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Preaching the Bible (Part 1)



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Editorial Introduction



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&

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In the fall of 2014, Nathan Finn, a member of the JBTM editorial advisory board, emailed me (Adam) to suggest that the journal dedicate one or two issues to the topic of preaching the various types of biblical texts, soliciting articles from pastor-scholars who would address preaching the specific literary genre, or types, as well as provide sermons which illustrate those principles. I presented the idea to colleague and friend Dennis Phelps, who serves as J. D. Grey Chair of Preaching at NOBTS. After a period of prayer, reflection, and discussion, we extended invitations to a group of experts in the field of biblical studies and/or preaching to contribute articles and sermons for a two-volume release of JBTM. The present issue represents the first installment of that series, which is outlined as follows:

- **Introduction** – Jim Shaddix, W. A. Criswell Professor of Expository Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina
- **Hebrew Historical Narrative** (in Pentateuch and Historical books) – Robert D. Bergen, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs; Distinguished Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Hannibal-LaGrange University in Hannibal, Missouri
- **Hebrew Poetry** (in Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs) – Jeffrey G. Audirsch, Associate Professor of Christian Studies at Shorter University in Rome, Georgia
- **Hebrew Wisdom** (in Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) – Daniel I. Block, Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois
- **Hebrew Prophecy** (in the Major and Minor Prophets) – Paul D. Wegner, Director, Academic Graduate Studies Program; Professor of Old Testament Studies at Gateway Seminary in Ontario, California

Each essay provides guidelines for exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics that are significant for that particular literary genre. The view which underlies all the articles and sermons is that the shape of the genre relates to the shape of the sermon. All the contributors assume a high view of Bible-driven preaching and are in general agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message. The articles and sermons are followed by the largest selection of book reviews JBTM has published in a single issue. The book topics include theology, biblical studies, history, ethics, and Christian ministry.

The next issue of the journal plans to feature the following articles and sermons:

- **Preaching Christ from the Old Testament** – Russell Meek, Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana
- **Gospels** – Robert H. Stein, Senior Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky
- **Greek Historical Narrative** (in Acts) – Dennis Phelps, Director of Alumni Relations and Church-Minister Relations; J. D. Grey Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana
- **Greek Epistles** (in Pauline & General Epistles) – David Allen, Dean of the School of Preaching; Distinguished Professor of Preaching; Director of the Southwestern Center for Expository Preaching; and George W. Truett Chair of Ministry at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas
- **Greek Apocalyptic** (in Revelation) – Gerald L. Stevens, Professor of New Testament and Greek at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana

It is our desire that the articles, sermons, and book reviews in this issue will spur Christian leaders toward more precise exegetical and hermeneutical work which results in more robust proclamation of God's Word and multitudes of changed lives.

Hearing God's Voice: A Practical Theology for Expository Preaching



Jim Shaddix, DMin, PhD

Jim Shaddix is W. A. Criswell Professor of Expository Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Expository preaching is a sacred obligation, not a sermonic option. It is a stewardship preachers have been given. Consider the rationale of the preaching task. V. L. Stanfield, one of my revered preaching predecessors at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, described preaching as “giving the Bible a voice.”¹ He concurred with John Broadus’s simple and accurate definition of preaching as “letting God speak out of his Word.”² In other words, Stanfield rightly saw the Bible as the written record of God’s voice, and preaching as the act of giving God his voice in the hearing of people.

If the Bible is God’s voice, it follows that preachers are compelled to preach it. The prophet Amos rhetorically asked, “The Lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8).³ The Apostle Paul, citing Psalm 116:10, similarly confessed, “Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak” (2 Cor 4:13). John Stott rightly concluded:

Here then is a fundamental conviction about the living, redeeming and self-revealing God. It is the foundation on which all Christian preaching rests. We should never presume to occupy a pulpit unless we believe in this God. . . . Once we are persuaded that God has spoken, however, then we too must speak. A compulsion rests upon us. Nothing and nobody will be able to silence us.⁴

Preaching, then, is rooted in basic assumptions that God has spoken, and he has orchestrated the record of his words to be compiled and preserved in our Bible.⁵ These assumptions drive both our hermeneutic and our homiletic.

¹John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., revised by Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 19.

²Ibid.

³All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

⁴John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 96.

⁵The terms Bible, Scripture, and Word are used synonymously and interchangeably by the author.

Because God has spoken and the Bible is the accurate record of his speech, we are compelled to communicate it accurately so that we represent God rightly. Biblical exposition, then, ought to serve as our foundational approach to preaching. In exposition, the preacher lays open a biblical text—God’s voice—in such a way that its intended meaning is brought to bear on the lives of the listeners. The word *expose* means to lay open or uncover, and it includes the totality of the preacher’s exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics. Expository preaching of the Bible, then, provides the only chance we have to preserve God’s voice correctly and reveal it to listeners accurately. Six theological footings anchor this conviction.

The Inspiration of the Bible

The practice of biblical exposition is first and foremost driven by a high view of Scripture, which itself depends on a certain conviction about biblical inspiration. By “inspiration” I am referring to “the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that enabled and motivated the human authors of Scripture to produce an accurate record and revelation of God’s redemptive will, purpose, and activity.”⁶ Preaching has to be driven by an understanding that the text of Scripture accurately records God’s voice. Merrill F. Unger asserted, “If the Bible is considered merely to contain the Word of God, rather than actually to be *in toto* the Word of God, there is naturally a decreased sense of responsibility to study its text minutely, or to systematize its theology, or authoritatively to declare its message.”⁷ The conviction that the Bible is God’s Word dictates everything in both the preparation and delivery of sermons.

The doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration frames up these convictions about Scripture as well as preaching. This doctrine suggests that “in the composition of the original manuscripts, the Holy Spirit guided the authors even in their choice of expressions—and this throughout all the pages of the Scriptures—still without effacing the personalities of the different men.”⁸ Inspiration is verbal because the words are inseparable from the message. Inspiration is plenary because it is entire and without restriction.⁹ Frank E. Gaebelein said, “The doctrine of plenary inspiration holds that the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted the exercise of their own personalities and literary talents, yet wrote under the control and guidance of the Spirit of God, the result being in every word of the original documents a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message which God desired to give to man.”¹⁰

⁶James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, MO: Gospel, 2005), 26. See also Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 66; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 199.

⁷Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 18.

⁸René Pache, *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 71.

⁹*Ibid.*, 72–73.

¹⁰Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Meaning of Inspiration* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1950), 9.

The Bible itself makes its own claims about its divine origin. Paul asserted that “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16), suggesting the divine source of the words we have in our Bible. Peter wrote that “prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). Essentially, these men were carried along by the Holy Spirit much like a sailboat is carried along by the wind. They were superintended by the Holy Spirit, giving Scripture a dual authorship—the Holy Spirit as the sole Divine Author and a company of divinely chosen men as human authors. God brought this whole process about through the unique personalities of individual writers, each one being fashioned by the circumstances of his own life and the genetic combination of his own personality, yet all the while being filled by the breath of the divine Spirit.

Some have tried to suggest that no relationship exists between the preacher’s view of inspiration and the way he preaches. Andrew Blackwood wrote, “Fortunately a man’s effectiveness in the pulpit does not depend upon his theory of inspiration.”¹¹ But if Scripture truly is inspired by God, then nothing could be farther from the truth. If the Bible is inspired by God, and preaching gives the Bible a voice, there is an essential relationship between inspiration and the way we preach. We must preach in such a way that our sermons rightly reflect the very voice of God.

This obligation demands that the preacher’s sermon journey begins with finding out what God has said. He cannot stand up and say “Thus saith the Lord” if he does not know what the Lord saith! That is why H. C. Brown Jr. asserted that the basic question to be asked about a sermon is: “Who said it?” That is, does the preacher speak from the Bible or merely from his own experience? . . . Therefore, one must always ask about a sermon, ‘Who said it? The preacher or the Bible?’”¹² When the eternal truth of God is revealed, the people, in essence, are hearing the very voice of God instead of the voice of the preacher.

Brown’s correct assertion begs another crucial question: How does this happen? How does the preacher go about rightly reflecting what God has said? After all, regarding the preaching and teaching gifts, Peter said, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). So how does the preacher speak the oracles of God in such a way that his words rightly reflect what the Holy Spirit gave to us? The only logical answer to this question is the exposition of biblical texts, or expository preaching. This process alone maintains the integrity of the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning in any given text of Scripture. Consequently, exposition is the natural outgrowth of what the Spirit has inspired the text to say and mean.

The Revelation of the Bible

The responsibility of expository preaching not only grows out of *how* God spoke through

¹¹Andrew Blackwood, *Preaching from the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1941), 182.

¹²H. C. Brown Jr., *A Quest for Reformation in Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1968), 88.

inspiration of the Bible, but also from *when* he spoke it and gave it to mankind. Where contemporary preachers stand in relation to the time in which God revealed his Word says much about how we preach. I have heard more than once the seemingly spiritual call for contemporary preachers to preach more like the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. Certainly, the quest to preach like the Bible preachers preached is a noble one . . . unless we fail to realize we have not been called to preach like they did. An important difference exists between preaching *now* and preaching *then*. In fact, the role of every preacher after the apostolic age has been fundamentally different than that of preachers before them. And that difference actually provides one of the strongest rationales for biblical exposition.

During the biblical period, preachers like Old and New Testament prophets, Jesus, and the apostles often were giving revelation in their preaching. They communicated things God said that people had never heard before. It was new information because God had never said it before. But those preachers also did a lot of explanation in the sermons they preached. Sometimes they were not giving new information, but simply providing explanation of stuff that had already been revealed. Additionally, they did a lot of persuasion in their preaching based both on what had been revealed as well as on what they had explained. Under the leadership of God's Spirit they appealed to people to respond by saying "yes" to what he had said.¹³

As the sun set on the biblical period, however, some things changed. First, God's voice was funneled into the Christ event, and his words were fulfilled totally and completely in his Son. The author of Hebrews summarized, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:1-2). About this astounding declaration, David Allen writes,

Amazingly, the author viewed the revelation of the Son as God's "speech" to us, and thus it is an appropriate metaphor for all that God does through Christ in the world and not just in reference to the words of Christ. Additionally, when Scripture speaks of the "word of the LORD" addressed to and through Old Testament prophets, the Son, as the second Person of the Trinity, is always involved as well.¹⁴

Second, God's special revelation—which the early church understood to be the accurate record of God's revelatory works and words¹⁵—was canonized to form the Old and New Testaments that comprise our Bible.¹⁶ Bryan Chapell writes, "Each verse, each recorded event, and each passing epoch of biblical history God uses to build a single, comprehensive

¹³Jim Shaddix, *The Passion-Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 71-72.

¹⁴David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, New American Commentary 35 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 104.

¹⁵Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics*, 36.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 15.

understanding of who he is.”¹⁷ Thus, the voice of God that reveals who he is and the mission he is on became contained in the Bible.

One of the natural results of the canonization of Scripture was that preaching simplified. Instead of involving the revelation, explanation, and persuasion that characterized the biblical period, preaching evolved to include only explanation and persuasion. The closing of the canon, so to speak, marked the end of God’s revelation of new material, at least as far as what he determined was necessary to be passed on through the ages to accomplish his purpose. And every preacher since that time has enjoyed the blessing of not living under the pressure of being responsible to introduce new information from God. Why? Because he stopped giving new revelation about “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3) and encapsulated them in the person of Jesus Christ. Since that time preachers have been charged only with the responsibility of explaining what God has already revealed in Christ and persuading people to act on it.

That reality magnifies the characteristic that is at the very heart of biblical exposition—explanation of the biblical text. Broadus, reflecting the influence of rhetoric on late-nineteenth century homiletics, identified four functional elements in preaching: explanation, argumentation (proof), illustration, and application. Of these four, he identified explanation as being “among the primary functions of the preacher.”¹⁸ And it is not difficult to understand why. Essentially, the other three elements are servants to explanation. While some of these functional elements at times overlap, explanation fundamentally drives the train. We do not just do application; we apply something. We do not just use illustrations; we illustrate something. We do not just do argumentation; we argue something. And that something is the truth of God’s Word rightly explained and understood. The text has to be explained in order for us to do the other elements of good preaching. Steven Smith insightfully has described preaching as “re-presenting the Word of God.”¹⁹ He writes, “This is a theology of preaching in one sentence: we speak for God because he has already revealed himself in his Son and his Son has revealed himself in his Word. This book is God’s communication with us. . . . We have an obligation to re-present what God has already said. So, we have to get at the meaning.”²⁰ So the default approach to preaching must be, by necessity, to explain what God has already revealed in his Word and persuasively apply it to people’s lives so they can obey it.

The preacher’s responsibility, then, is to peel back the layers of language, culture, background, worldview, literary genre, and more that characterize the difference between

¹⁷Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 270.

¹⁸John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Philadelphia: Smith, English, & Co., 1873), 145.

¹⁹Steven W. Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons Like Scripture* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 1.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 1–2.

then and now. He does so in order to expose the truth and all its relevance. This makes exposition more than a sermon form defined by the length of a given text, a particular rhetorical form, or a Bible book series. Exposition is a journey that begins long before the sermon is developed or preached. Essentially, exposition describes the manner of treatment with which Scripture is handled, a process by which the preacher discovers and encounters the true voice of God. In the sermon that has been birthed from this process, he explains enough of his journey to his listeners to enhance their understanding of the truth and its relevance for their lives.

The Nature of the Bible

Another theological mooring that grounds the practice of biblical exposition is the nature of this Bible that contains God's inspired and revealed voice. Contemporary Christian culture has a tendency to view the Bible as nothing more than a practical manual for daily living. We demand relevance, we long for practical application, and we gravitate toward what works. This earthy view of the Bible, while not totally without merit, has serious ramifications. It causes us to overlook some of the Bible's most important qualities. For example, the Bible is theocentric not anthropocentric; it is God-centered not man-centered; it is a book about God before it is a book about us. To make it otherwise is both selfish and arrogant. When we run quickly in our consideration of God's Word to the "how to" mentality of anthropocentricity, we often run right past the revelation of Almighty God in theocentricity. Additionally, the Bible is much more than just a book *about* God. It is a book *from* God. When the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians he had come to them declaring "the mystery of God" (1 Cor 2:1), he used the possessive "of God" to convey his understanding of the nature of Scripture. Paul considered his message to be the testimony that God gave inasmuch as it had God as its content. It was both from God and about God.

As a message both from God and about God, its specific content was intended to be delivered to people in a way that accurately represents what God has to say to them. A preacher can take just about any subject under the sun and somehow relate it to something about God from some place in Scripture. Just because a message is about God, however, does not mean that it is the message God intended people to hear. This is a subtle yet significant qualification for biblical exposition. Right preaching is not validated on the basis of its relational proximity to the idea of God. Preachers have been given a very specific message to deliver, and that message does not always include all things God-related. It is a specific message that God dictated and intended for a specific purpose (which I will address below).

The Bible's God-centered and God-dictated nature creates a tension in preaching. Preachers—especially pastors—rightly want to meet people's needs and heal their hurts. But what is a preacher to do when the Bible's God-centered and God-dictated message offers no specific and practical help for certain life situations? When that happens the preacher naturally feels the temptation to take his content from sources other than the Bible. He

may justify this move by noting that this extra-biblical information—often couched in life-application, felt-needs, and topical sermons—is not usually heretical in nature. It is quite possibly helpful wisdom for anyone to follow. But just because something is not heresy does not mean it faithfully represents the inspired Word of God, especially when it involves subjects to which God did not directly speak.

I liken this subtlety to the distinction between *God's stuff* and *good stuff*.²¹ God's stuff is the body of truth that is revealed in the Bible, given for the purpose of accomplishing God's agenda. It is the true nature of the Bible. Good stuff, on the other hand, is all the helpful advice and practical information we get in life that is not necessarily drawn directly from biblical teaching, but instead from information or principles that we glean from simple observation and research.

To illustrate the difference, consider some topics that God clearly addresses in the Bible. The old and new covenants, justice, holiness, the crucified life, the church, the ordinances, forgiveness, the second coming, and more are all topics to which God has specifically and clearly spoken on the pages of Scripture. All of those subjects are clearly God's stuff, and we should glean our understanding of them from applying good hermeneutics in our Bible study. By contrast, a therapist can observe enough people dealing with stress on the job in order to glean certain helpful principles for relieving stress. A marriage counselor can observe enough people recovering from divorce to identify some helpful guidelines for navigating that crisis. Parenting experts can talk with enough moms and dads to be able to delineate some practical ways for raising strong-willed children. And while general Bible truths can be identified that relate to these and other life experiences, it would be difficult to conclude that God addressed any of them specifically and directly in his Word. That stuff is good stuff, but we cannot categorize it as biblical truth.

Preachers have not been given the responsibility of addressing all things good and helpful. They have been charged with the task of speaking only what God has spoken. Stott pointedly asked, "How dare we speak, if God has not spoken? By ourselves we have nothing to say. To address a congregation without any assurance that we are bearers of a divine message would be the height of arrogance and folly. . . . If we are not sure of this, it would be better to keep our mouth shut."²² While all truth certainly is God's truth, he has sovereignly chosen to include in the Bible only the truth that is necessary to accomplish his eternal purpose. The preacher's authority to say "Thus saith the Lord," therefore, is not in good stuff but God's stuff. Consequently, he is compelled to rightly interpret, exegete, and proclaim biblical truth in such a way that it is free to accomplish God's purpose. And that kind of exegetical and hermeneutical rubric will issue forth in only one kind of preaching—biblical exposition. This practice is the only way for the preacher to be true to the Bible's nature.

²¹Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 58–59.

²²Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 96.

The Purpose of the Bible

The natural corollary to the theocentric DNA of the Bible is the purpose of the Bible. The theocentric nature of God's Word necessitates that we lean in a bit further to consider the specific reason for which the Bible was given, a reason which obliges us to preach it expositively. During the "battle for the Bible" that took place in my denomination during the last three decades of the twentieth century, issues like the Bible's inerrancy, infallibility, authority and sufficiency were frequent topics of debate. Little was said, however, about the *purpose* of Scripture. Yet this neglected issue has as much to do with how we preach as any of the others.

What you think about the purpose of the Bible largely will determine how you approach your preaching. If you think the Bible's purpose is just to get people converted, then most of your sermons will be evangelistic. If you think the Bible was intended to be an answer book for all of life's questions, then your sermons will generally pose and answer questions you think your listeners are asking. If you think the Bible was given to be a practical manual for daily living, then your sermons will take the nature of "how-to" messages on how to navigate life.²³ The simple fact, however, that the Bible says more to God's people than it does to unbelievers indicates its purpose could not be limited to conversion. All we have to do is come up with one question that the Bible fails to answer (e.g., What about dinosaurs?) or one life issue that it does not address (e.g., raising strong-willed children!) to prove the Bible was not given to us for those purposes. So why do we have the Bible? What purpose does it serve?

The answer is clear in just a brief survey of the biblical canon. The Apostle Paul set the table for the answer when he told the Roman believers that the people whom God foreknew, "he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:29–30). Before time began, God determined to save a people from their sins and set them on a course to be shaped into the image of his Son, Jesus Christ. Consequently, every believer is moving inescapably toward perfect righteousness as part of God's plan for Christ to reign throughout all eternity over a holy race made up of people who are citizens of his divine kingdom and children in his divine family.

When we look at the big picture of the biblical canon this purpose is verified. The Bible opens with the declaration that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). It closes with the creation of "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away" (Rev 21:1). The Bible opens with God creating for himself an even more precious possession than his physical world: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He

²³Shaddix, *Passion-Driven Sermon*, 278–79.

created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26–27). It closes with God re-creating mankind into his image (see 1 John 3:2 and Rev 21:3–4). Creation and re-creation of heaven, earth, and mankind essentially bookend the Bible with the resounding statement of God’s purpose of redeeming and restoring his creation and his creatures to their intended state.

In between those bookends is the story of our tragic fall from God’s design, his pursuit of us in Christ Jesus, and his redemptive plan to restore us to our intended purpose. Nowhere is this more evident than in the apostolic testimony of the new covenant. Paul told the Corinthians that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). He said to the Philippians that Christ Jesus “will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Phil 3:21). The Colossians were reminded they had “put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col 3:10). Peter told his readers that Jesus’s “divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:3–4). This mission of God to re-create his creation is the clear purpose of the Bible.

Such a realization leads us down a path toward expository preaching in at least two ways. To begin with, if the Bible clearly articulates its purpose of recounting God’s agenda of re-creating mankind into his image through Christ, then the accurate declaration of that story becomes paramount. It just makes sense that if we want to use something effectively, then we use it for its intended purpose. We do not use a washing machine to fix a computer or a toaster to make ice cubes. What sense does it make, then, to use the Bible to try to answer questions it was never intended to answer, or to navigate aspects of daily life that it nowhere addresses? The responsibility of discovering and proclaiming the Holy Spirit’s intended meaning in every text of Scripture assures us of accurately reflecting God’s voice with regard to the accomplishment of his agenda.

The Bible’s purpose of re-creation also compels us to do the work of exposing Christ in every text of Scripture. Every passage in the Bible either points to Christ futuristically, refers to Christ explicitly, or looks back to Christ reflectively. Consequently, the re-creation of individuals into Christ’s image demands the preacher determine where his preaching text stands in relation to Christ, and then expose that relationship to his listeners. So in a very real sense expository preaching and Christ-centered preaching ought to be synonymous terms. Exposition gives us the confidence that God’s agenda in Christ—the most relevant and urgent need in every person’s life—will truly bring about life-change in our listeners. In short, expository preaching simply allows the Bible to say what it was intended to say and do what it was intended to do.

The Power of the Bible

Serving as an accurate record of God's agenda of re-creation, however, is only part of the Bible's purpose. A careful reading of the New Testament reveals that God sovereignly has connected his Word with his agenda in a dynamic way. Specifically, God has ordained that the purpose of the Word is not merely to recount the story of his redemptive activity, but also to be the means of bringing it about! In other words, the Scriptures are actually the supernatural agent that fosters this re-creative process in the lives of people. The truth of the Bible is the powerful sword that is necessary for the accomplishment of God's purpose in our lives. Consequently, this cause-and-effect relationship demands that preachers unleash the Bible's innate power, allowing it both to say and do what was intended. Expository preaching is the only way for that to happen.

God's Word makes incredible claims about its own spiritual ability to affect life change. Consider just a few examples of its own testimony. When Joshua was intimidated about trying to fill the shoes of Moses after the death of the great deliverer, God reminded him that meditating on and obeying his Word were the secrets to his success and prosperity (Josh 1:8). The Psalmist made various claims about Scripture's ability to impact human nature. In Ps 19:7–13 God's Word is referenced by six different titles—law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and judgments. In those same verses, he mentions numerous characteristics of the Scriptures—perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, eternal, true, righteous, incredibly valuable, and very sweet. But we must not overlook all the blessings and benefits that God's Word brings—restoration of the soul, wisdom, joy, understanding, warning, reward, conviction, cleansing, protection from sin, and blamelessness before God. Our Lord has given us every truth, principle, standard, and warning that we will ever need for restoration into his image. Psalm 119 abounds with claims about the supernatural power of God's Word. In 119:9–11, heeding it results in spiritual cleansing and prevention from sin. In 119:18 it births awe-inspiring wonder. In 119:1–5 it gives direction for navigating life's journey.

The Old Testament prophets also knew the benefit of God's Word. In Isaiah 55:10–11 we are told it will give repentant sinners a heavenly drink that enables them to spiritually blossom upon their return to God. Then they are able to receive the grace-gifts of his Word, sowing and eating instead of being paralyzed by sorrow. All of this describes the prosperity that God's Word brings. In Jer 15:16 God's Word is the source of joy. In 23:29 the weeping prophet says the Word is sufficient to confront hard hearts and difficult situations with consuming and forceful power.

The New Testament is also thick with claims about the awesome power of Scripture. It stirs the hearts of those who receive its explanation and application (Luke 24:32). Jesus himself acknowledged that God's truth is the sanctifying agent in the disciple's life (John 17:17). The Apostle Paul claimed the Word of grace will foster spiritual growth and advance the believer toward glorification (Acts 20:32). He also identified it as the producer of faith

(Rom 10:17) and the possessor of pro-active and protective power for conviction (Eph 6:17). He told Timothy the Scriptures provide everything that men of God need for the entire salvation journey: wisdom for all godliness, instruction for knowing godliness, rebuke for straying from godliness, restoration to godliness, and training for pursuing godliness (2 Tim 3:14–17). The author of Hebrews noted the Word’s ability to do soul-searching and spiritual examination (Heb 4:12). James spoke of the Word’s ability to foster the sanctifying wholeness of salvation (James 1:21). The Apostle Peter said it purifies the soul, gives new birth to the dead heart, and fosters spiritual nourishment in infant Christians (1 Pet 1:22–2:2).

If these claims are true, then it follows that we should do everything we can to make them available to people who desperately need the redeeming work of God in Christ in their lives. To do otherwise would be worse than possessing a cure for cancer and withholding it from the public. It begs the question, *If this is where God has promised to invest his power, why would a preacher want to give people anything less than full exposure to this supernatural truth?* If the Holy Spirit does all of this work and more through God’s Word to affect life change, then the preacher has a high responsibility. He is charged with interpreting and preaching this truth in keeping with its full potency so that people are not robbed of their only hope of being transformed into Christ’s image through God’s powerful, life-changing Word.

The Literature of the Bible

While these propositions about the Bible’s inspiration, revelation, nature, purpose, and power help us to think rightly about the preaching event, one additional factor remains that provides additional incentive for us to preach expositively. That factor is the nature of the literature of the Bible, or literary genre. Not only must the expositor consider the reality that God spoke, but he must consider *how* God spoke his words in every given text of Scripture. Steven Smith reminds us that

Scripture is the Word of God presented in the voice of God. Preaching is re-presenting the Word of God by recapturing the voice of God. Therefore to capture the meaning of God’s words we must present the Word of God in the voice of God. To say it negatively, to capture the words of God without the voice of God is to miss the meaning of the text. Scripture is God’s Word in God’s voice.²⁴

Consequently, if we are going to communicate the right meaning of the text and represent the voice of God accurately, then our sermons must be influenced by the genre—or literature—of the respective text. Why? Because that is the voice God chose to speak his words.²⁵

The word *genre* is a French word that simply means form, or kind. Genre refers to the different categories or types of literature found in the Bible. In the Old Testament we find

²⁴Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God*, 18.

²⁵Ibid.

literature characterized by historical narrative, poetry, wisdom and prophecy. In the New Testament we also have some historical narrative literature, but it is accompanied by the Gospels and the Epistles, as well as apocalyptic material. In every text of Scripture we study and preach, we must first give consideration to its respective form to determine “How does it mean?” before we dive into its content to determine “What did it mean?”²⁶ In other words, the form of literary genre establishes the ground rules with which we engage the contextual evidence needed to rightly understand the meaning of any given text of Scripture. Kevin Vanhoozer writes, “What writing pulls asunder—author, context, text, reader—genre joins together.”²⁷ Literary genre is the indispensable antecedent to all the other pieces that go into interpreting a text correctly.

To expand on this idea further, it is helpful to think of our approach to literary genre in the Bible as a game. Each different kind of game has its own set of rules. Robert Stein explains it this way:

Think for a moment of a European soccer fan attending his first (American) football and basketball games. In football the offensive and defensive players can use their hands to push their opponents. In basketball and soccer they cannot. In basketball players cannot kick the ball, but they can hold it with their hands. In soccer the reverse is true. In football everyone can hold the ball with his hands but only one person can kick it. In soccer everyone can kick the ball but only one person can hold it. Unless we understand the rules under which the game is played, what is taking place is bound to be confusing.

In a similar way, there are different “game” rules involved in the interpretation of the different kinds of biblical literature. The author has “played his game,” that is, has sought to convey his meaning, under the rules covering the particular literary form he has used. Unless we know those rules, we will almost certainly misinterpret his meaning.²⁸

So for the expositor to interpret and preach a text of Scripture accurately, he has to play by the same rules as the author of his text. And the genre of the text is the way we know by what rules the author is playing. In this way, literary genre serves as a kind of covenant of communication, a binding agreement between author and reader (and preacher) about how to communicate.²⁹

This covenant is serious business when it comes to accurately reflecting God’s voice. To ignore literary genre in the Bible is to violate our covenant with the biblical author and with the Holy Spirit who inspired his message. Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays point out,

²⁶Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 229.

²⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 339.

²⁸Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75–76.

²⁹*Ibid.*

If you stop and think about it, you are constantly encountering different genres in the course of ordinary life. In a single day you might read a newspaper, look up a number in a telephone directory, order from a menu, reflect on a poem, enjoy a love letter, wade through instructions on how to get to a friend's house, or meditate on a devotional book. When you meet these different genres, you know (whether you are conscious of it or not) that you need to play by certain rules of communication, the rules established by the genre itself. If you fail to play by its rules, you run the risk of misreading.³⁰

And if we misread the text, then we most certainly will speak incorrectly when we preach. In other words, we will say what God did not say. Because the form or genre of the text is connected to the content of the text—and thus the meaning of the text—we must consider literary genre a crucial mooring for expository preaching. The meaning of the Bible is at stake and, therefore, the voice of God is at stake!

Conclusion

During my tenure on the faculty at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, a colleague surprised me with a question one day after listening to me preach in chapel. He asked, "Where did you get your convictions about expository preaching?" Not wanting to admit I had never thought through such a basic issue for a preaching professor, I quickly rattled off the names of some of the great preachers who had influenced me over the years. But throughout the evening I could not get his question out of my mind, and I finally admitted to myself that I had responded too quickly. My father was not a preacher. The pastors under which I sat during my formative years would not have been considered expositors. After several hours of processing the question, I finally landed on the real answer. The next day I told my colleague I had a better and more accurate answer for him. I told him that my parents raised me to believe that the Bible was God's inspired, supernatural, and authoritative Word. So when I started preaching, the thing that made the most sense to me was to do it in such a way that my words were as close as possible to how the Holy Spirit gave them to us. That is the primary reason I am constrained to biblical exposition—it is the most reasonable way to let people hear God's voice as close as possible to how the Holy Spirit gave it to us.

³⁰J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 151.

Hebrew Historical Narrative:

Suggestions on How to Use it in Christian Proclamation



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At their core, narrative compositions are presentations of chronologically sequenced actions—they are descriptions of participants doing things. Biblical narratives certainly fit this definition, but as evangelical Christians we affirm that they are more than written records of time-sequenced actions; they are the very words of God—repositories of divine insights, promises, guidance, and hope designed to benefit those who hear and read them.

To express it more poetically, stories are murals painted on the inner walls of the human soul. Expressed in words, they live within us as images and actions infused with ideas and values. They are cousins to dreams and fantasies, but differ especially in the fact that their agents, actions, and ideas were fashioned in the minds of others, not our own.

God is the great story maker. Just as he created the tree expressed as the watercolor artist's imitative streaks and dabs, so the Lord masterfully created the time, places, people, and even the actional possibilities that were translated into the events of biblical narratives. More than that, God sovereignly guided the storytellers' art and in so doing became both the initiator and finisher of all biblical narrative.

As evangelical Christians we affirm that biblical narratives differ from all other stories in that they are verbally mediated expressions of the mind of God, authentic and accurate in every way. They are, to extend an analogy, the frescoes on the soul's vaulted ceilings. To interact with them is to touch the finger of God.

Guidelines for Exegesis

Preaching biblical narratives transforms proclaimers into painters adorning the souls of our listeners with divinely authorized representations of God, his work, and his world. The challenge for the proclaimer is thus to perform the task faithfully and vibrantly.

Vibrant proclamation is a matter of both literary and performance art. It involves the coining of felicitous phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, as well as their skillful presentation to listeners. *Faithful* proclamation is the complement to the vibrant; it consists of the

presentation of accurate information gleaned through careful reading of the biblical text, thoughtful, sympathetic reflection on it, investigative research from secondary sources, and cogent integration of the assembled information in ways that are faithful to the intentions of the author of the text.

I recommend that Christians who wish to prepare sermons, Bible studies, or devotionals from Old Testament narratives carry out the steps listed below as part of their preparations. Keep in mind that these steps constitute an ideal. Each step is helpful and, one could argue, necessary; yet time or other limitations will likely prevent you from carrying them out fully. No matter; whether you paint with a brush that looks like a fan or one with a tip like a needle, paint with the skill and time you have.

1. Enjoy. Enjoy reading the Bible. Enjoy it enough to read it often. Sometimes, choose to read it even when you could watch TV or spend time checking out your favorite Internet sites. Enjoy it enough to read it slowly; relish and reread passages you already know so well you can recite them from memory.

To preach Old Testament narratives effectively you also need to take another step: Fall in love with the stories of the Old Testament. If you didn't know it already, you'll soon discover that they're about truly fascinating people—complex people whose relationships and personal challenges intersect repeatedly with our own.

2. Connect. Walk carefully through the words that paint the stories of Old Testament characters. Take the time to find the happinesses, challenges, threats, and possibilities woven into their world. Uncover the motives that energized and guided their actions. Look beyond peoples' unpronounceable names to discover the relational dynamics that guided the social interplay between them. Compare the ancient tools and technologies to modern counterparts to understand how similar yet different even simple daily tasks were. Feel the pressures, fears, and prizes of their very un-American social structures; learn to appreciate the advantages and restrictions of their androcentric world, one balanced precariously on a beam of honor and shame. In the end, know these people as well as you know your own friends.

3. Select. Ask God to guide you in your selection of a text and the preparation of a sermon, Bible study, or devotional. Then expect him to answer. The answer will likely come in the form of a more-emotional-than-rational sense that a particular narrative (or narrative book, if it is to be a series) is interesting to *you* and relevant to *your* life. Finding a passage that speaks to you is vital, for you will inevitably preach that passage with deeper insight and greater energy. When God's Word speaks *to* you, it can speak *through* you; when it lives for you, it lives for your listeners as well.

4. Analyze. Reread the selected text from your favorite version again to gain a clear sense of what the passage is saying. Then check out how other versions handled key verses or sections of the story. Keep several different English versions handy—either electronically or in print form—and consult them as needed. I have found www.blueletterbible.org to be an easy-to-use, free, and helpful site for viewing multiple versions.

If you are able, read the passage from the original biblical language. The truth is, however, if you have the skill and time to easily read any narrative text in biblical Hebrew or Aramaic, you're probably a gray-haired Old Testament professor at a seminary. If you can at the same time identify syntactical and lexical aberrations in the biblical Hebrew/Aramaic narrative text and can use those insights to identify author-designated points of special interest in the narrative, you are also a world-class discourse linguist. Congratulations!

But if you don't fit into either or both of those categories, I suggest you do the following: Look at the Old Testament narrative text using a Bible software resource by Logos, BibleWorks, or a free internet site like BlueLetterBible that will provide you with ready access to the Hebrew text, definitions of the original-language words, partial parsings of verbs, and virtually effortless viewing of many different English translations.

Perform a detailed analysis of the text. Biblical narratives were written down primarily "for our instruction" (1 Cor 10:11, HCSB)—to teach us about Jesus, the ways of God in the world, and how we can live a God-pleasing life. Narrative Scriptures do this using two primary features: actions and speeches. Actions performed by human beings in the stories of the Old Testament function in two main ways: They inspire us to follow a desirable pattern of behavior—one that results in a blessed outcome; and they warn us by depicting bad examples and then showing the resulting undesirable consequences. Actions performed by God within a narrative affirm his active presence in the universe and instruct us regarding the scope and power of his deeds. Speeches placed in the mouths of a narrative's major characters, on the other hand, are repositories of the key information and behavioral guidelines the author wished to pass along to his audience.

Writers compose narratives using four primary variables: settings, characters, actions, and quotations. By paying close attention to each of these aspects of biblical narratives, it is possible to gain important insights into the writer's intentions for the story. Listed below are some guidelines for analyzing each of these features.

A. Settings

1) *Pay attention to where the events occurred.* Narrative settings consist of three important components: the place, time, and attendant circumstances in which the narrative's actions took place. In many Old Testament narratives the biblical author has included explicit statements that provide the reader with details regarding the geographical location, time of year or time of day, and weather conditions or other physical circumstances in which certain of the events in a story took place. For the careful reader these details provide crucial insights into the author's communicative intentions for the story.

Specifically, the Old Testament narrators used setting-related details as a crucial indicator of the relative importance of each of the events in their narratives. Writers boosted the significance level of the events by explicitly associating them with culturally significant locations—places like capital cities (Jerusalem or Samaria), popular religious shrines (Shiloh, Bethel), and places of geographic extremity such as mountains (Sinai [1 Kgs 19:8–18], Carmel [1 Kgs 18:20–45]) or deserts (Sinai [Exod 19:1ff.]). By taking the narrative's setting into account, you will be able better poised to determine the author-intended significance

of a given event.

Using this guideline, for example, it is fair to conclude that David's adulterous act with Bathsheba, which occurred at the royal palace in Jerusalem (2 Sam 11:1–2)—in other words, inside the most important government building in Israel's most important city—was marked by the author as an unusually significant event. It would be gaged as being less important than the events in the lives of David's emissaries that took place in an unnamed city of the Ammonites in the previous chapter (2 Sam 10:2–4).

2. *Pay attention to when the events occurred.* By linking key events with unexpected times of day (midnight [Ruth 3:8–13], pre-dawn [1 Sam 11:11], sunrise [Gen 19:23]), with significant dates on the calendar—the “turning of the year” [2 Sam 11:1] or during religious festival celebrations (the year's seventh cycle of the moon [Neh 8:2]), creates an added layer of highlighting. Within the Book of Ruth, for example, it is fair to conclude that daylight events occurring within Naomi's hovel were not as important as Ruth's midnight encounter with Boaz at the barley threshing floor. Similarly, Gideon's attack on the Midianite camp—the climactic event in Gideon's military career—was given additional highlighting by the explicit mention of the fact that it was carried out in the pre-dawn hours (Judg 7:19).

3. *Pay attention to special circumstances associated with the events.* Narrators' inclusions of explicit weather-related details were used to highlight events (hailstorm [Josh 10:11; see Job 38:22–23], thunder and lightning [Exod 19:16], hot wind [Jonah 4:8–11]). Additionally, other odd natural phenomena such as thick smoke (Exod 19:16–18), fire [Exod 3:1], or an earthquake (Exod 19:18b) might be explicitly noted as attendant circumstances to key actional or thematic moments in a text. As a rule, the more important the geographical or temporal setting was within the writer's culture, or the more unusual the natural phenomena connected with an action, the more significant the event.

B. Characters

The significance of an action within Old Testament narrative—and therefore how much emphasis should be placed on it in the course of an exposition—is determined in part by who performed the action. Writers did not intend every action to be evaluated as equally significant. Accordingly, they often marked the significance level of actions by indicating who performed them. The following guidelines can be of assistance in trying to answer the question, Which part of the story did the writer want his audience to pay the most attention to?

1. *Pay special attention to actions performed by divine characters.* It is clear that for the writers of the Old Testament narrative, God was the single most important character in their accounts. Any action performed by Yahweh or his supernatural stand-in the Angel of the Lord automatically became a standout—a thematically central—event. When preaching expositively from Old Testament narrative, therefore, central emphasis should always be given to every activity explicitly attributed to God (e.g., Gen 19:24; Exod 12:29) or his authorized supernatural representative (2 Kgs 19:35). Such actions are relatively infrequent, but by no means rare; approximately 8% of all events in Old Testament narrative were performed by God or a lesser supernatural being (e.g., Angel of the Lord [Gen 16:10; 22:11]).

2. *Pay special attention to actions performed by the most socially powerful human being in the narrative.* By far the most common subjects in Old Testament narrative are human beings; roughly three-quarters of all verbs in the narrative framework have humans as their subject. People of different social ranks and societal roles participated actively in the recorded events. As a rule, the more social power a person had, the more thematically significant the actions they carried out within the narrative world. Consistent with this is the fact that within the majority of narratives the most significant actions were performed by most socially powerful males—clan patriarchs, kings, top military leaders, prophets, and priests. The person in the narrative closest to the top of the social power pyramid are the ones to pay closest attention to.

3. *Note where non-human subjects show up on the event line.* To enhance key actional moments within biblical narratives, the Old Testament writers sometimes used three relatively rare categories of verbal subjects: 1) subsets of the human being (e.g., Eglon's belly fat [Judg 3:22], Absalom's head [2 Sam 18:9]), 2) animals (e.g., Snake [Gen 3:4], Balaam's donkey [Num 22:28]), and 3) objects (e.g., Jericho's walls [Josh 6:20], Ehud's sword handle [Judg 3:22], the stone David used to kill Goliath [1 Sam 17:49]). Turning animals, inanimate objects, and human body parts into subjects of action verbs in Hebrew narratives is a rare phenomenon. These types of subjects constitute only about 2% of the total subjects in the non-quotational sections of Old Testament narrative. But when they are employed as subjects of action verbs, you can be certain the biblical writer was trying to create a focal event in the account. (Keep in mind, however, that the key actional moment in a story may be different from the thematic center; thematic centers are usually consist of speech acts.)

C. Actions

Within the vast world of biblical literature narratives differ from poetry, wisdom sayings, laws, prophecies, and other genres by the fact that they emphasize chronologically sequenced verbal actions. While they mostly depict the actions of human beings, biblical narratives affirm the truth that God also participates in human affairs. In order to gain a clear picture of the actional flow in an Old Testament narrative, it is a good idea for you to make the effort to summarize the story by writing one short paragraph that includes every key action. In your paragraph be sure to indicate who performed the key events and the order in which the events occurred.

1. *Summarize the actions of the narrative's main human character.* What was the situation at the beginning of the narrative? What was it like at the end? What role did the central human figure play in the change? For example, Israel was gravely threatened by an advancing Egyptian army (Exod 14:9). However, due to Moses's godly and forceful leadership, Israel was saved and Moses became revered (Exod 14:30–31).

2. *Summarize what God did in the narrative.* As in the case of the central human character, it is helpful to ask the three questions one more time. What was the situation at the beginning of the narrative? What was it like at the end? What role did God play in the change? In the story of Ruth, arguably the key event in the story was not Ruth's daring midnight actions at the threshing floor or Boaz's benevolent and socially responsible deeds, but the Lord giving Ruth a pregnancy (Ruth 4:13) that paved the way for coming of King David (see

Ruth 4:17–22) and the Messianic line that was climaxed and concluded by the coming of Jesus Christ (see Matt 1:5–16).

D. Quotations

Biblical narratives are a special type of narrative; I call it *hortastory*—that is, stories infused with exhortation, designed to provide readers and listeners with guidance for living. More than that, Biblical narratives are *theological* hortastory, written to guide people into a deeper understanding of God’s nature and ways, as well as his expectations for humanity.

Biblical writers used a special kind of event to accomplish the incredibly important tasks of conveying God’s ideas and behavioral guidance—the speech act. Through the miracle of narrative speech, characters give voice to much of the intellectual content—especially theological ideas and behavioral guidelines—that the author wished to convey to his readers and listeners. Since evangelical Christians like myself recognize God as the author of all Scripture, we affirm that in Old Testament speech acts placed in the mouths of important human characters we come upon God’s own authoritative pronouncements.

Of course, words spoken by the participants in biblical narratives can and do perform other, more mundane, functions as well: they make actions more comprehensible by revealing intentions and establishing motives; they adjust the emotional content of associated events; and they create relational connections between key characters. These functions are vital to a well-told story, but they are secondary to the presentation of theological and behavioral information. To gain a sense of the relative importance of individual speech acts by individuals, I recommend you adhere to the following guidelines:

1) *Pay attention to who is speaking within the narrative.* As a rule, the authors of Old Testament narrative placed the ideas they wished to emphasize within the longer speeches of the narrative’s most prominent and socially or religiously significant characters. The more socially powerful or religiously influential the character who spoke, the more important the ideas contained in that person’s speech are likely to be. Thus, the venerable prophet Samuel’s longest speech (205 Hebrew words; 2 Sam 12:6–25) can rightly be regarded as his most thematically central speech, especially in view of its concluding prophetic warning that “if you continue to do what is evil, both you and your king will be swept away” (v. 25).

Speech acts by kings and prophets were certainly important, but they pale in significance to speeches uttered by Yahweh. If a passage you are studying contains a quote spoken by God or his supernatural representative, consider the ideas and directives in it to be of central significance to the narrative as a whole. It was Yahweh, not Moses, who first uttered the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17), gave directions for the construction of the Tabernacle (Exod 25:1–31:17) and established the sacrificial system (Lev 1:1–7:34). It was the Lord, not King Solomon, who brought a sobering dose of reality to the celebratory dedication of the great temple to Yahweh in Jerusalem by threatening the destruction of both the temple and the nation that built it (1 Kgs 9:1–9).

Though socially powerful males occupied center stage in Old Testament narratives, others could play important roles as well. In fact, biblical authors had at their disposal

another technique that was highly effective in conveying key information in a narrative: the inversion. In the case of an inversion, the least significant person, not the most socially powerful, would make the crucial pronouncement. Thematically significant words could be made to stand out by having unexpected characters speak them. Examples include women (e.g., Abigail [1 Sam 25:23–31], Esther [Esth 7:3–6]), underage males (young Samuel, [1 Sam 3:10–18], young David [1 Sam 17:45–51]), and slaves (an unnamed Hebrew slave girl [2 Kgs 5:2–3], unnamed Aramean male slaves [2 Kgs 5:13]).

2) *Pay special attention to longer speeches.* Proper expository preaching of Old Testament narratives will inevitably highlight the content of the longest speeches within a narrative account. This is so, because the biblical narrators placed their primary theological ideas in the largest “speech bubbles” of the most important characters. The longer the speech, the more important its content is likely to be.

Speeches in the Old Testament narrative can be pretty long; six of them are more than a thousand Hebrew words long, and the longest has more than 8000 words! (The longest ones are: Deut 5:1ff. (8062), Exod 25:1ff. (2552), Deut 1:5ff. (2258), Exod 20:22ff. (1279), Lev 25:1ff. (1270), and Deut 27:11ff. (1140).

You may be thinking, those statistics are interesting, but for expositional purposes, how long is a “longer” speech in Old Testament narrative? The answer is “Surprisingly short”; 50% of the speeches in Old Testament narratives consist of 12 Hebrew words or less, while 90% of the speeches are less than 60 Hebrew words long. If you don’t have the time or inclination to pull up a Hebrew text on your smartphone and count words, you can use this informal rule: Any quote that is two verses long is likely to contain an important idea, and any speech at least five verses long is likely to be *really* important—especially if it is spoken by God or a prophet (e.g., Yahweh [172 words—Exod 20:1–17], Nathan [112 words—2 Sam 12:7–12]).

5. Finalize. Besides writing out a summary paragraph summarizing the events of the narrative you are planning to use in a sermon or Bible study, jot down thoughts and impressions that stood out to you as you read it. Identify insights that were helpful to you and ones you believe will be helpful to the people to whom you will be speaking. As an evangelical Christian expositor, look for ways to use the passage in a manner consistent with the practices of New Testament writers. The following section discusses New Testament usage of Old Testament narrative in some detail.

Using the New Testament as a Guide for Preaching OT Narrative

As Christian proclaimers of Old Testament narrative, we can do no better than use these literary and theological treasures in ways that reflect the purposes and employments given them by the New Testament writers. Thankfully, we have many passages in the New Testament that guide us in our attempts to understand how the New Testament writers used Old Testament narrative.

The Apostle Paul, for example, declared that all Old Testament “Scripture [including its narrative portions] is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). This position reflects the Jewish tradition in which Paul was raised, which understood the Torah to be “the full expression of knowledge and truth” (Rom 2:20b). As such, Paul understood Old Testament narratives to be a source of factual information, divinely sanctioned behavioral standards, and both positive and negative examples for living.

Consistent with the apostle’s words to Timothy, Jesus and the New Testament church leaders used Scripture in two primary ways: to educate the mind and shape the will. That is, they used Old Testament narratives to teach people fundamental religious truths and to help direct people’s wills to strive for ever-higher degrees of godliness in thought and deed.

1. *Use the Old Testament narratives as a witness to Jesus Christ.* First in importance among the educational uses of Old Testament narratives was the task of providing insights into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself authorized this use of Old Testament narrative by declaring that “the Scriptures ... testify about Me” (John 4:39). More than that, He led the way in using Old Testament narrative accounts to teach about himself. In a direct reference to the account of God’s provision of manna to the Israelites in the desert (Exod 16:4–35, see especially v. 4), Jesus declared that he himself was “the real bread from heaven” (John 6:41)—“the living bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:51).

By doing this, Jesus invited his listeners to do four things: 1) bring to remembrance the details of an Old Testament narrative account, 2) reflect on the function or quality of some focal element within the narrative, 3) compare that focal element to the life of Jesus and his ministry, 4) affirm that Jesus’ life and ministry was superior in effect to that of the narrative element to which he was compared.

Within John 6 Jesus declared that he was not merely “bread”; instead, he was the “real” and “living bread.” Manna sustained the physical lives of those who consumed it during their pilgrimage through a sterile and threatening world, but it had its limits; the Jews’ “fathers ate—and they died” (John 6:58a). By contrast, taking Jesus into one’s life would bring *eternal* life—not just four decades of life—to a person’s soul through all the trials of life in the present and the joys of eternity in heaven with him (John 6:58b).

Gospel accounts describe four additional references in which Jesus clearly made use of Old Testament narratives to provide instruction about himself. While conversing with Nicodemus the Lord spoke prophetically of his death and the role he was to play in providing salvation to humanity. To do so he used the Torah account of Moses lifting up the bronze snake in the wilderness (John 3:14; Num 21:4–9). As in the reference to manna, Jesus here brought a specific Old Testament passage to remembrance, indicated the significance of the bronze snake within the narrative, linked his own life and ministry to that aspect of the narrative, and then declared his superiority to the highlighted narrative element. Whereas the bronze snake saved the physical lives of afflicted Israelites in the wilderness, Jesus would provide unending spiritual salvation when he was lifted up on a pole, so that “everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life” (John 3:15).

The final instances I mention are recorded in staccato fashion in a short passage in the Gospel of Matthew. When confronted by a group of scribes and Pharisees, Jesus made reference to a triad of narratives found outside the pages of the Torah. The first was of Jonah being “in the belly of a huge fish three days and three nights,” a passage used by Jesus to teach about his own death and burial (Matt 12:40; Jonah 1:17). The second, also taken from the Book of Jonah, referred to the single greatest revival recorded in the Old Testament, that of the Ninevites repenting in response to Jonah’s preaching (Matt 12:41; Jonah 3:4-9). The final allusion was to the queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon’s court. Consistent with Jesus’ use of the manna and bronze snake narratives, Jesus used these Old Testament passages to teach something about his own life, and to underscore the fact that his life and ministry were superior to those of both the greatest evangelist and the wisest individual in the annals of Israelite history (Matt 10:42).

We find a final hint of Jesus’s use of narrative references his conversation with Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus. During that several-mile journey Jesus used “Moses and the Prophets” to provide instruction “concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). As students familiar with the Hebrew Bible know, within Judaism “Moses” referred to the Torah, and the word “Prophets” is a general term that refers to a section of the Jewish scriptures that includes both the Former and Latter Prophets. Since other Gospel passages portrayed Jesus utilizing narratives from both the Torah and the Prophets, it seems likely that he once again used Old Testament narratives to provide instruction concerning himself.

The canonical writings of Paul, Peter, the author of Hebrews, James, and Jude all bear testimony to the fact that the first-century Christian community incorporated Old Testament narratives into their thinking about Jesus. For the most part, the characters in the Old Testament narratives were used either as types—people whose actions prefigured the work of the Messiah—or foils—those whose actions contrasted sharply with those of Jesus. Examples of such persons and objects in Old Testament narratives involving Adam (Gen 3:6-19; Rom 5:14-19), Abel (Gen 4:10; Heb 12:24), Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20; Heb 7:1-16), God’s provision of water during Israel’s wilderness wanderings (Exod 17:6; 1 Cor 10:4), Moses (Heb 3:5-6), and Joshua (Heb 4:8-11). As Christian proclaimers of these same Scriptures, can we do less and still retain our integrity?

2. *Use the Old Testament narratives to teach doctrinal and practical truths associated with the Christian life.* The New Testament makes clear that the first-century Christian community’s leading spokesmen used Old Testament narratives to teach doctrinal and practical truths central to the Christian faith. Peter, for example, used the Torah narratives of Noah and Lot to teach that “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment” (2 Pet 2:9). Paul used the account of Adam (Gen 3:6) to teach that “sin entered the world through one man and death through sin” (Rom 5:12). Paul also used an incident in the life of Abraham (Gen 15:6) to demonstrate that “faith is credited for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). James used a different account from the life of Abraham, as well as details from the account of Israel’s conquest of Jericho, to teach that “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:21; see Gen 22:9-12). In each of these examples the New Testament writers used the narratives to convey or reinforce core Christian doctrines. Among the doctrines they addressed were those of God, sin, salvation, and the Christian life.

