

New Revised Standard Version  
Updated Edition

THE

A LOOK INSIDE THE  
PREMIER NEW STUDY BIBLE

WESTMINSTER

STUDY BIBLE

*with the Deuterocanonical/  
Apocryphal Books*

# A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS OF *THE WESTMINSTER STUDY BIBLE*

*The Westminster Study Bible* (WSB) acknowledges that reading the Bible today is not as simple as discovering what it meant in its own time in order to determine what it means for all time. Despite the Bible's antiquity, both those who have contributed to the WSB and those who will use it are contemporary readers who bring their own perspectives to the reading of the Bible. In other words, the themes or ideas we notice in the Bible and that strike us as important tend to be those that resonate with us and our present situations in some way. Through study notes, excursuses, and accompanying essays, the WSB recognizes this fact by delving into the ancient contexts of the biblical text and

Among its many features, the WSB pays close attention to the interdisciplinary connections that contemporary students and teachers will find both useful and relevant.

its continually evolving present interpretations, thereby exploring both the biblical world and its contemporary reading and reception.

This approach makes the WSB an ideal textbook for a range of biblical studies courses as well as courses in religion, philosophy, and the general humanities, whether introductory or advanced. In addition to its particular attention to classroom use, the WSB is a resource written for teachers and by teachers. Among its many features, it pays close attention to the interdisciplinary connections that contemporary students and teachers will find both useful and relevant. We expect this emphasis will also make it helpful in many different learning contexts, including religious congregations and organizations.

Contributors to the WSB teach in a variety of educational settings. The configuration of these scholars and the places they work is representative of the array of spaces in which the Bible is studied in today's world. WSB contributors use the Bible in undergraduate liberal arts and seminary classrooms, religious services, academic conferences, and a host of other locations and thus understand what it means to think about the Bible in and for vastly different contexts. These teacher-scholars also know what it means to interpret from a particular place and time, as they are situated and embodied readers of texts that also come from very different places and times. The contributors to the WSB have been carefully selected: each is an expert in the ancient contexts of the Bible, but each is also sensitive to how the biblical texts have been received and how readers might hear them now in multiple contemporary contexts.

Consequently, the features of the WSB attend to the cultural impact of the Bible in its original setting as well as its impact on later readers and communities, up to and including present-day readers.

The Bible is, after all, a classic of world literature that has been taken up and utilized in various art forms and expressions for millennia. Consequently, the features of the WSB attend to the cultural impact of the Bible in its original setting as well as its impact on later readers and communities, up to and including present-day readers. The classroom is in many ways the ideal place for these multiple "worlds" of text and interpretation to come together in a larger conversation that invites all sorts of readers—experts, novices, and those in between—to listen and learn from all parties involved. To study the Bible is in a very real way to study the world and to study humanity in the world. It is our profound hope that *The Westminster Study Bible* aids in that pursuit.

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"*The Westminster Study Bible* featuring the new NRSVue is a major achievement. Besides featuring what I believe to be the best current English Bible translation, this work offers the considered commentary of a new generation of biblical scholars both on the text of scripture and on a variety of important implications and applications for today. This is a state-of-the-art study Bible for the second quarter of the 21st century."

—DAVID GUSHEE,

Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics, Mercer University

## GENERAL EDITORS

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE GENERAL & ASSOCIATE EDITORS ON PAGE 21

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# INTRODUCTIONS TO CANONICAL GROUPINGS

In *The Westminster Study Bible*, each traditional grouping of books in the Jewish and Christian canons opens with an introductory essay discussing the biblical text, both positioning it in its ancient context and exploring how current perspectives affect our reading of the text. Below is a full list of the essays you will find in the WSB. Beneath each grouping is a sampling of headings to provide insight into the topics covered in these essays.

On the following pages you will find the Introduction to the Hebrew Bible essay along with the section discussing the Torah/Pentateuch.

## Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: Also Called the Old Testament and Tanakh

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*"The Westminster Study Bible provides an illuminating guide for students and teachers of the Bible. Its essays, introductions, study notes, and excursions reflect judicious scholarship to help readers make relevant connections between the multiple 'worlds' of the text and their contemporary contexts. Its attention to the impact of reception history is particularly enriching. Highly recommended."*

—JANETTE H. OK,

Associate Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

## Introduction to the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament

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# Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: Also Called the Old Testament and Tanakh

The Bible is an anthology of ancient texts read and valued by different religious communities that view it as sacred. The number and order of the books composing the Bible vary in different traditions (see **“The Bible as a Collection,” pp. 2145–47**). The first part of the collection is known as the Hebrew Bible, or simply the Bible in Judaism, but is traditionally called the Old Testament in Christianity. In the Jewish tradition, the books are grouped in a different order than in most English Bibles and are arranged into three categories known by the acronym TNK, commonly pronounced as *Tanakh* (see **“The Jewish Canon,” p. xxi**):

- *T* stands for *Torah*, the first five books of the Bible.
- *N* stands for *Nevi'im* (Prophets). This second division has two subdivisions: Former Prophets and Latter Prophets.
- *K* stands for *Ketuvim* (Writings).

Early Christians read these books most often in an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible known as the Septuagint, which also contained additional books (see **“Introduction to the Deuterocanonical/Apocryphal Books,” p. 1333**; these books do not appear in editions of the Hebrew Bible today). The typical order of the books in the Greek tradition was different from Hebrew editions in some respects, and this fact, along with the influence of another alternative ordering found in the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, impacted the ordering of the Christian canon. The arrangement of books used in the *Westminster Study Bible* follows the Protestant Christian tradition, which uses four categories derived from the earlier Greek and Latin orderings instead of the three categories of the Tanakh (see **“The Protestant Canon,” p. xxii**):

- The Law, or Pentateuch
- The Historical Books
- The Poetic and Wisdom Books
- The Prophetic Books

The following essay introduces the contents of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, using a modified order of the categories used in Judaism, each of which is followed by the corresponding canonical category in Protestant Christianity (wherever possible): Torah / Pentateuch, Former Prophets / Historical Books, Writings, and Latter Prophets / Prophetic Books. Since the Writings do not correspond as directly to the Poetic and Wisdom Books in Christianity, only the Jewish terminology is used (see **“Introduction to the Writings,” pp. 6–9**). The decision to privilege the canonical categories used in Judaism in the introductory essay highlights the fact that these texts and subdivisions belonged first to the Jewish religious tradition.

Since the *Westminster Study Bible* follows the canonical order used in the Protestant tradition, a few of the biblical books are introduced in Jewish categories that differ from their placement in the Protestant ordering of the text (see **“Canonical Orders of the Books of the Bible,” p. xxi**). For example, Daniel and Lamentations appear among the Prophets in the Christian tradition, but in the Jewish tradition, both of these compositions are placed in the Writings. In the essay that follows, these books are introduced as part of the Writings (see **“Introduction to the Writings,” pp. 6–9**, and **“Introduction to the Latter Prophets / Prophetic Books,” pp. 9–12**). Additionally, Ruth, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther also occur in the Writings and so are introduced there; in the Christian tradition, these books occur in the Historical Books (see **“Introduction to the Writings,” pp. 6–9**, and **“Introduction to the Former Prophets / Historical Books,” pp. 4–6**). Beyond this introductory essay, more information on each biblical book can be found in its own introduction.

Readers should also take into account that the varying orders found in the Jewish and Christian traditions can impact the reading process differently. Putting the Prophets at the end of the Old Testament allows Christians to see them as pointing toward what comes to pass later, in the New Testament. It is

Thematic essays like this are cited throughout the study Bible. See the full list of essays on page 12 of this preview.

a small step, it seems, from Malachi's promise of Elijah's return (Mal. 4:5–6) to Gospel texts where John the Baptist is identified with Elijah (Matt. 11:14; 17:10–13; Mark 9:11–13; Luke 1:17) and where that same prophet appears with Jesus in the transfiguration (Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30). The ending of the Hebrew Bible with the Writings, and specifically with 2 Chr. 36, creates a very different effect. The final words of the Hebrew Bible recount the edict of the Persian king Cyrus that allowed the Judean exiles to return home to Israel and rebuild the temple (2 Chr. 36:22–23). Rather than pointing forward to John the Baptist, this ending returns readers back to the heart of the Hebrew Bible and to the concepts of God's promised land, temple, and people.

