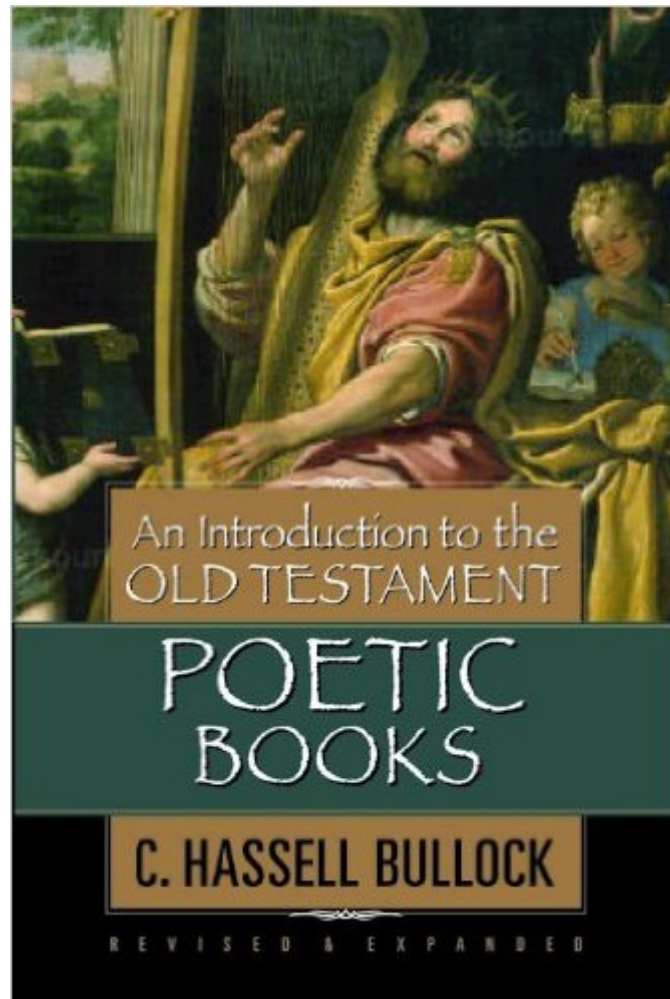


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An Introduction To The Old Testament Poetic Books



Synopsis

The poetic books of the Old Testament—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon—are often called humankind's reach toward God. The other books of the Old Testament picture God's reach toward man through the redemptive story. Yet these five books reveal the very heart of men and women struggling with monumental issues such as suffering, sin, forgiveness, joy, worship, and the passionate love between a man and woman. C. Hassell Bullock, a noted Old Testament scholar, delves deep into the hearts of the five poetic books, offering readers helpful details, like:

- Hermeneutical considerations for each book
- Theological content and themes
- Detailed analyses of each book
- Cultural perspectives.

Hebrew is a language of "intrinsic musical quality that naturally supports poetic expression," says Bullock in his introduction. That poetic expression comes from the heart of the Old Testament writers and reaches all of us exactly where we are in our own struggles and joys.

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Customer Reviews

I read this book as an assigned text for a seminary course on the Old Testament poetic books. I had previously read David Howard's complementary "Introduction to the OT Historical Books" (part of the same series as Bullock's poetic intro) for another course, and I really appreciated Howard's work. So, I expected Bullock's work to be comparable. Frankly, I was disappointed. I found Bullock's writing style to be rather cumbersome and bland. Whereas Howard's writing was engaging and accessible, I found myself struggling to stay on track with Bullock. I also found his use of first-person

plural pronouns to be strange. He frequently mentioned that "we" were making a particular conclusion or "we" were subscribing to a particular interpretation. Who is that "we?" Is he making decisions on behalf of me, the reader? Is he speaking on behalf of a group of nameless co-authors? Or is he presuming to speak for the entire evangelical community? In any case, the use of "we" was always odd and often annoying. These quibbles aside, Bullock's work is still substantial and helpful. He does a decent job of pulling together the various historical and contemporary scholarly positions for each of the poetic books. Of particular note was his approach to the various approaches taken to deal with the Song of Songs, in which he refused (to my surprise) to completely ignore the allegorical method which has a rich history but has been basically cast aside by modern scholars. In each chapter, I found his interaction with different methodologies and theological perspectives to be gracious, while maintaining a robust evangelical base.

[An evangelical perspective:] In terms of theology, argumentation, and factual accuracy, this book is generally very sound. The most important consideration is theology, and though Bullock never explicitly affirms certain fundamentals like the authority of Scripture or the existence of God, he clearly presupposes them. For example, he is quick to point out, as any orthodox reader would hope, that the theme of Proverbs is, in fact, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning wisdom" (174) and that Job supports, as expected, the truth of justice of God (128). He maintains a cautious and evenhanded tone in his discussion of contentious hermeneutical issues, ultimately weighing in on the side of exegetical conservatism, but not without giving a fair turn to contrasting viewpoints. In his discussion of interpretive methods for the Song of Songs, for instance, he does not dismiss the mythological method out-of-hand, but considers it thoroughly before labeling it as overly speculative (253). Unfortunately, Bullock makes several confusing and poorly supported interpretive choices on smaller issues. For instance, his position on the contrasting natures of the theology of wisdom (ancient versus modern) is unnecessarily dichotomous. Is the idea of a sovereign God (60) really just an ancient concern? Is a focus on mortality (74) really just a modern one? In his discussion of Job, Bullock makes what appears to be a fallacious argument regarding its structure: "the literary unity of Job should be assumed so that the message of the book as a whole may be determined" (97). But if the book has no literary unity, maybe it has no coherent message. Later he writes, "the wholistic [sic] approach takes precedence for the sake of literary integrity" (97).

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