

The Old Testament, Second Edition
Michael D. Coogan

Glossary of terms

acrostic A text in which the opening letters of successive lines form a word, phrase, or pattern. The acrostics in the Bible are poems in which the first letters of successive lines or stanzas are the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in order.

Ammonites Israel's neighbors east of the Jordan River. The Ammonites are the "sons of Ammon," who according to Genesis 19 were the offspring of Lot by one of his daughters. Their name is preserved in the modern city of Amman, Jordan.

angel A word of Greek origin originally meaning messenger. In the Bible, these are supernatural beings sent by God to humans.

anthropomorphic (anthropomorphism) The attribution of human characteristics to a nonhuman being, usually a deity.

apocalyptic A genre of literature in which details concerning the end-time are revealed by a heavenly messenger or angel.

Apocrypha Jewish religious writings of the Hellenistic and Roman periods that are not considered part of the Bible by Jews and Protestants, but are part of the canons of Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, who also call them the deuterocanonical books.

apodictic law A type of law characterized by absolute or general commands or prohibitions, as in the Ten Commandments. It is often contrasted with casuistic law.

Aramaic A language originating in ancient Syria that in the second half of the first millennium BCE became used widely throughout the Near East. Parts of the books of Daniel and Ezra are written in Aramaic.

ark of the covenant The religious symbol of the premonarchic confederation of the twelve tribes of Israel, later installed in the Temple in Jerusalem by Solomon in the tenth century BCE. It formed the footstool for the

cherubim throne on which Yahweh was thought to be invisibly seated.

avenger of blood In Hebrew the *goel*, the closest male relative who is legally responsible for his kin, usually in matters relating to death or property. The word is often translated “redeemer.”

Baal The Canaanite storm-god, who in Ugaritic myth defeats Sea and Death. In the Bible, worship of Baal is condemned.

ban (Hebr. *herem*) Something dedicated to a deity and restricted for the deity’s use, such as the spoils of war, including captured people.

Canaan The name of the Promised Land before the Israelite conquest. In second-millennium BCE Egyptian sources, Canaan refers to the entire southern Levant. According to Genesis 9, the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land of Canaan, were descendants of Noah’s grandson Canaan.

canon An official list of books that make up the Bible. Different religious groups have different such lists.

casuistic law Case law, often in the form of a conditional sentence, in which specific situations are addressed. It is often contrasted with apodictic law.

cherubim Composite supernatural beings who function as guardians of the entrance to the garden of Eden in Genesis 3.24 and whose outstretched wings over the ark of the covenant supported the throne of Yahweh.

Chronicler In modern scholarship, the term used for the author(s) of the books of Chronicles and, according to some scholars, of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

circumcision The ceremonial removal of the foreskin of the penis. According to Genesis 17.9– 14, it is the sign of the **covenant** between God and Abraham and is to be performed on all of Abraham’s male descendants on the eighth day after birth.

cities of refuge In the Bible, six cities set aside as places where someone accused of murder could find asylum until the case was decided.

city of David Another name for Jerusalem, especially

the ancient pre-Israelite city that King David captured and made his capital in the early tenth century BCE. In later tradition, it is also used of Bethlehem, David's birthplace.

Code of Hammurapi An ancient collection of laws issued by the Babylonian king Hammurapi (also spelled Hammurabi) in the mid-eighteenth century BCE.

confessions of Jeremiah In modern scholarship, those parts of the book of Jeremiah in which he laments to God the difficulties he experienced as a prophet. The confessions are in Jeremiah 11.18– 12.6, 15.10– 21, 17.14– 18, 18.18– 23, and 20.7– 18.

cosmology An account of the origins of the world; in the ancient Near East, cosmologies are usually creation myths.

covenant (Hebr. *berît*) A term originally meaning “contract,” used in the Bible of marriage, slavery, and international treaties and used metaphorically to characterize the relationship between God and the Israelites and between God and individuals such as Abraham, Aaron, and David.

Covenant Code In modern scholarship, the collection of laws found in Exodus 20.22– 23.19, identified as “the book of the covenant” (Ex 24.7). It is generally thought to be the oldest collection of laws in the Bible.

covenant lawsuit A genre used by the prophets in which Israel is put on trial by Yahweh for having violated its covenant with him.

