



October 2, 2012

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I write to you as the General Editor of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Although I have officially been in this position since the beginning of 2012, Jim VanderKam was kind enough to stay on for a few more months so that I could complete a research leave. I took over the reins from Jim's very capable hands at the beginning of May. My thanks to him, his assistant Sarah Schreiber, and the other graduate students who have assisted him over the years for their superb work and for making the transition such an easy one. I too am working closely with several other people. Billie Jean Collins, an SBL staff member in Atlanta, is the Managing Editor; she receives the submissions, communicates with the editors as well as the authors, and keeps all the processes well on track. Tim Pettipiece, based in Ottawa, is the Assistant Editor. He is involved primarily with the part of the process that leads up to the publication of each issue. Tim works closely with Maurya Horgan, who, along with Paul Kobelski, both at HK Scriptorium in Denver, takes care of the formatting, copyediting, and printing of the journal. This is truly a wonderful team, and it is a privilege and a pleasure to work with them.

In this letter I would like to address three aspects of the journal that may be of interest to SBL members: the scope, the commitment to quality, and the ins and outs of the review process.

Scope. *JBL* has the reputation as a very high-quality vehicle for historical-critical and philological studies of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, and certainly it is that. The consequence is that many scholars in our field whose research concerns materials outside of the Jewish or Christian canons (broadly defined) or who make use of approaches other than historical criticism and philology do not consider *JBL* when thinking about where to submit their best work. A closer look at the *JBL* table of contents, however, shows that articles on noncanonical literatures and topics, as well as those that use other kinds of methods, are in fact being published. The growing diversity of articles, in terms of subject matter and approach, is in my view to be encouraged, for as the "flagship journal" of the Society of Biblical Literature, *JBL* should reflect the range of sources (textual and material), perspectives, and methodologies that are in use in the field of biblical studies at our own moment in time, and it should continue to change along with the field itself. I would strongly encourage you to think about *JBL* as a journal to which to submit your best work in the broad and varied field of biblical studies, even if you might have thought that its subject matter and approach place it outside the journal's usual purview. I assure you that your work will receive the same fair peer evaluation as all other submissions.

Quality. While the journal has changed and developed throughout its history, along with the field of biblical studies itself, and will continue to do so, one constant has been the emphasis on quality. The high quality of the journal is widely recognized, most recently by Project MUSE, which has chosen *JBL* as one of only four journals to be added to its MUSE's Standard Collection on account of its high MUSE "score" and high-quality content. This is a remarkable distinction.

This commitment to quality means that only the very best articles—those that make an important contribution, and that are convincingly argued and clearly written—are accepted for publication. Submissions that are not accepted often receive very useful feedback from the peer reviewers. The main purpose of the peer review, however, is to select the highest quality articles. Although each issue of *JBL* is limited to 10 or 11 articles (depending on length), there is no annual quota for how many articles can be accepted.

Review Process. Manuscripts submitted to *JBL* go through a lengthy and somewhat arduous journey before they are accepted or rejected for publication. After being entered into our database, they are screened to ensure that they conform to *JBL* style and length and that they are suitable for the journal—that is, that they are academic articles and that they do not pertain to topics unrelated in any way to biblical studies. I then do a preliminary reading of the submissions that pass this review to determine whether they should go out for peer review and, if so, to whom. Submissions that do not situate their topic in the context of the field, that are not well-written, or that do not have a clear hypothesis or discernible argumentation, in other words, submissions that will be declined on these obvious grounds, are not sent along for blind peer review. The authors receive a letter that provides the rationale. This step is taken in order to reduce the burden on our already very busy editorial board by asking them to review only those submissions that adhere to the standards of high-quality scholarly writing.

Submissions that pass this level of scrutiny are sent out to an editor—that is, a member of the editorial board—who has expertise in the relevant area. That editor is asked to return her or his review within 30 days, at which point the manuscript is sent out to a second editorial board member with expertise in the field. Normally a final decision is made on the basis of these two reviews. When the first two readers diverge widely, the manuscript is sent out to a third reader. We strive to complete the review process within three months of submission, though it can take longer in cases where reviewers are unavailable right away or when a reviewer takes longer than anticipated to submit the evaluation. Submissions in areas not covered by any current editorial board members are sent outside the board to guest reviewers with the relevant expertise; because there are some members who rotate off the board each year, we also have the opportunity annually to address any lacunae that we have identified in terms of subject areas, approaches, or methodologies.

One may wonder why submissions are not sent simultaneously to two readers. The answer is logistical. In most cases, as I have mentioned, the reviewers are drawn from our editorial board, which numbers around 50. Given the breadth of our field, we do not have more than two or, at most, three editors in each area of the discipline, and most editors review submissions in their secondary areas as well. The diversity and sheer volume of submissions makes it unlikely that two reviewers in a given area would be free to review a submission at the same time. But one of them may well be free when the submission is

ready to be sent out or shortly thereafter. Rather than wait for both to be free, we simply send the manuscript along to the reviewer who is available.

Once the decision is made, an email is sent to the author, along with the comments by the editors who read it. As General Editor, I make use of four options: to reject, to accept with no or very few corrections, to accept on the condition that one of the original reviewers review the revised submission and verify that the required changes have been made, and to suggest that the author revise and resubmit for a new peer review. Once accepted, the articles are placed in a publication queue; it normally takes 12–15 months for an accepted article to be published in the journal. This may seem long, but it is not unusual for a high-quality, peer-reviewed journal.

Finally, I would draw your attention to the “Instructions for Authors” that are on the *JBL* website as well as at: http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/JBL_Instructions.pdf. Please note that the address for submissions is JBL.submissions@sbl-site.org.

My best wishes to all of you for a productive year, and I look forward to reading the fruits of your labors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AR', written in a cursive style.

Adele Reinhartz

General Editor, *Journal of Biblical Literature*
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