What Then Does This Text Mean?

Approaches to Critical Biblical Interpretation

Edited by

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and

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"*What Then Does This Text Mean?* offers a timely and compelling invitation to a new generation of readers to explore the expanding landscape of biblical interpretation. This volume is essential reading for those interested in hermeneutics broadly and in the intricate practices of biblical interpretation more specifically."

—Emerson B. Powery, Professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the School of Arts, Culture, and Society, Messiah University

"In this important follow up to *To Each Its Own Meaning* and *New Meanings for Ancient Texts*, Steven McKenzie and John Kaltner and their contributors provide students and scholars a one-volume window onto state-of-the-art biblical interpretation. This superb collection of essays sets before readers the vast array of critical approaches that define the field and invites us into the rich complexity of biblical interpretation. *What Then Does This Text Mean?* signals from the start the immense value of knowing that no single approach can determine what the Bible says or means and how a multiplicity of interpretations only heightens the Bible's vitality and relevance."

—Mary F. Foskett, Wake Forest Kahle Professor of Religious Studies and John Thomas Albritton Fellow at Wake Forest University

"No other resource prepares learners for public biblical interpretation as effectively as this update of a true classic. McKenzie and Kaltner not only include fresh perspectives but also feature emerging voices and global perspectives. Accessible to a wide range of readers, each chapter introduces a single interpretive approach, examines its insights and liabilities, and models that perspective in action."

—Greg Carey, Associate Dean and Professor of New Testament, Moravian University School of Theology

"This is a fantastic collection! McKenzie and Kaltner have gathered together twenty-two essays, each clearly explicating a biblical critical method by an expert in the field. The collection is perfect for both students in the classroom and for scholars seeking to enlarge their interpretive horizons."

—Jennifer L. Koosed, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and Professor of Religious Studies, Albright College

"*What Then Does This Text Mean?* is essential reading for students, scholars, and lay readers alike. This timely and excellent collection honors the rich history of critical biblical interpretation while bringing to the center Latine, Indigenous, womanist, and other interpretive traditions that have long contributed to the reading of biblical texts. *What Then Does This Text Mean?* makes a powerful case that the future of biblical studies lies not in narrowing the range of legitimate interpretation or limiting who has a place at the table but in expanding the table itself. The result is a vibrant convergence of perspectives that illuminates the past while demonstrating why these approaches are indispensable to the present and future of biblical interpretation—and to the world in which we read."

—Francisco Lozada, Jr., Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the Faculty, and Professor of New Testament Studies, Christian Theological Seminary

"What exactly are we doing when we read the Bible? McKenzie and Kaltner have been guiding a generation of scholars and students seeking to answer this fundamental question. This volume assembles some of the field's most compelling voices in biblical interpretation. With clarity and conviction, these essays show us how we can take up and read the Bible today."

—Joel M. LeMon, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and The Rev. Dr. Donald Allen Harp, Jr. Distinguished Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

"This book is a treasure trove for teachers and students seeking to appreciate the breadth of critical approaches to reading the Bible represented by a diverse and distinguished array of scholars. Its in-depth descriptions, helpful glossaries, and insightful applications make it an invaluable resource for enriching and expanding one's reading of Scripture. The suggestions for further reading and endnotes alone are reason enough to buy the book, and scholars will also find it a valuable resource for engaging approaches beyond their own areas of expertise."

—Janette H. Ok, George Eldon Ladd Associate Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

"McKenzie and Kaltner are back with the most comprehensive volume on the diverse ways scholars read the Bible. Cutting-edge essays by leading scholars showcase how both traditional and newer approaches illuminate the richness of biblical texts and why there isn't a sole, definitive meaning to any given text. An excellent classroom resource, this volume offers a vivid portrayal of the ever-expanding and dynamic landscape of biblical studies."

—Raj Nadella, Samuel A. Cartledge Associate Professor of New Testament, Columbia Theological Seminary

"This exciting, accessible volume maps and clarifies a remarkably large number of ways in which scholars read biblical texts today. It is an invaluable resource for anyone who wishes to engage contemporary biblical studies."

—Ken Stone, Distinguished Service Professor and Professor of Bible, Culture, and Hermeneutics, Chicago Theological Seminary

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Introduction

This book continues in the tradition of two earlier volumes. *To Each Its Own Meaning* (*TEOM*) articulated the objective to provide a collection of up-to-date introductions to critical methods for academic study of the Bible authored by practitioners of such methods but accessible to nonspecialists, particularly students, including an illustration of each method by its application to a specific biblical text.[1] Each author was asked to follow a specific format:

- to define the method, explaining its origin and development in relation to other methods covered in the book, defining key terms and concepts, and articulating its assumptions
- to apply the method to a text chosen by the author from Genesis or Luke-Acts
- to reflect on the drawbacks of the method and on its prospects for the future of the field
- to supply a brief list of resources for further study

A particular concern behind *TEOM* was to address the division between historical criticism and literary criticism. The latter term illustrated the issue,

because "literary criticism" was confusingly being used in two distinct ways—for the method of discerning sources underlying a given biblical text ("source criticism") and for literary theory. What was the significance, respectively, of history and of the nature of literature for the text? Was meaning to be found in the development of the text or in the text and its interaction with readers? These two broad kinds of endeavors have come to be known as diachronic and synchronic approaches. *TEOM* reflected the evolving state of the field in its division of the book's contents into three parts: "Traditional Methods of Biblical Criticism" (Reading the Bible Historically, Source Criticism, Form Criticism, Tradition-Historical Criticism, Redaction Criticism); "Expanding the Tradition" (Social-Scientific Criticism, Canonical Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism); and "Overturning the Tradition" (Structural Criticism, Narrative Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, Poststructuralist Criticism, and Reading the Bible Ideologically: Feminist Criticism). Authors were chosen for their expertise in these methods and for the diversity that they contributed to the project in terms of their area of study (Hebrew Bible / Old Testament or New Testament), gender, religious affiliation, and stage in career.

The 1999 revised edition of *TEOM* retained the same three-part division. It offered authors a chance to update their articles to reflect changes in the methods. Two articles were replaced in order to afford greater accessibility (Form Criticism) and to reflect a greater breadth in approach (Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality). Also, for greater breadth a second article on reading ideologically was added focusing on Socioeconomic Criticism.

New Meanings for Ancient Texts (*NMAT*) was designed as a supplement to *TEOM* and was intended to reflect the changing face of biblical studies by adding treatments of nine approaches that had developed or grown in the interim (Cultural-Historical Criticism, Disability Studies, Ecological Criticism, New Historicism, Popular Culture, Postcolonial Criticism, Postmodernism, Psychological Criticism, Queer Criticism).[2] The change in terminology from "methods" to "approaches" was noteworthy and betrayed the growing ease with the subjectivity inherent in interpretation of the Bible as a discipline in the humanities. The format of the essays was the same as that of *TEOM* with two relatively minor changes: first, authors were asked to illustrate the approaches with texts from the Pentateuch or the Gospels rather than Genesis or Luke-Acts; second, the key terms identified by authors were compiled into a list at the end of each essay.

The present volume both updates and expands the previous two in an effort to keep pace with the dynamism of biblical studies. The chapter format is the same except for the absence of parameters for biblical texts used to illustrate each approach (i.e., not limited to the Pentateuch or Gospels). There are twenty-two chapters, nearly the same number as in the previous two books combined (fourteen in *TEOM* and nine in *NMAT*). The number of approaches is remarkable, all the more so considering that several previously distinct "methods" (reading historically, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, tradition history, rhetorical

criticism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism) are subsumed under four general chapters treating historical and literary criticism of each Testament. The number of approaches is indicative of the growing diversity and interdisciplinary nature of academic biblical studies.

The more general coverage of historical- and literary-critical approaches does not signal their diminished significance. To the contrary, it indicates what we perceive as the integration of these individual "methods" in pursuit of larger historical and literary goals within the field. It also reflects the recognition that historical and literary criticism are in some sense "fundamental" to the discipline and are here to stay. The essays in *TEOM* remain useful for more detailed exploration. Finally, it suggests a growing sense of diversification of approaches within the field and a recognition of the value of different readings and the absence of a single "right" interpretation. Biblical scholarship is decreasingly binary (historical or literary, diachronic or synchronic, traditional or innovative) and increasingly both/and or even all of the above.

This democratization of approaches compromises the usefulness of "traditional" for categorizing them, especially in contrast with "newer" approaches. Feminist and social-scientific approaches, for instance, are in a sense now traditional and certainly not new. Moreover, feminist work can be synchronic or diachronic in orientation or both. A dozen of the essays in this book are continuous in some way with articles in the previous two volumes (including Reception History in relation to the article on the Bible and Popular Culture and Womanist Interpretation as arising in critical conversation with Feminist Criticism and African American Criticism, as well as other communal approaches).

We group the twenty-two essays in this volume into five categories:

1. Textual Approaches (Historical Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Historical Criticism of the New Testament, Literary Criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Literary-Critical Approaches to the New Testament, Textual Criticism);
2. Communal Approaches: Race/Ethnicity (African American Criticism, Asian American Criticism, Hispanic, Latino, Latino/a, and Latinx Biblical Interpretation, Indigenous Biblical Interpretation);
3. Communal Approaches: Age/Gender/Physical Ability/Sexuality (Childist Studies, Disability Studies, Feminist Criticism, Queer Interpretation, Womanist Interpretation);
4. Topical Approaches (Performance Criticism, Social-Historical/Social-Scientific Criticism, Spatial Theory);
5. Responsive Approaches (Affect Criticism, Environmental Hermeneutics, Postcolonial Biblical Criticism, Reception History, Trauma Hermeneutics)

The scheme is drawn from our experience in teaching these approaches to students and is largely practical and heuristic. It provides some balance in the presentation of the approaches with three to five entries in each category and a means of identifying the principal concerns of these different approaches in

reading the Bible. The categories are certainly not rigid or fixed. Every interpretation is in some way textual and addresses a particular community. Several of the Communal approaches describe themselves as intersectional, as indeed may be implied by the term communal. Most notably, womanist interpretation is an intersectional enterprise in essence and in intent. Similarly, conversation with other fields of study is not limited to the topical approaches, and all approaches have bearing on readers, faith communities, and the world at large. The various terms in the article titles—criticism, interpretation, hermeneutics, studies, theory—are somewhat interchangeable, but they reflect subtle differences in the ways that the authors conceive of their approaches.

We struggled a bit with how to identify the approaches in the fifth category, and we eventually settled on the term "Responsive." This is not to say that the approaches in other categories do not have a responsive quality. Just the opposite is true since every act of biblical interpretation is a response to the text and reflects the responses of readers situated in communities. To take two examples, textual criticism attempts to respond to the evidence found in different versions of the biblical manuscripts, while Asian American criticism reads the Bible in a way that responds both to the text and to the experiences of Asian Americans. What sets apart the fifth category is the fact that the responsive element of these approaches is more explicit and is their defining feature. In some cases, the focus is on how individuals and communities respond to texts (Affect Criticism and Reception History), and at other times the focus is on how texts can be interpreted in response to the experiences of people and groups (Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Trauma Hermeneutics). Another distinct aspect of these approaches is that they are communal in a global way since they often address matters like the environmental crisis that affect all people and are not unique to a particular group. Debates over categorization are an inevitable result of the proliferation of new ways of reading the Bible that has occasioned this volume. We put forward this framework aware that no system is perfect but believing that it helpfully reflects the current methodological state of the field of biblical studies.

Our experiences in the classroom have taught us that identifying their similarities and differences is an effective way for students to explore how the approaches relate to each other. This might be done by comparing all those under a given category, or by comparing those in one category with those in another. We have found that posing a set of four questions can be a simple but beneficial way to generate ideas and get the discussion started, and we list them here in the hope that some of our readers will find them useful.

1. What is the purpose of the approach?
2. What is a strength of the approach?
3. What is a weakness of the approach?
4. What does the approach contribute to your understanding of the Bible?

Virtually every one of the approaches we include in this book is the topic of at least one group or section at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical

Literature, the principal guild for academic biblical study in North America. The authors are practitioners of the approaches represented, and they showcase the diversity and sophistication of biblical studies as an academic discipline. When we shared the final list of contributors with those who had agreed to write, several of them commented that it was an extraordinary roster of scholars. We heartily agree! We are most grateful to them for agreeing to be a part of this project and for then following through with their excellent articles. We remain equally indebted to those who wrote for *TEOM* and *NMAT*.

In the preface to *New Meanings for Ancient Texts* we admitted to some uncertainty regarding where things might be headed in our field of study. "Working on this volume has led us to ponder the future of biblical studies as an academic discipline. What will a book of this nature look like in another twenty years? The vibrancy of the field and the pace of change make it impossible for us to predict, but we find it an exciting topic for speculation, and we hope that this book contributes in some small way to attract and engage future scholars in our discipline."[3]

Nearly fifteen years after we wrote those words that uncertainty is gone, our excitement has increased, and we are thrilled that some of those imagined future colleagues are the authors of essays included in this volume. We now know the answer to our question—this is what a book on biblical scholarship looks like a decade and a half on. It contains a collection of the interesting and diverse ways Bible scholars attempt to address the question posed in its title, one that Jesus asks his audience in Luke 20:17. The second word of that query ("What *then* does this text mean?") is noteworthy because of its open-ended quality that invites the hearer to determine the meaning of the text in question. The contributors to this volume have taken up that invitation, and they demonstrate that the Bible, like most texts, has many meanings, and no one of them reigns supreme over the others. This is a critical point because we believe the most dangerous form of misuse of the biblical text is the imposition of one God-given meaning on it, especially when this is done for selfish purposes that infringe on the rights of others. The more open we are to the different ways of reading it, the less likely we are to interpret the Bible in a manner that can be harmful.

NOTES

1. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Critical Methods of Biblical Study* (Westminster/John Knox, 1993; rev. ed. 1999).
2. Steven L. McKenzie and John Kaltner, *New Meanings for Ancient Texts: Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications* (Westminster John Knox, 2013).
3. McKenzie and Kaltner, *New Meanings*, xiii.

