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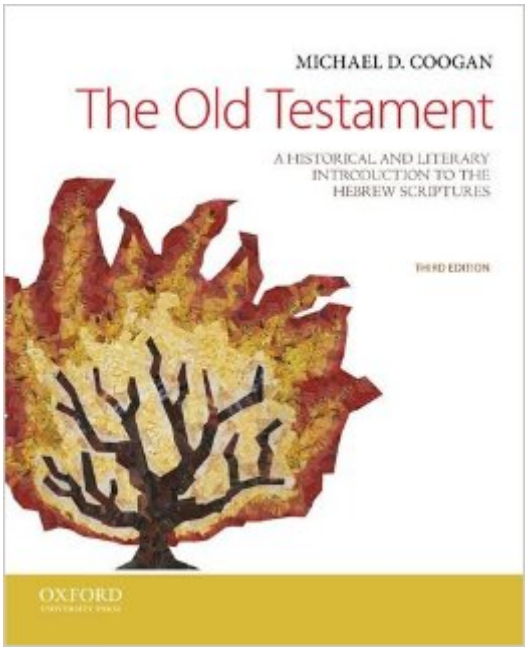
The Old Testament: A Historical And Literary Introduction To The Hebrew Scriptures



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Synopsis

Lucidly written by leading biblical scholar Michael D. Coogan, this balanced, engaging, and up-to-date introduction to the Hebrew scriptures distills the best of current scholarship. Employing the narrative chronology of the Bible itself and the history of the ancient Near East as a framework, Coogan covers all the books of the Hebrew Bible, along with the deuterocanonical books included in the Bible used by many Christians. He works from a primarily historical and critical methodology but also introduces students to literary analysis and other interpretive strategies.A FREE 6-month subscription to Oxford Biblical Studies Online (www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com)--a $180 value--is included with the purchase of every new copy of this text.SAVE YOUR STUDENTS 20%! This text is available in a discounted package with The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version, College Edition, Fourth Edition. To assign this package, order package ISBN 978-0-19-935856-4. For additional Bibles and packaging options, contact your Oxford University Press Representative at 800.280.0280

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Customer Reviews

Coogan is one of the leading Bible experts, a co-editor of the Oxford Bible Dictionary with Metzger. His point of view is balanced, educated, a "real teacher's" approach.The "Old Testament" book is a nicely done textbook. The maps reflect accurately the book discussion, the diagrams are clear and not very crowded, and the references at the end of each chapter are the best starting points for further exploration of specific topics. As the title indicates, this is an introduction (read: university

freshman/sophomore level) to the history of the Old Testament, with an equal discussion of the literary merits of the book(s). The book can easily be read on one’s own, because it is clearly written, and well organized. The chapters of the book are set up "historically", and there is an excellent discussion of the actual history/archaeology matching the Old Testament texts. The archaeological support for the Old Testament is superb; it makes you see the OT from a deeper, different perspective. I especially liked the fact that the book is balanced, and does not "interpret" theological points (that’s up to each reader, I think).The book is also very attractive, the print size reads very easily. To get the most out of the book, one would probably need a modern Old Testament translation (the Oxford NRSV with the Apocrypha would be ideal, or the Harper/Collins edition). I can easily see the book becoming a standard university textbook, just like Ehrman’s New Testament textbook.As much as I liked reading the book, I would love having a few more appendices. For example, a (brief) discussion of the Septuagint, possibly some commentary/interpretation from rabbinic sources, possibly discussion of the Qumran texts.

Michael Coogan writes well and delivers the story of the Hebrew Bible with a good balance. He shows in clear language how to understand this text and the contribution of scholars of all traditions in this understanding. The introduction is very straight forward. The layout is very attractive. Pertinent illustrations show the connection of modern scholarship to our understanding of the text. The appendix on the canon is very clear and concise. This is an exciting read for anyone. This is the best introduction available for students of the Hebrew Bible.

Coogan, prof. of religious studies at Stonehill College, has written an introduction to the OT which seems to aim at those new to the subject. He has apparently taken great care in producing this book. I am very sympathetic to his approach and care. However I am sorry to say, I fear that the result may be quite below some other introductions to the OT.I need first to explain first some basics about OT introductions.The books from the OT stem from cultures which are totally different from modern Western world: they cannot be understood without learning about this so different background. Moreover, since the end of the 19th century, scholarship has unanimously agreed that the OT books stem from different sources which underwent stadia of redaction and edition. However no conclusion giving a definitive picture of these sources and processes has been established, new complicated theories are still being proposed. All this (background, literary composition) makes it difficult to introduces the OT.On one hand some academic books starting right away with all this theoretical background and especially the very complicated source theories (e.g. this the case of the