3. *Use the Old Testament narratives as patterns for Christian living.* A third way in which New Testament writers also used Old Testament narratives was as a source of inspirational patterns for living. The unnamed author of Hebrews used Abel as an example of one who “by faith was approved as a righteous man” (Heb 11:4; see Gen 22:9–12). Paul used Abraham as a model of the life of God-focused faith, because Abraham “did not waver in unbelief at God’s promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Rom 4:20–21; see Gen 15:6).

4. *Use the Old Testament narratives as warnings regarding lifestyle choices.* A fourth use of Old Testament narratives within the New Testament was as cautionary examples designed to discourage inappropriate behavior by Christians. The author of Hebrews, for example, used an account of Esau to discourage Christians from being “immoral or irreverent” (Heb 12:16; see Gen 25:31–34; 27:36). Paul used the account of the Israelites in the wilderness “as a warning” (1 Cor 10:11) to the Corinthian Christians “not [to] commit sexual immorality” (1 Cor 10:8; see Num 25:1–9). Peter mentioned Balaam as “one who loved the wages of unrighteousness but received a rebuke for his transgression” (2 Pet 2:15–16; see Deut 23:4). John taught that we should be “unlike Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother” (1 John 4:10b–12a; see Gen 4:7–8).

The Old Testament narratives contain a treasure of lives lived and shared for our benefit. Enjoy them richly as a divine gift, then share them with those the Lord has placed in your care!

Sermon: The Story of Hannah's Pain

1 Samuel 1:1–20



Robert D. Bergen, PhD

First Samuel 1:1 is probably a verse you have never preached from, or even wanted to hear a sermon from. But you'll be glad you did once you've had a chance to study it. Let's do it together today!

¹There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ²He had two wives, the first named Hannah and the second Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. (1 Sam 1:1–2, HCSB)

First of all, what are these verses doing in the Bible? These tell us about a guy who has two wives, plus a bunch of relatives with unpronounceable names. Here we have the man Elkanah with ancestors named Jeroham, Elihu, Tohu, and Zuph, an Ephrathite (Ephrathite is what the Hebrew actually says here) in his background. What's the big deal about a genealogy of four generations of ancestors? What do those names of otherwise unknown ancestors have to do with this story? Well, the answer is—if you're an Israelite living three thousand years ago in Canaan—a lot. Those names mean that the writer wants you to think of Elihu as a really important guy; listing more than two generations of ancestors in a man's genealogy signals to the reader that the person is a significant individual. More than that, if you are an ancient Israelite genealogy wonk, the names tell you that the man is a member of the high priestly clan—that he is a descendant of Israel's first high priest, Aaron the brother of Moses (see 1 Chronicles 6).

Elkanah was an important man and a priest, and yet he had two wives. If he was a godly and important man, why did he have two wives? Can we use the example of Elkanah to justify bigamy today? No—not unless you're a Mormon! But we can use this statement to learn something about ancient Israel. Within that society, it was considered crucial for every marriage to produce a male offspring to pass along the family name and wealth, as well as to have someone to care for the parents in their old age. If a man's first wife—and it seems Hannah was that wife—could not produce children, then it was expected that a man would take another wife. We saw a similar situation in the life of Abraham (Genesis 16).

Here's the probable backstory behind the events of verse 2, as it might have been experienced by Hannah. Like every other little girl in her society, Hannah looked forward to an early marriage to an older man. Her father would arrange for her to be married to

an adult male as soon as her body showed evidence of being able to bear children. While young marriages like this would be scandalous and criminal in western cultures today, it was considered a good thing in ancient Asia. In Hannah's case it meant that she would be married to a respected and important man—a member of the high priestly clan. It also meant she would always have food and clothing, and that she would be able to do the most important thing a woman could possibly do in that society—produce children; to be fruitful and multiply.

Every time a woman gave birth to another child in ancient Israel, she increased the prestige of her husband and the clan, and consequently raised her own status within the family. A married woman who was barren, on the other hand, was considered cursed by God; her childlessness meant that the just and righteous God had found some good reason to close her womb. More than that, a childless wife could be expected to experience feelings of guilt, because she was consuming her husband's resources without giving him what he desired the most—a son. A childless wife might even cause others to question her husband's ability to father children, thus bringing shame on him and, consequently, the entire clan.

Hannah had been married to Elkanah for many years, but she had never produced even one child for her husband. For Hannah, every new month without a pregnancy meant a renewal of anxiety, guilt, and feelings of inadequacy and shame. And who could Hannah blame for her barrenness—herself? her husband? God? In the Hebrew language Hannah's name meant “Lady of Grace/Favor”; but I can tell you Hannah didn't feel like a recipient of God's gracious favor. It seems that after several years of living his wife's childlessness, the Levite Elkanah did what most men would have done in that culture; he made the decision to take a second wife. And so it was that Peninnah joined the family.

Peninnah soon solved Elkanah's problems; she gave birth to one baby after another, providing the family with heirs, workers, and children who would someday care for the parents in their old age. Everyone in the clan had a reason to rejoice. Everyone, that is, except Hannah; she was still living in a prison of shame, guilt, and emotional pain. The narrator moves the story forward by noting that the good and righteous man Elkanah:

³would go up from his town every year to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of Hosts at Shiloh, where Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the LORD's priests. (1 Sam 1:3)

Elkanah went to Shiloh to worship the Lord, because in his day that city was Israel's central worship site; that's where the ark of the covenant was located, and that's where Israelite males were expected go three times a year. On at least one of those pilgrimages to Shiloh each year, Elkanah would take his entire family. It seems probable that he would take the family to the fall festival known as the Feast of Tabernacles. There at Shiloh he and his family would live for a week in a temporary shelter, re-enacting their ancestor's exodus experience that had taken place hundreds of years earlier.

As part of the religious, weeklong family vacation, Eli and the other worshipers would present animal sacrifices to the Lord. They could be expected to offer up three animals to God; one that would serve as a burnt offering, one as a sin offering, and one as a peace offering. The burnt offering would have all the meat portions burned to ash at the altar. In the language of sacrifice in that day, the burnt offering said to God, “Through this animal’s death please accept me as a living sacrifice in service to You.” The sin offering spoke a different message. It said, “By this sacrifice I declare that I am a sinner worthy of death; this animal’s death satisfies that demand in my place.” With the sin offering the most sacred parts of the animal were burned up on the altar, with the other portions being given to the officiating priest. The peace offering’s message was one of thanksgiving. It served as an expression of gratitude for the restoration of right relations between God and the one offering the animal.

The third sacrificial animal was a party animal, since the man who brought the animal would be permitted to eat most of the animal’s meat. Elkanah naturally shared the meat from the peace offering with his family as the centerpiece of a special celebratory meal. It seems that he used the event as a sort of family awards dinner whereby he rewarded each wife for their hard work over the past year and for the blessing of children brought into the family by the wives. And so it was that

⁴Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he always gave portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to each of her sons and daughters. ⁵But he gave a double portion to Hannah, for he loved her even though the LORD had kept her from conceiving. (1 Sam 1:4–5)

Interestingly, the Hebrew text does not actually state that Hannah received “a double portion” from Elkanah; instead, it says that she received “a portion of two nostrils.” In my opinion, this means that Hannah got only one portion—a portion which seems reasonable since she had failed to provide her husband with any children. Of course, Elkanah did not give her this relatively small portion because he hated her. In fact, “he loved her, even though the Lord had kept her from conceiving” (v. 5b). But it didn’t feel like love to Hannah, and it provided the perfect chance for Peninnah to stick a verbal knife into her feminine rival’s spirit and then twist it. And Peninnah did not waste this opportunity: Hannah’s

⁶rival would taunt her severely just to provoke her, because the LORD had kept Hannah from conceiving. ⁷Whenever she went up to the LORD’s house, her rival taunted her in this way every year. Hannah wept and would not eat. (1 Sam 1:6)

These annual banquets—the meals that were supposed to be the happiest and best of each year—repeatedly served as the single most humiliating and painful of Hannah’s life. Once a year, every year, before all the members of the clan she was being openly humiliated for an embarrassing and shameful condition imposed on her by Yahweh Himself. Fascinatingly, the very God who commanded Hannah to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28), had also “kept Hannah from conceiving” (v. 6b). How could a truly good God command a person to do something and then make it impossible for them to fulfill that command?

Elkanah, being the good man that he was, tried his best to do some damage control. Using typical male logic, he did his best to help Hannah “get over” the unending humiliation associated with being a married woman endlessly failing to do the single most important thing a married woman could ever do.

“Hannah, why are you crying?” her husband Elkanah asked. “Why won’t you eat? Why are you troubled? Am I not better to you than 10 sons?” (1 Sam 1:8)

Clearly, Elkanah’s efforts came up short. It is obvious that, like most men in all of human history, Elkanah was virtually clueless when it came to understanding women!

Hannah, however, could not tell her husband that he was a failure as a comforter, for in ancient Asian culture women would not have had the right to criticize their husbands, any more than slaves would have had the right to criticize their masters. Marriage counselors who could have guided the couple through this crisis did not exist in the ancient world. And as far as we know, Hannah had no female confidant who would lend her a sympathetic ear—only a merciless, all-too-fertile rival! It would seem, therefore, that Hannah was living in solitary cell for one in the inner recesses of a benighted prison of pain. Hannah endured her annual torture session, and then immediately,

got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. (1 Sam 1:9a)

She got up, but where could she go? She couldn’t return home; there were no malls, museums, or coffee shops where she could hang out. She could have made the most desperate of all choices and ended her life, but she didn’t.

Impressively, she went to the one place in the universe where she could find genuine help; she went to the Lord. There she would find One who would listen with infinite care to each of her tear-stained words. There she would find One who had the power to change her deepest hurt into her greatest joy.

Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord’s tabernacle. ¹⁰Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the Lord with many tears. ¹¹Making a vow, she pleaded, “Lord of Hosts, if you will take notice of Your servant’s affliction, remember and not forget me, and give Your servant a son, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut.” (1 Sam 1:9b–11)

Hannah prayed to the Lord with an intensity and focus that was possible only for a person who was living with unending agony within her soul. What we hear in Hannah’s incredible prayer is something truly striking. We hear the words of one who has not been destroyed, but deepened; not shattered, but sculpted, and transformed by the most dreaded tool in the divine Sculptor’s hand, the tool of pain.

Indeed, the Lord had given Hannah the priceless but never requested gift of pain. By living in ancient Israel as a married woman denied the gift of motherhood, Hannah experienced

unrelenting humiliation and degradation. But from the pain of childlessness Hannah also learned one of the most important truths any would-be parent could ever learn—children are a gift that can come only from God. And while parents have the joy of nurturing and raising them, children are God’s property, lent to parents for only a few years.

The Lord understood Hannah and her pain. Sadly, the greatest religious leader of her day did not.

¹²While she continued praying in the Lord’s presence, Eli watched her lips. ¹³Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and scolded her, “How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!” ¹⁵“No, my lord,” Hannah replied. “I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven’t had any wine or beer; I’ve been pouring out my heart before the Lord. ¹⁶Don’t think of me as a wicked woman; I’ve been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment.” ¹⁷Eli responded, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the petition you’ve requested from Him. “And may your servant find favor with you,” she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent. (1 Sam 1:12–17)

Like Eli, sometimes God’s people—ministers and caring laypersons alike—fail to hear or understand the desperate heart cries of our neighbors. We want to help the people around us, but we don’t know enough about their hidden hurts to craft an appropriate response. As a result, our well-intended words fail to directly address a needy person’s desperate condition. However we, like ignorant Eli, can still do two helpful things: we can speak a caring word—“Go in peace”—and we can affirm and undergird their efforts to reach out to God for help—“May the God of Israel grant the petition you’ve requested from Him.”

Hannah had an encounter that day with the God who listens and acts. More than that, she was touched by the words of a supportive, if inadequate, servant of God. And these experiences changed her: “She no longer looked despondent” (v. 17b). Hannah left God’s house with hope, and her life would forever be better.

¹⁹The next morning Elkanah and Hannah got up early to bow in worship before the Lord. Afterward, they returned home to Ramah. Then Elkanah was intimate with his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰After some time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, because she said, “I requested him from the Lord.” (1 Sam 1:19–20)

At the end of the family’s religious celebration at Shiloh, they returned to their home in Ramah. In the course of time the loving relationship between Elkanah and his first wife was visited with the joy of a divine miracle as “the Lord remembered” Hannah.

The Hebrew word translated *remembered* in v. 19 deserves some special attention. When the subject is God, the term does not mean that God had temporarily forgotten something, but now just happened to have it return to His conscious thought. Instead, this verb was used by biblical narrators to clue readers and listeners in on the fact that God was about to act in a decisive and beneficial way to fulfill a commitment He had previously made. The verb is used

in connection with Noah when God ended the flood (Gen. 8:1), with Abraham when God delivered Lot from Sodom (Gen. 19:29), with Isaac's childless wife Rachel when she became pregnant with twins (Gen. 30:22), and with Israel when God began to deliver his people from Egyptian slavery (Exod. 2:24). To say "the Lord remembered" was to say that the Lord was about to do something especially good and important.

In this case the Lord remembered Hannah, and she "conceived and gave birth to a son" (v. 20a). The Lord of Hosts (see v. 11)—Yahweh of Armies, the mightiest warrior in the universe—had listened to the tearful request of a socially insignificant, barren peasant woman and granted it! To memorialize Hannah's courageous request—one forged in the furnace of emotional pain—and God's amazing grace, that son would be named Samuel. That child, conceived by faith and given by grace, would someday stand as the greatest spiritual in Israelite history since the days of Moses. That child would become Israel's last and greatest judge, and serve as Israel's first kingmaker.

And so I leave you with two questions. First, has God given you the gift of pain? Is there some situation or person in your life that serves as a constant source of trouble and emotional distress? If so, I have a second question: What are doing with that pain? You know, God could have taken that condition or person out of your life, but he hasn't done it—at least not yet. So let him use that condition, that person, as a shaping tool in your life. Let the pain teach you perseverance and mental toughness, but most of all let it arouse in you a deepened awareness of your need for God in your life. Let it inspire in you a greater urgency in your prayers, and a clearer vision of God as the one warrior in the universe strong enough to stand with you through every trial of life and give you ultimate victory. Let Hannah's story become yours.

Interpreting Hebrew Poetry



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Roughly one-third of the Old Testament is poetic in form.¹ Given the prevalence of poetry in the Old Testament identifying and grasping some general principles of interpretation is of utmost importance. This is further underscored by the fact that poetry is found in almost every book of the Old Testament.² Several books are completely poetic—Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Similarly, other books contain large portions of poetry: Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and Joel. That poetry is intertwined with biblical narratives (e.g., Exod 15; Deut 32; Judg 5; and 2 Sam 22:1–23:7), prophetic texts (e.g., Jer 1:4–10) and wisdom literature (Eccl 3:1–8) only compounds our task. Thus, creating a universal list of principles for interpreting poetry across genre lines seems difficult if not impossible. In this essay, I will discuss a variety of issues related to interpreting poetry in the Old Testament. Since this edition of the *Journal of Baptist Theology & Ministry* is on expository preaching from the Old Testament, the main thrust of the essay will be on interpretive principles that do not necessitate a thoroughgoing knowledge of biblical Hebrew, especially the nuances of Hebrew poetry.³

¹Fred W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Hebrew Poetry,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 550.

²Norman K. Gottwald argues that Leviticus, Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, and Malachi did not contain any poetic lines. See Norman Gottwald, “Hebrew Poetry,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 829.

³In many ways, there exists a gulf between interpreting Hebrew poetry and the art of interpretation typically taught in a hermeneutics class at the seminary level. It should be noted that excellent resources are available for interpreting Hebrew poetry, which for the most part falls outside the purview of our task. See F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Luis Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, trans. Adrian Graffy, *Subsidia Biblica* 11 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988); and Michael P. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980). For a comprehensive approach to the hermeneutics of biblical poetry,

Before beginning, it is important to distinguish between exegesis and hermeneutics. All interpreters use exegesis and hermeneutics, which are two sides of the same coin.⁴ First, the interpreter must exegete the biblical text. Exegesis is the attempt to extract the original and/or intended meaning of a text. This process is multifaceted and involves linguistic analysis and contextual analysis (i.e., literary, historical, and cultural).⁵ Second, once the exegetical work is done satisfactorily, the interpreter moves into the hermeneutical, or interpretive, stage. Hermeneutics utilizes exegetical work. This process can be overly simplified into key questions: Who was the author? Who was the audience? What is the purpose of the text within its original context? What theme(s) or principle(s) can be appropriately applied to today's contemporary society?⁶ When dealing with biblical poetry, however, the exegetical and hermeneutical process is not always so clearly demarcated (see discussion below). Thus, Ernst R. Wendland argued, "No single methodology is able to give us an adequate understanding of either an individual poem or a larger collection of them."⁷ As a result, greater attention must be given to the guiding principles that might extend beyond the traditional lines of interpreting the other genres of the Old Testament.⁸ Below, I will focus on five subsections that will help interpreters understand and apply biblical poetry: defining poetry, examining biblical parallelism, defining literary characteristics of poetry, discussing key approaches for interpreting the Psalter, and outlining the guiding principles for interpreting poetry. At the conclusion of the essay, I briefly discuss how the interpreter should approach the Old Testament as Christian Scripture and provide guiding principles for preaching biblical poetry.

What is Biblical Poetry?

Providing a definition of biblical poetry is not easy.⁹ Scholars are more apt to *describe*

see William Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 273–319.

⁴C. Hassell Bullock elaborates more thoroughly on the comparison between exegesis and hermeneutics. See C. Hassell Bullock, "Interpreting the Songs of Israel," in *The Literature and Meaning of Scripture*, ed. Morris A. Inch (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 80.

⁵It should be noted that this is an oversimplification of exegesis. Multiple layers exist within the literary, historical, and cultural analyses of the biblical text. The resources mentioned in n. 3 focus on the linguistic aspect of biblical poetry.

⁶This is not a complete list of questions related to the hermeneutical process. It does, however, give readers a starting point.

⁷Ernst R. Wendland, "The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry: A Procedural Outline," in *Discourse Perspectives on Hebrew Poetry in the Scriptures*, United Bible Society Monograph Series 7, ed. Ernst R. Wendland (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 24.

⁸For a similar argument, see Bullock, "Interpreting the Song of Israel," 81.

⁹Most notably, James Kugel denies the argument that the Bible contains poetry. See James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981). Alternatively, many scholars disagree with Kugel's notion that poetry does not exist in the Bible. For

what poetry is rather than *define* it.¹⁰ That being said, three characteristics seem to describe biblical poetry: terseness, parallelism, and figurative language. First, biblical poetry is notably terse.¹¹ This means poetry, as speech, is both compact and concentrated in content and message.¹² Second, poetry is distinguished from prose by the prevalence of linguistic features: parallelism, repetition of words/phrases, syntactic structures, the absence of Hebrew prose particles (e.g., direct object marker *’eth*, the definite article *ha*, relative clause marker *’asher*), unusual/marked syntactical structures (e.g., inclusios and chiasms), emphasis on phonology (e.g., assonance, alliteration, rhyme, etc.), direct speech, and poetry forms.¹³ Third, poetry contains a heightened use of figurative language as well as a larger use of affective devices (e.g., hyperbole, irony, allusion, etc.).¹⁴ Collectively, these characteristics emphasize the purpose of poetry which is “to instruct while it gives pleasure; instruction being the end, and pleasure the means.”¹⁵

Parallelism

The study of biblical parallelism can be traced to Robert Lowth’s seminal work on Hebrew poetry in “Lecture XIX” in *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicæ Oxonii Habitæ*.¹⁶ Elsewhere, Lowth provides a definition of parallelism:

example, see Tremper Longman III, “Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 169; cf. Robert Alter, “The Poetic and Wisdom Books,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 226–27; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 265.

¹⁰One important feature of poetry is it being a speech event that is typically based on a historical event or a hypothetical encounter with God or his people. See Wendland, “The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry,” 5. Although most attention is given to the written form of biblical poetry—especially modern interpretation—it is meant for oral recitation. See Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, 20. On the orality of poetry, see Walter E. Brown and Jeffrey J. Rankin, “Oral Poetry,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 497–501.

¹¹Longman, “Literary Approaches,” 170.

¹²J. P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Ineke Smit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 15.

¹³For the complete outline of the aforementioned features, see Wendland, “The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry,” 3–5. Given the scope and purpose of this essay only a few of the linguistic features will be discussed.

¹⁴See Longman, “Literary Approaches,” 169; cf. Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 109.

¹⁵Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. George Gregory (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1929), 2.

¹⁶Robert Lowth, *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum Praelectiones Academicæ Oxonii Habitæ* (London: Clarendon, 1753). By the time of his death in 1787, the original Latin work was translated into English.

The correspondence of one verse, or line, with another, I call parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it, in sense; or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction; these I call parallel lines; and the words or phrases, answering one to another in the corresponding lines, parallel terms.¹⁷

In “Lecture XIX,” Lowth identifies and describes the three forms (lit. “species”) of parallelism in biblical poetry: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic. Elaborating on the importance of parallelism for interpreting biblical poetry, Lowth explains:

The poetical conformation of the sentences, which has been so often alluded to as characteristic of the Hebrew poetry, consists chiefly in a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism between the members of each period; so that in two lines (or members of the same period) things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure. This parallelism has much variety and many graduation; it is sometimes more accurate and manifest, sometimes more vague and obscure.¹⁸

For Lowth, reading biblical poetry meant analyzing/comparing the relationship between consecutive lines of poetry. Of the forms, synonymous parallelism is the most prevalent and the easiest to identify. The chief characteristic of synonymous parallelism is “the same sentiment” in the first line of poetry and “repeated in different, but equivalent terms” in the second line of poetry.¹⁹ A wonderful example of synonymous parallelism is Ps 114:²⁰

- ¹ When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
² Judah became his sanctuary,

Since its original English printing, several editions have appeared. In this essay, the 1829 version is used: Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. George Gregory (Andover, UK: Flagg and Gould, 1829). Through Lowth’s study of biblical poetry, he concludes that the origin and “earliest application” of Hebrew poetry is grounded in the service of religion. See Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 154.

¹⁷Robert Lowth, *Isaiah: A New Translation, with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes, Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*, 10th ed. (Boston: Peirce, 1834), ix. More recently, Gerald H. Wilson argues that parallelism begins after a description/statement is made in “an initial line,” and then “a second (and sometimes a third) line is generated that shares some obvious grammatical-structural similarities with the first and yet redirects the focus of the first through alternate words and expressions. The close grammatical-structural similarity between lines provides continuity that emphasizes the parallel character of the two lines, while the distinctive phraseology of each phrase lifts the phenomenon beyond mere repetition and offers the opportunity for expansion or advancement on the original line’s meaning.” See Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms I*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 39.

¹⁸Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 157.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰English translations are from the English Standard Version unless noted otherwise.

- Israel his dominion.
³ The sea looked and fled;
Jordan turned back.
⁴ The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.
⁵ What ails you, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?
⁶ O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?
⁷ Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
⁸ who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

In the verses above, the underlined portions represent the words that are stated in the first line of poetry and, yet, repeated in different terms in the second line.²¹

The second form, antithetic parallelism, is somewhat self-explanatory—the second line of poetry is contrasted/opposed to the first. This form of parallelism does not follow any particular form or style. The contrasts and opposites between lines can be broad as thematic points (i.e., sentence level) or as acute as words (e.g., Prov 15:18).²² One of the most famous examples of antithetical parallelism is Ps 1.

- ¹ Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

²¹Due to its prevalence, synonymous parallelism contains various forms: the second line might reiterate the former line (e.g., Nahum 1:2); the second line can repeat a key element from the first line (e.g., Ps 105:20); the second line answers part or all of the first line (e.g., Isa 60:1); and sometimes the literary movement is from general to specific or vice-versa (e.g., Ps 51:9). This list is not exhaustive, but it does include some of the more prominent forms of synonymous parallelism. For the complete list, see Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 154–61.

²²Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 161–62. More recently, Bullock defines antithetic parallelism as a “method of saying contrasting things in different lines and in different ways.” See C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 38.

In all that he does, he prospers.

- ⁴The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps 1)

In Ps 1, the comparison between a righteous man (v. 1) and the wicked man (v. 4) establishes the thesis/antithesis comparison. The literary structure created in vv. 1–2 is contrasted in vv. 4–5. The psalm is concluded with the harsh reality of the comparison in v. 6a and v. 6b.²³

The final form of parallelism is synthetic or constructive. What sets this form apart from the other two is length. Synthetic parallelism is usually longer than synonymous and antithetical parallelisms. The lion's share of synthetic parallelisms is found in prophetic literature. In this form of parallelism, the second line of poetry develops the first line. The development in the second line might be subtle and/or obscure.²⁴

- ^{4b}How the oppressor has ceased,
the insolent fury ceased!
⁵The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked,
the scepter of rulers,
⁶that struck the peoples in wrath
with unceasing blows,
that ruled the nations in anger
with unrelenting persecution.
⁷The whole earth is at rest and quiet;
they break forth into singing.
⁸The cypresses rejoice at you,
the cedars of Lebanon, saying,
'Since you were laid low,
no woodcutter comes up against us.'
⁹Sheol beneath is stirred up
to meet you when you come;
it rouses the shades to greet you,
all who were leaders of the earth;
it raises from their thrones

²³Bullock does an excellent job highlighting the comparison between the righteous and the wicked. See Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 39–40.

²⁴Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry*, 162–64. More recently, the title developmental has been adopted instead of constructive.

all who were kings of the nations. (Isa 14:4b–9)

During the last fifty years, biblical scholars have challenged this form of parallelism. As a result, newer approaches to parallelism have emerged.

In 1981, James Kugel challenged Lowth's view of parallelism, particularly as it related to semantic aspects. For Kugel, the essence of parallelism is:

Sharpness, sequences of actions and cause-effect sequences, differentiation, differences in the *other* words in 'fixed pair' parallelism, B's going beyond A in repetitive parallelism, the nonsynonymity of numerical and 'self-contradictory' parallelism, the 'B-clause *kol*'—each is, in its way, an argument against fixing on the similarity of A and B as central. This is not to say that paralleling is not important—of course it is, it is the most striking characteristic of this style. But focusing on it is just somewhat beside the point.²⁵

This means that parallelism is identified as "A is so, and what's more, B is so." Thus, the second line of poetry (B) is connected to the first line (A), but does not have to be a restatement. As a result, B is somewhat a progression of A. The point of the text continues forward emphatically through echoing, defining, reiterating, or contrasting. Thus, Kugel rejects the notion that B is parallel with A because the former actually supports the latter. To support his argument, Kugel uses several texts. I will highlight several (see Ps 114 above also).²⁶

³Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the Lord I will sing;
I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. (Judg 5:3)

⁹Exalt the Lord our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy! (Ps 99:9)

²Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the Lord has spoken. (Isa 1:2)

Robert Alter also delineates the features of parallelism espoused by Lowth. He suggests line B intensifies the function of the parallelism. In other words, Alter argues that parallelism does not mean or imply synonymy—the repeating of a word/phrase from one line of poetry to the next.²⁷ For Alter, biblical poetry is best characterized by intensification

²⁵Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, 51.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 8–9, 23, and 51–53.

²⁷Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 28–29; *idem*, "The Characteristics of Ancient Hebrew Poetry," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and

or development within the line. Thus, the horizontal movement within the text is followed by a downward, vertical movement through the sequence of verses.²⁸ Biblical poetry, then, is identifiable by the “intensification of images, concepts, themes through a sequence of lines, and a narrative movement,” which is the development of acts/events (i.e., literary and/or historical). A great example of this intensification and development is in the creation account of Gen 1.²⁹

Realms or Spheres of Habitation	Filling of the Realms or Spheres
Day 1 Creation of Light/Dark (vv. 3–5)	Day 4 Creation of luminaries (vv. 14–19)
Day 2 Creation of Heaven/Earthly bodies of water (vv. 6–8)	Day 5 Creation of birds and sea creatures (vv. 20–23)
Day 3 Creation of vegetation (vv. 9–13)	Day 6 Creation of mammals and humans (vv. 24–31)

In the chart above, the initial statements appear in days 1–3 whereas the intensification occurs in days 4–6.³⁰ Given the poetic nature of Gen 1, the chapter fits neatly into Alter’s understanding of parallelism. The discussion over biblical parallelism has continued since the efforts of Kugel and Alter; however, for the most part, the influence of Lowth, Kugel, and Alter continue to control the landscape of biblical parallelism.³¹ As interpreters, we must be readily aware of parallelisms in biblical poetry.³²

Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 615.

²⁸Alter, “Characteristics of Ancient,” 615–16.

²⁹Ibid., 620. Within biblical studies, one poetic interpretation of Gen 1:1–2:3 is called the “Literary Framework View.” Many Evangelical scholars advocate this view. The newly published *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, edited by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) adopts this approach in the “study notes.” It should be noted, however, that some Evangelicals (most notably Wayne Grudem) have criticized the Literary Framework View. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 301–04.

³⁰John H. Walton describes days 1–3 as “realms of habitation” and days 4–6 as “filling of the realms.” See John H. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis 1: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 111–12.

³¹One caveat must be mentioned. Adele Berlin, more recently, has repositioned the discussion about biblical parallelism between the contributions of Kugel and Alter. For Berlin, parallelism is “the constructive device of poetry” where equivalences and contrasts are identified. This is accomplished by identifying the aspect and level of the text. The term aspect refers to “the area linguistics,” particularly semantic and grammatical aspects. Level refers to the textual structure (i.e., word, line, or clause). For the most part, Berlin focuses much of her discussion on four aspects of biblical poetry: grammar, lexis, semantics, and phonology. Due to her heavy emphasis on Hebrew linguistics and its outer workings, Berlin’s work is not easily accessible for all readers. See Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 17, 27. See also Berlin’s earlier work “Grammatical Aspects of Biblical Parallelism,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 50 (1979): 17–43.

³²An excellent overview of biblical parallelism—including its meaning, the historical study of parallelism, and other related issues—can be found in Joel M. LeMon and Brent A. Strawn,

Literary Characteristics of Biblical Poetry

Many Jews and Christians are drawn to biblical poetry due to its vivid and figurative character. To interpret adequately biblical poetry, we must be familiar with the plethora of literary features. In this section, I will discuss several of the most prominent literary features. As mentioned earlier, biblical poetry is known for its terseness—that is, short lines, few words, and few conjunctions. Thus, terseness adds to the explosive nature of poetry, meaning every word is ripe for interpretation.

⁵ Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding. (Prov 5:3)

¹ A time to be born, and a time to die. (Eccl 3:1)

Next, imagery is an overarching literary feature with many others falling under its umbrella. “Images are the glory, perhaps the essence of poetry,” notes Luis Alonso Schökel.³³ For this reason, we must do our best to define and understand these images. That being said, imagery evokes “a sensory experience in our imagination”³⁴ that can be described as “word pictures.”³⁵ Since imagery is an overarching literary feature, one example will suffice:

⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the Lord;
remove the foreskin of your hearts,
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Jer 4:4a)

In this text, the imagery of circumcising one’s heart is vivid and, to be completely honest, unfathomable. To physically circumcise one’s heart would actually bring about death; however, when interpreted figuratively, Jeremiah is challenging the Judahites and Jerusalemites despite the impossibility of imagery evoked.

Probably the most recognizable types of imagery are simile and metaphor. A simile is a comparison is made between two things while utilizing “like” and/or “as” (e.g., see Song 4).³⁶ The comparison being made is typically explicit.³⁷

“Parallelism,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 502–15.

³³Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetry*, 95.

³⁴Leland Ryken, *Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 90.

³⁵Ernest C. Lucas, “Terminology of Poetics,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 522.

³⁶For an in-depth analysis of similes in biblical poetry, especially Hosea see David L. Petersen and Kent Harold Richards, *Interpreting Hebrew Poetry*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, *Guides to Biblical Scholarship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 50–60.

³⁷G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1980),

² As a lily among brambles,
so is my love among the young women. (Song 2:2)

According to many, metaphor is virtually the same as a simile but with the absence of “like” and/or “as.” This is not the case however. Whereas simile creates an explicit comparison, a metaphor is implicit.³⁸ Additionally, a metaphor can be analytical and/or an overlap of word-meanings. Thus, metaphors are analytical, which can be understood in terms of “X is like Y in respect of Z” or tenor (X), vehicle (Y), and ground (Z). Within this in mind, I will examine Job 29:15.³⁹

¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.

Using the formula above, Job is the tenor (X) and his eyes are the vehicle (Y) and the ability to see is ground (Z). Several other literary features are worth briefly noting: hyperbole, irony, and personification.⁴⁰ Typically, hyperbole is an exaggerated statement not intended to be interpreted literally. Yet, in the Bible hyperbole is frequently used as “a tendency to think in extremes without qualification, in black and white without intervening shades of grey.”⁴¹

⁷ Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands. (1 Sam 18:7)

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?” (Ps 42:3)

Irony is a statement made with the intended meaning to be the opposite—typically containing a sarcastic ring.⁴² For example, Job makes an ironic quip to his antagonists in Job 12:2–3.

¹⁴⁵.

³⁸Ibid, 145.

³⁹See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 263.

⁴⁰A variety of other types of figurative language exists that can also assist in exegetical work. Due to the scope of the essay, the others have been omitted. Kaiser provides a helpful list of these additional figures of speech: pleonasm, paronomasia, hendiadys, hendiatrix, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, litotes, euphemisms, zeugma, and ellipsis. See Walter Kaiser Jr. “My Heart is Stirred by a Noble Theme,” in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, eds., Walter Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 146–50.

⁴¹Caird, *Language and Imagery*, 110.

⁴²Ibid, 134.

- ² No doubt you are the people,
and wisdom will die with you.
- ³ But I have understanding as well as you;
I am not inferior to you.
Who does not know such things as these?

Personification is the assigning of humanlike characteristics typically to plants, animals, and inanimate objects.⁴³ One of the most famous examples of personification is Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly in the book of Proverbs. In Prov 1, wisdom is personified crying out in the city streets.

- ²⁰ Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
- ²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
- ^{22a} “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?” (Prov 1:20–22a)

Although this essay does not focus on Hebrew poetics, three literary/structural features are worth mentioning given their notoriety: chiasms, inclusios, and acrostics. At times, identifying these structural features is difficult without knowledge of biblical Hebrew—especially acrostics. Chiasm (or chiasmus) is a structural, literary device where the word order of a line of poetry is reversed in a parallel line of poetry (a-b / b’ a’).⁴⁴ An inclusio, like a chiasm, is another structural device. As a literary unit (or envelope figure), an inclusio is framed by “the repetition of the same phrase or sentence at the beginning and end of a stanza or poem.”⁴⁵ Psalm 103 is a great example of an inclusio. Verses 1 and 22 frame the psalm with the refrain, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

The last literary feature of note is the acrostic. Describing the acrostic, F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp says, “The acrostic’s basic formal conceit is that the initial letters or signs of each line, couplet, or stanza, when read in succession, spell out a name, sentence, alphabet, or alphabetic pattern.”⁴⁶ There are 15 partial or full acrostics in the Old Testament (e.g.,

⁴³For a concise overview of the various forms of personification in the Old Testament (i.e., inchoate, synecdochic, collective, and characterized), see Paul E. Koptak, “Personification,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 516–19.

⁴⁴Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 298. Additionally, the parallel elements form an X in the biblical text. The X is representative of the Greek letter *chi*, which is where the name chiasm is derived. Chiasms are found in both biblical narrative and poetry; cf. Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 42–43.

⁴⁵Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 282–83; cf. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 303.

⁴⁶F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Acrostic: Ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” in

Ps 119; the book of Lamentations). Acrostics are literary masterpieces and demand an interpretation in the specified order.⁴⁷

Key Approaches for Interpreting the Psalter

When discussing biblical poetry we tend to immediately think about the book of Psalms. It is no wonder that the book of Psalms has been called “the most conventional poetry in the Bible.”⁴⁸ For centuries, Jews and Christians have been drawn to the Psalter “as a hymnbook for worship and a prayer book for devotion.”⁴⁹ The Psalter’s attractiveness is probably linked to its all-encompassing expression of “human emotions before God.”⁵⁰ Thus, I have decided to include principles for interpreting the Psalter. Before doing so, however, an overview is needed of the most notable approaches to interpreting the Psalms.

The study of the Psalter begins with Hermann Gunkel, the father of the form-critical study of the book.⁵¹ Famously, Gunkel tried to isolate the *Sitz im Leben* (i.e., “setting of life”) for each psalm. In short, he maintains the Psalms “arose in the cult of Israel originally.”⁵² Through his two works on the Psalter, Gunkel identifies several different types in the Psalter: hymns, community/individual laments, individual psalms of thanksgiving, royal

Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception, vol. 1, eds. Dale Allison et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 281.

⁴⁷Dobbs-Allsopp, “Acrostic,” 282–83. Abecedaries were used by students/scribes to “practice writing letter forms of the alphabet.” The acrostic texts of the Old Testament are influenced by abecedaries. Dobbs-Allsopp added, “The acrostic quite literally holds the poems together, like a container, and through its long-standing conventional sequence of letter forms guides the reader from beginning to end” (p. 285).

⁴⁸Alter, “Poetic and Wisdom Books,” 231.

⁴⁹James Limburg, “Book of Psalms,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 524.

⁵⁰Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *Psalms*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 1. Many scholars have recognized this truth. For example, John Goldingay explained, “Psalms make it possible to say things that are otherwise unsayable,” See John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 22.

⁵¹Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1967) and Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).

⁵²Gunkel questioned, “So where would the poetry of the Psalms have had its ‘setting of life?’” See Gunkel and Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, 7. Gunkel’s student, Sigmund Mowinckel tried to identify all of the psalms according to the annual New Year’s “Enthronement of YHWH Festival.” This approach has been described as the “cult-functional method” and represents ancient Israelite worship. Although Mowinckel’s work is important within Psalms studies, his approach falls outside the confines and purpose of this essay. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*, trans. A. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

psalms, and enthronement psalms.⁵³ First, hymns or songs of praise (e.g., Ps 117) make up roughly one-fifth of the Psalter. These psalms issue a call to lift up praise/rejoice to God. Frequently the phrases, “give praise,” “sing,” “give thanks” begin the psalm. From there, God is given praise.⁵⁴ Contextually, the hymns are related to “annual festivals and national festivals.”⁵⁵

Second, communal laments/complaints (e.g., Ps 80) are related to a specific calamity or threat to the people (e.g., war, imprisonment, drought, etc.). Typically, a fast is called and all the people congregate. The community is “sanctified” (Joel 1:14), sackcloth is worn, and pleading/weeping to God is done.⁵⁶ Individual laments/complaints (e.g., Ps 13) are derived from “the cult and its purposes.” A variety of situations are incorporated in the individual complaints (e.g., false allegations and illness). These psalms include an address, complaint, and a petition to God.⁵⁷ Third, individual thanksgiving songs were originally part of the worship service and linked to the thanksgiving offering. The offerer was celebrating deliverance from oppression/distress. These psalms possibly compliment individual lament psalms. More importantly, God is the object of the thanksgiving song due to his deliverance from distress. The structure of thanksgiving psalms does not always follow a set pattern.⁵⁸ Fourth, royal psalms emphasize a particular theme rather than a literary structure. These psalms are best understood as “kingship psalms” (e.g., Pss 2; 18; 20; and 110). Gunkel writes, “Most of these psalms are full of enthusiastic praises of the king and exuberant good wishes for his welfare.”⁵⁹ Fifth, wisdom and *Torah* psalms emphasize the theme of “fear of Yahweh.” These psalms do not contain a literary structure and due to their limited number are considered a minor type. It should be noted that scholars disagree concerning the number of wisdom/*Torah* psalms.⁶⁰ Wisdom psalms emphasize the proper way to live. This form of teaching is usually isolated or at the conclusion of a psalm.⁶¹ Sixth, enthronement psalms emphasize “Yahweh reigns” or “The Lord has become king” even when dire circumstances have arisen. For many Christians, enthronement psalms have been interpreted messianically.

⁵³Several dictionary articles and introductions to the Psalms provide helpful overviews of Gunkel’s literary types. These secondary sources are helpful for quickly identifying and outlining key characteristics of the major types of Psalms.

⁵⁴Gunkel and Begrich, *An Introduction to the Psalms*, 22–23; idem, Gunkel, *The Psalms*, 10–13. For a concise overview of Gunkel’s types, see also William H. Bellinger Jr., “Psalms 1: Book of,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, & Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 582–83.

⁵⁵Ibid., 61–62.

⁵⁶Ibid., 82–84.

⁵⁷Ibid., 94–96. See also Bellinger, “Psalms 1: Book of,” 581–82.

⁵⁸Ibid., 199–209.

⁵⁹Gunkel, *The Psalms*, 24.

⁶⁰Ibid., 22–23; cf. Bellinger, “Psalms 1: Book of,” 585.

⁶¹Claus Westermann, “Book of Psalms,” *New Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary*, 709.

Claus Westermann posits a second methodological approach to the Psalter. He jettisons Gunkel's approach in favor of the corporate/individual aspects of lament and praise. With reference to praise, Westermann explains that biblical Hebrew does not have a word for "thank/to give thanks." The idea of thanks is generally something that takes place between individuals. Thus, Westermann argues, "The expression of thanks to God is included in praise, *it is a way of praising*."⁶² Additionally, Westermann identifies two modes of praise—declarative ("God has acted") and descriptive ("God is . . . does"). Only the mode of declarative psalms can be distinguished by the categories of "declarative psalm of praise of the people" and "declarative psalm of praise of the individual." Declarative praises are directed to God and are expressed through confession/recognition or confession/declaration.⁶³ Descriptive praises, on the other hand, do not praise God for a unique act that has occurred, but rather they summarize "his activity in its fullness and praises God in the totality of his dealings with men and of his being. It does not have, like declarative praise, a specific, unique occasion."⁶⁴

The laments in the Psalter also play a prominent role in Westermann's approach. Similar to the individual/corporate praises, Westermann identifies two types of laments—corporate and individual. With regard to corporate laments, a group of people complains to God (at times questioning him also), usually because they feel God has rejected them. Moreover, this group is being threatened/attacked by an enemy. Similarly, laments of an individual (e.g., the book of Job) begin with a complaint against God and transition into a lament over personal suffering, which is generally at the hands of an enemy. Both the corporate and individual lament have "a historical antecedent and a sequel."⁶⁵ This means the lament psalms are related to a historical event that brings about lament and responsive action to the aforementioned event. The psalms of lament have three subjects: God, the lamenter(s), and the enemy. Both corporate and individual laments share similar literary structures: 1) address/introductory petition, 2) lament, 3) confession of trust, 4) petition, and 5) a vow of praise. Additionally, the lament of an individual also includes assurance of being heard, a request for God to intervene, and a concluding praise for God's action.⁶⁶

Most recently, Walter Brueggemann has created an existential, relational approach for interpreting the Psalter. Through various writings, he develops an "orientation-

⁶²Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: Westminster John Knox, 1981), 27, emphasis his. For Westermann, divorcing the concept of thanksgiving from praise leads to a misunderstanding. He explains, "Where a worshiper in the Psalms says, 'I will praise the Lord . . .,' he does not mean, 'I will be thankful to God,' but, 'I will respond to him for what he has done for me'" (p. 29).

⁶³See Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 31–35.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 32.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 168.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 165–213.

disorientation-reorientation” theological framework to the Psalter.⁶⁷ Orientation is the worldview where an individual enjoys “a serene location” in life. Disorientation is understood as “a new distressful situation” that causes the orientation of the individual to be altered. Reorientation is “new circumstance,” or “newness,” of life. Reorientation, however, is not merely the reviving of the old, but a surprise. Collectively, then, “orientation-disorientation-reorientation” represent the cycle of life described in the Psalter. Thus, Brueggemann believes this cycle is directly applicable to contemporary society.

All three approaches to the Psalter have merit. Yet, to navigate the methodological considerations presented in each, I believe several principles for interpreting the Psalter will help extract the meaning of the texts.⁶⁸

1. What type of psalm is it? (see discussion above on Gunkel)
2. What is the purpose of the psalm?
3. Who is speaking? (i.e., individual/group)
4. What is the emotional tone of the psalm? (i.e., frustration, joy, rage, etc.)
5. Is the psalm evoking a response from an individual, a group, or both?⁶⁹
6. Does the psalm have recurring words, phrases, or motifs? If so, what are they communicating?
7. What major themes or theology(ies) are emphasized?
8. What is the historical background/context of the psalm?⁷⁰ The search for historical background/context must always be linked to the message/meaning tied to Israel’s faith.⁷¹ This question is not always answerable, even in commentaries.

⁶⁷See Walter Brueggemann, “Psalms and the Life of Faith: A Suggested Typology of Function,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17 (1980): 3–32; idem, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984); *The Psalms & the Life of Faith*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR.: Cascade Books, 2007).

⁶⁸The principles listed are partially adapted from Bullock’s *Encountering the Book of Psalms*.

⁶⁹Concerning this point, Bullock notes, “The content and meaning of the Psalms are reapplied in the Psalter itself, especially from an individual to a corporate application. Therefore, our reapplication of them to our own individual and corporate circumstances is justified by the interpretive history within the Psalter.” See Bullock, *Encounter the Book of Psalms*, 55.

⁷⁰C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1998), 145.

⁷¹With reference to psalms lacking any solid historical connections, the interpreter must find a point of reference to Israel’s faith that in turn should provide a glimmer of context albeit a murky one. Furthermore, while seeking the origins/context of a poem is paramount, interpreters must

9. Collectively, these questions build up to the final question: How does the psalm fit within the shape and shaping of the five books of the Psalter?

These nine principles are general guidelines for interpreting the book Psalms. Depending on the psalm, not all of the principles will be applicable or needed for interpreting a text. It is after working through these questions that Brueggemann's approach becomes helpful. Bridging the gap between ancient meaning and contemporary society can easily be connected to his "orientation-disorientation-reorientation" motif.

Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry

As interpreters of the Bible, we should seek analysis and explanation of a biblical text in the intended historical, literary, and cultural contexts.⁷² Unfortunately, identifying the "intended" context(s) can be conjectural, especially when dealing with biblical poetry. In this section, I outline eight guiding principles for interpreting biblical poetry.

1. *Define the text.* The text under consideration must be a self-contained, literary unit.⁷³
2. *Consult a variety of translations.* This interpretive principle is grounded in the notion that an English translation does not always express the vivid and figurative language of the poetic text in a coherent or appropriate manner. For example, the syntactically and linguistically difficult text of Isa 28:10 certainly highlights the need to consult a variety of translations.⁷⁴

not lose sight of the way and manner in which the poem continues to instruct. David Firth makes this observation in his essay entitled "Preaching Praise Poetry," in *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching*, ed. Grenville J. R. Kent et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010), 89.

⁷²For a similar argument, see Wendland, "The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry," 2.

⁷³Wendland suggests that interpreters should look for "borders" that are easily identifiable and defensible. Additionally, by isolating a smaller literary unit, the interpreter should always be keenly aware of how the text relates/fits within the larger literary unit. He continues to state that delineating a literary unit of poetry is not a difficult task, save in the prophetic books. In this case, readers should be aware of the oracles and visions in the prophetic works. See Wendland, "The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry," 7. Similarly, Grant R. Osborne argues that interpreters should focus on strophic patterns (i.e., literary structure between lines and strophes) within biblical poetry. See Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 238. For similar arguments, see Rick Byargeon, "Listening to the Lyrics: Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature and Poetry," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, ed. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2002), 203; and Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 306.

⁷⁴Wendland begins his essay highlighting the difficulty of translation of Isa 28:10; however, he does not provide a comparison of translations. See Wendland, "The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry."

“For it is: Do this, do that, a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there.” (NIV)	“For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” (ESV, the KJV and NKJV are similar)	“For <i>He</i> says, ‘Order on order, order on order, Line on line, line on line, A little here, a little there.’” (NASB)	“For he says: ‘Law after law, law after law, line after line, line after line, a little here, a little there.’” (HCSB)	“He tells us everything over and over—one line at a time, one line at a time, a little here, and a little there!” (NLT)
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From a cursory reading of the above translations, one can quickly note the difference between the translational renderings. Both the NIV and NLT are closer to dynamic equivalency than formal equivalence and incidentally capture the essence or meaning of the text better than the others. By comparing English translations, interpreters can acquire some basic semblance of the poetic text.

3. *To what extent does parallelism affect the meaning of the text?*⁷⁵ Additionally, interpreters should ask: What types of parallelism(s) is/are employed in the text?
4. *Look for major themes (e.g., sacrifice), theological motifs (e.g., covenant), or events (e.g., the exodus).* Typically, these elements will provide valuable insight into the literary unit. Once the element(s) has been identified, we must try to understand it from a diachronic (i.e., historical development) and synchronic (i.e., literary development) perspective.⁷⁶
5. *What is the historical background/context?* As noted above, this question is not always easily answered. In the case of Exod 15, Deut 32, Judg 5, and 2 Sam 22:1—23:7 the historical context is readily apparent. In the Psalter, on the other hand, determining the background or context is not always evident.⁷⁷

⁷⁵For similar interpretive argument, see V. Philips Long, “Reading the Old Testament as Literature,” in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*, ed. Craig C. Broyles (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 120.

⁷⁶Wendland makes a similar argument, but describes this step as “key-term analysis,” see Wendland, “The Discourse Analysis of Hebrew Poetry,” 16.

⁷⁷When seeking the historical context of a poetic text, Bullock provides a helpful reminder: “History for the ancient Hebrews was not a mere horizontal series of events and successive generations. Rather

6. *How is figurative and cultural-specific language used?* As interpreters, we must always ask: What is the purpose for using imagery, metaphor, simile, irony, personification, etc? And, what impact does this cultural-specific language have on interpretation (e.g., shepherding)?
7. *Within prophetic literature, be cognizant of the interchanges between literal to hyperbole as well as literal to metaphor* (e.g., Jerusalem as a cooking pot in Ezek 24).⁷⁸
8. *Has the text been used elsewhere in the Bible?* This last step is arguably the most difficult. The hermeneutical adage “a text without a context becomes a pretext for a prooftext” is the motto for many Evangelicals (as it should be); yet, when engaging in biblical theology, we quickly realize the complexity of determining the context. Several initial questions will illustrate our point. Is the original, historical context all that is required for interpreting the text? What should we do when a text is quoted innerbiblically and/or intertextually? Take for example the prophet Jeremiah’s use of the divorce/remarriage laws in Deut 24:1–4. In Jer 3:1, the prophet repurposes the legal material in Deut 24:1–4 into a metaphor contrasting God’s *faithfulness* and Judah’s *unfaithfulness*. As a result, Jeremiah reapplied the moralistic teachings of the divorce/remarriage laws to function as the theological precursor to his forceful declaration for complete repentance by the Judahites (Jer 3:2–4:4). The textual comparison between Deut 24:1–4 and Jer 3:1 captures the conundrum and complexity of what is called recontextualization. R. W. L. Moberly succinctly summarizes recontextualization:

As soon as we take seriously the phenomenon of recontextualization already within the Old Testament canon, never mind when that canon is itself recontextualized in Jewish and Christian frames of reference, we see that ‘context’ is itself a complex and variable notion. . . . [Y]et historical context is not the only context. There is also a context constituted by the formation of the literature into a larger whole, a context that is literary and/or canonical.⁷⁹

In short, Moberly is arguing that biblical interpretation must be concerned with the full scope of interpretation. As interpreters of scripture, this final guiding principle forces us to consider the historical, literary, thematic, and theological elements of a given text in light of the full counsel of God’s word—even when the original meaning is recontextualized.

it was a horizontal series of events in conjunction with the vertical aspect of God’s intervention.” See Bullock, “Interpreting the Songs of Israel,” 86.

⁷⁸Alter makes this astute observation. See Alter, “Characteristics of Ancient,” 623. Along these lines, Lawrence Boadt maintains that the interpreter should recover the central image to best understand the poetic expression. See Lawrence Boadt, “Reflections on the Study of Hebrew Poetry Today,” *Concordia Journal* 24 (1998): 156–63.

⁷⁹R. W. L. Moberly, “Preaching Christ from the Old Testament,” in *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching*, ed. Grenville J. R. Kent et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2010), 234.

In conclusion, biblical poetry is identified by terseness, parallelisms, and figurative language. Scholars for centuries have approached the topic of poetry from a variety of methodological and ideological approaches, evidenced by the works of Gunkel, Mowinckel, Westermann, and Brueggemann in Psalms studies. The multi-layered complexity of biblical poetry—linguistic, semantical, grammatical, structural, historical, and theological approaches—presents challenges to the interpreter, but the when done with vigor and attention to details the reward is great.

