

The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible

Michael D. Coogan, ed. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 2 vols.: 1280 pp. \$295.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780195377378 (set).

The preface to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Books of the Bible* (*OEBB*) states that the designated audience is Biblical scholars, and college and university students (xxi). This encyclopedia is the first in a series of *Oxford Encyclopedias of the Bible*, each of which will focus on a specific theme in Biblical studies (xviii).

According to OUP's website, Editor in Chief Michael D. Coogan "is Director of Publications for the Harvard Semitic Museum, Lecturer on the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible at Harvard Divinity School, and Editor-in-Chief of *Oxford Biblical Studies Online*. Collaborative works that he conceived and edited include *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (4E), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, and *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*. His most recent book is *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (Oxford University Press, 2006)." The Editorial Board includes Marc Zvi Brettler of Brandeis University, Adele Reinhartz of the University of Ottawa, Daniel Schowalter of Carthage College, and Brent A. Strawn of Emory University, in addition to Dr. Coogan.

Contributors were drawn from around the globe. While the majority are North American, others come from Sweden, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Middle East. Contributor names familiar to this reviewer include Carol Newsom, David deSilva, Ehud Ben Zvi, M. Eugene Boring, and Charles A. Wannamaker. Some schools represented are Duke University, University of Oxford, Ashland Theological Seminary, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, University of Cape Town, Virginia Theological Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary.

The *OEBB* takes a comprehensive look at the books of the Bible. Canonical books of the Bible are discussed, but the content is not limited to canonical books. The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are included, as well as a variety of genres that were popular at the time of the writing of the books of the Bible. Examples include the articles "Apocalypses," "Prayers and Hymns," and "Testaments." The comprehensive scope of the *OEBB* is evidenced by articles on various translations and arrangements of the Bible that were not accepted as conventional to mainstream Protestants. One example is an article devoted to the discussion of the Samaritan Pentateuch. Translations covered include the Peshitta, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate. The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pesharim each have their own entries.

A very helpful feature of this resource is a set of comparison charts of Biblical canons, outlining the similarities and differences among six groups: Jewish, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Slavonic (Russian Orthodox), and Ethiopian Orthodox. The charts are separated into the categories of Books of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, Apocryphal Books and Appendixes, and Books of the New Testament. This comparison chart is found in volume 1, along with a List of Articles, a list of Maps and Charts, the preface, and eight pages of abbreviations used in the work. Volume 1 also includes articles from Acts to LXX.

Volume 2 contains articles from 1 Maccabees to Zephaniah, as well as the list of contributors to the work (mentioned previously), a topical outline, and an index. The topical outline of the *OEBB* is on pages 475-478 of

volume 2, and is very illuminating as it shows the conceptual framework behind the topics covered in the work. The *OEBB* also features an extensive index of almost one hundred pages, an unusual feature in an alphabetically arranged, topically focused work.

A basic framework for the shape of the articles to which the authors were to adhere is set out in the preface (xix). Nine outline points are included: name and meaning of the book in both English and original language(s); canonical status; authorship; date of composition and historical context; literary history; structure and contents; interpretation; reception history; and bibliography. Many of the articles have more numerous and more detailed sub-sections, depending on the complexity of the subject. Articles can also include See Also references, pointing the reader to other topics of interest.

The article on Genesis by David M. Carr gives the reader a representative view of the scope of the articles. The name of the book is discussed, as is the book's place in the canonical history of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions. The structure of Genesis as divided into primeval history (chapters 1-11) and ancestral history (chapters 12-50) is expounded, along with what makes the Genesis primeval history different from other ancient texts. The primeval history section is defined by correlations drawn between creation stories and flood or uncreation stories, while the ancestral history section is outlined by the growth of the family of Abraham. Parallels to oral folk stories are noted here. The "Table of the Nations" map details place and nation names in the narrative. The authorship of Genesis is discussed, along with the date of composition, historical contexts, and literary history of the book. The history of the interpretation of the book is followed by a section on the reception history of the book. A unique feature of the *OEBB* discusses how Genesis was portrayed in visual art through the centuries, as well as how the book has been portrayed in other secular art, such as in *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat* (332). This section of the article also discusses the curse of Ham and its perceived implications for Africa, and the place of Genesis in the ongoing dialog of faith in the modern world. The article concludes with a two-page bibliography divided into three sections: The Formation of Genesis and Historical Issues; The Shape and Interpretation of Genesis; and History of Interpretation and Interpretive Issues.

A quick glance through the volumes of the *OEBB* shows extensive bibliographies to the articles, some of which are broken into sections. The article on "Septuagint and other Greek Translations" by Emanuel Tov divides the bibliography into primary sources and secondary sources. The latter category is further broken down into four categories: general; retroversion and translation technique; revisions; and the Greek versions and Christianity. Some of the Protestant canonical book articles separate commentaries from other sources listed, while others provide one comprehensive list. The bibliography to the article on "Jeremiah" by Carolyn G. Sharp goes a step further with an annotated bibliography.

A review of this work would not be complete without discussing the relationship of the *OEBB* to the Oxford Biblical Studies Online. While many articles in the *OEBB* are included in Oxford Biblical Studies Online, not all of them are. Articles on books of the Bible are included, while some articles such as the "Nag Hammadi Library," "Pesharim," and the "Samaritan Pentateuch" are not. A helpful addition to the online version of the articles is the hyperlinking of Scripture references to their associated passages. Some of the images and maps are included in Oxford Biblical Studies Online; however, not all of them are, and when included, many need to be searched for separately. For example, the "Genesis" article is included in its entirety, including images and tables present in the article, but the "Table of Nations" map is not included, nor is it hyperlinked to the "Genesis" article. However, it can be found under the "Browse Images and Maps" tab. Much of the non-article information from the *OEBB* has

not been added to the Oxford Biblical Studies Online resource, including the comparison table of Biblical Canons, the list of contributors, the topical outline of the contents, directory of contributors, or the index. Individual libraries will need to make their own decision about whether this excluded information is worth the cost of the print or not. It is worth noting that the binding of the volumes does not seem to be of the highest quality. Perhaps it would be a worthy investment to have the books rebound in standard library binding.

This reviewer was initially skeptical about the profitability of adding this reference work to a seminary library collection, as there are many reference works on the books of the Bible. However, the breadth and depth of the *OEBB* changed her mind. The *OEBB* brings together topics that are not always easily found in one source, making this reference material invaluable for a broad overview of the topic, particularly for researchers unaccustomed to thinking outside of the Protestant canonical box. The extensive bibliographies will help to point researchers to quality resources for further study and edification.

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