
Preface

THIS BOOK IS WRITTEN for general readers. Since the book is neither short nor easy, it presupposes a keen interest in the subject matter; yet it does not presuppose any specialized knowledge. This book is also for those who want to understand not only what historical-critical scholars think, but why. I strive to explain as clearly as I can the evidence and reasoning that lead to the conclusions I draw. That form of explication entails two particular types of study that call for readers' patience and perseverance. First, the nature of the subject matter often entails the close comparison of texts (usually two versions of a prophecy, or a prophecy and a narration of its alleged fulfillment). Such comparisons sometimes must proceed word for word, with attention to precise nuances in meaning. Second, there are certain passages that require analysis of the ancient Hebrew or Greek or Latin in order to understand them correctly. However, readers need no prior knowledge of those languages to follow the discussion. My hope is that those willing to read and think carefully will be rewarded for their efforts with an enriched understanding of a complex subject, whether or not they agree with all my conclusions.

Terminology

Jew / Christian

There has been much recent discussion among biblical scholars about the precise meanings of the terms "Jew/Jewish" and "Christian," the concern being that modern connotations of those terms might lead to anachronistic misunderstandings when the terms are applied to people or things in Antiquity. At present, there is no clear consensus regarding to whom or what those terms should refer, nor on what other terms to use in cases when "Jew" or

“Christian” would be imprecise. Until scholars reach some broad agreement on what the appropriate terminology should be, I think it best in this book to use “Jew/Jewish” and “Christian” in their general traditional (and, admittedly, inexact) senses, the former in reference to the religion and culture of Israel, the latter in reference to the religion centered on Jesus. An inescapable ambiguity of such usage is that many of the earliest followers of Jesus can be described as both Jews and Christians. They understood themselves to be Jews; if, for our convenience, we refer to them as Christians, that is not because they practiced Christianity—which did not yet exist as a distinct religion—but because they revered Jesus as the Christ, the Anointed One.

Old Testament / Hebrew Bible

The *Hebrew Bible* is the Jewish scriptures in the Hebrew language (though a few pages are in Aramaic). Early Christians knew the Jewish scriptures mostly in Greek translation, and referred to them simply as *hai graphai* (“the writings”) and later as *ta biblia* (“the little scrolls,” from which derives our word “Bible”). The terminology of “Old Testament” and “New Testament” emerged after some Christian writings came to be regarded as authoritative scripture. The *Old Testament* is thus the Jewish scriptures as adopted, organized, and supplemented by Christians. Since the primary focus of my book is on the Christian interpretation of the Jewish scriptures, I usually refer to them as the Old Testament (OT).

Lord / Yahweh

Out of deference to the traditional Jewish custom of not pronouncing the name of God, most English translations of the Hebrew Bible, including the New Revised Standard Version, use LORD (in capital letters) where the Hebrew text has *yhwh*, the name of the God of Israel. I have modified the NRSV, rendering *yhwh* as “Yahweh,” the most likely pronunciation of that name. I reserve “Lord” for the Hebrew word *adon*, which means “lord, master.”

Uppercase and lowercase nouns

God/god. I capitalize “God”—out of deference to Judaism and Christianity—when it denotes the deity whom Israel called “Yahweh” and whom Jesus addressed as “Father.”

Christ/christology. I capitalize “Christ” because it is a title, but neither “christological,” which means “messianic,” nor “christology,” which refers to beliefs about the identity and spiritual status of Jesus.

Gospel/gospel. The word “gospel” is a common noun that names a literary genre, and is therefore written with a lower case *g*. The “Gospel of Matthew” is a proper noun, the title of a literary work, and is thus capitalized. I follow the same distinction for *letter/Letter*, *epistle/Epistle*, *book/Book*, and *psalm/Psalm*.

Exile/exile. I take the name of the forced relocation of Judeans to Babylon in the sixth century BCE to be a proper name: “the Babylonian Exile.” Otherwise I use the lowercase “exile.”

Antiquity/antiquity. I capitalize “Antiquity” because it is the name of a historical period, on a par with names like “Middle Ages” or “Renaissance.” The word appears lowercased only when it means “old age.”

Law/law. I capitalize “Law” when it refers to the Torah.

I lowercase “scripture” because the word is a common noun meaning “an authoritative religious text.”

I lowercase the word “gentile” because it is a common noun that means “non-Jew,” which to ancient Jews meant “foreigner.”