

BOOK REVIEWS

Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar, Lexicon, and Annotated Text by Miles V. Van Pelt. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. xiii + 235 pp., US \$44.99, softcover.

This book is what it claims to be: a complete beginning grammar for the study of Biblical Aramaic. Miles Van Pelt is the Alan Belcher Associate Professor of Old Testament and Academic Dean at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Mississippi). He probably is best known to theological students as co-author of the corresponding volume on Biblical Hebrew and auxiliary works. The present book is an addition to the widely-used and popular titles in Zondervan's biblical language series.

Basics of Biblical Aramaic (hereafter *BBA*) is divided into 22 lessons over four parts. The first part (Lessons 1–3) covers the basics of phonology and orthography. The second part (Lessons 4–11) deals with the nominal system, including particles (conjunctions, prepositions, etc.). The rest of the book is concerned with the verbal system, with the third part (Lessons 12–17) presenting all the “tense” forms in the basic stem and the last part (Lessons 18–22) presenting the derived stems. In addition to the lessons, *BBA* also contains an introduction on how to study its material effectively and paradigm charts for nominal forms and the strong verb. Completing the volume is a chrestomathy of all the Aramaic passages in the Bible. The chrestomathy has footnoted comments on grammatical points, conveniently cross-referenced both to the lessons of *BBA* and to other grammars such as Rosenthal (*Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*; Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006).

This book has notable strengths. Like most grammars of Biblical Aramaic, it presupposes basic knowledge of Biblical Hebrew and utilizes that knowledge to maximum effect in comparing vocabulary and explaining grammatical forms. Each lesson is short and easily digested in a single class session. There also are good summaries of essential points of syntax to help the learner understand the usage and function of grammatical forms and structures. As mentioned, Van Pelt previously collaborated on *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* (Zondervan, 2007; *BBH*) with mentor and friend Gary Pratico, and he faithfully follows the structure of that work. One difference is that no exercises are provided in *BBH* because it has a separate workbook. Because the corpus of Aramaic in

the Bible is small, Van Pelt sensibly includes exercises for each lesson in *BBA*, which give ample practice in analyzing forms and translating Aramaic expressions found in the Bible. Those who find quantitative analysis helpful will get no shortage of statistics regarding the frequency occurrence of words and forms.

A few points of improvement might be in order for future editions (if any) of this grammar. Curiously, no real background to the language is provided. Nothing is said regarding its place in the Semitic language family, nor is the learner informed about other corpora of Aramaic texts (e.g., the Targums) which are relevant to biblical studies. This seems an oversight worth remedying, because for serious students the study of Biblical Aramaic usually is a gateway to the exploration of other Aramaic literature. For example, knowing that the Aramaic of the Old Testament has a close affinity with Imperial Aramaic makes evident the value of studying the documents from Elephantine. The Elephantine documents show (among other things) Jewish communities outside the Land in post-exilic era dealing with the same sorts of challenges as those in Judea as portrayed in the Book of Ezra. Likewise, the Targums give the students their first taste of early biblical interpretation. Nor is there any mention of Aramaic's relevance to the New Testament. In this regard, another and perhaps more serious defect is the lack of a bibliography for those who desire to do further reading and study—although the list of abbreviations on p. xiii might inadvertently serve that purpose.

As noted, the organization of this grammar mirrors that of its Hebrew counterpart. A couple of lessons probably could be combined here or there. One candidate for this would be the presentation of the noun in its various states, which could be done in at least two lessons instead of three (if not one). Since one lesson provides a good discussion of the construct state in its various forms, it might make sense to treat the absolute and determined states in one lesson. Another case might be the material on pronouns; one wonders whether it would be preferable to discuss at least personal pronouns before introducing pronominal suffixes. One other item to note—though obviously beyond Van Pelt's control—is that the retail price seems rather high. But it is comparable to other books in the Zondervan series as well as to other recent Aramaic grammars such as the one by Frederick Greenspahn (*An Introduction to Aramaic*; SBL, 2003).

In the balance, these criticisms are fairly minor. This grammar is suitable both for classroom instruction and self-study. Those especially whose interests are concerned solely with the biblical text and not related topics (such as Comparative Semitic or cognate literatures) will find Van Pelt's work user-friendly. The present reviewer would recommend using

it for an introductory Aramaic course in an M. Div. program or undergraduate studies. For a Ph. D. course or a master's degree program designed to prepare for doctoral studies, something like Greenspahn's grammar would be preferable. However, either would be difficult to cover in a single semester, and whatever drawbacks Van Pelt's work appear to have can be remedied easily by a resourceful instructor.

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[*A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible*](#) by Hans M. Barstad. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011. viii + 229 pp., US \$30.00, softcover.

Hans M. Barstad is Professor of Hebrew Bible and Old Testament Studies at the University of Edinburgh. The present volume was first published in Norwegian in 1993 under the title *Det gamle testament: Ein innforing*. It was then revised in 2003 and republished as *En bok om Det gamle testament*. It is the second edition which serves as the basis of the present English translation.

In seven chapters Barstad seeks to introduce beginning students to the contents and theological themes of the various portions of the Hebrew Bible. In attempting to accomplish that goal Barstad writes chapter 1, "Introduction" (pp. 1–10); chapter 2, "The Priestly History: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers" (pp. 11–52); chapter 3, "The Deuteronomistic History: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings" (pp. 53–78); chapter 4, "The Chronicler's History: Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles" (pp. 79–97); chapter 5, "The Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Daniel" (pp. 98–132); chapter 6, "The Poetic Literature and Wisdom Literature: Psalms, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (pp. 133–69); and finally chapter 7, "Novellas: Jonah, Esther, Ruth" (pp. 170–74).

The volume concludes with a glossary, an index of Hebrew Bible texts, and an index of subjects. Barstad fleshes out his rather standard (though it deviates in significant points, more on this below) treatment of the text of the Hebrew Bible with excellent summarizations of the biblical material and useful asides concerning the history of scholarship and the *status questionis* of the more important topics.

Persons familiar with the Hebrew Bible as usually described by modern scholarship will observe right away the rather odd placement of Daniel among the "Prophets." Normally, Daniel finds its place in

introductions among the festival scrolls or wisdom texts. It is almost unique to find him set among the classical prophets, and indeed, Barstad does not really explain why he sees Daniel as a “prophet” when most of his colleagues do not. His rather weak suggestion that Daniel was such a late text that it had to be placed among the Writings (p. 31) really does not convince and seems to be special pleading.

Odd too is his placement of Jonah in the rather odd category of “novellas.” Jonah may have more “story” about it than some of the other classical prophets (though there is plenty of story in both Isaiah and Jeremiah) but that his book is “prophetic” seems as well established as the status of Ezekiel or Amos.

Concerning Ruth, Barstad hints that the view of marriage expressed in that book may have been in competition with the view of marriage as expressed in the Chronicler’s works (*vis-à-vis* the marriages of Jews with non-Jews) (p. 72). Unfortunately, he does not develop that incredibly important question beyond simply noting it. One could wish that he had.

Yet in spite of these minor points raising minor questions, Barstad’s work, on the whole, is excellently done. His descriptive powers are quite good and his ability to communicate some of the more complex issues in simple and accessible terms leaves readers certain rather than confused or disoriented.

For instance, Barstad’s discussion of the subject of holy war in connection with the Prophets is one of the best in recent literature. He suggests that holy war demonstrates “. . . the significance of the role of the prophets in warfare in ancient Israel” (p. 114), that “[t]he role that prophets played in warfare is also seen in the story about the seer Balaam in Numbers 22–24” (p. 115), and “[t]hat prophets played such an important role in situations of war has left clear traces also in the writing prophets” (p. 115). Hence, while many are comfortable discussing the role of Holy War in the Deuteronomistic History, the importance of the Prophets for the practice is rarely considered.

That is exactly why Barstad’s contribution is so important. He is able, because he is so familiar with the field, to bring to bear a whole variety of materials in order to illustrate his points.

In all, Barstad argues that our focus on the pre-history of the texts and our quest for sources may have limited value. It is the final form of the text that matters because it is the final form of the text that we possess. It is the final form which he introduces to readers.

First year Biblical Studies students, pastors, and interested laypersons would all benefit from a careful reading of Barstad’s volume. He has managed to balance scholarship and accessibility so that readers who

make the effort to work through the volume certainly will not be disappointed.

JIM WEST
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The Character of Christian Scripture: The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible by Christopher R. Seitz. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. 224 pp., US \$22.99, softcover.

Christopher Seitz, professor of biblical interpretation at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, primarily writes on issues related to canonical theology and theological exegesis. *The Character of Christian Scripture* is Seitz's second book-length contribution to the Studies in Theological Interpretation series, joining his *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Baker Academic, 2007).

In the Introduction, Seitz sketches in the trajectory of the book. He suggests that the "Christian church at its origin received the Scriptures of Israel as the sole authoritative witness" (p. 17). Seitz here introduces "the logic of the rule of faith" which was employed in the ante-Nicene period. The OT was believed to represent God as he truly was and is, and thus to reveal the trinitarian God of Christian faith. The OT itself proclaimed Christ, and the earthly life of Jesus accorded with "the literal and extended senses" of the OT (p. 18). The NT therefore makes regular recourse to the OT in speaking of Christ. The rule of faith "opened the Scriptures to a reading of extended senses, which were argued to be embedded in the literal sense of the OT in its given form and in its historical life, in order to clarify the most basic theological and trinitarian confession in the church's lived life" (p. 19).

Thus the OT makes its own unique contribution as Christian Scripture apart from its reception by the NT. Christians ought not to approach the OT simply as it has been received in the NT, but as it is unto itself. The NT offers a "sample" of reflection on the Christian theological contribution of the OT, but it is not exhaustive. Seitz is thus concerned that the theological voice of the OT be given due regard in its own specific idiom as a witness to the Triune God. Seitz also argues that the stabilized and authoritative "material form" of the OT served as a model for the second testament which emerged over time and "took up its place alongside the venerable and undoubted authority of the first" (p. 19).

