

EXPERIENCING SCRIPTURE



ANTONY CAMPBELL SJ

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Antony F Campbell, SJ

**EXPERIENCING
SCRIPTURE:**
INTIMACY WITH ANCIENT TEXT
AND MODERN FAITH

Antony F Campbell, SJ



Adelaide
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We are made in the image of God,
according to the likeness of God
(see Genesis 1:26)

When I consider your vastness, O God,
what are we that we are so special to you?
Yet we are!
(see Psalm 8:3–6)

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Abbreviations

ACR	<i>Australasian Catholic Record</i>
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (ed JB Pritchard)
ATI	<i>American Theological Inquiry</i>
ATF	Australian Theological Forum
CBQMS	The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i> .
JB	Jerusalem Bible (French: La Sainte Bible)
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series.
LXX	Septuagint, a Greek version of the Hebrew text
MT	Masoretic text, the traditional Hebrew text
NAB	New American Bible
NCB	New Century Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TOB	Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible (1977)
Vg	Vulgate, Latin translation of the Hebrew text

About this book

It is essential for those studying theology—basically, reflective thought about God—to be familiar with the Bible. Theology is not a recent development; it has been around for three thousand years or more and, in the Jewish and Christian faiths, theology begins with the Bible. It is important to be acquainted with it.

In the title ‘Experiencing Scripture’ full weight must be given to the *experiencing*, involving personal participation in the interpretation of a text. Many introductory courses about the Bible or the Older Testament teach students *about* these texts, but without actual experience of them. Presuming access to introductory information in one form or another, what this book aims to do is to give users personal experience of a limited number of significant texts from the Older Testament. The aim is to provide experiential awareness of these texts from the inside, rather than introductory knowledge about these texts from the outside.

For this ‘experiential awareness of these texts from the inside’ to be real, this book has to be used *hand in glove* with the Bible. As sections of this book are read, the relevant sections of the Older Testament have to be read and reflected on. Otherwise the ‘experiential awareness’ would be a total fraud. If readers of this book were merely convinced of my wisdom and experience and therefore of the rightness of what I have written about the Bible, my effort in writing this book and ATF’s in publishing it will have been wasted. This book has been written to enable people to get to know something of the Bible, to become acquainted with biblical text, and sensitive to its nature. For that to happen, sections of biblical text have to be read and absorbed. The aim of this book is to make that possible, better still to make it easier—not ‘easy’ (that would not be true) but easier than it might otherwise be.

Most people taking an introductory course on Bible or Older Testament want at least two things from a textbook: (1) it should be compre-

hensive, covering the entire field as far as possible; (2) it should be reasonably reliable and middle-of-the-road, providing a degree of confidence and security. An awareness that is lacking for many beginning students is the reality of the limits of such a textbook. To be comprehensive, it must—to some degree at least—be out of date. No author is capable of comprehensively researching the whole field, Bible or Older Testament, at a personal level; to some extent, authors must rely on what they were taught themselves a generation or so earlier or what they experience as currently accepted among their colleagues. The confidence and security such a textbook provides to its users is backed by the reputation of the author and the publisher.

Quite the contrary, however, is the aim of this book: not to replace an introductory text but—following some such introduction—to enable users to form their own judgments based on their personal awareness of a sample of significant texts. The confidence and security provided by a book of this kind is backed by and relies on the user's own experience of the text rather than on the reputation and judgment of another.

Consequently, this book aims to enable a user to become closely familiar with a limited number of Older Testament texts and so be in a position to form judgments about them and, resulting from that, to have an understanding of the nature of biblical text itself. Beyond this, the reality that these are key texts for the understanding of the Bible means that they have fundamental impact for the basics of faith today—our understanding of ourselves before God, essential to faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Israel's prophets reflect on the role of God in human life; faith in God's love, God's passion for justice, the essential place of fidelity in faith. Israel's foundational narratives explore the nature of human lives before God; they include issues such as creation, human freedom, and faith in God's unshakeable commitment to human life. Alongside these concerns, there is the importance of getting a feel for the nature of scripture. How does this biblical text reflect the mystery of God. Passages such as 1 Kings 13, 1 Kings 22, and Jeremiah 28, for example, show us Israel grappling with a related issue: how do we evaluate the claims of prophecy? Certainty is seldom to hand, but the issue remains for both Testaments. Getting close to key texts is the only route open to us. What our churches have to do, and what each of us has to do, is to experience scriptural text, to get up close with key texts and to leave space in faith for the fact of mystery. The use of 'Scripture' in the title, *Experiencing Scripture*, reflects the

reality that what is experienced in the Older Testament has its bearing on the Newer Testament too.