By presenting the books of the Hebrew Bible in the four-part order commonly found in most English Bibles, while keying the introductions that follow to the tripartite Tanakh structure, the *Westminster Study Bible* hopes to help readers experience the richness of the Bible via two of its major traditional arrangements.

## ● Introduction to the Torah/Pentateuch

This is the first introduction to a canonical grouping and showcases the approach to the text that these introductions provide. Find the full list of these introductory essays on page 2 of this preview.

The first five books of the Bible are frequently called the *Pentateuch*, a Greek term for a five-book collection (*pentateuchos*). The Hebrew name used for this same collection is *Torah*, a word that can mean “law” but also “instruction” or “teaching.” Both terms, *Pentateuch* and *Torah*, aptly describe these five books, which contain legal material and also much that is not law but instructive nevertheless.

### ***Origins of the Torah/Pentateuch***

In many ways, modern academic study of the Bible begins with the Torah and a number of thorny interpretive problems that its five books present. Several of these problems concern the compositional history of the Pentateuch as a whole and also of its constituent books. Early tradition—beginning already in the Bible itself—associated this material with Moses. This makes good sense for a number of reasons. After God, Moses is the most important character in the Torah. He is born in Exod. 2 and dominates Pentateuchal narrative from that point forward until his death in Deut. 34. Despite his importance, premodern readers occasionally indicated that a single author for the entire Torah was unlikely. Parts of the Torah are written in very different styles than other parts, for example, with each one apparently reflecting different time periods and circumstances. As a result of such differences, modern scholars began to construct theories about the origin and authorship of the five books of the Torah.

Moses's importance cannot be overestimated, however, and plays a large role in the traditional association of the Torah with him. He is said to be God's servant, for example, which is a rare and exalted epithet (Exod. 14:31; Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:5; cf. Josh. 1:1–2, 13). It is also reported that the Lord spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exod. 33:11). Moses had unique access to God (Exod. 33:7–11) and was granted a rare vision of God (Exod. 33:12–34:7). Unsurprisingly, the Torah concludes with a remarkable commendation of him and his work: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut. 34:10–12). A few Pentateuchal texts also identify Moses as a literate individual, which was truly exceptional in the ancient world outside of specially trained scribes. The things Moses is said to have written down include divine laws (see Exod. 24:4; 34:27–28), narratives (see Exod. 17:14; Num. 33:2), some combination of those two things (see Deut. 31:9, 24), and even a song (Deut. 31:19, 22).

Texts like these, along with Moses's prominence in the Pentateuch, explain why early tradition ascribed the Torah to him. Outside the Pentateuch—indeed, already in Joshua (see Josh. 8:31–32; 23:6)—we encounter references to “the law of Moses” (see, e.g., 1 Kgs. 2:3; 2 Kgs. 14:6; 23:25; 2 Chr. 23:18; 30:16; Ezra 3:2; 7:6; Neh. 8:1; Dan. 9:11, 13) and “the book of Moses” (2 Chr. 25:4; cf. Mark 12:26). Even in the New Testament, texts from the Pentateuch can be referred to as “the law of Moses” (Luke 2:22; 24:44; John 7:23; Acts 13:39; 15:5; 28:23; 1 Cor. 9:9; Heb. 10:28). The New Testament also makes mention of Moses writing or giving the law (John 1:45; 7:19; Rom. 10:5). Indeed, the New Testament occasionally refers to the Torah's directives as simply “of Moses” or by stating that this or that matter was what Moses said,

taught, or commanded (Matt. 8:4; 19:7–8; 22:24; Mark 1:44; 7:10; 10:3–5; 12:19; Luke 5:14; 16:29, 31; 20:28; John 1:17; 5:46; 7:22; 8:5; Acts 3:22; 15:1; 26:22; Rom. 10:19). Given this biblical precedent, it is common even today to hear the Torah called the “Five Books of Moses” (cf. Mark 12:26; 2 Chr. 25:4). And yet, as already noted, even in antiquity readers suspected that some of the passages found in the “Books of Moses” simply could not have been written by him. These would include the passage that praises him for his great humility (Num. 12:3) and the account of his death and burial (Deut. 34:5–6). Insights like these—coupled with different writing styles, distinctive vocabulary, duplicate narratives, and so forth—eventually led modern biblical scholars to posit not one but many authors for the Pentateuch as it now stands. Some interpreters would still attribute portions of the Torah to Moses or at least trace parts of it back to his time, but many would not, seeing the final form of the five books and the collection as a whole as the achievement of a much later period, the product of many hands, and the end result of a complex set of processes.

The first comprehensive theory about the composition of the Torah, set forth in the nineteenth century, is called the Documentary Hypothesis. For many years, this theory held sway; it posits that the Pentateuch is composed of four, originally discrete documents—each from a different time and author. This theory no longer commands the consensus it once did. While some scholars still hold to a version of it, others believe the Pentateuch is better understood as a kind of pastiche of large units of tradition that were only secondarily edited together. These units, like the four hypothetical strands of the Documentary Hypothesis, likely stem from diverse points of origin. Given the speculative nature of these types of analyses, still other interpreters choose to forgo inquiry into the compositional history of the Pentateuch altogether, focusing instead on the literary qualities of the books of the Torah in their current form. The questions surrounding the origin and development of the Pentateuch are deeply contested ones despite several hundred years of research, with scholars continuing to debate them to this day.

### **Narrative**

Readers will encounter different kinds of literature in the Torah. The first to be encountered is *narrative*. The Torah opens with not one but two narratives about God’s creation of the world (Gen. 1:1–2:4a; 2:4b–25). The existence of two different accounts of creation supports the idea that multiple hands lie behind the present text of Genesis. But these two stories also illustrate different narrative styles, quite apart from questions of composition. The first story is on the high end of the prose spectrum; some have called it Israel’s poem of creation. The eloquence of Gen. 1 does not manifest many of the techniques that mark formal Hebrew poetry, however. Indeed, the brief poetic insert in Gen. 1:27 is instructive in revealing that the surrounding material is not poetry, in fact, but prose. The second creation story is less formal and more folksy, although it too contains a poetic insert in 2:23.

Most of Genesis is prose narrative, and the same holds true for the first half of Exodus. Beginning in earnest in Exod. 20, the Torah shifts to a different genre—that of *law*—but even then narrative continues to be found, peppered in throughout what follows, providing connective tissue and an overall narrative arc (e.g., Exod. 24:1–18; 32:1–35; 40:16–38). Leviticus follows Exodus and is dominated by law, but it too contains a narrative section regarding the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (Lev. 8:1–10:19), which provides a link back and conclusion to Exod. 29:1–35. The book of Numbers contains a great deal of narrative material alongside some law, before Deuteronomy closes the Torah with a recapitulation of much of the narrative and law that has come before it. Deuteronomy contains the last words of Moses before Israel crosses into the land promised to the ancestors back in Genesis. In this way, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, the Torah presents a large narrative sweep from the creation of the world to the borders of Canaan.

### **Law**

The Pentateuch’s narrative arc is dominated by Israel’s stay at Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. Israel remains at this mountain for most of the Pentateuch (Exod. 19:1–Num. 10:11), and it is here where Israel receives God’s *law*—a second major genre that readers will encounter in the Torah.

While narrative provides the overarching framework of the Pentateuch, divine law is at its heart, and the heart of the law is the covenant at Sinai, beginning with the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17; repeated also in Deut. 5:6–21). Divine law begins earlier still, however: already in the opening creation accounts, God speaks in the imperative mood, issuing commandments—in other words, giving law (see

Each introductory essay to canonical groupings aims to illuminate the distinct approaches, emphases, and themes found within each section of the Bible.

Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:16–17). In fact, in the Jewish tradition, Gen. 1:22 is considered the first commandment, with the total number of laws in the Torah coming in at 613.