Chapter 1 lays out the canonical approach of Brevard Childs and offers a “fresh assessment” of it with responses to criticisms. Seitz believes the canonical approach balances extremes and retains its strength after passing through the fires of critics.

Chapter 2 raises the issue of the Church’s identification with the OT and NT respectively. How does the “church’s own providential location” (p. 93) compare or contrast with the revelatory perspectives of OT and NT writers? Seitz argues that each testament does its work differently and not “crudely developmentally” (p. 103), and thus neither testament is more decisive for dogmatic reflection on God, creation, the church, and the world. The closing of the NT canon and the Church’s location outside that canon implies that we cannot follow, say, Paul’s reading of the OT in strict imitation. We must consider individual NT writers in broad canonical relationship, taking into account each writer’s occasional perspective, and read the OT on its own terms while being mindful of our own non-apostolic time and circumstance.

Chapter 3 illustrates the challenge of biblical theology and identification with biblical authors by using Hebrews as a test case. Seitz argues that we should employ a canonical and theological sensitivity that does not restrict our reading of the OT to the “evaluative lens” of a single NT witness. Again Childs exemplifies a sound approach in reading Hebrews with “a variety of different overarching [canonical and theological] concerns” (p. 130). We must maintain the delicate balance of continuous and distinguishing features between our own location and that of the prophets and apostles.

Chapter 4 addresses the theological use of the Psalms in recent NT scholarship and in the earlier history of interpretation. This chapter in large measure summarizes preceding arguments before investigating older and more recent scholarship. Seitz concludes that more recent scholarship (e.g., N. T. Wright and Richard Hays) creates “a disproportionate picture of what theological use of the OT by the Christian church should actually look like” (p. 148). Pre-modern interpreters such as Calvin, Luther, and Aquinas more often engage the two-testament canon in a more appropriate way.

Chapter 5 briefly lays out issues related to canon. Seitz looks to the shaping of OT books to gain understanding of the canonical shape of the NT. Bearing in mind the shaping of OT books in their “complicated entirety,” a narrowly historical-descriptive search for authorial intention and identification misses the maturation process and misconstrues the effort of those books to speak to subsequent generations. The “diachronic complexity” of the canon shifts the focus away from authorial intention to a more comprehensive approach, which can perhaps shed some light

on the way we engage and identify with something like the collection of NT letters attributed to Paul.

Chapter 6 is one of the clearest and most helpful chapters in the book. It addresses what Seitz sees as a crisis in the contemporary church arising from a misunderstanding of the character of the two-testament canon and a breakdown of the rule of faith. The loss of basic assumptions about Scripture, what Seitz calls “tacit knowledge,” contributes to the problem. He takes aim at the same-sex issue in the American Episcopal Church (TEC). A developmental view of Scripture has led modern interpreters to doubt that the Bible is able to speak “directly into our day on the issue of same-sex behavior, because it cannot be expected to know something that lies developmentally outside its own two-testament range of religious progressing” (p. 177). The Bible is no longer taken to have a plain sense regarding these kinds of issues. The developmental view of Scripture finds difficulty discerning a voice from God in universal application to our own time and place. If, however, the OT is Christian Scripture in itself, not merely the first step in a historical development, it can provide normative theological instruction for the present.

The final chapter returns to describing the function of the rule of faith. It keeps us from an improper developmental view of Scripture and helps us see the two testaments as “mutually informing, mutually influencing witnesses” (p. 203). It reminds us that the early church looked to the plain sense of the OT as decisive for their own Christian thinking, which has profound implications for how we view the OT and its relationship to the NT.

On the whole, I think many evangelicals will feel that Seitz stretches the tensions of Scripture a bit too far at times, especially in discussing the ways in which various NT authors read the OT. I am inclined to think that NT authors are not as divergent from the text and from each other in the general spirit of their reading—and not as constrained by their time and occasion—as Seitz postulates, although I share his concern not to flatten the terrain where it truly is not flat.

Nor do I think the lines between apostolic and contemporary reading of the OT are as sharp as he draws them. While it should be appreciated that we are not apostles either in time or circumstance, we do read the OT from the same side of God’s revelation of himself in Christ. As I see it, the apostolic witness provides more contours for—and places more constraints on—our reading of the OT than he permits. I question, for example, his comment that using the NT’s use of the OT as a totalizing lens “would be akin to declaring Augustine’s use of the NT determinative of its plain-sense witness” (pp. 139–140). Does the decisive nature of the eyewitness revelatory testimony of the apostles not extend to some degree to the manner in which they read the OT? Is some

measure of normativity for reading the OT excluded from what Jesus passed along to them? It seems to me that granting more to the apostolic reading of the OT neither necessitates a reduced role for the OT as Christian Scripture nor disregards the perspective of readers at various times and places.

I would also quibble with the brevity of Seitz's discussion of the OT reading practices of pre-modern theologians. This type of work is instructive, but the discussion is too cursory and selective, even within the parameters of the book, to carry adequate persuasive weight.

My biggest disappointment with the book is its inaccessibility. There are a few untranslated German quotations which appear both in footnotes and in the main body of the text, but much of the rest of the book could almost as well be German to those who are not schooled in the discussion. The problem is not merely with jargon but also with a lack of simplicity of expression. Perhaps Seitz would contend that the nature of the issues defies simpler expression, but I believe more clarity is possible. And if Seitz is correct that there is a crisis in the contemporary church that his proposal pinpoints and addresses, then more clarity is urgently desirable.

I do find much that is commendable in Seitz's proposal. First, he correctly avoids an overemphasis on historical reconstruction and history-of-religions approaches to the text, which are too often merely conjectural. Second, it is certainly enriching to focus on the final form of the text, not simply in individual writings but also in broader canonical relationships. Too often naturalistic assumptions drive historical approaches to a discordant and unhealthy atomism. Third, I am in substantial agreement that the OT makes its own contribution to Christian theology, in its own plain sense and idiom, which is not limited to what the NT makes of it. The occasional nature of NT writings prevents them from exhausting the riches of the OT for Christian doctrine. Fourth, I appreciate the emphasis on retrieving pre-critical scriptural interpretation from the early fathers through the Reformation. Our own more recent context has its own set of blinders, and the Spirit of God has surely been operative in the Church throughout the centuries. Fifth, I also appreciate Seitz's willingness to incorporate certain gains from various quarters. He labors to avoid the overcompensation that sometimes characterizes different approaches, including that of "theological interpretation." Whether one agrees with him or not, there is a commendable effort toward balance throughout his proposal (which can sometimes also result in excessive qualification).

In the end, I believe that Seitz's proposal is worth hearing and heeding in many respects, but I would have a hard time recommending this particular book outside a doctoral context. I look forward to more

application of Seitz's methodology to both the trees and the forest of the two-testament canon. Rightly applied, I anticipate some fruitful results.

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[A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations](#) by R. B. Salters. International Critical Commentary, London: T. & T. Clark, 2011. xxxiv + 375 pp., US \$110.00, hardcover.

There has been considerable increase of interest in the book of Lamentations in recent years. Numerous commentaries and scholarly articles have appeared; among them most recently are Robin A. Parry's *Lamentations* (The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary; Eerdmans, 2010) and Stephen J. Bennett's *Lamentations* (New Beacon Bible Commentary, Beacon Hill, 2010). This current tendency is in contrast to the relative paucity of scholarly works on Lamentations in the first half of the twentieth century. The new International Critical Commentary (hereafter ICC) on Lamentations reflects this modern trend, considering there was no commentary on Lamentations in the first ICC series. Robin B. Salters is Honorary Reader of Hebrew and the Old Testament at the University of St Andrews. He has written numerous articles on Lamentations and also authored *Jonah and Lamentations* (Old Testament Guides 29; Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). It is widely recognized that for over one hundred years, the ICC series has played a significant role in biblical scholarship by providing excellent linguistic, textual, archaeological, historical, literary, and theological exegesis of the books in both the Old and New Testaments. The current commentary on Lamentations strictly follows this tradition.

The current commentary consists of three major parts: introduction, commentary, and theological reflection. In the introductory section, Salters gives a concise overview of title, canonical locations, authorship, and date and place of composition. He also presents several essential literary discussions: genre according to Gunkel's categories in the Psalms, literary connection with the city laments in ancient Near Eastern context, poetic features such as *qinah* meter and alphabetic acrostics, major translation differences among the ancient versions, and theology of Lamentations, including resolute loyalty to God, God's punishment for sin, and God's sovereignty as the lord of history in light of the Deuteronomistic theological context.

Regarding the authorship of Lamentations, Salters proposes that each chapter of Lamentations was written by a different author. He comes to this conclusion mainly because of the different alphabet orderings and poetic styles among the chapters and the fact that each chapter was collected and arranged shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. to commemorate the national disaster and its victims in a liturgical setting (pp. 9–11). He comments, “The fact that the order of the alphabet assumed in ch. 1 is different from that in chs. 2, 3 and 4 raises the possibility that the authorship of the first chapter differed from that of chs. 2, 3 and 4. The fact that ch. 5 is the only poem which is not an acrostic, has a different meter and form from chs. 1–4, and that ch. 3 differs in genre from the other chapters has a bearing on the debate” (p. 7). However, Salters’s argument regarding multiple authorship is not convincing for several reasons. First, even though the various theological themes in Lamentations are intertwined in a quite complicated way, theological, poetic, and stylistic similarities among the chapters of Lamentations can be easily found—similarities between chapters 1 and 2 are especially obvious. As for these similarities, following Westermann, Salters suggests that the acrostic form and *qinah* meter (3 + 2 metric pattern) are a secondary development through “quasi-imitation” process (pp. 10–11). However, his suggestion still raises a question: why this “quasi-imitation” process was not applied to chapter 5, which exhibits a poetic style quite different from other chapters. Second, it is somewhat simplistic to determine authorship based on the alphabet ordering.

