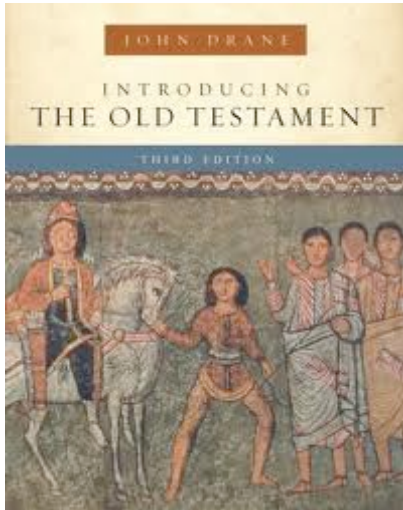


RBL 02/2012



Drane, John

Introducing the Old Testament

3rd edition

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011. Pp. 383. Paper. \$45.00.
ISBN 9780800698133.

Jordan M. Scheetz
Tyndale Theological Seminary
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

John Drane's *Introducing the Old Testament* (3rd edition) has a striking aesthetic quality ranging from the cover to the contents of each chapter, filled with art depicting biblical scenes, helpful charts, and photographs of important artifacts and places from antiquity. The book is also bound with a soft yet durable cover and clearly fits in the U.S. textbook genre (*UTB* books lack this collective sort of aesthetic concern). The chapter contents continue in the tradition of the earlier editions, dealing with the main chapter themes in the single-column narrative, but these main themes are enhanced by related topics covered in double-column articles interspersed throughout each chapter. In addition to previous editions, a summary paragraph introduces each chapter, and there is also a glossary of basic terms (350–67). However, all of this is in service to Drane's overall approach, which, on the one hand, covers a kind of political and religious history followed in a chronological evaluation of the Old Testament with the deuterocanonical books in chapters 1–8 and, on the other hand, topical discussions in chapters 9–13.

Chapter 1, "The Stories and the Books," deals with the tension that is found in the Old Testament: "The Old Testament is essentially an edited anthology, a collection of writings by different people and from different ages" (17). Although Drane notes that this points to an obvious process in relation to the development of the text, he makes this evaluation: "It is easy to forget that, whatever else may be said about their literary origins, the way these books were combined to form the final edition of the Hebrew Bible was intended to

present a coherent message that would both sum up and take forward the stories preserved by their individual writers” (14). In his evaluation, the final form presents a message that revolves around the promise given in Gen 12:1–3, the difficulties around that promise in the following generations, and God’s faithfulness to his promise:

It started with Abraham and Sarah and the promise that through their family God would bless many nations (Genesis 12:1–3). In the intervening centuries, this promise was repeatedly challenged from many different directions. Politically and economically, it was always under threat from other powerful empires. Religiously, it was undermined from within as the people were tempted to forget Yahweh, the God of their forebears, and turn to other forms of worship in religions which, the prophets complained, allowed their moral and spiritual responsibility to be left behind in the shrine instead of forming the basis of everyday life in home and market place. But God’s intention for this world never deviated: “the holy God of Israel remains faithful to the promises.... I, Yahweh, was there at the beginning, and I, Yahweh, will be there at the end” (Isaiah 49:7; 41:4). (16–17)

Although the chapter closes with a discussion of the shape of the Hebrew Bible with Law, Prophets, and Writings, the following chapters will be dominated by the key words from the previous quote—politically, economically, and religiously—with interspersed discussions of the biblical books following a chronology of history and proposed time of composition, including texts outside of the Hebrew Bible that are found in Greek collections.

Chapters 2–8 unfold this political, economic, and religious history. Chapter 2, “The Founding of a Nation,” unfolds the key political and economic event from Exodus to Deuteronomy, “of how God had rescued a disorganized group of slaves from Egypt and made them a nation in their own right” (38). The key religious event, however, comes from Mount Sinai and is summarized in the Ten Commandments in Exod 20:1–17 (49). These elements formed the essential parts of a “remembered story” (38). Chapter 3, “New People in an Old Land,” opts for an economic and political Israel being understood at least during the time of the judges as “a segmentary tribal system, comprising autonomous tribal units of diverse origins, who were able to act together without the need for a central organizational structure” (70). From a religious perspective, the Deuteronomic History, spanning from Joshua to Kings, explains “the theological basis on which Israel’s history was to be understood” (74). Ultimately this is the struggle between the worship of Yahweh and the other religions in Canaan. Chapter 4, “A King Like Other Nations,” identifies the rise of the monarchy with the failure of the older tribal alliances: “It was obvious that the old forms of loose tribal alliances were no longer adequate to

