

# Preface

This work is patterned after an extremely useful book, *A Handbook to Literature*, published by Prentice-Hall and now in its eighth edition. It is essentially an extended glossary of the terminology currently used in interpreting the Bible. More specifically, it focuses on the vocabularies of the various interpretive methods that biblical scholars use in speaking about the biblical texts. Covered herein are approximately fifty methods, both old and new, ranging from source criticism to social-scientific criticism to deconstruction.

There are two primary reasons for writing a book of this sort. First, there presently is nothing available that is as comprehensive or as accessible as this work. The few handbooks on the market are limited in scope to the New Testament, to the Old Testament, or to other particular areas of interest. It is therefore often the case that if a student, pastor, scholar, or any interested person wants to know something about a particular method, he or she must sift through literally hundreds of pages in a variety of scholarly works. Most of these books are written by scholars with other scholars as the target audience, which means that the language is more often than not inaccessible to the nonspecialist. With this work, I have attempted to do the sifting and then to condense the materials into manageable synopses that employ scholarly but accessible terminology. The book also provides in a single volume an extensive but certainly not exhaustive list of terms associated with biblical studies. Of course, one of the primary problems with a work such as this is determining what to include and what to omit. In the course of compiling this book, questions arose about the distinction between theological and literary terms, between critical and literary terms, and between critical and technical terms. For the sake of focus, I have included only those terms that relate in some way to interpreting the biblical texts as literary documents. Theological terms are included whenever theological and literary concerns converge.

Second, by presenting the various methods together in one place, this book highlights the role that methods play in the interpretive process. Most people outside the professional fields related to biblical studies are unaware of the constitutive role of interpretive methods. Methods are doors of access to the biblical texts because they actually determine what kinds of questions interpreters put to the texts. Literary source criticism, for example, asks questions about the genesis of a text, while reader-response criticism asks questions about the role that a reader's response plays in determining meaning. Redaction criticism relates meaning to authorial intention while social-scientific criticism asks questions about the relation between authorial intention and the defining structures of the author's social location. This book should assist readers in recognizing that, while these methods do not ask the same questions or have the same focus, each one can contribute to our understanding of the biblical texts. Furthermore, in order to make the book as relevant as possible, I have attempted to give adequate, albeit abbreviated, illustrations of biblical usage.