

John Haralson Hayes
Professor Emeritus of Old Testament
Candler School of Theology, Emory University
(1934–2013)

John Haralson Hayes was born in rural Abanda, Alabama in 1934, one of seven children in a sharecropper's home. Seventy-three years later, he retired as Franklin N. Parker Professor of Old Testament at Emory University's Candler School of Theology in 2007. In his remarkable and celebrated career, he published over forty books and numerous scholarly articles, directed twenty-five PhD dissertations, taught a generation of ministerial students, and served Baptist congregations in three states. Hayes always remembered his rural Alabama roots with great pride. As he approached retirement, he moved back to Alabama, not far from his birthplace, and began farming.

In spite of his family's limited financial resources, Hayes managed to attend and graduate from Howard College (present-day Samford University) in 1956, and completed seminary training at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1960, by which time the faculty had clearly recognized his intellectual promise. He went on to earn a PhD from the institution in 1964. He taught for several years at Trinity University in San Antonio before his appointment to the faculty at Emory University, where he concluded his career.

Hayes left lasting contributions as an interpreter of the prophetic literature and, more broadly, as a historian, especially through the two volumes he produced with J. Maxwell Miller: *Israelite and Judean History* (1976) and *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (1986, 2006). Yet as a true polymath, Hayes published in a wide range of areas: the history of biblical interpretation, archaeology, theology, and the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament through a wide range of critical methodologies, with a particular focus on form criticism.

While always a master of minute historical detail, Hayes displayed a penchant for writing introductory texts through which he could provide a grand view of complex topics. One of his early publications, for example, *Introduction to the Bible* (1971), served as a standard textbook in colleges and seminaries for almost three decades. Other notable introductory texts include *An Introduction to Old Testament Study* (1979) and *Understanding the Psalms* (1976), and the very widely used *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, co-authored with Carl Holladay (1982, 1986, 2007).

Hayes's most recent publication, *Interpreting Ancient Israelite History, Prophecy, and Law* (ed. Brad Kelle, 2013), reveals his creative and cutting-edge scholarship through ten ground-breaking essays that he wrote between 1968 and 1995.

Hayes served from 1977 to 1982 as editor of the prestigious *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Among his numerous edited volumes, the two-volume *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (1999) stands out as one of the most valuable and enduring

reference works in the field. He wrote many of the articles in the *DBI* himself, and careful readers will note his strong editorial hand in many more entries that do not bear his name.

As a teacher, Professor Hayes was known for his down-to-earth, witty, and humorous lecture style, with which he was able to introduce seminary students to critical biblical scholarship in a common-sense, non-threatening way. It helped that he had grown up in a country church, served as pastor, and often taught bible-study courses in local churches. His office door was *always* open, both figuratively and literally. Students loved to visit his cavernous office in Bishops Hall, with its overstuffed bookshelves, filing cabinets, and towers of stacked (or piled) papers—along with a box or two of produce from the farm and MoonPies for the sharing. Professor Hayes was a profoundly generous teacher.

Especially for his graduate students, this generosity made Hayes a particularly valuable mentor and dissertation director, roles he relished and found greatly satisfying. Hayes was also exceedingly generous with his prestige, giving students and colleagues equal billing with him in numerous publications, for example, ***Isaiah, the Eighth-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching***, co-authored with Stuart A. Irvine (1988); ***A New Chronology for the Kings of Israel and Judah and Its Implication for Biblical History and Literature***, co-authored with Paul K. Hooker (1988); ***The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity: From Alexander to Bar Kochba***, co-authored with Sara Mandell (1998).

While Hayes made a tremendous impact on biblical scholarship through his voluminous publications, his greatest impact on the field may be through his former graduate students now teaching in colleges, universities, and seminaries across the world. Hayes's students and colleagues honored him with two *Festschriften*: ***History and Interpretation: Essays in Honor of John H. Hayes*** (ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffery Kuan, 1993) and ***Israel's Prophets and Israel's Pasts: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John Hayes*** (ed. Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore, 2006).

Hayes continued to be a productive scholar after his retirement and taught a Sunday school Bible class in the local Baptist church near his farm. But in his final years, his thoughts returned to more personal matters, such as memories of his childhood and observations on human character. At this stage of his life, he wrote two more books—delightful and thoughtful books. In these books, as with his teaching, he cloaked difficult and complex messages with humor and wit in a distinctive southern voice. ***Abanda*** (2012) is a veiled autobiographical account of a white sharecropper's son growing up in rural Alabama during World War II at the early stages of the civil rights movement. Clearly the young boy, Josh, was John Hayes. The other book, ***If You Don't Like the Possum, Enjoy the Sweet Potatoes*** (2009), is a collection of clever essays with sage advice for dealing with every-day problems.

Over the course of his long career, Hayes achieved international acclaim for his scholarship and publications, taught a generation of ministerial students, and helped launch the careers of dozens of biblical scholars. He was also an Alabama farmer, the primary caretaker of his animals, whom he loved as much and probably more than his students and his chosen field of study. Though the circumstances of his death are not entirely certain, he seems to have died laboring in the field he loved the most. He was found unconscious in a pasture surrounded by his cows, apparently having suffered a massive stroke while helping one of his cows birth a calf.

J. Maxwell Miller and Joel M. LeMon