D The Deuteronomic source according to the Documentary Hypothesis, which is found almost exclusively in the book of Deuteronomy.

Davidic covenant The covenant between Yahweh and David, which guaranteed the divine protection of the dynasty that David founded and of Jerusalem, its capital city.

Day of Atonement A fall ritual of purification, described in Leviticus 16, later known as Yom Kippur. *See also* scapegoat.

day of the LORD A phrase used by the prophets, to describe Yahweh's fighting against his enemies. In apocalyptic literature, it is used of the final battle between good and evil.

Dead Sea A large body of water in the Rift Valley into which the Jordan River flows. Due to evaporation, it has a high mineral content and no life is found in it, hence its name.

Dead Sea Scrolls Ancient manuscripts found in caves on the western side of the Dead Sea beginning in 1948; some are the oldest surviving manuscripts of the books of the Bible, dating as early as the third century BCE.

Decalogue A word of Greek origin that means “ten words”; another name for the Ten Commandments. deutero-canonical books *See* Apocrypha.

Deuteronomistic Code According to modern scholars, the core of the book of Deuteronomy in chapters 12–26, consisting of ancient laws that differ in many details from those found in the books of Exodus and Leviticus.

Deuteronomistic History According to modern scholars, the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, which form a narrative history of Israel in the Promised Land. It was produced in several editions from the late eighth to the sixth centuries BCE by the Deuteronomistic Historians, who were informed by the principles of the book of Deuteronomy.

Diaspora Literally, scattering or dispersion, used to refer to exiles from Judah to Babylonia in the early sixth century BCE, and subsequently for any Jews living outside of Israel.

divination The practice of interpreting ordinary phenomena, such as the flight of birds and the inner organs of animals, as divine revelation.

divine council The assembly of gods, over which the high god presides. In the Bible, Yahweh is described as the head of the divine council, and prophets claim to have witnessed or participated in its meetings.

Documentary Hypothesis The theory classically formulated by Julius Wellhausen in 1878, which explains the repetitions and inconsistencies in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, as the result of originally independent sources or documents having been combined over several centuries. The principal hypothetical sources are J, E, D, and P.

E The Elohist source according to the Documentary Hypothesis, found in the books of Genesis through Numbers.

EI The name of the creator deity in Ugaritic texts, who presides over the divine council. It is also used of Yahweh.

elohim The Hebrew word for god or gods, which, although plural in form, is often used as a title for Yahweh and is translated “God.”

endogamy The custom of marrying within one’s ethnic or religious group.

Enkidu In the epic of *Gilgamesh*, the wild man created by the gods to distract Gilgamesh from his antisocial activities. Gilgamesh and Enkidu became friends, and Enkidu’s death motivated Gilgamesh to seek immortality.

Enuma Elish Also called the “Babylonian Creation Epic,” this is a work on seven tablets in praise of the patron god of Babylon, Marduk. It describes how Marduk defeated the primeval sea-goddess Tiamat and then created the world and humans. Its title is its opening words, which mean “when above.”

Essenes A Jewish sect of the second and first centuries BCE and the first century CE that produced the Dead Sea Scrolls.

etiology A narrative that explains the origin of a custom, ritual, geographical feature, name, or other phenomenon.

Fertile Crescent The arable area of land from southern Mesopotamia northward and then westward and southward through the Levant.

First Isaiah In modern scholarship, the parts of Isaiah 1–39 that are associated with the eighth-century BCE prophet Isaiah.

First Zechariah In modern scholarship, chapters 1–8 of the book of Zechariah, dated in substance to the late sixth century BCE.

form criticism The study of relatively short literary units in literature and in folklore with regard to their forms or genres, their original settings (German *Sitz im Leben*), and their social, religious, and political functions. It was developed

by Herman Gunkel.

Former Prophets In Jewish tradition, the first division of the Prophets, comprising the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings.

genealogy A family history in the form of a list of descendants.

Gilgamesh/*Gilgamesh* The hero of the Mesopotamian epic named for him, who with Enkidu travels widely and ultimately meets Utnapishtim.

golden calf The statue of a calf that the Israelites worshiped at Mount Sinai according to Exodus 32, and also similar statues worshiped at the shrines of Bethel and Dan in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Gunkel, Hermann (1862– 1932): The German scholar whose commentaries on Genesis and Psalms applied form criticism to the Bible.