address the challenges of changing circumstances” (78). Saul, David, Solomon, and their reigns are explained primarily in political and economic terms, so, for example, “David was a more charismatic figure than Saul and found it relatively easy to overcome tribal suspicions and resistance to the monarchy and to unite the whole of Israel into a remarkably powerful alliance” (83). Another example is found in Solomon’s downfall: “The seeds of Solomon’s destruction germinated in the same soil as many revolutionary political movements: the exploitation of an underclass by the rulers” (95). More religious explanations for these kings and their reigns are understood to come from the reflection of a later generation from the Deuteronomic Historians (cf. 87, 95). Chapter 5, “Two Kingdoms,” continues the same type of contrast between political and economic considerations and religious considerations. Although the biblical texts view Jehu’s actions from a religious perspective, Drane states, “his purge was obviously politically motivated” (120). Prophets are even framed in this political mindset: “A prophet is commonly thought of as a person who predicts the future, and while the prophets of ancient Israel and Judah had much to say about the possible futures of their people they were not fortune tellers or psychics, but politicians and preachers” (129). Chapter 6, “Judah and Jerusalem,” continues the same line of explanation even in relation to Josiah’s reform: “As it happened, this book also played right into Josiah’s hands, for its main ideas seemed to give a religious backing to the political moves he was already making” (147). Chapter 7, “Dashed Hopes and New Horizons,” describes a time where the religious interpretation of Israel’s history won out; in particular, “it was Jeremiah’s argument that won the day and his interpretation of Israel’s history came to be embodied in the canon of the Hebrew Bible” (168). This winning perspective is labeled the Deuteronomic History, where “obedience and loyalty to Israel’s own God led to success and prosperity” and where presumably the opposite led to destruction (168). A shift in religious expression is indicated during the exile with the focus on “circumcision and keeping the sabbath day, as well as prayer and the reading of the Torah” (184). Nehemiah and Ezra mark the return from exile that has both *political* and *religious* dimensions: “But there is no doubt that Nehemiah was responsible for political reorganization, while Ezra’s concern was more directly related to matters of religious practice” (186). Chapter 8, “The Challenge of a New Age,” completes the biblical history as presented by Drane with a bridge of sorts, preparing the reader for the political, economic, and religious environment of the New Testament: “From the time of the Maccabees to the Christian era, Jewish history was dominated by the issues that emerged in the course of these early struggles with Hellenism” (214). Political, economic, and religious considerations predominate the pages of this history, but especially a political tone rings throughout.

Chapters 9–13 shift from history to a mixture of apologetics, biblical theology, and hermeneutics. Chapter 9, “The Living God,” demonstrates how the “narrative approach”

used by the Old Testament to describe God is postmodern-friendly (221) and further reveals a God who is more diverse than many presuppose (e.g., 229–33). Chapter 10, “God and the World,” gives a perspective that demonstrates how Genesis, Psalms, and the wisdom literature “deal with the universal experience of people everywhere as they try to comprehend the world in which they live” (242). Chapter 11, “Living as the People of God,” demonstrates a deep connection between corporate and individual morality that is based on “the covenant faith, grounded in the justice, mercy, and truth of God” (288). Chapter 12, “Worship,” follows the topic of worship from different places of worship, including the tabernacle, local sanctuaries, the temple, and the synagogue, to the different practices of worship, including singing and music, prayer, dance and drama, and sacrifice, to the different times of worship, the Sabbath, the Passover, and the harvest festivals. Chapter 13, “From the Hebrew Bible to Old Testament,” deals with the issue of hermeneutics and in particular the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, tracing the arguments from Marcion, to the function of allegorical interpretation, to Luther and Calvin, to the modern era. It appears that Drane’s way of overcoming the seeming incongruity between the Old and New Testaments is by placing the Old Testament in its historical context: “Much of this strangeness can be dispelled once the Old Testament is placed in its proper historical and social context, which is why so much attention has been given to doing that in this book” (336).

The multiple editions of this textbook testify to the quality of writing and research that have gone into this book. The obvious advantage of an introduction written by one person is that a sustained argument can be made for the whole, where this overall picture is of course lost in multiple-author introductions. As has already been noted, the overall presentation and binding of the book makes it something that students and other readers should enjoy using and reusing.

Obviously, this textbook is targeted at students who are in their first cycle of theological education. Although I understand the reasoning for not adding footnotes or endnotes to such a text, a very helpful feature to future editions would be a short bibliography at the end of each chapter giving the main texts that were relied upon for the contents of the chapter, even if some of these are now outdated. This would enable the interested student to do further reading in relation to the main issues covered in each chapter. This is noted even though there is a short bibliography at the end of the book.

One urgent issue that needs to be addressed in this and other critical Hebrew Bible/Old Testament introductions that will impact the whole of the sustained argument is the reality that the three-stage canonization process of times past has met its demise. Although the arguments of Stephen B. Chapman (*The Law and the Prophets* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000]), Karel van der Toorn (*Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew*

Bible [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), or Georg Steins (“Zwei Konzepte—Ein Kanon,” in *Kanonisierung—Die Hebräische Bibel im Werden* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2010], 8–45), just to list a few, have not gained strong support of their differing perspectives on the canonization of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, one thing is certain, that the facts that once supported the reasons and dates for a three-stage canonization process have met their demise. With this foundation gone, Drane’s overarching argument that roughly follows these supposed historical stages of canonization, which includes deuterocanonical literature in his argument, needs to be rethought and brought into the present state of research. This can be said for the field as a whole, but the problem is that a standard replacement theory is yet to rise to a place of prominence.