TEXTUAL APPROACHES

Chapter 1

Historical Criticism of the Hebrew Bible

MAHRI LEONARD-FLECKMAN

Among Hebrew Bible scholars today, perhaps no phrase elicits such varied reactions as "historical criticism." A branch of critical inquiry that developed with the discipline of History in the modernist period (around the late nineteenth century), historical criticism soon dominated biblical scholarship.[1] Eventually, its hegemony and claims of objectivity in historical representation resulted in a pendulum swing in the latter half of the twentieth century (the later-modernist or "postmodern" period) toward deconstructionism and other literary-critical and theoretical tools.[2] A split soon materialized between modernist and later-modernist hermeneutics, not only in biblical studies but across the humanities. Arguably, the split has since widened into a chasm that historians have termed a "crisis of incompatibility," for it seems largely incapable of convergence.[3] In

The first section of this chapter is drawn in condensed form from Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, "History's Fragments and the Hebrew Bible." In Samuel L. Boyd, ed. "Untimely Time: On History's Instrumental Narratives," special issue of *English Language Notes* 62/2 (2025): 63–80, and is used by permission of Duke University Press. The second section also utilizes content from that article.

the field of Hebrew Bible, signs of this chasm or crisis include conflicting ideas of what historical criticism means, what counts as historical research, and even the relevance of history to biblical studies.

WHAT IS HISTORICAL CRITICISM? A (VERY) BRIEF HISTORY AND EARLY CRITIQUES

The inception of historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible is difficult to pinpoint.[4] Like the birth of the modern university and disciplinary divisions, its story privileges Europe. There, historical criticism emerged slowly between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, taking various pathways through different thinkers and intellectual movements.[5] This developing, cutting-edge body of scholarship founded and legitimized biblical studies as an academic discipline, and it liberated later generations of scholars to work beyond strictly religious settings and interpretations. Key among early, critical thinkers of the Hebrew Bible was seventeenth-century Dutch-Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza, whom many would call the founder of biblical criticism.[6] In his seminal *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*Theologico-Political Treatise*) (1670), Spinoza questioned the divine origin of the Bible and argued for the limitations of religious authority in secular politics. Though his work was subject to harsh critique and attempts at suppression, it became one of the most significant publications in European intellectual history. Spinoza himself built upon and synthesized the work of many others into a coherent philosophical and historical framework.[7]

Despite the import of Spinoza and other earlier thinkers, it was not until the late nineteenth century that historical-critical methods developed in more cohesive and systematic forms that have persisted to this day. These methods were particular to Protestant German scholarship that was influenced largely by Leopold von Ranke and the Rankian (or Rankean) school, which sought to penetrate the essence of history by establishing an objective, scientific historiographic method based on source criticism.[8] According to the Rankian research program and its careful weighing of sources, reliable historiography necessitated primary sources and especially archival sources, not literary texts oriented toward future generations.[9] In order to take a Rankian view of the Hebrew Bible, biblical scholars had to adopt a similar source-critical approach that viewed biblical texts as historically reliable sources that contained at least some objective information about the past as it "really happened."[10]

This search for an objective, scientific program of biblical scholarship—as distinct from long-standing theological methods and studies tied to ecclesiastical authority—made inroads largely through Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) and his "Documentary Hypothesis," or proposal of independent sources in the Pentateuch.[11] Alongside source criticism, a variety of other methods soon surfaced under the umbrella of historical criticism, including

form criticism, tradition-historical criticism, and redaction criticism (also known as composition history).[12] Simultaneously, biblical archaeology was born in Britain and North America, connected especially to William Foxwell Albright (1891–1971).[13] Biblical archaeology and textual studies were intimately linked, for the primary aim of archaeology was to verify biblical history within the southern Levant and the broader ancient Near East.[14] Key among this early work with texts and objects was the notion of the recoverability of earlier sources and traditions, including the idea of an original version, or urtext. The past was viewed as something that could be mined—in archaeology as in text—and verified through the remains.

The early development of historical criticism also created a methodological schism that developed through the rise of the modern university and new disciplinary boundaries, including the allocation of methods perceived to belong distinctly to the disciplines of History and Literature.[15] History and its methods came to be understood as objective and scientific as opposed to poetics, fiction, or art. The result was an impoverishment of literary methods in historical criticism; in biblical studies, these methods narrowed to source criticism and other diachronic approaches that sought to trace the history and development of biblical texts.[16] Importantly, too, the diachronic definition of source criticism in biblical studies was distinct from that of the Rankian program, the latter of which signified the critical evaluation of an information source in its current or final form.[17] Current-form, or synchronic ("all at one time"), evaluations would not take Bible scholars far in trying to recover the history of the southern Levant, for biblical texts were, and are, complex literary documents whose current forms are the results of long scribal processes of composition and transmission. Instead, scholars engaged in source criticism and related methods in biblical studies sought to reach *behind* current forms to reconstruct periods going back to Israel's inception in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages.

Because of such an emphasis on close textual work, some would argue that practitioners of historical-critical methods were (and are) remarkably sophisticated in their literary approaches.[18] Often, however, they have been accused of losing sight of a text's broader synchronic aims and narrative artistry in the desire for "excavative scholarship."[19] Historical-critical methods are literary in a particular sense; more accurately, they are literary-historical, meaning that "history" is unextractable from textual history and theories of textual growth and transmission, in the search for traces of plausible historical contexts through the complex tapestries of the primary sources. Similarly, historical-critical practitioners have been accused of lacking critical self-reflection of the tenuous nature of their methods, including the assumption that original textual cores, specific sources, redactional layers, or objective historical information about the past can be isolated from political ideologies and literary creativity. Regardless of the extent to which these sources allow entry into the deep past, they *were* (contra von Ranke's source-critical emphasis) future oriented. Such accusations against historical-critical methods in conjunction with the rise of later modernist methods and the critique of

universal truths and objective reality in the 1960s and 70s, led to the pendulum swing toward synchronic approaches and new literary methods in use today, such as new historicism and new formalism.[20]

In sum, through the 1990s, and despite ongoing critiques, traditional historical-critical methods retained a primary hold in reconstructions of the history of the southern Levant. Often, these methods were regarded as directly opposed to literary-critical and other critical hermeneutics that arose in reaction to the modernist agenda. Other methods of historical scholarship developed concurrently and can be traced in light of broader historiographic schools and trends in the discipline of History. These trends include the influence of social scientists, Marxists, the French Annales School, and the Weberians, all of whom attempted to construct new social-historiographic syntheses with varying degrees of success and influence in historical scholarship. These alternative forms of historical work influenced biblical studies but never achieved the same kind of unity or power as earlier methods of German scholarship.[21] These earlier historical-critical methods remain alive and well today, though they have become increasingly decentered since the 1990s, amid an explosion of alternative perspectives and methods of historical investigation.

CURRENT STATE OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM AND ONGOING CRITIQUES

The current state of historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible returns us to the crisis mentioned at the outset of this article, the conflicting ideas regarding definitions of historical-critical research and its ongoing relevance. For many, the center of historical investigations of the southern Levant has oriented away from biblical texts toward archaeology and extrabiblical witnesses. For others, the proliferation of alternative methods in biblical scholarship born from the interrogations of later modernism has superseded and rendered obsolete older historical-critical methods, if not historical criticism altogether. Still others continue to practice and teach these and other tools that developed in the modernist period, such as epigraphy, textual criticism, and ancient Near Eastern Studies, arguing that these traditional tools remain vital for training students. What counts as historical research of the Hebrew Bible today?

Arguably, the past now lies with archaeologists. Seventy years ago, one could write a history of ancient Israel focused on biblical texts, following "the" biblical presentation of the past and using biblical archaeology to support biblical evidence. Since the 1960s, this emphasis has slowly shifted, becoming more dramatic since the 1990s.[22] The expression "biblical archaeology" is far less common in mainstream circles today, and archaeologists have primary claim to southern Levantine history, especially the early history of Israel in the Late Bronze and early Iron Ages. Historians now often privilege archaeological data over

biblical evidence in historical reconstructions, and even (controversially) regard archaeology as playing the "high court" over biblical texts.[23]

Conjoined with archaeological discoveries is new textual evidence that has partly replaced biblical sources as the primary textual authority to the past. Before the mid-twentieth century, the earliest witnesses to the Hebrew Bible, and hence the earliest extant evidence from or about the southern Levant, were biblical manuscripts in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries CE. All of this changed with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the 1950s, a library of around fifteen thousand ancient Jewish manuscripts dating between the third and first centuries BCE. These manuscripts include an abundance of extrabiblical manuscripts that have flung wide a door into investigations of early Jewish religion, culture, and scribal practices that were not possible before. Dead Sea Scrolls scholars have helped to demonstrate the continuity between ancient Israelite and early Jewish scribal practices and traditions, including the important place of the Hebrew Bible within Second Temple literature of the Persian and Hellenistic periods.[24] These scholars have helped to undo some of the damages inflicted by anti-Jewish biases within early Protestant critical scholarship that sought to disconnect the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the Christian Old Testament) from Judaism and key contexts of textual formation in the Second Temple period.[25]

The increasing influence of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship has influenced a movement toward later dating in biblical scholarship, as well as an emphasis on studying later periods. Aiding in this shift in dating trends is also a growing sense of unease with the perilousness of historical-critical methods in reconstructing the history of the southern Levant, especially Iron Age history. The Scrolls provide a tangible start point to history, for without extant scriptural scrolls predating the Hellenistic period, ideas about scribal practices and contexts of preceding periods are conjectural and often circular. It is easy, then, to view the relationship between historical reconstructions and biblical texts as an insurmountable problem and to focus instead on history that begins in the Second Temple period (the fifth century BCE and later), leaving all that lies before with archaeologists.[26]

But privileging archaeology has its own dangers. No matter how much archaeology can and has enhanced our understanding of the southern Levant, it does not supply purely objective data, and archaeological interpretations (not to mention agendas) rely on biblical evidence. The methodological issues around historical criticism therefore apply equally to archaeologists, who need, or must contend with, biblical texts. To attempt to write history through archaeology without these ancient witnesses is impossible; it would require, as archaeologist Oded Lipschits has said, "supreme confidence in one's ability to snap *the* reliable archaeological picture and to develop from it an independent and dependable historical representation."[27] For Lipschits, as for others, balanced interaction between biblical scholars and archaeologists is vital for historical investigations of the Iron Age southern Levant. What this interaction will look like in coming decades remains to be seen.

Returning to Dead Sea Scrolls research, interests in scribal practices have also begun to expand beyond early Judaism to consider how cuneiform evidence from the broader ancient Near East might inform our understanding of scribal processes in the southern Levant. This cuneiform evidence far outstrips the limited evidence that we have from the southern Levant, in large part because of its durable material form. Based on both the cuneiform evidence and the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars now argue that scribal activity across the ancient Middle East was fluid, diffuse, and continuous, from the Old Babylonian period to early Judaism.[28] In early Judaism, textual pluriformity and scribal creativity seem to have been common across the composition and transmission of early Jewish literature, including biblical literature. Scribal processes therefore take on complex modes of existence and meaning that frustrate canonical notions of scriptural purity and call into question diachronic, historical-critical models, for it has become increasingly difficult to view textual traditions and processes of growth as discernable and isolatable.

Beyond archaeological and extrabiblical discoveries, as noted earlier, later modernism and its effects have upended earlier epistemological claims in the field (as in many fields) related to such concepts as truth, objectivity, grand narratives, and the hegemony of text and language. The result has been a deemphasis on diachronic methods, at least in some circles, alongside the incorporation of numerous other methods for historical research that include, for example, anthropological and literary practices, feminist and queer approaches, and a range of perspectives grouped under the unwieldy rubric "postcolonialism."[29] More recently, the material turn has heightened awareness of the contextual significance of the physicality of the evidence, such as the objects upon which inscriptions are carved and their locations, the materiality of scrolls and scribal practices, and the physical, embodied spaces of daily life and religious practice.[30]

All of these transformations have helped to develop a rich methodological pluralism, including more sophisticated forms of historical investigations. In a recent overview of historical criticism in the 2023 *Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, New Testament scholar Shively Smith praises contemporary historical work for ranging across disciplines in ways that "marshal methods of historical analysis in limitless configurations."[31] Simultaneously, Smith disavows diachronic, historical-critical practices. For her, the true paradigm shift in historical study of the Bible since the 1990s "is that it is no longer circumscribed by Eurocentric modes of historiography that avoid matters of identity, definition, and context."[32] Rightly, Smith objects to the continued dominance of models born out of the Enlightenment and the German university. Certainly, the centering of other worldviews, what Vincent Wimbush calls "reading darkly," is an imperative today.[33] However, Smith also stereotypes these older models as a single, unchanging monolith—"the" historical-critical method—which she describes as the same rigid, "positivistic, value-neutral, rationalist approach" now as it was in the late-nineteenth century.[34] She also problematically labels these methods as "Eurocentric," despite the fact that much

of Europe was not involved in the creation or perpetuation of historical-critical approaches.

In the same volume, historian Paul Michael Kurtz calls to renounce historical-critical methods altogether. Writes Kurtz: "a real hunger for the past, for the historical, might find fuller nourishment by foraging in other fields of history, while a true thirst for texts, for the critical, could be quenched by drawing from other areas of literary theory and codicology."[35] Notably, Kurtz's and Smith's articles open this 2023 introductory volume to methods in biblical studies, in which theirs are the only two articles tasked with contextualizing and defining historical research in biblical studies. Neither leaves space for the ongoing justification of diachronic, historical-critical methods in contemporary biblical studies. For both Kurtz and Smith, "the" historical-critical enterprise is no longer relevant.

Meanwhile, biblical scholars and archaeologists working in other circles—especially in Israel, western Europe, and North America—remain immersed in older, historical-critical models and continue to define historical criticism by these models. One example is a 2023, Israeli-based publication that showcases recent developments in archaeology and biblical studies related to the early Iron Age southern Levant. In terms of biblical scholarship, the editors explain the primary development as a move from interrogating the historicity of texts to interrogating their compositional structure (i.e., redaction or composition history).[36] For the editors, the primary development in biblical studies since the 1990s is, in fact, not new at all: it is diachronic, historical-critical work. The four chapters in the volume that focus on biblical scholarship all emphasize composition history, and all of the authors are from Israel or western Europe.[37]

This extreme distinction in positions regarding what counts as historical research, and which methods are relevant, exemplifies the "crisis of incompatibility" that can seem incapable of convergence. What was once a field with a perceived center can now seem, to some, a field in fragments, and to others a field with "limitless configurations." Even so, the boundary line between older and newer methods may not be as real today as it was just a few decades ago. Some of the most groundbreaking work in the past thirty years has sought to integrate modernist and later-modernist approaches, allowing the older and the newer to be infused and shaped by each other. Such work considers diachronic questions, though these questions may be far from its primary impulse. Instead, these scholarly projects take a wide variety of forms that draw upon, for example, literary and stylistic analyses;[38] archaeology and ruins;[39] memory studies;[40] material approaches;[41] critical anthropological discourses;[42] philosophy and intellectual history;[43] and social sciences and models of social-political formation.[44] This and other recent scholarship demonstrates that older models are not a rigid, static monolith, nor do all practitioners of newer methods disdain older approaches (and vice versa). The field may be quietly moving beyond later twentieth-century arguments, which were important at the time but have since, arguably, aged beyond their earlier utility.

