

**GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES
ON THE OLD TESTAMENT**

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PREFACE

This book is a lot like the Bible itself in that it is a diverse collection of writings emanating from a variety of geographic, social, cultural, political, economic, and religious contexts. But wait—that first sentence has already indicated a great deal about us (the editors) and about our views of the Bible. Maybe we’ve already revealed more about us—our background, education, life experiences, and so on—than about the Bible itself. To us, the Bible—and specifically the Old Testament—is indeed an eclectic anthology, much like this book. However, if someone else were to have written that first sentence, they might have started by introducing the Bible as the infallible Word of God, a book that provides moral and ethical guidelines for everyday life and God’s plan of salvation. Another person might have opened with the claim that the Bible is one of the most toxic texts ever produced and that its continuing influence in our world is one of the great mysteries and tragedies of our day. Incidentally, neither of these two potential perspectives is incompatible with our statement that the Bible is an eclectic anthology. The point is this: It’s all about perspective. People are different. They approach the Bible with their own various ideas, beliefs, and assumptions, which means there are a myriad of possible ways to write that first sentence. Nobody can say anything without saying something about themselves.

But you may have already known that. Most people living in our postmodern world—or whatever we are supposed to call it now (that’s also a matter of perspective)—realize that there is no neutral, objective perspective from which to assess things, no position that is unencumbered by a specific life setting. Everyone comes from somewhere. Everyone is born in a certain time and place to certain parents and has had certain experiences that shape how we see the world. All those “certainties,” to which many more could be added, make up who you are; they define your specific context and perspective. They also mean that you can be certain that your interpretation of a given biblical text is not the only way that it can be interpreted. While the idea of varied perspectives is hardly new, you may not be aware of the extent and nature of some of those different readings. Hence this book.

FORMAT OF THE BOOK

Herein we have gathered four essays around 28 Old Testament texts. Our intention is for you to read the given portion of the Bible and then to consider what four people from various contexts and backgrounds have written about it. In doing so, you will see the biblical text in a new light; you will learn something about the various interpreters and their particular location; and you will discover something about yourself. Put differently, when we encounter views that are different from our own, we have the wonderfully enriching experience of learning about (1) the Old Testament and (2) other interpreters and the places from which they come, which in turn (3) helps us see our own lives and views in a new way. We are thus engaging the Old Testament, each other, and ourselves. It’s a dynamic, interactive triangle.

But all three corners of the triangle must be present. The importance of your corner bears emphasizing: You must read the Old Testament for yourself. This is absolutely indispensable. You must read carefully and develop your own insights and analyses. This will not only help you “hear” the biblical voice (filtered through your own context, of course), but it will also enable you to appreciate the four different perspectives. We instructed the authors of the essays not to

summarize the biblical passage; there is no sense in using valuable space on something that you can do for yourself. So, you must uphold your end of the deal: You must read the Old Testament! Yes, you are reading a translation of the Bible and a translation is already an interpretation; but, still, it's crucial that you experience the text on your own.

To encourage you to do this, we have not included any of our own introductory material to each Old Testament passage, as it would inevitably reflect our own perspective, which would defeat the book's purpose of including as many different points of view as possible. Furthermore, you should read the essays with a Bible in hand; many times the authors include only the biblical reference (not the full quotation), which you would do well to look up in order to help you interact thoughtfully with the essay.

To facilitate further your engagement with all three corners of the triangle, we have included four questions at the end of each set of essays (one question for each essay). Use the questions to prompt your critical interaction with the various essays. If the question could occasionally be answered "yes" or "no," don't simply leave it at that. Assume that "Why or why not?" or "Explain your answer" follows—we just thought it unnecessary to write it out for you. Yes, our questions inevitably reveal our own interests and ideas, so please feel free to add your own questions and to question our questions. In fact, if you don't, you probably aren't thinking hard enough.

There are a mere 112 essays in this book; this, needless to say, is a pittance of the possible number. A book titled *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament* should not be a book at all, but rather a multivolume encyclopedia. But if that were the case, you would have had a much harder time buying it and carrying it around. Think for a moment about how this book barely scratches the proverbial surface of global perspectives on the Old Testament. If there are approximately 7 billion people in the world and if only 1 in every 1,000 has something to say about the Bible, then our 97 authors represent only about 0.000014 percent of perspectives on the Bible. We make this point—odd as it may seem—because we hope this collection of essays encourages you to seek out many more interpretations of the Old Testament, whether they be from scholarly books and commentaries or friends and family over lunch. These essays are intended to start conversations, not end them. It's a big world, and this book is terribly small. We are hoping you will create the rest of the encyclopedia.

