowledge for each period as it is examined.

A problem of organization arises when presenting biblical writings in approximate historical sequence, as in parts II–IV. Where should one place biblical books or sources that have a long tradition history and reflect a growth in stages over centuries? When treating composite or slowly evolved biblical writings, two flexible working principles are followed in this volume: (1) When there is wide agreement about a writing's sociohistorical anchor points, the work is discussed as often as necessary at each relevant stage, as, for example, with the Priestly writer (pp. 89–90; 105–7; 116–17; 120–23; 267–79) or the book of Isaiah (pp. 216–21; 284–88; 290–91). (2) When, on the other hand, the sociohistorical settings of a writing are vague or highly disputed, it is presented only at its most securely fixed historical point. Thus, the composite books of Amos and Micah, although containing much later material, are discussed only once and in their eighth-century contexts (202–4; 215–16), and Daniel, although preserving older traditions, is treated solely in its second-century milieu (pp. 331–33).

The chronology adopted for the divided monarchy is that of Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). I chose this scheme not because it is unimpeachable, but because it seems to me as satisfactory a solution of the chronological problems as any proposed to date. Other reputable chronologies have been published by Simon J. DeVries (“Chronology of the OT,” *IDB*, 1:580–99; “Chronology, OT,” *IDBSup*, 161–66); John Hayes and Paul K. Hooker, *A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implications for Biblical History and Literature* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); Paul K. Hooker (“Chronology of the Old Testament,” *NIDB*, 1:636–43); Mordechai Cogan (“Chronology, Hebrew Bible,” *ABD*, 1:1002–11); and Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Studies in the History of Culture of the Ancient Near East, vol. 9; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

I have transliterated Hebrew terms approximately as they are pronounced, even though this entails some inconsistencies according to the customary systems of transliteration.

Last, I have consistently used the dating sigla of B.C.E. (before the Common Era) and C.E. (the Common Era), in preference to the more usual B.C. (“before Christ”) and A.D. (*anno Domini*, “in the year of the Lord”), because I feel that it is important for all students of these texts to make a mental break between our own religious stances and the conditions and beliefs of biblical times. This is a necessary break if we are to appreciate the Bible as more than a sectarian or dogmatic document that simply mirrors our own religious ideas.

I send this abridgement on its way with special thanks to Rebecca Kruger Gaudino for the excellence of the abridgment, which I have reviewed with full approval. I am also most grateful to Neil Elliott and Michael West at Fortress Press, who first proposed this abridgement, and to Josh Messner, Tim Larson, and Paul Boenke at Fortress and to Zan Ceeley, Ann Delgehausen, and Beth Wright of Trio Bookworks, who have facilitated its production in this attractive format. I also wish again to salute the late John A. Hollar, who fanned the first sparks of my interest in writing this volume and whose advice and encouragement sustained me in the task. I am pleased to credit his direct and indirect imprint on many of the organizational and instructional features of this work. At a more technical level, close colleagues in various working groups of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature have given timely support and challenge.

Within the wide network of my indebtedness to others as expressed in the dedication, I single out the curiosity and imagination of my students, who over more than five decades have helped me to deepen and clarify my understanding of the Hebrew Bible and to communicate that understanding concretely and appealingly.