Pentateuchal law is diverse, extensive, and complex. Scholars have identified no fewer than four distinct legal corpora in the Torah. In their presumed chronological order, these four bodies of law are the book of the covenant in Exod. 20:22–23:19, the central legal collection in Deuteronomy (chaps. 12–28), the Priestly legislation (found throughout Leviticus and Numbers), and the Holiness Code (Lev. 17–26). Various subtypes of law have also been identified. Some laws, like the Ten Commandments themselves, are absolute or apodictic: “You shall not steal” (Lev. 19:11). Other formulations are called casuistic or case law because they entertain different scenarios with different outcomes (e.g., Num. 35:16–28). Adding to the Torah’s complexity, the legal materials exist in something of a symbiotic relationship with the surrounding and intervening narratives. The narratives help explain why Israel owes its allegiance and obedience to God—namely, because of God’s love for the ancestors and God’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery (see Deut. 4:37; 7:8). Motivations and explanations for law are unheard of in modern legislation but are prominent in the Bible—and not just in the narrative portions of the Torah, even within the laws themselves. An instructive example is Exod. 23:9: “You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (cf. Exod. 22:21; Lev. 19:34). Another instance is the way the Ten Commandments begin: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod. 20:2).

### **Poetry**

A final genre that appears in the Torah, but more sporadically, is poetry. As noted earlier, a few interpreters understand Gen. 1 as more poetry than prose, but the Torah contains a number of texts that indubitably qualify as instances of Hebrew poetry. Identifying a text as poetry depends on the presence of certain characteristics. These characteristics can appear in prose, too, but appear with particular density in poetic texts. In addition to Gen. 1:27 and 2:23, the NRSVue identifies the following texts of Genesis as poetry: 3:14–19; 4:23–24; 9:6, 25–27; 14:19–20; 16:11–12; 24:60; 25:23; 27:27–29, 39–40; 48:15–16, 20; 49:2–27. All these texts except for Gen. 49 are short poetic insets within larger narrative blocks. Genesis 49 is also an inset poem but is a very long one comprising Jacob’s blessing of his sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. In addition to Gen. 49, the Torah has several other extended poems: Exod. 15 (the Song of the Sea), portions of Num. 23–24 (Balaam’s oracles), Deut. 32 (the Song of Moses), and Deut. 33 (the Blessing of Moses). These longer compositions seem to be placed at key junctures in the narrative and at climactic points in their respective books and contain important information, whether of celebration, warning, or blessing. It is possible that these poems antedate the prose that currently surrounds them and that they once existed independently; whatever the case, the poems in the Pentateuch show that many genres are needed to adequately recount the long and complicated relationship of God and Israel as found in the Torah, with its fascinating weave of narrative, law, and poetry.

○ Brent A. Strawn

Learn more about Brent Strawn, one of the General Editors of the WSB, on page 21 of this preview.

Each contributor to the WSB is an expert in the ancient contexts of the Bible. They are also sensitive to how the biblical texts have been received and how readers might hear them now in multiple contemporary contexts. These teacher-scholars are active in their fields and use the Bible in undergraduate liberal arts and seminary classrooms, religious services, academic conferences, and a host of other locations and thus understand what it means to think about the Bible in and for vastly different contexts.



# BIBLICAL TEXT WITH BOOK INTRODUCTION, STUDY NOTES, & EXCURSUSES

Each biblical book opens with an introduction to orient readers to its historical, cultural, and literary contexts and provide a reading guide with a general overview and outline of each book. Sample pages from the introduction to Genesis, the biblical text, study notes, and an excursus are shown on the following pages.

Study notes open up the biblical text and explore cultural insights from the ancient world as well as help readers grasp how certain texts may have functioned in much later periods and far different settings.

Thematic excursuses offer more expansive discussions of important topics relating to the biblical text. Nearly two hundred excursuses are found throughout the study Bible and they are categorized into four distinct types, detailed below along with examples of each type.

## Four Types of Thematic Excursuses

**READING THROUGH TIME** excursuses provide a glimpse into how the interpretation of a particular text has changed through the years and across different communities of readers.

- Black and Beautiful – Song of Songs 5
- Isaiah and Judaism – Isaiah 56
- Judith in Art – Judith 13
- Paul, *Ekklesia*, and Democracy – 1 Corinthians 16
- 666/The Number of the Beast – Revelation 13:16-18

**FOCUS ON** excursuses offer a more detailed consideration of a theme, concept, figure, or place that appears in a passage or across many passages.

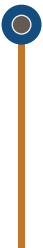
- Worship – Psalm 29
- Idolatry in Social-Political Terms – Hosea 5
- Masculinity – 4 Maccabees 15
- Infancy Narratives – Matthew 1-2
- Beyond the Canon – Jude

**MAKING CONNECTIONS** excursuses show how the biblical text may be related to events or circumstances outside and beyond the immediate passage at hand.

- Cult Prostitution – 1 Kings 14
- Amos and Martin Luther King Jr. – Amos 5
- Court Tales, Courtly Debates – 1 Esdras 3-4
- Women in Luke-Acts – Luke 2:36
- Frederick Douglass, Paul, and Onesimus – Philemon

**GOING DEEPER** excursuses afford a more thorough exploration of a topic than can be offered in the briefer study notes.

- God's Name – Exodus 3:14-15
- Woman Wisdom – Proverbs 8-9
- Diaspora – Tobit 1
- Dualism (Binaries) – John 3:3-21
- A Subversive Creation Hymn – Colossians 1:15-20

 "The Westminster Study Bible is a treasure trove of biblical interpretation. Its diverse writers employ wide-ranging methods and theories, taking the reader on an exciting journey from ancient to contemporary times. The excursuses of the WSB empower the reader to make connections by reading through time, focusing on specific aspects, going deeper into particular topics, while its essays provide longer discussions on key themes and topics. The WSB is a must-read for students, teachers and faith communities that love studying biblical texts."

—JACQUELINE M. HIDALGO,

Professor of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Diego

# GENESIS

## *Literary History and Growth*

Two of the basic facts modern readers want to know about a text are when and where it was written. Indeed, in the contemporary world, it is hard to imagine a text lacking a precise time-date stamp with atomic-clock precision and location of origin verified by GPS. Not so in the ancient world. This feature is important to bear in mind when reading Genesis.

One thing it upends is our idea that Genesis is a book. That term comes with so many presuppositions that do not fit this text. It can be more helpful to think of it as a compilation or an anthology of stories woven together into a loose narrative chronology for audience convenience. Genesis is more a repository of things ancient people believed worth preserving over many generations than a single story conceived by a single mind, or even than a unified story envisioned by a group of minds working in conscious collaboration with one another.

The oldest stories in Genesis may have an oral history going back before 1000 BCE, and some of those stories may have first been committed into writing not long thereafter. It is impossible to know on the basis of the information available to us. Nevertheless, scholars continue to work carefully to identify what can be said about the times and places from which the stories originated. For instance, the similarity between the flood account in Gen. 6–9 and Mesopotamian stories has convinced scholars this material drew on Assyrian and Babylonian culture. That might have been possible across many centuries, however, meaning that any conclusion on their origin must remain tentative.

Where scholars are more confident is in placing a date by which the text we know as Genesis reached the form represented here. It is widely accepted this occurred by sometime in the fifth century BCE, a period when the Persian Empire controlled Israel, and a new temple in Jerusalem dedicated to YHWH stood in place of the first one.

Whereas the primeval history (Gen. 1–11) and the Abraham narrative (Gen. 12–25) appear to be collections of many shorter stories knit together over centuries, the Jacob and Joseph narratives (Gen. 26–50) exhibit a coherence and shape that suggest each was created as a piece of literature with a purposeful narrative arc. What remains under debate among scholars is how these three major sections of the book called Genesis found their way into the shape known to us. The broader import of such arguments is that this text is the product of protracted development (some signs of which are still visible) that underscores the significant and sustained efforts of generations of priests, scribes, and others willing to preserve them. Whatever one makes of these stories, one cannot deny they were greatly valued by generations of people in antiquity.

Furthermore, the book called Genesis was also integrated into the larger tradition known as the Torah or Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. In this way, it became the opening act in an account of the origin and history of Israel prior to its establishment as a political entity in the Levant, itself a product of people collecting stories over centuries.

## *Authorship*

While identifying a precise author for any of the texts in Genesis is impossible, this does not make it unique in the ancient world. Anonymous authorship was ubiquitous and hardly seemed to cause any issue in antiquity. And yet, there are some features of the unnamed authors of parts of Genesis one can specify.