Hanukkah The festival commemorating the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BCE, which had been profaned by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

Hebrew The language of ancient and modern Israel. In the Bible, the term is usually used of individuals or groups living outside their homeland.

Hebrew Bible The Tanak, the canonical scriptures of Judaism. All of them comprise the Old Testament in the Protestant canon and most of the Old Testament in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox canons.

Hellenization The transformation of Near Eastern culture and society by Greek ideas, especially after the conquest of the Near East by Alexander the Great in the late fourth century BCE.

Hezekiah's Tunnel A 1700-ft (500-m) long tunnel under the city of David, constructed during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah in the late eighth century BCE. Its function was to divert the waters flowing from the Gihon Spring to a location within the city wall.

Holiness Code In modern scholarship, chapters 17– 26 of the book of Leviticus, generally recognized as an originally independent source whose principal theme is the holiness of Yahweh and of his people.

Horeb The name used in E and D for Mount Sinai.
Immanuel The child whose birth and early life were signs from God to Ahaz, king of Judah, during the Syro-Ephraimite War (Isa 7.14). He was probably the child of the prophet Isaiah and his wife, who was also a prophet.

Isaiah *See* First Isaiah; Second Isaiah; Third Isaiah.

Isaiah Apocalypse In modern scholarship, chapters 24–27 of the book of Isaiah, an early example of apocalyptic literature perhaps dating to the fifth century BCE.

Israel This name is used in several senses. First, it is the new name given to the patriarch Jacob in Genesis 32.28; Jacob's twelve sons then become the ancestors of the tribes of Israel. Second, it designates the people and later the geopolitical entity formed from the twelve tribes. Third, it is used as the name of the northern kingdom of Israel, as opposed to the southern kingdom of Judah.

J The Yahwist (or Jahwist) source according to the Documentary Hypothesis, found in the books of Genesis through Numbers.

Judah The name of one of Jacob's sons, the ancestor of the tribe of Judah. This tribe dominated southern Israel and became the southern kingdom of Judah. Later the same region was called Judea.

judge A ruler or a military leader, as well as someone who presided over legal hearings.

Kirta The hero of the Ugaritic epic that is named for him; the epic has many connections with biblical literature. Also called "Keret."

Latter Prophets In Jewish tradition, the second part of the Prophets, comprising the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets).

Levant A term used for the western part of the Near East, comprising the modern countries of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan.

Levites The priestly tribe, named for Jacob's son Levi, whose primary responsibility was ritual.

Major Prophets In modern scholarship, the books of

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, so called because of their relative length compared to the shorter books of the Minor Prophets. In Christian tradition, the books of Lamentations and Daniel have often been included under this heading.

manna The divinely given “bread from heaven” (Ex 16.4) that fed the Israelites in the wilderness after their escape from Egypt.

Marduk The chief god of Babylon, the storm-god who defeated Tiamat, as recounted in *Enuma Elish*.

Masoretic Text The traditional medieval text of the Hebrew Bible.

Megiddo A major city in northern Israel that because of its strategic location was the site of many battles. In apocalyptic literature, it can be called Armageddon and is the site of the final battle between the forces of good and evil.

Mesha Stela An inscribed monument erected by the Moabite king Mesha in the mid-ninth century BCE celebrating his victory over the Israelites.

Mesopotamia A word of Greek origin meaning “(the land) in the middle of the rivers.” It refers to the fertile floodplain between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers and comprises much of modern Iraq and northern Syria.

messiah Derived from the Hebrew word *mashiah*, meaning “anointed one,” this term is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to past and present kings and priests who had been anointed. In later Jewish and in Christian traditions, it is used of a future leader to be sent by God.

Midian A region in northwestern Arabia where Mount Sinai may be located.

Minor Prophets In modern scholarship, the twelve shorter prophetic books, from Hosea through Malachi.

Moabites Israel’s neighbors east of the Dead Sea. The Moabites are the “sons of Moab,” who according to Genesis 19 were the offspring of Lot by one of his daughters.

myth A traditional narrative concerning the remote past in which gods and goddesses are often principal characters.
northern kingdom of Israel The territory that split

from Judah after the death of Solomon in the late tenth century BCE and was an independent kingdom with its capital in Samaria until the Assyrians conquered it in 722 BCE.

