



A CONTEMPORARY INTRODUCTION TO
THE BIBLE

Sacred Texts and Imperial Contexts

Second Edition

COLLEEN M. CONWAY AND DAVID M. CARR

WILEY Blackwell

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INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE

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SACRED TEXTS AND IMPERIAL
CONTEXTS

Colleen M. Conway and David M. Carr

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Where to Find Basic Information on Biblical Books (Basics Boxes and More)

Below is a list of where you can find basic discussions of books (or major parts of books) in the Hebrew scriptures, with the books listed here in the order that they appear in the Jewish Tanakh (//Hebrew Bible). The page given in **bold number(s)** indicates where you can find a “Basics Box” that provides major information about a biblical book. This includes an outline, information about the time(s) in which the book was written, and (usually) a discussion of a major issue in interpretation of the book or text. In addition, some other pages are provided where you can find more information on different biblical books.

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BOXES

WHAT IS A MORE ON METHOD BOX?

These boxes give a brief introduction to methods used to interpret the Hebrew Bible. They detail the sorts of questions that each method attempts to answer, give an example of how the method has been applied, and include a reference to an article or book with more information about the method under discussion.

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What Is in Special Topics Boxes?

These boxes offer extra information relevant to the broader discussion. Some pull together relevant dates for a period, while others show parallels between texts, or summarize information on a theme or question that relates to the topic at hand. This information is not optional or superfluous. Instead, these boxes highlight topics that are worth focused attention.

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PREFACE

This book introduces students to the books of the Bible as shaped in the crucible of the history of Israel and the early church. A prominent theme throughout is the way the books of the Bible reflect quite different sorts of interaction with empires that dominated the ancient Near East and Mediterranean. At first some students and professors may find this approach unusual, since we do not begin with Genesis and do not proceed through biblical books in order. The group of texts introduced early on in this textbook is quite different from the Bible they now know. So why have we chosen this approach? There are many advantages. On the basis of our experience with using this approach we have seen that the picture of the Bible's development comes into focus as the narrative of its formation unfolds. By the end, students should find meaning in aspects of the Bible that they once overlooked, even as they also understand that much of the power of the Bible has been its capability to transcend the original contexts in which it was written. Moreover, through discussion of the history of Jewish and Christian interpretation of focus texts toward the end of many chapters, students will gain a taste of how faith communities have used the Bible in creative, inspired, and sometimes death-dealing ways to guide and make sense of their lives. Given the already large scope of this *Introduction*, we have focused on texts included in the Old and New Testaments, with a particular emphasis – in the case of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament – on books included in the scriptures of Judaism and various forms of Christianity. This meant that we could not give sustained attention to apocryphal/deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament, or to the range of non-canonical early Christian works that did not end up being included in the Christian Bible.

The date framework given in this textbook follows that of Anson Rainey and Steven Notley's *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2005). In many cases specific dates are uncertain, but Rainey and Notley provide a recent, solid framework to start from on an introductory level. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from Hebrew and Greek are our own.

As with any such textbook there is always room for improvement. We know that there are multiple ways in which virtually everything that is written here could be footnoted, qualified, and balanced with other perspectives. What this introduction provides is one general outline of a historical approach to the Bible that students can then supplement, correct, and balance in their future studies. We certainly invite all possible suggestions for correction and improvement of future editions of this textbook.

We have been helped by many people in writing this textbook. In particular, a diverse set of colleagues – Charles Carter, Thomas Dozeman, Esther Hamori, Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, Benjamin Sommer, Kent Reynolds, Robert Rezetko, Adele Reinhartz, Jerusha Rhodes, William Schniedewind,

Mark Smith, and Marvin Sweeney – generously reviewed portions of chapters on the Hebrew Bible and/or offered advice on revisions and corrections for the first edition or this second edition. In addition, students at Union Theological Seminary and Seton Hall University have read chapter drafts and suggested corrections, and we received some further helpful suggestions from anonymous reviewers recruited by Wiley Blackwell. Some students and teaching assistants who have offered a particularly large volume of helpful corrections are Mary Ellen Kris, Candice Olson, Lizzie Berne-DeGear, Laurel Koepf-Taylor, Meagan Manas, and Todd Kennedy. Maia Kotrosits provided timely assistance with the glossary and web materials. Our thanks to all for their generous help in this project.

Finally, with love we dedicate this volume to our parents, James and Patricia Conway, John (now departed) and Adrienne Carr, whose love of teaching and care for their students helped inspire this book.

Colleen M. Conway and David M. Carr

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- Figure 14.2 Web Gallery of Art, Image taken from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:13th-century_unknown_painters_-_Crucifixion_with_Two_Roundels_-_WGA23753.jpg
- Figure 15.1 akg-images/Pirozzi
- Figure 15.2 William Blake, Image taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Whore-of-babylon-blake-1809.jpg>
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- Figure 16.2 Granger, NYC./Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo

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The Pharaoh Merneptah hymn in Chapter 3, page 64, and the Cyrus cylinder text in Chapter 7, page 187: Pritchard, James; *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament – Third Edition with Supplement*. © 1950, 1955, 1969, renewed 1978 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press.

