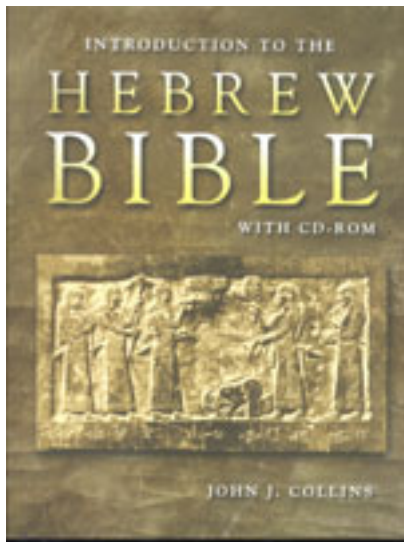


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**Collins, John J.**

***Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: With CD-ROM***

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. Pp. xii + 613 + 20 black-and-white images + thirteen maps. Paper. \$49.00. ISBN 0800629914.

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Biblical research, especially on the Torah and the Prophets, has been confronted with major changes and challenges since the last three decades, so that a new *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* is most welcome. Students are indeed often disoriented in the jungle of the present scholarly discussion. Professor Collins deserves all the more admiration for his effort to produce this introduction in spite of the challenging task of an individual scholar keeping in touch with all aspects of the debate.

In spite of the title of this book, Collins actually deals with the Greek Bible, since he also presents the so-called “deuterocanonical” books. The organization of the major parts of the book almost conforms to the threefold organization of the Hebrew Bible. The only difference is that the Prophets are split into two parts: “Deuteronomistic History” (the Former Prophets) and “Prophets” (the Latter Prophets). However, the order of the biblical books discussed is somewhat puzzling. The book of Jonah appears in the Writings together with Ruth, Esther, Tobit, and Judith, whereas Lamentations figures under prophecy (together with Jeremiah, who is traditionally regarded as his author). Collins apparently tries a compromise between the canonical order and a historical presentation (especially in the case of the prophetic books, which are organized according to the supposed date of the prophet). Since the *Introduction* ends with Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch and starts with Genesis, the reader might be compelled to draw the (wrong) conclusion that Genesis is the oldest book of the Hebrew Bible. Professor

Collins, of course, does not suggest this idea; nevertheless, his attempt to combine a presentation following the canonical order of the books and another according to their date of composition seems to this reviewer a bit problematic.

The book opens with general remarks about the difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament of the Protestant and Catholic churches; Collins also offers some remarks about the relation between “Bible” and “history” as well as about the exegetical methods. At the end of this first chapter Collins states: “This introduction is written in the belief that the best guide to the literary character of the biblical text is the comparative literature of the ancient Near East” (19). Consequently, the presentation of the Pentateuch includes a first chapter about the Near Eastern context (especially about the religions of the Levant, Mesopotamia, and Egypt). This chapter is followed by a very brief survey of pentateuchal scholarship. As to the present state of debate, Collins seems to maintain the Documentary Hypothesis, although in a rather moderate version. He seems to consider J not so much an author as a redactional process, which may comprise several successive editions and thus cover a quite long period of “Yahwistic” scribal activity. He does not believe it possible “to reconstruct J and E” but considers that “P and D, in contrast, correspond to well-defined blocks of text and present clear and well-developed theologies” (64). In this reviewer’s opinion, Collins also sounds somewhat too fatalistic as regards the issue of the publication of the Torah; he describes rather laconically the final editors of the Pentateuch as “Deuteronomists, priests, or whoever they may have been” (63).

