



Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction

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Discusses the historical background to the Old Testament, examines the writing of the individual books, and describes the impact of archeology on Bible study.

Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction Details

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Alexis says

Picked back up to support Biblical School classes...

David S. T. says

After reading Raymond Brown's Introduction to the New Testament last year, I wanted to read a similar book on the Old Testament, I ended up selecting this one. This book doesn't get into near the depth of Brown's book but at the same time it covers three times the amount of biblical texts but is only half as long. I found this book to be very well written and fascinating, but its quite different from the evangelical introduction that I've previously read. Overall though it was exactly what I was looking for. Based on this book and Brown's book, I'm surprised at how different these two Catholic scholars approach scripture from what I'm used to, they both seem very high up on critical scholarship and aren't afraid to doubt the validity of certain scriptures, but at the same time appear to keep their faith in Christ.

Even though this book is large it covers a lot of material, so for many subjects expect a great overview but not much depth. Also for the most part expect to only be presented certain scholarly views as fact and not have any dialog with other views. I think both of these things are fine, otherwise the book would have had to be much larger and it might have broken up the pace. This leads me to my biggest complaints, the bibliography is pretty weak and references to sources is non existent. My other complaint is that this book is over 25 years old and I'm sure scholarship has changed over that time. I'll have to look for a more up to date book later.

Those complaints aside, this book is exactly what I think a Old Testament Introduction should be (as long as you remember its more critical scholarship than evangelical). It covers the Ancient Near East, the geography of the land, daily life, cult and worship in Israel, textual criticism, archeology and tell digs. It introduces the different books of the bible, talks about the different type of Psalms and literature and places the books in their proper context, this is especially useful and informative when you get to the prophetic books which can be confusing if you don't know the background. I found extremely interesting the discussions of the Assyrian, Babylon and Greek empires and the pressure they put on the Jews.

Now when I say this book uses critical scholarship what I mean is expect lots of references to the JEPD editors of the Pentateuch (where Moses didn't write the Torah, but it was a series of 4 different editors who compiled stories). He points out obvious story reuses, and contradictions. He has comparisons from the creation account to the other creation stories in the ANE and doesn't accept a young earth. I don't think he believes the exodus account (at least not to the extent of 600,000 men, plus women and children in the desert for 40 years). He also believes Isaiah was written by 3 different sources. There are other examples I could give, but this should give an idea of some of the non evangelical views he holds. Of course at the same time he appears to have reverence for Jesus and does believe that Jesus is the son of God. Overall this book was highly informative and if you don't mind having your belief in the inerrancy of the Old Testament challenged (although maybe its still inspired), then this book is highly recommended.

Jane Harris says

It's a tome, but I'm nearly finished. Lots of good information. Should be read with a couple of books with view the material in a different light. Some of Boadt's interpretations are open to debate. But I enjoyed the book. I think Boadt's writing is a little cumbersome for many readers, though.

Steve Douglas says

When I was in undergrad and starting to wrestle with the nature of the Bible, I happened upon the recently late Catholic scholar Lawrence Boadt's *Reading the Old Testament* among the books my dad had accumulated for some theology courses he took when I was a youngster. Although in some need of a revision incorporating more recent critical scholarship, I still think this book holds up fairly well, not only as an introduction to the study of the Old Testament, but especially as a template for what an approach to the Bible looks like that takes its mind from honest biblical scholarship and its heart from within the "faith of our fathers, living still."

Matt Burgess says

Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction (1984), Lawrence Boadt

I'm not going to lie. The last half of this book was as daunting as it was the first time around. Almost 7 years ago, I was quizzed on this 576 page behemoth and the outcome was a C average. This time around is received more attention and more understanding than the first, but it was still a lot to consume.

Lawrence Boadt does a great job at presenting the methods used to understand the ancient cultures identified in the Old Testament as well as our strategies to explore its claims. I found the scientific methods very interesting as the tactics of several modern sciences were explained. An appreciation of the work performed by archaeologists and historians laid the groundwork for the findings presented in the subsequent chapters.

Although there are times I felt the author put his two cents into what is mostly a presentation of cumulative research, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* presses you to consider the cultural climates in which these ancient texts were written and by whom. The first few chapters challenged me to see God through the eyes of those early civilizations, and consider how the perception of the authors may have influenced their writing. All in all this book serves as a historical introduction to the Bible and the origins of the Abrahamic religions with historical emphasis. I would caution most readers to the length of the text and what could be misconstrued as data that inadvertently supposes errant texts.

Perhaps I'll pick it back up at some point and revisit those last few chapters that were glossed over.

Sue says

Good historical study of the Old Testament, written as a text for a class Boadt may have taught about how to

study the sources of the written document that becomes the Bible, from both oral and more ancient source material, archaeological evidence, histories of other cultures that lived during pre-Bible times, as well as the problems associated with translations and the tools scholars have used to overcome them. Written with the respect of a believer, it follows the established theory of J, P, E, D, etc. Good reference book.

Neocortext says

This book was fascinating, to say the least. I haven't read it in its entirety because I was reading it for a good, solid introduction to the archeology, geography, history, and literary background of the Bible because I finally had the cajones to include that book in my Ancient Lit. course again, but boy, the 5 or so chapters I did read so far (background and Genesis) have been riveting, in part simply because of the clarity of the writing and comprehensiveness of the material. The author gives a lot of information, but he doesn't get bogged down in esoterica: it's always interesting and always relevant. I'll likely go back to this book relatively frequently as a reference source and, probably, will pick my way through it a section or two at a time as the mood strikes.

