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# Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

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question chapters: The OT as Liberation? and Can the Bible Speak to Women?) What Kind of Literature? What Kind of Religion? Is a Theology Possible? This listing of questions shows that this book is not an introduction to the individual books or canon of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible *per se* but to its world. It addresses the question of the inadequacies of the historical-critical method and explores the contributions of both liberation/feminist and new style literary approaches. The final quest is on what a volume on OT theology should contain and suggests an organization of thought under four points: (a) affirmations in the OT about the nature of God; (b) concern in the OT for community rather than individual values; (c) the character of the prophetic critique of a nominally religious society; and (d) tolerance within the OT for more radical skepticism alongside normative revered tradition.

The volume is written for a general readership. Quotations are from the RSV. Technical terms and Hebrew/Greek words cited are explained. Specific points are meaningfully supported through an analysis of selected Old Testament passages. The paperback closes with a brief bibliography, an index of passages cited, and a general index. While somewhat dated, the book does offer some noteworthy insights.

Roger W. Uitti

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### **Introduction to the Hebrew Bible with CD-ROM**

John J. Collins

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004

613 pages, \$49.00 Softcover

John J. Collins, the author of this Hebrew Bible/OT Introduction, is an accomplished scholar of Roman Catholic background and teaching, and former president of the Catholic Biblical Association and the Society of Biblical Literature. He has been a professor at a number of prestigious universities (U. of Chicago, Notre Dame, and now Yale). He is well known for his work in Hellenistic Judaism and

wisdom, Jewish apocalyptic, and the Book of Daniel (Hermeneia, 1993).

This book is intended for a wide range of audiences. Accordingly, its text divided into 29 chapters, covers both biblical and deuterocanonical/apocryphal books significant to Christians and Jews the world over. The style of writing, ideological balance, and measured detail makes the book an ideal text for a one semester course in OT/Hebrew Bible Introduction.

Steering his way between the Scylla of biblical traditionalism and the Charybdis of liberal secularism, Collins makes every effort to find something positive in the midst of today's hermeneutic of historiographical suspicion. Thus one reads comments such as the following:

In the end, very little can be said about the exodus as history. It is likely that some historical memory underlies the story, but the narrative as we have it is full of legendary details and lacks supporting evidence from archaeology or from nonbiblical sources.... Regardless of its historical origin, however, the exodus story became the founding myth of Israel ... and of later Judaism ... It is repeatedly invoked as a point of reference in the Prophets, later in the Writings, and in the New Testament. It has served as a paradigm of liberation for numerous movements throughout Western history, from the Puritans to Latin America. It can fairly be regarded as one of the most influential, and greatest, stories in world literature (119).

In light of the available evidence, we must conclude that the account of the conquest in Joshua is largely, if not entirely, fictitious.... The results of archaeology have not been entirely negative. Excavations and surveys in the last quarter of the twentieth century brought to light hundreds of small sites that were established in the thirteenth to eleventh centuries B.C.E., primarily in the central highlands, but some as far north as Galilee and some to the south in the northern Negev.... These settlements are generally assumed to be Israelite, although they do not, of course, provided explicit self-identification. The identification of these settlements as Israelite is suggested first of all by the fact that this region is the stronghold of early Israel according to the biblical account, and it was clearly Israelite in later times (187-188).

In recent years, however, skepticism has grown about the historicity of Solomon's empire, because of the lack of archaeological evidence for it. To be sure, the primary area where such evidence might be

found is safely buried under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and arguments from silence must be treated with caution. But is now generally agreed that Jerusalem was a small town in Solomon's time, and expanded significantly only two centuries later, in the time of Hezekiah (488).