The future of historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible is unknown and up to future generations. As a historian, I would like to think that that we are moving toward integration over division. To be a historian is more about position than method. It is to care about context and recognize that context is inescapable, no matter the method or theory that drives one's research. To be a historian is also to question one's own context and suppositions that drive the historiographic project. One can only do so by recognizing one's own historical situatedness within a long tradition of critical scholarship, and through the open interaction of critical discourses, disciplines, and methods. What binds us together is the ongoing desire to understand the past that forever haunts the present. What prohibits us most from discovery is not disciplinary plurality or disagreement, nor even the lack of evidence, but rather academic siloes and rigidity.

APPLICATION OF THE METHOD: 2 SAMUEL 15:18–22

The textual focus is a brief encounter between David and Ittai, a Gittite or man from Gath, in 2 Samuel 15:18–22:

> [18]And all his servants were crossing over alongside him, and all the Cherethites and the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come with him from Gath, were crossing over before the king. [19]And the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why should you too go with us? Go back, stay with the king. For you are a foreigner, and you are also in exile from your own place. [20]Just yesterday you came, and today should I make you wander with us, when I myself am going wherever I may go? Turn back and take your brothers back with you; and may the Lord show you steadfast love and faithfulness." [21]But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, whatever place that my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there your servant will be." [22]And David said to Ittai, "Go and cross over." So Ittai the Gittite crossed over, and all his men and all the little ones who were with him. (au. trans.)[45]

This brief interaction takes place toward the end of the David narrative in 2 Samuel, within the unraveling of David's power and his son's attempted overthrow of his rule. Amid this attempted overthrow, David departs Jerusalem for a long journey east (2 Sam. 15:17–17:29). He leaves with his household and six hundred men, including "all the Gittites" who had come with him from Gath (15:18), referring to a prior political loyalty between David and the king of Gath in 1 Samuel 27. David then tells Ittai from Gath, an otherwise unknown character in the narrative, not to come with him but instead to "go back" and "stay with the king," meaning Absalom. David explains his reasoning thus: because "you are a foreigner, and you are also in exile from your own place." No, David emphasizes, "turn back and take your brothers back with you," and concludes with a blessing: "may the Lord show you steadfast love and faithfulness." Ittai pledges loyalty to David, stating "As the Lord lives, and as my

lord the king lives, whatever place that my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there your servant will be." Ittai then drops from the narrative and the journey continues. Later, Ittai returns in a single verse, when David sends out troops to quash Absalom's revolt. He divides the troops into thirds and places them under the command of loyal supporters: Joab, Abishai, and Ittai the Gittite (18:2).

These encounters between David and Ittai have long puzzled scholars, for the historical relationship between the coastal peoples or so-called Philistines (including the city of Gath) and the developing polity of Israel in the early Iron Age is assumed to have been antagonistic, as the biblical writers often portray. The tale of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 is the classic example, for the story presents a divided political arena and a struggle for control between the early monarchy (represented by Saul and David) and the Philistines. Often in the Hebrew Bible, the Philistines are presented as the collective enemy and threat to Israel's existence.[46] Texts that belie this depiction, which consist of 2 Samuel 15 and a handful of other texts in 1–2 Samuel (1 Sam. 27:1–7; 2 Sam. 6:9–11; 2 Sam. 18:2) and 1 Kings (1 Kgs. 2:39–40), are therefore significant for exploring ancient history writing, including the relationship between historical reality and textual representation.

In fact, scholars have come to think that more positive depictions of the Philistines may more accurately represent the social-political realities of the early Iron Age than the antagonistic ones. This theory is buttressed by archaeological work at sites like Tell es-Safi (ancient Gath), whose evidence suggests that there was far more cultural intermingling and cooperation in the early Iron Age than what is often presented by biblical scribes.[47] Seeking alternative language for what they see as an "entanglement" of enmeshed local and nonlocal traditions in the remains, archaeologists have turned to postcolonial and critical anthropological models of identity formation.[48] These scholars caution against overlaying generic, essentializing names from biblical sources (like "Philistines") onto the archaeological evidence; for them, a more viable hermeneutical lens is to consider identity as a verb rather than an object, meaning that it is about practice and interaction. The archaeological record therefore points to "continuities of social practices" and connectivity, from the Coastal Plain ("Philistia") to the Highlands ("Israel" or "Judah"), that indicate a wide range of homelands and unique local innovations.[49]

Tell es-Safi / Gath is a particularly intriguing example of one such "Philistine" site in this region, and not only because of its complex portrayal in biblical narratives. By the tenth–ninth centuries BCE, the site was one of the largest and most impressive cities in the southern Levant. After its destruction ca. 830 BCE, the impressive ruins of Gath remained, even as the location was eventually resettled by people affiliated more closely with Highland populations.[50] Because of the lasting impression of its ruins and the clear temporal boundaries of its Iron Age existence, Gath is a particularly rich space for exploring biblical historiography in conjunction with the archaeological evidence.

Such explorations have moved in three methodological trajectories. The first is diachronic, exemplified by composition-historical studies that have attempted to classify and date different scribal depictions of Gath. In general, composition historians have argued that all so-called "positive" scribal depictions of Gath (including those of Ittai) must be among the earliest written witnesses to the early monarchy, preserving genuine historical information from the early Iron Age that dates anywhere from the tenth to eighth centuries BCE, and no later than a century or so after Gath's destruction in the late ninth century BCE.[51] In contrast, later scribal representations of Gath become increasingly negative as cultural memories of its place in an earlier Iron Age landscape and its political connections to the early monarchy wane. The purpose of these later scribal representations is to create stronger boundaries between Gath and the Highlands and a corrective history that subverts older, more authentic depictions.

The second trajectory is synchronic and literary. For scholars who consider the narrative a cohesive and artistic whole, conflicting scribal views of David's relationship with the Philistines are no less perplexing than for the diachronically minded scholar. Though uninterested in dating specific texts, the resulting justification for the dissonant representations is similar to the diachronic approach: namely, that more positive portrayals must be more historically accurate. Robert Alter illustrates this position well, asking wryly, "Why would a much later, legendary, and supposedly glorifying tradition attribute this act of national treachery to David?" No, the writer must have had "authentic knowledge of a period when David collaborated with the Philistines; he was unwilling to omit this uncomfortable information, though he did try to mitigate it."[52]

The third trajectory bases itself in memory studies, as illustrated by Elizabeth Bloch-Smith's and Daniel Pioske's work on the relationship between memory, ruins, and biblical narratives. These two scholars espouse a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between sites of memory and the ongoing scribal process of writing about the past. For Bloch-Smith, Israel's foundational histories are tethered to ruins yet cut across the fabric of time to become spatial narratives, grounded in a specific time and place yet constructed, reframed, and reinterpreted centuries later.[53] Similarly, for Pioske, recollections of an allied relationship between David and Gath could hypothetically be recorded centuries later, based on the paucity of evidence about writing prior to the ninth century and the tenacity of communal memory as linked with Gath's impressive physical ruins.[54] Still, Pioske reiterates the historical-critical and literary argument that later scribes would likely have been uncomfortable with earlier records of encounters that affirm relations between the monarchy and Gath, even as they would have been "compelled to include" such episodes as likely well-known memories about David.[55]

From these three approaches, a majority claim emerges: more positive depictions of Gath are more authentic, and likely earlier, biblical witnesses, while more negative depictions are less authentic, and likely later. This majority claim has some drawbacks. One is the danger of assuming scribal intent. A second

is the dichotomizing and qualifying of all representations as either "positive" or "negative" from the point of view of contemporary scholarship. A third, specifically for the diachronic approach, is the attempt to organize a complexity of biblical representations into a linear conception of textual development. This attempt also betrays a circular inner logic: on the one hand, more positive portrayals of Gath are perceived to be earlier and thus more historically accurate. On the other hand, these "earlier" historical reflections are sidelined for what scholars perceive to be the more dominant, ultimately overriding—though entirely constructed—scribal image of antagonistic relations between Gath and Israel. The result is that the conventional image of Gath (and the so-called Philistines in general) as Israel's enemy is continually reinscribed in historical and literary reconstructions, despite widespread agreement that both the Iron Age archaeological and earlier biblical evidence complicate this image.

All of these approaches may be further refined by a fourth trajectory, one that emphasizes the continuity and pluriformity of scribal processes, from the Old Babylonian period into early Judaism. Recently, scholars have illustrated how the production and transmission of Sumerian literary manuscripts from the Old Babylonian period was a fluid and creative process that involved improvised production and adaptations alongside visual copying and memorization.[56] The concept of "production" was flexible in this period, which allowed scribes to create unique versions of well-known compositions. Others have made similar observations regarding the production, reuse, and rewriting of texts in early Judaism, including the Dead Sea Scrolls and the writings of first-century CE Roman Jewish historian Josephus. These scholars resist the notion that the ongoing process of rewriting is part of the history of reception and what happens to a text after it is "done." Instead, they reframe rewriting as an ongoing process of scribal activity, a "series of interlocking streams of tradition" or "discourses" that formed part of the "vibrant and ongoing discourse" of "Israel's literary heritage."[57]

Based on this recent scholarship, we can concur that there was cultural intermingling between Gath and the Highlands in the early Iron Age, and that this historical reality is preserved in some of our biblical witnesses. Yet we can also improve our understanding of how ancient scribal processes worked to recognize that the diversity of representations of Gath in our biblical witnesses likely reflect a process of textual growth that is neither consistent nor linear. In other words, not *all* positive representations of Gath are necessarily earlier textual witnesses simply because they are more positive. Nor would later scribes represent the relationship between Gath and the early monarchy solely negatively.

This short example conveys how an integration of approaches can enhance our historical understanding of both the Iron Age southern Levant and the realities of ancient scribal practices. Together, these approaches support anthropological and archaeological insights into the ongoing interactions and intermingling of cultures in the early Iron Age southern Levant, while also highlighting the range of scribal views on Gath in the biblical record and affirming the creativity of the scribal process into early Judaism. Likely, the interaction between David and

Ittai in 2 Samuel preserves a historical memory of intercultural cooperation and entanglement in the region. But it does not need to represent early writing to do so. Instead, like Gath's impressive ruins, one such text or site of memory could make a lasting impression, to be preserved and reused by scribes in different spaces and over time, as befit particular aims.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

modernism. A broad cultural and artistic movement that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, deriving from the early-modern intellectual revolution and the European Enlightenment (ca. sixteenth through eighteenth centuries CE).

late modernism. Refers to cultural and artistic developments from the 1930s through the 1960s that extended and intensified modernist principles.

historical criticism. An umbrella term for a range of critical methods for studying the Hebrew Bible that arose in the late nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. "History" (uppercase) refers to the discipline, while "history" refers both to the past and to historiography, or the writing of history.
2. On the "hegemony" of the historical-critical method, see Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, "Introduction," *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, rev. ed. (Westminster John Knox, 1999), 5–12. Postmodernism is a chameleon term and an ongoing process of interrogating the foundations of modernity as derived from the early-modern intellectual revolution and the Enlightenment in Europe (Beverly Southgate, "Postmodernism," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy [Wiley-Blackwell, 2009], 540). It grew out of poststructuralism, which critiqued modernity's assumptions of the objectivity of knowledge and the stability of language (Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* [W. W. Norton, 1995], 200–207).
3. Southgate, "Postmodernism," 545–46.
4. John Barton has argued that "biblical criticism" is a more expansive, and perhaps more honest, label for the emergence of critical methods in biblical studies than "historical criticism" ("Historical-Critical Approaches," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton [Cambridge University Press, 1998], 9–20).
2. On the inroads of historical criticism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century biblical scholarship, see Donald Bloxham, *Why History? A History* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 142–45. As John Collins writes, biblical criticism was influenced by "just about every major intellectual movement since the Reformation" ("Historical-Critical Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*. ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney [Cambridge University Press: 2016], 130).
6. Robin G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, reprinted ed. (Martino, 2014), 63; Ronald S. Hendel, "Culture, Memory, and History: Reflections on Method in Biblical Studies," in *Historical Biblical Archaeology and the Future: The New Pragmatism*, ed. Thomas E. Levy (Equinox, 2010), 250–61.

7. James Simkins, "On the Development of Spinoza's Account of Human Religion," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014): 51–72.
8. Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 9–27.
9. Aviezer Tucker, "Introduction," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 1–6.
10. J. Maxwell Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically: The Historian's Approach," in McKenzie and Haynes (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning*, esp. 18, 20.
11. Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically," 23–24.
12. Consult the chapters on these four methods in McKenzie and Haynes (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning*, 35–121.
13. Like historical criticism, however, archaeology linked to the Bible had deeper roots than the late nineteenth century; see Daniel D. Pioske, *The Bible among Ruins: Time, Materiality, and the World of the Biblical Writers* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 82–84.
14. The southern Levant refers to the geographical area that equates roughly to modern Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Here, I use it to refer specifically to ancient Israel/Palestine. Around the same time as biblical archaeology emerged, scholars of the Hebrew Bible began to study ancient Near Eastern sources not for their own sake but for comparative purposes (Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically," 25–27.
15. Michael C. Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 165–69; James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 59–61, 112–17, 197–204. Another early schism with ongoing ramifications was between religious and academic pursuits of biblical studies; see Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture*, viii, 159–69; James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now* (Free Press, 2007), 681. However, early historical-critical scholarship was not opposed to theology and disabused the false divide created by religious thinkers who perceived themselves to be threatened by the sciences. For example, Amsterdam's Jewish community effectively excommunicated Spinoza, not the other way around, and Spinoza himself was remarkably quiet about his religious sensibilities (Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* [W. W. Norton, 2007], esp. 352). See also the discussion of Julius Wellhausen's religious context in Paul Michael Kurtz, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan: The Religion of Israel in Protestant Germany, 1871–1918*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament 122 (Mohr Siebeck, 2018), esp. 45–57.
16. Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (Yale University Press, 2019), 16.
17. However, von Ranke's emphasis on textual and source criticism was modeled after philological methods in the study of antiquity (Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity" Question and the American Historical Profession* [Cambridge University Press, 1988], 26).
18. Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," 14.
19. The phrase "excavative scholarship" comes from Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (Basic Books, 2011), 13. Meir Sternberg labeled the historian's lack of attention to biblical poetics an "antihistorical performance" because it paradoxically ignores—even violates—the available evidence, meaning the text as it is or the "chief body of historical evidence that awaits proper interpretation" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Indiana University Press, 1987], 11. Sternberg was equally critical of literary inquiry that fails to recognize the extent to which its own goals involve assumptions of context. He called for a closer interworking of text and context and a renewed awareness that the literary and the historical are intrinsically bound.

