

A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible

Hans M. Barstad, trans. Rannfrid Thelle

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, vii + 229 pp., £19.99, pb; ISBN 9780664233259

RÉSUMÉ

Ce bref guide de la Bible hébraïque constitue une introduction accessible et stimulante à la littérature de l'Ancien Testament et à l'histoire des études scientifiques qui lui ont été consacrées. Le livre n'est pas organisé selon le canon juif ou chrétien, mais selon les catégories des milieux académiques. Il apporte aussi une réflexion de base sur une herméneutique responsable, avec des excursus traitant une variété de sujets intéressants et utiles. Il contient un glossaire des termes historiques, littéraires et scientifiques. Bien que rédigé à l'intention d'étudiants, il sera utile aux membres d'Église, aux pasteurs, aux enseignants qui ne sont pas des spécialistes et aux étudiants en quête d'une rapide vue d'ensemble de la littérature vétérotestamentaire et de l'état de la recherche.

SUMMARY

A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible introduces the reader to the literature of the Old Testament and the history of scholarship pertaining to it in an accessible and engaging way. The book is not organised according to Christian or Jewish canon order but by scholarly categories. This book also functions as a primer in responsible hermeneutics with excursions on a variety of interesting and helpful topics. It includes a glossary of historical, literary and scholarly terms. While intended for undergraduate students, this book is useful for lay people, pastors, non-specialist scholars and graduate students in Old Testament who desire a quick overview of Old Testament literature and scholarship.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ein kurzer Wegweiser zur Hebräischen Bibel führt den Leser auf leicht zugängliche und gewinnende Weise in die Literatur des Alten Testaments und die dazugehörige Forschungsgeschichte ein. Die Abhandlung ist nicht nach dem christlichen oder jüdischen Kanon aufgebaut, sondern folgt wissenschaftlichen Kategorien. Sie dient ebenfalls als Einführung in eine verlässliche Hermeneutik mit Exkursen zu zahlreichen interessanten und förderlichen Themen. Das Buch beinhaltet ein Glossar mit historischen, literarischen und wissenschaftlichen Termini. Ursprünglich für Studenten gedacht, stellt das Werk auch eine nützliche Hilfe für Laien, Pastoren, Wissenschaftler aus anderen Disziplinen und Jungakademiker im Bereich Altes Testament dar, die einen raschen Überblick über die Literatur und Forschung im AT gewinnen wollen.

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A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible by Hans Barstad introduces the reader to the literature of the Old Testament and the history of scholarship pertaining to it. It is intended to function as an undergraduate textbook but its usefulness extends well beyond that context. It

differs from other comparable books is in its organisation. Most Old Testament surveys are arranged according to the order of the Christian canon or according to the tripartite Hebrew organisation of Torah, Prophets and Writings. Barstad chooses to present the literature according to scholarly categories: the Priestly History (Genesis through Numbers), the Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy through 2 Kings, excluding Ruth), the Chronicler history (1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah), Prophetic Literature, Poetry and Wisdom Literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) and Novellas (Jonah, Ruth, Esther).

After a brief first chapter covering some preliminary issues (manuscript evidence, languages, the process of canonisation), Barstad divides his treatment of historical narrative into three groups: the Priestly, Deuteronomistic and Chronicler histories. In each chapter he not only summarises the individual books, but more significantly he deals with them as groups. Though he discusses Genesis through Numbers as a unified work under the title 'Priestly History', he makes a distinction between this title and the P source of the Documentary Hypothesis, of which he is sceptical. He regards Genesis through Numbers as a unified 'Priestly History' because the work as a whole seems to address priestly concerns. This chapter contains an excellent summary of Pentateuch scholarship since Wellhausen.

Chapters three and four, the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler histories, introduce the reader to standard scholarly opinions and their associated problems. The discussion of opinions pertaining to the Deuteronomistic History could, perhaps, have been a little more developed. Although Barstad disagrees with Noth's single redactor theory, he discusses neither post-Noth theories nor the current scepticism over the very existence of a Deuteronomistic History – but entire books are written for just that purpose. Instead, he points out some of the most important themes that distinguish the Deuteronomistic History, like covenant and holy war. Similarly, his focus in chapter four is on what unifies and differentiates the Chronicler history (including Ezra and Nehemiah) from the Deuteronomistic history.

The chapter on the Prophets is particularly praiseworthy. Barstad, a leading expert in Israelite and comparative ancient near eastern prophetic literature, ably guides the reader through issues of form, content, dating and historicity in an accessible way. This chapter is also an especially good introduction to the relevance of non-Israelite prophetic literature. Curiously, he includes the book of Daniel in this chapter. In the Christian canon, Daniel comes after Ezekiel, but the Hebrew canon places it in the Writings, not the Prophets. Daniel is unlike the other prophetic books in that it is made up of folk-tales and apocalyptic, not oracles against nations and other common prophetic genres. Furthermore, Jonah, a constituent member of the Twelve (which has been subject to final form criticism as a whole), is discussed in another chapter. Either decision could be justified by

itself, but since Jonah is separated because of content, why is Daniel not also kept separate? Regardless of this, Barstad deals with both books intelligently in their respective places.