The commentary proper consists of four parts: 1) an introductory discussion to each chapter including a brief outline, comments on poetic structure, and theological reflections; 2) Salters’s own translation; 3) textual notes on the Masoretic Text and other ancient versions; 4) detailed verse-by-verse exegetical comments. Perhaps the most valuable and unique contribution of the commentary section is the exegetical and critical comments. Like other ICC’s commentaries, Salters offers an excellent and thorough exegetical work and great sensitivity to the ancient texts. He compares the MT with other ancient versions (LXX, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate) and also with many Jewish sources (the Targums, Midrash, and medieval rabbinic commentaries from Rashi, Joseph Kara, and Ibn Ezra) as well as modern English versions. Although his discussion of exegetical comments is insightful and often challenging in its contextual settings, several suggestions are in order. First, as compared with comprehensive and lengthy discussion in exegesis, Salters’s discussion on theological reflection of Lamentations is very short, less than ten pages including the introductory section of each chapter in the commentary proper. Second, even though Salters mentions the poetic structures (*qinah* meter, acrostic pattern, poetic

genre) of Lamentations (pp. 15–21) and discusses why the authors might have utilized them, he does not explain how they function in the texts of Lamentations. Third, one might wish that Salters had used excursuses extensively to support important textual issues, for example, the use of the infinitive construct in 3:34–36. Finally, there are some quotations whose references are missing in the bibliography (e. g., p. 27).

Over all, Salters's contribution is a valuable addition to the International Critical Commentary series. Those who are interested in reading Lamentations exegetically will enjoy this commentary.

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David and His Theologian: Literary, Social, and Theological Investigations of the Early Monarchy by Walter Brueggemann (edited by K. C. Hanson). Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011. xvi + 204 pp., US \$24.00, softcover.

The distinguished and prolific author, the William Marcellus McPheeters Professor of Old Testament Emeritus at Columbia Theological Seminary, needs no introduction. This volume consists of journal articles published between 1968 and 1993 which have been lightly edited for republication (p. viii). An editor's forward and a preface by the author briefly situate these articles in the context of Brueggemann's own scholarly development and of changes in the field of Old Testament studies.

The first essay, "David and His Theologian," studies the interdependence of the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 9–20; 1 Kgs 1–2) and the Yahwist's narrative in Gen 2–11, proceeding on the assumption that these are both literary productions of the mid-tenth century B.C.E. The author's primary thesis is that the latter narrative is dependent on the former: "What Israel in the tenth century knew about sin and grace, curse and blessing, it knew because it had seen it happen in the current royal establishment" (p. 4). To establish this point he argues for a four movement structure in both narrative cycles that can be correlated as follows:

David and Bathsheba	Adam and Eve
Amnon and Absalom	Cain and Abel
Absalom and David	Noah and the Flood
Solomon and David	The Tower of Babel

A large part of the essay is devoted to discussing alleged parallels between these corresponding units and the exegetical-theological implications of the author's thesis.

The next essay, "On Trust and Freedom," is another study on the Succession Narrative and seeks to delineate a twofold kerygmatic element in it, specifically, that Yahweh's presence is decisive and that one must be willing to put oneself completely at Yahweh's disposal. To establish this conclusion the author focuses on three texts that emphasize Yahweh's presence in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam 11:27; 12:24; 17:14) and two affirmations of faith (2 Sam 15:25–26; 16:11–12). The author argues that these hope-filled affirmations by David have been carefully placed within the narrative at moments of great personal danger. As such they call forth a response of faith to the reality of Yahweh's presence.

In "The Trusted Creature" the author argues for the innovative nature of the Davidic material with respect to its antecedent traditions. By examining a series of texts (1 Sam 21:1–6; 2 Sam 12:16–23; 23:13–17) he seeks to show that "David is pictured as a fully responsible, fully free man" (p. 50) who was conscious that he had been trusted by God to act responsibly. According to the author this represents a "theological revolution" and a decisive turn in Israel's faith insofar as it affirms that man is not under law. Through the David stories, which in turn provide the blueprint for the Yahwistic account of man's creation in Gen 2, it emerges that what "God does first and best and most is to *trust his men with their moment in history*" (pp. 50–51, emphasis original). By examining 2 Sam 7, the author further explores the radical nature of the Lord's commitment to David's freedom to act, which he in turn sees as linked with Old Testament wisdom traditions.

The essay "Life and Death in Tenth-Century Israel" claims that in the tenth century B.C.E. ancient Israelite theology shifted from a theocentric to an anthropocentric worldview. Accordingly, the author claims that the important issue of a life of faith was no longer the keeping of God's commandments but rather "the extent to which men have functioned as life-bearers in a world where the issue of life and death is persistently pressing" (p. 64). Tenth century literary evidence that testifies to this theological shift is found in the Joseph and Succession Narratives, both of which center on issues of life and death rather than the common Old Testament emphasis on the *magnalia Dei*. Both cycles reflect three concerns from their historical context: the issue of political power, a humanistic milieu created by wisdom influences, and a growing royal ideology that viewed the king as a life-giver.

"Kingship and Chaos" focuses largely on the promise of Gen 8:22, which establishes order and stability after the post-diluvian chaos.

According to the author this statement displays links with wisdom traditions as well as Yahwistic royal theology. Ultimately, the author claims that the verse is to be understood as a royal decree of שלום (“peace”) which assumes a properly functioning monarch as the necessary human agent for the establishment of order. He then develops his earlier suggestion that there is a parallel between Absalom’s rebellion and the Flood Narrative (p. 94), with the former providing a formative literary and theological model for the latter. Thus the author asserts that “the royal decree of Gen 8:22, which puts an end to the chaos of the flood and affirms Yahweh’s commitment to the healthy life-giving order of his world, has among its informing motifs the reflection upon and memory of the Absalom rebellion” (p. 98).

In “Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18” the author takes issue with the atomistic approach to 1–2 Samuel found in historical-critical studies. As its title might suggest, the essay presents a literary-rhetorical study of 1 Sam 18 that is broadly similar in approach to studies by Gunn, Miscall, Polzin, Fokkelman, *et al.* The author argues for the literary and theological coherence of the text by engaging in a detailed reading of the chapter.

The essay “Narrative Intentionality in 1 Samuel 29” examines David’s “trial” before Achish as it functions within the immediate context of his Philistine sojourn (1 Sam 27–30) and as it stands between the narrative units of 1 Sam 24–26 and 2 Sam 1–4. These surrounding units center on themes of bloodguilt, vengeance, and murder (either contemplated by David or carried out by others and needing to be distanced from David). The author sees multiple layers of significance to Achish’s threefold statement of David’s innocence (1 Sam 29:3, 6, 9), an assertion that is true on some levels but perhaps not on others. The essay concludes with an unexpected turn when the author suggests that the Davidic narrative functions as a “type scene” for Jesus’ trial before Pilate, which likewise features a threefold acquittal in the Lukan and Johannine accounts. Like Achish, Pilate is presented as a “man in the middle.” In this way the author suggests that “the Gospel narratives can be helpfully read as analogies of the Davidic narrative, and that the two narratives, when juxtaposed, can be mutually illuminating” (p. 133).

In “On Coping with Curse: A Study of 2 Samuel 16:5–14” the author analyzes the episode of Shimei cursing David within the narrative context of Absalom’s rebellion. The episode reflects both an emphasis on God’s faithfulness to his promise in 2 Sam 7 as well as the influence of Old Testament wisdom traditions, which he discerns by a comparison of the words of Shimei, Abishai, and David respectively (pp. 142–3): David, though rejecting the strict “retribution theology” of Shimei and the vengeful response of Abishai (which reflects a purely human

agency), accepts the possibility that Shimei's curse could really be from Yahweh, while at the same time rejecting its flawed theological underpinnings. In this the author discerns the influence of Old Testament wisdom teaching, which recognizes the sometimes inscrutable nature of God's dealings with humans.

The final essay, "An Appendix of Deconstruction? 2 Samuel 21–24," synthesizes the results of a variety of prior studies (Budde, Carlson, Childs, Flanagan), arguing that both 2 Sam 5–8 and the "appendix" of 2 Sam 21–24 display a six-part chiasmic structure corresponding to each other theologically. Unlike 2 Sam 5–8, however, which serves to highlight the development of royal ideology, the author argues that 2 Sam 21–24 critiques or "deconstructs" this royal theology. Each section of the chiasm in 2 Sam 21–24 is examined in turn and deconstructive elements are discussed. The author claims that, ultimately, royal theology is being presented as a path to political oppression, self-aggrandizement, and death. Consequently, the appendix is to be understood as urging Israel to return to a more active faith and to more "grass roots" power structures exemplified by a greater emphasis on kinship relations, defensive (rather than offensive) warfare, and tribal religion (p. 172). Following the work of Childs, the author suggests that the appendix's poems form an *inclusio* with the Song of Hannah, which invites a canonical comparison between David and the mother of Samuel. He argues that, while the appendix deconstructs David of royal pretensions, it also indicates that he has become the approved king once he has become an empty-handed suppliant like Hannah (p. 174).

Given the nature of this collection, the topics covered are wide-ranging, and to provide a critique of each individual essay would extend this review beyond all reasonable bounds. The scholarship is showing its age to some extent (e.g., references to von Rad are ubiquitous), and the author is at his weakest when treating broader theological-kerygmatic themes (the first several essays often seemed to be overreaching with regard to the texts cited). When focused on specific passages, however, his analyses are stronger and provide much food for thought. Students of 1–2 Samuel will find it useful to have these studies conveniently gathered together.