For many, it is preferable to rely on the views of another, assuming that the other is a satisfactorily reputable scholar. For some, it is better to rely on their own judgments, after achieving familiarity with specific texts and aware of the general trends of reputable scholarship in the area. This book is aimed to be of use to these latter. It aims to provide not the security of views that are safe and socially acceptable but the security of views that are based on informed personal experience of human living and of the biblical text.

Courtroom lawyers know the difference between hearsay and direct observation. We all know the difference between what people say of others and what we discover when we get to know those others personally. Much knowledge in today's world is out of our personal reach—whether in art and literature, science and technology, cosmology, climate change, and so much else. Although there are immense fields of knowledge that affect biblical studies and escape most of us—archaeology, history, languages, various specialist disciplines, and so much more—there is still scope for direct experience of the biblical text and for allowing the biblical text to speak to us directly of its nature. Enabling that experience is the goal of this book.

That goal is why this book cannot be comprehensive; it is not a survey. To put it as directly as possible, drawing on another sphere: first you fall in love, then you meet the family. This book is about falling in love with the Bible.

OLDER AND NEWER: A Note

The terms 'Older' and 'Newer' Testament are used here in place of the traditional 'Old' and 'New.' The primary purpose is simple: not to detract from the unity of the Bible from a Christian point of view. 'Old' is understood by some to mean 'outmoded' or 'bypassed,' a view that should not be encouraged. The old split between 'God of wrath' and 'God of love' has long been recognised as nonsense and has gone by the board. 'Old' and 'New' may need to go the same way. 'First' and 'Second' Testament to my mind will not be accepted; 'First' and 'New' is worse, positively inviting replacement thinking. 'Jewish' and 'Christian' divorces Christianity from Judaism. From a Christian point of view, it is of course heresy. The current 'Hebrew Scriptures' is a tad on the narrow side as well as misleading.

For the early part of the Bible, the Protestant canon is the same as that of the Hebrew Bible as far as the actual books included are concerned; the sequence of the books, however, is quite different and significantly so—at least potentially (prophets last, pointing to Jesus; or ‘writings’ last, pointing to the Temple). Not encompassing the deuterocanonical books, ‘Hebrew Scriptures,’ of course, ignores those of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other faiths. No terminology is fully satisfactory; ‘Older’ and ‘Newer’ is more ecumenical than most.

PROLOGUE

CONTEXT:

Ancient Near East Geography

Orientation is important whenever we move into new territory. When beginning serious study of the Older Testament, it helps to know where some of nations are, something of the shifts in the wielding of political power, and of course the literary and cultural influences that flowed over the region. Any simplifying involves inevitable simplification; here we necessarily simplify.

For the lie of the land, a good map is indispensable. Fortunately, there are plenty available. In the north-west corner (top left) of a map of the biblical world is Turkey, its ancient name Anatolia, and in the second millennium seat of the Hittites, a major empire in the ancient Near East (a classic treatment: OR Gurney, *The Hittites*, 1952/54). Some biblical texts call the local inhabitants in Canaan Hittites; once we are aware of this, confusion will be rare.

Coming down the coast, the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, a major geographical block is Syria (biblical Aram) extending deeply inland; south of it, clinging to the coast, is Lebanon with Canaan occupying the southern segment. Around the corner, on the southeastern edge of the Mediterranean, is Egypt.

Moving substantially inland, east from the Mediterranean, we now have Iraq and Iran, with Saudi Arabia to the south; the ancient world had at different times Assyria (toward the north) and Babylon (toward the middle). In terms of political power, the basic sequence is from Akkad (see below) to Assyria (in three periods) to Babylon—for the purposes of this book, we may overlook the Amorites and the Mitanni. Saudi Arabia, of course, did not exist as a nation until relatively recent times; the Arabian desert, on the other hand, has always been there with its myriad

nomadic inhabitants. Further east again was Persia, a relative latecomer on the biblical scene.

