

Preface

My primary target audience with this book is scholars and students—formal and informal—of the Bible and of religion more broadly, as well as cognitive scientists of religion and cognitive linguists. As someone trained in biblical studies but adopting methodologies from the cognitive sciences, I don't believe I'll ever fully shake the sense of imposter syndrome from presuming to have something to say about fields in which I am not a specialist. However, I have been reassured by many kind and generous scholars from across these fields that that's just the nature of interdisciplinary research. I have tried to widen the scope of accessibility of this book to include interested laypeople, whom I hope can also find some value in it. I anticipate some readers will approach this book from a devotional perspective, while others will approach it from a perspective adjacent to a devotional one, and still others in the absence of any such perspective. Though I write as a faithful Latter-day Saint, this book is strictly academic, and I have made a concerted effort to recognize and mitigate the potential influence of any devotional lenses that may color my methodologies and my readings. There is certainly no conscious attempt on my part to promote any particular theological perspective in this book, though I do offer some critiques of the influence on the scholarship of certain theological sensitivities (including from my own tradition). Having said that, I suspect there are ways the book will horrify my coreligionists as well as others who are suspicious that I'm just trying to import Mormonism wholesale into the Bible. If such criticisms come in from all sides, I'll consider that a win.

One of the goals of this book is to begin to disrupt some of the scholarly conventions that are common to the study of the Hebrew Bible. As a subtle and yet influential means of structuring power and values, terminology is precisely one of those conventions. As a result, this book will be somewhat idiosyncratic in the terms it employs, and I'd like to take the opportunity here to explain myself. I begin with perhaps the least idiosyncratic terminological choice: I render the proper name of Israel's patron deity as YHWH, with the consonants of the Tetragrammaton in all caps (normally a standard when transcribing unvocalized names from ancient Southwest Asia). When vocalizing the name, a reader may