Attempting to keep alive the tension today between synchronic and diachronic perspectives, the book successfully pursues both a canonical and an historical unfolding of Hebrew/OT particulars. The first major Part, the Torah/Pentateuch, with a brief critique of the Documentary Hypothesis, is dutifully followed by the three other major units of the Hebrew Bible: The Deuteronomistic History, Prophecy, and the Writings. Within the Writings Collins does depart from the traditional printed Hebrew Bible canonical arrangement in a number of instances: he begins the Writings section with Ezra-Nehemiah, followed by Chronicles, instead of ending with these same books as in BHS; he displaces Lamentations from its usual place within the Megilloth (RSELE) to become a Septuagint-like appendage to the Book of Jeremiah; he removes Song of Songs from the Megilloth to link it up with the Book of Psalms and puts Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth closer to the other wisdom books of Proverbs and Job; and he allows the collection of "short stories" (Ruth and Esther, Tobit and Judith) to swallow up poor Jonah, once again jettisoned from his customary location (within the Twelve). For good historical sense, the Book of Daniel is joined by 1-2 Maccabees, with additional deuterocanonical/apocryphal books/additions given either their own chapter or added appropriately to the exposition of biblical books treated under the same name or related circumstance. Apparently such minor undermining of normal Hebrew canonical arrangements stems from Collins' own teaching preferences.




For today's students of the Hebrew Bible this worthy paperback offers many welcome pluses: a concise, up-to-date, lucid, readable text with a balanced, sensitive handling of both essentials and issues, including good reflection on moral questions raised in the stories told. There is a short but very up-to-date bibliography closing out each chapter, providing the student with cutting-edge resources for further study and research. Appreciated too is the absence of any ponderous page-for-page footnoting, and the presence of useful maps and helpful charts; plus an accompanying CD ROM with chapter study questions and access to boundless extras in resource articles

and readings, together with right of entry (at a cost) to the larger Libronix Digital Library System (LDLS).

The work is not perfect. What is missed in the presentations sometimes is more detail as well as more schematic, ideological introductions and conclusions to the several parts. For example, a schematic overview and comparison of the Priestly, Deuteronomistic, and Chronistic histories would have been beneficial. The author seemed to stick more to the individual books of the Hebrew Bible than attempt to capture larger units ideologically.

As an addition to the Glossary (607-613), a future edition of this volume might add a detailed index of names, places, and biblical references. As it is, once read, information is not so readily found again. Some corrections, too, are necessary: the reference on p. 414 should read “Zech 12:10-14,” not “13:10-14,” and numerous other typos require repair: [“o f” (43); “when the voice command him” (97); “pos-texilic” (201, 376, and 533); “punitive action against Job” (232); the large title to ch 14 should read “1 KINGS 17 (not “1 KINGS 12) – 2 KINGS 25” (261); “anyplace” (318); should be “Zephaniah’s” not “Nahum’s” (326); should be “1:8” (327); “LAMENATATIONS” (p.331); should be “1:4” not “4:4” (355); should be “sew” not “sow” (363); should be “4:5-6” not “4:3” (415), see also p. 419; “b ook (p. 422); “contested even *with* the Hebrew Bible itself” (442); “English 4:1-3 = MT 3:31-331” (559.); “arrive a knowledge of God” (594)].

There are a few minor inaccuracies that might be addressed in a second edition of this excellent text. The statement “the pronouncement that ‘it was good’ is lacking for the second and fourth days” (76) is incorrect. “It was good” is lacking in the MT only on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day (Gen 1:8); the different expression “it was so” is lacking on the 5<sup>th</sup> day (Gen 1:20). Could the “star out of Jacob/scepter out of Israel” (Num 24;17/2 Sam 8:2,12) not have been directed initially to reference the rise of the house of David (155)? Was Ugarit technically ever a *Canaanite* city-state (211)? Add “and 2 Sam 23:5” (see p. 243) to the end of the line “though it is used with reference to God’s promise to David in Ps 89:3” (235). While Nathan does not refer to a specific law, David does, in alluding probably to Ex 22:1E (240). In what sense was the priest Jehoiada “the successor” of Queen Athaliah (270)? The events of initial submission (2 Kings 18:14-16) to and deliverance from (2 Kings 19:35-36) Sennacherib in 701 BCE for

