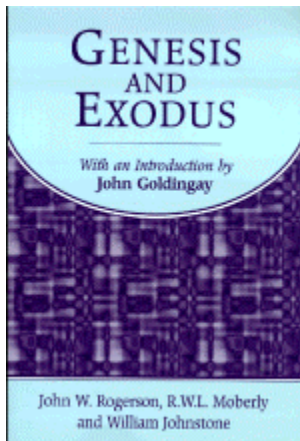


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Rogerson, John, R.W.L. Moberly, and William Johnstone

Genesis and Exodus

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001. Pp. 289,
Paperback, \$27.95, ISBN 1841271918.
Introduction by John Goldingay

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Almost twenty years ago JSOT Press brought an innovation to the publication of introductions to biblical literature. Departing from the traditional one-volume magisterial opus produced by a single author, the editors of this new series invited noteworthy British scholars to each create a brief introduction to a single biblical book (or to several smaller books treated independently) that would be published as its own volume in the series. The resulting volumes were published in the 1980's and 90's as Sheffield's "Old Testament Guides" and "New Testament Guides." For students of the Bible the benefits were obvious: they could now consult, on a book-by-book basis, an up-to-date introductory reference produced by a scholar who had extensive research experience in that particular biblical document. From a marketing standpoint one might conclude that JSOT benefited as well from this new approach, presumably selling far more units (albeit at lower prices) than by publishing fewer of a more expensive traditional OT or NT introduction.

Through the new "Biblical Guides" series Sheffield Academic Press is re-publishing the excellent JSOT series in a new format that adds value to its predecessor through the following features: 1) publication of previously separate introductions together in canonical association—in this case *Genesis 1-11* by J.W. Rogerson, *Genesis 12-50* by R.W.L. Moberly, and *Exodus* by William Johnstone; 2) updated bibliographies that include the most important relevant scholarly works produced since the JSOT volumes were published; 3) an introductory essay—in this case by John Goldingay—that situates the re-published work afresh in the contemporary horizon of biblical interpretation; and 4) a price lower than the cost of the three JSOT volumes separately. With this particular volume the result is an introduction to the first two books of the Bible

that helpfully presents the state of the academic art in critical, hermeneutical, and theological issues of the text at the centenary cusp.

Goldingay's Introduction offers a clear display of a postmodern, multi-perspectival approach to Genesis and Exodus *in nuce*. He briefly surveys these books three times. In its *literary* aspect ("the world of the text itself"), the narrative of these texts often more closely resembles the showing of a film than the telling of a story, as, for example, the inner life of the central character (God) becomes known to the reader not through narrative asides but by insights available through this character's actions. Here plot and theme offer important signals for theological interpretation. Treating the text's *historical* aspect ("the worlds behind the text"), Goldingay observes that following the demise of the JEDP analysis of compositional sources, contrary to expectations we might derive from Thomas Kuhn's famous theory, no new comprehensive analysis of pentateuchal composition has filled in the gap created by JEDP's fall from favor. From the current state of the evidence its analysis Goldingay concludes that the date(s) of composition will likely never be ascertained. Given that we cannot know with assurance in which periods of Israelite history the traditions and compositions of Genesis and Exodus were generated, these books are available to be read with a variety of biblical epochs as their background—pre-monarchic, exilic, post-exilic. "We can reckon to read Genesis and Exodus against these historical contexts because the books invite us to do so, whatever may turn out to be the facts of their origin" (24). There is, however, an historical downside to the persistent obscurity that beclouds the compositional origins of these books, for, according to Goldingay, "the attempt to discover what historical events lie behind Genesis and Exodus, while vitally important, is fraught with difficulties that may never be overcome" (27). Goldingay then turns to other ways in which Genesis and Exodus can engage with contemporary readers ("the world in front of the text"). In his consideration of the enormous influence that these books have long had in the formulation of theological doctrine Goldingay deals almost exclusively with the *Urgeschichte* of Genesis 1-11. When considering the texts' political dimensions, and the political dimensions of reading the texts, Goldingay restricts himself to Exodus. Both books factor into his brief overview of feminist reflections on the texts. Goldingay concludes with a list of references. But given the audience he clearly has in mind for this introductory essay, his readers would surely have benefited by the inclusion of fuller treatments of the various ways in which biblical writings can be read, such as W. Randolph Tate's *Biblical Interpretation. An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, revised edition, 1997) or Susan Gillingham's *One Bible, Many Voices. Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

Part I: Genesis 1-11. The multiple perspectives from which Genesis 1-11 can be understood are the focus of the first two chapters of Rogerson's three-chapter piece. After previewing various approaches (literary-critical readings, literary readings, liberation readings, feminist readings, Genesis 1-11 and ancient Near Eastern texts) in chapter one, in chapter two Rogerson offers more lengthy surveys of the best late-twentieth century scholarly contributions to each of these approaches. To the potentially confusing and conflicting plurality of methods sponsored by different interpreting communities