Approaching the Old Testament as Christian Scripture

There exists a love/hate relationship between the Old Testament and Christians. On the one hand, the Old Testament contains wonderful, vivid stories that resonate with most Christians: the creation of man and woman, Eve and the talking serpent, Moses and the Pharaoh, God at Sinai, the destruction of Jericho, David's unimaginable defeat of Goliath, David's affair with Bathsheba, Jonah's aquatic exile, Daniel's cozy night with lions, etc. On the other hand, the Old Testament represents an archaic (e.g., the sacrificial system), misogynist (Exod 20:17; Num 5:11–31), and violent (e.g., Josh 6:21; 1 Sam 15:3) worldview that is incompatible with the worldview of grace and mercy espoused by Jesus in the New Testament (Matt 5:38–39; Luke 6:27–36). In my experience, this love/hate relationship between the Old Testament and Christians extends to the church and, sadly, the pulpit. The seeming lack of sermons from the Old Testament highlights the reality that many laity, students (i.e., high school, college, and seminary), and ministers do not understand or appreciate the complexities of the Old Testament and its importance as *Christian* scripture. The disjointed relationship between the *First* Testament (i.e., the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) and Christians has led to a lazy and inconsistent approach to reading, interpreting, and preaching the Old Testament.⁸⁰ Even the book of Psalms, one of the most important books from the Old Testament with reference to the Christian faith, is “underknown” by many interpreters/preachers. Describing the Psalms being “underknown,” Brent A. Strawn notes, “‘Deeply loved’ does not necessarily translate into ‘adequately known,’ let alone ‘rightly understood’ or ‘correctly utilized.’”⁸¹

⁸⁰Similarly, Elizabeth R. Achtemeier explains that “[f]or some preachers, constructing a sermon from any portion” of the Old Testament “is a problem, because they have not read and studied the Old Testament and therefore do not know it. They approach it with all of the usual stereotypes—that the Old Testament is a legalistic book, that its God is not a loving Father but only a God of wrath, that its theology and worship are primitive and outdated, that its truths have been superseded by the ‘higher spiritual truths’ of the New Testament. None of these stereotypes is valid, and those who preach them are not preaching the gospel.” See Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), xii.

⁸¹Brent A. Strawn, Strawn, “The Psalms: Types, Functions, and Poetics for Proclamation,” in *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, edited by Roger E. Van Harn and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 2–3.

Before discussing some helpful guiding principles for preaching biblical poetry, I think it will be helpful to consider an overarching question related to the study of the Old Testament: How do Christians interpret and apply the Old Testament? Sadly, most Old Testament commentaries do not help Christians contextualize and contemporize the Old Testament—the one obvious exception is the *NIV Application Commentary* series. Broadly speaking, most, if not all, critical Old Testament commentaries emphasize historical-critical methodologies, which help readers understand and grasp the contextual and linguistic elements of Old Testament books. This critical approach to the books of the Old Testament is sometimes a detriment of the biblical books' theological richness. Yet, pastoral commentaries are equally culpable for overlooking and/or obscuring the intricacies and theological maxims of the Old Testament. Thus, pastors, many times, are forced to use New Testament commentaries as a reference point for understanding and preaching the themes from the “Old Covenant” (i.e., the *First Testament*).

Returning to my initial question (“How do Christians interpret and apply the Old Testament?”), the manner in which we answer this question will have direct implications on preaching the Old Testament, including biblical poetry. Most pastors will answer the aforementioned question with one of two methodological approaches—a redemptive-historical Christocentric approach or a Christotelic approach. The redemptive-historical Christocentric approach examines first the New Testament, then explores the Old Testament to discover places where Christ—and other New Testament motifs—may be found. This approach is seen as being viable and valuable for its insistence that at the center of the Old Testament is Christ himself (e.g., Christophanies, allegorical interpretations, and typological analysis). The redemptive-historical Christocentric approach recognizes the importance of Christ as the culmination of God's redemptive work for humanity.

Naturally, advocates of the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach have received criticism from Old Testament scholars. Opponents of the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach argue the approach can hinder interpreters/preachers from studying and grasping the depths of the Old Testament's revelation.⁸² Closely related to this first critique, the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach dismisses the historical context of the Old Testament text in favor of Christological connections and implications. In other words, the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach can lead interpreters/preachers to undermine the authority of the Old Testament message. Old Testament scholar John Goldingay emphasizes the importance of letting the *First Testament* speak for itself: “All Scripture has an inspired *first meaning*, its meaning as a communication between God and people in a particular historical context, to which we can have access by the usual

⁸²See Elizabeth Achtemeier, review of *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* in *Interpretation* 54 (2000): 218. James Barr made a similar argument 50 years ago: “Our decision against a ‘Christological’ kind of interpretation here is not primarily founded on historical-critical method, though this is not without importance. Theologically, it rests upon the fact that, though the God of the Old Testament is the Father of our Lord, the Old Testament is the time in which our Lord is not yet come. It is at the time in which he is not yet come that we ought to understand it.” See James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation: A Study of the Two Testament* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), 152.

methods for interpreting written texts.”⁸³ In other words, with the *first meaning* identified, the interpreter/preacher can now ask how the text points forward to the coming Messiah. Allowing the *first meaning* to take precedence brings significant value to reading the Old Testament as Christian Scripture, particularly by highlighting the Old Testament text’s theological richness within its original context. In other words, interpreters/preachers of the Old Testament must let the *first meaning* drive the sermon.⁸⁴ What this means is that the interpreter/preacher is responsible for telling and retelling the history of God’s chosen people—the Israelites—through proclaiming the salvation-history of God outlined in the Old Testament. If this key step of pastoral shepherding is overlooked, the interpreter/preacher runs the risk of the Old Testament “never becoming the Word of God.” Thus, the preaching of the full counsel of God is foundational for *all* Christian proclamation. This means the interpreter/preacher is responsible for unveiling and declaring what God has done in the ancient past with the Israelites as well as the in the lives of the New Testament church. By doing so, the interpreter/preacher can clearly “implant” in the minds of his audience/congregation the history and theology of God’s people—first the ancient Israelites and now the New Testament church.⁸⁵

The Christotelic approach, sometimes called “apostolic hermeneutics” or “eschatological hermeneutic,” allows the Old Testament to become the foundation of the New. This approach recognizes that the Old Testament is progressing to the Christ event chronicled in the New Testament.⁸⁶ In other words, the Christotelic approach follows the

⁸³See John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 219, emphasis added.

⁸⁴Walter Kaiser offered a poignant critique of the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach: “Others championed a Christocentric interpretation (also known to some as the ‘Redemptive-Historical’ method of interpreting), in which the interpretation of all Biblical texts should be done in such a way that the main theme should be explicitly and directly related to Jesus Christ. But in this method the emphasis falls on a whole-Bible-focus on God’s work in redemption across the whole canon. While this is beautiful and praiseworthy, it had the potential for substituting the specificity and particularity of individual passages for what was the final work of God in Christ, by always going for the one ‘big idea’ that embraced the whole canon. Much of Christocentric preaching tended to depend on a strong Biblical Theology, but a Biblical Theology that often wove together some twenty major biblical themes such as kingdom, temple, sacrifice, and the like, and one which then allowed the preacher to leap from anywhere in the Biblical text to a call for a trust in the Lord Jesus who is the author of so great a salvation, as recorded of course from one end of Scripture to the other.” See Walter Kaiser, “Part 7 on Christ-Centered Preaching,” www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/july/christ-centered-hermeneutics-walt-kaiser-jr-on-christ-cente.html.

⁸⁵Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, “The Relevance of the Old Testament for Christian Preaching,” in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, edited by H. N. Bream, Ralph Daniel Heim, and Carey A. Moore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 16.

⁸⁶Peter Enns popularized the Christotelic hermeneutical approach in his *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 162–72.

progression of the Old Testament to the Christ event. With the Christotelic approach the key word is “progressing.” Before Christians can properly understand the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, we must have a working knowledge and understanding of the themes and theologies of the individual books and the Old Testament as a whole. This task, unfortunately, is no small task and, I suspect, the main culprit for many interpreters/preachers avoiding or mishandling Old Testament texts from the pulpit. Like many—if not most—students of the Old Testament, I prefer the Christotelic hermeneutic over and against the Christocentric hermeneutic.⁸⁷ Thus, the guiding principles for preaching biblical poetry will be approached from the Christotelic hermeneutic.⁸⁸

Guiding Principles for Preaching Biblical Poetry

The principles for preaching biblical poetry will overlap several of the elements in the “Key Approaches for Interpreting the Psalter” and “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry” above. It should go without saying that the guiding principles below are presented from the Christotelic approach. Special attention will be given to the Psalter since other essays deal with preaching prophetic and wisdom texts—both of which contain biblical poetry.

⁸⁷Due to the scope of this essay, the supporting reasons for using a Christotelic approach are not discussed in the main body of the essay. That being said, I do feel it is necessary to briefly elaborate on reasons why I believe the Christotelic approach is the correct approach for reading, interpreting, and preaching the Old Testament. Like the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach, the Christotelic approach recognizes the importance of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament; however, the Christotelic approach begins by interpreting the Old Testament in its original historical-cultural context. Furthermore, such an approach protects Christians from the dangers of allegorization and lackadaisical typological readings of the Old Testament. In doing so, the Christotelic approach allows Christians to successfully: (1) draw out the text’s theological principles in its original context; (2) demonstrates the biblical text’s application to the modern believer; (3) and help identify and highlight the ways in which the Old Testament text points forward to Christ. In sum, the redemptive-historical Christocentric approach uses the New Testament to interpret the Old whereas the Christotelic approach reads the Old into the New.

⁸⁸Obviously, not all readers will agree with my use of the Christotelic approach. Other resources are available for those interested in preaching the Old Testament from a redemptive-historical Christocentric approach. For example, see *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012–present); David Murray, *Jesus on Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012); idem, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003); and Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

1. *Select a manageable text.* Preaching poetic texts can be a delight for both the interpreter/preacher and the audience/congregation. In many ways, defining a guideline for “how many verses” should be preached is difficult. What is certain is that the interpreter/preacher should identify a self-contained, literary unit that “has structural integrity.”⁸⁹ Personally, I do not believe a “formula” exists for determining too little or too much material to be preached. Obviously, some biblical poems are simply too large to preach in one sermon (e.g., Ps 119). On the other hand, poetic texts like the Song of Moses (Exod 15:1–18), the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:1–31), or David’s repentance (Ps 51:1–18), though long, can be preached in one sermon. The reality is, the length of the passage to be preached should be determined by the guiding principles below; however, I believe this principle should be first given the fact that all sermons *must begin* with the biblical text and not the trivial “find a text to support my points/arguments” approach that is sometimes abused by interpreters/preachers.
2. *Consult a variety of translations and read the poetic text over-and-over.*⁹⁰ By reading the poetic text multiple times, the interpreter/preacher can begin to identify the parallelisms, major themes, theological motifs, events, and figurative language in the poem.
3. *Identify the parallelisms within the text.* Poetry by nature contains parallelisms. The interpreter/preacher should be familiar with Lowth’s forms of parallelisms: synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic. To properly interpret biblical poetry, the interpreter/preacher must remember that the poems are making “their statement with poetic means.”⁹¹
4. *Identify major themes, theological motifs, or events.* The ability to identify and understand the themes, theological motifs, and historical events is no small task. In fact, this is one of the most challenging aspects of studying the Old Testament. The *First* Testament is vast and dense covering centuries of

⁸⁹Duane A. Garrett, “Preaching from the Psalms and Proverbs,” in *Preaching the Old Testament*, edited by Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 102.

⁹⁰Ellen F. Davis noted, “The best way to prepare a psalm is to read it over and over aloud, until you can see how and why one line yields to the next, until its images are haunting your imagination, until its phraseology and its particular pattern of repetition-with-variation (for that is the basic pattern of Israelite poetry) become distinctive in your mind.” See Ellen F. Davis, *Wondrous Depth: Preaching the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 24.

⁹¹Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 26. On the importance of identifying the distinctive features of biblical poetry (especially the psalms genre), see Thomas G. Long, “Preaching Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, edited by William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 558–66.

ancient Israel's interaction with God and the surrounding nations. It includes multiple theologies from various traditions and it describes elements of worship that are foreign to modern readers. Thus, it is imperative that the interpreter/preacher be fluent in the major themes, theological motifs, and historical events of ancient Israel.

5. *Identify the historical background/context.* Every biblical text has a context. The task of the interpreter/preacher is to identify—through various means sometimes—the most probable context of a given passage. In some cases, identifying the historical background/context of a poem is easy (e.g., the Song of Hannah in 1 Sam 2:1–1). At other times, especially in the Psalter, the historical background/context is not easily identifiable. When dealing with the Psalter, this principle should include more practical questions: What type of psalm is it? What is the purpose of the psalm (particularly with regard to its type)? Who is speaking? Is the psalm evoking a response from an individual, a group, or both? In these cases, the interpreter/preacher should rely on various introductory books and commentaries to assist in the process. Additionally, it will be greatly beneficial if interpreters/preachers are familiar with both Noth's and Westermann's approaches to classification of the psalms (see above).

From a preaching point of view, interpreters/preachers can preach a poetic text from two perspectives. Either focus on the meaning of the poetic text or focus should be on what is behind the poetic text. Both approaches are valuable. Naturally, a blend of the two can be done as well. The difference between the two approaches is significant. The focus on the meaning of the text approach is more concerned with the emotive purpose of the song/hymn over and against the back story (i.e., historical background/context) of the other approach. In short, focus on the meaning of the poetic text approach tries to avoid preaching the back story of a poem/psalm by focusing mainly on “the meaning of the text.”⁹² For example, most scholars agree that the historical background/context of Ps 51 is David's affair with Bathsheba and the subsequent condemnation of the king by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam 11–12). Thus, preaching from the meaning of the poetic text rather than the what is behind the text would mean that the interpreter/preaching would not focus on David's moral failure described in the Samuel corpus, but rather on the emotive response of David to his sins.

6. *Identify the figurative and cultural-specific language.* One of the greatest difficulties in preaching biblical poetry is trying to interpret and understand

⁹²Steven Smith, *Recapturing the Voice of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 135–36.

figurative and cultural-specific language.⁹³ Ellen F. Davis eruditely captures the importance of understanding this principle: “The main reason to preach the psalms is not to bare fact that they contain great lines or great metaphors. Rather, it is because the poets who composed them thought differently about God than we ordinarily do, and more deeply.”⁹⁴ These great metaphors, however, can be challenges for the interpreter/preacher.⁹⁵ Specifically when dealing with the Psalter, the interpreter/preacher should apply the various principles listed above for interpreting the Psalms, as well as consider the following questions: What is the emotional tone of the psalm? Is the emotional tone of the psalm expressed in figurative or cultural-specific language? Interpreters/preachers need to be reminded that figurative and cultural language can sometimes be graphic (e.g., Ps 137:9) making preaching some psalms difficult.

7. *After taking into consideration principles 4–6, identify the main purpose and/or meaning of the poetic text.*⁹⁶ Merely uncovering the purpose and/or meaning of the poetic text does not suffice the preaching of the poem. The purpose/meaning of the poetic text, however, does not mean it is an unconditional truth. In fact, poetry is rarely didactic in nature. Thus, interpreters/preachers must not be tempted “to read something into the text in order to have something to preach.”⁹⁷
8. *Structural development of the sermon.* To this point, principles 1–7 form the foundation of the sermon. With the groundwork done, the interpreter/preacher has two main options for preaching biblical poetry—linearly or thematically. The linear development of the sermon—sometimes called the analytical approach—follows the literary flow/pattern of the poem.⁹⁸

⁹³For a helpful overview of exploring figurative and cultural language in the Psalms, see Long, “Preaching Psalms,” 564–65.

⁹⁴Davis, *Wondrous Depth*, 26.

⁹⁵Timothy J. Ralston, “Preaching the Psalms: Sermonic Forms,” in *Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching & Preaching*, edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV and D. Brent Sandy (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 30.

⁹⁶Some scholars maintain that identifying the purpose should be the first of the preacher. For example, see Ralston, “Preaching the Psalms,” 33. In general, I would tend to agree with such a sentiment; however, biblical poetry contains such nuanced language and preponderance of figurative language, the interpreter/preacher should be able to properly exegete the poem before determining the main purpose.

⁹⁷Firth, “Preaching Praise Poetry,” 89

⁹⁸Ralston, “Preaching the Psalms,” 38–39; cf. Mark D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis, edited by David M. Howard (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 197–200. Duane Garrett notes that structuring a sermon according to the number of stanza

Timothy J. Ralston correctly explains that a “verse-by-verse” approach to the psalms (and I would add all biblical poetry) can quickly become enthralled in word studies and/or syntactical analysis, which do not have much to offer the church.⁹⁹ On the other hand, thematic development (i.e., topical) of a sermon isolates and focuses on a key theme(s) or thought(s) of the poetic text.¹⁰⁰ For example, a sermon from Ps 147 could focus on the sovereignty of God evidenced by his omnipresence (v. 3), omniscience (v. 4), and omnipotence (v. 5).

9. *Consider the emotive nature of the poetic text.* This principle primarily concerns preaching from the Psalter. As noted above, the Psalter consists of human prayers and songs directed to God. The emotive nature of the psalms provide interpreters/preachers with poems that “are endlessly interesting to preach—even fun to preach, although sometimes difficult fun.”¹⁰¹ We find enjoyment and difficulty in interpreting/preaching the Psalter because, as Martin Luther explains, it “teaches you in joy, fear, hope, and sorrow to think and speak as all the saints have thought and spoke.”¹⁰² Thus, the Psalter has provided centuries of saints—both old and modern—with the heart-wrenching plea of individuals and people along side the merciful and loving attention of God to those pleas.¹⁰³ The ebb and flow of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation (see Brueggemann above) within the Psalter provides interpreters/preachers the platform to assist the audience/congregation in sharing from the experiences of the ancient Israelites’ relationship with God.¹⁰⁴ In many ways, the Psalms testify the Israelites’ “full-orbed faith.”¹⁰⁵

The interpreter/preacher should ask a variety of questions that will help relate the emotive nature of the poetic text to the audience/congregation: “What does the poetic text mean for my audience? How does the poem

of the poem may be beneficial; however, he suggests this approach not be holistically adopted. See Garrett’s warning about the difficulties of such an approach to preaching biblical poetry in Garrett, “Preaching from the Psalms,” 103–4.

⁹⁹Ralston, “Preaching the Psalms,” 31.

¹⁰⁰For discussions on thematic sermons of poetic texts, see Firth, “Preaching Praise Poetry,” 94–96; cf. Ralston, “Preaching the Psalms,” 39–41; and Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 197–200.

¹⁰¹Davis, *Wondrous Depth*, 17.

¹⁰²Martin Luther, *Faith and Freedom: An Invitation to the Writings of Martin Luther*, edited by John F. Thornton and Susan B. Varenne (New York: Random House, 2002), 28.

¹⁰³Goldingay, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation*, 133.

¹⁰⁴Elizabeth R. Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 138.

¹⁰⁵Strawn, “The Psalms: Types, Functions, and Poetics for Proclamation,” 5.

mirror the lives of my audience? Does the situation within the poem align itself with the spiritual, psychological, or physical position of my audience? And, how can the interpreter/preacher connect the experience of the original audience to assist spiritual growth and knowledge of my current audience?"¹⁰⁶ The above questions require the interpreter/preacher to take the purpose or meaning of the poetic text (principle 7 above) and make it applicable to the audience.

10. *If possible, identify how the text progresses to the Christ event in the New Testament.* The application of this last step is contingent on the interpreter/preacher's preferred approach to preaching from the Old Testament (i.e., Christocentric or Christotelic). Caution should be used when tracing out the progression to the Christ event. Within the Psalter, several psalms have been deemed messianic, specifically select royal and enthronement psalms. It is no surprise that New Testament writers quote from the royal and enthronement psalms—especially Pss 2, 18, 45, 47, 93, 95–99, and 110.¹⁰⁷ In closing, I think Bullock is correct in his warning that the interpreter/preacher “should exercise caution not to over-messianize this book, but they need not follow the trend of modern scholarship and abandon the category of messianic psalms altogether, so long as their historical meaning is not abandoned.”¹⁰⁸ As interpreters/preachers, we all have a responsibility to glorify the Kingdom of God in our proclamation of his word. This last principle must be done with a deft hand. Too much emphasis on Jesus runs the risk of ignoring the meaning and implications of the original poem; yet, too little emphasis on the Christ event can lead to simply moralizing the biblical text. In this regard, the interpreter/preacher must be a trained tactician when it comes to shedding light on the Kingdom of God.

The guiding principles for preaching biblical poetry are not a static list. Preaching biblical poetry is truly an art, which is beloved in the eye of the beholder. That being said, I firmly believe that when an interpreter/preacher invests in the principles outlined above the reward will be edifying to the Christian and the audience/congregation.

¹⁰⁶The questions are slightly adapted from Achtemeier, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 148–149.

¹⁰⁷See Bullock, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 177–86.

¹⁰⁸Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 47.

Sermon: Psalm 23



Jeffrey G. Audirsch, PhD

Psalm 23 is arguably one of the most popular texts in the Old Testament. Given its popularity, Walter Brueggemann states, “It is almost pretentious to comment on this psalm. The grip it has on biblical spirituality is deep and genuine.”¹ If Brueggemann is correct, then why would I elect to write an exposition of Ps 23? Like Brueggemann, I am certain that for many Christians the meaning of Ps 23 holds a special place in their lives. Before moving on, I think it is important to examine his words more closely. He did not say it is “pretentious to comment” on Ps 23, but rather he says, “It is *almost* pretentious to comment.” The word *almost* is vital to the sentence.

We can become so familiar with aspects of everyday life (e.g., driving, chores, exercising, etc.) that they become second nature. Many times, it is these very routines that allow us to multi-task: talk on a cell-phone while driving or washing dishes and listening to music or reading a book while running on a treadmill. In other words, we become so familiar with aspects in our daily lives that we can disengage our minds while doing them. I believe that many of the famous texts of the Bible are jeopardized by a similar disengagement of our minds—the “I know what that text means” mentality. Many times we think what the text really means is nothing more than a restating of the verses. If not careful, we can lose the theological implications of the famous texts of the Bible due to familiarity. Similarly, Patrick D. Miller understands how familiarity with Ps 23 can present issues: “The very familiarity of the psalm presents a challenge to bring it alive so that even, if not especially, those who know it well may not pass it by too quickly but will find themselves drawn afresh by its words into the safe fold of God.”² It is for this reason that I have chosen Ps 23 as my exposition of a poetic text.

Background and Context³

Since Ps 23 is so familiar, I have decided to begin with a brief overview of the psalm. The superscription describes the psalm as “A Psalm of David.” The traditional interpretation of

¹Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 154.

²Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 112.

³The background and context of Ps 23 is built upon the “Principles for Interpreting the Psalter” in my essay on interpreting biblical poetry. The use of the information related to these principles is reorganized in an attempt to provide flow in my exposition. That being said, readers should be able to note which principles have directly impacted my exposition.

the psalm is that David is fleeing from some sort of danger (i.e., an exodus) and finds refuge in the wilderness. While on the run, God provides provision and protection (vv. 1–4) before bringing David back to the Promised Land (vv. 5–6).⁴

The story of God providing for the fleeing David is couched in the metaphors of the Shepherd/Host (i.e., God) and the Flock/Traveler (i.e., David). The vivid imagery of the Psalm grasps the reader's attention and draws her/him into the world of the narrator. From a quick reading of the text, it becomes clear that the psalm is divided into two distinct sections: vv. 1–4 and 5–6. In vv. 1–4, the Shepherd/Flock imagery controls the story whereas in vv. 5–6 a shift in imagery is made to the Host/Traveler metaphors.⁵ Due to the change in metaphors in vv. 1–4 and vv. 5–6, scholars have tried to establish the relationship between the two sections of the psalm.⁶ Below, the exposition of the verses will try to connect the two sections.

Psalm 23 is a psalm of confidence/trust.⁷ Psalms of trust are expressions of confidence in God (i.e., trust) when “a depth and intensity of trouble” is present. Moreover, psalms of confidence/trust contain declarations of profound faith in God's providence.⁸ That being said, it is somewhat ironic that many Christians identify Ps 23 with funerals. In America, the transition from a song of confidence/trust to a comforting text for grieving families has a long history.⁹ The seismic shift from a psalm of confidence/trust to a psalm of condolence/grieving evidences the effects of familiarity.

⁴The historical background/context of Ps 23 is principle 5 in my “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry” in my essay on interpreting biblical poetry. On the historical background of Ps 23, see Jack Lundbom, “Psalm 23: Song of Passage,” *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 12.

⁵The use of figurative language and cultural-specific language (i.e., shepherding) is principle 6 in my “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry.”

⁶Mark S. Smith, “Setting and Rhetoric in Psalm 23,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 41 (1988): 61.

⁷Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms*, The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel (Macon, GA: Smyth and Hewlys, 1998), 121, 191; cf. John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 345; Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1 with an Introduction to Cultic Poetry*, Forms of Old Testament Literature 14, eds. Rolf Knierim and Gene M. Tucker (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans: 1988), 113–15; Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 112; Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 154; and Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 204. Other Old Testament scholars have argued that Psalm 23 is a psalm of thanksgiving. See Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. Ap. Thomas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 125–26 and Ernest Vogt, “The ‘Place in Life’ of Ps 23,” *Biblia* 34 (1953): 195–211. Additionally, James Luther Mays maintains Psalm 23 is a royal psalm. See James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 117.

⁸C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 166, 176.

⁹William Holliday highlights the growth of Ps 23 within American secular culture as well as its misappropriated use at funerals. See William L. Holliday, *The Psalms Through Three Thousands Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 359–71.

Turning to the text itself, Ps 23 is about daily activities (e.g., eating, drinking, seeking protection) “in a radically God-centered perspective.”¹⁰ This God-centered perspective can be summed up as “life with [God] is a life of well-being and satisfaction.”¹¹ The way shepherding imagery is used to express life’s “well-being and satisfaction” corresponds with other metaphors used to describe God. In the Old Testament, three metaphors, among many, evoke a powerful image of God: father, husband, and shepherd. All of these metaphors emphasize devotion, compassion, gentleness, and security.¹²

As noted above, Ps 23 is viewed as the work of David. Contextually speaking, the shepherding imagery is better understood within the context of the whole flock rather than an individual sheep.¹³ This is certainly the case elsewhere in the Old Testament when the shepherding imagery is used. For example, God is described as the “Shepherd of Israel” in Ps 77:21 and 80:2 (see also Isa 40:11 and Ezek 34:11–16). Additionally, the “flock” imagery is used several times as a metaphor for people (e.g., Ps 74:1; 77:21; 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3). Thus, the metaphors of shepherd and flock can be used in singular cases (e.g., God/David in Ps 23) and plural cases (e.g., the Shepherd of Israel/Flock in Ps 77). The interchangeability of these metaphors makes Ps 23 both singular and plural—meaning the text can be applied to an individual (i.e., sheep) or a group of people (i.e., flock). In the conclusion, I will return to the implications of the flock being a metaphor for the people.

Exposition

Psalms 23 is framed by expressions of confidence in vv. 1 and 6: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (v. 1) and “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”¹⁴ Verses 2 and 4 capture the herding imagery through references to feeding/watering (v. 2) and shepherding/protecting (v. 4). Verses 3 and 5 emphasize the “ruler patronage” through the restoring of the soul (v. 3) and restoring of strength through the table metaphor (v. 5).¹⁵ Above, I explained that Ps 23 describes how “life with [God] is a life of well-being and satisfaction.” Though this is true, the metaphors of shepherd/flock imply that *God will provide when we submit to his authority*. This teaching is rooted in the “leading” of God in vv. 2–3. A shepherd cannot make sheep eat/lie down or stop/drink water. The flock must be willing to submit and follow the shepherd. The covenantal language of Exod 6:7 reiterates this relationship: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am

¹⁰J. Clinton McCann, “Psalms,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol 4., eds. Adele Berlin, Robert Duran, and Carol Newsom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 767.

¹¹Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 155.

¹²On the characteristics of the shepherd, see Gene Rice, “An Exposition of Psalm 23,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 52 (1995): 72.

¹³Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 348.

¹⁴All translations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵The use of similar/parallel themes in vv. 1 and 6, vv. 2 and 4, and vv. 3 and 5 draw upon principles 3 and 4 in the “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry.”

the Lord your God.” In Exod 6:7, God declares his election of Israel, and as a result the Israelites would know that he is God. The demise of Israel, however, is directly related to their election. By turning from God, they ceased to know him as “the Lord your God.”

With this in mind, let us turn to examine the psalm more closely. Given the unique structure of the psalm, two overarching themes (or points) support the main message of the text: *God will provide when we submit to his authority*. First, we must recognize that God is sovereign over our lives (vv. 1–4). Second, God proudly accepts us into his presence when we submit to his authority (vv. 5–6). These two broad themes are wonderfully illustrated through the metaphor of shepherding and hosting.

We must recognize that God is sovereign over our lives (vv. 1–4).

The main theological thrust of this theme is grounded in v. 1: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” The shepherding imagery controls the first part of the psalm (vv. 1–4); however, many times we miss the point that is being made. With God being the shepherd in Ps 23, he is supplying provisions (i.e., a place to eat and safe water to drink) and providing guidance along the treacherous path. Thus, the first part of the psalm is about our submissiveness and recognition that God is sovereign over all things including our lives. This submissive relationship between shepherd and sheep is called “pastoral sheep husbandry.” The imagery of the shepherd-flock relationship resonates with humanity “because mentally people are able to visualize God as a shepherd or a leader.”¹⁶ A shepherd had two primary responsibilities: provision and protection for his flock—see vv. 2 and 3. Beyond the sustenance provision, a shepherd determined the course for the flock. As the flock roamed the “green pastures,” the shepherd was to “fend off predators” because “he was accountable for their welfare and safety.” Moreover, the phrase “he makes me lie down” when translated literally is “he provides rest for me.”¹⁷ The pursuit of rest by the shepherd entails the active seeking out a location where the flock will thrive. The phrase, “he restores my soul,” describes the “effect of the provision,” that is, physical refreshment and renewal.¹⁸

In many ways, the provision and protection of the shepherd in vv. 1–3 parallels the benevolent acts of God when the Israelites were delivered from the oppressive hands of the Egyptians (cf. Exod 15:13).¹⁹ The use of cultural memories within the Psalter is

¹⁶Philip J. Nel, “Yahweh is a Shepherd: Conceptual Metaphor in Psalm 23,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 27 (2005): 81.

¹⁷The New Living Translation and the Common English Version render the phrase “He lets me rest” rather than the standard rendering, “He makes me lie down.” This is an example of why consulting a variety of translations is important. Consulting a variety of translations is principle 2 in my “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry.”

¹⁸Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 114.

¹⁹The deliverance of the Israelites from the oppressive hands of the Egyptians is a major theme

commonplace—meaning the ancient memories of the exodus, Sinai, the wilderness experience, etc. connect the historic acts of God in the past with the generations centuries removed from the events.²⁰ In doing so, the faithfulness of God is implicitly taught to the people. Verse 3b is intimately related to the faithfulness of God. The phrase “paths of righteousness” is reminiscent of Prov 2:9 and 4:11.

Then you will understand righteousness and justice
and equity, every good path. (Prov 2:9)

I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of uprightness. (Prov 4:11)

Like the texts from Proverbs, Ps 23:3b contains ethical and theological points of reference. The paths of God must be followed through obedience to his divine will and commands. Thus, the paths of God, when taken by the faithful follower, become safe and easy paths. Psalm 25 makes a similar assertion: “All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (Ps 25:10).

The phrase “for his names sake” can be perplexing. Yet, Psalm 31:3 might provide some assistance for interpretation: “For you are my rock and my fortress; and *for your name’s sake you lead me and guide me.*” If there exists a correlation between Pss 23:3 and 31:3, then the phrase “for his name’s sake” probably means God’s faithfulness and reputation are at stake.²¹ Along these lines, John Goldingay remarks that when God acts in faithfulness his name becomes a reflection of his character.²² After the horrendous idolatry at the base of Sinai by Aaron and the Israelites (Exod 32), God’s anger burned hot. Moses interceded on behalf of the people and God’s wrath was abated. Upon seeing the idolatry of the people, Moses smashed the two tablets he received from God. In Exod 34, Moses encounters God again and receives a second set of tablets. While at the top of Sinai, God describes his character to Moses:

The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the

throughout the Old Testament. Furthermore, the allusion to Egyptian bondage in Ps 23 is related to principle 4 in my “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry.” On the relationship between Ps 23 and the Israelite bondage in Egypt, see Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *Psalms*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 241–42.

²⁰For a brief overview of the cultural memories in the Psalter, see Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 100–17.

²¹deClaissé-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 242.

²²Goldingay, *Psalms* 1–41, 350; cf. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 115.

children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exod 34:6-7)

Psalms 23:3 and 31:3, along with Exod 34:6-7, underscore the importance of God's reputation, especially as it relates to his character. This means that God is faithful to us and he expects faithfulness in return. In v. 4, the treachery of life is depicted. The "valley of the shadow of death" is generic, which means it can be applied to any situation. The fear associated with this valley is overcome because God is "with me." It is important to note that the phrase, "you are with me," is at the middle of the psalm.²³ "You are with me" can only have power *when we recognize that God is sovereign over our lives.*

God proudly accepts us into his presence when we submit to his authority (vv. 5-6).

A shift in metaphors occurs in vv. 5-6. A host replaces the shepherd and a traveler replaces the sheep/flock. The context of vv. 5-6 is uncertain.²⁴ Yet, the verses continue the theme from vv. 1-4. When we recognize that God is sovereign over our lives, God proudly accepts us into his presence. The host prepares a table for the traveler "in the presence of my enemies." Naturally, the question related to v. 5 is: Who are the enemies? The term "enemies" is typically used in military contexts. The verse possibly continues the theme of provision from v. 4. God provides safety not only when danger is imminent, (e.g., "the valley of the shadow of death," v. 4), but also in presence of the enemies (v. 5). In v. 5, the safety of God is evidenced by comfort (i.e., anointing) and joy (i.e., overflowing).²⁵

Verse 6 describes the emotive effects stemming from v. 5. "Goodness and mercy" will not depart from the traveler. The word "mercy" might not capture the essence of the text. The Hebrew word *hesed* is typically rendered "steadfast love," which is a closer characterization of God's character.²⁶ Likewise, the phrase "shall follow me" carries the connotation of pursuit/chase. Thus, J. Clinton McCann suggests that the idea of pursuit/chase instead of following "better captures God's active, even frantic, attempt to reach us with the gift of life

²³deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 243.

²⁴The most prevalent theory interprets vv. 5-6 as a thanksgiving sacrifice in the temple. See Arthur Weiser, *The Psalms*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 230; cf. Vogt, "The 'Place in Life' of Ps 23," 195-211; Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 207-8; and Mays, *Psalms*, 118. David Noel Freedman suggests vv. 5-6 represent the imagery of the exodus as it relates to a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. See David Noel Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Collected Essays on Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 275-302. Mark S. Smith, on the other hand, believes the context is the return of the Israelites from exile. See Smith, "Setting and Rhetoric in Psalm 23," 61-66.

²⁵Dennis D. Sylva, "Changing of Images in Psalm 23,5-6," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102 (1990): 116.

²⁶For a similar argument, see J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "Preaching the Psalms: Psalm 23, Fourth Sunday in Lent," *Journal for Preachers* 31 (2008), 46. See also deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 244.

and the resources which sustain life.”²⁷ Moreover, the concept of pursuit/chase is typically used in reference to the acts of enemies.²⁸ Thus, the refrain, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” reiterates God’s comforting presence and joyful reception of those who submit to his authority. Reflecting on vv. 5–6, Sir Isaac Watts paraphrases,

The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days; O may your House be my abode, and all my work be praise. There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come. No more a stranger, or a guest, but like a child at home.²⁹

In many ways, Newton’s words underscore the “God-centered perspective” of Ps 23. So many times Christians view the psalm from a human-centered perspective—want for nothing (i.e., food, water, protection, and affirmation)—and miss the basic, and most important, notion that God is the central figure in all of our lives.

Conclusion

As a psalm of confidence/trust, Ps 23 captures the realities of life in prayer form. Although the psalm is divided into two sections (i.e., vv. 1–4 and vv. 5–6), I have shown how the character of God is to provide for his people.³⁰ Goldingay appropriately expresses the depth of Ps 23: “Food and water are known to fail and enemies to threaten. The psalm invites people into a declaration of trust that is both extraordinarily courageous and coldly rational.”³¹ Thus, there will be times in life when food and water fail or become scarce and our enemies threaten our physical, mental, and/or spiritual well-being. Even in the face of life’s turmoil, *we must recognize that God is sovereign over our lives* and know that *God proudly accepts us into his presence when we submit to his authority*. Personally, I have found that these two overarching themes in Ps 23 are overlooked when strife arises in my own life. When I find myself being shepherded in the greenest of green pastures beside crystal clear streams, I must realize that danger can be lurking around the next pass. The dangers of spiritual valleys can cause me to lose my footing, which can lead to enemies capitalizing on my fragile state. When Ps 23 becomes a reality in our lives, we must remember the words of Brueggemann: “Life with [God] is a life of well-being and satisfaction.”

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸J. Clinton McCann Jr., *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 131; “Preaching the Psalms,” 46–47; cf. deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *Psalms*, 244; and Mays, *Psalms*, 118.

²⁹Sir Isaac Watts, “My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (Psalm 23),” in *Amazing Grace: Hymn Texts for Devotional Use*, eds. Bert Polman, Marilyn Kay Stulken, and James R. Sydnor (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 51.

³⁰McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms*, 131.

³¹Goldingay, *Psalms* 1–41, 354.

In summary, Ps 23 is one of the most recognizable texts in the Bible. Familiarity with the psalm can possibly present interpretive pitfalls, especially given its popularity at funerals. The psalm is about living life in accordance to God's leading. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the shepherding metaphor in Ps 23 is further heightened elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments.³² In other Old Testament texts, God tasks Israelite kings to shepherd the people of Israel (e.g., 2 Sam 5:2; Jer 10:21; 23:1–3; and Ezek 34:23).³³ Of importance, Ezekiel chastises the failures of Judah's kings/shepherds for not appropriately caring for the people/flock.³⁴ As a result, in a dramatic reassignment of metaphor, Ezekiel declares God to be the *true shepherd* of the people:

Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. . . . I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. *I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep*, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. . . . Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture; and to drink of clear water, that you must muddy the rest of the water with your feet? And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet? . . . I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. (Ezek 34:11–23)

From a cursory reading it is readily apparent that Ezekiel recontextualizes the shepherding metaphor from God in Ps 23 to Israelite kings and back to God in Ezek 34. In Ps 23, the shepherd is God and the flock/sheep is David. Yet, in Ezek 34 the flock represents the people of God. The recontextualization of Ps 23 from individual to the people of Israel is heightened in the New Testament. The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1–7) appears to utilize the imagery presented in Ezek 34, especially the seeking out the lost sheep. Furthermore, the Gospel of John declares that Jesus is the “good shepherd,” clearly a Christological title. With his designation of Jesus being the “good shepherd,” John is equating him with

³²The use of a biblical text elsewhere in the Bible, especially with regard to recontextualization, is principle 8 in my “Guiding Principles for Interpreting Poetry.”

³³Within the ancient Near East, according to Nel, the metaphor of shepherding became “an indication of the just rule of the king, who, in terms of the royal ideology of Mesopotamia was accountable to the main deities who delegated the administration of justice to the king.” Within Egypt, the pharaohs were also depicted as shepherds, particularly with the flail and crook. See Nel, “Yahweh is a Shepherd,” 93–96; cf. Matthew Montonini, “Shepherd,” *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. J. D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–2015).

³⁴For similar arguments, see Ezek 37:24 and Zech 11:7–17.

God.³⁵ Thus, reading the recontextualized shepherding metaphor in reverse—Jesus as the Shepherd of Israel (Ezek 34) and Jesus as the Shepherd of David (Ps 23)—an important Christological truth becomes clear. With Jesus being “the shepherd in David’s place,” he is “the one who restores our souls, leads us in the paths of righteousness, accompanies us through danger, spreads the holy supper before us in the presence of sin and death, and pursues us in his gracious love all the days of our lives.”³⁶ To allow Jesus to become our shepherd, we must recognize that he is sovereign over our lives and by submitting to his authority He proudly accepts us into his kingdom. It is within the kingdom of God that life in Jesus Christ becomes a life of eternal well-being and glorious satisfaction.

³⁵Also, the imagery of the banquet in vv. 5–6 foreshadows the Lord’s Supper and the “anticipation of the eschatological messianic banquet at the end of day.” See Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 119.

³⁶Mays, *Psalms*, 119.

“That They May All Fear Me”: Interpreting and Preaching Hebrew Wisdom



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For those of us who are committed to preaching “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) the “wisdom literature” of the First Testament poses special problems. By “wisdom literature” scholars generally mean the books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, and a few Psalms.¹ How shall we understand the apparent secularity of many wisdom texts? Why are they so oblivious to the basic redemptive story line of the Bible? Wherein does their authority lie? How shall I interpret the strange figures of speech? How do I account for their resemblances to extra-biblical writings? Questions like these present unique challenges for preaching from these texts. They can only be answered by taking a closer look at how biblical wisdom works and what its pedagogical and rhetorical goals are.

The Distinctive Linguistic Features of Wisdom Writings

While there are questions whether there ever was “wisdom movement” in ancient Israel, texts identified as “wisdom” tend to be characterized by a distinctive vocabulary that focuses on knowledge and the wise application of that knowledge. Proverbs 1:1–6 introduces us to a host of these:

¹ The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

² For gaining wisdom (*hokmâ*) and being instructed (*mûsâr*);
for understanding insightful sayings (*ʾimrê bînâ*);

³ for receiving wise instruction (*mûsar haškêl*)
righteousness, justice, and integrity;

⁴ for teaching shrewdness (*ʾormâ*) to the inexperienced,
knowledge (*daʿat*) and discretion (*mēzimmâ*) to a young man—

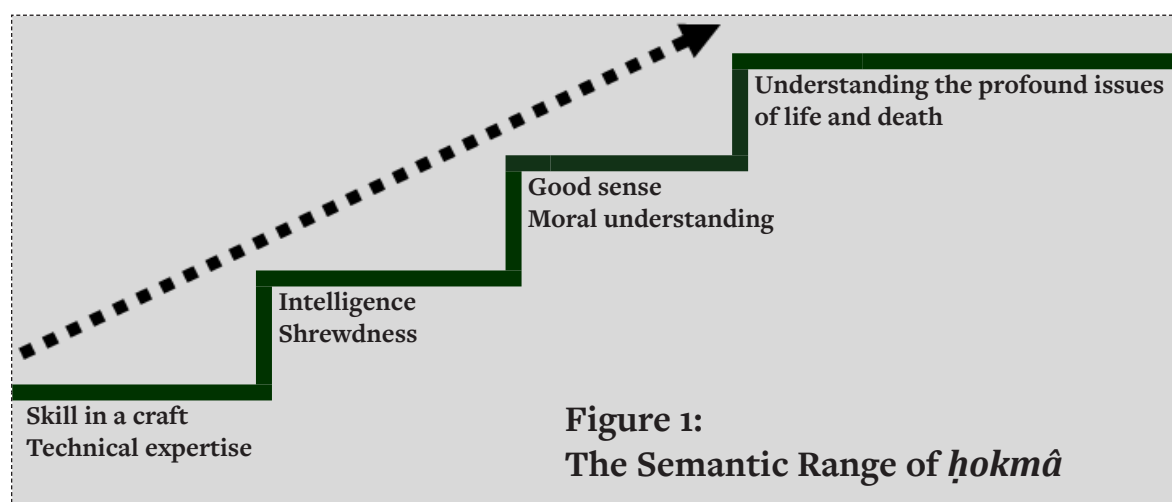
⁵ a wise man (*hākām*) will listen and increase his learning (*leqah*),
and a discerning man (*nābôn*) will obtain guidance (*tahbûlôt*)—

⁶ for understanding (*hēbîn*) a proverb (*māšāl*) or a parable (*mēlîšâ*),
the words of the wise (*dibrê hākāmîm*), and their riddles (*hîdôt*).

¹, 25, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 127, and 128 are often cited.

Of all the expressions concentrated in this text, “wisdom” (*ḥokmâ*) deserves a brief comment. The verb, *ḥākam*, “to be wise” occurs 26 times in the Hebrew Bible, and the adjective/noun, *ḥākām*, “wise, wise person,” occurs 135 times, though to this number we should add the Aramaic counterpart *ḥakkîn*, “wise men,” which occurs 14 times in the Aramaic of Daniel, and refers to the college of magicians and soothsayers to whom people go for the interpretation of dreams. The abstract noun, *ḥokmâ*, “wisdom,” occurs 151 times (4 of which are plural).

However, this is an interesting word with a considerable range of meanings (Fig. 1)



1. *Skill in a craft*

Fundamentally *ḥokmâ*, “wisdom,” denotes the skill of an artisan. The range of application is wide: skill in a craft (Bezalel, Exod 35:10; 30–35); metal working talent (2 Kgs 7:14, brass; Jer 10:9, gold); expertise in lamenting (Jer 9:17); dream interpretation, professionals skilled in the reading of the signs and in the manipulation of deity. (Gen 41:8; Exod 7:11; Isa 44:25; 47:9–12; Esth 1:3).

2. *Intelligence, Shrewdness*

These appear in several sub-types, positive academic wisdom, and negative scheming, cunning. First Kings 4:29–34 [Heb 5:9–14] presents Solomon as a master of the first kind, which he demonstrated by organizing observable data of the world in lists and categories (cf. Prov 30:15–33). His opposite is a stupid person, who is like the ostrich in Job 39:15, 17. The second kind of wisdom is represented by Pharaoh who plotted to get rid of the Hebrew children (Exod 1:10), and David, with his counsel to Solomon to plot the death of Joab (1 Kgs 2:6, 9).

3. *Good Sense, Moral Understanding*

At this level *hokmâ*, “wisdom,” refers to the ability to apply knowledge prudently to life. Compare the lesson from the ant (Prov 6:6), and the lesson from the helmsman (Prov 1:5; 11:14). Wise persons are able to navigate their way through life to desired and proper goals. Prudence is knowledge that works, that brings success to an enterprise, whether in short or long range terms. This is life controlled by the application of wise principles (Prov 2:2).

4. *Understanding the Fundamental Issues of Life*

It takes more than knowledge or even good sense to respond to the deep issues of life wisely. Wise persons are not always able to answer “why?” questions to life’s perplexities, but because they fear YHWH they trust him to sustain them and the universe.² They grasp that the essence of wisdom is theological, and that YHWH is the source and goal of wisdom (cf. Job 28). Anyone who denies the divine in general and YHWH in particular is a fool (Ps 14:1; 53:1). This perspective not only helps the wise navigate through the difficulties of difficulties in life, but it aids them in accepting the divine definition of “profit” (*yitrôn*). They recognize that the world was created as an ordered world, and that the wise person seeks to live within that order. However, “under the sun” human experience is not always ordered. Nevertheless, in the face of apparent vanities and absurdities, they receive life itself as a gift from God and with gratitude enjoy its blessings (Ecclesiastes).

The Distinctive Conceptual Features of Hebrew Wisdom Literature

These lexical considerations raise the question whether the ancient Hebrews recognized a distinctive genre of wisdom writing, and even if there ever was a “wisdom movement” in Israel, led by a distinct professional class of educated folk that self-consciously produced what we have come to know as the “wisdom writings.” Probably not, since elements that we have come to associate with the “wisdom movement” are found in all parts of the Hebrew canon and in all genres of biblical writings. At best we may speak of “an intellectual tradition” whose literary products display some coherence in aims, methodology, vocabulary, forms, and content. For the sake of convenience we may refer to persons engaged in this sort of enterprise as a sage—whether or not he/she claimed the title or others recognized him/her as such).

²Job is the prime example. The prologue characterizes him as “God-fearer” (*yĕrē’ ʾēlōhîm*) YHWH (1:1, 8), though he was deeply troubled by his own disasters. In the end, YHWH did not answer all his questions, but he had learned that God is absolutely reliable and in control of his creation.

Jeremiah 18:18 suggests that in the seventh–sixth centuries BCE Israelites distinguished three types of officials, whose differences are highlighted as Table 1:

Table 1: Who Speaks for God? The Classes of Leaders in Ancient Israel according to Jeremiah 18:18			
	Priest	Prophet	Sage
<i>Basis of Authority</i>	Inheritance in YHWH's Covenant with Levi	A personal and direct call of God	Popularly/officially recognized common sense, practical wisdom
<i>Source of Information</i>	The Torah of Moses	Direct revelation from God	The world out there: observation, experience, tradition
<i>Scope</i>	Israel: ethnocentric	Primarily Israel: ethnocentric	The world: universal
<i>Addressee</i>	Israel: the covenant community	Israel: the Nation and its leaders	The individual
<i>Message</i>	Instruction in the Torah of Moses	Proclamation to return to and live by the Torah of Moses	Counsel on prudent living

We may summarize the method and goals of the sage as follows:

1. The **source** of information is the world out there.
2. The **scope** is universalistic. The wisdom writings do not address Israel as a nation. The closest they come is the occasional use of the divine name YHWH. Otherwise they deal with issues that are common to all people.
3. The **emphasis** is on the personal, practical well-being of the individual. Almost nothing is said of institutional religion.
4. The **audience** is the individual. Even then, a book like Proverbs has a particular individual in mind. “My son” is a young man preparing for responsible adulthood in the court or in the counsel of elders.

In contrast to the Torah and the prophetic writings, on the surface wisdom literature appears to be relatively secular. There are no appeals to special divine revelation, no grounding of ethic in gratitude for YHWH's rescue from slavery or in the covenant he established with them at Sinai (Exod 20–24) and confirmed on the Plains of Moab (Deuteronomy), indeed no overt call for covenantal fidelity. The source of sages' information is general revelation, the world of nature and experience. The amount of God-talk is diminished and generally restricted to general adherence to the divine order built into the universe. This means that the perspective is not actually secular—there were no secularists in the ancient world! Actually, the sage makes four important assumptions concerning the universe.

- (a) The universe is ordered and life proceeds according to a fixed order.
- (b) This order is learnable and teachable.
- (c) By learning the order in the universe the individual is handed an instrument with

which to determine and secure his/her way through life.

(d) The source and foundation of the order in the universe is God himself.

Wise persons stand back and observe and listen to life as it unfolds around them, both in human experience and in the phenomena of nature. Based on their observations, they draw conclusions about the order in life. By definition wise persons recognize that order and arrange their lives accordingly—which explains why they prosper, that is, they succeed in the tasks to which they set their mind and hands. On the other hand, fools are unconcerned about that order and therefore have no interest in modifying their lives in accordance with that order—which explains why their lives are chaotic and futile.

However, it would be a mistake to understand the diminished grounding of ethic on the covenant as atheistic or even deistic. Israelite and ancient non-Israelites all viewed life from theological perspectives. This perspective is reflected in the watchword of Hebrew wisdom:

*The fear of YHWH is the first principle of knowledge (da‘at);
fools despise wisdom (ḥokmā) and discipline (mūsār).*

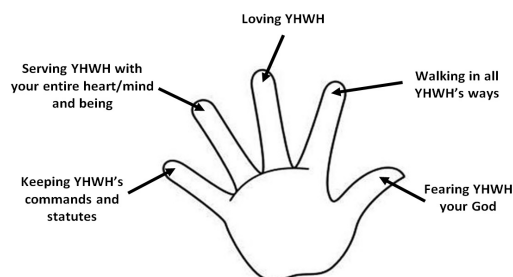
Variations of this theme occur in Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33. This motto contains in a nutshell Israelite theory of knowledge. But what is this “fear of YHWH”? The Hebrew word, *yārē*’ is capable of a wide range of meanings: “fright, dread, reverence, trusting awe.” Indeed, it is not only occasionally associated directly either with *he’ēmîn* (“to believe,” Exod 14:31) or *bāṭaḥ* (“to trust”), but may actually substitute for these words. In Gen 22 YHWH tested the faith of Abraham by demanding that he sacrifice Isaac (v. 1), but when the divine envoy assessed Abraham’s response he declared, “Now I know that you fear (*yārē*’) God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (v. 12). Here the word means something like “trusting awe” or “awed trust.”

Deuteronomy reinforces this interpretation in two ways. First, in 10:12–13, in catechetical form Moses asks an extremely important question: “And now, Israel, what does YHWH your God require of you.” He follows this up with a fivefold answer (one item for each finger on one’s hand (Fig. 1):³

To fear YHWH your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve YHWH your God with all your heart and all your being, and to keep YHWH’s commands and statutes which I am commanding you today, for your own good.

³Compare the Decalogue, which consists of ten principles of covenant relationship, one for each digit on both hands.