Another geographical locality needs our attention, even though neither it nor its inhabitants get a mention in the Bible. The place is Sumer and the people Sumerians (a classic treatment: SN Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 1963). A non-Semitic people, they are believed to be the originators of writing in the Ancient Near East. While they may not rate a biblical mention (they precede biblical times, belonging in the third millennium), their cultural and literary impact was enormous. Sumer itself was located in lower Mesopotamia, abutting the great Tigris-Euphrates delta. The people were not Semitic; their language was agglutinative (as is Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish). It is not related to any known language.

Finally, the town of Ugarit (or, in modern Arabic, Ras Shamra) needs to be mentioned. It was a centre of Near Eastern trade, situated on the Lebanese coast north of Israel. It was a coastal town (similarly, Byblos, Tyre, Sidon), a major trading post; it was not a kingdom or an empire. It was discovered in the late 1920s, when a peasant's plough struck what turned out to be a Mycenaean (Greek) tomb; attention shifted from the cemetery to a slight rise nearby indicating the presence of a town. A library of clay tablets was found in what was apparently a private house, adjoining the royal palace. The tablets were written in a previously unknown language, which proved to be alphabetic, written with cuneiform signs, and belonging to what has been called North-West Semitic with a closeness to Hebrew. It was deciphered within a year by three different scholars, in France, Germany, and America. Of major interest were the myths and legends that shed light on the cultural background to much Hebrew thought. The myths included poems about gods, such as El and Baal or Asherah and Anath, that otherwise had only been known as rather shadowy figures in the pagan pantheon of the Bible. (For the poems, see *ANET*; for more information, most accessible are probably Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* and Gray, *Near Eastern Mythology*.)

A SMATTERING OF POLITICS

In the second half of the third millennium (perhaps 2360—2180 BCE), the Akkadian empire held sway over Mesopotamia, sometimes more. Its two greatest kings were Sargon and NorAm-Sin. The city of that name (Akkad/Accad) was in northern Babylonia, on the river Euphrates; the city's exact whereabouts are not known with certainty. As empire, Akkad is the name given to the region of Mesopotamia north of Babylon

and south of Assyria. Akkadian is the name now given to the language of Mesopotamia from about 2500—500 BCE. It supplanted Sumerian, and in turn was supplanted by Aramaic, beginning around the sixth century BCE. For Sumerian and Akkadian, the writing used was cuneiform (characters imprinted on clay using wedge-shaped instruments). Assyrian power extended back into the second millennium BCE; in the early part of the first millennium BCE Assyria was the dominant power in Mesopotamia. In the closing years of the seventh century BCE, Babylon took over the primacy from Assyria, until in its turn it was replaced by the power of Persia (for a comprehensive account of Assyria and Babylonia, see A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 1964; for Persia perhaps Jon Berquist, *Judaism in Persia's Shadow*, 1995). The story of Egypt, of course, as one of the great powers of the ancient Near East extends back beyond the second millennium BCE and forward into the final centuries of Older Testament times. To situate all this beyond the Middle East, in the wider context of India, China, and America, the general reader has available Glyn Daniel, *The First Civilizations: The Archaeology of Their Origins* (1968).

CONTEXT:

Ancient Israel's History

Defining and understanding 'history' occupies volumes. Histories of Israel range from earlier volumes which were basically paraphrases of the Bible to more recent volumes which are not. The primary dilemma is simple enough: the Bible is not particularly interested in history; on the other hand, at least for the last couple of centuries Christian biblical scholars have been obsessed with history and the Bible. In my understanding, the primary interest of much of the Bible has been in understanding what has been happening and coping with it theologically. History has not been to the fore. In a totally different context, a remarkably apt observation is made by Inga Clendinnen, herself a historian: 'Making coherent stories out of the fragments we find lying about is a natural human inclination, and socially a necessary one, but when doing history it must be resisted' (*Dancing with Strangers*, 12). For Israel, it may have been a social necessity to make coherent stories out of the fragments of tradition—particularly those that concerned the ancestors or became the Pentateuch. For Christians today, the indulgence of an obsession with history is a natural inclination that must be resisted.