20. See Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament*, 141–62; Gina Hens-Piazza, "New Historicism," in *New Meanings for Ancient Texts*: *Recent Approaches to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and John Kaltner (Westminster John Knox, 2013), 59–76.
21. Nor did these alternative forms of historical work achieve the same kind of unity or support in the broader discipline of History; see Christopher Lloyd, "Historiographic Schools," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, 371–80.
22. Ido Koch and Omer Sergi, "Introduction," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy? Revisiting the Early Iron Age Southern Levant*, ed. Ido Koch, Oded Lipschits, and Omer Sergi, Mosaics 3 (Tel Aviv University; Eisenbrauns, 2023), 1–6. As Koch and Sergi note, the change is evinced in part by a change in terminology of the field itself, from "biblical archaeology" to "archaeology of the southern Levant."
23. Israel Finkelstein and Lily Singer-Avitz argue for archaeology's "high court" status in "Reevaluating Bethel," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 125, no. 1 (2009): 33–48; *contra* Nadav Na'aman, "Does Archaeology Really Deserve the Status of a 'High Court' in Biblical Historical Research?," in *Between Evidence and Ideology*, ed. Bob Becking and Lester L. Grabbe, Oudtestamentische Studiën 59 (Brill, 2010), 165–83; Oded Lipschits, "Bethel Revisited," in *Rethinking Israel—Studies in the History and Archaeology of Ancient Israel in Honor of Israel Finkelstein*, ed. Oded Lipschits, Yuval Gadot, and Matthew J. Adams (Tel Aviv University; Eisenbrauns, 2017), 233–46.
24. Andrew Teeter, "The Hebrew Bible and/as Second Temple Literature: Methodological Reflections," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 20 (2013): 349–77.
25. For example, Wellhausen saw a clear divide between ancient Israel and Judaism and imagined that true (Protestant) Christian roots resided not in Judaism but in Israel (Kurtz, *Kaiser, Christ, and Canaan*, 97–109). Anti-Jewish biases of Wellhausen and other Protestant, historical-critical scholars were also anti-Catholic and long kept Catholics and Jews from joining critical biblical scholarship, partly of their own volition and partly not (see Alan Cooper, "Biblical Studies and Jewish Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman [Oxford University Press, 2002]). The anti-Catholic and especially anti-Jewish roots of historical criticism can still be felt today (however subtly and unintentionally) in some diachronic tendencies to see the "final" product or current form of the biblical text—in other words, the work of the Jewish compiler—as a hurdle to overcome in the search for earlier or purer cores or traditions (Kurtz, "A Historical Critical Retrospective on Historical Criticism," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* [Cambridge University Press, 2023], 20; Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, The Old Testament, and Historical Criticism* [Westminster John Knox, 1993]).
26. As Dead Sea Scrolls scholar Molly Zahn writes, in the absence of manuscript evidence, "*we may never be able to accurately reconstruct the textual histories of books in the Bible*" (italics original) (*Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism: Scribal Composition and Transmission* [Cambridge University Press, 2020], 92).
27. Lipschits, "Bethel Revisited," 238.
28. E.g., Jay Crisostomo, "Writing Sumerian, Creating Texts: Reflections on Text-Building Practices in Old Babylonian Schools," *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 15 (2015): 121–42; Zahn, *Genres of Rewriting*.
29. Southgate, "Postmodernism," 541–42.
30. On the material turn, see Bruno Latour, "Can We Get Our Materialism Back, Please?" *Isis* 98, no. 1 (2007): 138–42. Examples of how the material turn has influenced studies of the Hebrew Bible, textual formation, and the southern Levant include Alice Mandell and Jeremy D. Smoak, "Spaces, Things, and the

Body: The Material Turn in the Study of Israelite Religions," *Journal of Hebrew Studies* 19, no. 5 (2019), 1–42; David M. Carr, "Background and Aims of a Scroll Approach to the Formation of the Hebrew Bible," *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research* 3, no. 2 (2023): 9–79.

31. Shively T. J. Smith, "Historical Criticism," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Ian Boxall and Bradley C. Gregory (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 38.
32. Smith, "Historical Criticism," 39.
33. Vincent L. Wimbush, "Reading Darkness, Reading Scriptures," in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Continuum, 2000), 21. To "read darkly" is to foreground marginalized perspectives while backgrounding dominant story lines; to stop trying to control biblical texts; to read more deeply, widely, critically, and with "serious multidisciplinary collective probing"; to know one's positionality and how it relates to critical scholarship.
34. Smith, "Historical Criticism," 38–39.
35. Kurtz, "A Historical, Critical Retrospective," 35.
36. Koch and Sergi, "Introduction."
37. Consult the articles in *From Nomadism to Monarchy? Revisiting the Early Iron Age Southern Levant*, ed. Ido Koch, Oded Lipschits, and Omer Sergi, Mosaics 3 (Tel Aviv University; Eisenbrauns, 2023).
38. E.g., Marc Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (Routledge, 1995); Hendel, "Culture, Memory, and History"; Alison L. Joseph, *Portrait of the Kings: The Davidic Prototype in Deuteronomistic Poetics* (Fortress, 2015).
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Chapter 2

Historical Criticism of the New Testament

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INTRODUCTION

> So, which results have you found after all your critical-historical, philological, psychological—and what not else!—commentaries on Jesus' biography? I say: none whatsoever—or else, that everything remains highly uncertain and speculative, allows for plenty of different and contradictory views which, for all their uncertainties, must not be told to the layperson without ado.

Thus railed Karl Heinrich Georg Venturini in perhaps the earliest critique of the "historical-critical method" in biblical studies.[1] Venturini's unimpressed remarks, however, could not derail the growing popularity of this approach. Today, historical criticism, with its overarching concern for "what really happened" in the formative years of Christianity, has become commonplace in New Testament (hereafter, NT) scholarship in the Western world.[2] Despite its ubiquity, however, many scholars from diverse positionalities have begun to challenge its primacy, nuancing its grandiose claims about objective history and its tendency to marginalize scholarship that adopts alternative approaches.

In light of this background, the present chapter has three main goals: (1) to delimit what historical criticism of the NT is and what knowledge it can yield for critical scholars, (2) to trace the historical origins and development of the method, and (3) to acknowledge its most prominent critiques so as to appreciate its place as *one among many* methods for studying the NT. These discussions set the stage for a brief demonstration of how historical criticism can aid in the study of the canonical Gospels.

OVERVIEW

Even though historical criticism is a mainstay of NT studies today, scholars are not united in how they define this approach (perhaps more accurately understood as "a cluster of related approaches").[3] Historical criticism is conventionally articulated (1) in terms of the kinds of questions that it asks, and (2) with reference to smaller "sub-criticisms" that have traditionally been housed within it.

The first articulation foregrounds an interest in ancient historical realities and focuses on the "history behind the texts" and the extent to which NT texts accurately reflect historical events.[4] In the pursuit of these historical realities, scholars have posed questions about the original versions, sources, and meanings of different traditions in the NT. These questions are wide-ranging and necessitate a range of approaches to acquire historical data, analyzing everything from ancient manuscript data to epigraphical evidence to archaeological findings.[5]

Historical criticism requires a certain set of assumptions about history and the NT, setting the approach apart from theological study.[6] One assumption is that the NT is a product of human authors with identifiable skills, competencies, experiences, and interests; this assumption requires that scholars appeal to human habits, ingenuities, foibles, and sociocultural positionalities—as opposed to supernatural explanations—to make sense of texts. A second assumption is that the NT does not just represent history: it *constructs*, *transforms*, and sometimes *fabricates* the past in ways that correlate to the interests of the person or group responsible for the tradition(s). Third, while NT texts refer to fantastical phenomena, such as gods, ghosts, divination, and miracles, historical criticism maintains that the texts cannot tell us about the objective truth of such theological claims. Instead, such ideas tell us more about the people who produced the texts, the beliefs they held, the values that motivated them, and the ways they recorded and transmitted these traditions. Fourth, historical critics assume (with varying degrees of confidence) that reconstruction of the past *is* possible and that there can be better or worse reconstructions of said past.

In short, historical criticism asks seemingly "disinterested" questions about early Christianity: when, where, why, how, and for whom was a NT text written? What factors influenced the composition and transmission of the texts? What did the stories and ethical teachings mean for the authors?

What did they mean for those who encountered them? Do the texts accurately report historical events, or do they engage in literary creativity (or even fabrication)? The claims of "disinterested" or "objective" scholarship were originally intended to differentiate historical-critical scholarship from theologically motivated work produced in confessional settings. In comparison, historical criticism insisted on a "neutral" approach without theological commitments.

NT scholars have crafted highly technical methodologies to investigate historical questions about the origins of the Jesus movement, the presence of certain ideas in the earliest extant literature (and its possible sources), the processes by which early groups formed and operated before they were institutionalized, and the means by which the texts themselves were produced, used, and transmitted in the movement's formative decades.[7]

Textual criticism involves the study of extant, early NT manuscripts in order to reconstruct the original version, a so-called critical edition.[8] (See the chapter on textual criticism in this volume for a more robust overview.) Once scholars had reconstructed the NT with some degree of confidence, others could then assess these literary works with fresh, critical eyes. One of the earliest observations historical critics made was that the canonical Gospels often share the very same stories about Jesus, raising questions about why they display such similarities (and related, why they have differing versions of other stories).[9] These observations occasioned the use of *source criticism*, which tries to discern which source(s) an author used in composing a text. Perhaps the most famous example in NT scholarship is the two-source hypothesis, which seeks to explain the extensive similarities among the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).[10] Advocates of the two-source hypothesis argue that the authors of Matthew and Luke independently used the Gospel of Mark as the narrative basis for their Gospels, supplementing it with a collection of sayings of Jesus that they both found elsewhere.

Source critics have received criticism for their tendency to posit sources indiscriminately. For instance, Helmut Koester identified numerous types of sources behind the Gospel of Mark: miracle stories, parables, apocalyptic materials, so-called controversy stories, the passion narrative, and materials concerning church discipline.[11] While many scholars are not persuaded by the identification of so many sources behind the Gospels, it is incontrovertible that NT authors consulted at least *some* sources for their compositions. Gospel authors regularly cite passages from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) to authorize their stories about Jesus, and Luke's author explicitly acknowledges that he consulted earlier literature before writing (Luke 1:1–4). For these reasons, among others, source criticism remains attractive, so long as one's imagination is disciplined.

Redaction criticism is closely related to source criticism: it tries to discern what changes an author has made to their source(s) and whether or not these changes attest a wider "editorial policy." The two-source hypothesis allows scholars to analyze the changes Matthew and Luke made to Mark's story. Redaction critics observe, for instance, that Luke added numerous stories to Mark's narrative,

including the miraculous account of Jesus's birth, the genealogy that links Jesus to Adam, the story of twelve-year-old Jesus in the Jerusalem temple, and the extensive ethical treatise in the Sermon on the Plain. Part of Luke's "editorial policy," we might surmise, involved including more stories about Jesus's youth to demonstrate his identity as the righteous Son of God and his significance for all humanity.

Form criticism examines the structure (or genre) of a text (or textual unit). The basic idea is that different genres arose in different settings and for different reasons, and so we can (ideally) understand the intended function of a text by analyzing its genre. Early form critics adopted the technical language of *Sitz im Leben* (German: "situation in life") to distinguish the distinct communal contexts in which certain genres arose. For instance, many scholars think that the parables of Jesus emerged within the communal dialogue between the historical Jesus and his first followers and that they thus functioned originally to illustrate his ethical teachings for his audiences. In contrast, other NT passages that appear to have more formulaic constructions (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3–5) may belong to a genre of early Christian "creeds" or "hymns" that were used in ritual or teaching settings. Some have argued, for instance, that the *Sitz im Leben* of 1 Cor. 15:3–5 stems from "apostolic teaching" in the context of missionary activity.[12] Form criticism can, therefore, expand our historical imagination of Christian origins and suggest where, why, and how different traditions were generated.

The extent of this imagination, however, has raised questions, resulting in form criticism falling out of favor with some. Early form critics operated with problematic understandings of early Christian communities, often because they accepted the descriptions of these communities in the NT itself. That is, early form critics started with an idealized story about the development of early Christianity and then attempted to correlate different literary forms to distinct moments within that trajectory. They also tended to assume that a single author could not (or would not) write in a variety of literary forms or voices, which, in turn, justified their allocation of different literary units to distinct *Sitze im Leben*. As James Crossley explains, form critics had a propensity to "view the final authors of the Gospels as passive recipients of tradition who merely tinkered with the sources to form a vaguely coherent whole and with little interest in creatively producing a work of literature."[13] Koester's identification of numerous sources behind the Gospel of Mark evinces this habit of aligning literary form and *Sitz im Leben*. For instance, some of the controversy stories, he argued, came about within socio-religious conflicts between Christians and Jews, while others emerged in the early Jerusalem community specifically (made up of Jews, Jewish Christians, and Gentile Christians), and still others were oral traditions that were "used in the propaganda and mission of the church."[14]

Indeed, the ideas that the Gospels arose organically from coherent early Christian "communities" and that they reflect those communities' social situations, theologies, and practices are now contested.[15] Not only is this construction of

Christian origins a product of early Christian myth-making (primarily in Acts of the Apostles and Eusebius's *Church History*)[16] but also, such imagination requires scholars to treat NT texts differently from other Greco-Roman literature, in that they have to automatically posit a community behind any text with a distinct theology. As some have argued, NT scholars' fixation on communally-produced literature may largely stem from the unexamined assumptions of nineteenth-century German biblical scholars, who were steeped in ideologies of Romanticism and nationalism,[17] or even from a more general Protestant presumption that differing expressions of theology must correlate to distinct communal forms.[18] Such contextualizing reminds us of how important it is to interrogate the history of our methods in biblical studies, a task to which we now turn.

