

Preface

The genesis of this book lies in four essays I published between 1998 and 2006 that all explored the meanings that particular Old Testament narratives conveyed to their original audiences using cultural anthropology to provide resources to interrogate and interpret the textual data (chapters 4, 5, 8, and 9). Courtesy of a semester of sabbatical leave kindly granted me by the University of St Andrews from September 2009 to January 2010, I was able to articulate and develop the methodological presuppositions underlying these essays—both why and how we should read Old Testament narrative and also in relation to the original context of such texts (chapters 1 and 2). In addition, I was able to write on four more narratives (chapters 3, 6, 7, and 10). My hope is that I have set out a reasonably coherent methodology and a sufficient number of case studies to illustrate its usefulness. With the permission of the original publishers, I have at times lightly edited the four essays already published to update them or to accommodate them more closely to the overall thrust of the book. Although there are many other narratives in the Old Testament that I could have examined, the book is already long enough with the eight I have discussed.

Over the years I have benefited from extremely helpful feedback on earlier versions of various parts of this volume from my friends in the Context Group, especially Zeba Crook, Dennis C. Duling, John H. Elliott, Anselm Hagedorn, and Gary Stansell. Professor J. Cheryl Exum encouraged me in the production of the first essay, on Saul. During the publication of this book I also profited from useful suggestions made by K. C. Hanson. I am grateful to all these colleagues for their assistance, while acknowledging that I alone bear responsibility for the book's contents. The contents of the book were completed while I was on the staff of the University of St Andrews, in its divinity school, St Mary's

College. Throughout my time at St Andrews, from my arrival there on 1st October 1992 until my departure on 30th September 2010, I profited from the friendship and assistance of my friends at St Mary's (especially Professor Ron Piper, who was head of school for much of my time at St Andrews; and Miss Susan Millar in the college office) and also from the university's overall commitment to excellence. Many were the times when St Andrews enabled me to attend conferences abroad at which I presented papers underlying chapters in this book or on other subjects. Although I have now moved on to another St Mary's, I will not forget this support over so many years.

The book is dedicated to Dr. Bernard Carey, solicitor of the New South Wales Supreme Court. Bernard and I got to know one another when we were working at a department store in Sydney in December 1970 before we started Arts and Law degrees at Sydney University early in 1971. We have been close friends ever since. When I found myself looking for the thesis for a New Testament doctoral dissertation in Oxford in the summer of 1982, a book he had mentioned to me approvingly several years before—Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*—came into my head. I was working on Luke-Acts at the time, and when I began to read Berger and Luckmann I found in it a new, social-scientific approach suitable for this text and the thesis I was looking for. Without Bernard's help in this way, my life would probably have gone off in quite a different direction.