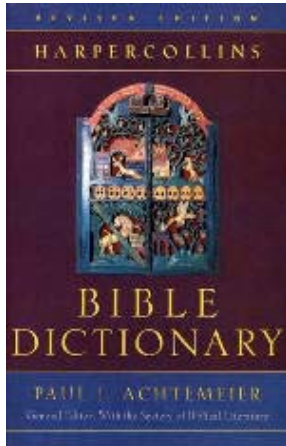


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Achtemeier, Paul J., Roger S. Boraas, Michael Fishbane, and PHEME PERKINS, eds.

The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary

New York: HarperCollins, 1996. Pp. xxiv + 1256, Cloth, No Price Available, ISBN 0060600373.

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This is a revised, expanded, and updated edition of the original *Harper's Bible Dictionary* published in 1985. Produced under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature by 179 of its members and revised with the help of a further 108, the avowed intention of the dictionary is "to make more widely available, and to an audience of nonspecialists, the results of the best of current biblical scholarship" (p. xix).

The *HarperCollins* is thus a broadly based reference work which contains articles on individual books of the Bible, names of persons and places mentioned therein (if they appear three times or more), major archaeological sites, important theological terms and topics, and those cultures that exerted some form of influence over the biblical peoples (such as Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome). The range of the dictionary also takes in much of the parabiblical literature (the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha). In all there are several thousand articles of varying lengths. In addition to these articles, the dictionary contains two prefaces, a useful section on the standard abbreviations of biblical and related literature (itself a useful reference tool), and a series of color maps with an index of place names.

The articles contained in the dictionary are useful, relevant, and up-to-date (the original articles which appeared in 1985 have all been reviewed, and where necessary, updated in the light of new findings). The language of these articles is generally nontechnical, and the content accessible to nonspecialists. Articles vary in length and detail according to the importance or interest of the subject matter. In addition to the brief dictionary entries, there are a number of longer expository articles in larger print. These include topics such as "Archaeology, History and the Bible," "Art in the Biblical Period," "The Bible and Western

Art," "Jerusalem." To these there have been added approximately 100 new articles on topics relating directly or indirectly to the biblical background such as "Masada," "judge," and "emperor cult." Particularly useful for the nonspecialist, however, will be the newly added articles on alternative interpretative methodologies, such as "narrative criticism," "feminist hermeneutics," and "liberation hermeneutics," which are increasingly gaining acceptance in mainstream biblical criticism.

The dictionary contains numerous helpful drawings and photographs in black and white, as well as several color pages in the center of the book. Most of these illustrations are well chosen and of good quality. A few of the black-and-white photographs are not so clearly defined (as was the case with the original *Harper's Bible Dictionary*): this is particularly so with some inscriptions and landscape photographs. However, this should not detract from the essential usefulness of the layout.

Another positive aspect of the dictionary, certainly as far as the nonspecialist is concerned, will be its ease of use (especially when compared to many of its multivolume cousins). For example, if one wanted to look up "eagle" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, one would find a cross-reference to a very long article on "zoology" in which the relevant information still requires some effort to track down. The shorter articles which characterize the *HarperCollins* are, however, ideally suited to such individual smaller topics. Often the *HarperCollins* seems to provide as much information as the *ABD* in these areas, and sometimes more. The *HarperCollins* also compares extremely favorably to other one-volume dictionaries of the same ilk, such as the *New Bible Dictionary*, in terms of breadth of scholarship, readability, and general usefulness.

Very short articles (rightly) do not have bibliographies attached and cross-reference the reader to other articles in the dictionary. However, the extent of the bibliography offered at the end of medium-length articles seems to vary between authors (five items for "Romans," but only one for "Ecclesiastes"). I was surprised that the author of the article on Ecclesiastes (James L. Kugel) selected only Michael Fox's commentary for further reading; I suspect that Fox would disagree with Kugel's understanding of the basic argument of Ecclesiastes and would certainly date the book to the Hellenistic, rather than the Persian period (i.e., some two hundred years later than the dictionary entry would suggest). This, in fact, remains the current scholarly consensus as to the date, although very recently a Persian dating has begun to find an increasing number of advocates (Kugel and C. L. Seow among them). Perhaps the possibility of a Hellenistic dating should have been mentioned and Seow's new commentary on Ecclesiastes in the Anchor Bible series listed alongside Fox's to balance the opposing views.

Authors are, generally speaking, balanced and cautious in the assessments that they make and the positions that they adopt, although differences of authorial opinion may occasionally be discerned when the topic of dictionary entries overlap. Thus Gerald L. Mattingly writes in "Conquest of Canaan" that the article ". . . recognizes the Israelite conquests in Transjordan as necessary antecedents to the invasion of Canaan proper and

defines the conquest as a more gradual process that extended beyond the brief series of campaigns described in the book of Joshua" (p. 193). By contrast, when Philip J. King writes in "Archaeology, History and the Bible," he speaks of current excavations shedding light on "Israelite origins in Canaan" and goes on to add that ". . . a dialogue between archaeology and biblical studies may help in understanding the process of Israelite emergence in the central hill country of Canaan" (p. 56). Both views are, however, mainstream, although the "emergence" model apparently supported by King has been gaining ground in recent years. Moreover, both authors are quick to point out that there are a number of possible ways of interpreting the available evidence and cite these possibilities during their articles.

One of the great strengths of the *HarperCollins* is in fact that its articles deal specifically with archaeology. Good use is also made of archaeological data in the articles dealing with biblical locations (e.g., "Hazor," "Lachish," "Jerusalem"). My only quibble is that this type of evidence was not always brought to bear when it might have been helpful: for example, the entry "Economics in Old Testament Times" by David C. Hester has a subsection entitled "The Monarchy (1020-586 B.C.)," which perhaps dwells overmuch on the "apes, ivories and peacocks" of the biblical Solomon at the expense of archaeology and what this might have told us about the post-Solomonic economies of Israel and Judah. Under the subsection "The Restoration (538-416 B.C.)," it might also have been helpful to mention the introduction of coinage and the move towards a monetarized economy (although this topic is covered in an informative expository article "money").

Minor details aside, the *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* is an excellent reference tool. It remains the best comprehensive one-volume Bible dictionary on the market, and is sometimes superior to much larger (and more expensive) dictionaries on minor topics. It is up-to-date, readable, and easy to use, and I have no hesitation in recommending this dictionary as a resource for any bible student or religious professional.