Rogerson offers the following desideratum: “It is very much to be hoped that members of different interpreting communities will be prepared to listen to each other and to learn from each other. The current great diversity of approaches to Genesis 1-11 should be seen not as a threat but as an opportunity. They all represent the activity of that human race whose origins and nature are the subject of Genesis 1-11” (71). In chapter three Rogerson briefly treats specific historical, critical, and thematic issues. A partial list includes myth, the translation and understanding of the Bible’s first three verses, the creation as a good and enduring order, the distinction between 1:1-2:4a as a creation story and 2:4b-25 as an origins story, the problem of the long-lived patriarchs, the ever-puzzling 6:1-4, the genealogies, and the Babel episode. He concludes with a negative assessment of attempts to date the elements that make up Genesis 1-11, noting that the more pressing questions focus on what contemporary readers as interpreters do with those elements.

Part II: Genesis 12-50. In most of his six chapters Moberly works from the thesis he put forth in *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Augsburg-Fortress, 1992): that the stories of Genesis 12-50 are told from a religious perspective not original to them—an Israelite, Yahwistic perspective—which has adapted the stories into the instructional reflection regarding life with Yhwh that is Torah. After noting contemporary options for reading these narratives, Moberly argues that, given that these stories are adapted stories, they present a certain complexity in their reading that can be very illuminating if taken seriously. Chapter two is a literary introduction to the whole of Genesis 12-50 with particular attention to the character of God in the various patriarchal cycles. Moberly’s third chapter follows with a more detailed examination of a selected sample text, the binding of Isaac. Here he briefly treat issues of narrative presentation, the morality of human sacrifice, toponymical etiology, the role of Abraham as exemplar of obedience, and the way(s) in which this story can be taken by the reader as “true.” In chapter four Moberly recommends his compositional model of “retelling from anew [*sic*] perspective” (145) as a help in determining sources that lie behind the present composition and a corrective to the assumptions required by the JEDP model: “The first question that must be asked is about the storytelling conventions and techniques of the Genesis writers, and only when that has been established with as much confidence as possible can one move on to ask about the evidence the text provides for the history of its composition” (151). Chapter five is an excellent presentation of scholarly assessments regarding the historicity of the religious and cultural traditions reflected in Genesis 12-50. With chapter six Moberly concludes his work by briefly surveying the history of interpretations of Genesis 12-50, recognizing the legitimacy of various readings within the context of the readers’ interpretive communities respectively. His list of works for further reading is annotated.

Part III: Exodus. Through a sequence of four chapters Johnstone builds an argument for identifying stages in the growth of the book of Exodus and taking those stages seriously along with its final form when interpreting the book. For each section of his argument he provides a brief bibliography. Johnstone begins with “matters historical,” offering a clear overview of the numerous issues surrounding the relationship of the Exodus narrative to actual history. He concludes that “within the limits of its narrative

form, [Exodus] reflects the general trend of history at the end of the LBA and the beginning of the IA—the destruction of Egypt West Asiatic empire, the confining of Egypt within its eastern borders and the emergence of new nation states in Syria and Canaan. Exodus is the Israelite version of these events” (201). All told, Johnstone considers the book of Exodus to be “a confession of faith expressed in a narrative of origins” (207). Generatively constitutive of this narrative confession are six institution-complexes, and in his second chapter (“Matters Institutional”) Johnstone outlines the sociological matrix and literary expression of each one: the festival of Passover, the festival of Unleavened Bread, the Offering of Firstlings, Theophany, Covenant, and Law. From these disparate beginnings Johnstone goes on in chapter three (“Matters Literary”) to trace the literary growth of the diverse tradition-collections that became the book of Exodus. His review of twentieth-century scholarship on the subject moves from the literary criticism exemplified by S.R. Driver through the tradition criticism put forward by M. Noth to the canonical criticism championed by B. Childs. Johnstone’s own contribution is an argument for and description of two main redactions—a “D”(euteronomistic) edition produced during the exile followed by a “P”(riestly) edition from the Restoration period. Both were produced from a great wealth of available traditions, and the purpose of each was not “to recreate the historical events in themselves so much as to illuminate the experience of their contemporaries and of succeeding generations” (264). Johnstone wraps things up with “matters theological”: an examination of the theologies expressed in the D-version and the P-version respectively. (Worthy of note in the final chapter is a clear explanation of the ancient vocalization and meaning of the divine name.) To those who would object to theologizing from hypothetical constructs such as D and P Johnstone contends that “[f]ull appreciation of the content of Scripture must include appreciation of the intention of the editors, who, step by step, promulgated authoritative Scripture, as far as that intention can be ascertained” (242). Ultimately, Johnstone sees no need to “regard ‘synchronic’ and ‘diachronic’ study as mutually alien. They may function complementarily” (254).

Indeed, the re-publication of these three excellent scholarly introductions can help preserve for the twenty-first century the advances in blended methodologies for biblical studies that began in the late twentieth.