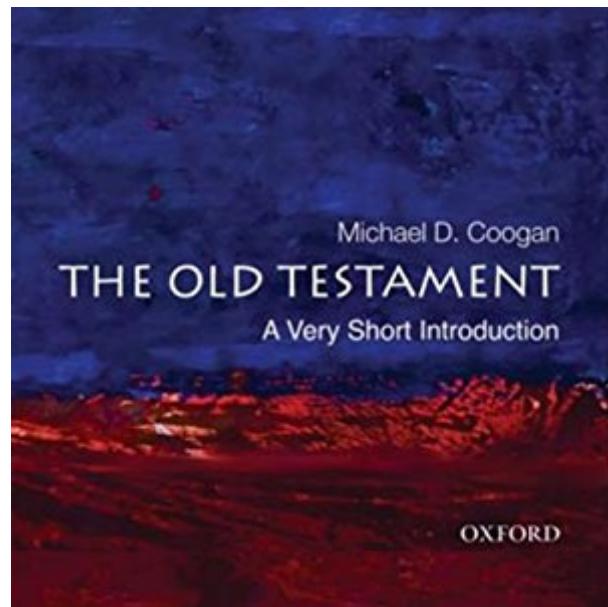


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# The Old Testament: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

Eminent biblical scholar Michael D. Coogan offers here a wide-ranging and stimulating exploration of the Old Testament, illuminating its importance as history, literature, and sacred text. Coogan explains the differences between the Bible of Jewish tradition (the "Hebrew Bible") and the Old Testament of Christianity, and also examines the different contents of the Bibles used by Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox Christians, and Protestants. He looks at the rise of modern biblical scholarship as well as the recovery of ancient Near Eastern literatures and their significance for biblical interpretation. Coogan explores the use of invented dialogue and historical fiction in the Old Testament, the presence of mythic elements in apparently historical accounts, and the relationship of ancient Israelite myths to those of their neighbors. The audiobook considers the Old Testament's idea of divine justice, especially in Ecclesiastes and Job, and looks at notions of the afterlife in the ancient Near East and in ancient Israel. Coogan highlights the significance of the history and literature of the Old Testament and describes how non-biblical evidence, such as archaeological data and texts, has placed the Old Testament in a larger and more illuminating context. The audiobook also discusses law and ritual in the Bible as well as the biblical understandings of prophecy. Here then is a marvelous overview of one of the great pillars of Western religion and culture, a book whose significance has endured for thousands of years and which remains vitally important today for Jews, Christians, and Muslims worldwide. About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Produced by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1995, Oxford University Press launched a new series called Very Short Introductions. Hundreds of these little books have come out since then, everything from Ancient Warfare to Hinduism to Wittgenstein. Written by a recognized expert, each one is designed to provide "a stimulating and accessible way in to a new subject." One such volume is *The Old Testament*, by Michael Coogan, who at the time was Professor of Religious Studies at Stonehill College and Director of Publications for the Harvard Semitic Museum. I regularly teach classes on the Old Testament. So I decided to read this book mainly because I wanted to pick up some ideas and strategies for taking on this task. I found a good bit of what I was looking for. A fine teacher, Coogan is at his best when explaining, for example, the development and canonization of Tanak(h), sometimes called the Hebrew Bible (pp. 1-11); or how source analysis, form criticism, feminist readings, and the canonical approach might be applied to the first fifteen chapters of Exodus (43-47); or the contents of the book of Job and how that book represents a strong, dissenting voice among the many voices that can be heard in the Jewish Scriptures (106-110). Conservative readers might be put off by any number of things in this book, like Coogan's assertion that the chronology of the Bible is often unreliable and sometimes just wrong (23), or his questioning of the existence of Abraham and the historicity of the Exodus (32). At times, I found his endorsement of Enlightenment culture a little over-the-top, like when he speaks of modern philosophy as critical thinking without presuppositions (21).

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