

PREFACE

The studies in this volume focus on some major issues in biblical research to which I have given attention over several decades:

The applicability of the “comparative method” toward the elucidation of biblical modes of thought, literary problems, and textual cruxes, over and against an interpretation based on insights derived intertextually from the biblical writings.

The identification of specific biblical literary techniques in this endeavor to gauge pivotal aspects of the ancient Israelites’ conceptual universe.

In the introductory chapter, the methodological problems that inhere in the comparative approach are set out. They are then illustrated by several examples pertaining to sociopolitical institutions and theological concepts, as well as to philological and literary aspects of the biblical writings. The ensuing in-depth analyses of selected issues—the pertinence of the biblical רֶפְאִים to the Ugaritic *rpui(m)*, the mythic concept of the “navel of the earth,” the ancient Israelites’ understanding of “revelation,” the conjectured existence of a biblical national epic, and the prophets’ presumed propagation of a “desert ideal”—culminate in findings that differ substantially from the views on these matters that prevail in contemporary biblical scholarship.

These studies underpin the proposition that by probing specific literary patterns and modes to which various biblical authors and editors repeatedly had recourse, one can elicit facets of speculative thought which the ancient Israelites entertained, but which do not find expression in the Hebrew writings in systematic and comprehensive accounts. This approach is illustrated by an examination of the pivotal concept of “eschatology” in relation to the biblical understanding of “history.” It is here that the interplay of form and content comes into full view.

In this context, I highlight some prominent techniques that biblical writers applied in the structuralization of larger literary units. The “resumptive repetition” enabled a writer to preserve, in his necessarily one-dimensional

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narration, the synchronicity of discrete but nevertheless interrelated events that occurred simultaneously in diverse locations. By splitting the line of discourse and intersplicing the parallel-running threads of the complex narrative, carefully marking the cutoff and resumption by the reiteration of key phrases, an author succeeded in impressing on his readers the concurrence of the events he was reporting. Their coincidence would have been lost in a one-line presentation, which would have created the impression of a sequential occurrence. A “redactor” would have used the very same technique for secondarily inserting initially independent units into an already “closed” corpus of literature. The “resumptive repetition” is thus seen as a technical mode, whose impact can be traced in the biblical texts on various levels of their transmission.

The widespread employment of the “resumptive repetition” and other such compositional techniques proves that they cannot be considered idiosyncracies of one or another author, nor characteristics of one or another literary stratum or source. Rather, they must be adjudged tools of the trade of the biblical literati generally, throughout the entire period of ancient Hebrew creativity. This phenomenon should be taken into account when the historico-critical method is brought to bear on the elucidation of the composition of biblical literary entities and their interpretation. This desideratum is exemplified in the analysis of a composite pericope of historiography—2 Kgs 17:24–41.

In the concluding essay, I present in detail my understanding of the book of Esther as a historicized “wisdom-tale,” identifying in it themes and collocations that reveal in the tale of Esther and Mordecai the presence of the “type-plot” of the low exile who rises to prominence at a foreign king’s court.

I wish to thank the editors and publishers of the periodicals and co-authored books in which these studies originally appeared for granting permission to republish them in this collection. While the scholarly discussion of the issues investigated was not brought up to date, practically all the essays have been reworked and expanded, several to a significant degree.

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Yom-Tov Lipmann, my mother, Hanna, and my sisters, Gerda and Regina Zelmanowicz, who perished in the Shoah.