

Cambridge University Press
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Edited by Thomas B. Dozeman
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METHODS FOR EXODUS

Methods for Exodus is a textbook on biblical methodology. The book introduces readers to six distinct methodologies that aid in the interpretation of the book of Exodus: literary and rhetorical, genre, source and redaction, liberation, feminist, and postcolonial criticisms. Describing each methodology, the volume also explores how the different methods relate to and complement one another. Each chapter includes a summary of the hermeneutical presuppositions of a particular method with a summary of the impact of the method on the interpretation of the book of Exodus. In addition, Exodus 1–2 and 19–20 are used to illustrate the application of each method to specific texts. The book is unique in offering a broad methodological discussion with all illustrations centered on the book of Exodus.

Thomas B. Dozeman is professor of theology at the United Theological Seminary in Dayton. He has written extensively on the book of Exodus and the Pentateuch in general and is the author of *God on the Mountain: A Study of Redaction, Theology and Canon in Exodus 19–24*; *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition*; *The Commentary on Numbers* in the New Interpreters Bible; *The Commentary on Exodus* in the Eerdmans' Critical Commentary series; *Holiness and Ministry: A Biblical Theology of Ordination*, and, with Konrad Schmid, *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Interpretation of the Pentateuch in Contemporary European Scholarship*.

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METHODS IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

The *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* (MBI) series introduces students and general readers to both older and emerging methodologies for understanding the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. Newer methods brought about by the globalization of biblical studies and by concerns with the “world in front of the text” – like new historicism, feminist criticism, postcolonial/liberationist criticism, and rhetorical criticism – are well represented in the series. “Classical” methods that fall under the more traditional historical-critical banner – such as source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism – are also covered, though always with an understanding of how their interactions with emerging methodologies and new archaeological discoveries have affected their interpretive uses.

An MBI volume contains separate chapters from six different well-known scholars. Each scholar first elucidates the history and purposes of an interpretive method, then outlines the promise of the method in the context of a single biblical book, and finally shows the method “in action” by applying it to a specific biblical passage. The results serve as a primer for understanding different methods within the shared space of common texts, enabling real, comparative analysis for students, clergy, and anyone interested in a deeper and broader understanding of the Bible. A glossary of key terms, the translation of all ancient languages, and an annotated bibliography – arranged by method – help new, serious readers navigate the difficult but rewarding field of biblical interpretation.

Volumes in the series

Methods for Exodus, edited by Thomas B. Dozeman
Methods for the Psalms, edited by Esther Marie Menn
Methods for Matthew, edited by Mark Allan Powell
Methods for Luke, edited by Joel B. Green

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THOMAS B. DOZEMAN
United Theological Seminary



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Contributors

Suzanne Boorer, Senior Lecturer in Old Testament Theology, Murdoch University

Thomas B. Dozeman, Professor, Old Testament, United Theological Seminary

Dennis T. Olson, Charles T. Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology, Biblical Studies, Princeton Theological Seminary

Jorge Pixley, Seminario Teologico Bautista-Managua

Kenton L. Sparks, Professor of Biblical Studies, Eastern University

Naomi Steinberg, Associate Professor, Religious Studies, DePaul University

Gale A. Yee, Nancy W. King Professor of Biblical Studies, Episcopal Divinity School

Preface: Methods in Biblical Interpretation

BACKGROUND

From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1980s, the historical-critical method dominated the study of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. A legacy of J. P. Gabler, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Julius Wellhausen, and their immediate intellectual heirs as well as of philologists studying nonbiblical ancient texts, the historical-critical method can best be understood as an unproblematic quest for the provenance of scripture. A product of Enlightenment thinking, it attempts to find the “true,” original political and social contexts in which the Bible was created, redacted, and first heard and read.