Figure 1: The Dimensions of Devotion
Deuteronomy 10:12-13



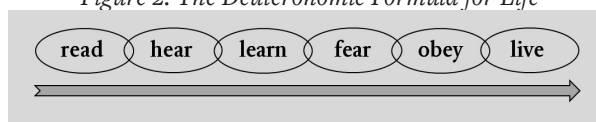
Notice that fearing YHWH comes first. Indeed, this deuteronomic statement may underlie the sage's conviction that the fear of YHWH is the first principle of wisdom.

Second, the critical role of the fear of YHWH is reinforced by repeated declarations of the importance of hearing the Torah (Table 2). We may summarize the Deuteronomic formula as follows:

Table 2: The Importance of Hearing the Torah						
Reference	Reading	Hearing	Learning	Fearing	Obedying	Living well
1. 4:10		X	X	X		
2. 5:23-29		X		X	X	X
3. 6:1-3			X	X	X	X
4. 17:13		X		X	X	
5. 17:19-20	X	[X]	X	X	X	X
6. 19:20		X		X	X	
7. 31:11-13	X	X	X	X	X	[X]

Figure 2: The Deuteronomic Formula for Life

“Read that they may hear, that they may learn, that they may fear, that they may obey, that they may live” (cf. Fig. 2).



It is assumed that hearing the Torah will result in “trusting awe” of YHWH, which will lead to obedience, which will be rewarded with life (i.e., YHWH’s full blessing). This link between the fear of YHWH and obedience is recognized in the later prophets. See, for example, Isa 50:10: “Who among you fears YHWH and obeys the voice of his servant? Let those who walk in darkness and have no light trust in the name of YHWH and rely on his God.” This link between fear (trusting awe), ethical living, and life/blessing appears repeatedly in the wisdom literature, especially Proverbs:

3:7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear YHWH, and turn away from evil.

- 8:13 The fear of YHWH is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
- 10:27 The fear of YHWH prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.
- 14:2 Whoever walks in uprightness fears YHWH, but he who is devious in his ways despises him.
- 14:27 The fear of YHWH is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.
- 28:14 Blessed is the one who fears YHWH always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.⁴

Contrary to the common view, Hebrew wisdom was far from secular. Although Israel's traditions of rescue from Egypt, the covenant ratified at Sinai and confirmed on the Plains of Moab, the desert wanderings, and the gift of the Promised Land are never mentioned, the theology of Moses as expounded in Deuteronomy underlies everything, even the book of Qoheleth, which otherwise sounds so cynical of the established order assumed by the sages (Qoh 12:13).⁵ Furthermore, while sages paid close attention to the world out there and drew many lessons from their own experiences, they would have been appalled at the suggestion that faith hinders the pursuit of knowledge. On the contrary, faith liberates it. Faith enables our investigations to arrive at the intended point and indicates its proper place in life. A faith commitment to the God of Israel who has revealed himself through particular saving acts is a given in the wisdom writings. It is a prerequisite to seeing reality as it truly is and to order one's life accordingly. Wisdom stands or falls according to the right attitude of person to God. One who is wise recognizes that tradition, experience and observation can lead to erroneous conclusions if we make a mistake at the beginning.

However, this does not mean that apart from the fear of YHWH no one may arrive at any correct conclusions. Humans are rational, and the universe is ordered. By common grace, God enables even people who lack faith to recognize some of that order. Nevertheless, it is the recognition of God in life that lends authority to the sage. All the lessons of experience and nature are passed through the filter of Yahwistic faith. In short, the wise person proceeds on the basis of a sanctified common sense: Prov 16:2, 9; 19:21; 20:24; 21:2.

⁴ Cf. also 1:7, 29; 2:5; 9:10; 14:26; 15:16; 24:21; 31:30; 1:7.

⁵This interpretation is reinforced when we observe the pervasive presence of other theologically loaded Deuteronomic expressions in the wisdom literature, which include words like "abomination" (*tô'ebā*), "righteousness" (*šēdāqā/šedeq*), and concepts like "trust/believe" (*bātaḥ/he'ēmîn*). See concordances. For a list of expressions common to Deuteronomy and the wisdom literature, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 362–63. Weinfeld mistakenly argues that the wisdom movement influenced Deuteronomy, rather than the reverse.

The Themes and Genres of Israelite Wisdom

While some of these have already been touched upon, it may be helpful at this point to review some of the motifs that keep recurring in the wisdom writings of the Old Testament. These have an important bearing on our understanding of the relationship between Hebrew wisdom and theology. In Proverbs (and Ben Sirach [Ecclesiasticus]), which for the most part represents normative “wisdom,” these themes tend to be reinforced; in Ecclesiastes and Job, many of these are challenged.⁶

1. The divinely ordained ordered nature of the universe. This notion, reflected in the “Creation Odes” in Proverbs (e.g., 8:22–31), provides the basis for the “first principle of wisdom”: “the fear of YHWH.”
2. The ambiguity of events and the meaning of life. While one may recognize in principle the order in the universe, it is not always easy to see that order played out in human experience. Thus tension may exist between “the fear of God” and “the knowledge of God.”
3. The correlation between human behavior on the one hand and punishment and reward on the other. The theological “deuteronomic principle” that obedience yields blessing and dis-obedience results in the curse underlies the emphasis on retribution found in many wisdom texts, but it is often presented in pragmatic and secular terms.
4. The supreme value of life. “Life,” defined as “long existence characterized by good health, many friends, children, a good reputation, possessions, and wisdom, is presupposed in texts like Prov 3:9–18.
5. The reliability of wisdom. While wisdom is difficult to acquire/find (Job 28), its acquisition is not only open to all, but when it is found it will provide a sure guide for life.
6. The personification of Wisdom (and Folly). This theme begins in a small way in Proverbs (1:20–33; 3:13–18; 3:19–20; 8:1–36; 9:1–18) but it comes to full bloom in the deuterocanonical (Apocryphal) Wisdom of Solomon. By the time this book was written it pervaded all of wisdom thinking.

The biblical wisdom texts develop the themes identified above through a wide variety of genres. The following represents a summary of their characteristic features and locations.

Simple Sayings (Proverbs, *mēšālīm*). The proverb represents Hebrew wisdom at its basic level. A proverb (*māšāl*) may be defined as “a short pithy statement in common use.” Proverbs are often colorful word pictures designed to teach a lesson. Proverbial material appears frequently in the Old Testament outside the wisdom writings,⁷ but hundreds of

⁶Cf. Katherine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Skeptical Literature*, BZAW 197 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1991), 75–83.

⁷Gen 10:9; 1 Sam 10:12; 1 Sam 24:14; 2 Sam 5:8; Jer 23:28; Ezek 12:22; 16:44; 18:2.

short proverbs are gathered in Proverbs 10–29. These short wisdom statements arise out of everyday experiences of life, both of the common folk and of the royal courtiers.

Numerical Sayings. The counting and listing of items reflects a combination of the sage's concern for order and his/her interest in nature. In the formula "X, indeed X+1," the last item always represents the center of gravity. For examples, see Prov 6:16–19; 30:11–33.

Autobiographical Stylization. The wise persons' perceptions are cast as first person discoveries, rather than universal abstractions. For examples, see Prov 24:30–34; Ps 37:25, 35–36; Job 4:8; Ecclesiastes.

Long Didactic Poems. These are often introduced with something like "My son," or "I will tell you." In the case of the former, the wise man (the teacher) is portrayed as a father exhorting his son (the pupil) to pay attention to the speech that follows. Ten of these lectures are preserved in Proverbs 1–9: 1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12; 3:21–35; 4:1–9; 4:10–19; 4:20–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27. These didactic poems are cast as second person commands. Their aim is to persuade the young to adopt a certain style of life.

Beattitudinal Poems. Some wisdom texts begin with *'ašrê* . . . , "Oh the privilege . . ." or "O the joy . . ." These occur not only in the First Testament (Prov 3:13–20; Pss 1, 32, 34:8, 112, 128), but are also found in the New Testament. In Jesus's Sermon on the Mount he speaks as the Wise God (Matt 5:3–12).

Dialogue. Some wisdom writings are cast as dramas, involving several characters who alternate speeches as they wrestle with difficult problems (Job) or celebrate the joy of human experience (Song of Songs).

Fable. Fables do not necessarily pursue moral goals, but they attempt simply to represent a truth which is typical. They operate on the assumption that strange dress renders a truth more forceful. Some of these are embedded in biblical texts outside those we classify as wisdom literature (Judg 9:8–18; 2 Sam 12:1–4; 2 Kgs 14:9; Ezekiel 17; 19).

Allegory. Allegories involve stories or descriptions in which the individual elements stand for something else. Qoheleth 12:1–6 is the finest example in Scripture, but see also Ezekiel 27.

Didactic Narrative. Since the goal of some wisdom texts (most notably Proverbs) is to train a young man for responsible life in the court, we should not be surprised if some have interpreted some of the courtly narratives in Scripture as wisdom. Some would treat the Joseph story as a lengthy essay on wisdom. Joseph is an ideal person, a wise man of the court, living in a foreign environment and subjected to temptations of all kind. Nevertheless he manages to order his life on the basis of the fear of YHWH and eventually makes his way

to the top. The stories of Daniel and Esther may be understood similarly. However, caution is advised against treating these as wisdom writings in the technical sense. The primary agenda in each lies elsewhere.

The Relationship between Hebrew Wisdom and International Wisdom

Several First Testament writers allude to international wisdom. First Kgs 4:30 refers to the wisdom of the east and of Egypt, which seems to refer to clan and court wisdom respectively. Jeremiah 49:7 mentions Edomite wisdom. Job and his three “friends,” who represent wise men, are all portrayed as non-Israelites, easterners. This biblical awareness of wise persons outside Israel is confirmed by extra-biblical writings. For virtually every genre of Israelite wisdom we may find counterparts in the literature of other ancient peoples (Table 3). The connection between Israelite and extra-Israelite wisdom is not clear. In some instances the Israelite material seems to have been influenced by the foreign literature (e.g., Amenemope and Proverbs 22:17–24:22). Solomon’s interest in wisdom and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of his court suggest that during his reign this interest in foreign literature may have been fostered, along with other forms of art. On the other hand, since interaction between these cultures was a fact of life, and since this literature reflects the experiences of “every person” the influence should not be restricted to the Solomonic era, nor should the influence be viewed as having been unidirectional. At the same time, since wisdom texts are often cast in garb that seems strange to modern western readers, having read other similar texts from that world helps us understand some of its bizarre features.

Table 3: Wisdom Texts in Extra-biblical Literature

Category	First Testament	Extra-biblical Analogue	Reference
Proverbial	Proverbs	Instruction of Vizier Ptah-hotep	ANET, 412–14
		Instruction of Meri-ka-Re	ANET, 414–18
		Instruction of Amen-em-het	ANET, 418–19
		Instruction of Ani	ANET, 420–21
		Instruction of Amen-em-opet	ANET, 421–25
		Akkadian Proverbs and Counsels	ANET, 593–94
		Counsels of Wisdom	ANET, 595–96
		The Words of Ahiqar	ANET, 427–30
Reflective	Qoheleth	The Dialogue of Pessimism	ANET, 600–1
		A Dispute Over Suicide	ANET, 405–7
		Protests of the Eloquent Peasant	ANET, 407–10
		A Dialogue About Human Misery	ANET, 438–40
Theodical	Job	“I Will Praise YHWH of Wisdom”	ANET, 596–600
		The Babylonian Theodicy	ANET, 601–4
Love Poems	Song of Songs	Dumuzi and Inanna Love Lyrics	ANET, 637–45
		Egyptian Love Songs	M. Fox, <i>Song of Songs</i> , 3–81

8,9

⁸ANET is the acronym for *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969). Other anthologies are also available.

⁹Michael Fox, *The Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin

Practical Counsel on Preaching from First Testament Wisdom Texts

Having explored the nature and goals of Israelite wisdom literature, I conclude this essay with some practical tips on preaching from these parts of the First Testament.

First, select a text that is coherent in its structure and its development of a theme. Like most of the Scriptures, for the most part, the wisdom texts were written to be read as entire compositions. However, an expository series will usually seek to work through the texts one pericope at a time.

Second, observe the literary contexts in which the texts occur, and interpret them within that context. The only place where this might be of less significance is in sections of Proverbs 10–24, where a topical approach may be justified.¹⁰

Third, pay close attention to the poetic features of the text, including the use of parallelism, figures of speech, humor, etc. Delight in the literary artistry and creativity of the author. Let yourself be entertained by the texts, and invite your audience to enjoy them.

Fourth, observe the literary form, reflect on the basis (authority) of the statement, and identify the purpose of the text: instruction, reflection, admonition, or entertainment.

Fifth, note the rhetorical devices employed by the speaker/author. What strategies are used to encourage the reader/pupil to be wise?

Sixth, note whether the statement is intended by the author as reflective of normative First Testament theology, or is the sage challenging facile and simplistic approaches to life. The pictures of life presented by Proverbs (which assumes the order in the universe and assumes that happiness within that order is achievable) and Qoheleth (which expresses intense frustration with the elusiveness of happiness) are quite different.

Seventh, compare the style, forms, and values of biblical wisdom texts with extra-biblical analogues. Introduce your congregation to these extra-biblical texts. The Scriptures were not written in a cultural vacuum. Access to extra-biblical analogues helps us understand why the texts were written the way they were written.

Eighth, interpret biblical wisdom in the light of its fundamental theological tenets: (a) *the fear of YHWH is the first principle of wisdom*; (b) observation of the universe and human experience yields knowledge that is true and lessons that must be applied in daily life; (c) The universe is fundamentally ordered, and the wise person will get in step with that order. When we preach First Testament wisdom texts it is liberating to know that all truth is God's truth. While the sages may rely heavily on personal observation and experience

Press, 1985).

¹⁰However, for a recent attempt at interpreting these sayings in context see Knut Heim, *Like Grapes of Gold Set in Silver: An Interpretation of Proverbial Clusters in Proverbs 10:1–22:16* (BZAW 273; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001).

for their conclusions, when interpreted through the filter of faith, the results will always square with divinely revealed truth. Contrary to what many scholars do, it is a mistake to interpret Israelite wisdom texts in isolation from the record of divine revelation, whether that revelation came in the form of YHWH's magnificent saving acts (as at the exodus) or in the form of propositional truth (as revealed at Sinai or through his inspired prophets). Anyone who disconnects these two is a fool.

Ninth, recognize that in the incarnation, the God who created this world became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. Jesus Christ is therefore not only the embodiment of pure divine wisdom; he is the Source of all the wisdom that we may gain in observing the world that he has created. I am cautious about moving too quickly to treating "Wisdom," which is often personified in Proverbs, christologically. In keeping with the gender of the Hebrew word, *hokmâ*, Wisdom is always portrayed as female. Furthermore, this personification is a playful literary and rhetorical feature. The author of Proverbs did not want us to imagine any real person behind the figure of speech. Her presence in the text constitutes an invitation to all to abandon their independent and geocentric thinking, to give thanks to God for the gift of Wisdom, and to learn all we can from "her" for the nurture of our own spiritual lives and the glory of God.

Sermon: A Lizard in the King's Palace

Proverbs 20:24–28



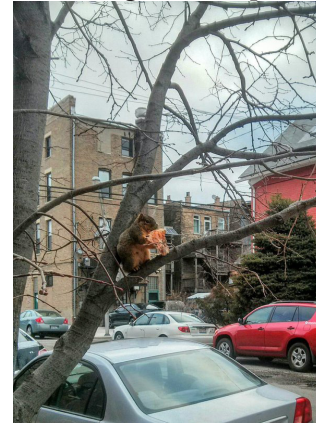
Daniel I. Block, PhD

²⁴*Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise:*
²⁵*the ants are not a strong people, yet they store up their food in the summer;*
²⁶*hyraxes are not a mighty people, yet they make their homes in the cliffs;*
²⁷*locusts have no king, yet all of them march in ranks;*
²⁸*a lizard can be caught in your hands, yet it lives in kings' palaces.* (Prov 20:24–28, HCSB)

Introduction

Some things in life do not make sense, but this can be for many reasons. Sometimes the senselessness arises because there is no apparent connection between cause and effect. We have a saying for this: “There is no rhyme or reason” to account for the phenomenon. Sometimes things don’t make sense because they are incongruent; an element in a picture does not belong. You see, life is supposed to be regular, ordered, predictable. If an element is inserted into the picture that does not belong we are disturbed, puzzled, amused, or stimulated. Just before I sat down to write this sermon, what made the television news in Chicago was a pizza squirrel.¹ Responding to a previous report of a rat in New York that had carried off a slice of pizza, we saw images of this squirrel up in the tree eating his loot. There is something wrong with this picture: pizza is human food; pizza is not eaten up in the tree in the middle of apartment blocks; pizza is not actually healthy for humans or squirrels. How did this happen?

The Chicago Pizza Squirrel



When I was an undergraduate I took an introductory course on Physical Geography. Here I learned a new word: erratic. We often use this word of behavior that deviates from the normal, or of people who are eccentric. In geology the word is used of a boulder or rock that a glacier picks up and transports often hundreds of miles and deposits in an area where it stands out from the native bedrock. It does not take a rocket scientist or even a rock geologist to notice that there is something odd about this picture. And that is also the

¹<http://chicago.eater.com/2016/3/25/11306378/meet-chicagos-pizza-squirrel>. Accessed March 25, 2016.

case with Prov 30:28: “A lizard can be caught in your hands, yet it lives in kings’ palaces.”

How do Proverbs Like This Work?

I have an idea that the biblical author who penned Prov 30:24–28 was dealing with a puzzle like this. The author was obviously familiar with the court, for one day he apparently noticed a lizard in the king’s palace. That the observer was in the king’s palace should not surprise, because this text is found in the book of Proverbs, which has a royal flavor from beginning to end. Many scholars think the book itself is the product of the court, and that the sages (wise men and women) responsible for the collection of proverbs found here were officials in the court, which would explain Prov 25:1: “These too are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied.”

Indeed, the interest in the court is reflected in the entire book. The word “king/kings” (*melek/mēlākîm*) occurs 34 times, to which we should add the verb “to be king” (*mālak* which appears in 8:15; 30:22), while the verb “to rule” (*māšal*) occurs 11 times. In the opening chapters we discover this remarkable ode to wisdom:

¹²I, Wisdom, share a home with shrewdness and have knowledge and discretion.

¹³To fear the LORD is to hate evil.

I hate arrogant pride, evil conduct, and perverse speech.

¹⁴I possess good advice and competence; I have understanding and strength.

¹⁵It is by me that kings reign and rulers enact just law;

¹⁶by me, princes lead, as do nobles *and* all righteous judges.

¹⁷I love those who love me, and those who search for me find me.

¹⁸With me are riches and honor, lasting wealth and righteousness.

¹⁹My fruit is better than solid gold, and my harvest than pure silver.

²⁰I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice,

²¹giving wealth as an inheritance to those who love me, and filling their treasuries.

(Prov 8:12–21)

The book also ends on a couple of royal notes, with the “words of King Lemuel” (31:1–9), and the alphabet acrostic, “In Praise of Feminine Nobility (*ēšet ḥayil*, 31:10–31; cf. Ruth 3:11). In his dissertation on this book, my doctoral student Christopher Ansberry (*Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs*, 2010) has argued convincingly that this book was cast as a manual to prepare a young man for responsible life in the court. So if the poet here notices a lizard in the king’s court, at least we know that the poet himself is not an erratic in this picture; he is quite at home here.

But what are we to make of the lizard in the king's palace? I suppose we first need to explain what kind of reptile we are talking about. Verse 24 suggests the text is not talking about massive reptiles like the Komodo dragon from Indonesia (10 feet long and weighing up to 150 pounds), but a little creature that fits in a class with ants, hyraxes, and locusts. In fact, this is a little gecko that scientists identify as the *hemidactylus turcicus*, a species that is found all around the Mediterranean. It is known unscientifically as the "Moon Lizard," because they come out in the evening. These are insectivores that rarely exceed six inches long. They are harmless to humans and often find their way into houses. So the sight the poet sees is not in itself rare, but it is odd. What is this little creature doing in the king's palace? People normally enter the king's house only by invitation or only on official business. He finds this curious, but lacking modern scientific research methods or instruments, he tries to get a handle on this puzzle by placing it alongside other puzzles involving little creatures.

An Israelite Lizard (Gecko)
Hemidactylus turcicus



He casts his reflections in the form of what we call a climactic numerical proverb. Actually this chapter contains a whole series of these numerical proverbs (vv. 11–31). Most of these begin with parallel statements, "There are three things that are . . . Indeed, four that . . ." (vv. 15b, 18, 21, 24, 29).

1. That are never satisfied: Sheol, the barren womb, the earth, fire. None of these ever has enough (vv. 15b–16).
2. That are inexplicable: how an eagle flies, how a serpent walks without feet, how a ship makes its way on the sea, and the way of a man with maid (vv. 18–19).
3. That are intolerable: a slave becoming king, a fool with a full stomach, an unlovable woman who gets married, a maidservant who replaces her mistress (vv. 21–23).
4. That are small but amazingly efficient and effective—they achieve their goals: ants preparing food in summer; hyraxes making homes in rocks; locusts going out in force without a king; a lizard rising to the top of the human social ladder (vv. 24–28).
5. That walk proudly: lion, strutting cock, the billy goat, the king (vv. 29–31).

You will notice that these are all observations on natural phenomena. This is how the wisdom writers work. In Proverbs you never hear, "The word of the Lord came to me saying," or "This is what the Lord God says." No, assuming that all truth is God's truth, sages observe events, whether human experience or the behavior of creatures and they arrive at conclusions about life (Prov 6:6–11):

⁶Go to the ant, you slacker! Observe its ways and become wise.

- ⁷Without leader, administrator, or ruler,
⁸it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest.
⁹How long will you stay in bed, you slacker? When will you get up from your sleep?
¹⁰A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the arms to rest,
¹¹and your poverty will come like a robber, your need, like a bandit.

But there is another dimension to this. The sages assume that human beings are images of God, which means they have God-given responsibility to learn the order that governs the world and to govern it in keeping with and in support of that order. That's why riddles like this are not only fun, they are also intellectually stimulating.

But think about the form of these sayings: "There are three, no four items in this category." Noted Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad suggested that the form arises out of a riddle. In our case we can well imagine someone saying, "Name three kinds of creatures who are out of their league." When we pose a riddle at our house, we still have a saying, "I'll give you three guesses, the first two don't count." Of course in these numerical proverbs the big riddle is always the last one—that's the real issue. The observer tries to "wrap his head around it" by putting it alongside other riddles. This does not ultimately solve the question, but it domesticates it, and makes it more manageable. This also works in the moral and ethical sphere. We have an example of this in Prov 6:16–19:

- ¹⁶Six things the LORD hates;
in fact, seven are detestable to Him:
¹⁷arrogant eyes, a lying tongue,
hands that shed innocent blood,
¹⁸a heart that plots wicked schemes,
feet eager to run to evil,
¹⁹a lying witness who gives false testimony,
and one who stirs up trouble (*měšallēah mēdānîm*, Greek *epipempei kriseis*)
among brothers.

These are all social evils, but the sermon on this text would need to focus on the last one. To the sage, the most egregious social sin is causing trouble within the community. This sounds like Paul in Gal: 5:19–21: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, *strife* (*eris*), jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." In a list of fifteen sins, the seventh entry is strife. It sounds like Paul has been reading Proverbs.

But this sort of numerical saying also occurs in literature outside the Bible. In a north Canaanite (Ugaritic) mythological text from the thirteenth century BC, we read the following:

Now there are two kinds of feasts that Balu hates,
Three that Cloud-Rider [hates]:
 An improper feast
 A low-quality feast,
 And a feast where the female servants misbehave.
There impropriety was certainly seen,
 There misbehavior of the female servants [was certainly seen]. (COS 1.258)

What does a Proverb like this Mean?

But now we seem far afield from where we began. Let's return to the lizard in the king's palace. What are we to make of this curious fragment of Scripture—inspired by God and preserved for all time as canonical truth? I find several lessons in this text.

First, we should not take life so seriously that we fail to notice the incongruities and oddities of life. The sage is inviting us to loosen up and have a little fun. If God created the creatures, including leviathan (the sea monster) for his own entertainment, don't you think it's alright for us to find a little joy at what we observe. I love Psalm 104, a brilliant nature psalm. After describing how the LORD takes care of all his creatures the psalmist breaks out in a doxology of praise:

²⁴How countless are Your works, LORD!
 In wisdom You have made them all;
 the earth is full of Your creatures.
²⁵Here is the sea, vast and wide,
 teeming with creatures beyond number—
 living things both large and small.
²⁶There the ships move about, and Leviathan,
 which You formed to play there.
²⁷All of them wait for You
 to give them their food at the right time.
²⁸When You give it to them, they gather it;
 when You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good things.
²⁹When You hide Your face, they are terrified;
 when You take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.
³⁰When You send Your breath, they are created,
 and You renew the face of the earth.
³¹May the glory of the LORD endure forever;
 may the LORD rejoice (celebrate!) in His works.

I really believe that God is pleased when we notice what he has created so brilliantly, and that as his images, we participate with him in the delight of his creation. This is what "Wisdom" personified did according to Prov 8:27–31:

²⁷I was there when He established the heavens,
 when He laid out the horizon on the surface of the ocean,

²⁸ when He placed the skies above,
when the fountains of the ocean gushed forth,
²⁹ when He set a limit for the sea
so that the waters would not violate His command,
when He laid out the foundations of the earth.
³⁰ I was a skilled craftsman beside Him.
I was His delight every day, always rejoicing before Him.
³¹ I was rejoicing (celebrating) in His inhabited world,
delighting in the human race.

And this is what wise people do, that is, those who have recognized, “The fear (trusting awe) of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom” (Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10). Observing the oddities in nature causes us to worship God.

Second, we should learn from this lizard and start celebrating the incongruities in our own life. If we are invited to learn from the ants (Prov 6:6–11), why should we not learn from lizards and geckos. The folks at Geico Auto Insurance company certainly think we can learn from these tiny reptiles. As a class, their commercials are among my favorites. They always make me smile. But let’s think for a moment about how this text fragment relates to life.

Can you imagine what the lizard was thinking when he found himself in the king’s palace? I can imagine a lot of questions he might have asked himself.

“What sort of box is this?”

“Is there anything here to eat?”

“How do I get out of here? Where’s the door?”

“Since I am stuck here, how do creatures behave in this place?”

“How did I get here? How did this happen?”

I am sure in the sage’s mind it was the last question that amused him. How do geckos land in the palaces of kings? Whatever the answer, a lowly creature found himself in the company of the highest official in the land.

Have you ever experienced this sort of serendipity, where you have found yourself in a totally unexpected situation? In our day, we inoculate ourselves against such surprises by sheer ambition and by scrupulous planning. For decades at our high school graduations we have sung or heard songs like Rogers and Hammerstein’s “Climb ev’ry Mountain,” written for *The Sound of Music* in 1959:

Climb every mountain, Search high and low
Follow every byway, Every path you know

Climb every mountain, Ford every stream
Follow every rainbow, Till you find your dream

A dream that will need, All the love you can give
Every day of your life, For as long as you live.

These days college and graduate students are encouraged to set their sights high and then to establish specific plans to achieve those goals. For decades now we have been feeding our kids the notion that they are the best, and therefore the goals they set become virtual entitlements. And if the plans don't materialize either it is someone else's fault or we find ourselves in deep and dark valleys of depression. "How did this happen? They said I could do it, but I obviously could not."

I am not hereby saying we should not dream, or that we should not plan carefully. I am simply saying that the more fixated we are on achieving *our* goals, the less we need to trust in God, and the more we close the doors to serendipities. How do you think Abraham would fare in this environment? O yes, the LORD granted him magnificent dreams of a homeland, of innumerable descendants, of a mission of being a blessing to the world. But the more he tried to control the means whereby these goals would be achieved, the more he floundered spiritually and in terms of his calling. The foundational motto of the sages of ancient Israel was not "You are somebody," or "You can do it," but "The fear (trusting awe) of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom." Indeed, in Proverbs we read,

Commit your activities to the LORD
and your plans will be achieved. (16:3)

A man's heart plans his way,
but the LORD determines his steps. (16:9)

Many are the plans in the mind of a man,
but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. (19:21)

I am sure the gecko did not plan to invade the king's palace; he just landed up there.

You know what, this kind of sums up my life. When I was young, my dream was to be a long-distance truck driver. As a total introvert, there could be nothing better than getting into that eighteen-wheeler in Halifax, on the east coast of Canada, and driving all the way to Vancouver, all by myself. What a dream! This is obviously not how my life turned out. No, my life has been one unexpected and unplanned for turn after another. How did I land up being the husband of Ellen? Wow! I certainly married up. How did I land up for a year of studies in Germany when I was an undergraduate? The Lord knew I would need German later. How did Rev. Henry Harder come to be the pastor of the church we were attending while I was university? He's the one who excited me about the Old Testament. How did I get a teaching position at Providence College with only a Masters Degree in 1973? When I graduated from seminary I was ready to take a church. How did I become interested first in the book of Ezekiel, and then in Deuteronomy? How did I find myself lecturing in Cambridge, Athens, Moscow, Sydney, Medellin, Colombia, and Wheaton?

None of these images were on my radar screen when I was growing up in the sticks of

northern Saskatchewan. I am number nine of fifteen children of an immigrant from Russia. We were dirt poor. In the farm house where I grew up, we had no central heating and no indoor plumbing. Our farm equipment was junk. How did this happen? I feel like a lizard in the king's palace. My life has been full of surprises. This does not mean it has always been smooth or easy—it has not—but what an adventure! All praise be to God. How did I get here? It was all of God. He took a self-conscious and socially awkward lizard and thrust him into the palace of kings. Not literally, but I punch myself every day at the life I have had. No one could have planned this. I certainly did not. Our passage teaches us to be open to surprises, to let go and let God have his wonderful way in our lives.

But there is a **third** significance I see here. When you think biblically of living in the palace of the king, what sort of texts come to mind? I think immediately of Psalm 23:

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.

And then I link this text to John 14:1–3:

¹Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. ²In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. ³If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also.

Wow! When I get there, I know I will ask, “How did this happen? How is it that I find myself in the palace of the heavenly king?” It certainly is not because I set this as my goal and I worked really hard to get there. On the contrary, as the psalmist says, the LORD has sent his hounds of heaven, called Goodness and Faithful Love after me. I was off doing my own thing getting lost, but he rescued me. And as the Gospel text declares, this grace is embodied in Christ, who through his sacrifice opened the door and ushered me in. Elsewhere Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:11). And of course, as in Psalm 23 and elsewhere in the First Testament, “shepherd” is a royal metaphor. The king lays down his life for the sheep (cf. Isaiah 53).

How did this happen? John answers this question as well: “The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). This actually reverses Prov 30:28. Instead of a lizard finding himself in the king's palace, the king has come to the lizard's home! Paul will describe this amazing condescension in my favorite hymn in the New Testament, Phil 2:5–11:

⁵Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus,
⁶who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage.
⁷Instead He emptied Himself by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.
And when He had come as a man in His external form,
⁸He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death—
even to death on a cross.
⁹For this reason God also highly exalted Him
and gave Him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow—
of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth--
¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus, who was enthroned in heaven, gave up the glories of his heavenly palace to live among lizards. Indeed, he took our place and died the most ignominious of deaths, that one day we might live in his eternal and glorious palace. Hallelujah, what a Savior! Hallelujah, what a king! Hallelujah, what a privilege is ours to be lizards in the king's palace!

Preaching the Prophets



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At first glance we might not expect that a message from an Old Testament (hereafter OT) prophet could have any relevance to life in our postmodern world, but the sins of the Israelites and the crumbling of their society are not so very different from our own. Not only that, OT prophets and modern-day preachers share some significant similarities.¹ Both are called by God to communicate his messages to their people. Both have a responsibility to communicate these messages clearly and to exhort their people to obey God; to do so poorly, or fail to do so results in suffering for their people. The OT prophets needed to warn their nation against the dangers of wandering away from God and into Baalism, bringing as a consequence God's punishment. Today the dangers are just as real, although some of our modern gods—money, pornography, pleasure, etc.—may not seem like an idol but can just as easily steal our hearts away from the true God. Where are the modern day “watchmen” that we need to call us back to God?

There are some important differences, however, between OT prophets and preachers today. First, God sent the prophets before the full revelation in the biblical canon was given. Prophets not only helped the people understand how God's revelation up to that point applied to their lives, they also declared new revelation from God. Second, the words of the OT prophets came directly from God and thus carried his authority. Pastors, on the other hand, teach people how to follow God based upon what has already been revealed by him in Scripture. It is therefore crucial that we exegete and communicate Scripture clearly and correctly.

It is unlikely that God's commands given through the prophets well over 2,000 years ago can be applied directly to our historical contexts. For example, God told Jonah to go and announce destruction on the city of Nineveh (Jon 1:2; 3:2–4), Isaiah to walk around naked (Isa 20:2–4), and Hosea to marry a harlot (Hos 1:2), but it would be most unwise for us to think that God is commanding any of us to do these same things. So how do we apply OT passages? Throughout church history people have attempted to find new and fresh ways to apply OT passages to their own historical contexts by using methods such as allegorical, typological, rabbinic, or pesher hermeneutics. For example, the Habakkuk Commentary

¹Gary V. Smith has written a book entitled *The Prophets as Preachers: An Introduction to the Hebrew Prophets* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

(1QpHab), dated to the latter half of the first century BC, uses a *peshar* hermeneutic to apply the biblical text to their time period. First a portion of the Hebrew text is given (e.g., Hab 1:4bc: “And justice does not emerge as the winner, for the evildoer accosts the upright man”), then it had the word *peshar* (Lit. “its interpretation”) followed by an interpretation and a direct application of the Hebrew text to their time (e.g., “the evildoer is the Wicked Priest and the upright man is the Teacher of Righteousness”).²

We would argue that these types of hermeneutics are not valid to use unless a passage specifically claims to employ these forms; for example, Paul states that he makes use of an allegory in Gal 4:24 and a type in Rom 5:14, but these are rare occasions. The far better way to bring over the application of OT texts to people today is by finding “timeless principles” that carry over into our historical context.

Google dictionary defines a principle as “a fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning.”³ If a principle is a “fundamental truth or proposition,” then it will likely be just as true in the OT time period as it is today. Our goal, then, in applying the OT is to bring out timeless principles that are true throughout history. Walter C. Kaiser says it like this: “The interpreter of the Bible is not only responsible to comment on the truth-assertions or meanings of the human author of Scripture (who after all was the one who stood in the counsel of God to obtain his revelation in the first place), but the interpreter must also go on to derive textually authenticated principles from those same Biblical texts.”⁴ We agree with Kaiser that these principles can only be truly authoritative for us today if they are grounded in the meaning of the text and it is equally true that we cannot simply teach what an OT passage is saying without finding legitimate principles therein that apply to us today. Both aspects are crucial for biblical preaching. If we only do the former and teach only what the prophet had to say to the people of his time, we will have dry, dusty history that has little application to modern life. And if we only do the latter, we will have motivational speaking with little authority from God’s word. We can achieve a careful balance between the meaning of the prophetic narrative and an insightful application that brings Scripture to bear on our lives by utilizing the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics.

²See Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, trans. W. G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 198.

³“Principle,” accessed June 29, 2015, https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&rlz=1C1GGGE_enUS62oUS62o&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=principle.

⁴Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Principlizing Method,” n.p. (cited 29 June 2015). Online: http://zondervanacademic.com/blog/moving_beyond/

Guidelines for Biblical Hermeneutics

Grammatical-Historical Method

Hermeneutics is the methodology and guidelines we use to determine what message the author was conveying to his audience. These guidelines are the foundation for the exegesis of the passage. John Bright says it well: “The text has but one meaning, the meaning intended by its author; and there is but one method for discovering that meaning, the grammatical-historical method.”⁵ This method examines the grammatical and syntactical aspects of the text, the historical background, the literary genre, and theological factors to determine what the text meant to its original audience.

Progressive Revelation

Remember that the biblical text was revelation the moment it was given to the nation of Israel and that God progressively revealed himself and his redemptive plan to the nation of Israel over hundreds of years. The OT laid a foundation for many of the concepts that would be further explained or modified in the New Testament (hereafter NT). The book of Hebrews spells out many of these concepts (e.g., the sacrificial system) that were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Matt 5:17).

It is often difficult, however, for modern readers to avoid reading the NT back into the OT. When reading the OT, it is important to keep in mind the vantage point of the prophet and his audience. The NT was not yet given, so how would the prophet himself have understood his message? It would be better to read the OT along the lines of a mystery book. As the story progresses, there is a foreshadowing of coming events and “clues” are given that later will be brought to light. Reading the conclusion first (or in this case the NT) may blind the reader to the intended progressive revelation of the book. The Bible, written as it was, beautifully portrays God progressively revealing his plan of redemption one step at a time until ultimately he revealed Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2a). A good example of a passage that contains a clue or foreshadowing that will be clarified throughout the rest of the Bible is Gen 12:3b, “and in you [Abraham] all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” At that point Abraham most likely had no idea how God would bless all the nations through him, but over time God revealed more specifics of his plan of redemption (Mic 5:2–5; Isa 11:1–9; 52:13–53:12; etc.), and that Jesus, the Messiah, would come through the line of Abraham and bring God’s redemption to all nations.

⁵John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 92. There are several different names for this hermeneutical method, but it is not the same as the historical-critical method which attempts to find the various sources of specific passages.

Prophets' View of the Future

Some OT passages appear to mix future prophetic events with events contemporaneous to the prophet, so that it is difficult to determine the author's meaning. A good illustration of this is found in Mic 5:2–5. The prophet first mentions a ruler from Bethlehem who would rule over Israel. Could this refer to the Messiah? The chief priests and scribes in Herod the Great's time certainly thought so (Matt 2:4–6). And yet v. 5 would appear to anchor this person at a different point in history: "And this one will be our peace, when the Assyrian invades our land." The Assyrians had been destroyed long before Jesus's coming.



We believe that the prophets gazed at future events like a mountain range—they could see the peaks but not the valleys so that the distance between peaks, or in the biblical text's case the timing between events, is not necessarily clear. Thus Micah spoke about coming future events right alongside a victory over the Assyrians, Israel's enemies at the time. All the events are correct, but the OT author does not state them in a sequential order because this was not yet revealed to him. As God reveals more and the events get closer, the distance between the events can be realized. First Peter 1:10–11 suggests this understanding: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know the person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." (author's translation)

Meaning and Fulfillment

It is also important to make a distinction between the meaning of the passage and its later fulfillment. The meaning of Hos 11:1 is fairly clear: "When Israel was a youth, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son" refers back to the Exodus and God's sovereign preservation of his nation. But Matt 2:15 quotes this passage and says that it was "fulfilled" when Jesus was brought out of Egypt. The Greek word *plēroō* means "to fill, fill up, make

full” in this case, as it does in other passages (Matt 1:22; 2:17, 23; 5:17).⁶ Thus when Hosea spoke this message he was clearly referring to the Exodus, but his words were later picked up by Matthew, who gives it a further meaning, and the message is said to be “full or filled up.” Not every OT passage is later “filled up”—only those picked up and added to by a NT author.

Guidelines for Exegesis

Exegesis is the careful, thorough examination of a biblical passage to determine its meaning. It draws upon various disciplines, such as linguistics (including stylistics), philology, theology, ancient history and culture, textual criticism, and more. Each of these areas may add crucial information to help understand a specific passage and draw out the application for today’s audience. Douglas Stuart goes further and states: “Exegesis is patently a theological enterprise, and a theology that is not applied to God’s people is sterile.”⁷ So how do we exegete the books of the prophets in order to arrive at their meaning and application? A full discussion of all the guidelines for exegesis would be far too lengthy for one article. We will therefore focus on those that are key to studying the prophets.

Having a clear understanding of the historical context of each prophetic book is crucial. Without this, the reader may miss both the meaning and significance of the prophet’s statements. The book of Amos was written against the backdrop of the eighth century BC during the reign of Jeroboam II (793/92–753 BC). These were prosperous times for Israel, but it was also a time of great wickedness due to the excessive greed of the wealthy. Amos 2:6–8 describes that they sold the needy “for a pair of sandals” (v. 6) and they desired even the dust “on the heads of the helpless” (v. 7). It was the prophet’s job to warn the nation of coming punishment if they continued on their current path. But the people’s response reached a new low. They “made the Nazirites drink wine and . . . commanded the prophets saying ‘You shall not prophesy!’” (Amos 2:12). Both actions show significant disregard for God. Chapter 4 makes it clear that God had chastened them again and again like a loving father, but they continued to rebel. As a result, within about twenty-five years the Northern Kingdom would be led off into captivity.

Without knowing this historical context and the prophet’s repeated warnings, someone might think that God is cruel. This is the case for many who read the OT without understanding its context. In reality the purpose of the three visions in Amos 7:1–9 is to show how gracious God is, first by calling off further judgments that the nation of Israel rightly deserved, and then by sending a plumb line (most likely Amos himself or the message that he brings) to let them know just how far short they fell from God’s standard.

⁶BDAG, 670–71.

⁷Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), xi–xii.

God could have wiped his hands of them and destroyed them, but instead he continues to call out to them.

Good exegesis is a multi-step process that requires time. While it may be tempting to pass over certain steps, they each contribute necessary information to that process. Below is a brief outline of the process that can serve as a guide to exegesis of the prophets.

1. Determine the Limits of Your Passage

This is a crucial step in exegesis and ultimately for sermon preparation—if the passage is too lengthy, you will likely just skim the surface and prepare a shallow sermon. Choose too little and you may miss the main purpose of the passage. Having said that, when preaching from the OT you will likely cover a lengthier passage than you would in the NT so that enough context can be provided to understand the prophet's message. Natural sections or paragraphs are the best units to select. Literary structures including chiasms,⁸ palistrophes,⁹ colophons,¹⁰ repetition of words, and key words (“behold,” “woe,” “thus says the LORD,” etc.) may help determine the boundaries of a section. Be sure to follow natural divisions of the text rather than allowing the chapter divisions or verse divisions mislead you. These were not in the original text and are sometimes awkwardly placed (As examples, Isa 4:1 should be part of chapter 3, and the chapter division between Isaiah 8 and 9 interrupts the flow of thought and might lead someone to misunderstand this section).

2. Determine the Literary Genre

One of the first steps when beginning to exegete a passage is to identify its literary genre. The prophets employ several genres (narrative, poetry, apocalyptic) and each must be handled somewhat differently.

Narrative

a. In prophetic literature, narrative is typically used in introductions to the book or sections that explain either the historical setting or other specific details. In these sections look especially for information related to the timing of events. Not only are verb forms important, but key words also help to confirm when events are happening.

b. In a narrative passage time is frequently conveyed by *wāw*-consecutives (*w^eqātal*;

⁸Chiasm – a figure of speech in which two or more clauses are related to each other through a reversal of structures, usually indicate by an A B B' A'.

⁹Palistrophe – a literary technique similar to chiasmus, but on a larger scale, A B C D D' C' B' A'.

¹⁰Colophon – a word or phrase at the end of the section.

wayyiqtol forms). The first verb sets the tense, with consecutive events marked by *wāw*-consecutives; that is, a *wāw* plus the opposite verb tense (*wāw* plus perfect for non-perfective action and *wāw* plus imperfect for perfective action).

Poetry

- a. Because tense structure is not as consistent in poetry, look for other time indicators, such as “then,” “after,” “while,” and “in that day.” Tense may quickly change within poetry, so track these movements. Amos 6:6–7 is a good example:

⁶Who drink wine from sacrificial bowls (present)
 while they anoint themselves with the finest of oils, (present)
 But they have not grieved over the destruction of Joseph. (past)
⁷Therefore, now they will go into exile at the head of the exiles, (future)
 And your banqueting and lounging will pass away. (future)

- b. When exegeting poetry in the prophets, it is important to keep in mind who is speaking or being referred to. The pronouns may change with little notice or other indications, though a parallel unit may help you determine the referent. A good example of when this principle comes into play is Isa 48:15–16.

¹⁵I [God], even I [God] have spoken; indeed I [God] have called him [Cyrus], I [God] have brought him [Cyrus], and He [God] will make his [Cyrus'] ways successful.
¹⁶Come near to Me [God] and listen to this: “From the first announcement I [God] have not spoken in secret; from the time it took place, I [God] was there. And now the LORD God [God] has sent me [Isaiah?; Cyrus?] and his [God's] spirit.”

- c. Hebrew parallelism is especially helpful in interpreting poetry; for example, if a word in one unit is unclear, the second unit may help to clarify it. There are a variety of forms of Hebrew parallelism, but the important principle is to determine whether the second unit repeats the first unit by rephrasing it (“A = B”) or whether the second unit serves to clarify, sharpen, or advance the topic further (“A, and what’s more B”).

Apocalyptic

- a. One purpose of apocalyptic material is to show that God is in control and will ultimately prevail.
- b. This type of material often uses images to describe coming events (e.g., red horse, flying scroll, golden lampstands, etc.). Usually there is an angelic guide to lead the author and sometimes explain the images.
- c. Although the concepts are pictured figuratively, they often originate from a

literal meaning (e.g., “eat my dust” comes from the concrete experience that dust literally flies up from the feet of the lead runner in a race and gets into the eyes and mouth of those behind). Some images appear in more than one biblical passage, which can be helpful for their interpretation. A general rule of thumb is to try to render a literal translation unless that does not make sense and then try to determine why that specific image is used. For example, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream about an unusual statue in Daniel 2 suggests that it represents more than a literal statue: the head of gold represents a strong and glorious kingdom, the silver breast and arms represent a less powerful and glorious, second kingdom, and so on.

3. Prepare a Translation of the Text

An accurate translation of the Hebrew text is a crucial starting point for your exegesis and sermon. This step should include comparing English translations and various ancient versions (Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta). Use a good English interlinear or translation of these if necessary. By comparing these translations and versions important nuances and textual critical issues may arise. Many English translations provide notes on the most important variant readings and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* includes information essential to help determine the most plausible original reading of the text. Good exegetical commentaries also often mention textual critical issues (e.g., Word Biblical Commentaries and Hermeneia Commentaries).

4. Analyze the Grammar

Grammatical Features

Looking closely at grammar is vital to determining the meaning of a passage. Look for verb forms, words indicating some type of temporal relationship, connecting words, words indicating reasons (*kî*, “because”), prepositions, etc. Also look for grammatical features, such as ellipsis,¹¹ anacoluthon,¹² asyndeton,¹³ parataxis,¹⁴ etc. Emphatic word order is another way the prophets highlighted important concepts in their messages.

¹¹Ellipsis – intentionally leaving out words for impact.

¹²Anacoluthon – a disrupted sentence or construction that lacks grammatical sequence.

¹³Asyndeton – the absence of a conjunction between words or parts of a sentence.

¹⁴Parataxis – joining short sentences by coordinating conjunctions.

Literary Devices

The prophets most likely spoke their messages instead of writing them first, and thus puns and other plays on words would have added interest to their messages. The book of Micah is known for its plays on words. For example, in 1:10 Micah states, “At Beth-le-aphrah (lit. ‘house of dust’) roll yourself in dust,” and in 1:14 he jests, “the houses of Achzib (lit. ‘deception’) will become a deception.” Note any nuanced meanings in the text from the use of literary devices, such as irony, metonymy,¹⁵ hendiadys,¹⁶ chiasms, palistrophes, parallelism, etc. An example of a palistrophe that adds interest and meaning to the passage appears in Isa 1:21–26, which is illustrated below.

“Faithful City Palistrophe”

- A. The “Faithful City” has become a harlot (v. 21)
- B. Righteousness once dwelt there (v. 21)
- C. Murderers dwell there (v. 21)
- D. Silver has become dross (v. 22)
- E. Everyone is corrupt (v. 22)
- THE LORD DECLARES (v. 24)**
- E’. God’s foes are destroyed (v. 24)
- D’. Dross is removed (v. 25)
- C’. God will restore judges/counselors (v. 26)
- B’. Righteousness has returned (v. 26)
- A’. A faithful city (v. 26)

The structure helps us to see an interesting turning point (v. 24) when God steps in to change the situation.

5. Determining the Meanings of the Words

Because the grammar and syntax of Hebrew is often very simple, Hebrew nouns carry considerable importance in creating the meaning. It is a very picturesque language, and this is especially true in poetic portions. For example, Isa 10:17–19 portrays the severity of the destruction God would bring on the Assyrian army by using images of fire (v. 17) and sickness (v. 18).

Each Hebrew noun has a range of meanings and, while there is often overlap in meanings between words, rarely do two Hebrew words overlap exactly. A word study

¹⁵Metonymy – the replacement of the name of one thing for a related thing.

¹⁶Hendiadys – two words used to form one concept.

is a vital tool for determining the nuances a specific word might carry. The following resources will be helpful for word studies:

Lexicon:

HALOT: Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann J. Stramm, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Word Study Books:

TWOT: R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. Chicago: Moody, 2003.

NIDOTTE: Willem A. Vangemeren, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997.

6. Examine the Historical Context

The role of each prophet was to supply God's perspective in the given historical situation. The better we understand the historical context, the better we can understand the specific revelation God gave and why. It is often at this point that principles emerge from the text that are applicable to ourselves. A good example of how history helps us understand the prophet's message is Isa 10:7–11:

⁷But this is not what he intends; this is not what he plans in his heart. But in his heart he plans to destroy and to cut off many nations. ⁸For he says, "Aren't all my commanders kings? . . . "and as I did to Samaria and its idols, so I will do to Jerusalem and its idols."

It is easy to miss what the Assyrian king is saying here. The Assyrians were not only conquering other nations; their intent was to wipe them out entirely by incorporating them into the Assyrian Empire. This is clearly seen in their deportation and assimilation policies. In v. 8 the Assyrian is arguing that it is better to be a commander in the Assyrian army than to be the king of one of these smaller nations that are being conquered. He then lists all the cities that he has already destroyed. In v. 11 he mentions that he has already destroyed Samaria (722 BC) and expects to destroy Jerusalem in the same way. But as we know from history, God stopped this proud king in 701 BC and destroyed his army outside of the walls of Jerusalem. An accurate timeless principle from this passage is that we have an amazing and all-powerful God that no human authority can overcome no matter how powerful or boastful they appear to be.

7. Establish the Theological Context and Meaning

Discover what theological concepts the prophetic book touches on and whether God reveals any new elements through this passage. See how the chosen passage fits into the broader theological context—what is being newly revealed here and how it compares with similar concepts in Scripture. This is extremely important for modern congregations since few have enough theological training to make these connections on their own. Pulling together similar ideas from the Bible can help us see the bigger picture of the topic being discussed. For instance, when a prophet mentions the “Day of the LORD,” explain how this concept continues to work out in the rest of the OT and its final outcome in the NT.

8. Apply the Passage to Our Lives Today

This crucial step is the point of spending time on exegesis—to help people understand what the prophet is saying, why, and how God’s timeless principles in his message apply to our lives today. A good example of a “timeless truth” in Isaiah 6 is that God is holy (v. 3)—a characteristic of God that never changes and one that influences much of the rest of the book. The title “the Holy One of Israel” is used for God twenty-five times in this book, often in contrast to the wickedness of his people (Isa 1:4; 5:18–19, 24; 17:4–8). The rest of Isaiah 6 speaks about Isaiah’s calling and commission, from which we learn such timeless principles as: God uses unworthy vessels (v. 5); God’s messengers must be cleansed before they can be useful to him (v. 6); seeing a holy God shows us how unholy we are (v. 5); God needs willing messengers (v. 8); and a messenger’s job is not always easy (vv. 9–13).

Guidelines for Biblical Homiletics

The final and most important step of all this exegesis is to bring it together in a sermon that not only is true to the text, but also has application and relevance to today’s audience. A careful balance is needed—the text must be explained in today’s terms so that people can understand the prophet’s message, how it contains a timeless truth, and how this truth applies to the problems we face today.

Determine How to Preach the Passage

At the start, you need to decide how long to spend in preaching a passage or book. Some books lend themselves to a series (Isaiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel), but others are better handled in one sermon (Jonah, Habakkuk, Joel). Sometimes even large books have one primary theme to convey (e.g., the book of Job) and so would not be a good candidate for a lengthy series. Determine first what the book teaches before deciding how many sermons to devote to the book.

If you choose to do a series, then you will need to divide the book into preachable units with clear and unique themes. Be sure to allow plenty of time to read the book through several times until these preachable units emerge. It is not as easy to preach through the OT verse by verse as it is in the NT. Many of the books of the prophets are long with a number of judgment oracles that often sound very much alike. For those of you who wish to preach verse by verse through the book of Job, remember that at the end God declares that Job's friends were wrong. I would recommend that if you choose to preach a series on a book, spend the first sermon providing an overview of the book and the big picture as to what the prophet is trying to communicate. It is also helpful to prepare an overarching title for a series that pulls together all the sermons in a meaningful and applicable way.