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Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets edited by Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012. 992 pp., US \$60.00, hardcover.

The fourth volume in IVP's Old Testament Black Dictionary completes the highly acclaimed series, and the latest instalment promises to be as valuable to students of the Bible as the previous offerings in both testaments have been. The articles demonstrate both depth and breadth of scholarship, providing the reader with both broad surveys of history of research and terminology, as well as surprisingly in-depth presentations of the specific subject matter for the allotted space. Of particular note, mentioned in the preface, are articles on new methodologies such as "Conversation Analysis" and "Performance Criticism," as well as articles on the history of interpretation of each of the Major Prophets and Book of the Twelve. Surprising inclusions include "Animal Imagery" and "True and False Prophecy"; surprising exclusions include the lack of a dedicated article on "Assyria" (especially in light of the length of the article on "Babylon"), its discussion instead being reserved for the entry on "Israelite History."

One aspect of this volume that is immediately apparent is the broad range of views that characterize the various articles. This is a deliberate move on the part of the editors, Mark Boda and Gordon McConville. As they state in the preface, "the Prophetic Books represent a large division of the Old Testament canon and contain within them a rich variety of language, literature and ideas. For this reason, they continue to be an area of fast-moving scholarly research, attracting the attention of researchers with a wide range of interests and commitments" (p. vii). Of course, in any project of this scope, a completely monochrome perspective would be both an impossible and undesirable aim, but Boda and McConville self-consciously opt for a light-handed approach to the editing process: "we have been keenly aware . . . that some issues in interpreting the prophets are fiercely debated because matters of fundamental importance are perceived to be at stake. This might have posed an acute dilemma. Was it our task to make a case for a particular viewpoint or to try to resolve contentious issue? We believe, however, that it would have been neither possible nor desirable to do this. Instead, we have undertaken to let the volume portray a broad picture of contemporary scholarship on the Prophets" (p. vii).

The advantages to this approach, according to Boda and McConville, are threefold: it acknowledges the commitments of the contributors to the views they hold, it recognizes the variety and complexity of contemporary study of the Prophets, and finally, it expresses the fact that understanding (both of the Prophets and, more

broadly, all of Scripture) is an unfinished task, in which the hearing of many voices is inescapably involved. Boda and McConville's words are certainly reflected in the main body of articles, sometimes in articles on the same subject matter. For example, the article "Ezekiel, Book of" by Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer defends feminist readings of the difficult chapters 16 and 23, while in the subsequent article "Ezekiel: History of Interpretation", Iain Duguid questions the legitimacy of feminist readings as bona fide exegesis of the text in its original context. For the editors, such an approach concedes "that readers may find some particular article not agreeable to their way of thinking" (p. vii). On the other hand, however, "we hope it is implied in the range of contributions that no one viewpoint has been allowed a final word. Our contributors have respected all points of view, and all the articles are offered to our readers for their own judgment and further reflection" (p. vii).

Understanding the approach of Boda and McConville is key, I would suggest, to making the most of the volume. The articles are of high quality, and as such are immensely helpful in providing a general survey of their subject matter, regardless of the particular perspective of the author. However, an awareness of the variety in perspective that will face the reader, and a generous but appreciatively critical spirit in reading the articles will multiply the value of the volume, both in terms of broadening awareness and appreciation for the views of those with whom they do not necessarily agree, as well as challenging and/or sharpening their own position in response.

In this regard, it should be said that the volume will therefore be of most value to those wishing to engage in critical study of the Prophets, and especially in being exposed to potentially differing viewpoints on the particular subjects at hand. For those seeking a more uniformly evangelical perspective (say in preparation for preaching or Bible study), volumes such as the *New Bible Dictionary* or the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (both also by IVP) may better suit their needs.

One further aspect of the present volume that is also worth mentioning is the overlap or otherwise of subjects and articles with the previous volumes in the series that requires some navigation. For example, entries on "Form Criticism" may be found in the *Pentateuch; Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*; and *Prophets* volumes, but in the *Historical Books* volume the reader is referred to the article on "Methods of Interpretation." In several respects, this is inevitable, and is sometimes simply reflective of the developments and distinctives of the study of the prophetic corpus over against, for example, Pentateuchal criticism. It is worth mentioning, however, that across the volumes the same subjects may be covered from quite different points of view.

On the other hand, each of the four volumes features an entry on “honor and shame,” but the discussion in each mainly covers the same methodological ground of outlining the overarching system, without much development of the distinctives in each corpora of the OT. While this is understandable, given that each volume is in its own right a separate contribution, and also in light of the fact that the article may well be read as a standalone piece, when taken as part of the overall series, there is a certain redundancy in covering the same ground four times over, especially given the generic nature of the honor/shame model involved. Such phenomena are of course part and parcel of a project of this nature, but it is worth being aware of when approaching this piece.

These issues notwithstanding, the immense value that any of the volumes in the Black Dictionary series hold to those engaged in critical study of the Bible is certainly reflected in the current offering, and in instances of repeated articles from previous volumes, one of course will find the most up to date research and references. Boda and McConville have done a marvelous service to the ever-changing and expanding field of study in the OT, and the *Dictionary of Old Testament: Prophets* belongs on the shelves of libraries and studies of anyone engaged in the area.

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[*Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature*](#) by Yair Lorberbaum. New York: Continuum, 2011. xi + 213 pp., US \$44.95, softcover.

Yair Lorberbaum is a distinguished author and professor at Bar-Ilan University. *Disempowered King* is the ninth volume in The Kogod Library of Judaic Studies Series. The aim of the series is to provide innovative direction for Jewish thought and life and to enhance the dialogue between classical sources and the modern world. This volume “deals with the understanding of the king, his stature, and his prerogatives in early rabbinic literature, and particularly in Talmudic literature” (p. ix). In this work Lorberbaum compares and contrasts the Talmudic view of kingship with that of the Bible.

In the first chapter Lorberbaum discusses what he considers to be the three views of monarchy found in the Bible: direct theocracy, royal theology, and limited monarchy. Direct theocracy rejects the notion of monarchy or human rule. Royal theology usually implies the deification

of the king, but Lorberbaum makes specific mention of sacral kingship as a form of royal theology. Limited monarchy is the view that human rule does not necessarily entail sacrilege since it does not promote the deification of the king. This approach is found most prominently in Deut 17. Lorberbaum believes these three to be mutually exclusive, but that they represent the rabbinic viewpoints.

In chapter two Lorberbaum identifies the idea of limited monarchy as the dominant approach to monarchy found in the Mishnah and Talmudic discussions. He then gives an in-depth analysis of the Law of the King found in Deut 17. Chapter three continues the analysis of chapter two by discussing the relationship of the institution of kingship and the law.

The fourth chapter discusses the view of limited monarchy from the tannaitic halakhah. The rabbis did not hold to a limited monarchy only because they thought it was the predominant biblical expression of monarchy, but also because they were reacting against the political approach found in the Romans Empire, which was a form royal theology. He ends the chapter by discussing reasons why the other two forms of kingship were rejected.

In the fifth chapter the subject matter turns to remnants of royal theology and theocracy that are left over in the Aggadah. He notes that a certain level of tension exists between halakhic and aggadic sources and that this tension can be explained by differing viewpoints regarding monarchy and political organization.

In the sixth and final chapter Lorberbaum discusses the sages' understanding of monarchy, specifically in light of their political situation. The sages viewed the king's power as limited and viewed the king's authority to be endowed by the Sanhedrin itself.

This work has many admirable qualities. Lorberbaum is able to move through a massive amount of information, as is displayed in the contents of the various chapters, with ease. One of the great qualities of this work is the massive amount of classical Jewish literature that it covers. If one was looking for ancient Jewish opinion on kingship then the quotations that he supplies throughout the work are worth the price of the book alone. Lorberbaum does not stop there, however, but he analyzes these texts and places them in their historical setting with mastery. This is complemented by clear writing that is direct and works towards his thesis. The flow of the argument is also clear and helps to make his case for an understanding of limited monarchy within the thought of early rabbinic literature.

Disempowered King, however, does have a few negative aspects that deserve attention. The first deals with Lorberbaum's three categories of monarchy. These categories pose a couple of problems. First, they are

anachronistic to ancient Jewish thinking. The sources that he is quoting would not have viewed the monarchy as presented in the Hebrew Bible in this way. The sources he cites are largely trying to wrestle with the biblical data and tend to highlight certain biblical texts as primary to the subject; they do not seem to think that there are competing ideologies of kingship in the text of the Hebrew Bible. I think that this is shown at the beginning of the fourth chapter (p. 128). A second problem with these categories is that they are overly simplistic and mutually exclusive. His discussion of direct theocracy, for instance, insinuates that the rule of God is antithetical to the rule of man (p. 3) and that theocracy manifests itself in a sort of ideal anarchy, as found in the book of Judges (ch. 5 and 17). It seems that all of the views of kingship that he would discuss, however, would agree that God is king and that there would be a form of theocracy in each of the views. With this being said, a brief discussion of the concept of the kingship of God in the literature he deals with would have been helpful.

A second critique that could be offered is that Lorberbaum will at times interject his opinion on a biblical text over against that of the sources that he is dealing with. This is noticeable in his discussion of R. Judah's view of Deut 17. When discussing how R. Judah views Deut 17 as a command he writes, "this language too does not change the clear impression that emerges from the passage [Deut 17]: that the appointment of the king is only seen as something permitted" (p. 41). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the classical view of monarchy so his interjections here (and a few times in other places) seem forced.

