PREFACE

The rich and variegated essays that appear in this volume are gathered to honor the scholarship and teaching of James L. Kugel, Harry Starr Professor of Classical and Modern Jewish and Hebrew Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University and Professor of Bible at Bar Ilan University in Israel. All the contributors engage the honoree’s work. It is with great joy that we offer these essays as a tribute to him and as an expression of gratitude for his gifts to the fields of Jewish studies, biblical studies and comparative literature. The contributors may have encountered him in New Haven or Cambridge, in the United States or Israel, as colleagues or as students, but all have in common the lasting impression he has made on their perceptions of biblical interpretation. His brilliance and poetic spirit have transformed our understanding of the Bible and our conceptions of the relationship between Scripture and interpretation.

The title of this volume points to the heart and soul of James Kugel’s contribution to scholarship. To be sure, it is difficult to capture in a single phrase the breadth, depth, and nuance of Kugel’s interaction with texts of Judaism in antiquity. Among the intellectual gifts that he brings to his work are a highly refined literary sensibility that embraces a knowledge of literature from antiquity to the present; boundless creativity that allows him to challenge established orthodoxies; and a poetic soul that infuses each of his works with stylistic elegance and extraordinary clarity. Kugel’s writing has served to illuminate how Judaism became a textualized religion by considering anew the interrelationships of text and interpretation, tradition and innovation, and production and reception. His work has significant implications for the historical study of Christian origins and the study of Judaism, as well as for the appropriation of sacred texts by Jews, Christians, and Muslims today.

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There has been a decided shift of emphasis in contemporary biblical studies due in part to Kugel’s work. No longer focusing primarily on the study of the origins and prehistory of the biblical text, the field now also encompasses the study of the emergence of Scripture.
and its role in shaping religious communities throughout the ages. A related movement is visible in Kugel’s own work. In his early work, exemplified by *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, the study of the Bible is juxtaposed to the history of its interpretive afterlife, enforcing the distinction between scripture and interpretation. In later works, however, such as *In Potiphar’s House* and *The Bible as it Was* (and in the longer version *Traditions of the Bible*), this distinction is no longer made: the creative work of interpretation is now treated as the life of the biblical text itself.

Combining literary sensitivity, comparative method, and conceptual boldness, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* challenged biblical scholars to reconsider the long-established application to the Hebrew Bible of a distinction between poetry and prose drawn by analogy from Greek literature. While not all followed Kugel’s denial that there is a clear category of writing in the Hebrew Bible that can be termed “poetry,” his definition of the rhetorical feature of parallelism successfully overturned the frequently rigid and schematic way in which Robert Lowth’s threefold categories of *parallelismus membrorum* had been appropriated by subsequent biblicists. Although scholarly attention has focused primarily on his reassessment of biblical poetry found in the first section of the book, a major contribution of the book to intellectual history and literary studies was made in the second, longer “half” of the book, in which Kugel traced the way in which Hebrew poetry has been conceived in Christianity and Judaism from antiquity to the contemporary period.

*In Potiphar’s House: the Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* offered a seminal contribution to biblical studies in its treatment of the *Nachleben* of the text. By tracing the early history of interpretation of the Joseph story and other biblical texts, Kugel demonstrated how early exegetes frequently focused on an irregularity or unusual detail in the biblical text itself as a basis for interpretive expansion. His theory of the origin and development of interpretive motifs and their peripatetic ways suggested new frameworks for the study of early biblical exegesis.

*The Bible As It Was*, for which he was awarded the 2001 Grawemeyer Award in Religion, along with a series of seminal articles in the 1980’s and 90’s, marked a continuation of this trajectory. The book is accessible and engaging to non-experts yet, along with its more scholarly edition, *The Traditions of the Bible*, valuable for biblical scholars as well. By providing a catalogue of ancient interpretations of the books of the Torah, culled from a diverse selection of Second Temple, early Jewish and Christian texts, he has raised our aware-
ness of the nature of textual interpretation as a phenomenon that is integral to the formation of Scripture itself. The book also points to the hermeneutical gulf between the presuppositions of ancient interpreters about Scripture and the Enlightenment presuppositions that undergird historical-critical scholarship today.

In addition to authoring nine books and editing three, Kugel has written well over forty articles, whose subjects range from a semantic feature of a biblical Hebrew phrase to the conceptualization of Midrash to the questionable effects of the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation on biblical interpretation. Not only biblical studies, but also the fields of Midrash and Qumran studies have been transformed by Kugel’s exposure of the textual process that generates biblical interpretation. Nor has Kugel’s work been confined to Judaism in antiquity. He has also contributed in his teaching and writing to the study of medieval Jewish exegesis and piyyut, and to the study of modern Hebrew, English, and Russian poetry. Most recently, Kugel has turned his attention to matters of religious experience. In his latest book, *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*, his work takes a theological turn, exploring the imagining of the divine in the Bible.

The twenty-two essays in this volume stand as a testimony to James Kugel’s influence on many fields in the humanities, as do the thousands of students who have been touched by his teaching at Yale, Harvard, Bar Ilan, and the many other universities where he has lectured with his characteristic urbane wit and charm. The essays are organized in three roughly chronological categories. The essays in the first group treat some part of the Tanakh, ranging from the creation and Abraham stories of Genesis, to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, to the evolving conception of sacred writing in the prophetic literature. The second set of essays focuses chiefly on the literature of Second Temple Judaism, from the distinctive biblical interpretation found in the Qumran scrolls to the role of scripture in the diaspora apocryphon Wisdom of Solomon. The last group concerns itself with the scriptural imagination at work in rabbinic literature, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in the nefarious anti-semitic work of Gerhard Kittel, and up to the present in a treatment of Levinas and the Talmud. There is overlap among categories, but this is inevitable. Indeed, this is the point James Kugel has struggled to communicate in his teaching and writing: in the earliest days of the rise of Scripture and through the emergence of early biblical interpretation, there can be no strict delineation between Scripture and its interpretation. We have abbreviated journal and series titles in accordance with the *SBL Handbook of Style*. 
The editors express our deep gratitude and appreciation to John J. Collins and to Florentino García Martínez, the editors of the Brill series Journal of Jewish Studies Supplement Series. John Collins invited this volume for the Journal of Jewish Studies Supplement Series in November of 2000 and since then has enhanced and improved the volume in innumerable ways through his insights and instruction. Our colleague John Kutsko provided valuable assistance in the early stages of the organization of this volume. We wish to thank Jay Harris, Harry Austryn Wolfson, Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard University and Rachel Rockenmacher, Administrator of the Center, for their gracious assistance in making possible a celebratory event in connection with this volume. We also want to thank our students, who devoted much time and attention to this project: Amy Donaldson, Matthew Gordley, Clare Nesmith, John Jeffrey Purchal, Alison Schofield, and Samuel Thomas. Stu Rosner, whose exceptional photographic portrait of Jim Kugel captures a unique expression, also deserves our thanks. We are grateful for the graduate student support provided by the Jordan Kapson Chair of Jewish Studies, the Philo of Alexandria Project of the University of Notre Dame, the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame, the Conant Fund of the Office for Ministry Development at the Episcopal Church Center, and our two home institutions: the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame and the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church.

Our final word of thanks goes to our esteemed honoree, Professor James L. Kugel, who continues to inspire and encourage new pathways of inspiration and interpretation. May his light continue to shine brightly and may God grant him "long life and peace."}

Hindy Najman
University of Notre Dame

Judith H. Newman
General Theological Seminary