Prepare the Structure of Each Sermon

Not every sermon needs to follow the guidelines mentioned here, but it is helpful to keep a good structure and flow.

Title: A title should be a concise and easy-to-remember statement of the key theme of the sermon. Questions often work well to get people thinking.

Transitional Statement with a Precise Key Word: A transitional statement is the critical sentence between the introduction and the main part of the sermon. It sets the structure for your sermon and features a key word to tie together the main points. Each of the main points should reflect the key word. For example, if the key word is "reasons," then each of the main points should be a reason. This can be a difficult concept to grasp. For instance, "forgiveness" or "God's love" may be the key idea of the sermon, but key words for a transitional statement would be "reasons," "steps," "concepts," or "exhortations"; but "things" is not specific enough to be a key word.

Main Points: The main points must be parallel (i.e., whatever the key word is), clearly stated, and as memorable and applicable as possible. I remember Dr. Warren Wiersbe, a masterful preacher, telling his class that the sermon points should already start to apply themselves. Thus a main point such as "Habakkuk complains to God" is not as strong as "God can comfort even the staunchest complainers." Ideally, each of the main points should come from the main points of the section's paragraphs (or strophes) and should be stated in the form of a timeless principle. While there is no set rule about the number of main points for a sermon, presenting five or more makes them difficult to remember. Work on these main points until they convey the biblical truth of the passage in the most meaningful way possible for your listeners. Next, add subpoints underneath the main points, following the grammatical structure of the passage. Avoid making too many subpoints or including too much detail.

Summary Statement: Summarize the passage into one sentence that is concise and yet

states as precisely as possible the meaning of the text. If you cannot capture the meaning of the passage in one summary sentence, then you probably need to narrow it down further. Use this summary sentence as a basis for the most important contemporary applications from the timeless principle(s) developed in your sermon. In preparing your sermon, think of as many practical applications of the central theme as you can, but use only the best ones for your sermon. G. Campbell Morgan captures the challenge and aim of this part of the sermon:

An English preacher of the last generation used to say that he cared very little what he said the first half hour, but he cared a very great deal what he said the last fifteen minutes. . . . Henry Ward Beecher . . . says that in the elaborated doctrinal part of Jonathan Edwards' sermon the great preacher was only getting his guns into position, but that in his applications he opened fire on the enemy. There are too many of us, I am afraid, who take so much time getting our guns into position that we have to finish without firing a shot.¹⁷

Conclusion

God has given us one of the most important jobs in his kingdom—to train his people to understand and follow his word. Ezekiel warns the “watchman” to be diligent and proclaim God’s message to his people; if he fails not only will harm come to his people, but he will be held responsible as well. God uses capable Bible expositors who are willing to be his “watchmen.” It is a difficult job that requires hard work, but the rewards are amazing.

¹⁷G. Campbell Morgan, *Preaching* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1937), 87.

Sermon: “Confident Faith in Uncertain Times” Habakkuk



Paul D. Wegner, PhD

Where do you turn to when life is out of control? Is your God big enough to protect you even through your biggest fears? And the headlines provide plenty of reasons to fear: major earthquakes; ISIS popping up throughout the Near East; home-grown terrorism; even the beheading of Christians. If ever there was a dangerous time to live it is now. Does God not know what is happening? Even worse, is he allowing it? If you are asking questions like these, then you are in good company. Habakkuk, a prophet who lived in the seventh century BC, asked similar questions in the midst of the equally threatening circumstances of his day.

God warned Habakkuk that the Babylonians were coming to punish Judah for their disobedience to him (Hab 1:6). Habakkuk declared this prophecy before the Babylonian empire posed a major world threat. Yet history goes on to show that Nebuchadnezzar II became an amazing general who tore across the ancient Near East taking country after country. After his father, Nabopolassar, died in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar stepped up to the throne and freed Babylon from three centuries of servitude to other ancient Near Eastern nations. He even destroyed the great Assyrian Empire, which had controlled much of the ancient Near East for about two centuries. Then Nebuchadnezzar headed east to fight Pharaoh Necho II and gained control of Syria and Palestine. To signify how great their power had become, Daniel 2 pictures the Babylonian Empire as a head of gold. There is no doubt, then, that the Babylonians were a fierce foe. Habakkuk had every reason to be afraid and even to question what God was doing.

So what are we supposed to do when things look out of control? Or when God’s people are suffering all over the world? Or when armies are threatening us? Let’s turn to the book of Habakkuk to find out how Habakkuk learns to have “Confident Faith in Uncertain Times.”

(Transitional Statement:) Here in this book we’ll see *three steps* that Habbakuk takes as he learns to trust in his God.

The book of Habakkuk has a very interesting structure: First there are two cycles in which Habakkuk complains to God and then God responds. In the first cycle (Hab 1:1–11) Habakkuk voices his complaint in vv. 1–4 and then God responds in vv. 5–11. In the second cycle Habakkuk complains in 1:12–2:1 and then God responds in 2:2–20. Then in chapter 3 Habakkuk offers a prayer in the form of a psalm of trust. So let’s look at this book to see how Habakkuk learns to trust his God.

STEP 1: STOP COMPLAINING AND LISTEN TO GOD (1:1–11)*Habakkuk's Complaint (1:1–4)*

In the first section of the book, Habakkuk begins his journey by questioning God. At this point he cannot believe that a good, all-powerful God cannot or would not just fix things. Wow, we have all been there haven't we? Let's read Habakkuk's complaint in vv. 1–4.

Habakkuk simply can't believe that God has allowed so much evil to continue to exist. He seems to question how an all-powerful God who *could* fix everything has let this happen. It's as though he is saying, This is just wrong, God. Everywhere I look there's oppression and violence. And justice...justice is turned upside down! Are you even listening to me, God? Why aren't you doing anything?

Here is Habakkuk, talking to the creator and sustainer of the universe, telling him what a lousy job he is doing. How many of you like to be told what to do, especially from someone who really has no clue what is happening and why? What do you think that God thinks about Habakkuk's complaint?

Look with me at Hab 1:2–4 again. Habakkuk implies that he could do a better job. For one thing, these sinners would all be gone. When they mistreated the righteous, then “woosh”—he would simply wipe them out. That would really fix things. With wicked people gone, righteous people would never be treated badly, and no one would be able to make a mockery out of God and his people again. Don't you wonder why God didn't say, “Oh, Habakkuk! I never thought of that! What a great idea!”? But would it really be a good idea? What about me when I sin? Should God wipe me out, too? Before long there wouldn't be any so-called righteous people left.

Habakkuk was no doubt discouraged, feeling as though his God did not care about him or his people. He wonders why God does not listen to him, or at least why he doesn't answer. Certainly God must not love him or he would have responded.

God's Response (1:5–11)

God responds to Habakkuk at this point, in vv. 5–11 in a way that would have surprised him. In essence he is saying in v. 5, “Don't worry Habakkuk—I am already working on it.” God has already been preparing an event so utterly amazing that Habakkuk will find it hard to believe when he hears. God is about to bring the Chaldeans, one of the main Babylonian tribes and another name for Babylon (v. 6), to invade the land. Verses 6–11 accurately describe the incredible Babylonian army at Nebuchadnezzar's command. They were strong and fierce, swooping down on their enemies with a force that few could resist. With this army, Nebuchadnezzar conquered country after country to enlarge his kingdom.

But there is a crucial detail in v. 11: God is watching Nebuchadnezzar and his army and at some point he will make sure that they are held to account for the devastation left in their wake. What more could we ask?

So the first step Habakkuk takes in his journey as he learns to trust his God is to “Stop Complaining and Listen to God.” Once we listen to what God has to say, we sometimes have to readjust our understanding of who he is. This is the next step.

STEP 2: REEVALUATE YOUR FAULTY PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT GOD (1:12–2:20)

Habakkuk’s Complaint (1:12–2:1)

In this first part of the second cycle Habakkuk speaks again in vv. 12–13. Let’s read them. Habakkuk has good theology. He knows that God is eternal (v. 12), he can use other nations to judge (v. 12), he is holy (v. 13), and he cannot approve of evil (v. 13). But Habakkuk has a dilemma, which he states clearly in v. 13b: “So why do You tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are You silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?”

God’s response in the previous verses blows Habakkuk’s understanding of God right out of the water. He knows that God cannot approve of evil and that the Babylonians are unquestionably cruel. So why would God let them destroy Judah, the only part of God’s nation that was still functioning? This does not sound like the God that Habakkuk knows.

Here is where it is good to take a step back and look at what had been happening in Israel and Judah that led up to the event about to take place. By the seventh century BC, the Israelites as a nation had wandered far from God, both in their worship of other gods and in the corruption of their society. God had already sent several prophets to warn to the nation of judgment if they continued along their idolatrous path, but the Israelites ignored these warnings. They made no change. As a result, by Habakkuk’s time the people of Judah would have already seen how God punished the northern kingdom by allowing Assyria to take them off into captivity. And yet the people of Judah did not change their ways. God is announcing that it is now time for Judah’s punishment.

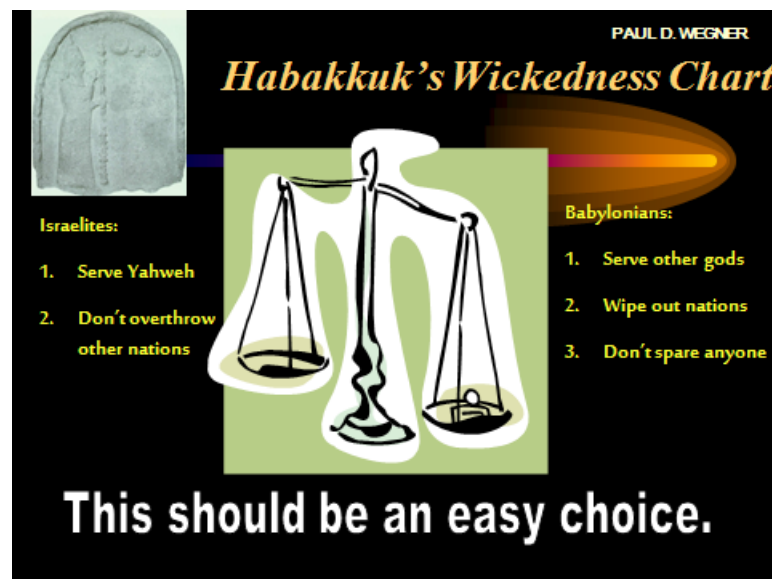
From Habakkuk’s perspective, however, the Babylonians are by far more evil. They were cruel, unrighteous pagans that deserved God’s punishment. Why would God spare them and punish his own people instead? Habakkuk argues his case before God, offering his evidence in vv. 14–17. Let’s read them.

Habakkuk reminds God that the Babylonians have proven themselves to be thoroughly pagan—they worship their “net.” Habakkuk uses the allegorical language of fishing to describe Babylon at war in the world. He says the Babylonians have been rampaging

through the world, easily gathering up peoples in their “net.” They even worship their “net” as the reason for their success. So what does this net represent? In some sense it represents Babylonian pride in their great military power as well as the power of the gods that they served—either Inanna (also called Ishtar), the goddess of fertility, love, and war, or other gods of war among the hundreds that they served. The allegorical language also has a literal sense as well; ancient wall reliefs from Mesopotamia actually picture prisoners being captured and held in leather nets.

Habakkuk’s point is that the Babylonians in no way acknowledge the sovereignty of Israel’s God. God should not let the Babylonians, a cruel and pagan people, punish God’s people who, in Habakkuk’s mind are more righteous. Look at v. 13 again: “Why are You silent while the one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself?”

This chart shows how Habakkuk pictures wickedness in the world. The Israelites serve Yahweh and are not overthrowing other nations. On the other hand, the Babylonians serve other gods, wipe out other nations, and spare no one.



The chart is titled "Habakkuk's Wickedness Chart" by Paul D. Wegner. It features a central illustration of a balance scale. On the left pan, which is higher, sits a small figure of a person. On the right pan, which is lower, sits a larger figure of a person. To the left of the scale, under the heading "Israelites:", are two points: "1. Serve Yahweh" and "2. Don't overthrow other nations". To the right of the scale, under the heading "Babylonians:", are three points: "1. Serve other gods", "2. Wipe out nations", and "3. Don't spare anyone". At the bottom of the chart, the text "This should be an easy choice." is written in a large, bold font. In the top left corner, there is a small inset image of an ancient Mesopotamian wall relief showing a figure in a net.

PAUL D. WEGNER

Habakkuk's Wickedness Chart

Israelites:

1. Serve Yahweh
2. Don't overthrow other nations

Babylonians:

1. Serve other gods
2. Wipe out nations
3. Don't spare anyone

This should be an easy choice.

PAUL D. WEGNER

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS CHART

ALL OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS AS FILTHY RAGS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISRAEL KNOWS BETTER BUT STILL DOES NOT FOLLOW GOD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BABYLON DOES NOT KNOW BETTER SO THEY SERVE POWER, MONEY, ETC.
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WHO IS MORE GUILTY?

To Habakkuk, this should be an easy judgment call. Of course the Israelites are more righteous. But God's perspective is different. Isaiah 64:6 says that the righteousness of Israel is like "filthy rags." The Israelites had received great revelation from Yahweh. They had made a covenant with him and claimed they would obey his laws. God had sent prophets to warn them repeatedly because of their wandering away from him. They are supposed to know better and yet they continue to sin blatantly against their God. The Babylonians, on the other hand, have no idea about this God and thus they serve power and what they consider to be the gods of power. So who has the greater guilt? I would argue that the Israelites are more culpable in that they have greater knowledge about God and what he expects.

Sometimes God has to get our attention—in Habakkuk's case the Israelites had taken advantage of God's patience and now they were going to feel the punishment in a way calculated to shock them, hopefully enough to motivate them to change their behavior and turn to God. Sometimes God has to do something so amazing for us to realize that he is capable of doing far beyond what we might ask or think. What do you say to a God who can control the strongest power in the world? In the next verse (Hab 2:1), we see that Habakkuk is starting to get it. He realizes he had stepped over the line when he questioned God, "Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?" and "Are you going to let the Babylonians slaughter nations without mercy?" Habakkuk anticipates a rebuke from God for his boldness (v. 2:1): "I will stand at my guard post and station myself on the lookout tower. I will watch to see what he will say to me and what I should *reply when I am reproved*" (my translation).

God's Response (2:2–20)

You know what I expected in Hab 2:2? God would give Habakkuk a slap, or at least a

verbal rebuke. Although that is what Habakkuk probably deserved, God's response is that of a patient teacher. This is now the second part of the second cycle. But God does not directly respond to Habakkuk's charges. Look at vv. 2–3. God then inserts an interesting statement in v. 4. The NASB reads: "As for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith."

Of course, this statement refers to the Babylonians, doesn't it? Remember that in 1:11 God states: "But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god." Their proud and hardened hearts will be punished by God. But I wonder if it doesn't also refer to the mouthy prophet himself, who just finished telling God how he ought to run this world. His presumptuousness has its root in pride, and an attitude like that needs correction. Instead of pride, a righteous person should live by faith, a concept that we saw in Hab 2:4 that is repeated three times in the NT. Each time Hab 2:4 is quoted in the NT, a different part of the verse is emphasized. The emphasis is on: the "righteous person" in Rom 1:17, "will live" in Gal 3:11, and "faith" in Heb 10:38.

PAUL D. WEGNER

New Testament Quotations

- Romans 1:17 "The **Righteous** one shall live by faith" ↑
- Galatians 3:11 "The Righteous one shall **live** by faith" ↑
- Hebrews 10:38 "The Righteous one shall live by **faith**." ↑

Although God's response to Habakkuk's prayer was not what he expected or could understand, he soon learned that God is still righteous and just. How so? The rest of chapter 2 explains the proud Assyrians would be punished for their excessive actions. Five "woes" are pronounced upon the Assyrians:

- 1st Woe (2:6): "Woe to him who takes what is not his"
- 2nd Woe (2:9): "Woe to him who gets dishonest wealth for his house"
- 3rd Woe (2:12): "Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed"
- 4th Woe (2:15): "Woe to him who destroys his neighbor to shame them"
- 5th Woe (2:19): "Woe to him who worships false idols"

The first four woes more easily translate into today's terms—stealing, destroying others to make oneself wealthy, killing others to build a city, seeking to ruin and shame someone. But “worshipping false idols” is a little more difficult since most people in western society do not worship idols statues. The principle here goes beyond the literal worship of an idol, to include anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Like the Babylonians, power can become an idol—it can be the focus of our lives, shaping everything we do and think. It can become what we value and live for above all else. But other things can become idols as well, such as money, status, even seemingly good things like family or friends. Exodus 20:5 lets us know that God is a jealous god and will not take second place to anyone or anything.

The most important part of this section is 2:20, which reminds us that “God is in His holy temple” and is watching over all of this—nothing escapes his gaze. Habakkuk thought that God was not watching as the Babylonians wiped out other nations—but he was. The woes listed just before this verse let us know that anyone who harms his people will have to answer to God.

Once Habakkuk stops complaining, listens to God, and re-evaluates his faulty suppositions about God, he is ready to take the next step.

III. STEP 3: TRUST IN GOD NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES (3:1–19)

In chapter 3 Habakkuk offers a prayer in the form of a “Psalm of Trust.” The words in v. 1, “according to the Shigionoth,” only occur here and in Psalm 7:1. “Shigionoth” appears to refer to a type of song. At the end (verse 2:19) it states, “For the choir director: on stringed instruments.” Some suggest it is a term that refers to the rhythm or cadence of the section. Either way, the word suggests a psalm.

Let's look at verse 2: “O LORD, I have heard your report and I am afraid” (my translation). It is very likely that Habakkuk is referring back to the message that God told him in 1:6. He admits that it has caused him to fear. Fear, when it causes us to look outside ourselves and to God, can be a healthy thing. Through this announcement of the coming punishment, Habakkuk is finally starting to see what his God is really like—he is a majestic God who can cause pagan nations to do his bidding.

Habakkuk then says, “Revive Your work in these years; in the midst of the years make it known.” He appears to be asking God to show him some of those great works from the past that he has heard so much about—like the parting of the Red Sea that allowed the Israelites to go across but drowned all the Egyptian soldiers. That was pretty good. Or when the Israelites marched seven times around Jericho and the walls fell down. That was pretty good, too. Or when Gideon with just three hundred men defeated a vast hoard of Midianites. Habakkuk is requesting similar miracles for himself and his people. And then in the last phrase of v. 2, Habakkuk adds, “In Your wrath remember mercy.” Isn't that

cute? Imagine Habakkuk telling an all-loving and all-merciful God to remember his own character. He can't be anything other than merciful, for that is part of his very nature. But what is amazing here is that Habakkuk does not ask God to take away his wrath. That is what I would want. Habakkuk seems to understand that God is a righteous judge who at some point has to punish the wicked, but who also can spare those Israelites not deserving this punishment. This is a lesson worth learning—that even in the midst of judgment God can protect us.

The next thirteen verses describe an all-powerful God coming both to judge and to rescue his people. In vv. 3–7 God is pictured as a valiant warrior and in vv. 8–15 he destroys all his enemies. Used here are terms and images from the Exodus from Egypt, a time when an entire generation died in the wilderness, yet God spared those of his people who trusted him. But the most important part of this whole chapter is vv. 16–19. Let's look at verse 16.

Poor Habakkuk. He knows that the Babylonians are coming, but all he could do was wait and tremble. And this very fear helps him to realize that God would take care of him. It is at this point that he takes the next step and chose to trust his God—that is all he could do. Look at vv. 17–19:

Though the fig tree does not bud
and there is no fruit on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,

Do you see what Habakkuk is saying? Even though there is famine. . . Even though there is no reason for him to hope, no human reason for him to trust in his God. . .

yet I will triumph in Yahweh;
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!
Yahweh my Lord is my strength;
He makes my feet like those of a deer
and enables me to walk on mountain heights!

Habakkuk is a changed person. He began with an arrogant attitude, but now he trusts in God no matter what. What made the difference?

1. Habakkuk now knows that God cares about him. The minute he stopped complaining and started listening to God's response, Habakkuk knew that God cared about what he had to say.
2. As Habakkuk listened to God, he found he needed to adjust his thinking. Although he knew a lot about who God is, he found that he was not looking at the world around him in quite the same way that God does. He learned that God does in fact

see everything, and that he acts in ways that are consistent with his character. God is in control of events in the world (not Habakkuk) and Habakkuk cannot compete with God.

3. God's unexpected and amazing plan teaches Habakkuk that God can do things far beyond anything that he would have imagined. Habakkuk learns that nothing is too difficult for his God, and he can trust in a God like this.

Like Habakkuk, we want to be in control of life's circumstances. God has to teach us that his ways are high above our ways, and that we cannot compete with him. Any time we try to tell God what is best to do, we are competing with God. What we need to do is trust that God knows exactly what is going on and that he can guide us in how to think and act.

It is much easier to trust in a God who can bring about amazing things like the events we see here in Habakkuk. When I can look at my problems through the lens of God's limitless power, I do not need to be discouraged. My God who loves and cares for me has allowed difficult situations to come into my life, and I will choose to learn from them.

Conclusion

So where do we turn when life seems out of control or when wickedness seems to be triumphing all around us? We turn to our all-powerful God. The book of Habakkuk teaches us that in our darkest hours, in our deepest suffering, we can, like Habakkuk cry out to him. We can make our complaints but then we listen to God through his word. We let him teach us more of who he is—and there will never be an end of learning about God. That is good news, not bad. When we learn and are reminded of his care for us and his limitless power, we can trust in him to take us through—to place us on the mountain heights.

So far this sermon has been totally about those that have already trusted in God through Christ and made a commitment to him, but there are also those here today that have not made that kind of commitment to him and there is some good news for you also. We all go through some types of trials. Wouldn't it be nice to have someone like God going through it with you. Just as Habakkuk learned that he could trust in a God who is all-powerful and caring, you could make that same kind of decision to put your trust in him. He will take care of you and help you get through even the toughest of problems. If you are interested in finding out more about this type of a God that can meet your deepest needs and be with you through those toughest times, we will be up in the front of the sanctuary and would like to introduce you to him. Today is the best time to find out about this God who loves you. Let's pray.

1 Peter. By Greg W. Forbes. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*. Nashville: B&H, 2014. 232 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.

Those who are familiar with the previous volumes in Broadman and Holman's *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* know that reading one of these volumes is like having a private Greek tutor sitting by one's side ready to explain all the salient points of the Greek text. Our tutor for 1 Peter is Greg W. Forbes, serves as lecturer in Greek, hermeneutics, and New Testament at Melbourne School of Theology in Australia.

As a guide, Forbes enables his readers to navigate through the Greek text of 1 Peter, helping them with text-critical issues, parsing, lexical issues, syntax, and interpretation. A benefit to reading this type of book is that Forbes not only presents his understanding of the text, he also examines other translations. The differences between these translations may seem trivial at first glance, but Forbes helps his readers understand why these minor variations in understanding sometimes have significant theological importance. Forbes deftly guides his readers down the path of evaluating these interpretations so they can arrive at the right understanding and translation of the text.

Forbes offers readers a quick overview of the material and its structure, followed by a discussion of each phrase or clause. Each section then provides a detailed analysis of the text and possible alternative translations found in the major commentaries and English translations. Forbes then takes his reader through the reasoning process to show why one translation is superior. While one may not always agree with his conclusions, one should find his survey and critique of the possible interpretations enlightening.

Forbes's book will not be the last stop on the journey to understanding 1 Peter, but it should be one of the first. Although the volumes in the *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* are not intended as replacements for other types of commentaries (e.g., contrast Forbes' introduction to 1 Peter of slightly more than three pages long with others that are 20–50 pages in length), they go beyond the intricacies of the Greek text to explain some customs and ideas needed to understand the structure and the meaning of the text. For example, Forbes has two paragraphs explaining the idea of household code in the Greco-Roman world and its place in the New Testament (77).

Sometimes travelers have to worry about outdated maps leading them astray; this will not be the case with Forbes's volume. He uses the fifth edition of the UBS text, which was still forthcoming when the book was printed. Moreover, his discussions on imperatives and imperatival participles interact with works by writers like Stanley E. Porter, Buist M. Fanning, and others. Also, he guides readers to some of the great scholarship of the past like that of A. T. Robertson and G. A. Deissmann. However, he provides little interaction with the discourse analysis of Steven E. Runge and Stephen H. Levinsohn.

Those who want to hone their Greek skills will find this book useful; a year of Greek, however, is a prerequisite for utilizing this book. Because Forbes supposes that his readers are familiar with Greek syntax, this book will prove challenging and require patience and a willingness to look up many terms in a syntax-level grammar.

For a second-year Greek student, this book offers a great example of how to take the material from a grammar like Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and apply it to the reading of a particular New Testament text. Forbes does this throughout the book as he shows the possible translations that others have offered and explains how they are different and what they mean. He then demonstrates how to sift through such possibilities to determine the best way to understand and translate the text.

Those who have had a course in Greek syntax and who are familiar with the terminology introduced in those classes will have an easier time reading and understanding this book than those who have completed only first-year Greek. The more general understanding that readers bring to the text, the more they will appreciate its insights.

Pastors and teachers who have the background to read and understand this text will find Forbes's work most helpful. His wide survey of the various possibilities of how a text could be read will often be eye-opening. Pastors will also find his homiletical suggestions useful. Most of his outlines follow the details of the text, but others bring together a topic that is scattered throughout the text of 1 Peter. For example, he suggests an outline for "The Victory of Christ" that includes material from chapters 2 and 3 (133).

Ideally, readers will work their way through the whole text of 1 Peter. The design of the book, however, will also allow readers to examine any passage they choose. For instance, Forbes includes short studies at the beginning of the book on two frequently used constructions in 1 Peter: "The Use of the Imperative in 1 Peter" and "Imperative Participles in 1 Peter." Whenever these forms appear, Forbes reminds his readers about these discussions.

Because Forbes's work is well documented throughout, those wanting to do additional research on 1 Peter will find his work to be a good starting point. In his text, he cites modern translations, grammars, lexical works, commentaries, and articles. The end of each chapter also includes a bibliography of works focused on the various topics discussed in the passage. For example, in the section on 1 Peter 3:8–22, Forbes has two bibliographic sections, one on "Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits in Prison (3:18–22)" and one on "The Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell" (131–32). He then marks what he considers the most significant entry with an asterisk. In total, Forbes's work contains 42 of these short bibliographies throughout the book.

Unlike the first volume of this series, written by Murray J. Harris (*Colossians and Philemon*), Forbes does not include a glossary. Many students who are just beginning their study of

syntax, however, might find one helpful because they will have read about the categories but have not yet mastered their meaning and significance. Such students will need to keep a grammar nearby.

I highly recommend Forbes's work, along with the other volumes in this series. Studying them together with the Greek text is like a return to seminary, where the student can watch a favorite professor exegete and explain the text—minus tuition. A sign of great teachers is that they not only provide answers, but also demonstrate a method of how to find answers. Those who work through this text will discover that they will leave with a greater understanding not only of the text of 1 Peter, but also of the Greek language and ultimately with an improved ability to understand other New Testament writings in Greek.

- Samuel R. Pelletier, *Truett-McConnell College, Cleveland, Georgia*

2 Corinthians. By Ralph P. Martin. Word Biblical Commentary 40. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 752 pages. Hardcover, \$54.99.

Ralph Martin was able to finish the revision of this volume (originally published in 1986) before his death in 2013. Martin served as the general editor for the WBC series, as well as the New Testament editor from 1977–2012. Martin also served several institutions as professor of New Testament, including the University of Manchester, the University of Sheffield, and Fuller Theological Seminary.

Martin explains in the preface the changes to this edition. He admits that because the first addition required 10 years to complete, he was therefore “not inclined to meddle with the text” of the commentary proper. The second edition reviewed here represents a substantial revision to the original; the first edition was just under 600 pages, while the revised comprises over 750. Most of the new material is found in a number of excurses scattered throughout the commentary. The series editors have printed these updates on gray paper to make them readily recognizable. Also, many of the excurses have been composed by scholars other than Martin. The new material includes sections discussing rhetorical studies of 2 Corinthians, the social setting of the letter/s (see below), Paul's opponents, the issue of the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the Holy Spirit. Also, the previous material concerning the collection for Jerusalem has been significantly expanded.

The commentary treats the usual background topics necessary for understanding 2 Corinthians. Regarding the composition of canonical 2 Corinthians, Carl Toney concurs with Martin's initial conclusions originally published in 1986: the letter preserved canonically as 2 Corinthians was originally two letters, namely 2 Corinthians 1–9, which was followed by a second letter, comprised of 2 Corinthians 10–13. The second letter was sent after a

“compositional hiatus,” during which the intensity of Corinthian opposition increased (69). Toney cautions, however, “that their [the two letters] redaction also points to the importance of reading them in their final form” (63). This is a prudent position, given both the extreme differences in tone between these two sections of 2 Corinthians and the many textual connections contained in the two major parts.

Martin formulates the *Sitz im Leben* of 2 Corinthians by depending heavily on the account of Paul’s ministry in Acts, as well as Paul’s own words in his letter to the Galatians. He maintains that Paul’s successful mission to the Gentiles resulted in increased pressure from Jewish Christians for Gentile converts to be circumcised. Martin argues that the agreement described in Acts 15 minimized the issue of circumcision, and was forged after Paul left the conference. Paul’s insistence on a circumcision-free gospel led to his estrangement from both Jerusalem and Antioch. Therefore, Paul’s *theologia crucis* and his corresponding self-description as a suffering apostle, as formulated in 2 Corinthians, originated out of Paul’s isolation from other leaders in the Christian movement, attacks on Paul’s authority from some in Corinth, and Paul’s desire to set his ministry apart from that of other Jewish Christians.

Martin’s exegesis of the text follows the standard WBC series format. For each subsection of the text, a bibliography is provided, followed by Martin’s translation of the text (including notes which explain the choices concerning textual variants, etc.). Martin then discusses the “Form/Structure/Setting” of the section, after which he presents a verse-by-verse exegesis of the Greek text. Finally, Martin provides his understanding of the meaning of the section under the heading “Explanation.”

If I were allowed one word to describe this commentary, I would choose the word “thorough.” At more than 750 pages, one would be hard pressed to say anything more about 2 Corinthians. As such, the commentary is an excellent reference work and can be heartily recommended. One would, however, need to complement this volume with other commentaries that are somewhat less detailed, and in which Paul’s arguments remain at the forefront so that one is not in danger of getting lost in the forest of exegetical trees. One might also consult contemporaries that scholarship on 2 Corinthians, and Pauline studies in general. Even though Martin’s commentary has been revised, it is still heavily dependent on pre-1980’s secondary sources.

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***Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives.* Edited by Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. xii + 339 pages. Paperback, \$26.99.**

In *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin*, Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves have assembled

a collection of essays which deliver a robust defense of a historic Adam and Eve and an understanding of the fall and original sin which implicates all of humanity in the disobedience of the original couple. Madueme is assistant professor of theological studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia. Reeves is theologian-at-large at Wales Evangelical School of Theology in Bridgend, Wales. They attempt to address the three areas named in the book's title by interacting with related discussions concerning natural science and the Bible, historical criticism of the Bible, and church tradition. They explain, "Our basic thesis is that the traditional doctrine of original sin is not only orthodox but is also the most theologically cogent synthesis of the biblical witness" (xii).

In part 1, the editors present three essays under the heading, "Adam in the Bible and Science." Drawing upon his previous work,¹ C. John Collins argues from the portrayal of the first couple in Genesis 1–5, literary echoes throughout the canon, and Second Temple literature for the "historical significance of Adam and Eve as the fountainhead of humanity and as the doorway by which sin came into God's world" (5). His essay explains that Genesis 3 *shows* rather than *tells* what is subsequently made explicit in the church's interpretation and formulation of the first couple, their fall, original sin, and humanity's resulting need for redemption. Also in part 1, Robert Yarborough surveys eight explicit New Testament references to Adam, notes briefly some of the interpretations of those texts, then provides a biblical-theological treatment of each of the texts. His comments on Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, as expected, yield more information for the study than the other texts. For Yarborough, Paul understands a historical Adam to be a central figure in soteriology, because through his disobedience all of humanity is subject to the pattern of sin and death (42, 46). Interestingly, the final essay in part 1 was contributed under a clever pseudonym, William Stone. The paleontologist surveys the literature of his field, correlates it with the latest in old earth creationist literature, then concludes that an affirmation of a historical Adam is possible if Adam is located at the root of the genus *Homo*, 1.8 million years ago (80).

At five chapters and 101 pages, part 2 ("Original Sin in History") is the largest section of the book. Peter Sanlon's chapter is titled "Original Sin in Patristic Theology," but should have carried the title "Augustine's View of Original Sin," because this was the only theologian whose view was examined. The chapter would have been strengthened by including other representatives from both the eastern and western church fathers. Admittedly, Augustine's influence has carried more significance than any other writer of the era. Even so, those who affirm believer's baptism should question whether their view of original sin and forgiveness of sin is consistent at every point with the Augustinian view. Consider this observation by Sanlon, "Baptizing infants evidenced an assumption that they had to be forgiven something—if not actual sins, then the original sin contracted from Adam" (92).

¹C. John Collins, "Adam and Eve in the Old Testament," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15.1 (2011): 4–25, and Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

This early church practice of infant baptism, which has been rejected for almost five centuries by those who affirm believer's baptism, was practiced by the early church to forgive the inheritance from Adam. In chapter 5, Robert Kolb surveys the Lutheran doctrine of original sin, beginning with Martin Luther and including the contributions of Melancthon, the Formula of Concord, Chemnitz, Hütter, Gerhard, and Spener.

In chapter 6, "Original Sin in Reformed Theology," Donald Macleod presents three key elements: Adam's freedom to fall, the covenant of works, and the withholding of restraining grace. Macleod's explanation of these elements, however, faces some challenges. Is it consistent to call the view that Adam and Eve were endowed with "freedom of moral choice" Pelagian then explain that the solution is found in Ames' comment, "Man of his own will freely fell from God" (130–31)? Macleod's clarification reveals a possible inconsistency in Reformed theology's view, "Adam's choice was foreordained as a free act, not 'caused' by any prior event or circumstance within the causal nexus (and, of course, the divine decree itself is not part of the causal nexus)" (136). One wonders how an act can be simultaneously foreordained and decreed, but free and uncaused. Also, Macleod cites support for the covenant of works in the Westminster Confession, although he notes the doctrine is not explicitly affirmed by Calvin, Zwingli, and Bullinger (131–33). The covenant of works, of course, is a theological inference without explicit biblical support. In the chapter, Macleod also considers humanity's relationship to Adam, two views of imputation, and the origin of the human soul.

In chapter 7, Thomas McCall surveys views of original sin in the writings of John Wesley and a host of Wesleyan theologians. The eighteenth century saw in Wesley, Watson, and Wakefield interpretations of original sin which were largely identical to the Calvinist interpreters, except for the innovations of prevenient grace and unlimited atonement. In the nineteenth century, Pope advocated a federalist view, but Summers and Miley both advocated a mediate view of imputation, which affirms inherited corruption but denies inherited guilt. Their rejection of the imputed guilt is rooted in their affirmation of moral responsibility and freedom. McCall's essay characterizes the continued movement among twentieth-century Wesleyans away from the "classic doctrine," a phrase used in the book to refer to the Augustinian view which later becomes the branch of Reformed theology affirming inherited guilt (the immediate view). McCall's chapter closes with the ominous mention of the rise among Methodists of process philosophy (163). If that is the case, then those Wesleyans are moving away from the Reformed/immediate view as well as Christian orthodoxy.

Part 2 concludes with a chapter by Carl Trueman, who summarizes and critiques the views of original sin of the following six modern theologians: Schleiermacher, Rauschenbusch, Barth, Bultmann, Niebuhr, and Pannenberg. All of the thinkers reject both the relevance of a historical Adam and the doctrine of alien guilt. Trueman rightly observes that "one's understanding of original sin is necessarily and decisively connected to the structure

of one's theology as a whole" (185). However, his treatment could leave readers to infer wrongly that an affirmation of a historical Adam requires an affirmation of alien guilt. Such a view would be incorrect, as illustrated by the many examples of Reformed and Wesleyan theologians cited in the chapters by Macleod and McCall who affirm both the historicity of Adam and mediate imputation (inherited corruption, not inherited guilt).

Part 3 addresses "Original Sin in Theology." In chapter 9, James Hamilton explores the topic through the lens of biblical theology. He explains that biblical theology "seeks to describe both the storyline and the network of assumptions and presuppositions and beliefs assumed by the biblical authors as they wrote" (189). Hamilton's definition continues by acknowledging, "The only access we have to what the biblical authors thought or assumed is what they wrote." One wonders, then, if a theological method labeling itself "biblical theology" would be better served by focusing on the *explicit* statements of the biblical text, rather than on *implicit* assumptions, presuppositions, and beliefs. This concern which arose when reading the beginning of the article was dispelled by the end of the article. Hamilton's biblical-theological treatment of original sin was majestic, and his use of English prose might be the finest example in the book. Just as Collins' view earlier in the book, Hamilton makes the case that the Bible *shows* (rather than explicitly *tells*) its audience that the Genesis 3 narrative is the explanation for sin and death in the world. In this excellent treatment of original sin, Hamilton never mentions imputed guilt. Also, he explains Hosea 6:7, a key Old Testament text, without importing a covenantal interpretation.

In chapter 10, Madueme and Reeves argue that affirming a historical Adam and original sin are required in order to account for the need for the atoning work of Christ. In that way, the gospel requires an affirmation of Adam and original sin (210, 224). In chapter 11, Madueme proposes scriptural realism as a model for addressing the relationship between faith and science. Then, he applies this to the doctrine of original sin. Strangely, Madueme concludes that sinful behaviors committed by people who suffer from biological conditions are not actually sinful (247). The result is that all people are responsible for Adam's sin (which they did *not* commit), but not responsible for their own actions (which they *did* commit) if those actions resulted from a biological condition. Part 3 concludes with a chapter by Daniel Doriani titled "Original Sin in Pastoral Theology." In this excellent chapter, Doriani explains that while culture and the church tend to reject or minimize the effects of sin, a robust theology of original sin will shape one's pastoral ministry.

Part 4, "Adam and the Fall in Dispute," concludes the book with chapters penned by Thomas R. Schreiner, Noel Weeks, and William Edgar. In chapter 13, Schreiner addresses Romans 5:12–19. Schreiner should be commended for his affirmation that Adam's sin brought sin, death, and condemnation into the world. Unfortunately, Schreiner provides theological conclusions which are not established by his exegetical work in Romans 5. Specifically, Schreiner states, "Human beings enter the world condemned and spiritually dead because they sinned in Adam" (278, also 272, 274, 279–80, and 287). None of the verses

under consideration explicitly affirm such a view. Romans 5:12 states that sin entered the world through one man's sin, and death entered because all sinned—not that man enters the world spiritually dead. Also, Paul's reference to spiritual death in Rom 7:9 contradicts the claim that people *enter* the world spiritually dead. Rather, Paul states that he was alive, then the commandment came, then "sin became alive and I died" (NASB). In the essay, Schreiner states that "verses 15–19 clearly teach that Adam's guilt is imputed to all human beings" (276). Such a view is not clearly taught in Romans 5, as others have argued elsewhere.² After establishing that Augustine worked from a poor translation of Rom 5:12, Schreiner affirms that Augustine's conclusion is nevertheless correct, that "all sinned in Adam," since Adam is their "covenantal and federal head" (278). However, because the phrase "in Adam" does not appear in the text, the concepts of covenantal and federal headship are not required by the biblical text. Is it possible that Schreiner's theological presuppositions are driving his conclusions regarding original sin, rather than the text of Romans 5? In chapter 14, Noel Weeks skillfully demonstrates that extra-biblical sources do not adequately account for human toil and death. Also, Weeks provides a biblical-theological treatment of Genesis 3, which concludes that human misery and death outside the original garden is a process and reality which flows from the actual disobedience of a genuine couple (304–5). In chapter 15, William Edgar interacts with the work of Christopher Southgate and William Dembski, who both assume the universe is very old, and attempt to account for the existence of animal death and natural disasters prior to the first sin of Adam. Edgar provides a strong critique of their work and suggests that the death of plants and animals prior to the sin of Adam is compatible with God's declaration in Gen 1:31 that creation was "very good."

Readers of *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin* will benefit from the sustained and robust arguments for a historical Adam and fall as well as the need for redemption in Christ. Also, the book raises the awareness that one's view of original sin is inextricably connected to other key doctrines, including one's understanding of the work of Christ on the cross. For example, Reeves and Madueme compare Christian doctrines to threads in a seamless garment, in which pulling one thread can damage an entire garment. They suggest that "when the doctrine of original sin is tampered with or lost, the doctrines of God and creation, humanity, sin, and salvation are all significantly affected" (210). Also, readers will benefit from a comprehensive argument, drawing upon the fields of historical theology, biblical theology, systematic theology, and natural science.

²As examples, see Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1945), 29; Frank Stagg, "Adam, Christ, and Us," *New Testament Studies: Essays in Honor of Ray Summers in His Sixty-Fifth Year*, ed. Huber L. Drumwright and Curtis Vaughan (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1975), 115–36; J. W. MacGorman, *Layman's Bible Book Commentary: Romans, 1 Corinthians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 53; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Bible, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 408–9; and Adam Harwood, *Born Guilty?: A Southern Baptist View of Original Sin* (Carrollton, GA: Free Church Press, 2013).

One of the weaknesses of the volume was the inconsistent assessment of the imputation of sin. For example, Macleod's chapter presents two Reformed views of imputation in the Reformed tradition, the mediate view (inherited corruption which later results in guilt) and the immediate view (inherited guilt) (139–41). Contributors such as Yarborough and Hamilton speak of the inheritance from Adam in terms of sin, death, and corruption, and their chapters are consistent with the mediate view. However, Madueme locates the denial of inherited guilt with Pelagius (226). Also, Schreiner argues against both the interpretations of both Pelagius and Blocher's mediate view of imputation (275–78). A reader might infer from the views of Madueme and Schreiner that one must explicitly affirm inherited guilt. However, Yarborough and Hamilton do not affirm inherited guilt in their biblical-theological treatments of original sin. It seems that the Reformed tradition remains unclear on whether one must explicitly affirm inherited, or alien, guilt.

Another weakness of the book was the insertion of human inability when discussing human sinfulness (253). One can affirm the universal sinfulness of humanity while rejecting the extreme positions of both human goodness and human inability. Finally, neither the title nor the subtitle reflect the organization of the material in the book. Presently, the book promises by its title to address Adam, the fall, and original sin. In the subtitle, it promises to address theological, biblical, and scientific perspectives. However, the major parts of the book deal with "Adam in the Bible and Science" (part 1), "Original Sin in History" (part 2), "Original Sin in Theology" (part 3), and "Adam and the Fall in Dispute" (Part 4). Perhaps in a subsequent edition, book chapters could be reorganized to reflect the order of topics presented in either the book's title or its subtitle.

Even with weaknesses noted above, the book should be required reading for all who desire to consider a comprehensive case for a historical Adam, his fall, and the doctrine known as original sin.

- Adam Harwood, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament.* By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 253 pages. Paperback, \$34.99.**

Constantine R. Campbell is associate professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, where he has served on faculty since 2013. He previously served as a senior lecturer in Greek and New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia. Campbell received a PhD from Macquarie University and is the author of several books including *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, *Keep Your Greek: Strategies for Busy People*, and *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*. His most recent work is *Colossians and Philemon: A Handbook on the Greek Text*.

The genesis for the present work came from Campbell's Greek students at Moore College and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His intention was originally to introduce students to the issues within contemporary Greek scholarship. After hearing testimony from students, Campbell felt that the benefit they received could be passed on to others. His purpose thus is to provide students, pastors, professors, and commentators with information about current issues in New Testament Greek scholarship, which include linguistics, lexicography, deponency, *Aktionsart*, idiolect, discourse analysis, pronunciation, and pedagogy. His primary aim is to create an interest in these issues so that the reader will be more equipped and competent to handle the Greek text.

Campbell begins with a brief history of Greek studies over the last 200 years. His survey primarily focuses on issues related to biblical Greek and modern linguistic theory. The purpose of this history is to provide context for understanding his discussion of topics covered throughout the remainder of the book. Campbell first explores the need for linguistic theory in New Testament Greek studies, as it has often been neglected, despite its direct bearing on exegesis and translation. Recognizing such neglect, Campbell provides the reader with a brief discussion of the various branches of linguistics, and then offers the example of the well-known debate over verbal aspect, specifically whether or not temporal reference is a constant feature of the indicative verb.

Campbell raises many important issues related to lexical semantics and lexicography. He addresses the interrelationships between symbol, sense, and referent. He also discusses the misuse of "synonymous" and deals with the all-important issue of context, including literary and historical. Lexical choice of the author, lexical fields, and the different types of ambiguity also are considered. The task of New Testament Greek lexicography is difficult, as it is never finished, because receptor languages are continually changing. While New Testament lexicons have improved and are better than their ancient Greek counterparts, there are still dangers to avoid. Citing John A. L. Lee, Campbell humbly reminds us that lexicons are often over reliant on glosses and on predecessors. They are also contaminated by glosses found in standard translations, and they are unsystematic in their determination of meaning.

Deponency and the middle voice is a familiar topic of discussion in Greek grammars and is one that is close to Campbell's heart. He reviews the history of the discussion from Moulton in 1908 to the SBL conference in 2010, where he and others argued for the categorical rejection of deponency. Campbell disagrees with others who reject the term "deponency," but have not offered an adequate alternative for the category the term represents. He also disagrees with those who claim that verbs in middle form may be middle in meaning. The issue is not wholly resolved, however, as mixed deponency and passive deponency offer challenges. The middle voice must continue to be studied and understood. Voice also may be the outworking of aspect, lexeme, and context in a way similar to *Aktionsart*.

Verbal aspect and *Aktionsart* are two interrelated topics that Campbell has studied in great depth. The reader will appreciate his experience and basic description of these concepts. He offers a brief history of the discussion about verbal aspect. This debate centers around whether temporal reference is a core feature of verbs in the indicative mood, especially with perfect-tense forms. Campbell's greatest contribution is his provision of a four-step process (Semantics, Lexeme, Context, *Aktionsart*) that assists in the exegeting of a verb in context. He also briefly addresses aspect in relation to narrative structure and planes of discourse.

Campbell offers a brief survey of the lesser-understood topics of idiolect, genre, and register and their influence on aspectual patterns. He concludes that genre and form account for convergent aspectual patterns. Patterns are predictable within a given genre and are also distinct from patterns in other genres. Idiolect and register account for divergent patterns due to author preferences for certain verbal phenomena.

Campbell dedicates two chapters to the various approaches of discourse analysis, which is rather new to New Testament studies. Campbell details the pros and cons of a few major approaches of discourse analysis. The Hallidayan approach focuses on cohesion of a text through the use of conjunction, reference, ellipsis, and lexical cohesion. The study of cohesion allows the analyst to describe objectively how a particular text hangs together. The approach developed by Stephen Levinsohn is especially useful because it marries the study of Greek parts of speech with principles from the wider linguistic world. Levinsohn's main focus is on the significance of an author's choice of words to express meaning. His approach is truly eclectic because he analyzes constituent order, sentence conjunctions, patterns of reference, backgrounding and highlighting devices, reporting of conversation, and boundary features. The approach of Steven E. Runge is the most useful for the Greek student and is the most comprehensive as it has been applied to the entire New Testament. Runge's approach also focuses on the function of Greek connectives, forward-pointing devices, information structuring devices, and thematic highlighting devices.

The final two chapters give attention to the issues of Greek pronunciation and pedagogy. My own study of textual criticism leads me to appreciate Campbell's concern and conclusions about Greek pronunciation. He rejects the Erasmian system because Erasmus ultimately failed to appreciate the difference between Koine and Classical Greek. The orthographies found in Koine inscriptions and papyri suggest the pronunciation was similar to that of modern Greek. I tend to agree with Campbell's conclusion that Erasmus represents a misstep that puts Greek pedagogy increasingly out of step with Greek scholarship. Campbell discusses the age-old issue of how quickly to get students reading the Greek New Testament. He also addresses the pros and cons of using technology and immersion methods.

As a teacher of Greek, I appreciate all the issues that Campbell addresses. Many of

them will be familiar to those who have studied Greek, while others will seem quite foreign. Campbell succeeds in stimulating interest in these unfamiliar topics, and he provides lists of resources to further personal study. I only wish he had provided more detailed examples of the concepts he explains. Anyone familiar with Greek who desires to be a better New Testament exegete should seriously consider hearing what Campbell has to say.

- David Champagne, Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi

***American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea.* By John D. Wilsey. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015. 263 pages. Paperback, \$25.00.**

John D. Wilsey is assistant professor of history and Christian apologetics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He serves as associate director and senior research fellow for faith and liberty at the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Seminary. He holds a Ph.D. from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and previously authored *One Nation Under God: An Evangelical Critique of Christian America*.

In *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion*, Wilsey is not asking if the United States of America is an exceptional nation. The answer to this question is obvious—the nation’s status as a world power implies as much. With an historical approach but theological angle, Wilsey traces the history of belief in America as a nation uniquely privileged by God. He offers a two-part argument that is descriptive and prescriptive. He uses an analogy of a two-sided coin to represent American exceptionalism, open exceptionalism on one side and closed exceptionalism on the other. Descriptively, he argues that Americans have embraced closed exceptionalism for much of their history. Then, prescriptively, he promotes an open version of exceptionalism. The metaphorical coin should be face down on closed exceptionalism, but face up for open. He contends that closed exceptionalism leads to a form of nationalism that is ultimately antithetical to the Christian gospel, but open exceptionalism is compatible with Christianity and can foster justice and human flourishing.

Wilsey argues that Americans “have always seen themselves as exceptional” (16). He highlights colonial New England as foundational to this tradition. As Americans conquered the continent and survived a Civil War, history seemed to substantiate their belief that they were a privileged people before God, perhaps even a new Israel. As America became a world power in the twentieth century, could anyone deny their privileged status? Even today, Wilsey says, “the concept of exceptionalism remains the guiding paradigm in self-identification for most Americans” (17). However much history might seem, on the surface, to confirm American exceptionalism, Wilsey asks how this would fit theologically with a Christianity that consists of a multi-national community of faith? Wilsey admits that the classical version of exceptionalism, which includes a chosen status ideology,

divine commission, national innocence, and belief in land as sacred, is antithetical to the Christian gospel. This is closed exceptionalism. It amounts to national idolatry and leads to injustice. Sadly, this has characterized much of American history. However, this does not discount Wilsey's open exceptionalism. In the open version, America "strives to serve as a communal paragon of justice, freedom, and equality among nations" (19). In contrast with closed exceptionalism, open exceptionalism is cultural and political, but never salvific.

Using another analogy, Wilsey likens American exceptionalism to a two-trunked tree—one representing open exceptionalism and one closed, with a root system that is theological, political, exegetical, and historiographical. The argument becomes cumbersome at this point, but the scheme allows him to detail the complex origins of American exceptionalism. Exceptionalism proceeded from America's search for purpose and meaning in its infancy. Although the closed version proved to be racist and oppressive, he insists that open exceptionalism offers promise. The belief in national election extends as far back as the New England Puritans. Wilsey argues that this sentiment peaked in the early- to mid-nineteenth century. He distinguishes between nationalism, which might lead to injustice, and patriotism, which has the potential to foster justice. Prescriptively, he promotes patriotism as characteristic of open exceptionalism.

In the last century, American leaders pursued a world-wide mission against evil. In this, America represented light and their opponents characterized darkness. In the mid-twentieth century, former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles epitomized this ideology during the Cold War. Paired with this descriptive account, Wilsey argues that Americans should seek instead open exceptionalism, which seeks justice, but also allows critique. It does not seek to dominate, as does the closed form. Moreover, open exceptionalism denies the dualism of light and darkness which is inherent within the closed form.

Closed exceptionalism includes belief in American innocence. In this way, America is the embodiment of perfection and can do no wrong. Additionally, Americans have regarded the landscape itself as sacred. This idea has been instrumental to closed exceptionalism and its form of nationalism. Wilsey reins this in, however, claiming, "The land in America is indeed a gift from God, blessing bodies, minds and souls. But nothing sets American land apart in any theological sense" (190). The land is a blessing, but it is not sacred.

Closed exceptionalism rests on faulty history. Wilsey demonstrates this point by surveying homeschooling materials, which promote closed exceptionalism with shallow and sometimes inaccurate history. The material is generally Anglo-centric, nationalistic, and partisan, embodying the worst traits of closed exceptionalism.