A final critique is that Lorberbaum sometimes offers too simplistic of explanations for complex texts without accounting for all of the data. He discusses the book of Judges as anti-monarchial only citing the Gideon narrative and the cycle of deliverers, but deals with neither the pro-Judah flavor of the book nor the refrain lamenting the lack of a king in the epilogue. There is also either very limited or no discussion, in both his biblical presentation and in the literature, with several pro-monarchial texts with messianic implications such as Gen 49:10 and Isa 9. He actually tends to ignore or minimize messianic discussion, which is an idea integrally related to kingship in the Bible and at times in the literature he is interacting with.

Despite these negatives *Disempowered King* is a book that would be very beneficial to the student or scholar interested in kingship or in classical Jewish thought. This book finds itself in an area of biblical studies that is once again starting to get attention. It complements prior studies on kingship such as Aubrey Johnson's *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press, 1967), Tomoo Ishida's *Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel* (Walter de Gruyter, 1977), Henri Frankfort's

Kingship and the Gods (University of Chicago Press, 1948), and Engnell's *Studies in Divine Kingship in the Ancient Near East* (Blackwell, 1967). It also finds a unique voice among very recent works including Robert Gnuse's *No Tolerance for Tyrants: The Biblical Assault on Kings and Kingship* (Liturgical, 2011) and Marty Alan Michelson's *Reconciling Violence and Kingship: A Study of Judges and 1 Samuel* (Pickwick, 2011).

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[*Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*](#) by Victor P. Hamilton. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011. xxix + 721 pp., US \$54.99, hardcover.

W. F. Albright famously endorsed Mitchell Dahood's Anchor Bible volume on the Psalms by saying: "Even if only a third of his new interpretations of the Psalter are correct in principle—and I should put the total proportion higher—he has contributed more than all other scholars together, over the past two thousand years, to the elucidation of the Psalter" ("Some Excavation Reports and Syntheses," *BASOR* 186 [1967]: 54). This was high praise indeed for Dahood's work, and probably hyperbole, yet it contained an implicit warning. Because Albright did not (of course) provide a list of which two-thirds of Dahood's proposals were probably *not* correct in principle, he in effect told the reader that Dahood's commentary was an admixture of convincing and unconvincing suggestions about readings and interpretations in the Psalter, and, likewise, implicitly acknowledged that *most* of them were not convincing.

I consult Dahood's commentary on the Psalms often, and I always recommend it heartily to my Hebrew exegesis students. But I warn them, less delicately than Albright did, that they will have to be careful and wise in separating the experimental from the reliable, the conceivable from the likely, and the plausible from the indefensible. And I almost never recommend Dahood's commentary to pastors whose Hebrew and exegetical skills are less than first-rate, and certainly never to laypeople looking for something useful to guide them in their reading through the Psalms. That would be consigning them to imbibing a host of speculative misinterpretations in the process of gaining a smaller number of valuable novel insights.

I would suggest similar cautions about Hamilton's commentary on Exodus. But first, I want to point out that there is no question that Hamilton is a brilliant OT scholar. That is clear from his long and influential teaching career and his prior writings. And there is no question that there are many truly impressive insights in his new Exodus commentary. Moreover, he provides novel translation suggestions and comments, as well as novel grammatical and/or lexical observations at many points that I find both well-considered and stimulating. Not only so, but he has produced a lengthy and well-written commentary that is a pleasure to read because of its propositional clarity and natural English style. Throughout, he pays attention to the original Hebrew (as well as the ancient versions) and seeks to show the reader *from the original* what is going on in each unit of material. I would add that he obviously loves the book of Exodus, seeks assiduously to bring out its message as he understands it, and takes very seriously its identity as the very word of the only true and living God. No reader of his commentary can doubt that he has spent endless hours with the text, thinking it through and seeking to understand every part of it. The commentary is also nicely laid out in general, with three sections for each biblical pericope: the author's translation, a set of grammatical and lexical notes, and a substantial general commentary. One structural weakness of the commentary is that it has an introduction of only nine pages (limited to "The Narrative and Theology of Exodus"). All sorts of principal issues, from authorship to dating, to genre and form, to the place and function of Exodus in the Pentateuch, to historical challenges, et al, are not addressed systematically. They crop up in small ways throughout the commentary, but a reader looking for Hamilton's views on what we usually call "introductory" issues will not easily find them. In the Introduction, he does something with the question of how Exodus should be outlined that is paradigmatic for the rest of the commentary: he lists several other scholars' general outlines for the book, and then lists his own, but contends for or against none of them. It is as if he were saying to the reader, "Here are some possibilities. See if you like any of them. Pick what you want." That approach is followed very often throughout the book. It appears that he is often comfortable with simply raising possibilities and leaving it to the reader to evaluate them using whatever criteria the reader may choose to or be able to employ.

The result is an admixture of convincing and unconvincing material, and any user of the commentary will have to work hard (and would need to possess the requisite expertise) to be able to separate the experimental from the reliable, the conceivable from the likely, and the plausible from the indefensible. Perhaps the best way to demonstrate this is to sample some of the more unusual ways that the commentary treats

two of the best-known passages in Exodus, the story of the burning bush in chapter 3, and the Ten Commandments in chapter 20.

*Examples from the Pericope on the Burning Bush
(Exodus 3:1–6, pp. 43–52)*

First, Hamilton titles the pericope “God Encounters Moses for the First Time,” even though he has already described various aspects of God’s gracious attention to Moses in chapter 2. “Encounters” means something very different from “reveals himself to,” which would have been a much preferable and less misleading wording. Then, in the author’s translation for 3:2 we read, “He caught sight, yes, the bush there ablaze with fire, yet the bush intact, unconsumed.” In 3:4, we read, “God called out to him from within the bush: ‘Moses! Moses!’ ‘Yes-s-s sir,’ said he.” And at the end of 3:6 we find, “Whereupon Moses cloaked his face, fearful of gazing upon Divinity.” I assume that Hamilton seeks to provide insight for the reader into the original text by presenting some sort of literalistic translation. The actual result, however, is misinformation. The translation of 3:2 suggests that the original was written in some sort of Pidgin-Hebrew. The rendering of 3:4 suggests that Hebrew *hinnēnî* does not mean simply “Yes?” or “Here I am” but means “Oh oh!—I must be in some sort of trouble,” an indefensible semantic assertion. Even the archaizing word order “said he” is a problem since it implies that the original is also archaistic Hebrew, though it is not. And “Divinity” in 3:6 is the result of Hamilton’s contention that the article in front of *’ēlōhîm* converts it to an abstract or the like—indeffensible grammatically, so, of course, he cannot cite anything in support of it.

In the Commentary section, still on 3:1–5, Hamilton states, “Shepherding is what Moses has been doing... it is a good preparation for another kind of shepherding to which God will call Moses... That may explain why there are several ‘ex-shepherds’ in the Bible... God takes both David (2 Sam 7:8) and Amos (Amos 7:14-15) ... and redirects their lives. So we say to all shepherds, ‘Watch your back!’” Here the hermeneutical error of exemplarism (making a principle out of something that simply happens in the Bible even though the Bible never says that it is intended as a paradigm) is followed by an application to “all” shepherds (presumably ancient and modern) to be careful lest their prior leadership training with sheep cause God to require them to function as leaders of people. The odd nature of this sort of reasoning—in a scholarly commentary, no less—should be evident: First, there are only three national leaders among the hundreds mentioned in Scripture who start out as shepherds. Further limiting this applicant pool, Amos actually calls himself a *bôqēd* (sheep breeder) and *bôlēš* (fig cultivator)

rather than *rō'ēh* (shepherd), and, moreover, was never a national leader in the same way Moses and David were. Second, if shepherding were such great preparation for leadership, why are no NT leaders former shepherds? And how about tax collecting? Was Matthew at a leadership disadvantage compared to, say, Andrew? Or the priesthood—should Ezekiel or Jeshua have felt inadequate by reason of being descendents of Aaron? Perhaps I have belabored this example, but it is far too typical of the sort of experimental and speculative assertions one finds throughout the commentary portions of the book.

Examples from the Pericope on the Ten Commandments
(Exodus 20:1–17, pp. 312–353)

The translation of 20:5 ends: “I . . . am a jealous deity, reckoning the ancestors’ iniquity to the sons, to the thirdlings and to the fourthlings of those who reject me.” And 20:13 is translated, “You shall not murder/kill.” For 20:5 Hamilton’s Grammatical and Lexical Notes say, “‘Thirdlings’ and ‘fourthlings’ are more commonly ‘third and fourth generation,’ but there is no word for ‘generation’ here.” Has Hamilton never heard of ellipsis? Does he actually think that giving unusual words new meanings is a good translation strategy—even if one is trying to be literalistic? (Check the usages of “thirdling” and “fourthling” on the web and you will see what I mean.) For that matter, “sons” in this context surely connotes the idea that sin is passed on from generation to generation via males, like Y chromosomes—or at least an uniformed reader might so conclude. As to the translation of Hebrew *tirṣāh* in 20:13 as “murder/kill,” Hamilton never offers an explanation. Is the reader supposed to assume that the word can have either meaning or both meanings at once? There’s no answer, so an uniformed reader could easily assume “kill” works just as well as “murder” here, and come away with a serious misimpression about what the commandment actually prohibits.

In the Grammatical and Lexical Notes for 20:5 Hamilton asks a question about the usages of Hebrew *pāqad*, often traditionally translated by the English verb *visit*. He asks, “How can a verb (without preposition) mean ‘be gracious to’ or be ‘be concerned about,’ but that same verb have the meaning ‘punish’ when it is followed by a preposition (‘*al* or *bē*)?” He concludes, “When God shows up for a ‘visit,’ you need to do one of two things: either welcome him, or run for cover.” This is not a proper application at all, because Hamilton seems unaware, and therefore leaves the reader unaware, of the phenomenon of phrasal verbs (verbs that have a given meaning only when they are used with a given preposition) and of the exegetical flaw known as the root fallacy

(assuming that an original meaning of a word always accompanies it, as if the English words *terrific*, *terrible* and *terrifying* all had something to do with “fear” as they all once did, but only one of them still does).