History is normally based on documentary sources (multiple) and records (of various sorts); added to these are mute artifacts (works of art,

works of architecture, discoveries of archaeology, etc). For biblical material, documentary sources and records outside the Bible are relatively few; the Bible as documentary source is often unhelpful if its primary concern is unhistorical. Archaeological discoveries require interpretation; such interpretation has all too often proved highly subjective. Archaeological discoveries related to the Bible may appear abundant; that appearance may be deceptive. Tunneling in Jerusalem began in 1864–67, the Palestine Exploration Fund was established in 1865, and it was not until 1890 that the first stratigraphical excavation was begun by Sir Flinders Petrie in 1890, at Tell el-Hesi. For all the immense industry that has followed those beginnings, Palestinian archaeology is in its infancy.

Before any history of Israel can be attempted, the nature of the Pentateuch, and also the so-called historical books, has to be determined. If Genesis One, for example, was not reporting how creation was believed to have occurred (which it certainly was not), if the stories of the Garden, Cain, the Flood, were not reports of what was believed to have happened back then (which they may not have been), and if the stories of the ancestors, of the Exodus from Egypt, and even the texts concerning Sinai and the wilderness were not composed with a view to preserving history (which may well be the case), then the starting point for any history of Israel must be chosen with care in order not to distort the Bible. It is a sobering thought that the contents of the Pentateuch do not rate a mention in 1–2 Chronicles. Chronicles is about Jerusalem's Temple, starting with David (after Adam, Seth, and Enosh, and genealogies galore) and ending with Cyrus and his decree for the rebuilding of the Temple. Primeval times and ancestors, Egypt and Exodus, Sinai and Settlement are not reported. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are there, but merely in the genealogies. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, even Joshua, are there—in the genealogies. The silence merely means that Chronicles is about something else. Nevertheless, it is sobering to realise that, in Chronicles' view, the traditions of the Pentateuch did not matter enough to be mentioned, even in passing. On a more limited scale, Walter Brueggemann remarks: 'It has been assumed that this [Gen 2–3] is a decisive text for the Bible and that it states the premise for all that follows. In fact, this is an exceedingly marginal text' within the Hebrew Bible (*Genesis*, 41).

We can begin safely enough—although not without controversy—around the tenth century BCE. Currently, we do not have extra-biblical material (non-biblical documents etc) available for the time of David and Solomon. Currently, such references begin around the mid-ninth century.

Four come to mind: 'Ahab, the Israelite' mentioned in the monolith of Shalmaneser, c 852 (*ANET*, 279); 'Jehu, son of Omri' mentioned in the same Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk, c 840 (*ANET*, 280–81); 'the house of David' mentioned in the Tell Dan stele, c 835 (*IEJ*, 45:1–18); Omri and son mentioned in the Mesha stele, c 830 (*ANET*, 320). Before this mid-ninth century period, there has to be time for Saul, David, and Solomon, as well as Jeroboam and others. It is quite a squeeze. In my judgment, there is quite a bit of legendary exaggeration in the Solomonic texts; the Davidic texts, on the other hand, are surprisingly sober in what they portray?

The Bible portrays Saul as Israel's first king, established and deposed by the prophet Samuel. David follows, then Solomon, one of his sons. The image of Solomon can be one of great wisdom and wealth; the same biblical texts also portray him ending up as a senile idolater. The Israel over which Saul, David, and Solomon reigned is portrayed as one kingdom, referred to in modern times as the 'united kingdom.' The break-up of this kingdom into a northern kingdom (with ten tribes, beginning under Jeroboam I) and a southern kingdom (with Judah and usually Benjamin, remaining under the Davidic dynasty) is situated toward the end of the tenth century (around 932–922 BCE). The 'united' aspect of David and Solomon's united kingdom is portrayed in the biblical text as far from strong.

Assyrian power brought the northern kingdom to an end in 722, incorporating it as three provinces within the Assyrian empire. In 701, the Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, a siege that was suddenly lifted; the experience of deliverance marked the theology of the time. The 'deuteronomic reform,' a reform movement associated with the book of Deuteronomy and endorsed by the Judean king, Josiah, had major theological and social impact on Israel in the closing decades of the seventh century. About the same time, Assyrian power weakened and fell prey to the Babylonian empire. The Babylonians made a first move on Jerusalem in 597 and ten years later sacked the city in 587, the formal beginning of the period that is known as Israel's exile. In due course, the Babylonians fell to the power of the Persians, and the exile was formally ended with the decree of the Persian king, Cyrus, in 538 BCE.