In his final chapter, Wilsey focuses on open exceptionalism and presents a model for civil engagement. He uses W. E. B. Du Bois as an example of one who faithfully embodied this ethic in America, and Justin Martyr as an example of Christian engagement in antiquity. His model puts forth the best of American ideals, but also recognizes the hard truth of America's current faults and past evils.

Wilsey makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion on exceptionalism, civil religion, and patriotism. Wisley is concerned not only with tracing historical development, but also with offering a solution. He succeeds on both fronts. How viable his model of open exceptionalism is remains to be seen. The reader never has grounds to question Wilsey's affection for his country. His balance on this point is refreshing, since historians often lean to the extreme of either vilifying America or blindly exalting it. Wilsey embodies the approach that he promotes in this work. In addition to the main content of this work, I appreciate the aesthetic value of the book. Thought-provoking quotations frame the content for each chapter, and pictures add a visual dimension. Each chapter includes a section for further reading which offers the major secondary sources on each subtopic.

Furthermore, Wilsey's research is strong. His endnotes demonstrate depth both in primary and secondary sources. At times, however, he draws out illustrations at the expense of reinforcing his argument. One example is in chapter three, when he needlessly draws out background on Queen Mary who reigned in sixteenth-century England (92–94). However, this does allow him to develop a narrative. In general, he skillfully frames the historical context and background.

This book has a broad appeal. Scholars concerned with American exceptionalism and civil religion will need to consider Wisley's work, but it would also be suitable for history courses in colleges and seminaries. Even further, the author asks important questions that all Americans, but especially Christian Americans, should be asking. Evangelicals who increasingly feel tension in civil and cultural engagement should consider Wilsey's proposal of open exceptionalism. This approach is thoughtful, sophisticated, and also compatible with the Christian gospel.

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***Arminian and Baptist: Explorations in a Theological Tradition.* By J. Matthew Pinson. Nashville: Randall House, 2015. 262 pages. Paperback, \$22.99.**

J. Matthew Pinson is president of Welch College in Nashville, Tennessee. He previously served as pastor in churches in Alabama, Georgia, and Connecticut. He earned master's degrees from the University of West Florida and Yale and a doctorate from Vanderbilt.

This book is a collection of Pinson's previously published articles on the history and doctrine of Reformed Arminianism with the addition of one new chapter. Pinson's purpose in publishing these essays is to help "those who wish to understand the Arminian Baptist theological tradition and the unique stream of Arminian theology associated with it, thus complementing a growing body of literature from this theological vantage point" (xi).

The premise of chapter 1 is that Arminius has often been interpreted based on later

developments of Arminian theology rather than his own writing. Pinson first sets Arminius in his historical and theological context. He then argues that Arminius held Calvin in high regard and affirmed much of Reformed doctrine while discussing those areas where Arminius departed from Calvin. He concludes that “an examination of Arminius’s writings shows that his theology must be cleared of the charge of semi-Pelagianism, Pelagianism, and synergism” (27).

Chapter 2 discusses Arminius’s understanding of the atonement. Pinson draws from the writings of Arminius to present his view of God’s justice and mercy as well as to demonstrate how both can be satisfied through the threefold office of Christ.

Chapter 3 explores the influence of Arminius in the history of the General Baptists. Pinson presents the history and doctrinal development of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys and their movement from being “staunch Calvinist Puritans within the Church of England to anti-Calvinist, antipaedobaptist Separatists” (61). Helwys later departed from Smyth and was instrumental in establishing the General Baptist movement in England. Pinson discusses the different views on soteriology of these two men including original sin, depravity, human ability, free will, and justification. He argues for a close correspondence between the thinking of Arminius and Helwys concerning these subjects.

Chapter 4 continues with a discussion of the thinking of Helwys on determinism, the free will of Adam, the cause of reprobation, the fall of Adam, redemption in Christ, infant salvation, and the nature of free will. Pinson also presents Helwys’s reasons for rejecting unconditional election and affirming general redemption.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of “Thomas Grantham, the foremost English General Baptist of the latter half of the seventeenth century,” who “is the quintessential representative of Arminian Baptist theology, combining classical Arminian soteriology with a distinctly Baptist view of church and state” (101). John Goodwin was an Arminian Puritan who came to the end of his ministry roughly around the time Grantham came into prominence. Pinson compares the doctrines of these two men in order to compare the distinctiveness of Grantham’s soteriology with the Arminians of his time.

Chapter 6 presents the theology of John Wesley concerning his views on atonement, justification, and apostasy. This chapter follows from the previous because Goodwin’s legacy was “mediated through John Wesley” (106). The purpose of this chapter is to show that “a thoroughgoing understanding of Wesley’s soteriology will help to engender a clearer understanding of biblical and historic Free Will Baptist and Reformed Arminian understandings of salvation.” Furthermore, “This chapter will do that by examining Wesley’s views on atonement, justification, and apostasy, with special attention to the historical context of his thought” (130).

Chapter 7 is Pinson's argument that "it is consistent for one to be orthodox, confessional, Baptist, and Arminian" (154). He concludes with a statement on the importance of Arminian Baptists to apprehend their past, their connection with the "tradition of the Reformation, and the Reformation's rooting of itself in and appropriation of the consensual orthodoxy of the creeds, councils, and fathers of the early church" (173). He warns against watering down doctrine in order to make Christianity pleasing to the culture of the day.

The nature and structure of this book is both a strength and a weakness. Each chapter is a coherent whole that can stand on its own. This characteristic is inherent in the fact that each chapter was originally a journal article. However, the book as a whole can be seen as somewhat disjointed. If the author had set out to write on main subject matter of the book, one would expect to see a unified flow from beginning to end. At the end, however, Pinson does an admirable job of providing a unified framework for his previously published articles.

Pinson includes book reviews of *Introduction to Classical Arminianism*, by F. Leroy Forlines; *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, edited by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke; and *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, by Roger E. Olson. Also included are subject, name, and Scripture indices. One item that would have enhanced the book would be a bibliography of all the works cited in the various essays.

This book is highly recommended to those who desire to grow in their understanding of the underpinnings and support for a position as a Baptist that lies between Calvinism and classical Arminianism. This book is not an apologetic for Arminianism, but a study in the history that led to the doctrines formulated and promulgated by the General Baptists that led to today's evangelical Baptists. This work is not an extensive development of Arminianism in all its flavors and branches, but is a good introduction to the history of the branch that has come to be known as Reformed Arminianism. This book is recommended for the layman who desires to know more about Reformed Arminianism. Also, Pinson's study will benefit the scholar who is beginning to study some of the major figures that led to its development and the relevant doctrinal issues.

- Robert Littlefield, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana

***Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age.* Edited by Mark Dever and Jonathan Leeman. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. 432 pages. Hardcover, \$44.99.**

Mark Dever serves as senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C., and as president of 9Marks Ministries. He received a PhD from the University of Cambridge and has authored a number of works on ecclesiology, including *Nine Marks of a Healthy*

Church. Jonathan Leeman, who earned a PhD from the University of Wales, serves as an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church and his publications include *Political Church*. Contributors to the various chapters serve as either professors at Southern Baptist seminaries or as pastors of local Baptist congregations.

Dever and Leeman warn that our present age displays a strong suspicion toward authority. They lament this fact because they contend that exercising authority is not intrinsically immoral; indeed, they argue that Scripture outlines prescriptions for the proper use of authority within the local church. These prescriptions, they insist, constitute a divinely-given polity for the church.

Dever and Leeman offer this volume in the hope that Baptist churches might regain an interest in polity and thereby become healthier. All contributors write from their Baptist convictions, and they address matters related to congregationalism, the ordinances, church membership and discipline, the role of elders and deacons, and the manner in which churches should cooperate with other congregations.

The book begins by examining the foundational authority for a Baptist church, the local congregation. Though a church body relies on its elders to provide direction, the “last and final court of appeal in matters related to the local church is the congregation itself” (49). Michael A. G. Haykin provides a historical survey of congregationalism, noting that the model’s many proponents—the French Protestant Jean Morély, the early English Separatists, the Particular Baptists—all shared the conviction that congregationalism “best reflected the scriptural teaching” (27). Stephen and Kirk Wellum then explore that scriptural teaching, arguing that only Spirit-endowed members of the new covenant should comprise the local church body.

The ordinances assist the local church in commemorating and presenting the gospel. Both Thomas Schreiner’s survey of the scriptural doctrine of baptism and Shawn Wright’s historical analysis argue that the practice of believer’s baptism best displays the gospel because of its ability to preserve regenerate church membership. Also, the Lord’s Supper portrays the gospel by commemorating Christ’s work on the cross and by pointing to his future coming.

The topics of church membership and discipline receive attention because, as contributor John S. Hammett explains, Scripture’s “one another” commands reveal that the gospel call to community requires church members to fulfill certain spiritual and practical obligations to one another in the local church body. One such obligation is the responsibility to enact loving church discipline. Thomas White provides a helpful chapter that surveys the New Testament teaching on church discipline and then offers practical suggestions for church leaders regarding this neglected practice.

In a Baptist congregation, an elder or a group of elders provides direction for the congregation. Benjamin Merkle gives an overview of both the biblical qualifications for elders and the role that elders play in the life of the church. The office of deacon also merits attention, not because the deaconate functions with the same authority as an elder board but because deacons provide for the physical and practical needs of the congregation. Andrew Davis contributes a chapter on practical matters in deacon ministry.

Though each Baptist church remains autonomous, it can and should fellowship with other church bodies. Jonathan Leeman concludes this volume by offering theological justification for such cooperation. He explains that while churches together may unite together around a shared commitment to apostolic doctrine, each church should also individually unite around a shared commitment to the apostolic office. Leeman defines apostolic office according to the keys of church discipline found in Matt 16:18–19. He argues the keys are given to the local congregation alone. His approach provides for broad fellowship because churches may partner with other bodies that hold to the Christian faith while maintaining congregational authority. The authority to exercise the keys of the apostolic office resides within the local congregation and not an external religious body.

In terms of critique, a few weaknesses do merit mention. Not many contemporary Baptists in America are accustomed to the plurality of elders model presented in this volume. For this reason, the editors would have better served churches interested in transitioning to such a model if they had included information on how such a transition might occur as well as advice on how an elder board best functions. Also, the editors could have offered more space to voices who reject the concept of a plurality of elders in order to accommodate the diversity present in Baptist life.

In addition, contrary to the suggestion found in Shawn D. Wright's chapter on baptism, this reviewer is not convinced that figures such as Tertullian offer a clear example of contemporary Baptist convictions regarding the ordinance of baptism. Tertullian did not embrace infant baptism, but he believed in baptismal regeneration. He opposed infant baptism in part because he feared that children might sin after receiving baptism and lose their salvation. His ecclesiology deserves attention, but a more complete explanation of his views is appropriate lest readers wrongly infer that Tertullian's views on these matters were like contemporary Baptists.

Still, this book should be commended for several reasons. It presents a concise yet rich defense of key Baptist distinctives. Also, it deliberately focuses on practical application; chapters often feature suggestions for church leaders who may wish to enact or recover these distinctives within their congregations. It is a significant and helpful introduction to Baptist ecclesiology, and its strengths far outweigh its weaknesses.

Church leaders will receive the greatest benefit from reading it. Should they seek to enact

the convictions presented here, their churches will display the gospel in a rich manner that is contrary to the anti-authoritarian trend in contemporary culture. Seminary students and scholars interested in ecclesiology will also find it helpful. The book will serve in many ways to introduce readers to the more detailed works on ecclesiology authored by many of its contributors.

- David Mark Rathel, St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, Scotland

***The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement.* By Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. 356 pages. Hardcover, \$39.99.**

The Baptist Story provides the reader with an expansive survey of the more than four hundred years of Baptist history. Told chronologically and in three major sections, each author writes in the area of his expertise. Haykin writes the section concerning the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Baptists, Chute the section on nineteenth-century Baptists, and Finn on the twentieth century and beyond. The book concludes with a chapter on Baptist beliefs.

In a mere 356 pages, the authors manage to tell the entire Baptist story. This is no easy feat. Told in almost a story manner, the authors depict the rise of the Baptists from John Smyth in seventeenth-century England to John Piper in twenty-first century America. The text highlights important individuals, theological issues, confessions of faith, the development of associations and conventions, and the inevitable schisms that haunt the denomination. Of particular strength are the sections concerning the first British Baptists, Baptists and religious liberty, Black Baptists, Baptists and the slavery issue, Baptists roles in World War II, and the 1979 Conservative Resurgence.

While dedicating the majority of the text to Baptists in England and the United States, the authors do a sufficient job of telling the story of their brethren in other parts of the world. Each of section is well-researched, well-written, and fairly represented the person or event. In particular, the balanced depiction of the 1979 Conservation Resurgence merits praise. It is rare to read a book that describes such a volatile event without praising one side and demonizing the other. To add color to the text, the authors provide boxed sections with primary source material germane to the topic. The last section makes this book different from any other Baptist history book. The authors do a masterful job of depicting the commonalities of what distinguishes Baptists from other Christian denominations. It would be difficult to argue with any of their findings, and this section alone is worth the price of the book.

Along with these praiseworthy aspects, however, some puzzling elements detract from the book. The authors provide a bibliography at the end of each chapter, but there are no

internal notations. In the introduction, the authors state that footnotes are not incorporated to preserve word count and because it was written from their personal perspective. However, direct quotations within parenthesis are not noted. Their perspective is important, but for a book designed as a textbook, the inability for students to follow a direct quote to the original document is a major flaw. The authors also choose to provide birth and death dates for some individuals but not others. In addition, other than Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, the role of women in Baptist life deserves more attention. Despite these few drawbacks, *The Baptist Story* is a strong book, accurate, fair, and well written. The authors tell the story so well that it is difficult to put the book down. It adds much to Baptist history. I recommend this book, and it should find its way to every Baptist's personal library.

- Joseph Early Jr., *Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, Kentucky*

***Baptists in America: A History.* By Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 329 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95.**

In *Baptists in America: A History*, Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins offer the academic community one of the best Baptist history texts in recent years. Concentrating on the American context, the authors provide more than enough background of the earliest English Baptists to bridge the gap to America where the text begins in earnest.

Placed within the broader context of national events, the theme of *Baptists in America* centers on how Baptists evolved from persecuted, seventeenth-century dissenters to that of a nearly-established church in the South by the mid-twentieth century. All of the text is located within this overarching theme. The research concerning Roger Williams, John Clarke, Obadiah Holmes, Isaac Backus, and others who stood up to the established church and fought for religious liberty is well delineated. The Baptist dissemination from New England to Charleston, South Carolina, and Sandy Creek, North Carolina, demonstrates not only Baptist growth, but also how they often differed over *adiaphora* issues, but never over matters such as the centrality of Scripture, believers' baptism, and religious liberty. The portrayals of J. P. Boyce, E. Y. Mullins, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Walter Rauschenbusch, and many others provide insight into what theological matters demanded attention in their respective eras.

The authors also provide in-depth analysis of the developing importance of Baptist higher education, slavery, reaction to evolution, biblical criticism, confessions of faith, fundamentalism, and the Civil Rights Movement. Moreover, the examination of the 1979 Southern Baptist Convention Resurgence is recounted in an evenhanded manner. This feat is rarely attempted or accomplished. The changes at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1993 provide valuable information on how these events helped shape the Southern Baptist Convention's theological agenda as it entered the twenty-first century. Black Baptists

also receive attention and the commentary provides a wealth of information. In particular, the examination of Black Gospel music is fascinating. The authors also provide valuable material on Primitive, Landmark, Independent, and a myriad of other Baptist entities and how they fit into the larger Baptist story.

There are no major flaws in this text. The authors aim to tell the story of American Baptists and do so in a scholarly yet accessible manner. Virtually all significant content is included. Also, the bibliography is extensive, and the internal notation easily allows readers to locate the primary source for further information. I highly recommend *Baptists in America: A History* with no reservations to Baptists who want to know their history as well as to non-Baptists who want to know about the denomination.

- Joseph Early Jr., *Campbellsville University, Campbellsville, Kentucky*

***Beginning Biblical Hebrew: A Grammar and Illustrated Reader.* By John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013. 332 pages. Paperback, \$40.00.**

In the past few decades, publishers have produced a phenomenal number of Hebrew grammars. The number of new students has not overwhelmed the academy to the point of needing new and better learning tools and a glut of new grammars. Nor has our knowledge of Hebrew grammar developed, for the most part, to the point of needing publishers to produce a rapidly increasing number of textbooks. So why then are so many Hebrew grammars emerging on the market? And what does the present volume add to the mix?

John Cook and Robert Holmstedt explain that their new textbook arose out of the same situation as most others of this recent generation – “the authors’ dissatisfaction with the available grammars” (9). While the authors state that the available grammars did not satisfy them and motivated them to produce their own grammar, the reader may infer another factor. Language curriculum and pedagogy, more than in other disciplines, depends heavily on the pedagogical philosophy of the professor. The student learning outcomes and ordering of material can vary greatly from class to class. Furthermore, as Cook and Holmstedt point out in their preface, most other Hebrew textbooks lean strongly on a grammar translation model. The authors of this new grammar sought to incorporate new ideas – at least new to the study of biblical languages – from the science of second language acquisition, and also to avoid the large amounts of detailed grammatical information and metalinguistic jargon of other grammars, borne out of a change of aim. The authors do not want primarily for students to be able to translate a text—in this case the Hebrew Bible—but rather to understand a language system.

Did the authors succeed with their goals? Let us look first at the presentation of the book. The book bears two covers with slightly different versions of the title. The front (left-hand) cover contains the title with the words “A Grammar” in the subtitle in larger font than the rest of the subtitle. The back (right-hand) cover again contains the title but with the words “Illustrated Reader” in larger font. The grammar section of the book runs left-to-right while the reader follows a Hebrew model, running right-to-left. The two meet in the middle. The grammar section includes lengthy and important appendices. The grammar section proper runs to 139 pages; the appendices contain 93 pages; the reader comes to 90 pages. Each section is separately paginated.

The grammar lessons contain a striking amount of white space. The student may need the white space for notes since each lesson contains sparse information and needs to be supplemented with material from the appendices or from the instructor. Within the 139 pages of grammar, the authors have separated 50 lessons, so each lesson averages between two to three pages. Thus the authors have pared down the language into small bits and confined each lesson to one discrete topic.

As mentioned above, the authors have relegated much crucial information to the appendices. The appendices contain all detailed information concerning phonology and morphology as well as all information about irregular forms. Each lesson presents a topic in very simple fashion with a series of footnotes sending the reader to the appendices for more information. This method of dividing the information has clear benefits since it allows for concise lessons without bogging the student down with crushing detail. Problems occur, however, when the authors apply the system inconsistently. For example, lesson eight is one of the briefer lessons, covering the definite article and interrogative particle on one sparsely filled page. The authors describe the form of the definite article as the *he* with a following *dagesh chazaq* (*forte*). The appendix contains the fuller description explaining the problems related to guttural letters in the noun, but no note in lesson 8 sends the reader to the appendix. Likewise, lesson nine shows the process of attaching the inseparable preposition, but no note links to the fuller and necessary explanation given in the appendix. One hopes the authors will be able to correct such oversights in a later printing.

Some readers may have significant problems with certain other aspects of the grammar. Cook and Holmstedt have espoused a view of Hebrew word order that has placed them at odds with the traditional presentation of Biblical Hebrew as a VSO language. They have presented their understanding of the SVO character of the language has been presented at length.¹ Currently no consensus exists in the scholarly community on the question of word order in Biblical Hebrew, but a prospective user of the textbook should understand the position of the authors and how it might affect issues of sentence structure, word order, and

¹See, e.g., Robert D. Holmstedt, “Word Order and Information Structure in Ruth and Jonah: A Generative-Typological Analysis,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 54.1 (Spring 2009): 111–39.

information load.

A great advance in the book comes in the nature of the practice and written work in each chapter. Traditional grammars emphasize translation from Hebrew to English in the written work. Some will include sections of English to Hebrew translation. Cook and Holmstedt move yet a step further by asking the student to create Hebrew phrases and sentences on their own. In addition a good number of assignments ask the students to converse with one another in Biblical Hebrew. Some may find this kind of productive, compositional work problematic. The authors have included this kind of work here, however, because of the great benefit in such work for the acquisition of language as shown by even a cursory familiarity with the work in second language acquisition (SLA) theory.

Beginning Biblical Hebrew enters exciting and largely untapped areas of Hebrew pedagogy. Many teachers of Biblical Hebrew will be uncomfortable and perhaps even opposed to the pedagogy contained in the book. On the other hand, many will feel that the authors did not go far enough in creating a textbook that takes full advantage of the work being done in other communication learning approaches such as Total Physical Response, for example. This textbook advances pedagogy, and likely the discussion concerning language pedagogy to such a degree, however, that we can forgive any particular shortcomings.

- Todd Borger, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

***The Chosen People: Election, Paul and Second Temple Judaism.* By A. Chadwick Thornhill. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015. 288 pages. Paperback, \$35.00.**

A. Chadwick Thornhill (PhD, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary) is chair of theological studies and assistant professor of apologetics and biblical studies for Liberty University School of Divinity in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Chad Thornhill in *The Chosen People* seeks to discover “how Jewish authors spoke of election and how this background knowledge relates to Paul” (16). First, he examines the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, and the Dead Sea Scrolls for references to election. Next, he compares those texts with selected Pauline texts to determine whether they influence the apostle’s view of election. Did Paul see election as divinely determined or did Paul base election on human responsibility? Thornhill concludes that Judaism understood that God elected Israel, but also that the true people of God were those Jews who individually chose to obey the Torah and the stipulations of the covenant. This literature shaped Paul’s understanding of election. Thornhill contends that Paul’s view of election was a both/and perspective of divine initiative and human responsibility (211ff).

Thornhill describes his purpose and methodology clearly in chapter 1. He positions himself within the “remnant-oriented and conditional” group.¹ Thornhill’s book is commendable in its vast research of the primary literature of Second Temple Judaism. He has been critiqued for omitting some key OT texts; such were outside the scope and purpose of his study.² The author’s research affords the reader access to the topic of election in this vast body of intertestamental literature and shows how it intersects with primary Pauline texts.

In chapter 2 Thornhill shows how Judaism understood election of the individual in relation to corporate responsibility. Though he admits the distinctions of individual and collective are artificial, this groundwork is necessary for grasping how Judaism viewed collective responsibility of each individual to the larger group. The author sees these categories reflected in Paul’s thought patterns (52). The revelatory work of God in Christ is an added dimension in Paul’s thought (57).

Thornhill in chapter 3 moves from individual election to corporate perspectives on how Judaism defined the “people of God.” Judaism used corporate metaphors and motifs like the vine/plant motif, houses, remnants, and the like, to describe the collective nature of Israel’s election (70). These corporate metaphors like “first fruits,” plants, vineyard, and foundation imagery appear in Paul’s discussions on the people of God. A collective emphasis demands individual “right behavior” (94) and separation from the world. Thus, there is “*continuity* between Israel as God’s chosen people and those who are his people through the Messiah-from-Israel” (94, emphasis his). Paul uses similar terms like “elect,” “called,” “beloved,” and “election,” which all refer to God’s people as they are defined by God’s Messiah (98).

In chapter 4 Thornhill examines the criteria in Judaism for who was “in” and who was “out.” All writers in Judaism viewed the Torah as central (146), but the implicit and/or explicit criteria varied among writers. Although Judaism displayed a wide variance in criteria for determining who was “in” or “out,” Thornhill argues for strong agreement among them that “being Jewish did not mean one belonged among the people of God” (135). Contra Sanders, a large portion of ethnic Jews were thought to be “out.” Thornhill views Paul’s argument in Galatians on who was “in” and who was “out” as the apostle’s way of “joining in the same theological soiree as he lays out his own understanding of what defines the people of God” (135). Though Paul obviously diverges significantly from his contemporaries, he was

¹The other two “camps” are: G. F. Moore’s “national and unconditional view” in *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (1927–1930; reprinted, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997). E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985) also holds this view; and Joseph Bonsirven’s “national and cooperative” view in *Palestinian Judaism in the Time of Jesus Christ* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1984). Thornhill believes Sanders pushed the pendulum too far. The “camp” designations are Thornhill’s.

²Thornhill entertains key OT texts as they appear in the NT text and when appropriate for the study. Full treatment of OT theology on election and/or the treatment of how the NT uses the OT are beyond Thornhill’s purposes here.

informed by the literature of his day. Thornhill's argument seems a bit forced here. Even Sanders recognized that by not upholding the law, such behavior would result in being "out." Second, is Paul trying to join the ancient debate or might he truly be fighting proponents of a "different gospel" (Gal 1:6–12)?

In chapter 5 Thornhill discusses the issue of Jewish and Gentile inclusion and/or exclusion in Judaism. His arguments include frequent challenges to E. P. Sanders's conclusions from the primary literature (155) that all Jews are included (elect). Thornhill (170) finds some evidence (albeit not abundant) suggesting eschatological conversion of the Gentiles (Tobit, Wisdom of Ben Sira, *Sibylline Oracles*, 1 *Enoch*). He maintains that Paul's discussion of the place of Jews and Gentiles in the people of God derives from this context. Again, this argument seems forced based upon the tenuous evidence presented. Would not a stronger argument be found in Thornhill's conclusions from his next chapter, that Gentiles inclusion is consistent with God's covenant with Abraham?

Thornhill offers a strong exegetical argument from Romans 3:21–4:17. He garners support from N. T. Wright that Paul has "re-defined" election (174). Jesus's obedience ("faithfulness of Jesus Christ") brought a significant shift in God's plan for humanity. The "works of the law" no longer constitute the marker of God's people. These themes constitute a renewal of the covenant *with* Israel and are consistent with God's covenant purpose *through* Israel to bring about the new covenant for the inclusion of Gentile and Jew alike. Paul maintains the covenant of Abraham has come to fruition apart from the law, just as God had intended (178). Paul refused to define the boundaries of the elect to a limited, specific group. Rather, he sees consistency with God's original purpose in his covenant with Abraham "to bless the nations and bring resurrection life of his son to humanity" (185).

In chapter 6 Thornhill pulls his thesis together in discussion of divine determinism and human responsibility. He demonstrates both of these perspectives in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. Thus, he contends that Paul's perspective in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1:3–2:10 is one of "Both/And" (211ff). There is divine initiative *and* human responsibility. Paul is asserting both realities. Thornhill does not mean "that Paul understands divine and human action to be occurring on the same level or to the same efficacy. But neither should we take Paul as asserting that God acts in such a unilateral manner so as to make the presence of human responsibility either illusory or meaningless" (212).

Thornhill in chapter 7 states his case calling for a "rereading of Romans 8:26–11:36" set against a Jewish background (229). He contends Paul's concern is for the "fate of Israel and inclusion of the Gentiles" against the idea of double predestination (229). The election of Israel is not nationalistic and the "boundary marker" of God's people is now faith in Jesus the Messiah (253). The author concludes his book with chapter 8. He offers a recap of ideas and suggestions for further discussion.

Thornhill's work deserves consideration by pastors, Bible students, and anyone interested in the current debate on election. His copious content footnotes provide the reader with ready access to the theological contenders of all views on election. His method of using the primary literature as reference for the doctrinal study of election is commendable. Regardless of the reader's theological persuasion on election, Thornhill's work is highly recommended for this subject.

- Craig Price, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Christian Bioethics: A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families.* By C. Ben Mitchell and D. Joy Riley. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014. 207 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.**

C. Ben Mitchell holds a PhD in philosophy with a concentration in medical ethics from the University of Tennessee. Currently, he is the provost and chief academic officer at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. D. Joy Riley is board-certified in internal medicine, and earned a master's in bioethics from Trinity International University. She currently serves as the director of the Tennessee Center for Bioethics and Culture.

Christian Bioethics is a recent volume in the B&H Studies in Biblical Ethics series which "aims to promote understanding and respect for the reality and relevance of God's moral truth—what Francis Schaeffer called 'true truth'—in contrast to truth claims that are false or distorted" (xi). The book executes this task very well for its intended audience.

The book stands out due to three unique features. The first is the background of the co-authors. Specifically, the two co-authors represent two different fields of study, both of which have direct and decisive bearing on the topic. Mitchell's training as a philosopher and ethicist provides insight into the logic and linguistic arguments and nuances, while Riley's training in bioethics combined with her MD gives her a distinct vantage to explain crucial elements that are not always covered in such books (which are often written by ethicists who do not practice medicine). The second feature is the nature of the authors' interaction with each other. After setting up the topic for each chapter, the authors engage in an extended dialogue, with each weighing in from his or her field of expertise. At times this clarifies an issue, and at other times it amplifies a point. In each dialogue, both scholars enrich and enlighten the other's comments, complementing what the other has contributed. Third, each chapter begins with a case study. The case-study approach is not unique to works on ethics, but the authors embrace the model fully, following the case study to the end. Indeed, the case studies are not mere illustrations used by the authors as a prop to set aside and then explore other issues or merely to make a tangential point. Rather, the case studies are integral to the chapters and to the overall aim of each section.

Beyond the form and structure of the work, the content is excellent and clearly fulfills the aim advertised in the subtitle, “A Guide for Pastors, Health Care Professionals, and Families.” The book is divided into four unequal parts: Part I: Christian Bioethics; Part II: Taking Life; Part III: Making Life; Part IV: Remaking/Faking Life. The authors credit the memorable (and rhyming) titles of the final three parts to Nigel M. de S. Cameron, one of Riley’s mentors at Trinity International University (xiii).

The authors set the scene in the introduction by describing an infertile couple’s dilemma, and after outlining the book’s contents they return to the couple and conclude the introduction by setting a goal for themselves and their readers: “Our prayer is that by the time you have read this book you will have a better idea how you would help Phil and Sara and the other people whose cases you will find in this volume” (5). The authors go even further by unabashedly stating the rationale behind the book. After clearly subscribing to the “all truth is God’s truth” view, Mitchell and Riley explain that they “see science and faith, medicine and theology as friends, not enemies” (5). This explains their approach, which is further evidenced by the “common ground” dynamic between them in the pages that follow. They do not engage in a dialogue to show the flaws in one field or another. Instead, the co-authorship approach exhibits their appreciation for one another, because they are not in combat but in collaboration.

In “Part I: Christian Bioethics,” the authors open the discussion by focusing on the morality of medicine. Chapter 2 sets up the purpose and payoff of the book by framing the challenges inherent in bioethics, covering the ancient challenges, up to the twenty-first century. Part I clearly foreshadows the book as one that refuses to settle for easy answers to simple questions.

The authors cover euthanasia, assisted suicide, and abortion in “Part II: Taking Life.” Chapter 3 focuses on the sanctity of human life and abortion. The authors cover a range of important questions, including: “Under what circumstances, if any, can abortion be morally justified?” “Do the doctors have the moral authority to end the life of an unborn child?” and “What biblical norms or principles, if any, apply to medical technologies that did not exist when the Bible was written?” (47). This sample shows the authors’ refusal to evade some of the most challenging questions raised in bioethics. Chapter 4, on human dignity and dying, covers a range of questions, including, “Is it ever right to remove life-sustaining treatment like a ventilator” (68), as well as a helpful taxonomy of suffering (79–81).

In “Part III: Making Life,” Mitchell and Riley turn their attention to the ethical boundaries and moral quandaries involved in procreation technologies. Chapter 5 covers infertility and Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART). In chapter 6, the authors explain the ethical dilemmas and life-saving potentialities of organ donation and transplantation. To conclude Part III, Mitchell and Riley discuss in chapter 7 the tantalizing and (arguably) terrifying prospect of clones and human-animal hybrids.

As an appropriate final piece of the bioethics puzzle, chapter 8 introduces readers to a more recent and still-emerging area in the field. The chapter stands alone in “Part IV: Remaking/Faking Life” and is devoted to life-extension technologies, cutting-edge advancements which are heightening the stakes (and the longevity) of bioethical issues.

The concluding chapter ends with a stirring reminder of the stakes. Though some current bioethical dilemmas may subside, new ones will emerge. The combination of budgetary constraints, increasing costs, and the waning influence of Judeo-Christian values and Hippocratic virtues are poised (collectively) to increase the pressure on the vast and complex institutions and agencies (public and private) involved in health care. The looming threat is that the tangled issues of health care will turn out to be a spreadsheet-driven, bean-counting, budget-oriented “problem to solve” through mathematical formulae and economic prognostications. Mitchell and Riley have set out to persuade readers that the issues are not primarily reducible to calculations and finances. Rather, these issues involve humans who are made in God’s image and as such demand our highest moral standards and ethical judgments in line with God’s revealed truth.

Two indices (name and subject) help make the book user-friendly, and all acronyms and foreign terms are transliterated and explained. The book aims perfectly at the stated target audience: pastors, health care professionals, and families. These groups should read this engaging work. The chapters are not needlessly long, the verbiage is clear, and the sources are a helpful mix of ancient and contemporary sources, including the Bible and websites. The tone is both conversational and authoritative. Regardless of whether readers agree with the authors at each point, this work is essential for evangelicals interested in ethics, medicine, or both.

- Ryan A. Neal, *Anderson University, Anderson, South Carolina*

***Christian Faith: Dogmatics in Outline.* By Brian A. Gerrish. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015. 400 pages. Paperback: \$50.00.**

Brian Gerrish is an honored scholar in the field of theology. He is John Nuveen Professor Emeritus of Historical Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Distinguished Service Professor of Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary. His books include: *Saving and Secular Faith: An Invitation to Systematic Theology* and *The Pilgrim Road: Sermons on Christian Life*.

Gerrish attempts to make “a contribution to the disciplines of historical theology and dogmatic theology” (xi), as he addresses how the church has understood certain doctrines throughout its history. Gerrish believes reputable dogmatics revises and reinterprets

doctrine. In this sense, the Chicago theologian is a revisionist. Gerrish's writing is thought-provoking, clear in his expression, and of a unique persuasive tone. The book's outline focuses on contrasting and balancing the thoughts of John Calvin (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (*Christian Faith*).

The structure of the work is simple, but its content is not simplistic. The major parts of *Christian Faith* include Creation and Redemption. Within those major headings, Gerrish provides discourse on God, certain christological aspects, the Trinity, and eschatology. In addition, Gerrish approaches doctrinal items concerning Christian living such as faith, justification, and baptism. The chapters are not exhaustive. However, Gerrish usually includes valuable historical information dealing with the treatment of the doctrine as discussed throughout the last two millennia, as well as subtle transitions into his own opinions and evaluations.

Gerrish believes in modernity and thus favors a modern "voice" that attempts to balance the Christian faith and modern thought. He claims the enemy is not the modern mind, but sometimes it is the perplexed believer in the pews or, worse, in the pulpit (32). Unfortunately, Gerrish is highly critical of believers whose religious experience is led by a sense of piety (precritical interpretation of Scripture) instead of a modern worldview. That is, the worldview that integrates the developments of science regarding creation (theories of human origins) and theology (biblical criticism) in general.

Gerrish endorses a non-traditional conception of God as Creator. Gerrish asserts a created moral order, but separates himself from the belief that God caused the world to exist out of nothing. For the author, God as Creator should be understood as *a* or *the* "creative principle of cosmic order" (45). The reason Christians refer to God as "Father Almighty" and "Creator" is simply because this "creative principle" acts in ways that remind one of parental care.

Gerrish's heart might appear to be orthodox in regards to saving faith through Christ. However, he affirms a theory of human origin divorced from Scripture. He does not attempt to balance the topics of the age of humanity and age of the earth with God's Word. For the author, humans simply come from apes, though now the theory is highly discredited by the scientific community (61). Gerrish's "modern" understanding of the doctrine of Creation and God leads him to also endorse a distorted concept of sin (77). As Gerrish believes in "possibilities" of the "stories" of creation and the first sin (85), his doctrine of sin is amalgamated with modernity including depth psychology, Freudianism, and existentialism. With a persuasive tone, he attempts to make readers accept that sin is simply "mistrust." However, the traditional view encompasses more than mistrust, and sees sin as disobedience and rebellion against God.

To an extent, conservative Christians might accept the scholarly and sophisticated flavor

of Gerrish's work. However, as the author attempts to prove that Jesus is distinct from God, not as a different person in the Trinity, but as a lesser being, Gerrish fails to connect with conservatives. According to Gerrish, the doctrine of the equality of Jesus with God is a dogma created by the tradition of believers and revision of dogma by church councils. His argument is that all the passages mentioning or implying that Christ is God are permeated by hermeneutical and textual difficulties. The only acceptable one might be John 20:28, but even this passage might be underlined and influenced by Greek culture and John's desire to make Christ known as God and Messiah (137–44). In his attempt to revise the doctrine, Gerrish explicitly portrays Christ as less than God. Believing that Christ's equality with God is a dogmatic that has been inserted by the church's interpretation and tradition without scriptural support is an amazing assertion.

Gerrish's challenges to persons of different theological persuasion than him are not all negative. When discussing the problem of evil in the thought of Calvin and Schleiermacher, Gerrish asks, "Is God is the author of sin?" (94). Gerrish gives fresh answers to the problem of evil encouraging believers to ask different questions. Rather than ask, "Why did God allow this unfortunate event?", the Christian should understand science and ask, "What are the natural causes that brought about this unfortunate event?" (102).

Gerrish's work is valuable for pastors, theologians, and congregations as they exercise their faith. Conservative readers will not agree with many of Gerrish's arguments, but he presents an interesting discussion of the tenacity of faith. "Come what may" ought to be the mindset of believers serving God, regardless of personal harm or discomfort in this world (105–6).

On another positive note, Gerrish understands that theology and dogmatics are a never-ending academic exercise. He clarifies that he is not attempting to provide the final answer or revision (105). Moreover, Gerrish corrects historical and theological misconceptions of Calvin and Schleiermacher as his discussion centers on those two theologians. His corrective agenda is also seen in his treatment of other theologians, such as Luther, Barth, and Brunner.

I would not recommend *Christian Faith* to a Southern Baptist audience. The author clearly works from a liberal platform. For him, faith is not traditional trust in the God who created the heavens and the earth and who came in the form of man to save sinners. Faith is "but discernment of an orderly pattern in events that both sustains human existence and makes moral demands on us" (211). Gerrish might defend this definition of faith as a semantic problem for those of simple faith, but those of simple faith will wonder: Where is God in this picture?

Another reason for my evaluation is that the work is ecumenical. The ecumenical agenda is sensed from the beginning, initially geared *benignly* to the realm of Protestantism in the explanations of doctrines accepted by most Protestants. Nonetheless, after 200 pages of

hints, Gerrish fully discloses his invitation to dialogue on the subject of *other ways* to be saved through the “great religions” of the world (211). The author endorses a “hypothetical pluralism,” which is his manner of saying that he believes pluralism enhances ecumenical dialogue. He does not, however, want to disclose that he is a pluralist “Christian” (211). He is apparently not satisfied with the maxim Jesus gave of himself in John 14:6.

Finally, for a theologian of Gerrish’s reputation, readers might be disappointed to see an ambiguous discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity, not to say poor in argument. Basing his understanding on Augustine’s “Love Trinity,” Gerrish attempts to remove all philosophical presuppositions or preunderstandings of the doctrine as it has been relayed throughout the centuries of Christian history. The author does not affirm the traditional view of the Trinity as God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The end of the work might leave readers startled, for the author claims that eschatology is simply an “energizing ideal” and believing in a renewal of the whole creation is “absurd” (318).

For those interested in liberal excursions in dogmatic theology, Gerrish’s work will be appreciated. Others who expect conservative and traditional theological views will be left unsatisfied.

- Luis Munoz Bueno, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***The Community of Jesus: A Theology of the Church.* Edited by Kendell H. Easley & Christopher W. Morgan. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013. 288 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.**

One of the greatest needs of the contemporary American church is a robust ecclesiology. This contribution provides a Baptist account of the church from multiple perspectives. The editors, Kendell Easley and Christopher Morgan, are professors at Union University and California Baptist University, respectively.

The first five chapters of the book focus on the biblical theology of the church. Paul House begins with Old Testament foundations. Though he covers some New Testament texts and sometimes focuses on the individual believer rather than the corporate life of Israel in the Old Testament, this is useful background.

Andreas Köstenberger’s discussion of the Gospels examines each book individually and shows sensitivity to their diverse theological emphases. Easley’s chapter discusses the church in Acts and Revelation. This pairing seems forced; arguably, Acts should be paired with Luke, and Revelation with John’s writings. In addition, Easley’s approach is more a lexical study of New Testament terms for believers and the church rather than a full biblical theology.

David Dockery’s chapter on Paul’s theology of the church is helpful, though there are

some gaps. He does not deal with the relationship between Israel and the church in Romans 9–11, for example. The Israel-church question is mentioned in several other chapters, so the absence here is magnified. Finally, Ray Van Neste surveys the General Epistles. He surveys each letter, though more selective focus might have been helpful given the scant material in several of these books. In addition, the parallel doctrinal categories for many of the books potentially diminishes the diverse voices of these books. Nevertheless, he points in an overall helpful direction.

Before describing the remainder of the book, a few general comments on the biblical theology section seem warranted. The biblical-theological methodology varies, which makes for some inconsistency across the chapters. There is also sometimes a lack of clarity in distinguishing between the individual and corporate. If the church were simply an aggregate of saved individuals, then a lack of distinction would be appropriate. But if there is something unique about our corporate identity and life (that is, if there is really a distinct doctrine of the church), then it might be helpful to keep the individual and corporate more discrete. In American contexts, especially, where our individualistic culture pushes in that way already, the corporate dimensions of the biblical witness are too often muted. My preference would be to highlight this corporate reality more consistently.

The remaining chapters cover other perspectives, though it is worth noting that the chapters on biblical theology outweigh these remaining four chapters. James Patterson provides a nice survey of the doctrine of the church in history. While history is not normative (nor does he appeal to it in that way), historical issues provide a helpful context for contemporary discussions.

Steve Wellum's contribution is primarily an exposition of the Progressive Covenantal understanding of ecclesiology. For those familiar with *Kingdom Through Covenant* (co-authored with Peter Gentry), this chapter offers a reprise of some of that work's argument. Wellum argues for this third way, situated between Covenant and Dispensational theologies. Because the chapter does not emphasize eschatology, the implications of his position are especially used to defend regenerate church membership in contrast to Covenant Theology. Although this was the only systematic contribution in the book, the direction of the chapter meant a number of topics were never addressed from a systematic perspective (e.g., church government, polity, the ordinances, discipline, and the church's relationship to culture). Perhaps another chapter should have been included to develop more fully a systematic doctrine of the church.

Christopher Morgan focuses on "The Church and God's Glory." After preliminary discussion of God's glory in general, he ends with an encouraging reminder that the church has a cosmic and eternal role in bringing glory to God. He encourages the church today to glorify God by exhibiting unity, holiness, truth, and love. The final chapter by Bruce Riley Ashford connects the church to the mission of God. This is a chapter from which almost

every pastor, church leader, and church member could benefit.

The volume has some undeniable strengths. The essays develop arguments in support of key Baptist themes such as the importance of the local church, believer's baptism, and regenerate church membership. Also, the intended balance among biblical, systematic, historical, and missional theology permits the book to address ecclesiology from various perspectives, each of which sheds light on the topic in fresh and helpful ways.

Even so, the book suffers from some defects common to the anthology genre. The articles vary in depth and quality, and sometimes there is overlap as different authors circle back to shared themes. I am also not sure that the heavy emphasis on biblical theology leaves room for a full statement of the other perspectives. What is more puzzling is the absence of several issues of debate within Baptist (and especially Southern Baptist) circles. For example, there is no discussion of the current debate on elder-led Baptist churches (versus a more direct congregationalism). There are two brief mentions of elder-led churches, but no attempt is made to show what this implies about current polity debates. Terms like congregationalism and polity are mentioned only in the chapter on the history of the doctrine. Also, there is no mention of what was, in my Baptist youth, one of the pillars of Baptist distinctiveness: the autonomy of the local church. How the church relates to larger bodies (whether denomination, convention, or association) is a matter of some significance. Despite brief mention in the introduction, issues like the ordinances, ecumenism, and church discipline are discussed in passing rather than in depth.

For some, the lack of any sustained discussion of eschatological views in the church might be problematic as well. The millennium and millennial views are mentioned directly only on a single page (189). Also, there is no discussion of the church's role in the future. For that reason, it seems there is a tilt toward amillennialism in the book, whether intended or not. In addition, there is a consistent refrain in most chapters that the church replaces Israel (see Wellum's essay in particular). Although this is a nuanced supercessionism, it is one nonetheless. This is, of course, a contested issue (and one with which I disagree). While those conclusions do not necessarily detract from the book's helpful insights, I suspect this trajectory will make the book less useful or attractive to some readers. A slightly more nuanced approach in a few places might have broadened its reach.

These criticisms do not mean the book is of no value, but they do suggest limits on its use as a primary text on ecclesiology, even (or perhaps especially) within a Baptist context. Given the dearth of emphasis on serious and thoughtful ecclesiology within evangelicalism, we should welcome and value every contribution, even when we could hope for more. For those willing to mine the book for the insights throughout, this is a helpful first step in growing our understanding of and love for the church.

- Carl Sanders, Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

***Convictional Civility: Engaging the Culture in the 21st Century, Essays in Honor of David S. Dockery.* Edited by C. Ben Mitchell, Carla D. Sanderson, and Gregory Alan Thornbury. Nashville: B&H, 2015. 208 pages. Hardcover, \$29.99.**

Convictional Civility: Engaging the Culture in the 21st Century is a collection of 12 short tributes and 10 significant essays written in honor of David S. Dockery, a prominent figure both in Baptist life and in Christian higher education. After 18 years as president of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, Dockery is now president of Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. The work was edited by C. Ben Mitchell, provost, vice president for Academic Affairs, and Graves Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union University; Carla D. Sanderson, provost emeritus of Union University, now vice president for Institutional Effectiveness and Professional Regulation at Chamberlain College of Nursing; and Gregory A. Thornbury, president of The King's College. Contributors include well-known figures, such as Timothy George, James Leo Garrett Jr., Millard J. Erickson, and R. Albert Mohler. Although a relatively short 186 pages, the book's scope is very broad, ranging from the Bible to leadership and health care. In order to provide the prospective reader an idea of its depth, this review of the book will focus on two of the several fine essays.

The book ably accomplishes two tasks. First, the text leaves the reader with a deeper knowledge and appreciation of Dockery's life and ministries. Even more significantly, the book provides the reader an opportunity to reflect on a question that is essential for the Church's effectiveness in the twenty-first century: how can we hope to faithfully and effectively proclaim the gospel in a culture that is already very polarized and increasingly more secularized? Although, at some level, each of the essays is an attempt to answer this question, two essays stand out in particular. Each certainly has a different focus, but together they form a comprehensive attempt to identify the problem and point the way to a solution.

In his essay "Convictional Clarity," Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues that the problem facing the church is the shifting worldview of the broader culture, brought on by the increasing secularization of western society. The consequences of this shift, Mohler states, are momentous; rejecting the Christian worldview leads to an attitude of skepticism concerning "final truth" and the denial of ultimate authority. This, in turn, results in a cognitive barrier that prevents any return to God (37).

Mohler makes several thought-provoking claims about correlations. Secularization could not have developed outside the context of modernism, and theological liberalism would not have developed but for secularization (39). This may lead one to believe that the enemy is modernism. But since correlation is not causation, this conclusion is too simplistic. The shift from medieval thought to early modern thought resulted in a conceptual framework that made the Reformation possible, and a certain kind of secularization, the secular state, was necessary for religious liberty, arguably a necessary condition for the flourishing of religious belief. This prompts us to move beyond simple categories, such as pre-modern, modern, and

post-modern, and to see each of them as a set of individual philosophical commitments of differing degrees of value. One response to the problem of contemporary secularism is to weep in despair at what was lost, a kind of cultural Christianity. Another response is to see our time as an opportunity for people to be genuinely Christian. In other words, secularization may mean that Christianity is no longer the default position, but the availability of other options means that the choice of Christianity is significant in a way that it has not been since the first few centuries of the church's history.

Even a cursory reading of this essay forces one to admit that Christians either have failed to recognize the problem at all, or, have significantly underestimated the severity of the problem. The problem, succinctly and cleverly stated in a section of the essay titled "The Church's Augustinian Moment," is this: "how 'in the world' do Christians tell the truth?" (44). In that section, Mohler argues for what seems to be a surprising claim, namely that arguments based on natural law fail. The argument, though, is cogent. Natural law arguments appeared to be the best hope for making the case for traditional morality to those who will not affirm revealed truth. Even if one cannot derive normative facts from non-normative ones, nature, or how things naturally are, should at least give us some insight into how things ought to be. Mohler correctly points out that these arguments persuade only when there is common agreement concerning what is "natural." How, then, in a pluralistic democracy, do we persuade others of the truth of a position? How do ministers equip their church members to participate effectively in the political process, whether in government bodies, civic groups, or corporate committees and task forces?

Mohler urges Christians to speak their convictions clearly and boldly. In an insightful and practical essay, Millard Erickson reminds us that this boldness must always be tempered by grace and love. The ineffectiveness of proclamation may very well be a consequence of shifting worldviews, but it is certainly a result of the loss of civility in our discourse. What keeps us from being civil? Erickson finds four reasons. First, politically and socially, we are an increasingly polarized society. Second, we intentionally try to suppress views other than our own. Third, we accuse others of being uncivil when that accusation is just a way of being uncivil ourselves. Fourth, we have simply lost a sense of what we call "common" courtesy (19–25). So, it is not surprising that proclamation is unsuccessful when it simply becomes an escalating war of words.

Erickson continues to outline steps intended to aid in our effort to renew civil discourse. Some of these require critical self-reflection and courage. We are urged to grow in self-understanding, develop our abilities to think and express ourselves clearly, and speak with forthrightness and sincerity. We are not only to hold ourselves responsible for clear thinking, but also to hold others responsible. We cannot have civil discourse unless we have genuine discourse.

The remaining steps focus on the transformation from mere discourse to civil discourse.

We must make a genuine attempt to see things from the other person's perspective. Being able to appreciate why someone would hold a different belief is a necessary condition for genuine dialogue. To do this, though, both sides have to genuinely listen to the other. All too often, speakers pause only to plan their next salvo.

Effective proclamation sometimes requires diplomacy, and diplomacy should not necessarily be regarded as obfuscation. Erickson cites the example of Nathan's diplomatic engagement with David in 2 Samuel 12. A direct confrontation would likely have been pointless, but diplomacy resulted in repentance. Diplomatic discourse requires humility, which is a distinctively Christian virtue. Unfortunately, society tends to prefer the proud, and the temptation to exchange Christian humility for the world's pride is an ever present one.

Finally, we should be willing to agree with others to the extent that we faithfully can. It is rare when we can find no common ground with those who disagree with us. A key to finding those points of agreements is to assume the best intentions of the other party. This is simply to treat the other party with charity, something to which we are called anyway (26–33).

In the end, both authors emphasize the importance of proclamation—though perhaps we have mistaken uncivil shouting for genuine proclamation. May we always be obedient to the command in 1 Peter 3:15 to defend our hope in gentleness and reverence, remembering that the gentleness is just as critical for the mission of the church as is the defense. *Convictional Civility* serves as a greatly needed and highly recommended guide to these issues.

– Randy Ridenour, Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma

***Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition.* Edited by D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider. Chicago: Moody, 2015. 262 pages. Paperback, \$19.99.**

Evangelical scholars differ on dispensationalism and covenant theology as well as their resulting biblical-theological themes. *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption*, edited by D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider, is a helpful contribution to the discussion as these essays define, clarify, and defend dispensational theology. D. Jeffrey Bingham is dean of the School of Theology and professor of theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has published numerous articles, and his books include *Irenaeus' Use of Matthew's Gospel in Adversus Haereses*, *Pocket History of the Church*, and *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*. Glenn R. Kreider is the professor of theological studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, and he has written *God with Us: Exploring God's Personal Interactions with His People throughout the Bible*. The contributors dedicate this book to the late Charles C. Ryrie.

Bingham and Kreider explain the vision of the book and the goals of these essays as follows:

They focus on areas believed to be reflective of the past and present status of dispensationalism, strategic to the future of the tradition, and helpful to the gospel ministry. They are concerned with foundational matters of dispensationalism's evangelical identity, definition, history, and hermeneutics. In continued affirmation that one of its greatest blessings is providing insight into one divine plan revealed progressively in the Bible, other essays trace this concern. Finally, attempting to situate dispensationalism more broadly, the volume concludes with chapters on the relationship of the tradition to other traditions and to the global context. (13–14)

Due to space limitations, a few chapters of this work are summarized.

Kreider's article, "What is Dispensationalism? A Proposal," is the first essay and sets the foundation for the remaining essays. His purpose is to define and defend dispensationalism from the Scriptures. He defines a dispensation as "not merely a period of time, an age, but a distinguishable period of time during which God administers His plan of redemption differently from other eras or periods (21). Kreider also addresses misunderstandings concerning dispensationalism, describes a dispensational hermeneutic, and argues that salvation in each dispensation is given by grace through faith and grounded in Christ's finished work. He contends that Scripture affirms the definition of the dispensation and he argues that the biblical story depicts seven dispensations. He concludes by presenting both dispensationalism's theological distinctives and unresolved tensions.