From the Commentary on 20:1–7, consider this excerpt: “One might assume that v. 4 prohibits the representation of the Lord by images . . . However, it seems that it would be images of other gods rather than images of himself that would provoke the Lord’s jealousy. . . . Actually, the Bible never provides an extensive explanation for this prohibition. . . . The truth can be extrapolated . . . because God speaks from heaven without anything representing him being visible, there is no legitimacy for making any kind of an image of him . . . Since at that holy mountain God does not manifest himself in an image, images are therefore excluded . . .” Such reasoning stands the text on its head. It makes an unwarranted conclusion about the limits of the prohibition on idolatry in defiance of the explicit terminology and grammar of 20:4, and it bases the idea that we can’t worship the true God via idols only on a possible *precedent*—not instruction, but mere precedent—at Sinai.

The samplings I have presented above are not unique in nature. There are hundreds of other experimental, conjectural assertions distributed throughout the commentary. It does not often reflect an advanced knowledge of Hebrew grammar, nor the sort of balance and caution that commentaries intended for wide distribution usually strive for. But I am nevertheless delighted to own it, intend to consult it often, and am pleased to recommend it to scholars, students and pastors whose Hebrew is strong and whose exegetical skills are active. Why? Because in parallel to how Albright spoke of Dahood’s Psalms commentary, I would guess that about a third of Hamilton’s novel ideas probably have some merit, even if two-thirds do not, and so many of them are so novel that when they are, happily, correct, you are going to find them—at least currently—only in this commentary. Such insights are worth a lot, but you will have to sort your way through the sorts of questionable assertions sampled above to find them. Unfortunately, the pastor or layperson without solid linguistic and other technical skills will not be able to tell the difference.

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[*Festive Meals in Ancient Israel: Deuteronomy’s Identity Politics in their Ancient Near Eastern Context*](#) by Peter Altmann. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011. xii + 299 pp., US \$150.00, hardcover.

Dr. Peter Altmann is an Assistant Professor of Old Testament at the University of Zurich. He has written a number of articles, for both print and online journals, focusing on banquets and feasts in the biblical text.

In *Festive Meals in Ancient Israel*, Altmann attempts to “emphasize the centrality of meals for identity formation as well as for political and religious rhetoric in the texts of Deut 12:13–19; 14:22–29; and 16:1–17” (p. 244). Anthropology and biology frame Altmann’s discussion of meals in the ancient world. He examines the understanding that meals both bring together and divide communities, in that those of a similar class in the ancient Near East are brought into a closer union while sharing a meal and those of separate social strata are further divided by the food (or lack thereof) available to each class, as well as the use of taste and smell to enhance memory. He uses archaeological and archaeozoological data to shed light on the importance of meat in Israel during the Neo-Assyrian Empire, as well as the iconographic and administrative texts of surrounding cultures, including Neo-Assyrian and Ugaritic mythic texts in order to understand the role of banquets and feasts in the ancient Near East.

Altmann understands the texts of the Deuteronomic law code (which he refers to as “DC”) to be in opposition to the common usage of banquet and feast vocabulary and iconography in the Neo-Assyrian Empire:

The DC reformulation of worship as community-defining cultic meals, mandating provision for all individuals of the Israelite community, lays out an Iron Age II Israelite response to the Neo-Assyrian hegemony that was perpetrated militarily, economically, and also ideologically through foundational myths and rituals such as the *akitu* and *Enuma Elish*, which connected the divine and political monarchs as a way to augment imperial power. (p. 208)

The DC banquets and feasts are not focused on the king, as the Neo-Assyrian feasts are, but instead view Yahweh as the provider and supplier of prosperity and each individual head-of-household as the host. Altmann believes that the banquet texts attempt to “transform Judahite society” through centralized festivals that “each ‘Israelite’ carries back with them to their homes” (p. 209). This is understood to be an attempt to view Yahweh’s divine provision as central and the Neo-Assyrian king’s authority as secondary, if it is to be considered at all. Altmann points out that killing an animal for meat “terminates its productivity” (p. 100), so most common Israelites were not used to regular meat consumption. The DC includes “your son, and your daughter, and your male slave and your

female slave, and the Levite in your gates” in the household that must be cared for by the individual hosts, the household leaders. By bringing together family as well as non-familial community members who lack blood relatives, home, or land, in a feast of abundance, the issue of social justice is taken up because all members of Israelite society are included in the consumption of meat, the food normally reserved for the rich.

Altmann successfully makes his major points: that the ritual meals in Deuteronomy provide identity for the Israelite people during the Neo-Assyrian Empire; that Yahweh replaces the Assyrian king as central provider of the feast; and that DC includes all social classes of Israelites in the feast, providing a social justice element to the feast. However, the overall feel of the book was that of an extended literature review. The book recounts a tremendous amount of literature in each section in order to support each argument. The constant movement back and forth between the literature on each subject and his actual arguments cause the book to feel somewhat disjointed.

Altmann commands a wealth of knowledge on the subject of festive meals in the biblical text, as seen by his multiple publications on the topic. In the context of this monograph, he puts forth an argument that requires a response. He challenges a great deal of traditional scholarship as well as some current threads in European scholarship relating to the compositional history of Deuteronomy, using a perspective (food and ritual meals) that is not oft quoted in the compositional history of Deuteronomy. Altmann also puts forward a very strong argument for meaning within the book of Deuteronomy from the perspective of the ritual meal. The audience for this monograph is limited; outside of specialists within the field of Deuteronomy or the even more specific field of ritual meals, this book will not find much appeal. As a monograph representing a revised version of Altmann’s dissertation, however, a limited audience is to be expected.

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[*Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers*](#) by John Goldingay. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011. xii + 384 pp., US \$24.99, softcover.

Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers, written by Dr. John Goldingay, David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California and an

ordained minister in the Episcopal Church. While many of the articles collected in *Questions about Biblical Interpretation* have appeared earlier, they have been revised and furnished with indexes of modern authors and ancient sources. In this new volume, Goldingay addresses twenty three questions concerned with the interpretation of the First Testament (a unique title by which the author designates the Hebrew Bible or Tanak). *Questions about Biblical Interpretation* is a handy companion to *Key Questions about Christian Faith: Old Testament Answers* which appeared in 2010.

The book under review is composite of four parts: (1) concerning Scripture as a whole; (2) concerning narrative; (3) concerning the Old Testament as a whole; and (4) concerning the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The first part deals primarily with questions on new hermeneutical methods and the art of homiletics. This part includes a detailed discussion of topics such as liberation theology, evangelical biblical interpretation, canon and lection, scriptural preaching, and theological reflection. The second part is much shorter and consists of four questions on biblical narrative and systematic theology, biblical story and its application to our life, preaching on narrative, and the historicity of biblical narrative. The third part deals with the First Testament as a theological unity, which covers the Christian relation to the First Testament, the christological appropriation of the First Testament, evangelical study of the First Testament, and the relation of Old Testament theology and the biblical canon. The final part unfolds the interpretation of the Torah, popular interpretation of prophecy, prophecy today, and the interpretation of poetry and wisdom.

While some of the questions addressed are more or less familiar to the Christian reader, most of the articles offer multifaceted solutions to new challenging questions. For this reason, I will review two articles considered notable enough for Christian ministers and pastors. The first essay that caught my attention is "How Might Preaching Be Scriptural?" (pp. 131–37). Experiential preaching involves more than just simple storytelling. Goldingay's exposition of the Psalms illustrates what experiential preaching is. In his own words, "Having realized this, I have once or twice preached on a psalm by mediating on it Godward out loud, offering God the actual prayers and praises, the questions and the confessions, that emerge for me from this psalm, and inviting the congregation to join me in these prayers or to substitute the ones they need to utter on the basis of this text. I was preaching, but praying, on the basis of the fact that having people do that within Scripture was a way of communicating with us that God had reckoned appropriate" (p. 132). Elaborating further on this homiletical practice, Goldingay compares the role of the homilist to the function of the Psalms, since both "give voice

to the longing plea of people and also to the loving response of God” (p. 133). Another alternative is to bolster the homilist's authenticity. According to Goldingay, Paul's letter to the Romans (chs. 3–8) is kind of an oral imaginative preaching supplemented with an emphasis on personal authenticity. Indeed, “the Gospel is graphic, and Scripture is graphic” (p. 137).

“How Do We Preach on Narrative?” (pp. 174–82) is another remarkable contribution of this volume. While this essay differs from the article outlined above, the reader will find they complement each other neatly. Hebrew narratives encompass Genesis to Kings and Chronicles to Nehemiah alongside shorter narratives of Ruth, Jonah, Esther, Daniel, and Job. Given the unfailing love for biblical prose, I fully agree with Goldingay that “stories are a key resource by which Scripture communicates, and therefore a key challenge to the preacher” (p. 175). Sharing the commitments and concerns of God's people of old is vital to good preaching. Judging from this Christian perspective, Goldingay infers that “such stories manifest a characteristic they share with the biblical story as a whole: they bring to life the events on which the faith is based. This faith is itself a gospel, a piece of good news about something that has happened” (p. 177). A couple of other useful models of preaching on narrative are attested thus far: telling the story without adding interpretative comments (e.g., the Gospel of Mark or Kings); applying the story into the framework of the narrator (e.g., the Gospel of Matthew, Genesis, or Chronicles); attaching didactic materials to the story (e.g., the Gospel of John); continuing the biblical story into the life of the faith community (e.g., the Gospel of Luke). Moreover, the preacher ought to remember that stories usually have a structure and scene as well as a particular cultural and historical context.