A note to potential readers: though the book is written by a scholar, it is also written from a Christian perspective, so though it provides a lot of information that creationists and fundamentalists would find highly suspect (i.e., it discusses the relative age of the world and sources for various biblical threads in both history and via Sumerian/Babylonian sources, as I believe a scholarly text should), it doesn't necessarily provide a lot of "literary" readings and is--as the author himself admits--influenced by a Christian background and provides interpretations that rather seem to split the difference between a purely "literary" reading and a reading of material assumed to split the difference. So while the technical information is fantastic, it doesn't necessarily offer the most compelling interpretations outside of the Bible's contemporary historical context.

Adam Marischuk says

A very readable introduction to the Old Testament and related scholarship

Few fields elicit as strong a bias as Old Testament studies across the religious-political spectrum- Lawrence Boadt offers a very light introduction to Old Testament scholarship with this single volume book.

He writes from what Fr. Richard McBrien would describe as a liberal academic position (and on a few issues a conservative academic position). Overall the book is non-controversial and non-confrontational. The background information (the Canon and place of the OT in the Church) is from a Catholic perspective but is neither dogmatic nor apologetic. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on the People and the Land, which sets the stage for the Jewish Scriptures.

The book additionally gives a wonderful summary of Source Criticism (p.92-103), which is instrumental in understanding the Pentateuch. Then a brief outline of Form Criticism which has played a major role in curtailing various extravagances in Source Criticism.

At 550 pages (excluding notes and bibliography), this is intended as a single volume textbook for the Old Testament. It works wonderfully well as such.

Timothy says

FINALLY I am done with this book. It was good, but it took me forever to read; it consistently sparked my interest but never really grabbed me. Oh well, I shouldn't be too critical of an introductory textbook on the Old Testament for not being exciting enough.

The content is shaped by the author's personality. As a (liberal-ish?) Catholic with a high regard for Judaism, he is determined that readers should experience these scriptures in their original Jewish context instead of trying to filter them too much through Christian theology.

This is a great source of information, but for as long and comprehensive as it is, it's very easy to read and light on references. I imagine that makes it more palatable for students, but in many cases I found myself wishing it would pile on the footnotes and get into thornier conceptual territory.

Danny says

This is one of the very best books I have ever come across in reading about the bible. It is packed full of so much information and I learned so much for it. I recommend this book to every Christian out there as I feel this is a must read. I think it's important that everyone understand the historical context of their sacred texts. Those that I have recommended this to and finished reading it said it was very helpful and gave them a new understanding of the bible. I do warn you though--this is like a textbook--it can be rather dry so be prepared for a long read.

Kristofer Carlson says

While this was written as a textbook, it is remarkably free of academic cant, and is actually readable. There are times when just a bit more detail would have been useful, such as when the discussion of the Geography of Israel didn't make a point of mentioning that the Northern kingdom's lands were much more fertile than the Southern kingdom's lands, which partly accounts for the different trajectories of the two nations. Also, the discussion of the O.T. Canon is too simplistic: it mentions the Hebrew Scriptures, the Catholic Canon, and the Protestant Canon, but makes no mention of the Orthodox Canon. It also doesn't mention that while there is a single canon of Hebrew Scriptures in use today, that particular canon hadn't been closed in Jesus' day, and in fact there were multiple canons: the Saducees (and the Samaritans) used the Torah alone; the Pharisees used the Law and the Prophets, but not the Writings; the Essenes had a much larger canon; and the Diaspora (like the early Christian Church) used the Septuagint, which existed as a widely variant collection of writings. Perhaps I quibble too much; this is an introduction, after all. But an introduction should at least make mention of variant views, even if for reasons of space it cannot explore them. Some reviewers have downgraded this book for its embrace of higher criticism, but there is a difference between using higher criticism as a methodology, and embrace of higher criticism and its conclusions---this book does the first. Still, as a general introduction to the Old Testament and modern scholarship about same, this is a fine work, and highly recommended.

Kenneth says

Written by a former professor at the seminary where I received an M.A. in Theology.

Our course on the Old Testament used the book for a text.

The narrative is clear. The arguments weigh the evidence that Biblical Studies involve. Boadt integrates the various types of modern criticism (Historical, Genre, Form, etc.) with concise outlines of each individual book or story.

Every important aspect of the Old Testament is described in pedagogical depth with relevant cultural information providing illumination of the important themes.

Boadt is in the ideological "center" of the Roman Catholic study of Holy writ, in the same category with, say, Raymond Brown or the New Jerome Biblical Commentary cohort.

The approach to the subject matter is written in a way that is interestingly accessible by the standard of ancient history.

Recommended for an introductory text. Helps when the reader is familiar with the actual books being discussed in the Bible.

Catherine says

Interesting read that reviews the Old Testament and also compares it to myths and legends of other ancient cultures. I did only read chapter 6, which is on Genesis 1 - 11, the topic for my current assignment.

Diane Wallace says

This is an excellent book chalk full of information on the sources behind the Old Testament. It discusses what is learned from archeological tells to the four primary sources of the Pentateuch. Broadt discusses every book, its origins and message. It is impossible to retain all this information so I know I will reread again carefully. I read this book kind of fast-paced for a course taught by a sister.

Donna says

Great book to read and to help to understand more about this history of the ancient Near East and the types of people/tribes that are represented in the OT. Gives a more in depth understanding of the OT. You will learn more than you ever did in church by reading this book along with studying the OT.