Old Testament In Christian tradition, the name for the first part of the Bible, which comprises the Jewish scriptures.

oracle against the nations A genre used by the prophets and in apocalyptic literature to describe Yahweh's judgment on foreign nations.

P The Priestly source according to the Documentary Hypothesis, found in the books of Genesis through Numbers and at the end of the book of Deuteronomy.

parallelism A feature of biblical and other ancient Near Eastern poetry in which one phrase or line is followed by another that is synonymous, contrasting, or climactic.

Passover The spring festival commemorating the Exodus from Egypt.

Pentateuch A word of Greek origin, meaning "five books," used by modern scholars to refer to the first five books of the Bible. *See also* Torah.

Philistines One group of the Sea Peoples. In the late second millennium BCE, having failed to conquer the Egyptians, they settled on the southeast coast of the Mediterranean where they vied with Israel for the control of Canaan. The term "Palestine" is derived from their name.

Promised Land The land promised by God to Abraham and his descendants. Its boundaries vary in the Bible, but it corresponds roughly to the territory comprising modern Israel and Palestine.

prophet A word of Greek origin meaning "spokesperson." The prophets were believed to be recipients of direct communications from God. Sayings of and stories about many of the prophets are found in the part of the Bible known as the Prophets.

prophetic gesture The use or interpretation by a prophet of an ordinary phenomenon as having symbolic meaning.

Prophets In Jewish tradition, the second of the three parts of the Hebrew Bible, comprising the books of Joshua

to 2 Kings and Isaiah to Malachi. *See also* Former Prophets; Latter Prophets; Major Prophets; Minor Prophets; Torah; Writings.

proverb A short pithy saying, often in poetry.

Purim The festival commemorating the deliverance of the Jews by Esther and Mordecai from the plot of the Persian official Haman.

redaction criticism In modern scholarship, the study of the processes of redacting or editing, by which such larger works as the Pentateuch and the book of Isaiah were given their final forms.

Reed Sea The body of water that the Israelites crossed in their Exodus from Egypt. Although later identified as the Red Sea, it is more likely one of several smaller bodies of water or wetlands east of the Nile Delta.

Ritual Decalogue In modern scholarship, the replacement copy of the Ten Commandments that Moses received from God after he had broken the first set because of his anger at the golden calf incident. Found in Exodus 34.10–26, it is exclusively concerned with worship, hence its name.

royal ideology In modern scholarship, the term for the complex of ideas associated with the Davidic monarchy, including the Davidic covenant.

sabbath The day of rest, the seventh day of the week. The term can also be used for longer periods of time, as in a “sabbatical year.”

sacrifice The ritual offering of food or incense to a deity.

Samaria The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel from the early ninth century to 722 BCE, when it fell to the Assyrians. Subsequently, Samaria was used as the name of the region in which the city was located.

scapegoat A goat “for Azazel” (Lev 16.10), probably originally a desert demon, to which the sins of the community are symbolically transferred on the Day of Atonement.

Sea Peoples A coalition of peoples who in the late second millennium BCE moved from their homeland in the

Aegean Sea through the eastern Mediterranean. One of the Sea Peoples was the Philistines.

Second Isaiah In modern scholarship, chapters 40– 55 of the book of Isaiah, dated to the mid-sixth century BCE. Also called Deutero-Isaiah.

Second Temple The Temple completed in 515 BCE to replace the Temple of Solomon, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586.

Second Zechariah In modern scholarship, chapters 9– 14 of the book of Zechariah, probably dated to the fifth century BCE. Also called Deutero-Zechariah.

Septuagint The ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, made beginning in the third century BCE.
servant songs In Second Isaiah, a group of four poems that speak of a servant of Yahweh. They are Isaiah 42.1– 4, 49.1– 6, 50.4– 11, and 52.13– 53.12.

Sheol The Hebrew term for the underworld, where persons go at death.

Shema In Jewish tradition, three excerpts from the books of Deuteronomy and Numbers that are recited daily and, written on small scrolls, attached to the body during prayer and to the door of a house. The term means “Hear,” from the opening word of Deuteronomy 6.4.
Siloam Tunnel *See* Hezekiah’s Tunnel.