To sum up, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation* is a well-written collection of articles that will cause many thinking Christians to step back and mull over the uncompromising truth of Scripture. The reader will find some articles more engaging than others, but they still might be helpful at other occasions. I am convinced that not just pastors and ministers will benefit by reading this book. Also laypeople and undergraduate students of theology and biblical studies will appreciate the caring, pastoral tone of the author. Above all, Goldingay has provided us with a solid resource for further study and application in ministry.

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Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East by Samuel Greengus. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011. xix + 334 pp., US \$36.00, softcover.

Scholarly opinion on the nature of biblical law was radically altered in 1901 when a stele containing the Code of Hammurapi was unearthed at the ancient site of Susa in Iran. It was quickly discovered that this particular “code” or collection, and others recovered in later excavations, contained numerous civil or ethical laws that bore a remarkable, and sometimes identical, resemblance to those in the Hebrew Bible. Recognition of this remarkable similarity now obligates all exegetes and scholars, whether evangelical or otherwise, to study the civil legal system of the Bible within the context of the ancient Near East (ANE). Failure to do so runs the risk of possibly misunderstanding and misappropriating Scripture’s laws.

In *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East*, Samuel Greengus maintains that a distinct historical relationship existed between biblical, rabbinic, and ANE law collections, and that exploring this relationship should enable the student of biblical laws to gain a “fundamental level of meaning, closest to what the ancient peoples themselves may have understood these laws to say in their own time and setting” (pp. 1, 289). Such an exploration is possible because even though the biblical laws were regarded to be of divine origin, they were in essence related to human history and experience and not beyond human comprehension and attainment (Deut 30:11–14). In effect, a substantial portion of what was mandated must have been already familiar to the ancient Israelites and most likely based upon pre-existing ANE laws.

Later on, rabbinic legal traditions were codified in the so-called “Oral Law,” the Mishnah and Tosefta, and the *baraitot* scattered throughout the Talmud. Most of these were interpretations of biblical laws, but several of the early rabbinic laws do not have a counterpart in the biblical tradition. Instead, they resemble the ANE codes. This is not unusual because larger bodies of legal materials generally existed in ancient societies beyond what is recorded in their respective literatures. Such striking commonalities between ANE laws and those in the Bible and early rabbinic traditions require a comparative and contrastive study. The cultural context demands that the differences as well as the similarities between the various cultures be recognized (p. 5).

As a result, Greengus proposes to compare those biblical and early rabbinic laws for which similar ANE material exists. Consequently, his study employs the ANE legal material as a kind of a cultural baseline or a “law of the nations” tradition that began in ancient Mesopotamian

culture and continued into biblical and rabbinic times (p. 6). The transmission and knowledge of these ancient laws extended throughout the entire “Fertile Crescent” through trade, commerce, conquest, migration, and other means. It transcended ethnic, national, and language barriers.

Since the ANE laws were themselves part of a larger legal tradition, they should be able to serve as a commentary on the background behind the later biblical laws and early rabbinic material. Comparative use of this commentary of “customary laws” should also provide evidence of possible “cultural dialogue” taking place between the Israelites and their Canaanite neighbors. Some of the “law of the nations” tradition continued unchanged down into rabbinic times. Others in comparison were modified in significant ways; some, perhaps, were even rejected. The deliberate modification or rejection of laws opens the possibility of understanding Israel’s legal self-awareness.

Greengus is no stranger to ANE and biblical and Jewish law. After earning a Ph. D. in Assyriology at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, he joined the faculty of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1963. Currently, he serves HUC-JIR as Julian Morgenstern Emeritus Professor of Bible and Near Eastern Literature. Throughout his long and distinguished career, Dr. Greengus has published numerous books and articles on Babylonian law and literature. More importantly, however, as far as this study is concerned, he also spent those years reading and studying ANE law codes with many graduate students (including this reviewer).

Since no discernable principle of organization of law codifications can be readily found in the Bible, the early rabbinic material, or the ANE (p. 9), Greengus orders the study of the laws in this book under eight general topics moving from material dealing with personal and family relationships to those concerning property and then on to concerns in larger societal structures. Accordingly, the first chapter examines comparative laws relating to family relations and sexual behavior. Chapters two and three focus on debtors and debt slaves and chattel slaves respectively. The next chapter surveys laws relating to personal injury and homicide. Laws pertaining to movable and immovable property are the subjects of chapters five and six. The last two chapters consider the larger societal issues of unlawful address of supernatural powers and the courts and the justice system.

Each chapter goes through its respective topic in numbered steps. For example, Greengus examines the similarities and differences between the ANE customary laws and those of the Bible and early rabbinic tradition concerning marriage rules and incest in five sections,

all of which consider the danger of incest and other unions affecting sexual rights and access, paternity, and inheritance (pp. 11–35). The focus on the issue of offspring in biblical marriage rules may explain why laws against homosexuality are addressed in the Bible, while laws against lesbianism are not (p. 81).

At the beginning of the book, Greengus provides helpful front matter, an expanded table of contents, and an introduction explaining the purpose and methodology of the study. At the end, the author offers a summary and final thoughts. A number of useful items are found in the end matter: a timeline, an appendix on the history and culture of Israel and her neighbors, an extensive bibliography, and a series of indexes on primary texts cited in the work. A subject and/or a name index would improve the work, but an expanded table of contents, extensive indexes of primary texts, well-written footnotes, and the ten-page, two columns per page bibliography help alleviate the lack.

In the final chapter, Greengus argues that the evidence points to four major categories within the early Jewish Law (p. 282):

1. ANE laws that continued virtually unchanged into rabbinic times, but are absent from the Bible.
2. Biblical laws that are basically identical with those in the ANE and that continued with little change into rabbinic times.
3. Biblical laws that were modified in distinct and noteworthy ways in contrast to the ANE practice.
4. Biblical laws that were modified by later reinterpretation by the rabbis.

According to Greengus, the evidence attested from these four categories suggests that biblical and rabbinic laws were part of a shared legal tradition within the ANE. Or put another way, the biblical and rabbinic laws represent legacies of a good portion of the customary cultural legal tradition of the ANE. In addition, the laws given in the Hebrew Bible must “represent a selection out of a larger body of customary laws or legal traditions that were recognized but not included” (p. 288) in the extant written collection. Furthermore, to Greengus, the extant written collections developed out of a dynamic orally transmitted “customary law” tradition. This tradition originated in the ANE and continued over centuries of time.

The vast material presented here will require careful study and evaluation. Obviously, scholars will not agree with Greengus on every point or conclusion of this study. Pure Biblicists, on the one hand, may bristle at the idea that the Hebrew Bible needs to be examined within the ANE context as a matter of interpretive principle. On the other,

traditional Old Testament scholars may not see the value in studying early rabbinic law, especially one resembling a law attested in the ANE, but not the Bible.

Nevertheless, three methodological principles make *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* an important work for those interested in the study of biblical and rabbinic law. First, Greengus shows that these collections are homogeneous with those of the ANE. All three are centered on the same legal genre. That is, they were cut from the same broad cloth. Second, all three shared a demonstrated propinquity of place. All three originated in the lands of the “Fertile Crescent.” As far as legal custom was concerned the entire ANE seemed to reveal a cosmopolitan vivacity. Third and finally, all three shared a demonstrated propinquity of time. Despite the millennium that may have separated some of the laws evaluated herein, Greengus is able to argue cogently that biblical and rabbinic law was substantially part of the broader ongoing common tradition of ANE law.

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[*The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*](#) edited by Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xx + 785 pp., US \$150.00, hardcover.

The *Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls (OHDSS)* is an invaluable resource for the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) as it introduces and examines eight ongoing areas of debate and research: (1) Archaeology of Khirbet Qumran and the Judaean Wilderness; (2) The Scrolls and Jewish History; (3) The Scrolls and Sectarianism; (4) The Biblical Texts, Interpretation and Languages of the Scrolls; (5) Religious Themes in the Scrolls; (6) The Scrolls and Early Christianity; (7) The Scrolls and Later Judaism; and (8) New Approaches to the Scrolls. Edited by two leading DSS scholars, Timothy H. Lim (University of Edinburgh) and John J. Collins (Yale University) have demonstrated dedication and expertise in their fields (Hebrew Bible and DSS) and have compiled a world-class list of contributors for this volume. Contrary to many previous volumes of the DSS that attempt to formulate an authoritative synthesis or a scholarly consensus of the issues, the *OHDSS* proposes an alternative approach: “It is our intention here to reflect on diverse opinions and viewpoints, highlight the points of disagreement, and point to promising direction for future research” (p. 2).

In part 1 Eric M. Meyers, "Khirbet Qumran and its Environs," summarizes the various positions regarding the function and occupation of the site, investigates the adjoining cemetery and ceramics, and concludes that a connection does exist between the DSS and the settlement. In "The Qumran Cemetery Reassessed," Rachel Hachlili, after a detailed analysis of the surveys, burial characteristics, human remains, and women in the Qumran cemetery, concludes that the cemetery is the burial place for the inhabitants who lived at Khirbet Qumran.

In part 2 Martin Goodman, "Constructing Ancient Judaism from the Scrolls," suggests that the DSS should be investigated in their own right, rather than from later Judaism or Christianity, to construct a portrait of Second Temple Judaism. Michael O. Wise, "The Origins and History of the Teacher's Movement," offers an alternative historical reconstruction of the Teacher of Righteousness in the mid-70s B.C.E. rather than the consensus view in the second century B.C.E. In "Women in Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls," Tal Ilan examines the role and position of women in Second Temple Judaism with a detailed investigation of the "biblical," apocryphal, and sectarian texts.