A substantial number of stories in the book exhibit knowledge of and interest in the priestly world. Avoiding any role for sacrifice (preserved for the temple in Jerusalem), the use of the divine name YHWH (only revealed later to Moses; see **“God’s Name,” p. 89**) and a penchant for genealogy characterize these texts. Many theories have prevailed at one time or another about the other material in Genesis, but none has won the day. While it is clear these stories exhibit different interests and sensibilities than the Priestly ones, their origin remains elusive. One result of this feature is the prevalence of repetition in Genesis, which most often occurs when a Priestly version of a story and a non-Priestly version are both preserved. Frequently these stories occur one after another, creating a disorienting duplication for contemporary readers unaccustomed to this strategy.

References to excursuses appear throughout the WSB to assist readers in their study of the text.

### **History and Historicity**

It is unavoidable to wonder whether anything that Genesis says reflects actual historical events. To answer that question one must, above all, note that the sort of modern historical documentation this question has in mind does not appear to have been a primary interest of any of the authors of this text. Rather, their desire was to preserve important ideas and to express theological views, something that seems to have been more significant to them than the contemporary wish they would have recorded events in the ancient equivalent of a newspaper account. Even so, place and personal names, the duration of lives and events, and attention to details of obvious historical import do figure regularly in these texts. While it is true that these stories bear a certain historical veracity in depicting life in ways that would have been familiar and believable to audiences in the first millennium BCE, it is equally true that attempts to use Genesis to confidently reconstruct historical events of the Bronze and Iron Ages misunderstand its nature. Genesis does not provide us with enough detail to make such reconstructions fully compelling.

### **Reading Guide**

Despite its long and winding development, the form of Genesis has an easily identifiable two-part structure. It first provides a primeval history, then offers a narrative of the ancestors of Israel.

The primeval history comprises chaps. 1–11. Beginning with a dual account of the creation of the world (chaps. 1–3), it traces the growth of humanity with its accompanying increase of sin (chaps. 4–5), leading to God’s decision to deal with this creeping iniquity through a catastrophic flood (chaps. 6–9). The result of the flood is a covenant between God and Noah never to allow such a catastrophe to ever again destroy humanity, which will now proceed from Noah’s line. Humanity does not reform itself, however, epitomized in the Tower of Babel story. There, humanity’s desire to seize divine prerogatives results in the confusion of their language by God, making such large-scale cooperation impossible ever again. A helpful way to remember the shape of this section is the schema of creation (chaps. 1–3), uncreation (chaps. 6–7), and re-creation (chaps. 8–11).

In the closing verses of chap. 11, the primeval history narrows its focus onto a single family from southern Mesopotamia. This family produces the ancestors of Israel, and so this account of its patriarchs and matriarchs is widely known as the ancestral narrative (chaps. 12–50). Most often, it is further divided into three parts, identified by the three patriarchs that dominate them: Abraham (chaps. 12–25), Jacob (chaps. 26–36), and Joseph (chaps. 37–50). Among the numerous themes that link these parts, two stand out: migration and the subversion of birth order (primogeniture). The centrality of migration to Genesis is often overlooked. Every major figure in the ancestral narrative not only migrates during their life but migrates involuntarily at least once. Their experiences of and responses to migration merit the reader’s attention. Likewise, the repeated pattern, subverting custom, whereby the firstborn son does not become the primary heir of his father provides the central narrative tension of each story and can orient one throughout chaps. 12–50.

Each introductory essay to biblical books ends with a Reading Guide section. While many of the features of the study Bible allow for digging deeper, this section helps readers maintain a comprehensive understanding of the broad strokes of each book.

C. A. Strine

sent out the dove from him to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground,<sup>9</sup> but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him.<sup>10</sup> He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark,<sup>11</sup> and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth.<sup>12</sup> Then he waited another seven days and sent out the dove, and it did not return to him any more.

**13** In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from the earth, and Noah removed the covering of the ark and looked and saw that the face of the ground was drying.<sup>14</sup> In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.<sup>15</sup> Then God said to Noah,<sup>16</sup> “Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons’ wives with you.<sup>17</sup> Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”<sup>18</sup> So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives.<sup>19</sup> And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

**20** Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.<sup>21</sup> And when the LORD smelled the pleasing

odor, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humans, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.

<sup>22</sup>As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.”

**9** God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.<sup>2</sup> The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.<sup>3</sup> Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you, and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.<sup>4</sup> Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.<sup>5</sup> For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

<sup>6</sup>Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed, for in his own image God made humans.

<sup>7</sup>“And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and have dominion over<sup>a</sup> it.”

**8** Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,<sup>9</sup> “As for me, I am establishing my

*a 9.7 Gk mss: Heb multiply in*

Study notes offer clear explanations for a variety of readers. Students and professors will find material for digging deeper; preachers will find gems for sermon preparation; and those participating in individual or group Bible study will find a deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

versions of the flood. The association of a dove with an olive branch of peace may have connections to this feature.

**8:13** Although the Jewish tradition now places the beginning of its year in the autumn (known as Rosh Hashanah), at some time in antiquity Israel celebrated a spring new year (two weeks before Passover begins). The flood account works with this latter understanding.

**8:20-22** Across the ancient world, it was customary to offer a sacrifice in thanks to divine protection as Noah does here. Likewise, the image of a deity smelling a pleasing odor and responding with further blessing occurs across the ancient Near East. The Lord responds with a promise about the enduring stability of the natural world and ecosystem.

**9:1** The commission to humans in 1:28 is reiterated here. The divine project of 1:1-2:4a begins anew.

**9:2-3** Whereas humans are originally given only seeds and fruit to eat (1:29), now all animals and plants are designated as food for them.

**9:4-6** Now God specifies the punishment for murder: a life for a human life.

**9:8-17** The covenant promised in 6:18 is now established between God and Noah. Noah represents all humanity (v. 9) and all living creatures (v. 10). God commits never to allow another annihilating flood. God selects a sign of the covenant: the rainbow, associated with the end of a great rainstorm, will hark back to this commitment. The sign may be for God’s remembrance as much as humanity’s.

## GENESIS 9

**Reading through Time: The Curse of Canaan (Genesis 9)**

Genesis 9:18–27 describes Noah’s intoxication and the response of his three sons. Ham reports to his brothers, Shem and Japheth, that Noah is drunk and has passed out naked. These brothers cover their father without looking at him and, when Noah awakes, he blesses them. In sharp contrast, Ham’s son Canaan is cursed to be his uncles’ slave. This strange passage appears intended to explain animosity between Israelites and Canaanites, but Canaan plays no role in the story and is not mentioned at all until Noah’s curse.

In the history of Christian interpretation, the curse of Canaan came to be applied to anyone seen as an enemy worthy of enslavement and condemnation. This was facilitated in part by the multiple senses of Scripture, in which interpreters could read a text in its “plain sense” (the literal sense) but also in other ways that permitted the substitution of different characters for the original ones (the figural sense). In the figural interpretation of St. Augustine (354–430 CE), the Canaanites were identified with the Jewish people, who were condemned to slavery because they had not accepted Jesus. This reading waned in the Middle Ages, when Christians reemphasized the plain sense and engaged with Jewish interpretations that resisted equating the Jewish people with slavery. In the sixteenth century, anti-Jewish readings of the text shifted to anti-African readings. This shift was facilitated by an argument that the curse should apply to Ham, not Canaan, and therefore also to Africans, since, according to the genealogy of Gen. 10, Ham is the father of the African peoples. By the nineteenth century, the use of “the curse of Ham” as divine justification for African slavery was the most common interpretation of the passage in the United States, with its supporters arguing that it was both obvious and correct. Abolitionists disagreed strongly, though theirs was the minority position. (See “**The Bible, Race, and Ethnicity**,” pp. 2163–64.)

The use of this text in anti-Jewish and anti-African ways demonstrates, historically, that those in power may interpret a text in ways that denigrate other people and consider them to be inferior. There is a warning here: interpretation is always a product of texts *and* their interpreters (and these interpreters’ environments). Racist readings of the curse of Canaan would not have occurred without preexisting cultural biases that were incorporated into these interpretations, often without question or textual warrant.

