Week 7, Lecture 18.¹ Tools of the Trade: Commentaries

Mini Commentaries
"Readers Guide" in the Catholic Study Bible.
The running notes on every page of the Jewish Study Bible or the Oxford Study Bible: NRSV.

One-Volume Commentaries
Collegeville Bible Commentary (Liturgical Press)
International Biblical Commentary (Liturgical Press)
New Jerome Biblical Commentary
https://www.amazon.com/Womens-Bible-Commentary-expanded/dp/066425781X

Remarks on 1-Volume Commentaries
These commentaries can give more information than a mini-commentary.
E.g. the NJBC article on Genesis runs from pages 8-43 (large pages of small print!)

Authors are important! Many students simply site the name of the commentary, or the name(s) of the editor(s).
Academically this information is practically useless. Why?
These works are written by dozens/scores of authors who often disagree with each other.
Beginners imagine that "all scholars agree." The truth is much more complex!
It is much more important to know who wrote the article than the title of the commentary, or the name of the editor.

Multi-Volume Commentaries, Seminary Level
New Interpreter's Bible (12 volumes) replaces the older Interpreter's Bible
Berit Olam*, OT (Liturgical Press, 13 volumes, ongoing project) [* Hebrew for "eternal covenant"]
Sacra Pagina, NT (Liturgical Press, 18 volumes)
Paideia*, NT (Baker Publishing) [Greek for "elementary instruction"]

Remarks on Seminary-Level, Multi-Volume Commentaries
The New Interpreter's Bible article on "Genesis" runs from pages 319-674.
When the editor gives a scholar 300-400 pages, she or he can go into more detail than if they have only 30-40 pages.
Commentaries at this level are written for graduate-level students and interested educated laity.
They do not presuppose knowledge of the biblical languages.
At times they will point out puns or theological nuances that can be "lost in translation."
They do not go into the details of unusual grammar and syntax

Multi-Volume Commentaries (50-90 volumes per set), "State of the Art"
Anchor Bible (originally published by Doubleday), AYB. Continental Commentary
Hermeneia* (Fortress Press) [*Greek for "Interpretation"]
International Critical Commentary
Word Biblical Commentary (62 volumes, ongoing project)

Remarks on "State-of the Art" Multi-Volume Commentaries
One of my students: "You can go down that rabbit hole as far as you want to go!"
The AB / AYB contains 2 volume commentaries on Mark, Luke, and John; 3-volumes on Leviticus

¹ For "filing purposes" I plan to number the lectures consecutively throughout the course. So, although this is the first lecture this week, its number reflects its overall place in the total sequence of lectures.
The ICC contains a 3-volume commentary on Matthew

**Westermann's Commentary on Genesis**

**Research Procedure.** If a "mini commentary does not have what you want, go to a 1-volume commentary. If that does not do it, go to a seminary-level commentary; still no luck? Try a "state of the art" commentary. If it is not there, scholars will search library databases: My favorite is the American Theological Library Association. Still not luck? Here is where a student can write a dissertation, or a scholar can write a book!

**Editorial Slant**
AB materials generally "centrist." Hermeneia, more progressive -- History-of-religions school. E.g., In explaining NT, AB relies mostly on **OT background**; Hermeneia relies heavily on the Mediterranean **pagan background** Evangelical publishing houses: often theologically conservative, but philologically excellent.

**Wisdom Commentary (Liturgical press) Projected to be a 58-volume series**
Main editor: Barbara Reid, O.P. (Dominican Sister)

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**Week 7, Lecture 19. Annunciation Narratives**

**Monograph**

**Biblical Annunciations of Birth. Five Steps in the Literary Form**

1. The **appearance** of an angel of the Lord (or appearance of the Lord)
2. **Fear or prostration** of the visionary confronted by this supernatural presence
3. The divine **message**.
   a. The visionary is addressed by name
   b. A qualifying phrase describing the visionary
   c. The visionary is urged not to be afraid
   d. A woman is with child or is about to be with child
   e. She will give birth to the (male) child
   f. The name by which the child is to be called
   g. An etymology interpreting the name
   h. The future accomplishments of the child
4. An **objection** by the visionary as to how this can be or a request for a sign
5. The **giving of a sign** to reassure the visionary.

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2 Brown, *Birth*, 156.
Biblical References for the Five Steps

Parentheses indicate where the substance of a step is present in an unusual manner.

