

CONCERNING BIBLE DICTIONARIES

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In Hebrew Bible: History of Interpretation (HBHI),^[1] Hayes and his coworkers integrate a history of Jewish and Christian studies of the Hebrew Bible (HB), book-by-book and section-by-section. Abingdon Press sought the following emphases: (1) articles to include paragraphs demonstrating that earlier HB passages are interpreted in later HB sections, (2) inclusion of Jewish interpretation history, (3) articles featuring Jewish contributors, (4) articles about Deuteronomistic document criticism, Poetic criticism, Prophetic criticism, Pentateuchal document criticism, and criticism of the Decalogue, and (5) contributors who incorporate Islamic interpretation, as well. Contributors to HBHI include HB scholars associated with the Restoration Movement such as these: W. C. Gwaltney, Jr. (Milligan College), “Lamentations;” R. R. Marrs (Pepperdine University), “Obadiah;” M. E. Shields (Drury College), “Haggai;” and J. T. Willis (Abilene Christian University), “Micah”.

Abingdon published a two-volume Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation in 1999. As HB students required greater economy and usability, Abingdon broke one Dictionary into three: Methods of Biblical Interpretation (2004), New Testament: History of Interpretation (2004), and HBHI (2004). Each, a separate collection of scholars’ articles from the two-volume collection, focuses on issues treated by critical and exegetical scholars among early Christian fathers, medieval exegetes, Reformation interpreters, and modern critics. The present assessment of the forty-one HBHI articles may yield an indication of the kinds of scholarship that Hebrew Bible students can expect publishers of Bible dictionaries to emphasize, de-emphasize, mention, marginalize, or omit.

HBHI, like other recent publications, lacks balance. Nineteenth and twentieth century commentaries and critical interpretations from some Christian viewpoints are de-emphasized, barely mentioned, marginalized, or omitted. In HBHI, contributors to most of the articles repeatedly cite, for example, Wellhausen’s criticisms and the work of his disciples; no contributor cites, for example, Wiseman’s case for a literary unity of Genesis. For another example, employing the deuteronomistic historian hypothesis – as if fact, disciples of Wellhausen and Noth discern a deuteronomistic history “very different from that of Noth” and “distinct in its conception” from other disciples of Noth (A.D.H. Mayes, 330); contributors to HBHI de-emphasize, marginalize, or omit examples of spiritual-historical-grammatical criticism and interpretation.

What does an assessment of publications like HBHI signal for HB (and other Biblical) studies? A continuation of the following seems likely:

^[1] John H. Hayes, ed. (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), xxiv, 366 pages. \$40.00.

1. De-emphasizing, marginalizing, or omitting orthodox-classical-traditional interpretations (such as spiritual-historical-grammatical interpretation) that place confidence in the received HB text
2. Preferring un-substantiatable and conflicting schemes of text evolution rather than the excellently preserved and critically examined received HB text (much better text evidence than 150 years ago when text evolution schemes were hatched)
3. Bowing the knee to failed hypotheses: document, fragment, supplement, and redaction schemes^[2]
4. Deferring to Jewish HB text treatments and embracing Islamic HB text mistreatments while ignoring evangelical HB text scholarship
5. Marginalizing evangelical HB exegesis and commentary.

HBHI offers a large bibliographic tool for seminary and university classes in HB, courses on BI, and student preparation for graduate exams and theses. The HBHI list of abbreviations, alone, includes more than ninety rabbinical works, more than five hundred reference works, serials, and periodicals, and thousands of books and commentaries. To tap the wealth of evangelical HB scholarship, though, students must look elsewhere.

Christian professors and scholars with opportunities to contribute articles to Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries well support serious HB studies (and other Biblical studies) when they include works that (1) rely on the received HB text to reach orthodox-classical-traditional interpretations, (2) explore interpretations that reject schemes of text evolution, or (3) adopt views such as spiritual-historical-grammatical interpretations.

^[2] JEPD, JEDP, JEHPD, . . . JRjERjeDRjedPRjedp, et. al.