Stacy Davis

Taking the “Reading through Time” approach, this excursus highlights how the interpretation of the curse of Canaan has changed throughout history and how different communities have used it to support their cultural views.

Learn more about these thematic essays and read “The Bible, Race, and Ethnicity” beginning on page 12 of this preview.

covenant with you and your descendants after you<sup>10</sup> and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.<sup>b</sup> <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup>God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh, and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup>When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature

of all flesh that is on the earth.” <sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

<sup>18</sup>The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. <sup>19</sup>These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was peopled.

<sup>20</sup>Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. <sup>22</sup>And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup>Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. <sup>24</sup>When Noah awoke

*b* 9.10 Gk: Heb adds *every animal of the earth*

**9:20–23** This short story reads like a cautionary tale. Noah unwisely consumes too much wine, and Ham unwisely gazes at his father. This story gives some indication of the cultural norms of the time but is far from clear.

# THEMATIC ESSAYS

Fifteen thematic essays provide wide-ranging treatments of the different ways the Bible may be read and interpreted, examine aspects of the Bible's history and its ancient contexts, explore various themes in biblical literature as they relate to contemporary concerns and issues, and show how the Bible has been received and interpreted in culture and science over time and locations.

**ESSAYS WRITTEN BY** Stacy Davis, Mary F. Foskett, Kerry Hasler-Brooks, J. Todd Hibbard, Jennifer L. Koosed, Davina C. Lopez, Emerson B. Powery, Henry W. Morisada Rietz, Claudia Setzer, and Brent A. Strawn.

## Full List of Essays

- The Bible as a Collection: The Making of the Biblical Canons
- The Bible and Methods: How to Read the Bible
- The Bible in Its Ancient Contexts
- The Bible in Public Life
- The Bible in Religious Interpretation and Practice
- The Bible in Global Contexts
- The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality
- The Bible, Race, and Ethnicity
- The Bible and Social Justice
- The Bible and Visual Art
- The Bible in Film and Media
- The Bible in Music
- The Bible in Literature
- The Bible in Museums
- The Bible, Science, and the Environment

READ THIS ESSAY ON PAGE 15


READ THIS ESSAY ON PAGE 13

"The diverse general editors, Drs. Emerson Powery, Stacy Davis, Mary Foskett and Brent Strawn, are to be applauded for shepherding this brilliant project that takes seriously the use of the Bible in contemporary culture and societies, as well its historical contexts. This opus on the Bible is front-loaded with essays that address intersectionality and the Bible and the Bible in, for example, visual art, social justice, museums, and music. The volume reflects the multiplicity, complexity, and possibilities of biblical interpretation. The excellent contributions reflect the skills, range, and commitments of the excellent scholar-teacher contributors. This is a wonderful expansive resource for teachers and students"

—MITZI J. SMITH,

J. Davison Philips Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

# The Bible, Race, and Ethnicity

Emerson B. Powery 

Learn more about Emerson B. Powery and all the editors of the WSB on page 21 of this preview.

The most stimulating stories of human history have always involved the coming together of people of different ethnoracial backgrounds, and the Bible and its interpreters both shed light on and have profoundly shaped these interactions as well as people's sense of their own identities. As socially constructed categories, "race" and "ethnicity" have profoundly affected the way many have organized their worlds. The terms will be used interchangeably in this essay and often combined into one adjectival form, *ethnoracial*, as a broad reference to groups with different cultural backgrounds.

Though centered on the people of Israel, the Bible includes collections of narratives, laws, and writings about Israel's migration, interactions, and conflicts with other ethnoracial people groups.

- According to Genesis, YHWH scattered people "abroad over the face of all the earth" into various regions and places (Gen. 11:8-9). God then established a covenant with Abraham to "make of you a great nation" and to bless "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:1-3). The story of Exodus opens with Israel's oppression in the land of Egypt. Joshua and Judges relay the ongoing military conflicts between Israel and various Canaanite groups. Despite numerous stories of ethnic conflicts, Israel's Torah (Law) testifies to the people's commitments to non-Israelites in their midst: to grant fair wages to poorer Israelites and immigrants (Lev. 19:10; Deut. 24:14), to seek the benefits of the Sabbath for the immigrant as well as for the Israelite (Exod. 20:10), and to include non-Israelites in Israel's worship practices (Num. 9:14; 15:14-16). The story of Ruth is a classic example, in which a Moabite woman cares for her widowed Israelite mother-in-law and, eventually, becomes an ancestor of Israel's most memorable king, David. Biblical stories attest to numerous interethnic marriages, even while debates about the maintenance of these relationships continued in some circles (cf. Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13).
- The Prophetic Books also bear witness to these ethnic interactions. The prophets Hananiah and Jeremiah publicly disagree over the length of Israel's exile in Babylon (Jer. 28), even as Jeremiah encourages the exiles to settle down in the land, intermarry, and seek the welfare of the place in which they find themselves (Jer. 29). Several prophets pronounce divine oracles on the nations surrounding Israel. A few prophets envision YHWH's temple as a place of reconciliation for all nations (Isa. 56:7; Zech. 8:23). The paradox of Jonah's story reveals much about ancient attitudes toward others. Despite the successful mission to Assyria, the account concludes with Jonah's anguish over God's merciful action toward this anti-Israelite group (Jonah 4).
- The wisdom tradition appeals to non-Israelite traditions as part of its public wisdom pronouncements. Sections of the Proverbs (22:17-24:22) may have been borrowed from Egypt. The story of Job is comparable to Babylonian theodicy accounts, and the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach are clearly products of their Hellenistic environment.
- The Gospels emphasize Jesus's mission as one to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6; 15:24), even while reluctantly expressing his occasional forays among non-Jews. He heals one enslaved to a gentile centurion, who himself is a kind benefactor of the local Jewish community (Luke 7:1-10). He casts out a demon from a non-Jewish Gerasene on "the other side of the sea" (Mark 5:1-20). At the behest of a persistent Syrophenician woman, he heals her daughter from afar (Mark 7:24-30). He imagines a "Samaritan"—considered a "foreigner" in some Jewish circles (Luke 17:18; John 8:48)—as a merciful human being.
- The shift to a full-blown vision of gentile inclusion among Christ followers energizes the apostle Paul's mission (Gal. 1:16; 3:8-9). Paul recalls one of the confessions of the Christ-following community—one offered at its baptismal ceremonies: "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Not all Jewish Christ followers shared Paul's emphasis (cf. Acts 15).

## THE BIBLE, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

These intentionally concise essays include references to both biblical texts and external sources. The goal is to stimulate connections and foster creativity among students, scholars, preachers, and study groups.

- Despite the language of an increasingly inclusive Jesus movement, the Acts of the Apostles fails to trace the missionary service of any leading *gentile* figure who becomes an active Christ follower during the early decades of the movement. Rather, the diverse ethnic makeup of the Jesus followers stems from another direction: within Judaism itself. One key component of this direction is the story of Pentecost in Acts, in which multiple languages are spoken and Jews “from every people” are present (Acts 2). For the writer of Acts, then, the Jews become, as Cynthia Baker stipulates, the “*model*—not merely his *foil* or *counterpoint*—for imagining a universal, multiethnic, spirit-filled community” (“From Every Nation under Heaven,” in *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings*). It is crucial to avoid the mistakes of past interpreters who assumed that “Jew” meant a “singular” ethnic identity and “Christian” meant a “universal” identity encompassing all ethnicities (whether Jewish or gentile Christ followers) and that this distinction between the two “groups” made the latter term more suggestive of global inclusion. The distinction between Jew and Christ follower—with respect to ethnicity—must be held in tension with another claim the story of Acts makes about the unity of all human races: “from one ancestor” God created all people (Acts 17:26). The final book of the New Testament, Revelation, offers an eschatological view of an inclusive global gathering centered on the Messiah figure (i.e., the Lamb) and God’s throne (Rev. 7).