We have done our best to assemble a wide range of views. Nevertheless, the book should probably be titled *Global* Perspectives* on the Old Testament**. With the first asterisk we call attention to the fact that as English speakers we could only accept essays written in English. We also solicited submissions via e-mail. As such, by requiring contributors to write in our native language and to have Internet access, we have by necessity precluded a majority of the world's population. Furthermore, we live and work in the United States. Most of our personal and professional connections are here; therefore, there are far more contributors from the United States than any other single country. Because of this, we feel as though we should iterate that we mean "global" in more than simply the geographic sense. There is religious, ethnic, ideological, political, and socioeconomic diversity in the essays, and those elements, of course, are not bound by particular geographic location. We also assembled contributors from various walks of life; this book is much more "global" than a typical collection of professional academic papers.

The second asterisk shows that, while limiting our fingerprints as much as possible, the essays were proofread and minimally edited. We made the decision to standardize spelling and punctuation, and even to capitalize the word "Bible." Beyond that, we did little else. We did not standardize, for example, the style of referring to eras (B.C.E., C.E., B.C., A.D.); we did not

change inclusive or non-inclusive language or capitalization for pronouns referring to deity. The third asterisk denotes that the term “Old Testament” reflects a Christian perspective; it implies that something “New” fulfills it. We have, however, decided to follow the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible (rather than the Christian Old Testament). Furthermore, although we did not begin with a prescribed list of 28 Old Testament texts for which to solicit essays, we did, of course, ultimately determine which texts the book would address.

Let’s mention one more asterisk-worthy matter. You will notice that each set of essays opens with a page featuring a map locating each of the four authors in that set. But where on the map should we put each author’s dot? Where the author was born? Where they have spent most of their life? Where they went to school? Where they were when they wrote the essay? Where they reside now? The place about which they write? It’s not that easy. We live in a transient world. We have decided to put the dot in the place, or places, about which they are writing. Or if geographic location or context is not central to their essay, then the dot is located in the place of their primary current residence. Hence all the dots should have an asterisk to that effect too.

In short, this is only one of many possible ways to assemble a book called *Global Perspectives on the Old Testament*. Despite its limitations and the inherent difficulty of producing a book of this nature, we are confident that you will find these perspectives to be enlightening and engaging. There are many additional introductory and hermeneutical issues that we could explore at the outset, but we won’t. So let us limit ourselves to two final thoughts. First, the Old Testament is the sacred literature of the Jewish and Christian traditions, but the influence and impact of the Old Testament have extended beyond those two religions. People who are not Christian or Jewish read or are familiar with the Old Testament. In our effort to offer as many global perspectives as possible, we have included views by those who do not treat the Old Testament as Scripture. We fully understand that some people with a faith commitment to the text may feel that those outside the tradition do not have anything to offer. We respectfully disagree, and both of us—for the record—are in the Christian tradition.

Our world is too big and complex to ignore thoughtful and intelligent readers simply because they approach the text without a set of traditional religious lenses—or because they come from a tradition other than Judaism or Christianity. We sincerely appreciate all of the authors of these essays for allowing their work to be published in a book that includes approaches with which they may strongly disagree.

Second, if the essays are eclectic, then so too are the biblical texts that they interpret. You will notice that some sets of four essays deal with only one chapter from the Bible (Genesis 22), some with part of a book (Genesis 37–50, Exodus 1–15), and others with whole books. Much of this has to do with the nature of the Old Testament—it’s not a tidy collection, and some parts have garnered more attention than others. As a result, sometimes the essays in a chapter are in direct dialogue over the same specific text or topic, while other times they address different portions of the passage. Hopefully, every set of essays will draw you into the discussion.

The Old Testament has a sort of “unevenness” to it, and so do the various sets of essays that follow, which in turn reflects the complex nature of the world in which we live. And thus, we end this short Introduction where it began: If the perspectives herein feel somewhat scattered—all over the place—then we say, “Yes, exactly, and so is both our global world and the Old Testament.” Hence a book with our title will inevitably be a bit messy. And yes, this view again reflects our particular perspective as white, Western-educated, middle-class, heterosexual men in the Christian tradition. From where we stand, the following essays offer fresh, compelling readings of the Bible from a variety of perspectives. Tell us what you think from where you stand.

STUDENT AND TEACHER RESOURCES

This text is available in a variety of formats—digital and print. To learn more about our programs, pricing options, and customization, visit www.pearsonhighered.com.

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Instructor's Resource Manual and Test Bank (0-205-92572-3)

This valuable resource provides chapter outlines, lecture topics, and suggested media resources. In addition, test questions in short essay formats are available for each chapter.

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