Sinai The mountain on which God revealed himself to Moses and made the covenant with Israel. Its location is disputed.

son of man A phrase that in the Hebrew Bible means human being. In Daniel 7.13, it is used of someone who is given universal rule; the identity of this person is disputed.

southern kingdom of Judah The kingdom that after the death of Solomon in the late tenth century BCE continued to be ruled by the Davidic dynasty with its capital in Jerusalem, until it was captured by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. *See also* Judah.

Succession Narrative In modern scholarship, the originally independent source incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History that relates how Solomon eventually succeeded David on the throne. It is found in 2 Samuel 9– 20 and 1 Kings 1– 2. Also called the “Court History of David.”

suzerainty treaty In modern scholarship, a binding agreement between a king or suzerain and a lesser king, the suzerain's vassal. Elements of suzerainty treaties are used by the biblical writers in their presentation of the covenant between God and Israel.

synagogue A word of Greek origin meaning "gathering together," used of religious assemblies of Jews and the buildings in which such assemblies took place.

Syro-Ephraimite War The attack on Judah and Jerusalem by the northern kingdom of Israel and Aram in 734 BCE, in an attempt to force the king of Judah, Ahaz, to join an anti-Assyrian alliance.

tabernacle The moveable shrine that served as the Israelites' place of worship after the Exodus from Egypt, described in detail in Exodus 26. Also called the "tent of meeting."

Tanak An acronym used for the Hebrew Bible in Jewish tradition, formed from the first letter of the Hebrew names of each of its three parts: the Torah, the Neviim (the Prophets), and the Ketuvim (the Writings).

tell An artificial mound formed from the stratified accumulated debris of successive human occupations.

Temple of Solomon The Temple in Jerusalem built by King Solomon in the mid-tenth century and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. It is also known as the First Temple.

Ten Commandments The text of the contract or covenant between God and Israel made on Mount Sinai. *See also* Decalogue.

Tetragrammaton A word of Greek origin meaning "four letters," referring to the four Hebrew consonants (*yhwh*) of the name of the God of Israel, Yahweh.

theodicy A word of Greek origin meaning "divine justice," used with reference to literature that deals with the problem of human suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent.

theophany A word of Greek origin meaning the appearance of a god, used by modern scholars to refer to the appearance of a deity to humans, usually with appropriate manifestations of divine power.

Third Isaiah In modern scholarship, chapters 56– 66 of the book of Isaiah, dating to the late sixth or early fifth century BCE. Also called Trito-Isaiah.

Tiamat The goddess of the primeval salt water who in

Enuma Elish is defeated by the storm-god Marduk.

tithe A religious offering of one-tenth of the value of produce, livestock, or other commodities.

Torah/torah In Jewish tradition, the Torah is the first of three parts of the Hebrew Bible, comprising the five books of Moses from Genesis to Deuteronomy. The word *torah* literally means “teaching” or “instruction” and is often translated “law.” *See also* Prophets; Writings.

tradition history In modern scholarship, the study of the stages in the development of a genre, theme, or concept prior to its incorporation into the biblical text.

tree of life The tree in the garden of Eden whose fruit provided immortality.

tree of the knowledge of good and evil The tree in the garden of Eden whose fruit was forbidden.

Ugaritic A Semitic language closely related to Hebrew used in second-millennium BCE texts from the site of Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. The Ugaritic texts include a number of myths and epics that shed light on Canaanite religion.

United Monarchy During the tenth century BCE, the ten northern tribes of Israel and the southern tribe of Judah were united under the rule of David and his son Solomon, both of whom are called “king of Israel.” When Solomon died in 928 BCE, the united kingdom of Israel was split into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

Utnapishtim In the *Gilgamesh* epic, the hero of the story of the Flood.

Wellhausen, Julius (1844– 1918): A German scholar who wrote *A History of Israel* (1878), which is the classic formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis.

wisdom literature A type of writing whose focus is human existence and often its relationship to the divine. It employs a wide variety of forms, such as proverbs, dialogues, and fables. Wisdom literature was used widely in

the ancient Near East and is found throughout the Bible, especially in the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

Woman Wisdom The depiction of the quality of wisdom as a goddess who is the companion of Yahweh.

Writings In Jewish tradition, the third of three parts of the Hebrew Bible, comprising the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. *See also* Prophets; Torah.

Yahweh The personal name of the God of Israel. *See also* Tetragrammaton.

Zion A name of Jerusalem, used especially in poetic texts.