The “linguistic turn” – or, the use-and-abuse of different critical theoretical approaches to texts – was relatively late coming in the scholarly interpretation of the Bible. When, in the 1970s, biblical scholars began experimenting with methodologies borrowed from philosophy, anthropology, and literary studies, the results were at times creative and invigorating, as theoreticians demonstrated how biblical texts could yield new ethical, political, aesthetic, and theological meanings. Sometimes, valuable older interpretations that had been effaced for many years by historical-critical concerns were recovered. Frequently, however, the results also could be painfully derivative and the authors’ motivations transparent. Students’ and scholars’ strange vocabulary and obfuscations couldn’t hide unexamined political and theological (or antitheological) commitments.

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Thanks to the globalization of biblical studies and the emergence of concerns rooted in issues related to ethnicity, gender, economics, and cultural history, the quest for the Bible's meaning has intensified and proliferated. Both within the academy and within a larger, more interconnected, religiously inquisitive world, the methodologies used to study biblical texts have multiplied and become more rigorous and sophisticated. Their borders may be porous, as a single scholar may work with two or more methodologies, but several schools of criticism in biblical studies are now established and growing. Interest in new historicism, feminist criticism, rhetorical criticism, postcolonial/liberationist criticism, and several other methodologies that focus on the "world in front of the text" consistently has provided paradigm-shifting questions as well as contingent, but compelling, answers. This is not to say that older historical-critical scholarship has simply evaporated. Most scholarship in the United States, and an even larger majority of work done in Europe, still falls comfortably under the historical-critical banner. So, the practice of "Classic" historical approaches, like source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism, is still widespread, though much of their findings have been altered by coming into contact with the emerging methodologies as well as by new archaeological discoveries.

RATIONALE

What, then, is needed at this time is a group of short books that would introduce the best work from within these various schools of criticism to seminarians, graduate students, scholars, and interested clergy. *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* aims to fill that need.

The key to reaching the full, wider spectrum of this readership is to build these books around the most widely studied books of the Bible, using the best possible writers and scholars to explain and even advocate for a given perspective. That is, rather than long, separate introductions to methodological "schools," like Postcolonial Criticism, Rhetorical Criticism, Source Criticism, and so on, *Methods in Biblical Interpretation* publishes separate, shorter texts on the most popular biblical books of the canon, with chapters from six leading proponents of different schools of interpretation.

DESCRIPTION

In order to make the volumes truly introductory, comparative, *and* original, each of the chapters is divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter introduces to students the given method, a bit of its history, and its suitability and promise for the entire book under discussion. This part gestures toward various ideas and possibilities of how this particular methodological approach might interact at various points with the biblical book.

The second part of the chapter, building on the background material presented in the first, then shows the method “in action,” so to speak. It achieves that by asking each contributor to focus this second part of the chapter on one of two passages from within the biblical book. The comparative and pedagogical value of this second section of each chapter allows students to view different methods’ interactions with the same biblical verses.

The two-part chapters offer opportunities for scholars both to explain a methodology to students and then to demonstrate its effectiveness and cogency, that is, the chapters do not merely offer bland, shallow overviews of how a theory might work. Subjective, opinionated scholarship, especially in the second half of each chapter, is in full display. Authors, however, also have written their contributions for a student and general audience, and thus have explained and distilled theoretical insights for the uninitiated. So, lucidity and accessibility are equally manifest.

Each of the *Methods of Biblical Interpretation* volumes also contains an annotated bibliography, arranged by methodology, and placed at the end of the book. Such material, as well as a short glossary, provides students with tools to understand the application of any given theory or methodology and further investigate the history of its development.

It is not desired, nor probably even possible, to have the same methodologies included in every volume of the series. Certain biblical books lend themselves much more easily to certain forms of criticism (e.g., rhetorical criticism and Paul’s letters; narrative criticism and the synoptic Gospels). Therefore, there is some flexibility on which methods will be included in a volume. The selected methods depend, of course, on the choice of

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contributors and are determined by the volume editor in consultation with Cambridge University Press. Such flexibility helps ensure that the best people, writing the most exciting and compelling scholarship, are contributing to germane volumes. Following these considerations, the series aims to have half of the essays closely related to historical-critical work and half devoted to more recently emerging methodologies.

It is hoped that these carefully structured volumes will provide students and others with both a sense of the excitement involved in such a wide spectrum of approaches to the Bible and a guide for fully making use of them.