In the North American context, the ethnic themes of the Bible have continually informed the American historical landscape. Race and ethnicity are cultural—not biological—phenomena. As a manifestation of these phenomena, the interactions between the Bible’s ethnoracial themes and North American interpreters have left an indelible mark on U.S. history. Many U.S. interpreters over time attempted to utilize the ethnic-geographic distinctions they discovered in the Bible to map racial distinctions onto the categories they experienced in their own contemporary worlds. Genesis 10—with its so-called Table of Nations (a label imposed by these later interpreters)—provided much ideological fodder for this engagement, producing questions like, What was the racial makeup of Adam and Eve? What was the “mark” placed on Cain’s head for the murder of his brother Abel, and how did this relate to skin color? What geographical regions traced their ancestry to one of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and did this express God’s favor for some groups over others? These interpreters cared less about what these stories meant in their ancient settings—f or example, how Noah’s curse on “Canaan” (Ham’s son) provided justification for Israel’s wars against the Canaanites—than how to use them in slotting modern people into racial hierarchies.

The U.S. histories of various ethnoracial groups have also given shape to how some contemporary readers engage biblical stories and texts within their respective communities. U.S. Latino readers may place (im)migration at the forefront of their hermeneutical engagement. After all, the Bible frequently describes the movement of people from one region to another. Many stories are about people on the move. How might readers interpret these ancient accounts differently if they read them from the perspective of migrants themselves rather than those who welcome migrants (from the side of privilege; see Efrain Agosto and Jacqueline M. Hidalgo, *Latinxs, the Bible, and Migration*)? Asian American interpreters may consider how their sense of marginality in a dominant (white) society or their existence between “American” and “Asian” cultures affects their engagement with biblical stories about characters who also live hybrid lives (see Mary F. Foskett and Jeffrey Kah-Jin Kuan, *Ways of Being, Ways of Reading: Asian American Biblical Interpretation*). Native American readers may reconsider their relationship to the land in light of Israel’s entrance into Canaan. Such interpreters may interrogate these stories from the perspective of the Canaanites who resided in the land prior to the arrival of the new migrants (see Robert Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Deliverance, Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today”). African American interpreters may press beyond an investigation of biblical characters of African descent (e.g., Ebed-Melech, the Cushite who rescued Jeremiah, or the Ethiopian eunuch who received Philip’s baptism) to wrestle with the marginal characters of every biblical story in light of their history as a marginalized group within the American context (see Brian Blount et al., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*).

The Bible is full of tales about ethnic groups, conflicts, and migrations, and we—contemporary readers of various ethnic histories and social engagements—do well to heed these stories and think together about how they can aid in the discussions that are critical to the thriving of contemporary multiethnic societies.



# The Bible and Methods: How to Read the Bible

Stacy Davis

There are a variety of reasons for reading and studying the Bible. For many scholars, for example, there is the desire to learn more about the peoples and places the texts describe. For those who are Jewish or Christian, biblical study can be a religious undertaking. For readers who identify with other religions or have no religious identity, studying the Bible can give important context to a range of past social movements or historical events, such as Western colonialism, feminist movements, abolitionism, and the Cold War. Studying the Bible is also relevant to examining contemporary issues like LGBTQIA2S+ advocacy and climate change activism. The main purpose of any study Bible is to give its readers the tools and notes needed to understand ancient texts, and this is where methods play an important role.

There are multiple ways to read the Bible, from feminist criticism to social-scientific criticism to disability studies to ecological studies. These methods, however, were preceded by the historical-critical method, which prioritizes placing biblical texts within a particular historical time frame and context. Most books of the Hebrew Bible were written between the eighth and first centuries BCE. Most historical-critical scholars posit that those books come from multiple sources—particularly the Torah (Genesis–Deuteronomy). One influential theory known as the Documentary Hypothesis argues that the Torah is constructed from four originally discrete sources that can be identified and separated on the basis of various criteria. These four sources are the following: the J or Yahwist source, which prefers using the divine name YHWH (*y* produces a *y* sound in German); the E or Elohist source, which often uses the divine name Elohim; the P or Priestly source, which emphasizes order and sacrifice; and the D source, which is found in and represents the core ideas of the book of Deuteronomy. Scholars continue to debate the composition history of the Hebrew Bible—and the Documentary Hypothesis no longer enjoys the consensus it once did; even so, knowing that a unit like Gen. 1–3, for example, contains two different creation stories likely from different sources can facilitate reading and understanding. And so the historical-critical method is closely linked to source criticism, a method that looks for different sources in particular biblical passages.

Nearly all the books of the New Testament can be dated to the first century CE, with some considered possibly written in the early second century CE. Similar to the different sources in the Torah, the first five books in the New Testament (Matthew–Acts) also have different sources, as follows, based on the Four Document Hypothesis: M (Matthew), Mark, L (Luke), and Q (a sayings source), with a separate group of sources for John. Most scholars believe that Mark, the earliest Gospel, and Q are sources for Matthew and Luke. This theory helps to explain why so many stories and sayings repeat in these Gospels. In addition, the authors of Matthew and Luke have their own textual traditions, which is why, for instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son only appears in Luke (15:11–32) and the parable of the Unforgiving Servant only appears in Matthew (18:23–35). John, however, has very few similarities with Matthew, Mark, or Luke. For those interested in knowing what the historical Jesus may have said or done, if a saying or event appears in John and one of the other Gospels, the odds of its historicity increase, given their independent sources.

In addition to a basic understanding of the Bible's multiple sources, knowing a few key dates and events will help the reader's historical-critical approach to it as well. For the historical background of the Hebrew Bible, Israel had two major exiles: the first when Assyria invaded the northern portion of Israel in 722 BCE and the second when Babylon invaded the south, called Judah, in 597 BCE and 587/586 BCE. Whether a text was written before or after an exile gives the reader historical context that can influence what a text means. While Hosea and Jeremiah both warn readers to repent, their contexts are different. Hosea is speaking to the north about its idolatrous temples and the threat of the Assyrian invasion (Hos. 10), while Jeremiah is arguing that Jerusalem in the south has the proper temple but that will not save the people from Babylon if they do not behave properly (Jer. 7). For the New Testament, the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE is a key date and historical event. The introductions to each biblical book and the notes in this study Bible will give the reader the basic historical information they need to read the book in its context.

Tables on Gospel parallels and unique passages in the Synoptic Gospels are included in the WSB. Learn more on page 17 of this preview.

The essays in the WSB offer wide-ranging perspectives, from a comprehensive overview, as seen in this essay, to a more focused lens, as demonstrated in the previous one. This diverse approach, present in all features of this study Bible crafted by educators for educators, positions it not only as an excellent textbook for seminary and college courses but also as a valuable resource for congregations and church leaders.

Additionally, another method that may be particularly useful in a course that includes both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is a form of rhetorical criticism (how language is designed to persuade the reader) called intertextuality, or inner-biblical exegesis, a way of paying attention to how biblical texts function in other parts of the Bible. The writers of the texts in the New Testament drew on the Jewish Scriptures to interpret and define Jesus. This means that the New Testament is full of allusions and quotations from the Jewish Scriptures, especially the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures, used by the early church). Two examples are as follows: The author of Matthew uses the story of a young woman having a child in Isa. 7 as proof of Jesus's miraculous conception by the Virgin Mary (Matt. 1:22–23). In Gal. 4 and Rom. 4, Paul uses the story from Genesis of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar to demonstrate not only that Jesus is the Messiah but also that salvation includes gentiles, or non-Jews, as well as Jews. Notes in many study Bibles often indicate where New Testament texts cite or allude to Jewish Scriptures so that the readers can see the similarities and differences in interpretation.

Because of the multiple types of text in the Bible, including narratives, law codes, dialogue between prophets and God, psalms, letters to new Christian communities, and stories about Jesus, there are multiple methods that scholars use to explain its content. Not simply of use to scholars, these methods are important tools for students as well. Those mentioned here (including feminist, social-scientific, disability, and ecological approaches) are but a few of the twenty-three different methods described in two well-known volumes about biblical criticism: *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (1999) and *New Meanings for Ancient Texts: Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications* (2013). Comprehensive as they are, these volumes do not include other important recent methods, such as childist interpretation and womanist interpretation. When reading a scholarly work on the Bible, it is always helpful to see what method or methods the author is using to interpret a particular text, because there are many from which to choose. And when doing your own interpretation, know that you have multiple ways to do that work. While some assignments may require a more historical or source-based focus, others may not.