most commonly used book in Germany, the leading country for theological studies: Einleitung in das Alte Testament, by Zenger, Braulik and Fabry, which can be ordered at .de). This is however the best way to disgust and turn off beginners... On the opposite some very conservative books directly introduce the OT books in the chronological order without giving enough attention to scholarship (or try to disqualify them as being entirely based on antisupernaturalist biases, such as is the case with the fundamentalist bookÂ A Survey of Old Testament IntroductionÂ by Gleason Archer.)The best manner of introducing the OT is also the most difficult: it consist in finding a compromise.This is the way followed here by Coogan, in his own words p. xvii : "rather than begin with introductory material about canon, history, geography and the like, I introduce students immediately to the biblical text. I also begin where the Bible does (...) of course this is not the oldest material. I intersperse the chapters dealing with the early part of Genesis with background material..."This book is from by Oxford University which published earlier (2004)Â The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian WritingsÂ by Bart Ehrman, an excellent teacher (in spite of his anti-supernaturalist bias and axe to grind with fundamentalists...) who still took care to begin with several introductory chapters. Ehrman’s introduction is in my opinion successfully done. Here the same format (boxes) as in Ehrman’s book is used, however the OT is much more difficult to introduce than the NT and results somewhat in a failure because the material is too disorganised and interspersed, lacking structure and a smooth flow, resulting in a jerky presentation, or, to use an ancient hyperbole, chaos: "the earth was formless and void...". Unfortunately in this book God did not quite pop up and say "Let there be light". The book does not provide the clear oversight and insights which a beginner should receive.The only real exception is fortunately the source theory, which is the only subject of chapter 2. This difficult theory is the testcase for any introduction to the OT, I found Coogan citing too many verses throughout the Bible, something a beginner may not be up to. It would better to cite much less, but explain better. Covering a whole page of the book with the text from Genesis 6 and 7 color-coded according to the source is nice, but not the best manner of explaining things . Compare with the simpler, yet far better manner of explaining used by Boadt in his classicÂ Reading the Old Testament: An IntroductionÂ (Paulist, 1984), chapter 4. Coogan seems to be a very cautious person, and mentions all kinds of evolutions since the old classic JEPD model which has been shown inadequate (p. 28, left column). Yet he does not succeed in explaining in so little space what are precisely all these theories, leaving the beginner more confused than anything. And then, after having said that the old JEPD does not fit the data, he chooses to stick to it...This illustrates my second criticism of the book. While Coogan should be praised for his cautious zeal to cite many Bible passages throughout the book, to often mention the

Deuteronomist school, he does this to the detriment of good explanations. I mean that a better exposition may have result from mention fewer things, but explaining them better.I enjoyed that Coogan did not use the awful and unreadable acronym YHWH, but simply the traditional and politically incorrect Yahweh. I appreciate very much that he covered the whole, authentic OT, as it was still existing at the time of the early church, thus including illuminating books such as the Wisdom of Solomon (which was so inspiring to NT books such as the gospel of John or the Epistle to the Hebrew, and was therefore rejected by the pharisaic movement when it crystalised into rabbinic Judaism and produced the current Hebrew Bible).The best use I can see for the present book is to have it as a second read, a mixture of introduction and biblical commentary (i.e. reading it along with the OT), BUT ONLY AFTER reading a book such as Boadt'sÂ Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction. For information. a book that uses precises the same approach as Coogan's (directly following the OT books) is Steven L. McKenzie'sÂ The Old Testament: Its Background, Growth, & Content(Abindgdon, 2007). It is much shorter, better explained, and better structured: for each biblical book the same structure is used: content, growth, context and interpretation. However this fixed pattern leaves too little flexibility and Boadt's inexpensiveÂ Reading the Old Testament: An IntroductionÂ (see my review of it) simply remains the best introduction, covering also the complete OT, and is unbeatable regarding price... Another well explained introduction is Andrew Hill and John Walton'sÂ A Survey of the Old TestamentÂ but it has a very low entry level (from my European perspective it is designed for the education level of high school teenagers, which is frustrating for those who have enjoyed higher education), with a lot of wasted paper space. The books by McKenzie or by Hill and Walton, in the protestant fashion, cover only the OT books that were not purged by late rabbinical judaism (as a reaction to Early Christianity).(For those who feel ready to tackle the recent developments in documentary research, the best introduction (yet already somewhat outdated... 1998) seems definitely to be Steven McKenzie'sÂ The Hebrew Bible Today: An Introduction to Critical Issues. The best scholarly books in English are those by Thomas RÃ¶mer:Â So-called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary IntroductionÂ (synthesis of recent research) andÂ Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, 34)Â (cutting-edge research papers); the best books are however to be found at .fr, again edited by RÃ¶mer et al: Le Pentateuque en question and IsraÃƒÂ«l construit son histoire).

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