The years after this exile (the post-exilic period) have proved a fertile ground for intensive study in recent years. The numbers returning to Jerusalem were disappointing. The problems associated with the return were many. The people who had been left behind in Judah (now the Persian province of Yehud) were naturally not particularly hospitable to the re-

turning exiles. Both sides seemed to view themselves as the 'faithful remnant'. A diaspora (those living in Babylon and elsewhere) grew in strength and size. In due course, the Persians were replaced by the Greeks, and the Greeks by the Romans. Resistance was mounted in Israel (by Hasmoneans and Maccabees for example). Issues such as the rebuilding of the temple and questions of intermarriage bulk large in the post-exilic literature. The enormous impact of the period is proving a rich lode for much modern research.

CONTEXT:

Interpretation As Art

The art of interpretation is just that: an art. 'How to' books are written in abundance; unfortunately, too many of the 'how to do it' books are written by those who have not done very much of it. The subjective element has to be identified and appreciated. The relevance of certain approaches has to be evaluated for the specific text under consideration. One size certainly does not fit all. What I propose here comes from long experience and practice. I dare hope it will be helpful; I am sure it should not be the last word.

Describing interpretation as an art rather than a science is to give more weight to intuition than to process (that in, to validated intuition over pre-determined sequence—'more an art than a science, requiring sensitivity to the individual case rather than mechanical implementation'[Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 1.184]). As an art, interpretation leans toward the conscious use of acquired skills and creative imagination. As a process, more weight would be given to the steps to be applied to the raw material in order to form the product. Interpretation, often referred to in biblical circles as exegesis (for the outsider, a sometimes mystifying word of Greek origin), is frequently portrayed in process terms. In a process-dominated approach, step-by-step, the text (the raw material) needs to be treated using the insights and skills of the discipline known as text criticism (how to establish the best available text). Stepwise, this is then followed by source criticism (the unity of a text's origins; formerly misnamed literary criticism reflecting the German *Literarkritik*), by form criticism (what sort of a text is this?), tradition history (what can be known of the past of these ideas?), redaction criticism (has serious editing had its effect on this text?), canon criticism (what does the situation of this text within the canon of scripture contribute?), and numerous others. It is the 'numerous others' that points

to qualities in the text or interests in the interpreter that otherwise would not be adequately accounted for. At this point an observation from Stanley Fish is appropriate: 'This meant that the business of criticism was not . . . to determine a correct way of reading but to determine from which of a number of possible perspectives reading will proceed' (*Is There a Text in This Class?*, 16). 'Numerous others' includes a wide range of 'possible perspectives'. Their inclusion is surely right; to achieve it by insistence on a mechanical sequence of procedures is surely wrong.

It is the mandatory step-by-step process that is problematic for interpretation. As an art, interpretation encounters the whole, brings acquired skills to bear, and—insightfully, imaginatively, with methodical care—looks to see what ought to be done to validate what intuition, or pondered impression, suggests as potential meaning in the text under consideration.

The process approach to interpretation raises practical problems. As with any task in the area of arts and crafts, tools need to be selected that are suitable to the job in hand. For interpretation, text criticism may be vitally necessary or fundamentally unnecessary; a general survey of the text and the task in hand will lead to that decision. Similarly, the need for a source-critical analysis will depend on the text in question and the nature of the task in hand. Form criticism's basic question is: what sort of a text is this? For many uses of a text, a brief answer is about as far as form-critical inquiry needs to go. The more a listing of this kind progresses, the clearer it becomes that the demands of interpretation need to be evaluated in terms of two issues: the nature of the text itself and the nature of the task being addressed. An inquiry for academic purposes into a highly composite text is a quite different matter from a group leader's preparation for group discussion of a text that is relatively unified or a preacher's preparation of a homily.

Similarly, there may be a difference of focus and intensity of concern between the interpretation of texts believed to be communicating information as to what should be and texts found to be in conflict and therefore inviting to thought as to what might be. Where information is concerned, the question arises of its authority: primarily divine or primarily human. Where invitation to thought is concerned, the thought to which we are invited could be from either human or divine sources and issues of social and cultural context are well to the fore.