THE HISTORY OF THE HISTORICAL-CRITICAL METHOD IN NT SCHOLARSHIP

Many NT scholars working today were introduced to the historical-critical method as the standard approach in the field. Yet, like all academic approaches, this method appeared at a particular time as a consequence of particular cultural conditions. The earliest expressions of modern biblical criticism (including historical criticism) came about amid the intellectual revolution accompanying the Enlightenment in Western Europe.[19] Alongside generating new ethical ideas about liberty, equality, justice, and more, the Enlightenment encouraged the use of reason and empirical evidence to guide intellectual enterprises. This was an especially important innovation for interpreting the Bible. Previously, biblical interpretation was dominated by church authorities, but Enlightenment ideals encouraged interpretations that had human-centered explanations and were based upon publicly accessible, empirical evidence. In the post-Enlightenment context, biblical studies (with its accompanying critical approaches) became a distinct, coherent academic discipline. Historical criticism represents, in part, the discipline's early efforts to systematize its work alongside other "sciences."

As important as the Enlightenment was, influences on the rise of historical criticism can be found even earlier during the Protestant Reformation, which called into question the institutional authority of the Roman Catholic Church and opened the interpretation of biblical texts to anyone who could read the Bible, even in translation. The new accessibility of biblical texts unleashed an avalanche of possible interpretations, encapsulated by the fracturing of Protestant churches into ever-smaller denominations reflecting these different interpretations. In such a chaotic, "anything goes" context of interpretation, one can understand the desire to standardize how the Bible was studied and establish some common starting points. Historical criticism was developed, in part, to create such standardization, and it enshrined a set of approaches that appealed to empirical information about history, as opposed to divine revelation.[20]

The Reformation was an important formative context in another way: the majority of the scholars involved in constructing the foundations of historical criticism (including its sub-criticisms) were Protestant Christians. As one commentator in the early 1960s already noted, the historical-critical method is "a typically Protestant problem,"[21] in that the questions and interests of Protestant Christians have conventionally foregrounded this approach. This is not to say that non-Protestants did not engage in it. Rather, the point is that the rise of historical criticism—especially with its fixation on the origins of Christianity, often by excavating them from later institutional overlays—reflects common Protestant critiques of Catholicism.[22]

Early NT historical critics, then, reflected the typical Enlightenment enthusiasm that careful textual study and rigorous methodologies would allow them to uncover "what really happened" during the formation of Christianity. Space does not allow a detailed overview of scholarship during this formative period, but historical criticism obviously challenged some long-held views from its inception. These challenges included suggestions that the miraculous deeds attributed to Jesus were myths crafted by his followers to convey theological truths (D. F. Strauss);[23] the resurrection was fabricated by Jesus's disciples to cope with their disappointment in the wake of his death (H. S. Reimarus);[24] and Jesus viewed his own mission as a failure when his long-awaited apocalypse never materialized (Albert Schweitzer).[25]

By the 1950s, historical criticism had "won almost a complete victory, in academic circles."[26] New textual discoveries (the Nag Hammadi library in 1945 and the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947) had further kindled scholars' enthusiasm about reconstructing the past with increasing accuracy. Historical criticism's primacy lasted well into the subsequent decades when most NT scholars working today were trained.[27] However, its place of honor has waned somewhat in response to recent criticisms.

CRITIQUES OF HISTORICAL CRITICISM

Many scholars would be happy to see historical criticism decentered in NT scholarship. While it has been the target of trenchant ideological criticisms (which tend to receive the most attention) for the last forty years, we should not forget that it received theological criticism almost from the outset. The theological criticism was somewhat predictable, because the approach "treat[ed] biblical material in a different manner than theological thought had done for centuries, and in the process question[ed] the validity of theological method."[28] Indeed, many early historical critics were (in)famous for their skepticism toward the Bible, which confirmed, for some, the fear that historical-criticism's goal was to undermine Christian faith. The example par excellence is D. F. Strauss, who lost his academic position because his scholarship expressed skepticism about supernatural elements in the Gospels.

Such anxieties are rare among critical biblical scholars today, but theological resistance can still be found among some evangelical Christian scholars, who still regularly express concern that historical-critical scholarship produces conclusions that are at odds with the literal truth of the texts. For instance, for historical critics, the differences among the Synoptic Gospels raise the possibility that one version of the story might be more accurate than the others; such a conclusion is necessarily anathema to many evangelical NT scholars who operate under the premise that the Bible is literally true and infallible.

In response to the perceived threats of this scholarship, more conservative evangelical figures have developed strategies for undermining it. For instance, one commentator labels historical-critical scholars as "atheist New Testament scholars" and likens them to the "false believers who look and sound like true believers" that Jesus prophesied and who would "work from within the church to undermine and hurt the faith of other believers."[29] Such claims may sound absurd, but within a conservative theological context, they serve a critical function, since the conclusions of historical criticism can be dangerous to long-held beliefs. This lofty rhetoric is thus required to disarm the historical-critical method and protect theological claims. As a result, many critical NT scholars avoid engaging with such conservative scholarship as a matter of course. In response, evangelical scholars have established venues, such as the Evangelical Theological Society, the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, and Bible colleges whose tenets align with their evangelical views, where they can carry out their biblical study, protected from historical criticism and other critical approaches.

However, the ideological critique of historical criticism has largely been elicited by the postmodern intellectual landscape from the 1980s until today and has wider implications for biblical studies.[30] The ideological critique calls into question historical criticism's claims to be value-neutral and the assumption that history is "something firmly fixed in the world, objective, lying somewhere beneath the surface and only needing to be discovered."[31] Scholarship across academia has shown that all disciplines, even the most rigorous sciences, are influenced by their broader cultural contexts.[32] When it comes to history, not only can no singular method produce a complete or definitive reconstruction of the past, but also every historical pursuit reflects the cultural positionality of the scholars behind it, whether they acknowledge it or not. These caveats, coupled with the fragmentary nature of all ancient historical data, render suspect historical criticism's ability to reconstruct an objective, or even accurate, past. Perhaps more damning is the corollary that the assumed "objective" historical conclusions about the NT actually privilege certain kinds of ancient identities and experiences: namely, those of literate, elite men. Thus, critics charge, the historical-critical enterprise has expended enormous amounts of time and energy on these elite figures in early Christianity, whereas other approaches reveal that women, nonelites, enslaved people, and the like, also had important roles in early Christianity.

Relatedly, historical criticism's overwhelming confidence in its reconstructions of early Christianity has struck a negative chord with many of its critics. The absoluteness of this method is due, in part, to its indebtedness to its Protestant origins. Wolfgang Roth noted this danger some sixty years ago when he observed, "The historical-critical method has on occasions made itself absolute and, as a result, become a theological position which claimed to disclose the ultimate meaning of the Biblical text through historical interpretation."[33] This dogmatic "absoluteness" has prompted some of the recent resistance to the approach, especially as scholars have begun to question whose history is being reconstructed in these studies. Further, some argue that its fixation on the singular meaning of biblical texts has turned modern biblical scholarship into "a curatorial science in which the text is fetishized, its readings routinized, its reader bureaucratized."[34] The assumption, moreover, that interpretation can only be found in the past has potentially dangerous consequences. A group of scholars known as "The Bible Collective" maintains that the continual appeal to antiquity as the only realm of meaning "has the double effect of obscuring the significance of the Bible in contemporary Western culture and of turning the Bible into an historical relic, an antiquarian artifact."[35] If we take seriously the absoluteness by which historical criticism has represented itself in NT studies, we soon encounter the second aspect of the ideological critique: the way in which historical criticism has marginalized other approaches in NT scholarship.

Once historical criticism achieved hegemonic status in biblical studies, its advocates often dismissed other approaches as "niche" or "inconsequential." Both charges embodied the presumption that other approaches only told "part" of the story, whereas historical criticism accessed the "real" and "most complete" version of early Christianity. An even more problematic claim is that scholarship adopting other approaches is "not legitimate" due to its explicit ideological interests. The implicit assumption here is that historical criticism has no ideological interest and is "value-free."[36]

Such delegitimization has famously been directed at feminist scholarship on the historical Jesus, a field that has long been dominated by historical-critical scholars. When feminist scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza attempted to historicize their work and point out its limitations, they dismissed her as "having an agenda" and her work as suspect in comparison to their "objective" and "disinterested" approach to studying Jesus.[37] In practice, these kinds of exchanges about the legitimacy of methods have often involved white, male, European or North American scholars who champion historical criticism, set in opposition to women scholars and scholars of color who argue for the validity of other approaches. The optics are, to say the least, not great.

Part of the explanation for this methodological dichotomy (historical criticism vs. everything else) almost certainly has to do with historical criticism's pedigree. It has become "as suspect as the Enlightenment project itself."[38] Embodying Enlightenment ideals, historical criticism ostensibly calls for the production of

human-centered, empirically-based knowledge, but the interests that it foregrounds have conventionally been those created and promoted by elite European scholars with very distinct social positionalities.[39] By putting such interests on a pedestal and reinforcing their primacy as "legitimate scholarship," other approaches to studying the NT are, by definition, marginalized.

Using gender theory to examine the different ways power operates in this conversation, Francis Borchardt suggests that historical criticism has often been treated as a masculine form of knowledge production (i.e., normative, neutral, universal), and that other approaches, namely, those "that do not make the same claims to universality," are depicted as feminine (i.e., partial, subjective, limited in consequences). Biblical scholars, in other words, have not just made a distinction between historical criticism and other criticisms; they have also subordinated and devalued the latter. He continues that while other approaches

> might be deemed suitable for a specialized study, a thematic conference, or an edited volume, they are not thought to make the fundamental contributions to the understanding of a text which demand critical engagement and either repetition or refutation. There is even a dichotomy asserted in some circles between historical-critical approaches, termed exegesis, and all other approaches, which if they are provided with any label at all, are called hermeneutics. . . . This has a silencing effect on other approaches, and perpetuates less engagement with the works and scholars responsible for them.[40]

Whether one follows Borchardt in all of his conclusions, it is now widely recognized in NT scholarship that historical criticism has a distinct positionality, and it values one set of scholarly ideals, sometimes at the expense of others, thus embodying an ideology of its own. However, because the method achieved normative status in the guild, it has been difficult to recognize these ideological influences and their wide-ranging effects until recently.

Interestingly, the backlash against the unstated assumptions involved in historical-critical methodology has encouraged a proliferation of alternative forms of biblical criticism. *The Postmodern Bible* offers a host of alternate criticisms: reader-response criticism, structuralist and narratological criticism, poststructuralist criticism, rhetorical criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, feminist and womanist criticism, and ideological criticism.[41] Many of these approaches eschew the idea that the NT can only be meaningful when grounded in its ancient context. Others prefer to build on some elements of historical criticism, instead of displacing it altogether.[42]

In short, recent critiques of historical criticism have been enormously productive, generating a range of new approaches to the NT in hopes of filling in gaps and asking questions that historical-critical scholars did not consider. When it *is* used, it is common to see disclaimers that the approach only pursues very specific questions about the NT. This demonstrates the extent to which historical criticism has been relativized and can no longer claim to be the only "critical" approach to studying the NT.

ILLUSTRATING HISTORICAL CRITICISM: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

This story is preserved in all four canonical Gospels, though only the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) will concern us here.[43] Of particular concern are the differences in how each Gospel narrates this episode:

Matthew 3:13–17	*Mark 1:9–11*	*Luke 3:21–22*
13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14** John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" **15** But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. **16** And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw God's Spirit descending like a dove and alighting on him. **17** And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."	**9** In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. **10** And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. **11** And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."	**21** Now when all the people were baptized and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, **22** and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

I have left aside John's version (1:29–34), because the verbal and sequential similarities are far more extensive among the Synoptics. John also departs from the Synoptics' narrative sequence, shows more interest in Jesus's divine identity than in historical events, and contains unreliable historical details (such as the Jews collectively speaking against Jesus in John 8:31–59).[44] The common details are immediately evident: John the Baptist, baptism, the Jordan River,[45] heavens opening/tearing apart, the Spirit descending like a dove, and the heavenly voice expressing approval and acknowledging sonship.[46] These similarities are most striking when read in the original Greek, but they come through clearly in translation as well.

The historical-critical questions connected to this passage (and others like it with such extensive similarities) include: What do we know about the authors of these Gospels and their relationships to one another? What kinds of sources did they use when composing their narratives? How did they alter, rearrange, or even fabricate parts of these stories? Can we discern any specific interests or

concerns based on the changes they made? In general, how do we account for these passages having so many details in common? As discussed earlier, these are classic concerns of the historical-critical method. What follows will primarily employ source criticism and redaction criticism to begin to answer these questions, but as we will see, they do not exhaust what historical criticism can investigate.

For more than two centuries, these strong verbal parallels have suggested to NT scholars that there is some direct literary relationship among these texts. Most are persuaded by the two-source hypothesis that the Gospel of Mark's narrative was the "backbone" for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, requiring Mark to be the earliest of the three. The "evidence" for Mark being this source is twofold. First, Mark's Gospel evinces a less sophisticated writing style than Matthew and Luke, implying that the authors of Matthew and Luke reworked Mark's rougher language. Second, Matthew and Luke supplement Mark's narrative with a shared body of material that is not found in Mark (mostly sayings of Jesus), implying that both authors considered Mark's story to be foundational but in need of expansion.[47] Mark's baptism story is spartan, and Matthew and Luke seem to have reproduced its basic features, with Luke retaining Mark's wording and structure more faithfully than Matthew. Matthew has made evident changes, discussed momentarily, but still retains the basic elements of Mark's story.

Thus, with the source-critical approach, we can begin to reconstruct one compositional scenario to explain these literary similarities: the authors of Matthew and Luke used the Gospel of Mark and a second collection of material to compose their Gospels. This is the two-source hypothesis mentioned earlier. Some forms of source criticism go even further and try to access the oral tradition that may have preceded the written sources, although accessing oral tradition is notoriously complicated. In any case, source criticism aids in understanding the process behind the composition of these Gospels, thus helping us reconstruct the development of traditions and texts in early Christianity.

The observations about source use lead directly into redaction criticism, due to the latter's interests in identifying and accounting for editorial changes that an author makes to their sources. Redactional-critical analysis can start to explain the differences that appear in each version of the story. While Luke's changes to Mark's version are minor and largely in the form of vocabulary and word choice, Matthew's version is strikingly different. In particular, Matthew 3:14–15 has no parallel in any other Gospel, suggesting that these verses did not come from an earlier source, but rather, from the hand of the author. Just as important, these verses function in a distinct way in their immediate literary context. They explain *why* John the Baptist needed to baptize Jesus, and thus, tell us much about Matthew's interests in writing his Gospel.