Nathan D. Holsteen, professor of theological studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, addresses hermeneutical issues in his essay titled "The Hermeneutic of Dispensationalism." He argues that dispensationalism's hermeneutic is authorial intent, the most used hermeneutic in the Christian historical tradition. He states that those who employ the grammatical-historical method most likely advocate authorial intent. Holsteen traces the historical development of covenant theology's hermeneutic and compares it to a dispensational hermeneutic. He concludes that the covenant hermeneutic prioritizes unity as the overarching theme that emphasizes one covenant, one salvation, and one people of God. He contends that the dispensational hermeneutic is a literal hermeneutic that is grounded in authorial intent with the main principles that Scripture is understandable to the original readers and revelation progresses through redemptive history. This literal approach is characterized by a reluctance to depart from it in favor of any systematized hermeneutic. Holsteen observes that different applications of the literal hermeneutic account for the varieties within dispensationalism.

Darrell L. Bock, senior research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, is the author of the essay "God's Plan for History: The First Coming of Christ." Bock argues for a three-dispensation scheme from the Gospels and the Book of Acts. He presents his argument by examining the nature of the kingdom, the covenants, and God's plan concerning Israel and the nations. He notes that Jesus's parables expand the kingdom

concept inherited by the Jews from the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism. First, Jesus reveals that the kingdom is new in God's eschatological plan. Second, he shows that the kingdom brings the vindication of the righteous and judgment for those outside of the kingdom. Third, Jesus demonstrates that the kingdom has arrived in one sense and is still future in another sense; the kingdom is already/not yet. Bock explores the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants to display the three dispensations of promise, inauguration, and consummation. He also explains that the Gentile inclusion of the covenant promises is grounded in the Abrahamic covenant, yet God has not permanently excluded Israel from their covenant promises.

T. Maurice Pugh, senior pastor of New Life Fellowship, wrote Chapter 9, titled "Dispensationalism and Views of Redemption History." His essay discusses the theological approaches to redemptive history, specifically covenant theology and dispensationalism. He examines the concept of a Christian view of history, noting key events in redemptive history. He outlines the distinctive features of covenant theology and dispensationalism while showing that both systems share many similarities, including a commitment to a high view of Scripture and the centrality of the person and work of Christ. He shares the pastoral implications from his study of redemptive history in the final section of his essay, which are: the believer's greater faith in God's sovereignty; encouragement of the believer's hope of the resurrection and that God will enact his covenant promises; and the assurance that God's justice will prevail.

Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption presents several helpful essays in defense of a dispensational theology. They display a variety of dispensational approaches both historically and presently, and many essays interact with covenant theologians. Holsteen's essay on the hermeneutic of dispensationalism is one of the strongest because its hermeneutic is foundational to dispensational theology. His presentation of the Reformed doctrine of predestination as a foundation for the unity of the covenant principle shows the rationale and method of the covenant hermeneutic in contrast to the dispensational hermeneutic. His description of the dispensational hermeneutic clarifies how dispensationalism maintains the integrity of the dispensational emphasis on God's one plan of salvation that is revealed progressively through different dispensations. One shortcoming in the book is a lack of interaction with a new brand of covenant theology known as progressive covenantalism. These theologians propose a via media between covenant theology and dispensationalism by highlighting the diversity within redemptive history while maintaining a commitment to interpret God's land promises typologically. While Bock's essay addresses one of their key publications in an endnote, this book should have one section or essay to address this new proposal.

Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption is highly recommended for anyone interested in a holistic study of dispensationalism. It is a great resource from many highly respected scholars and it serves as a current summary of dispensationalism.

- Kenneth J. Reid, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky*

***Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism.* Edited by John F. Hart. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015. 276 pages. Paperback, \$19.99.**

With an increasing desire of Christian pastors and laity alike to find spiritual certainty in uncertainty times, *Evidence for the Rapture* comes as a thorough defense and creative presentation of the biblical perspective of pretribulationism. Evidence for the Rapture is a collection of essays written by pretribulationist scholars from well-known conservative institutions.¹ John F. Hart, general editor of *Evidence for the Rapture*, is professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, where he has taught since 1983. Hart's publications include: *50 Things You Need to Know about Heaven* as well as contributions to *Overcoming the World Missions Crisis and Dispensationalism*, *Tomorrow and Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie*. The ten contributors to *Evidence for the Rapture* have published commentaries in key prophetic texts and other biblical books for the Moody Bible Commentary Series and the Expositor's Bible Commentary Series. Each author is well-suited to address the doctrine of pretribulationism.

The purpose of *Evidence for the Rapture* is to identify key eschatological passages within the New Testament and show how they reveal a pretribulation rapture. The Day of Lord is a key Old Testament concept that is addressed and which is viewed through the lens of various New Testament authors.

The organization of the book is outlined clearly in the introduction by Robert L. Thomas. The first four chapters address the biblical (or, in this case, philosophical) underpinnings for a pretribulation rapture. Chapter 1, "The Rapture and the Biblical Teaching of Imminence," by Thomas, deals with the key concept of imminence—a term used to describe the unexpected nature of the coming of the Lord *and* of God's judgment. Chapter 2, "Jesus and the Rapture," focuses on the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel Apocalypse passages, highlighting Hart's belief that the rapture originates with Jesus himself—and then was taken up by New Testament authors. Chapter 3, "The Rapture and the Day of Lord," examines this Old Testament concept in the New Testament, emphasizing Glen Kreider's focus on the judgment that will follow the rapture moment. In chapter 4, "Jesus and the Rapture: John 14," George Gunn provides an eschatological analysis of John 14:1–3. He argues that the phrase "I will come back and take you to be with me" is the strongest statement in the Bible concerning an actual rapture and return to heaven. He goes on to state that the "place" being prepared for his followers is a holding place for a 7-year tribulation (112).

Chapters 5–7 focus on the primary eschatological passages of Paul in 1 Cor 15, 1 Thess 4–5, and 2 Thess 2, and the book's contributors argue for the following interesting exegetical

¹These institutions include Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, The Master's Theological Seminary, The College of Biblical Studies-Houston, and Shasta Bible College and Graduate School.

conclusions:

- a rapture and 7-year interval in 1 Cor 15:23–24 (126)
- Paul’s statement “Death, where is your sting?” corresponds to the final trumpet, thus indicating Christian victory over death at the time of the rapture (135)
- the promise of a resurrected body in 1 Cor 4:14 with the phrase “the dead *through* Christ will rise first” revealing this resurrection as the rapture (150)
- the term *apostasy* in 2 Thess 2:3, rendered by most translators as “rebellion” or “falling away,” should be translated “the departing” and applied to raptured Christians (181)

Chapters 8–10 focus on the book of Revelation. In chapter 8, “John and the Rapture,” Andrew Woods mines the seven letters of Rev 2–3 for evidence of the rapture, emphasizing Rev 3:10 as the key verse that shows this concept, while highlighting other evidence prior to the tribulation moments that begin in Rev 4. In chapter 9, “What Child is This?” Michael Svigel provides insight into the modern pretribulation movement by highlighting one of the earliest arguments by J. N. Darby concerning the child of Rev 12 as an image of Christ and thus, through proxy, the Church raptured. Michael Rydelnik closes the book by arguing for the necessity of a rapture of the Christian Church in order to allow Israel to fulfill its God-given task of blessing humanity.

For the interested pastor or lay person who accepts the pretribulation rapture as a reasonable interpretation, this book is a gold mine of creative scholarship that can be used to affirm this particular view of New Testament eschatology. The value of this book is found in its evaluation of the key eschatological New Testament texts as well as its outlines of some of the key cogs in the pretribulationists system of belief, including:

- the concept of imminence of both rapture and final judgment
- the idea that pretribulationism originating in Jesus himself and was captured by various biblical authors
- the Day of the Lord as an essential concept for understanding all New Testament prophecy, which is all future-oriented
- any reference to judgment or tribulation occurs after the rapture—thus there are not rapture references in Rev 4–19 because those verses reveal the Day of the Lord
- Israel must play a role in the future in order for God to show his faithfulness to his promises to Israel in the Old Testament

It is unfortunate that this system is not stated explicitly in the book. Even so, the authors are thorough in their approach. They are keenly aware of the objections to their position and methodically attempt to provide a defense of the pretribulationist position in each biblical text addressed.

Due to the purposes and focuses as stated above, some areas of the book could be improved. First, many of the basic interpretive assumptions of the authors are logically weak. It would be easy to accept the idea of a pretribulation rapture if Jesus had taught the rapture clearly. However, not all of the eschatological Gospel references indicate clearly the existence of a pretribulation rapture. The assumption that Paul would have gained his information on this subject directly from Jesus and not from his own spiritually-guided reading of the Old Testament prophets is an over-simplified view of Paul's scholarship and a weak attempt at providing more authority to the pretribulationists cause by claiming that their ideas come directly from Jesus. In addition, the creative exegesis needed to reveal Paul's understanding of a pretribulation rapture pushes the boundaries of sound biblical analysis. Second, the redefinition of terms such as apostasy as well as forcing concepts to fit a preconceived interpretive philosophy moves away from a natural reading of these eschatological passages. Ultimately, this leaves the reader with a sense that these authors are trying a bit too hard to prove their point beyond all doubt.

Even with those concerns, *Evidence for the Rapture* will be a treasured resource for the reader who is convinced of a pretribulation rapture. The wealth of information and the biblical focus will delight readers who share a similar view of the rapture. However, for readers who are not inclined to accept the biblical maneuverings of pretribulationism, this book will be an exercise in patience as one pursues a better understanding of the arguments from pretribulationist interpreters.

- Randolph Rogers, Wayland Baptist University, Plainview, Texas

***Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament.* Edited by Margaret Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A. Sánchez. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 700 pages. Hardcover, \$39.00.**

The editors of the *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* affirm that biblical interpretation is a responsibility that surpasses the boundaries of any particular religious community. Therefore, this two-volume set is intended to serve as a resource for general readers of diverse social and ideological locations. Throughout the commentary a survey of historical and contemporary interpretations of biblical texts is provided in order to encourage "competent and discerning interpretation of the Bible's themes today" (2). The current review will focus exclusively on the New Testament volume of the set.

The structure of the commentary is conducive to its emphasis on past and present engagement with the biblical text. The compilation begins with four topical essays that deal with contemporary interpretive perspectives, the Jewish heritage of Christianity, the experience of rootlessness in the early Christian community, and the apocalyptic legacy of

the early church. Introductory essays are provided for each section of the New Testament as follows: the Gospels; Acts; the Pauline Epistles; and for Hebrews, the General Epistles, and Revelation as a unit. These contributions provide general information on historical, literary, and theological issues for each division. Essays devoted to individual books of the Bible are comprised of a brief introduction followed by a section-by-section commentary, which is guided by a three-tiered format: “The Text in Its Ancient Context,” “The Text in the Interpretive Tradition,” and “The Text in Contemporary Discussion.” Each essay is followed by a list of works cited.

The New Testament volume of the *Fortress Commentary* finds a more balanced tone than its Old Testament counterpart.¹ Contributors hail from various denominational backgrounds, such as Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, and even Baptist. In the fascinating essay “Reading the Christian New Testament in the Contemporary World,” Episcopal scholar Kwok Pui-lan elucidates the manner in which biblical interpretation varies across diverse ethnographic contexts, reminding readers that the familiar “Western” interpretation is not always the correct reading of the text. However, some of his perspectives may cause discomfort for conservative, evangelical readers. For example, Pui-lan is dismissive of the household codes in Colossians and Ephesians on the basis of their deuteropauline status, and theorizes that they “were written during the increasing patriarchal institutionalization of the church” (23). He also appreciates the development of a “new” New Testament, in which Gnostic texts are integrated into canonical writings. Pui-lan cautions, “As global citizens living in the twenty-first century, we have to remember how the gospel of Jesus Christ has been misused to oppress and construct the other, whether the other is Jewish people, women, racial and ethnic minorities, colonized people, or queer people, so that history will not be repeated” (25). While his warning is well-sounded, it should not be heeded at the expense of the integrity, authority, and inerrancy of the biblical text.

Nonetheless, the variety of perspectives throughout the text is a strength of the work. A comprehensive listing of non-traditional insights is impossible, so a few examples must suffice. The essay on the Gospel of John is penned by the Jewish scholar Adele Reinhartz. For a Gospel that is often charged with anti-Semitism, Reinhartz’s appraisal is enlightening, as she allows readers to experience John through a Jewish perspective. In contrast to Laura S. Nasrallah’s excellent overview of the rise of Pentecostalism in her commentary on 1 Corinthians, Michal Beth Dinkler exhibits a disappointing lack of attention to pneumatology in her chapter on Acts. In the topical essay on Paul, Neil Elliott provides a thorough yet concise survey of the life, ministry, and writings of the apostle. He covers Paul’s Jewish background, Paul’s polemic against Roman imperial ideology, and the seeming contradictions in Paul’s own writing and persona. Like other contributors, Elliot reminds readers that the “commonsense” interpretation of a text is often culturally conditioned, and not always the

¹See my review of *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha* in this issue of JBTM.

“right” view. He contends that “the loss of false confidence can be the occasion for new discovery and, when shared with others, new opportunity for mutual understanding” (390). Readers would do well to read critically though, as Elliot also reprimands clergy members who fail to denounce Pauline passages that do not promote egalitarianism. Barbara R. Rossing’s insightful essay on Revelation also bears mention. She recommends reading the difficult text through the lens of its original audience, the marginalized. At the same time, she advocates a “hermeneutic of hope” that is appropriate for both the original audience and for modern readers.

A congenial tone pervades the book as contributors present conclusions judiciously and use questions frequently to encourage thought and introspection. For example, in relation to Mark 7, Raquel S. Lettsome asks, “What are the pollutants that we fear in our contemporary practice of the faith?” (194), and in relation to Acts 1 Demetrius K. Williams queries, “Should an ancient narrative be a contemporary imperative?” (331). Regardless of how one answers such questions, the volume reminds readers that the Bible is still living and active, relevant and effectual.

To conclude, this resource is an excellent contribution to New Testament scholarship when evaluated with a critical mindset. Readers are exposed to a multiplicity of perspectives on the biblical text, both past and present. Moreover, the three-tiered format familiarizes readers with the interpretive strategies of the early church, patristic scholars, and modern exegetes. As contributors encourage readers to engage with the texts both lay persons and clergy will find much to contemplate in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The New Testament*.

- Andrea L. Robinson, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana

***Fortress Commentary on the Bible: The Old Testament and Apocrypha*. Edited by Gale A. Yee, Hugh R. Page Jr., and Matthew J. M. Coomber. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. 1050 pages. Hardcover, \$49.00.**

The *Fortress Commentary on the Bible* is a two-volume compendium that “seeks to invite study and conversation about an ancient text that is both complex and compelling” (1). The editors share in a desire to help students understand the rich contexts from which the Bible arose. Therefore, the commentary is intended as a resource to enable general readers to engage in contemporary discussions about the legacy of the Bible and grapple with possible meanings “as active interpreters in their own right” (1). The current review will evaluate the first volume, which treats the Old Testament and Apocrypha.

The structure of the commentary is an outgrowth of its purpose. Following a brief introduction, the first chapter provides information on the ancient and modern context of the Bible, as well as an overview of interpretive methodologies. The following two chapters,

“The People of God and the Peoples of the Earth” and “Reading the Christian Old Testament in the Contemporary World,” explore issues such as ethnography, ecology, and sociology in relation to biblical studies. The contributors discuss the clash of worldviews that modern interpreters often experience when approaching the ancient texts, and shine light on new interpretive avenues, such as feminist and post-colonial readings.

The main body of the commentary is divided into five sections: Torah, Historical Writings, Wisdom and Worship, Prophets, and Apocrypha. Each section begins with an essay providing introductory material on genre, authorship, historical setting(s), and distinctive themes. The preliminary essays are followed by a chapter devoted to each biblical book within their respective categories. The commentary chapters provide a section-by-section analysis of the biblical text with corresponding discussions of “The Text in Its Ancient Context” and “The Text in the Interpretive Tradition.” Each chapter concludes with bibliographical information.

The greatest strengths of the book are threefold. First, the attention given to the history of interpretation, past and present, for each biblical pericope is invaluable. There are few other resources that provide such a comprehensive survey of the history of interpretation for the entire Old Testament and Apocrypha. Second, all of the contributors give consideration to the historical and literary backgrounds of the biblical texts. Attention is given, for instance, to the writings of Philo, Josephus, Qumran, and many others. Additionally, readers are introduced to patristic writings through the interpretive histories. Third, unlike most Old Testament commentaries, the volume contains a substantive section on apocryphal works. The contributors provide an excellent overview of the body of literature as a whole, as well as information on specific apocryphal texts. Regardless of whether one regards the literature as canonical, the thorough treatment certainly will enhance readers’ understanding of both Old and New Testament contexts.

On a critical note, evangelical readers will encounter several major problems with the volume. First, the commentary boasts an impressive array of expert contributors from a variety of ecumenical viewpoints. Unfortunately, evangelical conservatives are sorely underrepresented. As a result, many of the contributors do not appear to regard the Bible as the inspired Word of God. For example, Hugh R. Page Jr. blatantly asserts that “the Hebrew Bible does not speak with a single voice on the issues of what it means to be part of the human family” (40). Matthew J. M. Coomber suggests that the portrayal of God in the Torah is an amalgamation of the Canaanite God El and the Israelite YHWH (18–19). Rodney S. Sadler Jr., in his exegesis of Genesis, posits that the puzzling narrative of Noah’s sin Gen 9:18–28 is included as an inadequate “justification for the dislocation and oppression of the Canaanites” (101). Moreover, the inclusion of Tamar Kamionkowski’s textually unjustifiable interpretation of the Nadab and Abihu incident (Lev 10–11) as a “homosexual account” reflects a troubling disregard for proper exegesis. With so many instances of doubt regarding the authority and inspiration of the Bible in the opening chapters alone, evangelicals may be hesitant to utilize the volume as a resource.

A few other points of criticism also bear mention. The commentary is intended for general readership and, indeed, the text is accessible. However, professors and pastors should be wary of recommending the volume for lay readers who might not have the skills to evaluate critically the myriad of issues presented in the book. The interpretive stance taken by the commentary is highly influenced by reader-response methods, which are not always faithful to the original intent of the biblical authors (303). While not all interpreters favor author-oriented meaning, most conservative biblical interpreters still do. Finally, on a minor note of criticism, no indices are provided at the end of the text. Students or pastors interested in obtaining the volume might prefer to purchase a digital version with searchable features.

Regardless of the stated problems, the commentary represents a valuable contribution to modern biblical scholarship. The thoroughly researched and documented information places centuries' worth of biblical research at the reader's disposal. More importantly, the attention given to contemporary ethical issues reflects the contributors' genuine desire to convey the continuing relevance of the Bible today. The engagement with current discussions on the relationship between Christianity and science, ecology, sexuality, and morality is well-appreciated. Additionally, the variety of ideologies and interpretive methodologies coalesce into a highly interesting, if not always orthodox, literary experience.

- Andrea L. Robinson, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership.* By Bobby Jamieson. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015, xi + 243 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.**

Bobby Jamieson is a PhD student in New Testament at the University of Cambridge. Prior to his doctoral studies, Jamieson served as assistant editor for 9Marks in Washington, DC. He is the author of *Sound Doctrine: How a Church Grows in the Love and Holiness of God*.

Since the days of John Bunyan, the relationship between baptism and church membership has been a topic of debate. Recently, Bunyan's arguments have taken on new life with Baptist figures like John Piper arguing for open membership (i.e., church membership without immersion baptism as a requirement). While Piper is not the only Baptist arguing for open membership, he is one who has popularized this view.

Enter Jamieson's *Going Public*. Jamieson is concerned with the necessity of baptism for church membership. More than that, however, he is concerned with the nature and health of the church, which includes baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church membership. In *Going Public*, Jamieson sets out to argue that "baptism and the Lord's Supper are effective signs of church membership: they create the social, ecclesial reality to which they point" (2). He goes on to describe *Going Public* as "a constructive theological account of how baptism and the

Lord's Supper structure the church" (3).

Going Public is divided into the following three parts: Getting Our Bearings; Building a Case; and The Case Stated, Defended, Applied. In Part 1, Jamieson provides an introduction in which he explains why baptism as a requirement for membership is a topic worth debating. After providing some foundational definitions regarding membership and communion, Jamieson then describes two key issues surrounding the baptism-membership debate: 1) "the question of whether baptism is the initiatory rite into the church and how that bears on its relationship to church membership," and 2) "the theological relationship—or better, interrelationship—between baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church membership" (16–17). In chapter 2, Jamieson offers six reasons why "open membership just feels right" (21). These include: the culture of tolerance, a pendulum swing on discipline and denominational divisions, evangelicals' cooperative DNA, evangelical essentialism (i.e., boiling doctrine down to the essentials of salvation), advancing secularism and the need to stick together, and not wanting to be the odd man out (22–32).

In Part 2, Jamieson builds his case for the ecclesial shape of baptism and communion—their "intrinsic connection to local church membership" (56). He first offers a theology of baptism, arguing that "baptism is where faith goes public" (36). After providing a biblical-theological understanding of baptism, Jamieson argues that the biblical evidence suggests that all Christians should be baptized, and because baptism is where faith goes public, paedobaptism is not biblical baptism. In the next two chapters, Jamieson suggests that baptism should be understood in two ways. First, baptism should be understood as the initiating oath-sign of the new covenant. In describing baptism as the initiating oath-sign of the new covenant, Jamieson is saying that "baptism is a solemn, symbolic vow which ratifies a person's entrance into the new covenant" (63). Second, Jamieson considers baptism to be the passport of the kingdom, meaning baptism is "how the church identifies someone as a kingdom citizen" (93). He writes, "When a church baptizes someone, they identify him or her as a member of the new covenant, a citizen of the kingdom, someone who belongs to God and God's people" (93).

In the next chapter, Jamieson connects baptism with communion and church membership. Jamieson notes, "The Lord's Supper, therefore, is an exercise of the church's authority to affirm and oversee its members' professions of faith in Jesus" (118–19). This leads him to conclude several points, including that baptism should be a requirement to participate in communion and that the Lord's Supper is an effective sign of membership (125–26). Because baptism and communion provide the church with ecclesial shape, "they give the church visible, institutional form and order" (144). Ultimately, to remove baptism as a requirement for membership obviates membership altogether.

In Part 3, Jamieson puts together the pieces he discussed in Part 2 together. First, he provides a thorough summary of why baptism is required for membership. Then, he answers

seven potential objections to baptism as a requirement for membership. In particular, he addresses this objection: “It’s wrong for a church to exclude anyone from membership whom they’re confident is a Christian” (169). After providing readers with seven arguments against open membership in chapter 10, Jamieson concludes *Going Public* with practical application. He discusses how one can begin to require baptism for membership, how churches should practice baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and how one can make membership meaningful again.

Bobby Jamieson has written a timely and practical work. While *Going Public* is thoroughly biblical and theological, it addresses practical ecclesiological issues that every pastor must face. With the baptism-membership debate growing among Baptists, and Southern Baptists in particular, Jamieson has provided theologians, pastors, and laypeople alike with a biblical-theological argument for why baptism should be required for membership. While some might argue that Jamieson has not necessarily provided adequate biblical evidence for baptism as a requirement for membership, one must see the strength in Jamieson’s work. Utilizing Scripture and biblical theology, Jamieson has constructed a theological framework in which to understand the ecclesial shape of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Jamieson’s *Going Public* has several excellent features as well, making it a valuable resource on baptism and church membership. These include chapter summaries at the conclusion of each chapter and an appendix which offers readers a three-minute explanation of why baptism should be a requirement for church membership. While some will find areas of disagreement throughout the book, *Going Public* will be a valuable pastoral and theological resource for years to come.

- Dustin Turner, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Vintage Church, New Orleans, Louisiana

***Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide.* Edited by Cameron Cole and Jon Nielson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2016. 224 pages. Paperback, \$17.99.**

Theology and practicality often occupy two ends of the ecclesiological spectrum where youth ministry philosophy is concerned. To encourage theology is to jettison practicality and *vice versa*. Yet even those who try to fuse these two unavoidable elements of ministry in their publications focus more on the “theological” rather than the practical, often leaning toward neo-orthodoxy. Thus, it has become a rare experience to find a book that combines these important elements of ministry for those working specifically with youth. For this reason, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry* is an unusual treasure. The authors of this self-proclaimed guide have offered a thoroughly practical manual for youth ministry while concurrently beginning where Scripture starts, theological truth.

This book is a collaborative effort comprised of fourteen contributors, including Cameron Cole and Joe Nielson, who edited the volume. Cameron Cole is the director of youth ministries at Cathedral Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, and is also the chairman of Rooted Ministries, which hosts both a resource blog and conference (203). Joe Nielson is ministry director for Christian Union at Princeton University. Previously, he served as college pastor at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. Nielson earned an MDiv from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where he is currently completing his DMin. He has authored two books, *Bible Study: A Student's Guide* as well as *The Story: God's Grand Narrative of Redemption* (204–5).

The book's purpose is clear and precise. Cole explains, "This book champions the gospel as the core of effective youth ministry. It argues that the message and reality of Christ's victory over sin and death should permeate every single facet of ministry to young people." Furthermore, the book seeks to show "how the gospel relates to the major categories of youth ministry" (18). This unapologetic purpose drives the organization of the text.

Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry is separated into three major sections: Foundations, Practical Applications, and The Fruit of a Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry. Rightfully so, the first section and each of its chapters discusses the seven facets of a gospel-centered foundation: gospel centrality, discipleship, expository teaching, relationships, community, partnering with parents, and generational integration. Section 2 discusses four practical elements of youth ministry, each garnering its own chapter. These include Bible study, volunteer training, music, and retreats/events. The third section's three chapters center on areas in which students can "bear fruit": evangelism, serving the poor, and short-term missions trips. Finally, chapters are set up in a seeming reflection of the book. Each chapter begins with a theological proposal of the chapter's subject matter and ends with practical considerations for youth ministry.

As with any book that is a collaboration of writers, there is variance with the quality of writing throughout the book. While the overall quality of the volume is high, some chapters stand out. This is especially true of the first and foundational chapter by Cameron Cole: "The Gospel at the Heart of All Things." In this compelling chapter, Cole posits that the struggles of and answers for teenagers are shared by all humanity today and addressed in the opening chapters of Genesis. He argues simply and concisely that the most important thing a youth minister can possess is an accurate appraisal of these fundamental problems: wrong sources of truth, wrong views of self, and wrong views of God (25–26). He maintains that students have the same spiritual problems and the same glorious solution as our original parents. Grounding these in the fall narrative as well as within redemptive history, Cole wonderfully demonstrates that a ministry centered and based on the gospel is the sole solution to these original dilemmas.

The value of this book is two-fold. First, it succeeds in building a foundation for youth

ministry in which Scripture seems to lay that foundation. Although youth ministry resources overflow with adjective-laden ministry concepts, many fail to provide a foundation for ministry that effects and propagates a holistic ministry philosophy. That is to say, when a foundation is off balance, the youth ministry inevitably will experience some form of atrophy and degradation. Thankfully, this book lays a foundation that helps avoid such troubles.

Second, this book succeeds in addressing the major elements/categories of a gospel-centered youth ministry. Of particular note are the chapters on expository teaching and music in youth ministry. While most youth/family ministry books deal with issues of parental integration, volunteering, activities, etc., they often assume (unfortunately) the major elements in ministry: proclamation of the Word and musical worship. This book does a delightful job placing these two elements in the context of youth ministry, while at the same time keeping them founded on the good news of Christ. Echoing John Stott, contributor Eric McKiddie argues that the goal of a youth minister's sermon is to interpret the passage and to communicate that truth clearly and simply to one's students (55). Similarly, Tom Olson provides a wonderful chapter on "Singing That Flows from the Gospel." In a brief space, Olson provides a solid theological and biblical framework for music in youth ministry. Especially noteworthy is Olson's practical application of walking ministers through the difficult task of choosing biblically and theologically rich songs for their students (144-47).

For those youth ministers yearning for a deeper, thoroughly biblical approach to youth ministry, this volume is a wonderful starting point. By providing a strong foundation and an eye for detail on perennial characteristics of youth ministry, this book will prove to be a staple among youth ministry resources for years to come.

- Christopher Talbot, Welch College, Nashville, Tennessee

***Illustrated Bible Survey: An Introduction.* By Edward E. Hindson and Elmer L. Towns. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013. 607 pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.**

Edward Hindson is the host of "The King Is Coming," a syndicated television program that is broadcast throughout the United States. He also serves as distinguished professor of religion and biblical studies at Liberty University. His degrees include a ThD from Trinity Graduate School, DMin from Westminster Theological Seminary, and DLitt et Phil from the University of South Africa. He has written more than forty books, most of which concern biblical prophecy and the return of Christ. He served as editor of five major study Bibles, including the *Knowing Jesus Study Bible*, which won a Gold Medallion Award.

In 1971, Elmer L. Towns and Jerry Falwell cofounded Liberty University. Towns has authored more than 100 books. He currently serves as distinguished professor of systematic

theology and dean of the School of Religion at Liberty University and dean of the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. Towns holds a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary and a DMin from Fuller Theological Seminary. Hindson and Towns have served together on the faculty of Liberty University for more than thirty years.

Hindson and Towns believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God and is more important than any other book. The authors have almost one hundred years of combined experience teaching biblical survey courses. Their reason for writing this book was “to provide a college-level textbook that is accessible to students and layman alike.” Therefore, the authors have not provided “technical discussions of authorship and genre” (xi). The authors, however, provide a concise, non-technical discussion of the structure and genre of each book as well as a brief and helpful discussion of the characteristics of Hebrew poetry.

The introductory chapters include a discussion of the historical development of the Bible and a discussion of how to interpret and apply the Bible to life. The remainder of the book is primarily a summary of the message of each book of the Bible. Although the differences between the order of the books in the Hebrew Bible and the English Old Testament are noted, this textbook follows the English Old Testament.

While mentioning the difficulties of precisely identifying the author of most the Old Testament books, Hindson and Towns consistently provide reasons for accepting the traditional authorship of each book. Internal evidence from the biblical text is regularly cited as support for traditional authorship.

In addition to a summary of the message of the book, each chapter provides a concise discussion of the background and structure and an outline of the book. A chart summarizing the key facts of each book is provided at the beginning of each chapter. A reflection section that encourages the reader’s personal spiritual growth is also included. Each chapter concludes with a short discussion of practical ways to apply the book’s message. A listing of books is provided in “For Further Readings” to aid readers who desire to engage in further study. Also, study questions are provided that can be used as discussion starters or review questions.

The “Reflection” and “Practical Application” sections are features that are not included in many college textbooks. These sections demonstrate that the authors are not just concerned with providing information, but also concerned with the spiritual development of the readers. Laypersons who may have some difficulty applying the biblical passages should find these sections helpful.

The inclusion of the word *Illustrated* in the title of the book is certainly appropriate. In addition to numerous photographs of relevant geographical locations and archeological artifacts, the text contains multiple maps, charts that summarize key concepts, and illustrations of items such as the tabernacle. An index of names, an index of subjects, and a

Scripture index are included as well.

The overview of each book helps the reader understand the basic message of each book. The overview, combined with the concise background information, provides a text that any person who desires to learn more about the Bible will find helpful. This is a good resource for Sunday School teachers who are looking for assistance in lesson preparation. The “Practical Application” section of each chapter should be particularly helpful.

While this book has many commendable features, several things could be improved. The chapter that discusses the period between the Old and New Testament provides the basic historical information but fails to illustrate how the cultural and political changes during the intertestamental period shaped the cultural and political environment of the New Testament world. Moreover, the authors do not include any discussion of first-century Judaism and how the Judaism of that period differs from the Judaism of the Old Testament era. Since Christianity developed within the context of first-century Judaism, a basic understanding of first-century Judaism is necessary for properly understanding the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament authors. Also, Hindson and Towns do not advocate a particular interpretation of Revelation. While it is not necessary to embrace fully one of the major interpretations of Revelation to understand the basic ideas in the book, a textbook that is designed for a college survey course should at least make the student aware that the church has interpreted that book in various ways.

Despite these minor issues which might be addressed in subsequent editions, the authors have accomplished their stated purpose of providing a textbook that can be understood by students in a biblical survey course as well as laypersons reading for personal benefit.

- Gary E. Blackwell, William Carey University-Tradition, Biloxi, Mississippi

***Invitation to Philippians: Building a Great Church through Humility.* By Donald R. Sunukjian. Biblical Preaching for the Contemporary Church. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. xi + 113 pages. Paperback, \$14.99.**

Rather than being a collection of dusty, old sermons disconnected from the vibrancy of congregational life, Sunukjian takes readers of *Invitation to Philippians* on an exciting journey through the text of Philippians and expertly evinces how this ancient epistle is still highly relevant and applicable to the church today. Sunukjian (PhD, UCLA; ThD, Dallas Theological Seminary) is a prolific author, whose works include the popular homiletics textbook, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance*. Also, Sunukjian is a seasoned preacher who served fourteen years as senior pastor of churches in Arizona, Texas, and most recently in California. He is currently professor of Christian ministry and leadership at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. Prior to joining Talbot, Sunukjian

served for ten years as professor of preaching at Dallas Theological Seminary.

In his preface, Sunukjian states that the purpose of the entire Biblical Preaching for the Contemporary Church series (of which *Invitation to Philippians* is a part) “is to offer models of the principles presented in the textbook [i.e., *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*]” (xi). Sunukjian also gives this fourfold description of successful sermons: “A sermon comes alive when it is true to the biblical author’s flow of thought, clear in its unfolding, interesting to listen to, and connected to contemporary life” (xi). In his introduction, Sunukjian succinctly sketches the exegetical contours and structural outline of Philippians in two pages, and then proceeds to walk his readers through Philippians in a series of fourteen sermons.

Since *Invitation to Philippians* is written as a test case of his previous work, it would be helpful to summarize two of the core tenets within *Invitation to Biblical Preaching*. First, Sunukjian is a proponent of “biblical preaching,” and not necessarily expository preaching.¹ In other words, for Sunukjian, true biblical preaching is defined by “how the biblical material is treated—that is, faithful to the meaning and flow of the original author and relevant to the contemporary hearer.”² Thus, for Sunukjian, sermons that are textual, topical, or expository all can be examples of truly biblical preaching. Second, and more important, Sunukjian’s work assumes a thorough and detailed exegesis of the passage considering all pertinent historical (descriptive) and theological (prescriptive) matters involved.³ This is important because *Invitation to Philippians* assumes, but does not model, this phase of the sermon process.

Numerous strengths mark Sunukjian’s work. First, Sunukjian is a master homiletician and communicator. His consistent style, creative use of humor, storytelling, illustrations, and props work together not only to bring the text of Philippians to life, but also to connect Philippians with the life and needs of the church today. Sunukjian first exegetes his audience, then asks hypothetical questions and paints scenarios relevant to every member of his congregation. Sunukjian then invites them to derive their own answers and conclusions from within Scripture itself. Second, Sunukjian offers an effective model for preaching epistolary material in an inductive, narrative style. This is the power of inductive preaching, storytelling, and comedy, as any good comedian would never spoil the joke by giving away the punchline at the beginning. Third, Sunukjian’s methodology is applicable to numerous other books in the Bible. Sunukjian’s inductive sermon approach can easily be applied not only to other epistolary material, but to narrative as well—thus fostering the creation and delivery of sermons that are at once “clear . . . interesting . . . and connected to contemporary life” (xi).

Despite its considerable strengths, *Invitation to Philippians* is not without its shortcomings. First, careful readers will notice the lack of footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography for this

¹Donald R. Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 13–14.

²*Ibid.*, 13.

³*Ibid.*, 19–64.

work. There are only two footnotes in Sunukjian's book (60, 84). This is incredible, given that neither of these footnotes support his rather bold claims regarding the structure and themacity of Philippians (1–2). As a result, readers should give some pause regarding the credence of Sunukjian's more innovative claims. Second, regarding the structure of Philippians, Sunukjian argues for a macro-chiasm in which Philippians 2:19–30 (Paul's vetting of the *ethos* of Timothy and Epaphroditus) are the key verses of the epistle. No major commentary surveyed for the purposes of this review follows Sunukjian's rather remarkable structural proposal. In fact, out of the works surveyed, I located only two other scholars who agree with Sunukjian's hypothesis for a macro-chiastic structure, Luter and Lee—although Sunukjian disagrees on many of their textual divisions within their chiastic arrangement.⁴ Furthermore, none of the works referenced for this review agree with Sunukjian regarding the key verses within Philippians. Obviously, this means that Sunukjian risks missing Paul's main point in Philippians, which is, according to Black, not Paul's thanksgiving for financial support (contra Sunukjian), but “unity for the sake of the gospel” (Phil 1:27–30; 4:2–3).⁵ Third, as with any anthology of homilies, there is always the inherent danger that any mistakes in Sunukjian's work will be perpetuated by those parroting his sermons.

In sum, *Invitation to Philippians* provides a fine example of how one can preach inductively through Philippians, while connecting the key truths within the text to contemporary congregations in creative, relevant, and meaningful ways. Sunukjian shines in his effective use of drama, humor, application, and illustrations, which help bring the text to life for contemporary congregations. However, Sunukjian's failure to cite his sources as well as to give his rationale for many of his more innovative exegetical, structural, and thematic decisions, threaten to undermine the credence of his project.⁶ Those looking for an in-depth, verse-by-verse exposition of Philippians will be left wanting as well.

– Gregory E. Lamb, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

⁴See A. Boyd Luter and Michelle V. Lee, “Philippians as Chiasmus: Key to Structure, Unity and Theme Questions,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 92. See also C. Richard Wells and A. Boyd Luter, *Inspired Preaching: A Survey of Preaching Found in the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 133.

⁵David Alan Black, “The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Textlinguistics,” *Novum Testamentum* 37 (1995): 16.

⁶It should be noted that Luter and Lee's hypothesis of a macro-chiastic structure for Philippians was severely critiqued (and many consider soundly refuted) by Porter and Reed. See Stanley E. Porter and Jeffrey T. Reed, “Philippians as a Macro-Chiasm and Its Exegetical Significance,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 13–31.

John. By Murray J. Harris. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. xxxiv + 366 pages. Paperback, \$34.99.

Visionary, scholar, and shepherd are three words that come to mind at the mention of the name Murray J. Harris, founding editor of the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (EGGNT). First, Harris's vision to create an excellent exegetical resource for busy pastors and students alike came to fruition with Harris's *Colossians* and *Philemon*—the first volume published in the EGGNT series.¹ Second, Harris completed his PhD at the University of Manchester under the supervision of the late F. F. Bruce, and is currently professor emeritus of New Testament exegesis and theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and former warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge. Third, Harris is also a prolific author whose works include numerous commentaries and scholarly monographs.²

Lastly, Harris displays a shepherd's heart in aiding pastors and teachers as they grapple with the Greek text in expositing the New Testament with "accuracy and authority" (xxii). Furthermore, Harris's shepherding is evinced in the prioritization of his life through relinquishing his role as co-editor of the EGGNT to care for his wife, Jennifer, who struggles daily with the challenges of multiple sclerosis (xx–xxi).

Bedrock to the EGGNT series is Harris's "lifelong conviction that the careful grammatical investigation of the text is the necessary prelude to a correct understanding of its message," and that "the systematic exposition of the scriptural text is a prerequisite for the renewal and upbuilding of the church" (xx). The EGGNT series seeks to "close the gap between the Greek text and the available tools" such as intermediate grammars and grammatical analyses (xxii).

In his introduction, Harris proffers a brief prolegomenon (12 pages) to the introductory matters of John, and then proceeds to guide his readers phrase-by-phrase in his detailed exegetical and syntactical analyses of the Fourth Gospel throughout the remainder of this book. Structurally, Harris adopts a fivefold division in his exegetical outline of John's Gospel [i.e., I. 1:1–18; II. 1:19–12:50; III. 13:1–17:26; IV. 18:1–20:31; and V. 21:1–25] (11), which deviates from the traditional fourfold structural view [i.e., I. 1:1–18; II. 1:19–12:50; III. 13:1–20:31; and IV. 21:1–25] (10). Thus, it appears that Harris has expanded the structural proposals of Brown³

¹Currently, there are five available titles in the EGGNT series (*John*, *Philippians*, *Colossians/Philemon* [2nd ed.], *James*, and *1 Peter*) with fifteen more volumes planned which span the entirety of the canonical NT.

²For his commentaries, see: *Colossians and Philemon* in the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991; Nashville: B&H Academic 2010 [2nd ed.]); *Second Corinthians* in Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976; 2008 [2nd ed.]); and *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* in New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). For his monographs, see *Jesus as God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) and *Slave of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001).

³Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; AB 29–29A; eds. William F. Albright and

and Köstenberger⁴ in his own proposal—evinced a major break between Jesus’s parting prayer (17:1–26) and the passion narrative (18:1–19:42).

Numerous strengths mark Harris’s work. First, Harris’s work is affordable, approachable (benefiting even the non-specialist), as well as concise—thus, ensuring the work’s viability and readability. Harris is able to synthesize much of the fruit of his detailed analyses in a succinct manner, which should prove beneficial to the busy pastor or teacher working through the Greek text. Second, despite his brevity, Harris spends the necessary time and space to explain key exegetical, syntactical, and text-critical details behind hotly-debated passages such as John 1:1 (15–20) and the so-called *Pericope Adulterae* (i.e., John 7:53–8:11; 166–67), as well as key theological concepts including the importance of “believing” in the Fourth Gospel and the idiomatic, prepositional phrase *pisteuō eis* (“believe in”) that John uses to express this crucial concept—with Christ typically being the “divine object of faith” (31–32). Third, Harris recognizes the importance of the subject of *oidamen* (“we know”) in John 21:24 (346), explains the five possible interpretational options (given the evidence), and adopts a position contra the consensus view (Johannine community view) regarding the authorship of the Fourth Gospel (3–4). Moreover, Harris highlights the importance of the term *apосynagōgos* (“excommunicated,” or “excluded from the synagogue”) regarding Martyn’s exclusion hypothesis⁵ as a primary motivation for the writing of John’s Gospel denoted by the threefold repetition of *apосynagōgos* in John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2 (189). Against Martyn, Harris sees both “missionary and pastoral purposes” (evinced in the purpose statement of John 20:31) as the primary motivations for the penning of John’s Gospel (5–6).

However, Harris’s work is not without faults. First, Harris’s comments often become esoteric due to the superfluous amount of abbreviations throughout. Second, since the EGGNT series is based off the UBS⁵ Greek text (xxii), it would have been helpful for Harris to include the UBS⁵ Committee ratings for verses containing textual variants. Interestingly, Harris comments only briefly on thirty-one of the forty-two C-rated textual variants⁶ in his work, and monolithically cites Metzger⁷ regarding his text-critical evaluations. Third, Harris’s sources seem outdated, with the most recent of his “recommended commentaries” being Köstenberger’s 2004 BECNT volume (13).

David N. Freedman; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966–1970), 1:cxviii.

⁴Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT; eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 10–11.

⁵J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 31–41. Martyn suggests that the exclusion of the Johannine community was an enforcement of the Birkath ha-Minim (i.e., “the Benediction against the heretics”), which was a means of expulsion by self-exclusion. Cf. David A. Lamb, *Text, Context, and the Johannine Community: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the Johannine Writings* (LNTS 477; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clarke, 2014), 8, n. 22.

⁶This is according to the count of this reviewer.

⁷Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd. ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994).

In sum, Harris's *John* is the fruit of a lifetime of scholarly study and exegesis of the Greek NT. Pastors, students, and informed laity will find Harris's *John* to be a helpful handmaiden in their exegetical toolbox in working through the Greek text of the Fourth Gospel, while seasoned Johannine scholars may find many of Harris's sources a bit dusty and outdated. This work is intended to be neither a full-scale commentary (xxii) nor a replacement for one's own exegetical and syntactical analysis of the text. With these caveats in mind, I highly recommend *John* and the rest of the EGGNT series, as they fill an important lacuna in biblical studies through their synergistic union of the inductive and deductive elements of hermeneutics. I am grateful that Jennifer was able to "share" her full-time caregiver for the penning of this work (xx). May the tribe of such a visionary, scholar, and shepherd such as Harris increase.

– Gregory E. Lamb, *Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina*

***The Messiah of Peace: A Performance-Criticism Commentary on Mark's Passion-Resurrection Narrative.* By Thomas E. Boomershine. Biblical Performance Criticism Series 12. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015. 464 pages. Paperback, \$57.00.**

Thomas E. Boomershine has supplied a much-needed commentary on the Gospel of Mark from a performance-critical perspective. Boomershine, a leader in the development of performance theory as a critical methodology, founded the Network of Biblical Storytellers in 1977 as well as the Bible in Ancient and Modern Media, a section of the Society of Biblical Literature. Until 2006, he served as the G. Ernest Thomas Distinguished Professor of Christianity and Communication at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Boomershine's research is presented in two mediums, with the first consisting of a series of webinars in which Boomershine performs Mark's passion-resurrection narrative in both Greek as well as in English. According to Boomershine, these webinars serve to introduce the chapters of the book. The second medium is the book itself, which consists of two parts. Following an introduction, the first part is a running commentary on Mark 14:1–16:8, labeled by Boomershine as "Mark's passion-resurrection narrative," or "PRN." The second part is a collection of eight appendices that expand upon information addressed in the introduction.

Boomershine's commentary on Mark is superb. He eruditely handles numerous critical methodologies, yet does so in such a way as to focus the study around performance criticism. His commentary has four primary elements: translation, sound map, notes on the translation, and a concluding section discussing how the passion-resurrection narrative should be performed. While there is much to commend in this book, such would require too lengthy a review, so what follows is limited to highlighting one weakness and one strength of the book.

One of the highlights of *The Messiah of Peace* is Boomershine's optimistic approach to Jesus's passion-resurrection narrative. In contrast to many scholars who interpret the passion narrative as the failure of Jesus's ministry, Boomershine interprets the passion-resurrection narrative in light of Jesus's Son of Man prophecies. As indicated by the Son of Man statements, Jesus (as well as Mark's audience) anticipated the events of the passion. The resurrection brings about a restoration of honor for Jesus and his followers. Boomershine exploits this paradigm by noting the fall and rise of various characters in Mark. One of the more fascinating characterizations in the book is Boomershine's treatment of the young man in the tomb whom he contrasts with the young man who fled naked from Jesus's accusers in the garden of Gethsemane. Whereas the first abandoned Jesus in shame during the passion account, the second sits in the resurrected Jesus's tomb, robed in white. In conclusion, Boomershine's optimistic perspective on the passion-resurrection narrative provides a refreshing perspective within a field which has overly stressed the negative aspects of the account.

The most obvious difficulty with Boomershine's work is the unjustified omission of Mark 1–13. He offers no perceivable explanation as to why he excluded the first thirteen chapters of Mark from his commentary. The passion-resurrection narrative is indeed the climax of Mark's Gospel, but it nevertheless comprises only the final portion of the overall Gospel. To exclude the majority of the Gospel is a glaring deficiency. In Boomershine's defense, however, he does a commendable job of engaging the entirety of Mark's Gospel since he understands the passion-resurrection narrative as the climax of the events preceding it. Additionally, for Boomershine to write a commentary on the entire Gospel would be exhaustive, considering that his commentary on 14:1–16:8 is 327 pages.

A series of eight appendices rounds out the book. The first is devoted to establishing the historical context of Mark's Gospel. In the second appendix, Boomershine compiles the Greek sound maps attested throughout his commentary. The introductory material in this appendix is especially insightful, as here Boomershine discusses the nature of Greek punctuation. Boomershine then turns his attention to the pronunciation of first-century Greek in the third appendix. Unfortunately, this appendix adds little more to the discussion already given on pp. 6–7 of the introduction. The fourth appendix expands upon "The Rhetorics of Biblical Storytelling" in the introduction and provides biblical examples of "the rhetoric of alienation/condemnation" and "the rhetoric of involvement/implication." Next Boomershine defends his implementation of John Elliott's classification of the *Ioudaios/ta ethnē*. In the sixth appendix, one of the more interesting of the studies, Boomershine analyzes the audiences *in* Mark in order to ascertain the audiences *of* Mark. He concludes that Mark was written to large audiences primarily of non-believing Jews and Gentiles seeking to rationalize the events following the Jewish-Roman revolt. The seventh appendix offers an excursus on the pronunciation of *elōi* in Mark 15:34. Finally, appendix eight offers a short comparison of the Greek in Mark 15:20 and Judg 16:25, with Boomershine contending that the mocking of Jesus echoes the mocking of Samson, as attested by the LXX of Alexandrinus.

In conclusion, Thomas E. Boomershine has written an exceptional commentary on Mark's passion-resurrection narrative and should be commended for his work. Despite the minor grievance discussed above, *The Messiah of Peace* will stand as a *magnum opus* of performance criticism and provides a clear example of how it can be applied to a text.

- Mark D. Cooper, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana

***NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Edited by D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 2880 pages. Hardcover, \$49.99.**

D. A. Carson is the general editor of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Carson received his PhD from the University of Cambridge. He is a gifted and prolific writer, and his writings have been published in fourteen languages, including German, Russian, and Spanish. He has written or edited more than sixty books, published more than two hundred and sixty articles, and edited three series: New Studies in Biblical Theology (IVP), Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans), and Studies in Biblical Greek (Peter Lang). Also, he serves as president of The Gospel Coalition and as a member of the editorial board of The Christ on Campus Initiative. He is on the faculty of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, as Research Professor of New Testament, and he previously served as the academic dean of the Northwest Baptist Theological Seminary in Vancouver, British Columbia.¹

The *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* (2015 edition), edited by Carson and written by more than sixty scholarly contributors including three of whom are women (unlike previous editions which had no women as study notes contributors), "aims to provide enough detail to answer the questions that many readers raise when they read the Bible without indulging in all the details that might be better left to separate commentaries" (Editor's Preface, xxiii). Thus, the 2015 edition has features common to a number of other study Bibles, such as the complete text of a version of the English Bible (in this case, the New International Version, or NIV), explanatory notes, biblical verse cross references, introductory articles on the biblical books, charts, maps, graphical illustrations, pictures, and various other Bible study aids (e.g., a concordance). However, while the 2015 edition has features and study resources typical of some other study Bibles, it is distinguished by the extensive information provided in its 2880 pages, the colorful and helpful way the information is displayed and organized, and the availability of a digital edition with free and unlimited access for those who obtain a print edition.

The 2015 edition provides a wealth of information for reading and studying the Bible.

¹"D. A. Carson's Publications." A Listing of Articles, Books, and Reviews, <https://www.thegospel-coalition.org/pages/d-a-carson-publications> [accessed June 27, 2016].

A one-page quick start guide quickly introduces readers to the features of the 2015 edition, followed by a detailed table of contents. Unfortunately, the four-page introduction to the *NIV Study Bible* was not included in the 2015 edition as it had been in the 2011 edition (which also had the quick start guide), thus omitting additional beneficial guidance on the Bible's features. Yet, once readers go from the quick start guide and the table of contents, they discover that the 2015 edition has nearly 20,000 verse-by-verse study notes, a biblical verse cross-reference system of over 100,000 entries, and a concordance with more than 35,000 Scripture references. Other interesting features include clearly written introductory articles on the Old and New Testaments, each biblical book, and related topics, such as on the genre groupings of the biblical books and on the period between the Testaments. Also, twenty-eight biblical theology articles have been added to the 2015 edition on topics, such as "The Bible and Theology," "The Glory of God," "Creation," "Sin," "Covenant," "Sacrifice," "Death and Resurrection," "Love and Grace," "The Gospel," and others (interestingly, no article is entitled "Salvation," although the subject is discussed in various articles listed). Finally, more maps, charts, graphical illustrations, and pictures were added to the 2015 edition.² However, the information and features have increased the size and weight of the 2015 edition (to almost six pounds), making it the thickest and heaviest of the *NIV Study Bible* editions and likely causing a number of readers to decide not to carry it to church or Sunday Bible study but to use it as a "stationary" reference Bible. Also, when the 2015 edition is open for reading, the reader must adjust to reading "on the curve" instead of reading flat pages, due to the thickness of the Bible (and turning the very thin and limp pages may warrant an adjustment by readers with stiff fingers).