Readers of *Experiencing Scripture* want to get a first-hand feeling for the nature of biblical text. Source criticism can show that certain texts are composite, involving the combination of complete or near-complete sto-

ries (rare, two only: Flood and Sea), or made up from one story along with additions, enhancements, contrary views, etc from other sources (quite common). Form criticism can ask the questions that reveal texts as love poetry, reports of events, political propaganda, reflective stories, and so much more. A reader's task is not to encompass all these possibilities; it is rather to realise that in biblical text such things are possible.

As art, interpretation will begin with an overview to gain some familiarity with the text, in the light of the use to be made of the text. Armed with a degree of familiarity with the text, the interpreter can then evaluate the approaches that may be necessary or helpful in getting at the meaning of the text relevant to the context in which it is being used (any dogmatically fixed sequence of approaches is obviously out of the question).

Initial acquaintance with the text should involve the question: what sort of a text is this. Technically, this is a genus and species question, but technical or not we are all aware of the importance of such questions. There is the old crack that if you don't know the difference between a mail-box and an elephant's ear, we won't ask you to post the letters. There is the embarrassing situation after a family conference deciding on the need for a dog, when somebody comes back from the pet shop with a half-grown fluffy cat—'It looked like a puppy to me.' The genus and species of a text, what form criticism calls literary genre, is essential to beginning to understand its meaning.

Once upon a time, some people assumed that most narrative text in the Bible was history. This is much the same as assuming that most animals in the world are dogs. Biblical texts can be reports of a past event, commentary on a present situation, or predictions of a future hope. They can express human feeling or human thought. They can contain commands and prohibitions as well as exhortations and instructions. They can deal with fact or fiction, story or propaganda, and practically every other literary form that human ingenuity has harnessed in the service of expression.

One aspect of form criticism was its concern for setting (German: *Sitz im Leben*). The question was: what sort of a social situation gave rise to a text like this. Form criticism embraced the reality of *patterns* in human expression and went beyond to ask after the *settings* for such texts in human living. After the contributions of Stanley Fish, we recognise that an element of setting is context. The simple question 'How is it?' varies in meaning according to its context. Asked by a patient of a doctor, it may receive the reply 'OK; it's non-cancerous.' Asked of a friend looking out the window, it may receive the reply 'OK; it's cloudy, but there's no rain

in sight'. Asked of a gardener looking at a plant, the reply may be 'OK; it's healthy enough, but it was root-bound and needed replanting'. The simple question, 'What happened?' asked of a historian may get one reply, but get a quite different reply from a novelist. All of this is part of exploring what sort of a text is being dealt with. More than the answers, it matters to be aware of and open to the questions. A second context beyond the context of the text, yet equally open to awareness and question, is the context of the interpreter (for example, liberals, conservatives, etc etc), open to consideration from a number of points of view. Again, more than lists of contexts, it matters to be aware of and open to possibilities.

With biblical texts, as so often with texts from the distant past, things are more complex. Both authors and editors, setting and context are what, borrowing a term from Paul Ricoeur, can be called 'functions' of the text; as a rule, they do not tell us about the text, but the text tells us about them. As a result, our understanding of the context of a text is controlled by our understanding of the text itself. The hypothetical cannot be avoided; awareness and caution must be the order of the day.

With some awareness of the sort of text being dealt with, the reader has to assess what is needed for interpretation against the background of the nature of the text and the nature of the task that interpretation is needed for. Needs can be multiple: personal, pastoral, and academic. The demands of interpretation will vary in each case. After establishing the boundaries of a text (an important task all too easily overlooked), a first basic step, which will be common to most interpretation, is to become aware of the blocks of material (or stages of the narrative) in the text and the functional relationships between them. Out of this awareness comes the evaluation of the approaches needed: perhaps source criticism, perhaps more intensive form criticism, perhaps reflection on tradition or redaction (editing), and so on. Any attempt to impose a unique sequence for interpretive approaches is out of the question. For almost all purposes, some conscious sense of the structure of the present state of the text is a basic starting point for whatever follows. Structure involves questions like: is it organised? if it is, how is it organised? what relationships exist between its parts? Fuller investigation and interpretation can proceed from there, along the trajectory toward meaning.

In this book, analysis of what I see as the structure of those texts being dealt with in detail will be presented in tabular form. Readers will realise that this is, at the same time, both description and interpretation. The advantage of the tabular presentation is that it shows the reader at a glance