To be sure, the need for Jesus to undergo baptism may have been confusing, even distressing, to some of his first followers who believed that he was the son of God and the Messiah—and thus, not someone who needed "baptism

of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). Matthew's insertion of verses 14 and 15 serves to ameliorate this discomfort with Jesus's baptism. It acknowledges the uncomfortable aspect of the baptism by including John's statement that he feels inferior to Jesus and by having Jesus explain that all this is happening "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). These additions reassure readers that they are not alone in thinking that Jesus's baptism seems odd and that, contrary to their initial impulse, there is nothing inappropriate about it. Redaction criticism thus explains why Matthew's version of this episode differs so much from the others.

To be sure, NT scholars could ask countless more questions to better understand and historically contextualize this story: How common were baptisms in first-century Roman Palestine? What did baptism mean in contemporary Judaism? Did all baptisms take the same form? Do the Synoptics reflect conventional depictions of baptism? Does the dove imagery carry symbolic significance in ancient literature? Are there associations between birds and gods in other ancient literature? Did this event actually happen, or is it a contrived "initiation" modeled on lives of heroes in other ancient literature? This list of queries, which could be multiplied *ad infinitum*, is a good reminder that historical criticism is wide-ranging in its interests, and even though the smaller sub-criticisms have been dominant in some periods of NT scholarship, they by no means exhaust the historical questions that NT scholars can ask.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on taking stock of historical criticism in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. It has explored how different scholars describe the method, what its goals typically are, the basic contours of its historical emergence, and its most recent critiques. Even though the case study was restricted to a mere handful of verses, the story about the baptism of Jesus shows the potential of this approach to yield historical insights about ancient composition and early ideas about Jesus.

Despite the important critiques surveyed, historical criticism is not going anywhere in NT studies. Curiosity about the past is part of being human. So, Edenburg: "Understanding the past that produced the long-lived cultural artifacts such as biblical literature is an important part of human self-understanding."[48] How much more alluring are ancient texts when they are considered sacred to two billion people across the world. Moreover, in some modern contexts, the increasing appeal to the Bible in the public sphere only makes the pursuit of its past meaning(s) more important and urgent, if only to chart how far away from them modern interpreters have moved. So long as scholars recognize historical criticism's limitations and acknowledge its role as one among many approaches to studying the NT, its place in biblical studies seems assured.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

form criticism. A method of identifying and analyzing the genres of texts to determine the particular communal settings in which they arose.

historical criticism. A method of analyzing ancient texts by investigating their origins, meanings, and contexts in the past.

objective/disinterested/value-neutral history. An approach to studying history that claims to be free of bias, ideology, judgment, *and similar influences*.

redaction criticism. A method of analyzing the changes that an author has made to the source(s) they used to compose a text.

source criticism. A method of identifying and analyzing the earlier source(s) that may lie behind a text.

NOTES

1. Karl Heinrich Georg Venturini (d. 1849), as cited in Eckart David Schmidt, "Betwixt and Between: Fr. Schleiermacher's and D. Fr. Strauss's Contributions to the Paradigm of the 'Historical Jesus' in Early Nineteenth Century Theology as Prototypes of Post-Enlightenment Christology and Jesus Research," in *The Many Lives of Jesus: Scholarship, Religion, and the Nineteenth Century Imagination*, ed. Cristiana Facchini and Annelies Lannoy (Brepols, 2024), 61–84, 71. Schmidt notes that this is the "earliest fundamental criticism of historical Bible critique" (71) of which he is aware.
2. "The West" is an artificial construct historically bound up with colonialism, imperialism, and racism. This self-constructed "Western world" (namely, Europe and North America) is where historical criticism emerged and where it remained paradigmatic until very recently. Many critiques of the method are based on its close connections with the regimes of power that have sustained the supremacy of "the West."
3. David R. Law, *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (T&T Clark, 2012), 1. So also, historical criticism is a "basket of procedures" or more pointedly, "a bundle of presuppositions attempting to escape theology" (Cynthia Edenburg, Francis Borchardt, Jason M. Silverman, and Juha Pakkala, "Historical Criticism: Essential or Expendable?," in *Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions: Methodological Encounters and Debates*, ed. Martti Nissinen and Jutta Jokiranta [SBL Press, 2024], 31, 35).
4. James G. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches*, Reading Religious Texts (Routledge, 2010), 31. Similar descriptions of the approach can be found in Shively T. J. Smith, "Historical Criticism: Methods," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Ian Boxall and Bradley C. Gregory (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 40–44; Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Fortress, 1975), 33–54; Law, *Historical-Critical Method*, 14–20.
5. Law, *Historical-Critical Method*, 1.
6. Cf. Law, *Historical-Critical Method*, 20–23.
7. The study of the interpretation and use of the NT after the canon was fixed is often referred to as the reception history of the New Testament. See the chapter on this approach in this volume.
8. See James Barker, "Historical-Critical Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*, ed. Patrick Gray (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 349–52.

9. Gospel similarities had long been noticed, as attested by Tatian's *Diatessaron*, an effort to harmonize the canonical gospels in the second century CE.
10. See Sarah E. Rollens, "Did the Authors of the Canonical Gospels Know Each Other?" *Bible Odyssey*, Dec. 14, 2022, https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/did-the-authors-of-the-canonical-gospels-know-each-other/. Also John S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Fortress, 200), 1–53.
11. Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Trinity, 1990), 287–92.
12. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), 33, 188, 420; Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Eerdmans, 2016), 428.
13. Crossley, *Reading the New Testament*, 20.
14. Koester, *Ancient Gospels*, 287.
15. Sarah E. Rollens, "The Anachronism of 'Early Christian Communities,'" in *Theorizing 'Religion' in Antiquity: Studies in Ancient Religion and Culture*, ed. Nickolas P. Roubekas, Studies in Ancient Religion and Culture (Equinox, 2019), 307–24; Stanley K. Stowers, "The Concept of 'Community' and the History of Early Christianity," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 23, no. 3 (2019): 238–56; Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Giovanni B. Bazzana, *Kingdom of Bureaucracy: The Political Theology of the Village Scribes in the Sayings Gospel Q*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 274 (Peeters, 2015), 7–8.
16. Similar observations have been made about the Hebrew Bible, for instance, that "it is remarkable how neatly [historical-critical] conclusions are fit into just a few myths prominently narrated in other sources" (Edenburg, et al, "Historical Criticism," 33).
17. Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature*, 50–104; Halvor Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth-Century Historical Jesus* (I. B. Taurus, 2012).
18. Rollens, "The Anachronism of 'Early Christian Communities,'" 318–21.
19. For detailed overviews of the social, religious, and cultural contexts operating in the early decades of historical criticism, see: Roy A. Harrisville and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Theology and Historical-Critical Method from Spinoza to Käsemann* (Eerdmans, 1995), 32–48; Law, *The Historical-Critical Method*, 25–80; Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 225–69; Wolfgang M. W. Roth, "The Historical-Critical Method and Its Function in Biblical Interpretation," *Indian Journal of Theology* 12, no. 2 (1963): 51–58; Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, 6–32.
20. Roth, "The Historical-Critical Method and Its Function in Biblical Interpretation," 53.
21. Roth, "The Historical-Critical Method and Its Function in Biblical Interpretation," 53. Roth later emphasizes, "The decision to adopt the historical-critical method is truly a Protestant decision" (58).
22. On the "essential inner connexions" between Protestant theology and historical criticism, see the remarks by Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James H. Leitch (Fortress, 1963), 56, with a wider discussion on 17–61. See also Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 165–20; Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, 7–10.
23. Harrisville and Sundberg, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 89–110; Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 330.
24. Harrisville and Sundberg, *Bible in Modern Culture*, 49–65; Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 243.

25. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 340.
26. J. W. Rogerson, "Historical Criticism and the Authority of the Bible," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith Lieu (Oxford University Press, 2006), 841.
27. Edenburg et al., "Historical Criticism," 44.
28. Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, 4. Similarly, Law also notes how historical criticism is sometimes reduced to being a "secular" method of interpretation (*The Historical-Critical Method*, 6).
29. Robert Clifton Robinson, "A List of Conservative and Liberal Bible Scholars," n.d., https://robertcliftonrobinson.com/a-list-of-conservative-and-liberal-bible-scholars/. This entire post is useful for showing how evangelical thinkers wrestle with the implications of historical-critical scholarship.
30. Rogerson pinpoints liberation theology and feminist criticism as the most vocal critics of the approach (Rogerson, "Historical Criticism and the Authority of the Bible," 844). Milder criticisms can be found somewhat earlier, as in Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method*, 73–88.
31. Edenburg et al., "Historical Criticism," 64.
32. For instance, Mark Walker, ed., *Science and Ideology: A Comparative History* (Routledge, 2013); Stanley Aronowitz, *Science as Power: Discourse and Ideology in Modern Society* (Minnesota University Press, 1988); Denis R. Alexander and Ronald L. Numbers, *Biology and Ideology: From Descartes to Dawkins* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).
33. Roth, "The Historical-Critical Method and Its Function in Biblical Interpretation," 54.
34. Elizabeth Castelli, Stephen D. Moore, Gary A. Phillips, and Wilhelm Wuellner, eds., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (Yale University Press, 1995), 2.
35. Castelli et al., *The Postmodern Bible*, 2.
36. Cf., Edenburg et al., "Historical Criticism," 44.
37. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (Continuum, 2000); Amy Madeleine Walters, "Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and the Quest for the Historical Jesus," *Open Theology* 6, no. 1 (2020): 468–74; Sara Parks, *Gender in the Rhetoric of Jesus: Women in Q* (Lexington/Fortress, 2019), 5–8.
38. Rogerson, "Historical Criticism and the Authority of the Bible," 842. Similarly, as John Barton has pointed out, "the central accusation against the historical-critical method that one hears nowadays concerns its Enlightenment origins" (John Barton, "Historical-Critical Approaches," in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton [Cambridge University Press, 1998], 9). In *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Fortress, 2001), Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood interrogate the concept of "biblical scholar" and implicate nearly all approaches to studying the Bible (theological, historical-critical, postmodern, etc.) as sustaining the Enlightenment project to different degrees. Obviously, historical criticism is the method most often criticized for carrying the Enlightenment torch.
39. In addition to the foundational scholars tending to be elite white European men, Robert Morgan offers the sobering reminder that the first several generations of NT scholars were also largely drawn from church-related contexts ("New Testament" in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu [Oxford University Press, 2008], 28–49, here 32). Apart from several infamous cases of skepticism, most of these early critics had confessional interests to some degree, despite their claims to neutrality.

40. Francis Borchardt, "CSTT and Gender #2: A Gender Theory Critique of the Historical-Critical Method," July 6, 2017, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/2017/07/06/cstt-and-gender-a-gender-theory-critique-of-the-historical-critical-method/.
41. Castelli et al., *The Postmodern Bible*.
42. Rogerson, "Historical Criticism and the Authority of the Bible," 844.
43. This analysis will leave aside textual criticism, which is the object of a dedicated chapter in this volume and requires direct engagement with ancient manuscripts. We will begin with the NRSVue, which translates a critical edition of the Greek text.
44. Increasingly scholars are arguing that John knew and used the Synoptic Gospels to compose his Gospel (e.g., James W. Barker, *Writing and Rewriting the Gospels: John and the Synoptics* [Eerdmans, 2025]); Mark Goodacre, *The Fourth Gospel: John's Knowledge of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* [Eerdmans, 2025]).
45. Although the location of John's baptisms is not in this excerpt, Luke mentions it earlier in Luke 3:3.
46. See also, Sarah E. Rollens, "The Baptism of Jesus," *Bible Odyssey*, June 28, 2022, https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/the-baptism-of-jesus/.
47. This common body of material that Matthew and Luke share is often known as "Q." Q is an abbreviation of the German term *Quelle* (source), and this shared material also shows extensive verbatim agreement, as well as similar sequences of arrangement, in each Gospel. Interested readers should consult this accessible introduction: John S. Kloppenborg, *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus* (Westminster John Knox, 2008).
48. Edenburg, et al., "Historical Criticism," 25.

FOR FURTHER READING

Barker, James. "Historical-Critical Methods." In *The Cambridge Companion to the New Testament*, 348–68. Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Edenburg, Cynthia, Francis Borchardt, Jason M. Silverman, and Juha Pakkala. "Historical Criticism: Essential or Expendable?" In *Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions: Methodological Encounters and Debates*, 23–70. SBL Press, 2024.

Law, David R. *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed*. T&T Clark, 2012.

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Chapter 3

Literary Criticism of the Hebrew Bible

SONG-MI SUZIE PARK

Literary criticism is an umbrella term used to reference a variety of interpretive approaches, all of which begin with the assumption that the biblical text is literature. That is, this criticism maintains that the Bible, including the portion known as the Hebrew Bible, consists of stories, poems, and other types of written work that have artistic value. As such, this criticism treats and analyzes the biblical text as it would other literatures: by looking at the way that the story or poem is told and how it communicates its message. In short, literary criticism focuses on the literary features and techniques that are used to convey meaning.[1] Literary criticism therefore can entail an examination of setting, plot, structure, point of view, characters, characterization, imagery, tone, themes, rhythm, genre, language, as well as other literary features.

By looking at such features, literary critics attempt to decipher the meanings, messages, and ideas that a work conveys. For example, a literary critic might explore why a particular term/motif/theme/image is used or repeated or how a character is portrayed and the significance of this portrayal within the text. They might focus on or delineate the purpose of a particular point of view or tone evident in the narrative. A literary critic, through an examination of the literary features, might also try to understand the artistry contained in a work. In this

way the literary critic not only looks at meaning, strictly speaking, but evaluates the success or failure of a text at being forceful, convincing, or engaging. They might also reveal and unpack the artistic techniques, such as imagery, wordplay, or rhythm present in the narrative that add to its artistry.

Widely construed, literary criticism covers a number of other approaches, such as feminist criticism, gender criticism, ideological/contextual criticism, structuralism, deconstruction/poststructuralism, and reader-response criticism. Literary criticism is so pervasive that most of the criticisms described in the chapters of this book can be said to constitute some form of literary criticism.

Some types of literary criticism, such as structuralism[2] and deconstruction or poststructuralism,[3] have become less popular of late in the study of the Hebrew Bible; so much so that I will forgo a discussion of them in this chapter. Reader-response criticism[4] of the Hebrew Bible too has largely declined in usage, replaced by approaches that focus on the identity and context of the reader/interpreter. As many of these more popular reader-centric methods are described in other chapters of this book, I will only focus on two kinds of literary criticism in this chapter: narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism.

DEFINING LITERARY CRITICISM

Literary criticism, confusingly, in biblical studies also refers to documentary or source criticism, which are types of historical-critical approaches to the Hebrew Bible. Ironically, historical criticism, another umbrella mode of analysis, is the approach to which literary criticism is most frequently compared. Indeed, such a comparison still functions as a useful means by which to delineate the boundaries of literary criticism.