Collins does not present the five books of the Pentateuch but offers the following organization: “Primeval History”; “The Patriarchs”; “The Exodus From Egypt”; “The Revelation at Sinai”; “The Priestly Theology” (Exod 20–40; Leviticus; Numbers); and “Deuteronomy.” This organization already shows that he deals with the Priestly and Deuteronomistic elements of the Pentateuch mainly in the last two chapters. But is it really possible to characterize the entire book of Numbers as “Priestly”? Collins himself admits that this book contains non-Priestly texts, which he describes as “older traditions” (153). The reviewer is less certain for his part whether all non-Priestly texts in Numbers are necessarily older than the Priestly material. But Collins also deals with P in the presentation of the Primeval History, where he discusses separately the Yahwistic and the Priestly versions of the creation. Interestingly, Collins argues that the J version is quite late and that most of its themes and motifs “can be more easily explained in an exilic context or later” (75). How this observation can be combined with a more traditional dating of J in the case of the other books of the Torah remains, however, unclear. As for the patriarchal narratives, Collins adheres to the common view that the J account started in Gen 12:1. He rightly underlines the fact that the ideological character of the non-Priestly patriarchal narratives is quite different from that of Deuteronomy and of P, and

he concludes from this observation “that the stories first took shape before the rise of the monarchy” (88), a conclusion that the reviewer finds difficult to share. Collins also correctly underlines the difference of the Joseph story in regard to the other narratives in Genesis and advocates a very late origin for this story, since according to him, “the best parallels are provided by Herodotus and later Greek writers.” The chapter on Exod 1–15 is mainly a description of the narrative, except in the case of the story of the crossing of the Sea, where Collins presents the supposed earliest Yahwistic version (117). In the chapter dealing with Exod 16–24; 32–34, Collins focuses on the Decalogue and the Covenant Code. He remains cautious as to the date of the latter; the only evidence is that the Covenant Code is earlier than the Decalogue and Deuteronomy. (Collins neither discusses nor addresses John Van Seters’s recent challenge of this opinion.) Collins must also be praised for paying much attention to the book of Leviticus, which is rather infrequent in Old Testament introductions written by Christian scholars. He similarly offers a fine description of Deuteronomy and of its formation, including a good discussion of the Assyrian treaty parallels. Collins argues convincingly that the first edition of Deuteronomy can hardly be earlier than the time of Josiah (170). The interesting appendix dealing with the relationship between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code concludes with the idea that “there is good reason to think that the books of Genesis through Numbers were edited by Priestly writers. Deuteronomy, in contrast, was originally linked with the historical books that follow it” (177–78). These books are presented as “The Deuteronomistic History,” but the only introduction to this scholarly hypothesis is to be found in the three first pages of the chapter dealing with the book of Joshua. Given the importance of this hypothesis, but also the growing challenges to it today, a separate chapter would have been more appropriate.

The chapter on Joshua mainly contains a summary of the different views about the historicity of the conquest and a short summary about the Deuteronomistic redactions of the book; curiously, Collins also considers Josh 24 to be “Deuteronomic,” in spite of several recent studies that appear to have established the post-Deuteronomistic location of this text. In his presentation of Judges, Collins emphasizes the Deuteronomistic character of the book, in contrast to the two books of Samuel, which, quite astonishingly, he discusses in two separate chapters. Since these books are intrinsically linked to each other, it is difficult to understand this decision. At any rate, Collins observes that these two books do not reveal the same strong Deuteronomistic pattern that can be found in Judges and Kings (218), and he concludes from this that the positive accounts of the rise of monarchy are older material that could easily have been taken over in the time of Josiah, whereas the critical texts about kingship stem from Deuteronomistic redactors of the exilic and Persian periods (223). The chapter devoted to 2 Samuel contains an excursus on the royal ideology of Judah. Collins argues that the Judean royal ideology

until the Deuteronomic reform was quite close to the conception of the king's role in the ancient Near East. The two books of Kings are separated as "1 Kings 1–16" and "1 Kings 12 [*sic*]-2 Kings 25." In the latter chapter, Collins deals mainly with the prophetic records, which he considers to have been integrated into the book by Deuteronomistic redactors, as well as with the end of Israel and Judah. He interprets the last verses of 2 Kgs 25 as a "positive note" (278).