One major shift in biblical studies in the last half century has been the recognition that people read the same texts differently depending on their own social location(s), influenced by such factors as gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, and sexual orientation, to name a few. As long as the author does not misrepresent a text (e.g., suggesting that the Gospels were written in the fourth century CE), there is no one “right” way to read. Someone examining the story of Gen. 1 from a feminist perspective may emphasize the simultaneous creation of genders, while an ecological critic may focus on the systematic ordering of creation and the emphasis on the goodness of all creation. A social-scientific interpretation of John 9 may focus on the dynamics among Jesus, the Pharisees, the healed man, and his parents, while an interpretation based on disability studies may question the ways in which not being able to see is interpreted as a sign of sin or moral failing. A postcolonial reading of Assyria, as described in the books of 2 Kings, Isaiah, and Hosea, may engage more critically not only with Assyrian as well as biblical texts but with the ways scholars tend to favor the biblical descriptions of the communities involved in the conflicts, as opposed to the Assyrian descriptions. Consequently, the study of the Bible can be enhanced by multiple scholarly methods as well as by the different disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of studies readers bring to the texts, including but not limited to psychology; anthropology; sociology; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; history; and literature.

Reading the Bible requires time and patience; however, if one has both, combined with curiosity and a willingness to learn, the stories and ideas in the texts can lead one to timeless questions about human interactions, how to make sense of the nonsensical, and how ancient communities saw themselves. Whether the texts are sacred for the reader or viewed as part of world literature, the different methods of biblical interpretation enable any reader to engage the biblical books critically and with their own questions in mind.

# TABLES, CHARTS, DIAGRAMS, & MAPS

Tables, charts, and diagrams introduce historical timelines, rulers of ancient empires, measurements, Gospel parallels, unique passages in the Gospels, diagrams of temples and tabernacles, and more.

## Full Listing of Tables, Charts, and Diagrams

- Timeline of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean World to the Early Second Century CE (chart)
- Ancient Empires in the Bible (essay with charts)
- The Tabernacle (diagram) ○
- First Temple (diagram)
- Temple Comparison (diagram)
- Biblical Weights and Measures (table)
- Gospel Parallels (table) ○
- The Synoptic Problem (essay with diagram)
- Unique Passages in the Synoptic Gospels (table) ○

SEE THIS DIAGRAM ON PAGE 20

PREVIEW AN EXCERPT OF THIS TABLE ON PAGE 19

SEE THE UNIQUE PASSAGES IN MATTHEW TABLE ON PAGE 18

## Color Maps

These maps illustrate ancient Near Eastern geography, political territories, historical events, and location names across the time span of the biblical writings. The maps in the WSB include:

- Maccabean Military Campaigns
- Ancient Israel in the Time of the Ancestors
- Tribal Distribution during the Time of the Judges
- Assyrian Empire Map
- Persian Empire Map
- Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth
- Roman Empire from Augustus (d. 114 CE) to Trajan (d. 117 CE)
- Jerusalem from the Time of David to the Maccabees
- Judea, Samaria, and Surrounding Areas in the First Century CE ○
- Judah and Babylonia at the Time of Jerusalem's Fall (587/586 BCE)
- The Journeys of Paul as Described in the Acts of the Apostles



“The Westminster Study Bible is an exciting new addition to this ancient genre of tools for reading and understanding Scripture. It is an especially valuable resource for theologians interested in recent developments in Biblical studies and in the Bible’s reception history and an invaluable companion for general readers who want to approach their Bibles in an informed and probing way.”

—CHRISTINE HELMER,

Peter B. Ritzma Professor of Humanities, Professor of German and Religious Studies, Northwestern University

## Passages Unique to the Gospel of Matthew

Working in conjunction with sections on “The Synoptic Problem” and the “Two/Four Source Hypotheses” in the introductory essay to the Gospels and Acts, the WSB also provides charts listing the unique passages in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

1:1-17	The Genealogy from Abraham and David
1:18-25	The Birth of Jesus
1:23; 2:5-6, 15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14-15, 35; 21:4-5; 27:9	Fulfillment Citations
2:1-12	Visit of the Magi
2:13-15	Escape to Egypt
2:16-18	Massacre of the Infants
2:19-23	Return from Egypt
3:14-15	John Questions Baptism of Jesus
5:17-20	Jesus’s Words Fulfill the Law
5:21-24, 27-28, 33-38, 43	The Antitheses
6:1-8, 16-18	On Charity and Prayer
7:6	Saying on Profaning the Holy
10:5-6	Mission to Israel Alone
10:36	Enemies within the Household
11:28-30	Comfort for the Weary
13:24-30, 36-52	Parables about Weeds, Treasure, Pearl, and Net
14:28-31	Peter Tries to Walk on Water
16:17-19	Jesus Blesses Peter as the Foundation of the Church
17:24-27	Teaching on the Temple Tax
18:15-20	Calling One’s Fellow to Account
18:21-22	How Many Times One Must Forgive
18:23-35	Parable of the Unforgiving Servant
20:1-15	Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard
21:28-32	Parable of the Two Sons
23:1-2, 7b-12, 15-22, 24, 30	Sayings about the Pharisees
25:1-13	Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids
25:31-46	The Last Judgment
27:3-10	The Death of Judas
27:24-25	Pilate Washes His Hands, Blood Curse on the People
27:52-53	The Saints Are Raised
27:62-66; 28:11-15	The Guard at the Tomb
28:16-20	The Great Commission

*Because the earliest known biblical manuscripts do not contain clear paragraphs or subtitles, section subtitles are always subject to editorial interpretation.*

## Table of Gospel Parallels

This table indicates where readers will find corresponding or nearly identical passages in the NT Gospels, or “Gospel parallels.” A parallel points to a common tradition (i.e., textual source) that appears in similar or different literary contexts across Gospels, usually sharing more than a few words or a phrase. Parallels underscore material that more than one Gospel writer deemed important to include in their tellings of the Jesus story.

In each column, the references placed in bold indicate the parallels listed in consecutive order for that Gospel. The Gospel of John is referenced only in the few instances where a parallel with John occurs in one or more of the Synoptic Gospels. For traditions that are unique to each Gospel, see “**Differences between John and the Synoptic Gospels,**” p. 1849, and the charts for the three Synoptics: “**Passages Unique to the Gospel of Matthew,**” p. 1721; “**Passages Unique to the Gospel of Mark,**” p. 1770; and “**Passages Unique to the Gospel of Luke,**” p. 1801–2.

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
<b>Genealogies</b>				
Genealogies of Jesus	<b>1:2–17</b>		3:23–38	
<b>Preparation</b>				
John the Baptist	<b>3:1–6</b>	<b>1:2–6</b>	<b>3:1–6</b>	<b>1:19–23</b>
John’s Preaching of Repentance	<b>3:7–10</b>		<b>3:7–9</b>	
One More Powerful Is Coming	<b>3:11–12</b>	<b>1:7–8</b>	<b>3:15–18</b>	<b>1:24–28</b>
John Is Imprisoned	14:3–4	6:17–18	<b>3:19–20</b>	
The Baptism of Jesus	<b>3:13–17</b>	<b>1:9–11</b>	<b>3:21–22</b>	<b>1:29–34</b>
Genealogies of Jesus	1:2–17		<b>3:23–38</b>	
The Testing of Jesus	<b>4:1–11</b>	<b>1:12–13</b>	<b>4:1–13</b>	
<b>The Beginning of Jesus’s Public Ministry (According to John)</b>				
The Cleansing of the Temple	21:12–13	11:15–17	19:45–46	<b>2:14–16</b>
<b>Jesus’s Ministry in Galilee</b>				
Jesus Begins His Ministry in Galilee	<b>4:12–17</b>	<b>1:14–15</b>	<b>4:14–15</b>	
Jesus Is Rejected in His Hometown	13:53–58	6:1–6a	<b>4:16–30</b>	
Jesus Calls the First Disciples	<b>4:18–22</b>	<b>1:16–20</b>		
A Man with an Unclean Spirit		<b>1:21–28</b>	<b>4:31–37</b>	
Jesus Heals Many at Peter’s House	8:14–17	<b>1:29–34</b>	<b>4:38–41</b>	
Jesus’s Preaching Tour		<b>1:35–38</b>	<b>4:42–43</b>	
Jesus Cleanses a Person with a Skin Disease	8:1–4	<b>1:40–45</b>	<b>5:12–16</b>	
Jesus Heals Someone with Paralysis	9:1–8	<b>2:1–12</b>	<b>5:17–26</b>	
The Call of Levi	9:9–13	<b>2:13–17</b>	<b>5:27–32</b>	
The Question about Fasting	9:14–17	<b>2:18–22</b>	<b>5:33–39</b>	
Plucking Grain on the Sabbath	12:1–8	<b>2:23–28</b>	<b>6:1–5</b>	

Based on *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, edited by Kurt Aland, 15th edition, © 2013 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, with revisions. Used by permission. Versions previous to the 15th edition were also consulted.