Hezekiah's Jerusalem are most likely close sequential events. Isaiah 10: 16 speaks of YHWH's sending "wasting sickness among his stout warriors" and Isaiah 17: 14 of "terror at evening" and then joy "before morning." The reference in Isaiah 14:12 is actually Helel ben Shachar; Lucifer is the Vulgate [quomodo cecidisti de caelo Lucifer qui mane oriebaris] translation (369). The ancestors of Zechariah are just as likely actually father Berechiah and grandfather Iddo (Zech 1:1; 1:7), with no confusion whatsoever (contra the author) with Isaiah 8:2's "Zechariah son of Jeberechiah" (404). This is the case in spite of the less precise reporting by Ezra 5:1 and 6:14; the real confusion lies in Matthew 23:35's reference to "Zechariah the son of Barachiah" when the name there should be "Zechariah the son of Jehoiada" (2 Chron 24:21). One might effectively add to the fine text (450) that with regard to Solomon the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 8:2) also rewrites 1 Kings 9:11-14 to claim that Hiram/Huram of Tyre gave Solomon some cities, not the other way around. The aside on the Wisdom of Solomon might better read: "The only book in the *Catholic* Old Testament that was composed in Greek is the deuterocanonical 2 Maccabees" (589). In the discussion of prophecy in the ancient Near East (284) there is something flawed about the Akkadian pairs  and . While the first pair is known from the Old Akkadian period on, the second set predominates later in Neo-Assyrian times. Scholars have debated whether or not these term sets are interchangeable (von Soden) or actually refer to different classes of prophets (Landsberger). Whatever the outcome here, suspect stands the sentence "a  eats a raw lamb in public, and then proceeds to deliver *his* message," as the "ecstatic" here cited in Akkadian is a woman, since in Akkadian the feminine form is made by adding a *t* to the end of the stem.

A comment or two may also be made about the exposition of the Book of Daniel. The sentence "The second half of the book of Daniel was certainly composed in or around Jerusalem" would best be moved from where it is farther down the page to open appropriately the first paragraph of *The Visions (Daniel 7-12)* at the bottom of p. 562. More clarity might be given to this quizzical comment: "Daniel does not say that everyone will be raised, only the righteous and the wicked" (570). And finally, the very picture on the book cover

depicting King Jehu of Israel bowing before the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (742 B.C.E), is curiously never mentioned in the text of the book, although this oversight most probably is the fault of the cover and book designer, not the author. A second edition might add such detail on pages 269-270 or p. 29.

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### **The Old Testament: A Brief Introduction**

Christoph Levin

Translated by Margaret Kohl. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001

191 pages, \$22.95 Hardcover

The author, Christoph Levin, is currently Professor of Old Testament in the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Ludwig-Maximilians University at Munich and is a minister in the Moravian Church. As the title implies, this crisp introduction, originally published in German in 2001, runs only 176 pages of expository text in English translation.

The reader is quickly brought up to speed on today's critical approach to Old Testament. "At present, Old Testament scholarship is in the process of striking out in a new direction.... It is becoming increasingly clear that ancient Hebrew literature has to be read as part of Ancient (*sic*) Near Eastern culture and religion.... The literary genres and themes we find in the Old Testament, its social background – even ancient Israel's concept of God – are no longer without analogy.... On the other hand, analytical exegesis, especially as it is treated in German-language research, is penetrating ever more deeply into the Old Testament text, and shows that its emergence is for the most part the outcome of a long process of literary self-interpretation, the presuppositions for which can no longer be looked for in the monarchies of Israel and Judah, but actually belong to the postexilic Judaism of the Second Temple period" (1-2). Thus primal events such as the patriarchal stories, the exodus, the conquest, and