There is no special introduction to prophets and prophetic literature, except in the chapter on Amos and Hosea, which contains a short introduction to prophecy in the ancient East and in Israel. Collins organizes the presentation the prophets as follows: "Amos and Hosea"; "Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah"; "The Babylonian Era: Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Lamentations"; "The Exilic Period: Ezekiel and Obadiah"; "The Additions to the Book of Isaiah" (Isa. 40–66; 24–27); and "Postexilic Prophecy: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Joel." This alleged chronological order is somewhat problematic. As indicated above, this sequence follows not the canonical order of the books but the alleged chronological order of the prophet to whom each book is attributed. It is thus hardly surprising that one finds in these chapters only few remarks about the formation of the prophetic books. Rather, the focus is almost exclusively on the personality of the prophets, as is shown, for instance, in the following quotation: "Ezekiel differs from other prophets in the prominence of his priestly concerns. . . . Like Jeremiah, he has a distinct persona that emerges in the book, but it is a different persona from that of his contemporary" (355). This approach is somewhat at odds with the major trends of research on prophetic books, which have recognized for several years that investigation should start with the book and not with the "prophetic individual." There is only one page added to the last chapter that deals with the twelve Minor Prophets as a book; according to Collins, the most prominent common trait of the Twelve is their eschatological concern (422).

The last part, devoted to "The Writings," opens with a chapter on Ezra and Nehemiah, followed by the presentation of the books of Chronicles. The books are considered to be "close in time to the later prophets" (427). Collins is not convinced by the idea of the "Chronicler's History." In Chronicles, he does not find any trace of Hellenistic influence (459); this opinion is not shared by all the specialists of these books (Knoppers, Welten). Psalms and the Songs of Song (but not Lamentations) are presented together in the following chapter. Here Collins pays much attention to the theology of the Psalms. The next two chapters deal with the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible and the books of Proverbs, Job, and Qoheleth. Judean wisdom literature can be traced back to the time of Hezekiah, at which time the oldest chapters of Proverbs would have been written. As for Job, the prose tale cannot be earlier than the sixth century B.C.E. Collins does not specify how he understands the relation between the prose narratives and the dialogues and

monologues in the center of the book. Qoheleth is located in the Hellenistic period, but the “exact dating [of the other wisdom books] is not crucial here” (519). The chapter on the “Hebrew Short Story” deals with Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Tobit, and Judith. All these books should be dated in the postexilic era (in regard to Ruth, Collins does not accept the view that this story was composed as a polemic against Ezra; see 533). The chapter dealing with Daniel and 1-2 Maccabees also offers a short introduction to apocalyptic literature and the troublesome situation in Judea during Hellenistic domination. The final section on the deuterocanonical wisdom books provides the reader with information on Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch; according to Collins, these books make the greatest theological difference between the (Catholic) Old Testament and the Hebrew Bible (581).

This introduction is well presented and easy to read. Several maps and illustrations, as well as a concise glossary, reinforce the value of the book (unfortunately, the organization of the maps, which start with “the world of the patriarchs” and end with “the Greek Empire,” fosters the idea of the existence of a historical patriarchal period). As to the accompanying CD-ROM, it probably contains useful pedagogical tools, but the reviewer was unfortunately never able to install the software that it contains, even with the help of a specialist. Each chapter concludes with a selective bibliography entitled “For Further Reading”; Collins provides for every title a short but very helpful comment about its purpose. The reader will also find a strong emphasis on theological and ethical concerns, which is rather unusual in an introduction to the Hebrew Bible (see, e.g., the remarks about the condemnation of homosexuality in Lev 18 and 20 [149–51] or the moral problem of the conquest [193–95]). For the beginner, this book is a valuable entry into the world of the Old Testament; however, the advanced students should supplement the information given here, especially as regards the redactional history of Old Testament literature as well as the social locations of its authors.