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The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANET	James Pritchard (ed.), <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
George	Andrew George, <i>The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
Livingstone	Alasdair Livingstone (ed.), <i>Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea</i> . State Archives of Assyria, 3. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989.
NJPS	<i>The New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation</i> . Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985.
NRSV	<i>The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible</i> . New York: National Council of Churches, 1989.
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
<i>OT Parallels</i>	Victor Matthews and Don Benjamin, <i>Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East</i> (3rd revised and expanded edition). Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2007.

For Bible abbreviations, see the Prologue, “Bible Abbreviations, Chapters and Verses.”

Asterisks after Bible citations, e.g. “Genesis 12–50*,” indicate that only parts of the cited texts are included.

//indicate that the texts before and after the slashes are parallel to each other.

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL PERIOD

This shows major periods and corresponding texts covered in this book.

DATES	1250–1000 BCE (13th–11th centuries)	1000–930 (10th century)	930–800 (10th–9th centuries)	800–700 (8th century)	700–586 (7th and early 6th centuries)	586–538 (6th century)	538–332 (6th–4th centuries)	332–63 (4th–1st centuries)	63 BCE–100 CE (1st century BCE to 1st century CE)
Chapter	2	3	4	4	5	6	7	8	9–15
MAJOR EVENTS (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)	Spread of villages in hill country Tribal “Israel” emerges Saul’s chieftainship	Formation of Davidic monarchy Jerusalem taken as capital of Judah/ Israel David and Solomon	Formation of northern kingdom of “Israel” Rise and fall of Omride dynasty	Dominion and destruction of northern “Israel” by Assyria Dominion of Judah by Assyria	Eventual decline of Assyrian power Enactment of Josiah’s “reform” Decline of Judah into domination by Babylon First wave of exile	Destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple Second and third waves of exile of elites to Babylon	Persian victory, waves of return, rebuilding of Temple Nehemiah’s rebuilding of the wall Divorce of foreign wives under Ezra and elevation of Torah	Hellenistic rule Hellenizing crisis Hasmonean kingdom	Roman rule
MAJOR WRITINGS (AND ORAL TRADITIONS)	(No writings, but oral traditions about exodus, trickster ancestors)	Royal and Zion psalms Proverbs (early forms of other texts like the non-P primeval history)	Jacob narrative Joseph narrative Exodus – wilderness story Song of Deborah	Prophecy to the north by Amos and Hosea Prophecy to the south by Micah and Isaiah	Formation of Deuteronomy and following historical books (Joshua–2 Kings) Nahum and Zephaniah Early prophecies from Jeremiah	Exilic additions to biblical books Lamentations Ezekiel and Second Isaiah Non-P (L) narrative of early Israel P counter-narrative of early Israel	Haggai Zechariah Nehemiah memoir Temple rebuilding Ezra narrative Third Isaiah Combined L/P Pentateuch Psalter	Early parts of Enoch Ben Sira Ezra–Nehemiah Esther 1–2 Chronicles Daniel 1–2 Maccabees Judith	Most of the New Testament
MAJOR NEW IDEAS AND THEMES	Election theology	Royal/Zion theology			Exclusive devotion to Yahweh enforced (briefly) by Josiah	Monotheism	Dual Temple – Torah focus	Judaism Resurrection	Emergent belief in Jesus as messiah and Son of God

TIMELINE

Important texts are noted in **bold**.

<i>BCE</i>	SOUTH (Judah)	NORTH (“Israel” in narrower sense)
1300	(Waning Egyptian domination of Canaan)	Spread of villages in Israelite hill country
1200		Merneptah Stela (Assorted battles, e.g. Deborah, of hill-country Israelites with neighbors)
		Oral exodus traditions Oral ancestral traditions Oral victory traditions
1100	Saul’s “chieftainship”	
	David (Hebron; 1010–1002)	
1000	David (Jerusalem; 1002–970)	
	Royal psalms, Zion psalms Solomon (Jerusalem; 970–930)	
	Proverb collections (early form??) Non-P primeval history	
	Rehoboam (Jerusalem)	Jeroboam founds northern monarchy (early written forms of) Jacob narrative, Joseph novella exodus-Moses narrative, and Song of Deborah
900		Omride dynasty (880–841)
		Jehu’s coup (841)
		Jeroboam II (782–753)
800	Isaiah (start of collection)	Amos
	Syro-Ephraimite war (735–734)	
	Assyrian domination of Israel begins (745–)	Hosea
		Assyrian domination of Judah begins (734–)
		Isaiah (continued), Micah
	Hezekiah (715–686)	Assyrian destruction of Israel (722)
	Hezekiah’s rebellion and reform (705)	