

UNIT 3: INTRODUCTION

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

Your reading is directed as follows:

Overview: If this is your first opportunity to familiarise yourself with contemporary biblical scholarship on the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, you may wish to begin by reading some of the articles/chapters presenting an overview of and offering different approaches to the interpretation of the Pentateuch.

- Alter, Robert, 'A Peculiar Literature', *The World of Biblical Literature* (London: SPCK, 1992), 1-24.
- Clines, David J.A., 'Pentateuch', in Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (eds), *The Oxford Guide to Ideas and Issues of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 391-94.
- Freedman, David Noel, 'The Pentateuch', in John W. Rogerson and James D.G. Dunn (eds), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 25-31.
- O'Kane, Martin, 'The Hebrew Bible', in Anne Hession and Patricia Kieran (eds), *Exploring Theology* (Dublin: Veritas, 2007), 53-61.

Historical Context: Much attention has been given in biblical scholarship to the ideology implicit in the historical perspectives championed by the biblical authors and also to the controversial role played by archaeology in informing our understanding of the provenance of biblical texts.

On issues of ideology in relation to the Hebrew Bible, see

- Barr, James, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of the Millennium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially chapters 3, 4 and 5.

On biblical archaeology, see

- Davis, Thomas W., *Shifting Sands: The Rise and Fall of Biblical Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), especially chapters 4-5.

Textual and Scribal Considerations: A good place to start is the first chapter in Michael Fishbane's seminal work *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*:

- Fishbane, Michael, 'Introduction: The Role of Scribes in the Transmission of Biblical Literature', *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

See also key articles and essays exploring the theory that much of the biblical literature emerged from various schools with distinctive ideologies:

- Heaton, E.W., 'School and Libraries', *The School Tradition of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 2.
- Wright, David P., 'Introduction', *Inventing God's Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 1.

Anthropological approaches: It is important to be aware of the hugely significant and ground-breaking work of the anthropologist Mary Douglas. In particular, see:

- Douglas, Mary, 'Mountains, Tabernacle, Body in Leviticus 1-7', *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter 4.
- Douglas, Mary, 'Jacob Weeping for Joseph', *Jacob's Tears: The Priestly Work of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapter 2.