

UNIT INTRODUCTION 2

Aim:

The aim of this unit is to give you a general overview of the Pentateuch, its composition and the scholarly issues biblical commentators are currently addressing.

Your reading is directed as follows:

General overview

You may wish to begin by reading four articles/chapters that present an overview of the Pentateuch, offering different approaches. It is probably best to read them in the order I have presented them below:

- Martin O'Kane (The Hebrew Bible)
- Robert Alter (World of Biblical Literature)
- Freedman (The Pentateuch)
- Pentateuch (from *Oxford Guide to Ideas and Issues of the Bible*)

You will generally find full bibliographical details at the start of the book (if it is an e-resource) or on the very first page if it is scanned material from a book. If you have any problem or need any more information as to the source of the reading, please contact Martin O'Kane (m.okane@tsd.ac.uk).

Historical Context

The chapter entitled 'History of Israel' in J. Barr (*History and Ideology in the Old Testament*) will raise issues about the ideology implicit in the historical perspectives championed by the biblical authors. Similarly, the chapter 'Legacy of Biblical Archaeology' in T.W. Davis (*Shifting Sands: the Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology*) discusses the controversial role archaeology has played in informing our understanding of the provenance of biblical texts. The chapter 'Historical Memories in the Patriarchal Narratives' in R.S. Hendel (*Remembering Abraham: Culture, Memory, History in the Hebrew Bible*)

highlights the important theme of historical continuity that the biblical authors wished to highlight.

Textual and Scribal Considerations:

A good place to start here is the chapter 'The Role of Scribes in the Transmission of Biblical Literature' in Fishbane (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*). You may find this chapter a little technical but it is important to browse through it, nevertheless. The chapter 'Schools and Libraries' in E.W.Heaton (*The School Tradition of the Old Testament*) explores the theory that much of biblical literature emerged from various schools with distinctive ideologies. Another worthwhile chapter is 'Fixing God's Torah' in D.P. Wright (*Inventing God's Law*).

Creation motifs:

There are two sources that offer perspectives on the creation stories that are probably new to you. These raise questions of the biblical texts and indicate the movements away from traditional historical criticism among contemporary biblical scholars. The first is the chapter 'The Cosmic Temple: Cosmogony according to Genesis 1:1-2:3' in Brown (*Seven Pillars of Creation*) and the second is the chapter and the second is the book L. Witham (*Where Darwin meets the Bible: Creationists and Evolutionists in America*) which you might simply like to browse through.

Anthropological approaches:

Finally it is important to be aware of the hugely significant and ground-breaking work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas. Try to read through 'Mountains, Tabernacle, Body in Leviticus' in Mary Douglas (*Leviticus as Literature*) and 'Jacob weeps for Joseph' in Mary Douglas, (*Jacob's Tears*).