The chapter on Poetic and Wisdom Literature is, again, replete not only with up-to-date insights about the literature itself but also with a survey of the history of scholarship. Barstad is especially thorough in his treatment of the Psalms (23 pages). A short chapter covering Jonah, Ruth and Esther finishes the book.

More than a mere survey of the books of the Old Testament, this book also functions as a primer in responsible hermeneutics. Throughout, Barstad argues that older critical methods, while still applicable and helpful, are insufficient in and of themselves. The current diversity of methods, including especially final form literary analysis, is a necessary and beneficial development. The book is sprinkled with helpful excurses (not so named) on topics like the 'The Bible and Archaeology', 'The Deuteronomistic History and History' and 'Prophecy as a Phenomenon', which correct common misunderstandings and misuses of the Old Testament, and which are invariably fascinating. The end matter includes a glossary of historical, literary and scholarly terms which is a treasure in and of itself.

While intended for undergraduate students, *A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible* contains an astounding amount of information in comparatively little space, making it useful for laypeople, pastors, scholars not specialising in Old Testament and graduate students in Old Testament who want a quick and accessible overview of Old Testament scholarship. Barstad manages to encompass and distil the bewildering diversity of contemporary scholarship and present it in a way that is both understandable and engaging for the non-specialist.

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A Basic Introduction to Biblical Hebrew

Jo Ann Hackett

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2010; xxv + 302 pp., £26.99, hb; ISBN 978-1-59856-028-2

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Jo Ann Hacketts *Elementare Einführung ins Bibelhebräische* stellt eine klar geschriebene und kreative Grammatik des Bibelhebräischen dar, die in einem Semester vermittelt werden kann. Sie bringt traditionelle Lehrmethoden auf den neuesten Stand und verbessert sie mit Hilfe origineller Beiträge. Hacketts Grammatik ist deduktiv, aber sie folgt einer natürlichen Anordnung und besitzt somit viele Vorteile eines induktiven Ansatzes. Die Autorin vermeidet es, den Studenten mit Fachausdrücken zu überfrachten, aber sie lehrt traditionell anspruchsvolle Konzepte, wenn dies einem besseren Verständnis dient. Zwei Besonderheiten dieser Grammatik bestehen zum einen in Hacketts Termi-

nus für die *wayyiqtol* Form (konsekutives Präteritum) und zum anderen in der Anführung von Verbparadigmen, die mit der grammatischen Form der ersten Person beginnen statt der dritten. Diese ausgezeichnete Grammatik umfasst nützliche Appendices und eine CD-Rom mit Aussprachehilfen zu hebräischen Wörtern.

SUMMARY

Jo Ann Hackett's *A Basic Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* is a clearly written and fresh one semester Biblical Hebrew grammar, updating and improving traditional teaching methods with some original contributions. Hackett's grammar is deductive, but it is organised intuitively and so has many of the advantages of the inductive approach. She avoids overwhelming the student with technicalities but teaches traditionally advanced concepts when they aid comprehension. Two unique features of the grammar are Hackett's term for the *wayyiqtol* form (consecutive preterite) and the presentation of verb paradigms starting with first person forms instead of third person forms. This excellent grammar includes helpful appendices and a CD-ROM with audio pronunciations of Hebrew words.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette première introduction à l'hébreu biblique contient une présentation claire et novatrice de la grammaire de cette langue, mettant à jour et améliorant les méthodes traditionnelles d'enseignement avec des apports originaux. Cette grammaire est déductive, mais étant organisée intuitivement, présente bien des avantages de l'approche inductive. L'auteur a su éviter de submerger l'étudiant de points techniques mais expose les notions qu'on présente traditionnellement lorsque celles-ci aident à la compréhension. On peut signaler deux éléments originaux de cette grammaire : la désignation de la forme *wayyiqtol* comme un prétérit consécutif, et l'arrangement des paradigmes verbaux en commençant par la première personne au lieu de la troisième. Des appendices utiles et un CD-ROM donnant la prononciation des mots hébreux sous forme audio accompagnent cette excellente grammaire.

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Jo Ann Hackett's *A Basic Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* is an outstanding addition to the range of introductory Hebrew grammars. Clearly and concisely written, it approaches teaching Biblical Hebrew from an original (if, at times, idiosyncratic) angle, updating and improving traditional methods.

Hackett's grammar is designed for one semester (10 or 15 weeks, three or two lessons per week). Reading mechanics are covered in the first six chapters, nouns, pronouns and adjectives in chapters seven through eleven, and verbs from chapter twelve on. Other parts of speech are scattered throughout the book. The fact that the mechanics of reading and pronunciation occupy the first six chapters means that, if the schedule of two to three lessons per week were rigidly kept, this would take up two to three weeks, which seems excessive. As Hackett predicts in her introduction, however, instructors will