Another appealing aspect of the 2015 edition, in comparison with previous editions and some other study Bibles, is the display and organization of the information and features. While the contents and layout of the 2015 edition are similar (and in a few instances, even identical) to that of previously published *NIV Study Bible* editions, various features have been placed in a more logical and handy sequence, such as the index of maps being placed preceding the color maps, and the Old Testament chronology and the New Testament chronology charts being placed adjacent to the Old Testament and New Testament sections, respectively, instead of being together in the beginning of the Bible (as in the 2002 and 1985 editions). In addition, the 2015 edition has gained much appeal and ease of readability through the widespread use of more (and appropriately chosen) color in the study notes, charts, illustrations, interior maps, and pictures, especially in comparison with the 1985 first edition which, other than the words of Jesus (in red) and the geographical maps at the end, was essentially a black-and-white edition.

All in all, the colorful display, additional content, and better organized features have resulted in a more compatible and current edition for today's media-oriented and

²"NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Unpacking God's Story." Study Bible Features Overview, <http://www.nivzondervanstudybible.com/overview/> [accessed June 27, 2016].

technologically-immersed society. One particular indication of that is the offer by Zondervan of free access to a digital edition of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* to those who purchase the 2015 edition. A card is attached after the last page of the 2015 edition with a scratch-off access code which allows use via a computer, phone, or tablet. Such access makes the Bible “portable” and handy for reading, studying, taking notes, or referencing any of the information and features of the 2015 edition.

Study Bibles are numerous, and people buy and use study Bibles for different reasons and in various ways. Is the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* better than the *Disciple’s Study Bible*, *The Holman Illustrated Study Bible*, *The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*, *The Open Bible*, *The Experiencing God Study Bible*, the *Interactive Study Bible*, the *NIV Archaeological Study Bible*, the *Stewardship Study Bible*, or the *Quest Study Bible*, all of which I have obtained through the years? I have been helped in some way by each of them in my reading and studying of the Bible. However, if I seek to have a contemporary library of resources in one book to help me study the Bible, then the 2015 edition of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* merits consideration—and I recommend it as such.

- Jerry N. Barlow, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***The Pastor’s Ministry. Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds.* By Brian Croft. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 185 pages. Paperback, \$16.99.**

Brian Croft serves as senior pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and as founder of Practical Shepherding, Inc. He is also the senior fellow of the Mathena Center for Church Revitalization at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has twenty years of pastoral ministry experience and has written or contributed to more than a dozen books sharing the lessons from his experience with pastors and church leaders.

The purpose of this book is to call pastors to remain true to the biblical calling of being the shepherd of the flock of God. Brian Croft states that “the aim of this book is simple: to reveal the priorities God sets for every pastor” (16). He also states his “hope is that the power of God’s word expounded in these pages will invigorate every pastor to see what God desires for his life and ministry and to better discern what he can do that will please the Chief Shepherd” (18). As implied by the title, the intent of the author is to present these priorities as “grounded in an exposition of God’s word and practically fleshed out in the context of life and ministry” (17).

In the introduction, Brian Croft draws from 1 Peter 5:2–4 as the guiding exhortation for the book, thus declaring that the unchanging call of a pastor “is to shepherd the souls of God’s people humbly, willingly, and eagerly, and to do all of this on behalf of the Chief Shepherd,

Jesus Christ” (15). He then declares ten key priorities of a pastor, which serve as the ten chapters of the book. These ten priorities are grouped into three categories: foundation, focus, and faithfulness.

Under the title of “foundation,” the first three basic priorities of a pastor are described—namely, “guard the truth,” “preach the word,” and “pray for the flock.” In these chapters, Croft gives the Old and New Testament background for each priority before turning to application of that priority in the work of the pastor. The strength of this section is in the practical guidance regarding preaching and praying. Sound advice and encouragement based not only on Scripture but also upon the experiences of the author in the modern church help make these demands achievable, and leave the reader with real suggestions for putting them into practice. For example, Croft presents the case for solid expository preaching, using one’s own material, and with both the people and oneself in mind. Likewise, he provides a number of suggestions regarding ways to pray for every individual within the church. Certainly, these three activities are foundational for the pastoral ministry, and Croft does well to highlight their necessity.

In the section designated as “focus,” Croft addresses the next four responsibilities of a pastor: “set an example,” “visit the sick,” “comfort the grieving,” and “care for widows.” In portions of this section, the material reads like a minister’s manual. For example, specific details are given regarding the duties of the pastor at a funeral, such as when to arrive, where to stand, how to work with a funeral director, and so on. Overall, this section does relate the ministerial focus of a pastor, but the chapter on “care for the widows” seems too narrow. If the broader topic “care for the needy” had been chosen, and elements for orphans, the poor, and aliens/strangers were included with the widows, then perhaps the section would have been stronger. As it stands, the chapter seems to serve as a preview of the book he is co-authoring on the topic (117), and is an arbitrary choice from among the many responsibilities calling for a minister’s attention.

In the final section, Croft combines the pastor’s need to “confront sin,” “encourage the weaker sheep,” and “identify and train leaders” under the heading of “faithfulness.” As indicated by this heading, the challenge of a pastor in these difficult tasks, and when working with difficult people, is to remain faithful. Not only must he deal with sinners and broken people, he must help train the next generation of shepherds to do so as well. In comparison, the chapter on confronting sin, which focuses on the need for church discipline, is one of the weaker portions, in that the biblical basis leans only upon a few New Testament passages. This seems odd, given the balance of the other chapters. Certainly, examples from the Old Testament abound, such as Nathan’s confrontation of David (2 Sam 12).

In the conclusion, Croft challenges ministers to keep watch over themselves. Here he comes full circle, calling for the pastor to remember he is subject to the Chief Shepherd himself. Croft makes it clear that a pastor can easily discredit himself when he fails to watch

over his testimony.

This book is of great help for the young minister needing advice in the pastorate. At the same time, this work challenges mature pastors to examine their ministries and to recommit to these biblical priorities. The length makes it easy to read, and the practical nature of the material makes the book an asset for any minister's library. Although the work may fall short of being a textbook for pastoral ministry, it certainly may serve as supplement as well as recommended reading for ministerial students and church leaders. Whether reading this as a textbook or for personal growth, the material instructs and encourages readers to focus on God's word and to accept the challenge to shepherd faithfully God's flock.

- Tim Tew, Charleston Southern University, Charleston, South Carolina

***Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion.* By R. Larry Overstreet. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 312 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.**

R. Larry Overstreet is adjunct professor in the PhD program at Piedmont International University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. In addition to *Persuasive Preaching*, Overstreet has written *Biographical Preaching: Bringing Bible Characters to Life*. The author brings a solid academic tenure, coupled with seventeen years of pastoral work in churches in both Michigan and Indiana. He writes as a seasoned practitioner, and this work makes an important contribution to the field of preaching.

In *Persuasive Preaching*, Overstreet seeks to make the case that persuasion was a key element to New Testament preaching, a case he makes convincingly, as he examines the Greek words used pertaining to persuasion. The author follows his study of the biblical material by offering clear examples on how to organize sermonic material for the purpose of persuasion. He provides helpful case studies of how to form various arguments for the purpose of persuading one's hearers to respond to the biblical message.

The book reads as an impassioned plea for the recovery of persuasion in contemporary pulpit ministry. Overstreet laments that too often sermons excel in exposition, but fail in persuasion. Faithful preaching must be seen as more than imparting biblical information, but also as a call to respond in faith and obey the living God.

The book is arranged in four parts, with part one addressing the challenges facing persuasive preaching. In this section, Overstreet provides a careful working definition of persuasion, which draws from secular sources as well as from the field of homiletics. Overstreet understands persuasion in the preaching context as "the process of preparing biblical, expository messages using a persuasive pattern, and presenting them through verbal and nonverbal communication means to autonomous individuals who can be convicted and/

or taught by God's Holy Spirit, in order to alter or strengthen their attitudes and beliefs toward God, His Word, and other individuals, resulting in their lives being transformed into the image of Christ" (14).

With such a perspective, persuasive preaching is by definition a counter-cultural effort due to the lingering influences of modernism and postmodernism on the worldview of many individuals. To seek to persuade anyone to do anything, not to mention making a truth claim that one way is the only way, is *anathema* in virtually every quadrant of western culture. However, Overstreet underscores that such is the task for those called to proclaim the gospel, irrespective of whether the cultural winds are hostile toward such an approach.

In Part 2, which includes chapters 3–7, Overstreet offers a valuable study of the biblical text. In chapters 3–4, he presents linguistic, rhetorical, and theological reasons why persuasion is biblically appropriate by establishing that it was widely practiced in the ancient world and was integral to the preaching and teaching of the New Testament. The author includes a helpful study of how New Testament writers used the word *peithō*, concluding that the usage was consistent with the idea of being fully persuaded.

In chapters 5–7, Overstreet describes how the Aristotelian rhetorical principles of persuasion—namely *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*—are evident in New Testament preaching and ministry. A reminder of these pillars of rhetorical principle is helpful. *Logos*, the logical argument of a message, is represented clearly in Paul's preaching. *Pathos*, which includes emotional engagement of both the speaker and the audience, also is evident in apostolic preaching. *Ethos*, which refers to the character of the speaker as it impacts the ability to persuade, is seen in the New Testament requirements for those who would serve as spiritual leaders in the church.

Part 3 of this text includes chapters 8–11. In this section, Overstreet provides practical application on how to structure persuasive messages and presents examples of how to sharpen one's homiletical skills. Four specific patterns of persuasion are delineated: motivated sequence, problem-solution, refutation, cause-effect. The author provides sermon examples to show how these patterns can be used when preaching to contemporary listeners. In Part 4, which included chapters 12–14, Overstreet provided a vital discussion on three topics of application for one considering persuasive preaching. In chapter 12, Overstreet discusses the difference between persuasion and manipulation. With the present cultural trends giving strong opposition to truth claims and the exclusivity of Christ, persuasion is lumped wrongly into the category of manipulation. In this very important chapter, Overstreet differentiates between persuasion, which has biblical warrant, and manipulation, which is unethical and out of order for a minister of the gospel.

Overstreet writes this book from an evangelical perspective, which he observes especially in the final chapters when he addresses the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, along with

the public invitation. The final chapter is a reasoned appeal for the recovery of an invitation in the Christian worship service for the purpose of giving people an opportunity to respond to the message heard. Overstreet argues that such a segment is important as a logical and practical basis of persuading people to respond to biblical truth.

Appendices A–D contain information from secular sources as well as the New Testament on the usage of various Greek words related to persuasion. Appendix E contains sample sermon outlines for each of the four persuasion patterns.

Overstreet issues a strong challenge to recover persuasion as an essential goal of Christian proclamation. He sets forth a biblical theology of preaching that should be in the curriculum of every homiletics department as a reminder that true preaching, in its biblical form, is more than imparting information. The preaching moment is not a performance, but a God-ordained means to call men and women to the obedience of faith as it relates to every facet of their lives. Indeed, we preach to persuade.

As one with a weekly pulpit ministry, I was confronted by this work to embrace a renewed intentionality to persuade. The need for persuasion has become an urgent need for those called and charged to lead the church of Jesus Christ. In the face of an intolerant pluralism and the daily bombardment of hundreds of appeals and messages in our digital culture, the effort to persuade for the cause of Christ is ever present. Overstreet gives numerous examples to consider in this helpful text, and he concludes with this pastoral exhortation: “Our task is to preach, to persuade others to turn to our Lord, and to live in full commitment to Him. May it be said of our ministries for God, as it was said of Moses, ‘Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant’ (Heb. 3:5)” (214).

- James B. Law, *First Baptist Church, Gonzales, Louisiana*

***Prevenient Grace: God's Provision for Fallen Humanity.* By W. Brian Shelton. Anderson, IN: Warner, 2014. 283 pages. Paperback, \$24.99.**

Prevenient grace is a doctrine which is rejected by its opponents and neglected by its advocates. W. Brian Shelton, provost at Toccoa Falls College in Toccoa Falls, Georgia, defines his topic: “The doctrine of prevenient grace is the belief that God enables all people to exercise saving faith in Christ by mitigating the effects of sinful depravity” (259). Calvinists reject the view that God provides grace which enables every person to respond freely to the gospel; this rejection is exemplified by a survey of sizeable systematic theologies published recently by Dortian Calvinists who fail to mention the doctrine. Ironically, Arminians assume its truth but have not mounted a significant defense for the doctrine. Shelton explains there have been “no seminal works on prevenient grace in the two hundred year legacy of John

Wesley” (i).¹ Shelton’s research fills a gaping hole in theological literature.

The author’s aim is careful and measured. He attempts to make the case that prevenient grace is implicit in the Scripture and that it does not contradict but in fact coheres with other biblical teachings on salvation. Shelton “seeks to demonstrate that prevenient grace is the best overall theological explanation for the universal opportunity and free will passages we find in the New Testament” (vii). In chapter 1, Shelton defines prevenient grace, noting the concept is consistent with Calvin’s view of total depravity as total inability. Also, prevenient grace is similar to Calvin’s view of common grace, since both prevenient and common grace extend to all people but are not by themselves salvific. In chapter 2, Shelton presents an exegetical case for prevenient grace. After briefly making a case for sinful depravity, he proposes a selection of New Testament texts in support of the doctrine of prevenient grace. In John 1:9, Jesus “enlightens everyone.” In John 12:32, Jesus promises to “draw all people” to himself. Romans 1–2 states that all people can know God exists due to his creation and their conscience; this universal ability among people can be explained by the universal nature of prevenient grace. In Rom 2:4, God’s kindness—rather than monergistic regeneration—leads to repentance. Titus 2:11 states that “God’s salvation has appeared to all,” which can be interpreted as universal opportunity for salvation. Shelton comments on other verses which provide less significant support for the doctrine.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider the concept of prevenient grace in light of key theological developments throughout church history. Chapter 3 examines whether and how the concept is consistent with the writings of the early church era (Irenaeus, Origen, Macarius, Augustine, and Pelagius), the semi-Pelagian debate, the medieval church (Bernard of Clairvaux and Thomas Aquinas), the eastern church, the Reformation (Luther and Calvin), the Counter Reformation, Remonstrance and Anglican theologies, and twentieth-century theologians (Richard Niebuhr and Emil Brunner). This brief chapter identifies views in the most unlikely places that are consistent with prevenient grace. For example, the position of the Synod of Orange (AD 529) “strikingly resembles prevenient grace” (73). The aim of the chapter was to demonstrate that many thinkers in the Christian tradition have simultaneously affirmed total human inability for doing spiritual good—including repenting of sin and believing in Jesus—as well as God’s grace which enables every person to repent of sin and believe in Jesus. In chapter 4, Shelton focuses on the doctrines of depravity and prevenient grace in the writings of two prominent theologians, James Arminius and John Wesley.

Shelton attempts in chapter 5 to use methods of systematic theology to reconcile passages on prevenient grace with the rest of Scripture (179). At the end, he concludes: “The Arminian

¹Although Shelton draws from articles as well as unpublished academic works and published monographs on prevenient grace in the writings of certain theologians, his claim seems to be correct. I was unable to find a major work on the doctrine of prevenient grace published in English in the last two hundred years.

doctrine of prevenient grace holds together four principles of biblical salvation without contradiction: sinful depravity, salvation by grace, human responsibility, and the universal offer of salvation” (234). In chapter 6, the author addresses implications of the doctrine for issues such as the destiny of the unevangelized as well as for baptism and preaching. Shelton ends the book by summarizing his argument in the form of a 15-question catechism.

Shelton presupposes that the sinful state of every person is such that “human wills are depraved and unable to perform any spiritually good act” (iii). To this point, Christians should be in agreement. Biblical texts such as Rom 3:10–18 clarify that people are not righteous, which is why righteousness attained by faith in Christ (vv. 21–26) is celebrated as good news. However, Shelton follows both Arminians and Calvinists in presupposing total inability. This doctrine affirms more than the sinful, unrighteous condition of people. Total inability goes beyond this basic affirmation that humans are sinful to assert that people are *unable* to do that which God has commanded sinners to do, namely to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus (ii, 2, 13). Because Shelton accepts the Calvinist/Arminian presupposition that depravity entails the *inability* to repent and believe, he regards prevenient grace to be the best way to account for biblical texts which indicate: God’s desire for every person to be saved, the unlimited extent of Christ’s atonement, and the universal invitations and commands for people to repent and be saved.

If prevenient grace is true (namely, that God enables every person to respond to the gospel) then it seems the effects of total inability are canceled out and there was never a time that a person heard the gospel and was *unable* to respond. However, if total inability is *not* presumed, then prevenient grace is no longer necessary. Perhaps a better theological method would be to affirm human sinfulness as well as salvation by God’s grace through faith in Christ (which are clear in Scripture) without adopting total inability and its corresponding doctrine of prevenient grace—neither of which are perceived clearly in Scripture by Christians outside the Calvinist-Arminian framework. Of course, such a move would render this book (and all other writings which presuppose total inability) to be unnecessary.

Shelton should be commended for attempting to fill the theological lacuna due to the neglect of this doctrine by both Calvinist and Arminian theologians. He has articulated a peaceable and positive case for the doctrine of prevenient grace. Whether one affirms the doctrine in question, this monograph’s contribution to the field should be appreciated, and it is likely to become a key secondary resource for theology students and scholars who consider whether God has provided all of fallen humanity with prevenient grace.

- Adam Harwood, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana*

***Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness.* By Richard B. Hays. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014. xxii + 155 pages. Hardcover, \$34.95.**

In contrast to some biblical scholars, Richard Hays's works do not appear on the shelves of bookstores with the same frequency as quarterly periodicals. Though Hays does not publish at a prolific rate, when he does publish his works are typically notable in their impact on the field of biblical studies. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* has affected the understanding of the impact of Old Testament (OT) texts in the theology and writing of Paul since its publication in 1989, and *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, which was named one of the top 100 most important religious books of the twentieth century by *Christianity Today*, has influenced both the church and academy. Richard Hays currently serves as George Washington Ivey Professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, where he served as dean from 2010–2015.

Reading Backwards is an invitation to embrace a figural reading of Christian Scripture. By figural reading, Hays means “the discernment of unexpected patterns of correspondence between earlier and later events or persons within a continuous temporal stream” (93). The figural reading of Christian Scripture proposed by Hays flows from the hermeneutical strategies of the Gospel writers. In his introduction, Hays argues that the Gospel writers should be looked to as models for contemporary interpreters of the biblical text. Thus, he makes the foundational thesis of his work that “the Gospels teach us how to read the OT, and—at the same time—the OT teaches us how to read the Gospels” (4). Hays tests this thesis by examining the unique way in which each Evangelist reads the OT.

After exploring the way in which each Evangelist reads the OT in chapters 2–5, Hays summarizes his findings in his concluding chapter. He notes that all the Evangelists read the OT figuratively yet distinctively, providing four voices that come together in a polyphonic proclamation of Jesus's divinity, based on Israel's Scriptures (95). Hays is careful to note that reading the OT figuratively does not mean reading it as “deliberately predicting events in the life of Jesus” (94). Hays concludes *Reading Backwards* by observing ten ways the four Evangelists read the OT (104–9). Though Hays does not present these observations as a complete method, he does recommend that they lead toward a “Gospel-shaped hermeneutic.”

Understanding the use of the OT by the New Testament (NT) authors is no easy task, and continues to be one which divides scholars, particularly in the evangelical world. With the contentious nature of the topic in mind, there are some areas in which I question Hays's analysis. Foremost among these areas is Hays's propensity to assume a direct level of influence between OT and NT texts when there are no direct verbal parallels in the text. One example of this would be Hays's assertion that when the Pharisees in Mark 2 ask, “Who is able to forgive sins but the one who is God?” Mark is invoking in the dialogue of the Pharisees Exod 34:6–7 (21–22). While Exod 34:6–7 does state that YHWH is a God “bearing away transgression, rebellion, and sin,” there is no explicit claim in the passage (though it is

certainly implicit) that God alone forgives sin. The connection between these two passages becomes even less likely when one considers that Mark's copy of the OT—the Septuagint—states that God takes away (*aphaireō*) sin, while the Pharisees in Mark wonder that Jesus could forgive (*aphiēmī*) sin. With the lack of similarity in content and vocabulary, one might wonder if Mark is reading this passage at all, much less reading it backwards.

Though some of the NT texts Hays identifies may not be evidence of an intentional backwards reading by the Evangelists, the vast majority of the texts he identifies are clear examples of the Gospel writers reading Israel's Scriptures backwards in order to understand and explain the life of Jesus. By examining the figural OT reading of each Evangelist, Hays substantiates half of his thesis: the OT does teach us how to read the Gospels. By examining how the Evangelists use OT intertexts to make vital points—indeed, the most vital points—of their message, Hays highlights the fact that to understand the Gospels, readers must understand the OT and how it was used by the Evangelists. Hays highlights that the failure of contemporary scholarship to consider the way the Evangelists read the OT is particularly evident in the claim that the Synoptic Gospels contain a low Christology (72).

The second half of Hays's thesis—that the Gospels teach us how to read the OT—is proposed in theory in *Reading Backwards*, but not proven in praxis. Though Hays proposes that the OT *should* be interpreted figuratively by the contemporary church, following the model of the Evangelists, he does not do so within the work. *Reading Backwards* examines only OT texts in contexts where they are cited or alluded to by the Evangelists. Though Hays does not provide a figural reading of any OT passages apart from those found in the Gospels, he does provide ten observations which may aid in doing so. These observations are perhaps the greatest gift Hays offers the church and the Christian academy in *Reading Backwards*. In these observations, Hays offers a way in which the contemporary Christian community may participate in a genuinely Christian reading of the OT. Whether it will be for readers of Hays's work to put this promising method into practice or if Hays will do so himself when he expands the current work is yet to be seen. What is certain, however, is that hermeneutical ventures of this sort are necessary as the church seeks to understand how we are to interpret from Moses to all the prophets all that was written concerning Jesus, who we confess to be the Messiah (Luke 24:27).

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***Systematic Theology*. By Anthony C. Thiselton. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 467 Pages. Hardcover, \$40.00.**

Anthony C. Thiselton is professor emeritus of Christian theology at the University of Nottingham, England. He holds degrees from King's College London (BD, MTh), the University of Sheffield (PhD), and the University of Durham (DD). He has written multiple works in the fields of hermeneutics, Christian theology, biblical studies, and the philosophy of religion. His other works include *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, and *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching Through the Centuries and Today*.

After a long career of writing in the disciplines of hermeneutics, theology, and biblical studies, Anthony Thiselton has provided a systematic theology. Though it is only 467 pages, readers should not underestimate the amount of information contained in this volume. In his *Systematic Theology*, Thiselton discusses the classic topics of Christian theology as well as some unique topics of theological method.

Thiselton begins his *Systematic Theology* by addressing issues of theological prolegomena. He notes the necessity for coherence in systematic theology and addresses objections to "system." He is skeptical of some correspondence theories of truth and appropriates a coherence theory for his work. Thiselton does not deny the claim that truth is that which corresponds to reality. Rather, he notes that in epistemological issues such as those in systematic theology, one has to rely primarily on tests of coherence. Also, theology must deal with the Bible in its historical context, rather than using the Bible as a set of proof-texts. Furthermore, Thiselton deals with issues concerning conceptual grammar as well as the usefulness of developments in speech-act theory, hermeneutics, sociology, and literary theory for systematic theology.

Thiselton divides his doctrine of God into two chapters. The first of these two discusses God's personhood, the Trinity, and God's holy love and grace. He notes that God is personal, but not in the same way that humans are personal. Thiselton prefers to describe God as "suprapersonal." Thiselton states, "God is *more* than a person but *not less* than a person" (30). He affirms that God exists as Trinity, noting the implications of his being suprapersonal, namely that God is not "three human like persons" (32). He prefers to explain God's existence as Trinity in terms of the reationality among the three members. Thiselton also prefers to understand God as the dynamic, "living God" rather than the static, immutable God of theism. Thiselton does not deny theism understood as adherence to the belief in one God who relates to the world in a suprapersonal way (40). He summarizes the theism he denounces as follows: "But 'theism' can also be more abstract, static, and theoretical than belief in the living God of the Bible, and especially the God of the OT. . . . (T)heism seeks to know God through his *being*, while faith in the living God knows God from his *activity*"

(40). The theism Thiselton has in mind is the theism of philosophers such as Aristotle, who understood God as the immutable, unmoved mover. By “the living God,” Thiselton means the God who enters into history and interacts in a suprapersonal way with the people whom he has created. In the next chapter, Thiselton discusses issues such as the problem of evil and the arguments for God’s existence. He addresses the challenges of atheism in the next chapter.

Thiselton delineates in chapter five his doctrine of the nonhuman creation as well as ordinances for human welfare. In that chapter, he provides his angelology as well as his understanding of the need for human ordering in the creation. He contends that humans are placed over creation for the purpose of preserving it. To bear the image of God means to represent God and exercise his authority over the creation. Moreover, Thiselton discusses the implications of humankind bearing the image of God for how people ought to care for creation. Here he explains how humans are to care both for animals and the environment. In his discussion of biblical anthropology, Thiselton denies mind-body dualism and affirms the unity of human nature.

Regarding the doctrine of sin, Thiselton understands sin primarily as “misdirected desire” and “alienation” (148–53). Chapter 7 provides a brief survey of historical thinkers on this topic. He discusses the contributions of major theologians from the patristic, medieval, reformation, and modern periods. It is because of humanity’s misdirected desire and subsequent alienation from God that leads Thiselton to his treatment of Jesus as mediator in chapter 8.

Thiselton addresses topics of Christology in chapters 8–10. In chapter 8, he explains the role of Christ as mediator. He defines the gospel in terms of the cross, and he defines the cross in the terms of God’s grace (179–83). He notes the different Hebrew and Greek terms for “redemption,” “salvation,” “mediation,” and “sacrifice.” One might wonder why Thiselton embarks on these word studies in light of James Barr’s well-known attack on word studies.¹ Thiselton draws from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion that language has the ability to embody forms of life, as well as concepts. He is careful to note that words embody concepts, and that one can better understand concepts through analyzing how the words that represent these concepts are used. He also discusses the expiation-propitiation debate. He interprets this concept in light of Paul’s understanding of reconciliation and demonstrates this is not an either/or issue. Christ’s work on the cross serves as a means of expiating sin as well as providing mediation between mankind and God. He provides a brief historical theology of the theme of atonement in chapter 9, noting its hermeneutical implications. Thiselton provides a “concise Christology” in chapter 10. He favors the “Christology from below” approach of Wolfhart Pannenberg and begins with a discussion of the historical Jesus, drawing from

¹James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 54, 164, 234.

Pannenberg, as well as from N. T. Wright and James D. G. Dunn. Thiselton specifically notes Jesus's teaching on the kingdom of God and provides a brief analysis of the Christology of the Epistles and Acts.

He explicates his doctrine of the Holy Spirit in chapters 11–12. He provides an exposition of the biblical material in chapter 11 and an exposition of historical insights in chapter 12. These topics receive more attention in Thiselton's previous work, *The Holy Spirit: In Biblical Teaching Through the Centuries and Today*. He notes the significance and contributions of Pentecostal theology as well as other charismatic thinkers.

Thiselton focuses on the doctrine of the church in chapter 13. He discusses the identity of the church as well as the church's ministry and sacraments. Regarding the church's identity and ministry, he draws heavily from the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In one sense, the church is a fulfillment of God's design of humanity, namely the church is a community. God created persons to be in communion with one another. Of particular interest here is Thiselton's distinction between a person and an individual. He states, "An individual . . . becomes a person when the self opens itself up to other selves and to God" (314). One here might question whether this concept applies to fetuses as well. In other words, is a fetus considered a person or an individual? Thiselton's definition applies to fetuses as well in that the fetus still exists in communion with and is dependent on its mother. Just because one is not *aware* of one's being in relationship with another self does not mean that she is not in fact in that relationship. Thiselton also discusses issues of church government and the role of the sacraments. He elaborates on three models of church government: episcopal, presbyterian, and congregational. He favors the episcopal and presbyterian models over congregationalist models. This is not surprising, considering that Thiselton is ordained in the Church of England.

The last two chapters deal with topics surrounding eschatology. In chapter 14, Thiselton discusses the return of Christ and the resurrection. He details the three classical views of the millennium: premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism, favoring the latter. He also notes the failures and lack of biblical foundations for predicting Christ's return. He then turns to the resurrection of Jesus and its implications for what is called the general resurrection of the dead. Here he draws heavily from the work of N. T. Wright. Thiselton discusses in chapter 15 the last judgment, eternity, and the restoration of all things. He notes different objections to the doctrine of God's wrath and judgment, claiming that these objections stem primarily from a misunderstanding of the biblical teaching on these topics. He points out that God judges his creation because he loves his creation. He states, "We have only to imagine the attitude of loving parents or grandparents, when their child or grandchild is bent on self-destruction or foolishness, to appreciate that *not* to experience some reaction of anger or wrath would simply indicate lack of concern or of love" (370). Of particular interest in this chapter is Thiselton's treatment of the fate of those who do not "directly participate in salvation" (386). He notes the three classical views: eternal torment,

conditional immortality, and universalism. Before embarking on his discussion of these three views, Thiselton states, “*In truth, all three views find serious support in the history of theology, and none should be lightly or thoughtlessly dismissed. Each makes a serious and thoughtful point*” (386, emphasis his). This point might not be accepted well among conservative Evangelicals. One should note, however, that Thiselton does not explicitly endorse any of these three views. Yet, the view that receives the most discussion is universalism.

Anthony Thiselton’s *Systematic Theology* is a welcome contribution to the field of systematic theology. Readers will benefit from the interdisciplinary nature of Thiselton’s work. One of the markers of good theologians is their ability to interact intelligibly with the work of other disciplines outside of theology. Thiselton shows his knowledge and familiarity with the fields of sociology, anthropology, philosophy of language, and philosophical hermeneutics throughout the work. Also, he does a commendable job of interacting with the seminal works in contemporary scholarship in biblical studies and biblical theology. He primarily interacts with the works of Gordon Wenham, Gerhard von Rad, N. T. Wright, and James D. G. Dunn when engaging biblical-theological issues. One should also note his preference of theologians, namely Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jürgen Moltmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, as he draws from these theologians in almost every chapter of the book. His reliance on Pannenberg is not surprising, given that he thinks that Pannenberg’s three-volume *Systematic Theology* is the best one written to date (xi). Also, in his discussion of the attack on the doctrine of revelation, Thiselton does not endorse any specific view of revelation. Instead, he clearly holds the Bible as the primary source and authority for theology.

Also of interest is the absence of a section on soteriology. Perhaps Thiselton sees soteriology so interconnected to Christology, ecclesiology, and eschatology that he does not deem it necessary to provide a special section for soteriology. Even if this is the case, one is still unclear as to why he omits this section. Perhaps the greatest weakness of Thiselton’s work is one of its greatest strengths: namely, its brevity. Though it is convenient to have a systematic theology that is less than 500 pages, adequate attention is not always given to multiple topics. Thiselton notes this weakness throughout the work. Overall, Anthony Thiselton’s *Systematic Theology* is a phenomenal work. It will serve as useful to scholars, students of theology, pastors and ministers, as well as interested laypersons.

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***A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.* By David E. Garland. Biblical Theology of the New Testament. Edited by Andreas Köstenberger. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 656 pages. Hardcover, \$44.99.**

David E. Garland is William B. Hinson Professor of Christian Scriptures and dean for academic affairs at George W. Truett Seminary, Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Previously, he taught for twenty-one years at his alma mater, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Garland is a prolific author. He has written, co-written, or edited twenty books, including fourteen commentaries. Three previous studies of the Gospel of Mark¹ paved the way for his twenty-first book, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God*.

The book itself, having a hardcover, is durable yet lightweight in spite of its great length. The left and right margins are 1 5/8 inches wide, ideal for jotting down notes. The text has no color or graphics (i.e., maps, figures, pictures) except an occasional chart. The material unfolds in a highly ordered manner beyond the two parts and fourteen chapters. As proof, a “detailed” table of contents spans fourteen pages.

A Theology of Mark's Gospel is one of eight planned volumes in Zondervan's Biblical Theology of the New Testament series; an ambitious project, in part, because biblical theology has been difficult to define.² General Editor Andreas J. Kostenberger asserts, “Biblical Theology engages in the study of the biblical texts while giving careful consideration to the historical setting in which a given piece of writing originated. It seeks to locate and relate the contributions of the respective biblical documents along the lines of the continuum of God's salvation-historical program centered in the coming and salvific work of Christ” (23).

In Part 1, Garland tackles the text of Mark. “Introductory Matters” consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the following historical-critical issues:

1. Authorship: John Mark organizes unrelated stories from Simon Peter, his source.
2. Audience: Gentile-Christians acquainted with Neronian persecution
3. Place of Writing: Rome, not Galilee or Syria

¹*Mark*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); *Mark*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002); with Karen Lee-Thorp, *Mark: Gospel of the Servant King*. Bringing the Bible to Life, ed. Karen H. Jobes (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

²Childs concedes, “The term ‘Biblical Theology’ is ambiguous. It can either denote a theology contained within the Bible, or a theology which accords with the Bible. . . . From one perspective the entire modern history of the discipline of Biblical Theology can be interpreted as the effort to distinguish between these two definitions and to explore the important implications of the distinction.” Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 3.

4. Date: "priority of Mark," prior to the destruction of Jerusalem
5. Genre: revelatory, scriptural book analogous to the biblical histories

Garland admits, "The dizzying debate over Mark's genre . . . has not been repaying" (88). Chapter 2 presents a seventy-nine page, literary-critical reading of the Gospel.

In Part 1 as well as Part 2, Garland provides Greek word analyses and background studies. He knows when to cite relevant Old Testament passages or extra-biblical literature.³ He can utilize textual criticism (see 141–42, 172–73, 195–97, 242, 313, 402, 431, 515, 537–41). He also adeptly highlights literary features such as *inclusio*,⁴ *chiasmus*,⁵ recurring themes,⁶ and characterization.⁷ A *Theology of Mark's Gospel*, therefore, offers the best of both worlds: access to Mark's meaning "behind the text" (historical criticisms) and "inside the text" (new literary criticism: text-centered approach). The typical commentary offers either/or.

In Part 2, Garland tackles the theology of Mark. "Major Themes in Mark's Theology" consists of twelve chapters. Each chapter complements every other chapter, offering a different perspective of the Gospel. Chapter 3 focuses on 1:1–13, which Garland painstakingly exegetes. He labels 1:1 an "incipit," or title that previews the whole Gospel, and he dubs 1:2–13 as Mark's introduction, which intends "to give the readers clues about Jesus' divine identity" (221). Chapter 4 examines six titles of Jesus: Son of God, Messiah, Son of David, Son of Man, Lord, and Teacher. Nevertheless, Garland cautions, "Mark's picture of who Jesus is is told in a story, and a systematic analysis of the titles used for Jesus in the gospel does not tell the whole story" (227). Chapter 5 explores "enacted Christology." Garland shows how "Mark conveys that Jesus is uniquely the Son of God by recording him doing things that only God can do or has the right to do" (262). Chapter 6 surveys the Gospel's presentation of God, but Garland admits, "Mark does not delve into the nature of God. . . . Most of the references to God in Mark's gospel occur on the lips of Jesus" (317). Chapter 7 profiles the kingdom of God, a central theme of Jesus's teachings but surprisingly subtle in Mark, only fourteen occurrences (1:14–15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 10:13–15, 23–25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43). Garland notes, "In Mark, the term (kingdom) primarily is used as a way of talking about God's activity" (336). Chapter 8 is an outstanding feature of Garland's book because it sifts through the many, often conflicting, views about the "messianic secret." Chapters 9 and 10 probe discipleship. Garland gleaned from the Gospel requirements for aspiring disciples such as: unconditional obedience, leaving everything behind, potentially severing family ties, following on the way,

³See Scripture Index (612–34) and Index of Extra-Biblical Literature (635–39).

⁴E.g., 4:2 and 4:33 (118); 8:22–26 and 10:46–52 (146–47; 436); 11:12–14 and 11:20–26 (149–50; 484–85); 1:10 and 15:38 (230); 1:21–28 and 2:1–12 (283); 13:5 and 23 (453–54); 12:41–44 and 14:3–9 (533).

⁵E.g., 12:24–27 (154); 13:5–23 (158); 2:1–12 (284).

⁶E.g., "gospel," "Christ," "Son of God," "way," "to hand over," "kingdom of God," "hearing," "scribe," and "watching."

⁷E.g., the Gerasene demoniac (123–24), a woman with a hemorrhage (124–26), Jairus (124–26), the Syrophenician woman (133–34), and a rich man (143–44).

denying oneself, faith and trust, living in community, humble service, and watchfulness and prayer. Chapter 11 explores “Mission in Mark,” especially the mission to Gentiles. Chapter 12 scrutinizes Mark’s soteriology while chapter 13 considers Mark’s eschatology. Chapters 13 (Olivet Discourse) and 14 (Mark’s Ending) augment what Garland analyzes earlier in chapter 2.

Throughout his study, Garland allows Mark “to speak.” The Gospel’s distinct message is his primary focus. Garland assumes that what the evangelist mentions or omits is purposeful. Therefore, he does not use Matthew, Luke, or John to supplement Mark. *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* is not a harmony or Gospel parallel. Two examples will suffice. First, Garland does not regard Levi as one of the Twelve because that name does not appear on the list of Jesus’s disciples (3:13–19). Jesus had met Levi at his tax booth, an event Matthew also records. In that Gospel (see 9:9), the tax-collector is not Levi but Matthew, a name that does appear on the list of Jesus’s disciples. Second, Garland does not add the slicing of Malchus’s ear to Peter’s profile because Mark does not finger Peter as the culprit. Luke adds that Jesus “touched the ear and healed him” (22:51). Because Mark omits the healing, Garland describes Jesus’s cursing of the fig tree as his last miracle.

Proficient with text-centered, literary-critical methodology, Garland reveals Mark’s skills as a writer, what historically has been doubted. Two examples will suffice. First, Mark uses the adverb “immediately” forty times, but, according to Garland, its overuse does not indicate a clumsy style. Mark’s deliberate wording actually conveys the pace of God’s apocalyptic invasion through Jesus. Second, Mark concludes his Gospel abruptly, but, according to Garland, its ending (16:8) recalls its beginning, a sentence with no verb (1:1). “The gospel becomes an endless loop. It must be reread and reheard” (558).

David E. Garland has synthesized extensive research to produce an excellent resource. He is a wordsmith who writes with an authority seasoned by grace, sharing his viewpoint only after fairly representing other scholars. Even so, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel* could be improved if it would give more attention to Jesus’s humanity, more than just four pages (313–16); it devotes one chapter to Jesus’s divinity (chapter 5). In contrast, the New Testament paints a balanced Christological portrait.

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***The Work of Theology.* By Stanley Hauerwas. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 305 pages. Paperback, \$28.00.**

Stanley Hauerwas is Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. He has written broadly in the disciplines of theology and ethics. He holds degrees from Southwestern University (BA), Yale University (BD, MA, MPhil, PhD), and the University of Edinburgh (DD). Among his other works are *Approaching the End*, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir*, and *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, which he co-authored with William H. Willimon.

In *The Work of Theology*, Hauerwas aims to explain the “how to” of theology. More specifically, he sets out to do this by reflecting on how he came to think theologically. The book is divided into thirteen chapters, plus an introduction and a postscript. Though the book is divided into chapters, each chapter is more of an essay than a chapter. These essays do not necessarily lead logically to the next essay in the book's order; rather, they seem to stand on their own as individual works. This does not mean that there is no logical coherence to the book, but that the book is more of a collection of essays on topics that have a place in theological prolegomena and are not structured in any particular order. Though *The Work of Theology* is a work in the “how to” of theology, it does not provide an established theological method. Again, it is primarily a collection of essays that deal with topics that come under the umbrella of theological prolegomena. The essays in *The Work of Theology* cover a number of topics. These topics include, but are not limited to, how the Holy Spirit works, how to tell time theologically, the relationship of theology to ministry, how to write a theological sentence, how to be theologically funny, and how to do (or not to do) Protestant ethics.

There are multiple strengths in Hauerwas's text. For one, the reader will notice the book's accessibility. Though several of the topics that Hauerwas deals with are dense and difficult, he does more than an adequate job of writing in such a way that an interested layperson should be able to comprehend the book without excessive reference. For example, in his essay “How to Tell Time Theologically,” Hauerwas discusses a theological understanding of the concept of time. After discussing the contributions of several prominent theologians on the topic—namely, Augustine—Hauerwas returns to a narrative understanding of time (100). In order to avoid losing his readers in the different theories of time and God's relationship to time, Hauerwas reminds readers that humans exist in time (i.e., God's time), and that this should be the primary focus of how Christians tell time.

Another important contribution Hauerwas provides is his understanding of the role of language in theology. He discusses this both in the introduction and in the essay, “How to Write a Theological Sentence.” Hauerwas draws primarily from the work of Stanley Fish, who might give the conservative reader some pause, since Fish is one of the major contributors to contemporary reader-response hermeneutics. Many Evangelicals have naturally held a disposition against reader-response hermeneutics due to their neglect of the role of the

author in determining the meaning of a text. One should not, however, be too quick to reject the entire project. Though there might be some disagreements with those who propose a type of reader-response hermeneutic, there is still much that conservatives can learn from them.

Hauerwas provides a brilliant exposition of one of these points. Drawing from Fish, Hauerwas reminds the reader that the language she speaks is not her own language, but the language she inherited from her community. In other words, the words a speaker uses when she speaks do not belong to her. As Hauerwas explains, "That the words we use are not our words means we in fact often lose control over what we mean when we use them. . . . That we do not have control of the words we use I think is surely the case if you are determined, as I have been determined, to think in and with that tradition of speech called Christianity" (2). One would have to provide an impressive argument here to show that Hauerwas is wrong. The fact is that persons do not possess the language they use, but rather they inherit it, along with its meanings, from their respective communities. Neither does this lead necessarily to one denying objective meaning, nor does it lead necessarily to denying a correspondence theory of truth. Rather, what Hauerwas says here is a simple reminder to the reader that she does not get to choose the words she uses; they are determined for her. Hauerwas states, moreover, "Theologians do not get to choose what they are to think about. Better put, theologians do not get to choose the words they use. Because they do not get to choose the words they use, they are forced to think hard about why the words they use are the ones that must be used. They must also do the equally hard work of thinking about the order that the words they use must have if the words are to do the work they are meant to do" (2). Hauerwas makes a good point here in reminding his reader that theologians do not get to choose their words, and that they should reflect on why they must use these words. The essay, "How to Write a Theological Sentence," nicely supplements this point.

Another strength of Hauerwas's work is his essay, "The 'How' of Theology and Ministry." Hauerwas begins this essay with the following statement: "What has happened that we now need to ask what role theology may have for those in ministry?" (103). He discusses the unfortunate decline for respect for serious theological work in many churches as well as seminaries. He even goes so far as to say that if what ministers know does not matter anymore, then the church has become nothing more than another help-organization (106). Hauerwas is correct here. One cannot separate theology from the work of *the church* and still say that it is the work of the church. What ministers know cannot be separated from what ministers do. Hauerwas's call for ministers to be actively engaged in the work of theology is a call that should be answered positively by those ministers, regardless of their denominational background.

There are some weaknesses to *The Work of Theology*, however. As noted above, Hauerwas does not seem to provide a specific order to the essays that comprise this work. Many who pick up this work might expect each essay to function as chapters do in a book, naturally

leading from one topic to the next. Those who have read Hauerwas's previous works, however, should know that the majority of his books are similarly arranged, and thus should not be surprised that he does the same here. Hauerwas's choice of hermeneutician(s) also may be viewed as a weakness due to their reputation for denouncing authorial-intent hermeneutics. Though reader-response hermeneuticians such as Stanley Fish tend to gravitate towards subject-focused theories of reading, one should maintain an open but cautious ear to what they have to say.

Overall, Stanley Hauerwas's *The Work of Theology* is a phenomenal work. Other essays that stand out in this work are "How to Remember the Poor," "How to Think Theologically about Rights," and "How (Not) to Retire Theologically." As noted above, Hauerwas is a great writer in that his work is not only clear, but also enjoyable. There are many places where *The Work of Theology* will bring the reader to laughter and then to prayer. This work will serve well university and/or seminary professors, ministers of all vocations, and interested laypersons.

- Andrew Hollingsworth, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana

A Double Review of *People to Be Loved* and *Living in a Gray World*

***People To Be Loved: Why Homosexuality Is Not Just An Issue.* By Preston Sprinkle. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 223 pages. Paperback, \$16.99.**

***Living In A Gray World: A Christian Teen's Guide to Understanding Homosexuality.* By Preston Sprinkle. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 155 pages. Paperback, \$12.99.**

Now that the United States has legalized same-sex marriage via judicial fiat, many young evangelicals are wrestling with how to interact with the issue of homosexuality. One such author is Preston Sprinkle (PhD, Aberdeen University), who has served at Cedarville University in Ohio, Nottingham University in England, and Eternity Bible College in California and Idaho. In *People To Be Loved* and *Living in a Gray World*, Sprinkle explores the biblical teaching on homosexuality, eventually landing at a moral position consistent with the traditional Christian stance. However, some of his moral argumentation and handling of particular texts leaves his work unsatisfying. *People to Be Loved* (hereafter, PTBL) is directed towards an adult audience; *Living in a Gray World* (LGW) is basically the same material geared towards a teen audience. As such, both books will be reviewed together.

Sprinkle's methodology and approach is deeply influenced by his personal interaction with homosexual people. Sprinkle notes that as he researched homosexuality, he "made it a point to spend half my time in books and the other half in the lives of gay people. . . . I have made many unexpected friends whose stories have seeped down into my bones" (PTBL,

9). Indeed, both books contain numerous anecdotes about homosexual people who had negative experiences with churches. Sprinkle also makes numerous references to the oft-repeated claim that negative attitudes from Christians contribute to a higher suicide rate among homosexual teens.

Sprinkle affirms that marriage is intended to be heterosexual and monogamous, though he arrives at this conclusion in a circuitous manner. Sprinkle downplays the normative nature of Gen 2:24–25 for all future marriages, claiming, “Just because Genesis 2 affirms a heterosexual marriage doesn’t mean that all marriages must be heterosexual” (LGW, 37). Instead, Sprinkle believes Jesus’s reference to Gen 1:27 in discussions about divorce in Matt 19 and Mark 10 are sound biblical argument for heterosexual marriage (PTBL, 35–36). In his discussion of Eph 5:21–32, Sprinkle eventually concludes that the “relationship between Christ and the church requires a fundamental difference,” and it appears Paul “has sexual difference in mind” (PTBL, 37).

Romans 1:18–32 is adequately handled in both books. Sprinkle clearly states, “Romans 1 says both male and female homosexual acts are sin” (LGW, 55). Sprinkle rightly notes that Paul borrows terms from the LXX of Gen 1:26–27 in building his argument that homosexuality is a prime example of idolatry. Since Paul grounds his argument in creation, Sprinkle agrees the prohibition of homosexual acts is not culturally limited (PTBL, 93). Likewise, Sprinkle also correctly points out that the word *arsenokoites* in 1 Cor 6:9–11 is derived from the LXX of Lev 18:22 and 20:13 (PTBL, 109; LGW, 153). For Sprinkle, if God says having homosexual sex is wrong, then “it’s actually unloving” to encourage people to engage in such behavior (LGW, 55).

Other positive aspects of Sprinkle’s work include his accurate assessment that there is no conclusive evidence for a genetic predisposition towards homosexuality (PTBL, 128). Furthermore, he says, “I’ve learned . . . the claim ‘I was born gay, and therefore it’s okay’ is not only theologically wrong; it is scientifically naïve” (PTBL, 130). Teenagers experiencing same-sex attraction are passionately urged not to commit suicide (LGW, 94). Homosexuals should be viewed as people to be loved and evangelized with gospel. Indeed, there are numerous points where Sprinkle should be praised.

Despite these strengths, Sprinkle’s work ultimately is unsatisfying for several reasons. First and foremost, Sprinkle’s understanding is confused, particularly his claim that Gen 2:24–25 does not necessarily preclude same-sex marriage. When Gen 2:24 says a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, no other possible combination is considered. The obvious inference is that God is providing a creation standard by which all other marriages should be compared. It is unclear why Sprinkle wants to sidestep this clear interpretation.

Moreover, in *Living in a Gray World*, Sprinkle claims the word *arsenokoites* is only used

once in the New Testament in 1 Cor 6:9–11, a glaring factual error, as the same word occurs in 1 Tim 1:10. This mistake is odd, since Sprinkle discusses the use of *arsenokoites* in 1 Tim 1:10 at length in *People to Be Loved* (PTBL, 117–18).

While it is true that many of us as Christians have not been as kind or compassionate as we should to any number of people struggling with sin, if one were to read only Sprinkle's description of the modern evangelical church, the impression likely would be that we are all much closer in attitude to Fred Phelps than Billy Graham. Sprinkle recounts numerous stories of people who expressed homosexual attraction to their church leaders, only to be publicly ridiculed and treated in the most ungracious ways imaginable. My concern, however, is that Sprinkle seems to accept all such stories as accurate. Again, I do not deny that at times preachers and church leaders can lack the grace needed to address difficult issues. But Sprinkle seems to overlook the human tendency to recount stories of confrontation in such a way as to paint our opponents in the most dark and grim manner possible, while presenting ourselves with fairer shades and in a complementary light. It is entirely possible that in some of the stories Sprinkle repeats, the church in question responded in a manner precisely consistent with New Testament church discipline, only to have been misrepresented years later as the story is retold to an author. What is interesting is that Sprinkle alludes to this possibility and advises Christian teens that their homosexual friend "could be misrepresenting" how his or her parents responded to them as a child who has come out (LGW, 104).

Sprinkle's handling of Ezek 16:49–50 seems to have been influenced by revisionist interpreters. In this passage, Ezekiel specifically notes that Sodom is unconcerned about the poor and needy. Many pro-homosexual interpreters have thus claimed that Sodom was not judged for sexual immorality, but for being unkind to poor people. Sprinkle affirms such an approach, remarking, "It's pretty sad when overfed, greedy Christians who perfectly fit Ezekiel's description run around hating on gay people" (PTBL, 45). Regrettably, Sprinkle fails to emphasize the strong sexual language used in the entirety of Ezek 16, as well as the fact the Hebrew word *to'ebah* ("abomination"), which occurs in Ezek 16:50, is also used to describe homosexuality in Lev 18:22 and 20:13. Furthermore, Jude 7 references Sodom's sexual immorality. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed *both* for sexual immorality *and* injustice to the poor.

Pro-homosexual, revisionist interpretations also seem to have influenced Sprinkle's understanding of David and Jonathan's friendship. Sprinkle contends, "David and Jonathan weren't gay. But they did experience deep-seated, same-sex affection, and nonsexual intimacy toward each other. *Same-sex oriented Christians experience similar desires to a greater degree*" (PTBL, 147, emphasis added). Sadly, Sprinkle goes even further by claiming that same-sex attraction "includes a virtuous desire to be intimate—in the David and Jonathan or *Jesus and John* sense of the phrase—with people of the same sex" (PTBL, 147, emphasis added). In reality, there is no hint of same-sex attraction between David and Jonathan or Jesus and John. Neither relationship is analogous to the type of same-sex attraction Sprinkle describes.

The word “love” used in 1 Sam 1:26 to describe David’s love for Jonathan is also used in 1 Kgs 10:9 to describe God’s love for Israel. The emphasis is not on latent sexual desires, but on covenant loyalty. Sprinkle borrows ideas from pro-homosexual deconstructions of the text in arguing that “same-sex attraction” as used in our culture is analogous to David’s friendship with Jonathan or Jesus’s friendship with John. Sprinkle gives away too much and makes an analogy that does violence to the meaning of Scripture.

Perhaps Sprinkle’s sloppy handling of Scripture in Gen 2:24–25, Ezek 16:49–50, and 1 Sam 1:26 are all indicative of what I perceive to be the deepest hermeneutical problem in his work—namely, that he appears to be influenced by the postmodern idea that we can never arrive at a certain meaning for any given text. It is quite concerning to read this remark by Sprinkle about his current work: it “doesn’t represent my codified, unchangeable, etched-in-stone declaration of what I have and always will believe about homosexuality” (PTBL, 11). While it is certainly true that we can always improve the way we apply biblical truth, Sprinkle seems to indicate that we cannot assert concretely the truth in the text. Perhaps this is merely poor wording. But it seems as if Sprinkle at least gives some credence to the idea that objective inquiry is not possible.

People who experience same-sex attraction are certainly people to be loved, and it is painfully evident that men and women with such temptations have sometimes encountered unhelpful attitudes among Christians. But it is also painfully evident that revisionist interpretations of Scripture often abuse the intent of the original text in order to circumvent the clear Scriptural teaching. Sprinkle is to be applauded for the texts he handles with care (Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9–11), but the degree to which revisionist interpretations have influenced his handling of other texts is cause for concern.

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