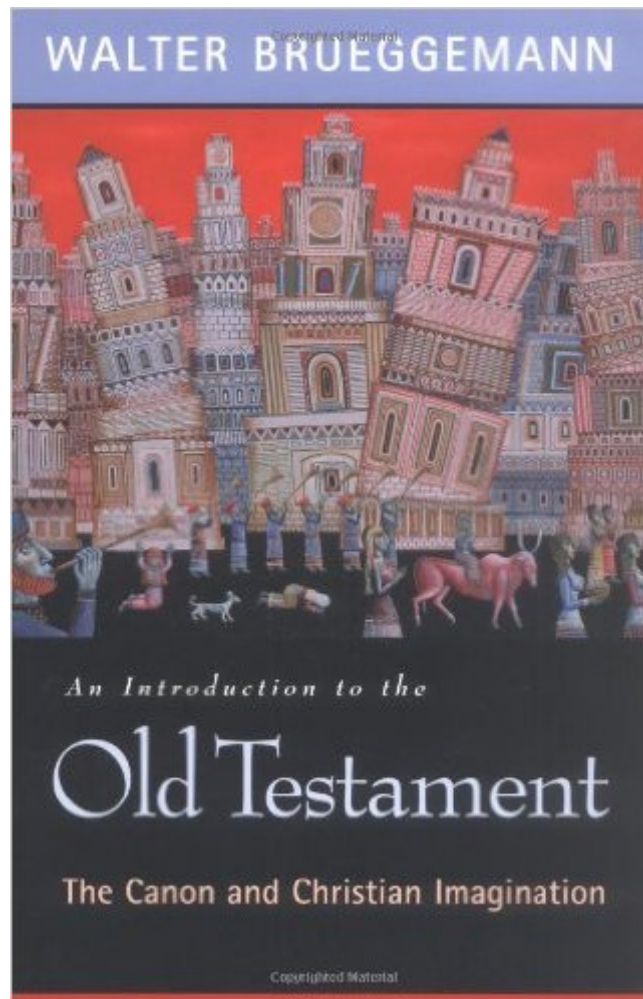


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An Introduction To The Old Testament: The Canon And Christian Imagination



Synopsis

In this book Walter Brueggemann, America's premier biblical theologian, introduces the reader to the broad theological scope and chronological sweep of the Old Testament. He covers every book of the Old Testament in the order in which it appears in the Hebrew Bible and treats the most important issues and methods in contemporary interpretation of the Old Testament--literary, historical, and theological.

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Customer Reviews

I have been a fan of Walter Brueggemann, professor emeritus of biblical studies from Columbia Theological Seminary, since I encountered him through his text 'Theology of the Old Testament', which formed the basis of a course I took my first year in seminary. Brueggemann has a clear and strong writing style, coupled with definite and innovative ideas about the development of the Hebrew Scriptures as they have come to us. Brueggemann looks at things from a canonical perspective, ordering the books differently from what most Christians would be used to in their Bibles. Starting with the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, he then proceeds through the prophets and then to the writings, following the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and a more likely ordering of original authorship. While all texts have gone through a process of being handed down, often edited/redacted in the process, their original ideas or events occurred in a particular order. Brueggemann gives due respect to Brevard Childs and his ideas of canonical criticism while recognizing that this can become a limiting tool, and so Brueggemann introduces the idea of

imagination as a counter. True to form from his early text 'Theology of the Old Testament' and other texts, Brueggeman looks for the truth that resides in the tension between, in this case, in the tension between the normative and the imaginative becoming of the community. Brueggemann brings in the wide range of biblical scholars in the course of his study, ignoring very few noted names along the way. This makes his text an ideal book for introductory courses in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament for undergraduates and seminarians. Brueggemann also puts forward his own interesting arguments and interpretations for consideration.

Compared to Prof Brueggemann's other Old Testament books, my big surprise is a title of The Old Testament rather than The Hebrew Bible! Added surprise is a sub-title of The Canon and Christian Interpretation. In OT Survey classes he contrasted his approach between Jewish interpretation with Christian inter. So I noted his quotes in using the 4 I's of Interpretation, Ideology, Inspiration, and Imagination! They occur in the Intro and near the end of his chap on Torah. On Page 11 "Now it will occur to an attentive reader that these facts of the traditioning process-Imagination, Ideology, and Inspiration (my caps)-do not easily cohere with each other! Specifically the force of human ideology and the power of divine imagination seem to be definitionally at odds. Precisely! That causes the Old Testament, to be endlessly complex & problematic, endlessly interesting and compelling." This carried me back to 2002 sessions at Montreat and Columbia upon first hearing his process of interpretation: "The interface between the canonical and imaginative is exactly the way in which the most responsible and faithful interpretation takes place." I can see & hear his trip from well-neglected notes on the podium up to the chalk-board, as he hastily wrote the Hebrew for his key scripture. In the dramatic Isa 6, after writing the "living creatures," he sailed down the steps, waving wildly his arms all around the wall of the classroom singing "Holy, Holy, Holy!" He seemed propelled alongside us into the living words of the Prophet. He earned his standing ovation! That was not the only incident to stress his "Imaginative Remembering.

Brueggemann sets out to examine the Canon and Christian Imagination according to the Hebrew canon and often times, according Jewish interpretation rather than Christian. For the former, his order is: the Torah, the Prophets consisting of, The Former Prophets, - Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; and the Latter Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel. Then the scrolls of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and the Song of Solomon. Finally, he examines what he considers the revisionist historical corpus of I & II Chronicles, Ezra & Nehemiah, with Daniel arriving last. For the latter, I can cite his rejection of Paul's doctrine of the Fall, although he encourages a constant

interpretative method akin to the New Perspectives (p38-39) and his insistence that the author of Hebrews 'misread' Jeremiah 31 and completely missed the author of Jeremiah's intent (pg 189). On the other hand, Brueggemann deals especially well with Proverbs 8 as seen through the eyes of John's Prologue. Overall, until it comes to his disavowing of anything remotely connected to supersessionism, he presents a balanced view of Christian use of the Hebrew Scriptures. His path is not always what one would expect. While he uses historical criticism, his method involves the focus on what he calls the 'end of the traditioning process.' For the author, it is not greatly important how a book came together, but the theology of the book in final form. For him, the process is far from over and should continue now that the canon has been delivered to the 'interpretive community of the church'. He makes a strong case that the bible contains more light than a simple 'reportage' view can give, and indeed, suddenly becomes a conservative Protestant as he makes his case that more study is needed.

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