This in-depth, 8-page resource serves as an invaluable aid for readers, facilitating not only comparative study and textual analysis but also providing essential tools for understanding literary structure and studying redactional activity. Additionally, preachers and church educators will discover its utility as a valuable resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, enhancing their ability to engage with and communicate the profound narratives of the Gospels effectively.

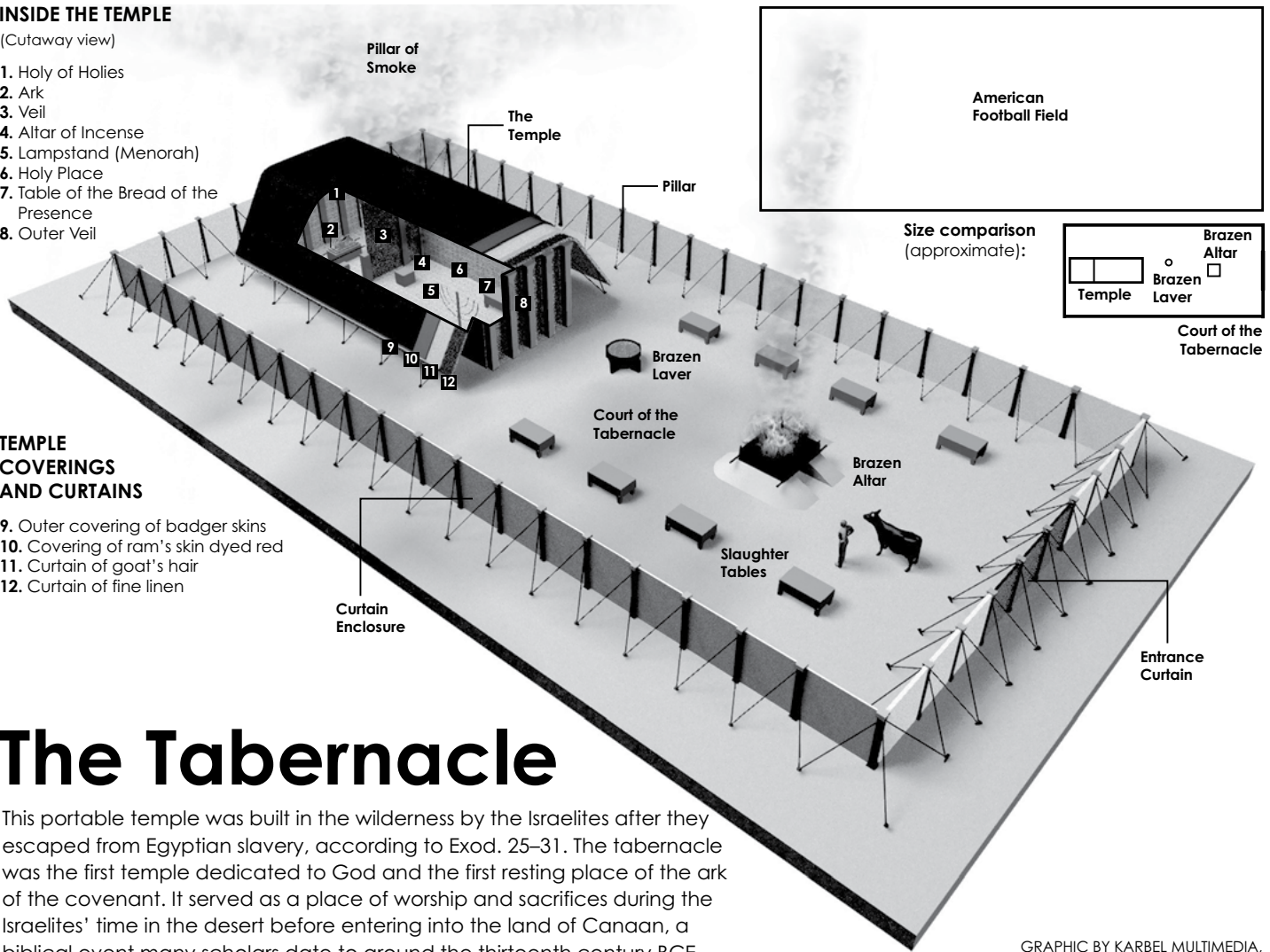
**INSIDE THE TEMPLE**

(Cutaway view)

1. Holy of Holies
2. Ark
3. Veil
4. Altar of Incense
5. Lampstand (Menorah)
6. Holy Place
7. Table of the Bread of the Presence
8. Outer Veil

**TEMPLE COVERINGS AND CURTAINS**

9. Outer covering of badger skins
10. Covering of ram's skin dyed red
11. Curtain of goat's hair
12. Curtain of fine linen



# The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites after they escaped from Egyptian slavery, according to Exod. 25–31. The tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the ark of the covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' time in the desert before entering into the land of Canaan, a biblical event many scholars date to around the thirteenth century BCE.

GRAPHIC BY KARBEL MULTIMEDIA, COPYRIGHT 2008 LOGOS BIBLE SOFTWARE

The diagrams in the WSB offer a comprehensive visual exploration of biblical texts, illuminating the details of ancient structures such as the tabernacle. By juxtaposing these visuals with textual analysis, scholars and church professionals gain invaluable insights into the evolution of religious beliefs and practices over time. This holistic approach not only enriches our understanding of ancient rituals but also facilitates meaningful comparisons with contemporary expressions of faith, fostering a deeper appreciation for the relevance of historical perspectives in informing present-day spirituality.

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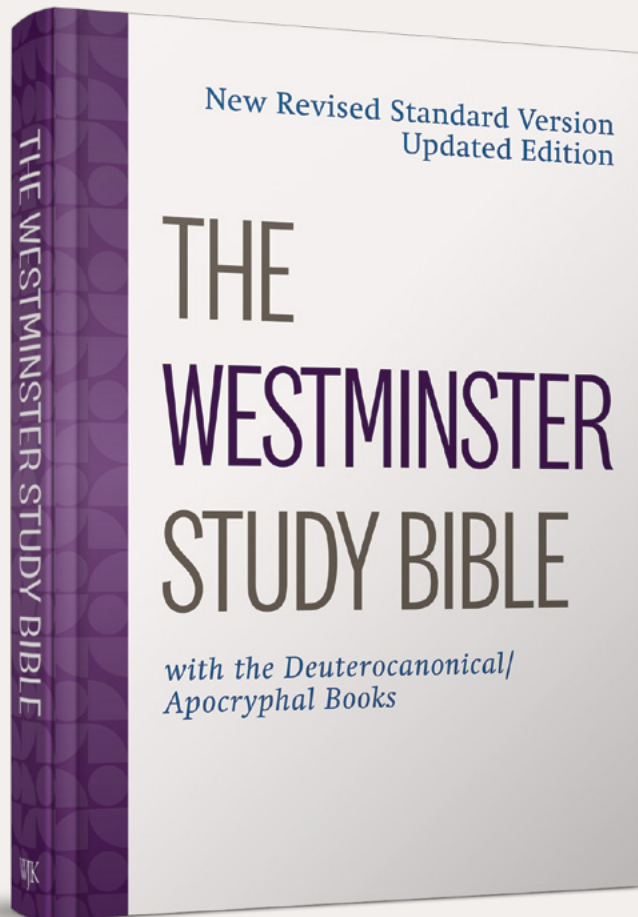
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