To triangulate the contours of literary criticism, it is best to go over what it is not: Literary criticism of the Bible does not make any claims about whether the biblical text is fiction or nonfiction. It does not concern itself with whether the literature reflects historical reality or is historically accurate. It is uninterested in the historical process by which the literature came to be or a text's preceding versions or evolution through time. It does not try to discover the original author of the written work or the author's historical context, message, or intent (authorial intent).

In sum, in contrast to historical criticism, which largely entails a diachronic ("across time") analysis, literary criticism interprets and analyzes the biblical text as it exists in its current form by examining the text itself. That is, literary criticism entails a synchronic reading of the biblical text as it presently exists. It also treats the text as a kind of closed system that has integrity and coherency. Literary criticism assumes that the text makes sense and is understandable in its current form without recourse to knowledge outside of it. Literary criticism, in short, is interested "in the narrative world, the world *within* the text."[5] In

comparison, historical criticism attempts to fragment or take apart the text so as to get a glimpse of "the world behind the text."[6]

Though there are differences between literary and historical criticism, they are not oppositional or exclusive. Rather, many literary critics of the Hebrew Bible think that historical and archaeological knowledge is important and useful. As such, in terms of the practice, they may, at times, utilize historical and archaeological information to help or supplement their literary analysis of the Hebrew biblical text. Many current interpreters therefore use a mix of literary and historical-critical methods in their reading and interpretation.

NEW CRITICISM

Theories in literary studies influenced the rise of literary criticism in biblical studies. Especially important was a literary critical theory known as New Criticism, which was dominant in the first half of the twentieth century. New Criticism maintained that a text was autonomous and "closed": That is, everything needed for the interpretation and understanding of the text was already present and discoverable in the final form of the text.[7] Hence, New Criticism posited that the meaning of a text stemmed *not* from its author or their intent (authorial intent) or their background, culture, or context. Rather, as everything needed to discern the meaning was already present within the written work, New Criticism posited a close reading of the text in its final form as the key mode of analysis.

New Criticism was highly influential in biblical studies; the pervasive use of literary criticism, which shares many of the assumptions and modes of analysis entailed in New Criticism, within biblical studies speaks to its impact.

This connection to New Criticism also explains, in part, why literary criticism of the Bible can be seen as theologically challenging. Treating the Bible like any other literature can undermine the Scripture-ness—that is, the canonical status, holiness, or authority—of the biblical text. If the Bible can be read, interpreted, and analyzed as any other literature through an examination of its literary features, it raises the disturbing possibility that the Bible is *just like* or *just is* another text. Yes, it is still venerable because of its age, clout, and popularity. However, literary criticism raises the prospect that the biblical text might not be special and, therefore, not *as* holy as assumed. Especially theologically challenging is the deemphasis on the author and their intent. This movement away from the author and their intended message undermines the understanding of the biblical text as divinely inspired—that is, that the Bible is somehow traceable or connected to God and, therefore, entails the message or intent of its divine "author."

Though New Criticism was influential and posed some theological challenges, current literary critics of the Hebrew Bible do not fully adopt its tenets or assumptions. Rather, as I mentioned earlier, in practice, many literary critics of the Hebrew Bible assume that intent of the author and their historical background

and context has some relevance. One can even argue that the use of literary criticism, especially in the academic study of the Hebrew biblical text, has become pervasive and commonplace in part because many literary critics use a mixture of methods, including historical-critical approaches, in their analysis.

NARRATIVE CRITICISM OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Narrative criticism refers to the application of literary criticism to the narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible—that is, those sections that are told mainly in prose. As Adele Berlin writes, "The study of narrative, or narratology . . . aims to find the building blocks of literature and the rules by which they are assembled."[8] In terms of usage, narrative criticism, as a subset of literary criticism, entails a close reading that focuses on the literary techniques present in the text. The history of narrative criticism of the Hebrew Bible spans several decades. As such, a comprehensive history is beyond the scope of this chapter. For those interested in a more detailed overview, David Gunn offers a fuller account of the development of narrative criticism of the Bible in the previous version of this book.[9]

A brief mention of some of the key works that exemplify this approach is warranted, however. One such work is Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*.[10] Written during World War II in Istanbul and published in 1946, Auerbach analyzed the literary styles in a selection of important works of Western literature. For the study of the Hebrew Bible, Auerbach's first chapter was the most important. In it, he compared the narrative style of Hebrew biblical literature with that of Greek: namely, Homeric works.

Though there were other literary critical works after Auerbach, it would take several decades for literary criticism and, in particular, narrative criticism of the Hebrew Bible to reach its heyday. During the 1980s, several formative monographs on the topic were published. The literary features of the Hebrew text received a more sustained focus by Robert Alter in his seminal work, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981), and the sequel volume, *The World of Biblical Literature* (1992).[11] Reading and analyzing the Hebrew Bible as a work of historicized prose fiction, Alter unpacked the complicated and sophisticated literary styles and techniques present in the Hebrew Bible, such as type-scenes, dialogue, repetition, and characterization.

The stylistic devices and techniques used in the Hebrew text, especially the presence of an omniscient narrator, were furthered detailed and cataloged by Shimon Bar-Efrat in his book, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (1989).[12] Originally published in Hebrew in 1979, Bar-Efrat's work would be complemented by Adele Berlin's later examination of the poetics—"the science of literature"—of the Hebrew Bible in her volume, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical*

Narrative (1983).[13] In particular, Berlin analyzed the effects and significance of characterization and point of view.[14]

The poetics of the Hebrew text received sustained attention in Meir Sternberg's seminal work, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (1985).[15] Attempting to offer a "systematic reconstruction" of "the workings and rules of ideological art,"[16] Sternberg presented a sophisticated and comprehensive accounting of the compositional techniques found in the Hebrew Bible. Offering a close reading of key biblical narratives, Sternberg detailed the presence and effects of narratorial omniscience, point of view, perspectives, gaps, ambiguity, ambivalence, characterization, repetition, rhetoric, and persuasion.

To these foundational volumes can be added other important works of narrative criticism, such as those by Yairah Amit,[17] Mieke Bal,[18] J. P. Fokkelman,[19] J. Cheryl Exum and David Clines,[20] Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn,[21] and Susan Niditch,[22] among others. They have greatly increased our understanding of the literary features, styles, and effects of narratives in the Hebrew Bible. Bespeaking the popularity and wide application of narrative criticism, many of these works use a variety and mixture of approaches, such as feminist or gendered criticism, in their literary analysis.

Application of Narrative Criticism

The application of the different types of literary criticism will allow readers to gain a better sense of each method. Unfortunately, narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism have significant overlap and are viewed as synonymous by many interpreters,[23] making it difficult to discern the differences between them. To help clarify the specific features of each criticism, I will utilize and apply both approaches to the same body of text, namely, 1 Samuel 1, which centers on the conception and dedication of the prophet Samuel.

1 Samuel 1: The Advent of a New Leader

The literary features in the conception narrative of the prophet Samuel herald the birth of an Israelite hero, one who will ring in a new era for the currently rudderless country. The story begins with an ordinary Israelite man with two wives: The first, Hannah, is beloved but childless. The second, Peninnah, is the opposite: She has children but is seemingly unloved by her husband—or at least not as beloved as Hannah (1 Sam 1:2, 4–5).

The contrasting descriptions of the characters alert the reader to the presence of motifs found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. The first, exemplified by the rich stories of Israel's matriarchs Sarah (and Hagar) (Gen. 16), and Rachel and Leah (Gen. 29:31–30:24) center on the rivalries between a beloved, favorite, infertile wife and her oppositional double: an unloved, unfavored, fertile second wife. This motif is enhanced by a second motif: A woman has difficulties having children, but with the help of God or after a divine/magical encounter miraculously

conceives and gives birth to a special male child who will become a leader or hero. This motif is found in the stories of Sarah (Gen. 18:1–15; 21:1–6), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Rachel (Gen 30:14–24), and Samson's unnamed mother (Judg. 13).

The twin motifs of infertility and rivalry drive the plot in 1 Samuel 1 as Hannah, distressed and provoked by Peninnah, goes to pray at a shrine in the town of Shiloh, an ancient holy site (vv. 7–9). During her impassioned prayer, she vows that if God were to give her a son, she will return him back to God. She also promises that no razor will touch his head (v. 11), which suggests that her child would be a Nazirite, an ambiguously described class of holy men of whom Samson is the most famous. Though little evidence can be found in the biblical text of Samuel serving as a Nazir, his mother's vow and promises, as well as his special conception to an infertile woman, emphasize his special and holy status.

Hannah's prayer leads to an encounter, which reveals why Israel is in such a dire need of new governance: As evidenced by Shiloh's confused chief priest, Eli, there seems to be a leadership vacuum in Israel. Befuddled by the vision of an impassioned petitioner, Eli misinterprets Hannah's anguished prayer as the mere babblings of a drunk (v. 13). So confused is he that he admonishes Hannah and tells her to put away her drink (v. 14)! The tone is humorous but also mortifying considering the purpose of Hannah's prayer and her obvious distress and desperation.

Not unusual for the Hebrew text, the reader is not given access into the characters' thoughts. Rather, it is through Hannah's actions and speech that the reader is alerted to her cleverness and piety. Hannah replies to Eli's accusation that she has not been drinking—that is, pouring out wine or beer (Isa. 57:6)—but instead, in her anguish, has been "pouring out her soul" (v. 15).

This encounter adds to Hannah's characterization. Considering that alcohol, not prayer, is the easier and perhaps more common form of self-medication, Hannah's reply emphasizes her piety. Her wordplay about "pouring out her soul" (v. 15), insofar as it plays on the drinking/drunkard idea, also speaks to her cleverness. Even in the midst of an embarrassing encounter with an admonishing, blustery, and clearly confused religious official, Hannah has her wits about her, quickly retorting with a pun. Adding to the irony and humor, she is charged with public drunkenness when a Nazir was supposed to refrain from drinking. Here she is promising to be a good mother to a Nazir, only to be confused and accused of being a lush herself!

The humor in the narrative is undergirded by something darker and more somber. Eli, the head priest, cannot tell the difference between the fervent prayers of the desperate and the drunken ramblings of the inebriated. He is so disoriented that when he sees a woman silently talking to herself at a religious site, his first thought is—not that she is praying—but that she must be imbibing. If Eli cannot properly interpret the pious emotions and actions of a parishioner, how can he properly interpret those of God? How then can he adequately serve as head priest, as the chief intermediary between God and God's people? The answer is obvious: He can't. And he hasn't been.

Adding to Eli's lackluster performance, he is also portrayed as ungracious and unpastoral, perhaps even unkind, to poor Hannah. Without first inquiring after Hannah or even inquiring as to what ails her to drink, he brazenly admonishes her for showing up to the shrine intoxicated. Even when Hannah tells him that she has been praying, not drinking, Eli seems unconcerned, never asking her the reason for her troubles. His interaction with a despairing and despondent parishioner speaks badly about his care of the community and country—and, as such, illustrates his ineptitude as a religious leader.

More importantly, Eli does not realize the significance of this meeting. God has already decided to oust him and replace him with the child of the mother whom he has just encountered. A similar lack of awareness will be present when King Saul meets David (1 Sam 16:14–23). Hence, in hindsight, the encounter between Eli and Hannah therefore serves as a kind of final failed performance review for Eli, who is declared unfit for his job. He is so unfit, so not in touch with God, that he does not realize that he is about to be fired, and his job soon given to the child of the woman he so casually dismissed, first as a drunk, and then subsequently, after discovering her true purpose, with a throwaway blessing that God grant Hannah her request (v. 17). As evident by the literary features of this narrative, such as tone, plot, motifs, characters, and characterization, Israel is desperately in need of a new leader.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

In biblical studies, James Muilenburg is credited with introducing "rhetorical criticism" during his 1968 presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). In his speech, titled "Form Criticism and Beyond," Muilenburg, who was a form critic, noted the limitations of this criticism. Muilenburg argued that form criticism failed to focus sufficient attention to the parts of the biblical text that were unique, artistic, and distinctive. As such, he called upon scholars to take "full account of features beyond the spectrum of genre."[24]

To that end, Muilenburg argued for a new method of interpretation, which he termed rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism, according to Muilenburg, entailed attention to "the nature of Hebrew literary composition," especially "the structural patterns that are employed for the fashioning of a literary unit," and "in discerning the many and various devices by which the predications are formulated and ordered into a unified whole."[25]

As such, Muilenburg outlined the two main concerns/tasks of rhetorical criticism: (1) "to define the limits or scope of the literary unit and how it begins and where and how it ends" by noticing the presence of repeated "climactic or ballast lines" and (2) "to recognize the structure of a composition and to discern the configuration of its component parts . . . and to note the various rhetorical devices that are employed for marking . . . the sequence and movement of

the pericope, and . . . the shifts or breaks in the development of the writer's thought."[26] In short, Muilenberg argued that special attention should be given to chiasms, *inclusios,* structure of strophes, rhetorical questions, and the repetition of particular words, particles, and vocatives.[27]

Considering this description, it is unsurprising that some scholars have criticized rhetorical criticism as just a different term to describe an analysis of style or artistry. The overlap between rhetorical criticism as outlined by Muilenburg and stylistic analysis also explains why some interpreters of the Hebrew Bible currently view rhetorical criticism as largely synonymous with narrative criticism.

With regard to the Hebrew Bible, the main difference between narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism seems to be one of emphasis. Phyllis Trible, a student of Muilenburg's, offers a detailed guide for rhetorical criticism of the Hebrew Bible. In rhetorical criticism, attention should be given to beginnings and endings of texts, repetition, discourse type, design and structure, plot development, character portrayals, syntax, and particles.[28] Considering that these literary features are the same features that narrative critics focus on in their analyses, the confusion between the two approaches remains. However, as exemplified by works of well-known rhetorical critics of the Hebrew Bible, such as Trible and Jack Lundbom,[29] the practice of rhetorical criticism helps to delineate the small differences that separate it from narrative criticism. Specifically, as practiced, rhetorical critical readings of the Hebrew biblical text emphasize and center around the literary features of *inclusios,* chiasmus, and repetition.[30] As such, an emphasis on these features seems to be a key distinction between rhetorical and narrative criticism.