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<th>Ishmael</th>
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<td>9,18-21</td>
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Seven Annunciation Stories

4 OT, 3 NT. We will take a look at the 3 OT stories from Genesis. I have "color coded" them, so that the different elements of the story will stand out.

Annunciation of Ishmael’s Birth, Gen 16:7-13 (RSV)

The angel of the LORD found her [i.e., Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her.” 10 The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” 11 And the angel of the LORD said to her, “Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the LORD has given heed [yishma’el = “God hears”] to your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.” 13 So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “Thou art a God of seeing”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” [no objection or sign in this story].

Annunciation of Isaac’s Birth, Gen 17:1-3, 15b-21 (RSV)

A later editor has inserted the story of Abram’s change of name and God’s covenant with him into the annunciation.

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.” 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, . . . [change of name from Abram to Abraham; covenant of circumcision] “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. 16 I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” 17 Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed [the name “Isaac” literally means “he laughs”], and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” 18 And Abraham said to God, “O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!” 19 God said, “No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him” 20 As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly; he shall be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. 21 But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.”

3 Ibid.
Annunciation of Isaac's Birth, Gen 18:1-2, 10-15 (RSV)
The story of Abraham's overwhelming hospitality is inserted into the middle of the annunciation story.

And the L ORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.  
2 He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them, and bowed himself to the earth, . . .

The L ORD said, "I will surely return to you in the spring, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.  

4 Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.  
5 So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?"  
6 The L ORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, "Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?"  
7 Is anything too hard for the L ORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son."  
8 But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "No, but you did laugh."

Annunciation Narratives as Sources for Psycho-Biography
In her OT lectures, Levine mentions psycho-biography
This is an effort to understand the possible psychological reactions of the literary characters involved in the story.
For example, the revelation to Rebecca: the younger twin will succeed; the older twin will be a failure

How did this affect the way that she raised her sons?  
Did she reveal this to her husband? If so, how did it affect their relationship?  
Did she reveal this information to one or both of her sons? How did it affect their relationships.  
Such questions can inspire prayer or theological reflection. This can happen in the bible, or extra biblically  
Apocryphal works, Jewish Midrash, patristic allegory; novelists and move-makers.

Post lecture note: I skipped over this section, and went back to it later. I ad-libbed, and did this from memory.  
Then I found the notes as I was ending the lecture, so I did this section from the notes.  
I cut-and-pasted the recording to that it will be in proper order. There's a bit of "overlap," but not too much.  
Sorry for any confusion!

Annunciation Narratives as Sources for Historians
From the perspective of historians, the annunciation narrative is written with 20-20 hindsight.  
It might be written decades or centuries after the child has been born.  
The reader of the story has information the characters in the story did not have.  
The reader knows that Ishmael is going to be a great prince.  
Hagar did not have that knowledge before he was born.  
She might have died without knowing it.  
The questions asked in psycho-biography, while interesting, are not historical questions.

The example of Rebecca and her twins (Jacob & Esau) is from my "ad lib."  

The reader knows that one of the twins she is carrying will succeed; the other will fail.  
This is knowledge the historical Rebecca did not have before her children were born.  
She might have lived her whole life without coming to this realization.  
After Israel conquered Edom (in the time of King David, 800 years after Rebecca)  
Then someone wrote a story to "explain" why Israel with the "top dog" and Edom was not!  
Our ancestor (Jacob) tricked their ancestor (Edom)! -- into foolishly giving away his birth-right.

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4 The "ad lib" is based on Levine's lecture on "Isaac" in her Old Testament Lectures in the Great Courses series. My live class had just viewed the lecture a few minutes before. Anyone who wishes a personal copy of her excellent lectures will find them available from The Teaching Company at their web site: http://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/old-testament.html
The Historicity of Narrative Details of Annunciation Stories
When a character shows fear, is encouraged not to fear, shows doubt or makes an objection
It is important to remember: These are elements of the literary genre.
Perhaps they happened, perhaps the are later additions the audience "expects" in such a story.
The historian cannot even be sure of the fact that a person had a heavenly vision
much less the contents.

The Historical -- and Theological -- Value of Annunciation Narratives
From the narrative the historian learns what the author thinks are the main accomplishments of the child.
These are what scholars call vaticinia ex eventu, "prophecies" after the event.
This is where the "theological money" comes down!
Looking back at the life of the person in its totality, with confidence that this was directed by God,
the ancient author expresses this confidence by expressing it as the word of God / God's angel uttered to the
prospective mother before the child was even born.