Application of Rhetorical Criticism

With these general contours of rhetorical criticism in mind, let us return to the conception narrative of the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 1. When I read this pericope through the lens of narrative criticism, I focused on characters, characterization, tone, motifs, and plot. As I mentioned earlier, the boundary between narrative and rhetorical criticism is murky—and they may be largely synonymous in meaning. That being said, following Trible and Lundbom, I will shift my focus to those aspects of this story that are of specific interest to rhetorical critics of the Hebrew Bible—chiasmus, *inclusios,* and repetition—in my reading of 1 Samuel 1.

1 Samuel 1: The Advent of a Holy Hero

When read through the lens of rhetorical criticism, the story of Samuel's birth in 1 Samuel 1 stresses the holy and special status of Samuel, and, in so doing, foreshadows his future career and calling as Israel's religious leader. The literary

features of 1 Samuel 1, especially the chiastic and concentric patterning, *inclusios,* and repetition, evince this message through its emphases on Shiloh, Hannah's vow, and Eli's lack of sight/insight.

The *inclusio* that frames 1 Samuel 1 suggests something singular is about to occur. After the introduction of the characters (vv. 1–2), the plot turns to the holy city of Shiloh (v. 3). Aside from being the future site of Samuel's conception and call, Shiloh is also the site of the family's annual pilgrimage. It is also the location of a crucial encounter, one that will serve as the turning point of the plot of 1 Samuel 1. Considering the importance of Shiloh, it is unsurprising to find that it functions as the key part of the *inclusio* of 1 Samuel 1, because Hannah's story and "journey" begin and end at Shiloh (1:3, 24–28).

The movement to and from Shiloh acts as a critical structural device, spotlighting God's role in the conception of Samuel. For example, Shiloh, as well as the term, "to worship, bow down," are repeated at pivotal junctures in the narrative (1 Sam. 1:3, 19, 28). Marking the turning points, the occurrences of these two terms—"Shiloh" and "to worship" (vv. 11, 19)—highlight Hannah's progression from infertile petitioner to expectant mother to, finally, sacrificial mother as she fulfills the vow that she made to God at Shiloh to return the child that she fervently prayed to receive (v. 28).

The use of Shiloh as part of the *inclusio* as well as the reiteration of "Shiloh" (vv. 3, 9, 24) and "to worship" (vv. 3, 19, 28) draw attention to the deity who is the object of worship and petition at this site. It is the God of Shiloh, the narrative asserts, who hears and answers Hannah's desperate prayer for a child. It is God who remembers her (vv. 11, 19) and fulfills her wish by causing her to conceive a child whom she vows to return. Considering the unusual circumstances of Samuel's birth, the narrative therefore declares that his birth is no mere coincidence. Rather, it is the result of a miraculous intervention by a compassionate God moved to act by the pious supplication of a desperate petitioner.

As such, Samuel, the miracle child, the narrative implies, must be extraordinary, endowed with a divine purpose. Considering the circumstances of his unusual conception, God must have an important task for Samuel to accomplish. Moreover, Hannah's role in the conception adds to the characterization of Samuel as remarkable and spiritually endowed. Her willingness to return the child back to God means that the child is really God's to begin with; he is just on temporary loan to Hannah. In either case, the message is clear: Samuel is special—a child of God—who has divine destiny.

Considering this message, it is unsurprising that Hannah's prayer in which she promises to return her child is accentuated by the narrative. Two chiastic patterns in 1 Samuel 1 reveal the stress on Hannah's prayer.

The first and most noticeable concentric pattern consists of the entire narrative of 1 Samuel 1:

A. Mention of Shiloh and false protégés (Eli's sons) (v. 3)
B. Mention of Peninnah's sons at Shiloh (v. 4)
C. Hannah's womb closed (vv. 5–6)
D. Misunderstanding and conversation with a man (husband) (v. 8)
E. **Hannah's prayer and vow (vv. 10–11)**
D′. Misunderstanding and conversation with a man (Eli) (vv. 12–16)
C′. Returns from Shiloh, Hannah remembered by God and conceives (vv. 19–20)
B′. Mention of Hannah's son after return from Shiloh (vv. 20–24)
A′. Mention of / return to Shiloh with real protégé, Samuel (v. 28)

The concentric structure shows that the heart of the story—its climax—is Hannah's petition for a child and her vow to return him to God (E). Bespeaking the importance of Hannah's request and vow, her prayer also follows a chiastic pattern.

a	b
Give (*natan*) to your maidservant a	male child
a′	b′
I will give (*natanti*)	him back to the Lord

These chiasms put the focus on Hannah's petition and, in particular, her promise to return the child to God in Shiloh. As such, these structures set up for the stories that follow about Samuel's call (1 Samuel 3) and, more importantly, his future at Shiloh as its rightful and chosen leader. Hence, Hannah's prayer emphasizes the divine selection and conception of Samuel as Eli's replacement and as the one called, chosen, and indeed "conceived" by God for this divine purpose.

This message about the divine destiny of Samuel is supported by a second concentric pattern. Like matryoshka dolls, imbedded in the first, larger concentric pattern, a second, smaller concentric pattern can be detected. This smaller imbedded pattern consists of Hannah's interaction with Eli (1:13–18).

A. Eli watches Hannah praying and admonishes (vv. 13–14)
B. Hannah replies that she is troubled (v. 15a)
C. Not drinking wine (v. 15b)
D. Pouring out her soul (v. 15 c)
C′. Not a wicked woman (v. 16a)
B′. Hannah replies that she is anguished and in grief (v. 16b)
A′. Eli blesses (v. 17) and Hannah hopes she finds favor in his eyes

As is evident, the second chiasm stresses Hannah's justification of her actions before the recriminating Eli. In particular, the pattern highlights her explanation that she has been pouring out her soul, not wine. That is, the narrative emphasizes that Hannah is a pious, sad, desperate woman and therefore deserving of a miracle by a compassionate deity. As such, when all the structural features are considered (the two concentric patterns and the chiasm), they throw into sharp contrast Hannah's devout manners with Eli's confused, reactionary one. Though he is a priest, he is obviously the less pious, the less perceptive, and less respectful of the two. Unfortunately for the community, however, it is Eli, not Hannah, who serves as chief priest. How much better would it be if the pious Hannah, or better yet, considering that her gender disqualifies her from the priesthood, if her yet-to-be-born miracle son could serve as chief priest in Eli's stead?

Adding to the negative characterization of Eli, the *inclusio* that frames the second concentric pattern further accentuates Eli's confusion and waning ability as religious leader. The *inclusio* focuses on his ability to see. The opening bracket of the *inclusio* (A) entails Eli *watching*, but misunderstanding, Hannah's actions. The closing bracket (A´), after Hannah has explained her action, has Eli dismissively blessing Hannah, and Hannah's gracious response that she hopes that she has found favor *in his eyes.* Both brackets involve and mention Eli's visual acuity. As such, his impaired sight and therefore impaired insight are accentuated, strongly hinting that Eli can no longer see and, therefore, is no longer fit to serve as head priest at Shiloh. As the patterns indicate, Eli is blind and likely has been such for a long time. The message is loud and clear: He needs to be replaced immediately by someone more clear-sighted and less timeworn. How timely that a desperate, pious, infertile woman—one who fortuitously offers to return her child back to God—just happens to show up at Shiloh.

The emphasis on Eli's blindness and ineptness in 1 Samuel 1 also sets the scene for the story of Samuel's call that shortly follows.[31] First Samuel 3 describes how Samuel, now an apprentice at Shiloh, hears a voice calling him while in the house of the Lord. Though Samuel's name sounds like the phrase "God/El has heard,"[32] Samuel, in contrast to God, does not hear very well initially. Confused as to the source of the mysterious noise, Samuel goes to Eli, whose earlier metaphoric blindness has now become literal (1 Sam. 3:2). Eli's blindness, however, seems to have improved his attitude as well as, ironically, his insight. In marked contrast to Eli's earlier impolite behavior to Samuel's mother, Eli reacts graciously to the confused Samuel. Understanding that the voice is that of God's, Eli guides the neophyte as to how to respond (1 Sam. 3:9). Most importantly, Eli finally accepts God's message told through Samuel that Eli and his family will be removed as Israel's leaders (1 Sam. 3:11–18). In response to his termination, Eli responds with a statement that again alludes to the vision motif: "He is the Big Boss (lit. "the Lord"). Whatever is good in his eyes, he is going to do anyway" (3:18) (my translation). Resigned to his forced retirement, the old priest is finally ready to turn over the keys to Hannah's son.

The plot as well as the literary features central to rhetorical criticism, such as *inclusios,* chiasmus, and repetition, hence, work to neatly present the problem, highlight it, and point to its resolution.

CONCLUSION

Literary criticism describes a range of approaches to the interpretation and reading of the Hebrew Bible. It is widely utilized, frequently in concert with other approaches. Many, if not most, of the various criticisms described in this book can be said to be a part of literary criticism.[33] As such, this book testifies to the influence and importance of this mode of analysis. Indeed, literary criticism can be said to be one of the central methods by which the Hebrew biblical text is currently read and interpreted.

In this chapter, I have focused on two types of literary critical approaches: narrative criticism and rhetorical criticism. Though there is much overlap between the two, I have tried to elucidate their particular and somewhat distinctive features and emphases by reading 1 Samuel 1 through the lens of each approach. By applying literary critical approaches to the Hebrew biblical narratives—that is, by looking at the literary features of the story—subtle messages and emphases can be discerned and the narrative's artistry and nuances revealed.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

chiasm, chiasmus, chiastic. Literary device where a sequence of items/ideas is listed and then repeated and listed in reverse order, forming a crossover pattern reminiscent of the Greek letter chi (χ).

deconstructive criticism. Method associated with Jacques Derrida of analyzing texts that reveals how the meanings of texts are contradictory and unstable. See also poststructuralism.

diachronic. "Through time," a diachronic reading refers to a kind of literary analysis that focuses on how a literary text or tradition evolved and developed throughout time.

form criticism/critic. Method of interpretation that is concerned with identifying and classifying literary units of text, their genre, and their original "setting in life."

inclusio. A framing device where words, themes, and phrases, which are presented at the beginning of a section, are repeated at the end, creating a bracket or enclosure.

narratology. Study and analysis of literary features and aspects of narratives.

poetics. Study of or theory about the literary features and aspects of literature and its effects.

poststructuralism. Method of interpretation that questions the assumption undergirding structuralism that the structures of a literary work and the meanings generated by them are stable and objective.

reader-response criticism. Interpretive approach that focuses on the reader's role in the generation of meaning.

structuralism. Method of interpretation that focuses on the discovery of structures that undergird and shape texts, *usually conveyed as contrasting pairs or binarisms* and the meaning generated by them.

synchronic. "All at one time," a synchronic reading refers to a kind of literary analysis that focuses on understanding a text in its final form, without reference or consideration of its historical development or origins.

NOTES

1. Richard G. Bowman, "Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Fortress, 1989), 19–45; Rhiannon Graybill, "Literary Criticism, Literary Theory, and the Bible," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation,* vol. 1, *African American Interpretation-Materialist Culture*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, et al. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 515–24; David Jobling, "Method of Modern Literary Criticism," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001), 19–35.
2. On structuralism, see: Roland Barthes, *Structural Analysis and Biblical Exegesis: Interpretational Essays* (Pickwick, 1974); John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study,* 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (Westminster John Knox, 1996), 104–38; John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook,* 4th ed. (Westminster John Knox, 2022), 152–65; David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 1986); David Jobling, "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning," in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., Gale A. Yee, 90–114; Edmund Leach, ed., *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (Jonathan Cape, 1969); Daniel Patte, "Structural Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, rev. and expanded, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Westminster John Knox, 1999), 183–200; Daniel Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* (Fortress, 1976); Robert M. Polzin, *Biblical Structuralism: Method and Subjectivity in the Study of Ancient Text*s (Fortress, 1977).
3. On deconstruction or poststructuralism, see: Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 220–36; William A. Beardslee, "Poststructuralist Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning,* ed. McKenzie and Haynes, 253–67; Danna Nolan Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing," in *Judges and Method*, ed. Yee, 115–37; Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 161–62.
4. On reader-response criticism, see: Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, 198–219. Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 186–87; Edgar V. McKnight, "Reader-Response Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Westminster John Knox, 1993), 230–52.
5. Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 106.
6. Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 106.
7. Jean Louis Ska, "Narrative Criticism, Narratology," in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (de Gruyter, 2022), 20, 802.
8. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Eisenbrauns, 1995), 15.
9. David M. Gunn, "Narrative Criticism," in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. McKenzie and Haynes, 201–29. Also see Graybill, "Literary Criticism, Literary Theory, and the Bible," 515–24; Ska, "Narrative Criticism, Narratology," 801–4.

10. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought* (Princeton University Press, 2003); first published in 1946 by Francke Ltd. Co.
11. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (Basic Books, 1981); Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (Basic Books, 1992).
12. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Almond Press, 1989).
13. Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. Berlin writes further, "If literature is likened to a cake, then poetics gives us the recipe and interpretation tells us how it tastes" (15).
14. Berlin, *Poetics and the Interpretation of Biblical Narrative,* 16.
15. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading,* Indiana Series in Biblical Literature (Indiana University Press, 1985).
16. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, xi.
17. Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress, 2001).
18. Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Indiana University Press, 1987); idem., *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 3rd ed. (University of Toronto Press, 2009).
19. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural-Analysis*, 2nd ed. (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Press, 1991)*;* idem., *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Westminster John Knox, 1999).
20. J. Cheryl Exum and David Clines, eds., *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Continuum, 1993). Also see: J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: The Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).
21. David Gunn and Dana Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993).
22. Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (Harper & Row, 1987).
23. Suzanna Smith, "Old Testament Rhetorical and Narrative Criticism," in *Literary Approaches to the Bible*, ed. Douglas Mangum and Douglas Estes (Lexham Press, 2017), 35–47 (41); Patricia Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," in *To Each Its Own Meaning,* McKenzie and Haynes, 159.
24. James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (1969): 7.
25. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 8.
26. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 9–10.
27. Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," 18.
28. Phyllis Trible, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method, and the Book of Jonah* (Fortress, 1994), 101–6.
29. Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study on Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Eisenbrauns, 1997); Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (Fortress, 1984).
30. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament,* 199–203.
31. Thank you to John Kaltner for the insight that Eli's blindness and replacement, which is mentioned in 1 Samuel 1, finds fulfillment in 1 Samuel 3.
32. Though Samuel's name sounds like the phrase "El has heard" (from *shin-mem-ayin*), it lacks the ayin. Hence, according to P. Kyle McCarter, the name originally meant, "His name is El" (*I Samuel* [Yale University Press, 1980], 62n20). Thank you to Steve McKenzie for this clarification.
33. Graybill, "Literary Criticism, Literary Theory, and the Bible," 521.

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