In part 3 John J. Collins, "Sectarian Communities in the Dead Sea Scrolls," compares the Damascus Document (CD) and the *Serekh* texts and identifies multiple communities within a broad movement in early Judaism with the Qumran site as an individual settlement. Joan E. Taylor, "The Classical Sources on the Essenes and the Scrolls," examines the description of Essenes in the classical sources, compares them with the *Serekh* and Damascus texts, and asserts their similarities. In "Sociological Approaches to Qumran Sectarianism," Jutta Jokiranta describes various sociological frameworks and their ability to cultivate an informed imagination to accurately theorize about the Qumran movement within early Judaism. Sacha Stern, "Qumran Calendars and Sectarianism," examines various approaches to justifying the 364 day solar calendar's practical utilization at Qumran, and concludes that these approaches are inconclusive and the practice is difficult to establish. James C. VanderKam, "The Book of Enoch and the Qumran Scrolls," examines the texts and themes of Enoch and criticizes Gabriele Bochaccini's (*Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*; Eerdmans, 1998) historical sketch of Second Temple Judaism and the origins of Qumran from Enochic Judaism.

In part 4 Ronald S. Hendel, "Assessing the Text-Critical Theories of the Hebrew Bible after Qumran," critiques the text-critical theories (Cross, Talmon, Tov, and Ulrich), aligns himself with Ulrich's multiple literary editions theory, and expands it into an eclectic set of

representatives that includes locale, social group, textual groups and subgroups, and editions. In “Authoritative Scriptures and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” Timothy H. Lim, recognizing anachronistic terms such as canon and Bible, identifies authoritative Scriptures and a bipartite open canon (Torah and Prophets) at Qumran. Molly M. Zahn, “Rewritten Scripture,” identifies *Jubilees*, 1QapGen, *Temple Scroll*, and 4QRP as key texts in defining Rewritten Scripture as a genre: “a group of texts which reproduce substantial portions of one or more biblical books, but modify the scriptural text by means of addition, omission, paraphrase, rearrangement, or other types of changes” (323). In “The Continuity of Biblical Interpretation in the Qumran Scrolls and Rabbinic Literature,” Bilhah Nitzan classifies the *Pesharim* as the typical exegetical genre of the DSS, and identifies three types of *peshet*: continuous, thematic, and isolated. Jan Joosten, “Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Greek in the Qumran Scrolls,” delves into the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the DSS and their contribution to linguistics.

In part 5 Jonathan Klawans, “Purity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” identifies a quasi-purity at Qumran after comparing the women, the cemetery, and toilet practices with the sectarian literature. In “Apocalypticism and Messianism,” Michael A. Knibb is hesitant to describe Qumran as an ‘apocalyptic’ community, because their primary emphasis was on proper Torah observance. Concerning messianism, Knibb views the DSS as a development of traditions already contained in the Hebrew Bible, which formed part of the spectrum of beliefs that were common to Second Temple Judaism. James R. Davila, “Exploring the Mystical Background of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” defines mysticism as a union with the divine or a form of deification, and notes the direct influence of Jewish mystical traditions to later Jewish and Christian mysticism. Armin Lange, “Wisdom Literature and Thought in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” states that the wisdom texts from Qumran are almost all non-Essene in origin, mostly dated to the third and second centuries B.C.E., and provide insight into the development of Jewish wisdom with their emphasis on Torah. Albert De Jong, “Iranian Connections in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” identifies the connections between Zoroastrianism and the DSS in their use of Iranian loanwords (*raz*: “secret or mystery” and *nahshir*: “hunt”), décor, ideas (e.g. eschatology), and religious practice. David Lambert, “Was the Dead Sea Sect a Penitential Movement?” answers this question in the negative. Arguing against anachronistic repentance concepts influenced by western religions, Lambert identifies “divine re-creation” (rejecting a former life and adopting a new one) and a different set of terms operative at Qumran.

In part 6 Jörg Frey, “Critical Issues in the Investigation of the Scrolls and the New Testament,” summarizes the misguided history and

fascination of DSS parallels by New Testament scholars. However, Frey maintains that the DSS still provide invaluable insight to understanding the background and message of the New Testament and early Christian ideas. L. W. Hurtado, "Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology," analyzes the development of Christology by which early Christians accommodated devotion to Jesus as divinely significant within the Second Temple Jewish. George J. Brooke, "Shared Exegetical Traditions between the Scrolls and the New Testament," examines the content, form, and method of biblical interpretation in the DSS and the New Testament. Identifying shared exegetical traditions, Brooke provides a method for interpretation: "The most suitable way of explaining what is shared is to set everything with the context of common exegetical tendencies in Judaism of the time, some of which may seem particular to Jewish sectarianism of the period, but which could also belong in Judaism more broadly" (p. 587).

In part 7 Aharon Shemesh, "Halakhah between the Dead Sea Scrolls and Rabbinic Literature," identifies the fundamental difference between *halakhic* writings in the DSS (Temple Scroll, Damascus Document) and Rabbinic literature as the continuity of the biblical tradition in the DSS compared to the innovation of explicit disputes and opinions of the rabbis (*mahloket*). Daniel K. Falk, "The Contribution of the Qumran Scrolls to the Study of Ancient Jewish Liturgy," is a study on prayer in the DSS organized by a series of six types of questions: (1) definition and classification; (2) textual; (3) literary; (4) historical; (5) contextual and social-scientific; and (6) ideological and theological. Stefan C. Reif, "Reviewing the Links between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Cairo Genizah," recognizes the differences between the DSS and G material, and systematically compares these two collections.

In part 8, Carol A. Newsom, "Rhetorical Criticism and the Reading of the Qumran Scrolls," reviews the history of rhetorical criticism and the use of persuasion as a universal human characteristic. Beginning with the rich usage of rhetorical criticism in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies, Newsom views this methodology as a useful toolbox of skills for DSS studies. Maxine L. Grossman, "Roland Barthes and the Teacher of Righteousness: The Death of the Author of the Dead Sea Scrolls," addresses the persona of the historical Teacher of Righteousness as an authorial figure in light of critical theory and the death of the author. Emphasizing reader response approaches and the presence of multiple audiences, Grossman identifies the identity of the author as an aspect of textuality with a shift from single to multiple meanings and from fixed historical claims to destabilizing ones. Hector L. MacQueen, "The Scrolls and the Legal Definition of Authorship," by examining the case of copyright between Qimron and Shanks, raises

issues of authorship, originality, moral rights, and exceptions to copyright.

In brief, each article in *OHDSS* can be divided into (and will be evaluated in) three general sections: first, all the articles have excellent summaries on the history of research where diverse viewpoints and issues are introduced; second, each author, to varying degrees of success, attempts to critically engage their respective topic by examining some aspect of Qumran or DSS; and third, each article ends with a helpful suggested reading section and bibliography. The strength of *OHDSS* is its balance of generalization and specialization—without compromising expertise or readability—in its articles. Its weakness, however, is the unequal weight (i.e. number of articles) given to the different sections with some collections giving an exceptional overview of its pertinent issues (e.g. Part 4: The Biblical Texts, Interpretation and Languages of the Scrolls) and others giving only a partial picture of the discussion (e.g. Part 7: The Scrolls and Later Judaism). Overall, the *OHDSS* is an extraordinary collection of articles that meets its objective to reflect diverse viewpoints, highlight ongoing issues, and direct future research. Students, scholars, novices, and specialists will find the *OHDSS* a welcome introduction and companion to DSS research with its succinct yet comprehensive history of research, expert yet accessible evaluations of critical issues, and nuanced yet uncomplicated methodologies.

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[*Psalms as Torah: Reading the Biblical Song Ethically*](#) by Gordon J. Wenham. *Studies in Theological Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012. xiii + 233 pp., US \$22.99, softcover.

Gordon Wenham, emeritus professor at the University of Gloucestershire, has taken on a much neglected area of Psalms study: ethics. The book is comprised of an introduction, ten chapters, and a conclusion.

The book falls into two main sections. In chapters 1–4, Wenham addresses the preliminary questions of why the psalms are so important to Jewish and Christian ethics and how they function to instill that ethic in the worshipping community. To accomplish this, he first surveys how the psalms have been appropriated among Jews and Christians from OT times through the centuries. He demonstrates that psalms were widely used in private and public worship in every era of

Jewish and Christian history (p. 7). Following this, Wenham briefly surveys contemporary scholarship on Psalms while advocating a canonical method, which “insists on using the present sequence of the psalms as a tool for unpacking their meaning for the Psalter’s compilers” (p. 40). Also, in accord with this method, Wenham insists on utilizing the full hermeneutical possibilities of the psalm headings (p. 35). In the third chapter, building on the work of David Carr (*Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*; Oxford University Press, 2005) and Paul Griffiths (*Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*; Oxford University Press, 1999). Wenham makes a substantial case that many OT books were intended to be memorized. The goal of memorization was to transmit the values of the culture to the people and to future generations (p. 42). This, he argues, has a profound impact on how the psalms were able to play such a formative role in Israel’s ethical thinking. He states, “as a reader memorizes a text, he becomes textualized; that is, he embodies the work that he has committed to memory” (p. 53). In his fourth chapter, Wenham notes that the Psalter “makes a stronger claim on the believer than either law, wisdom, or story” (p. 57). The reason for this is the unique, participatory nature of psalmic language. When one reads the narratives or laws of the Old Testament, one can do so rather passively. However, in the act of praying a psalm, you commit yourself to the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions of the psalm (p. 57). Wenham draws from speech act theory to elucidate this dynamic between the reader and psalms. He summarizes, “praying the psalms is a performative, typically a commissive, act: saying these solemn words to God alters one’s relationship in a way that mere listening does not” (p. 75). Additionally, the generic language of the psalms encourages the reader to identify themselves with the “I” of the Psalmist, which allows the poems to shape one’s beliefs, emotions, and perspective (pp. 60–62).

The following six chapters outline the ethics taught and implied by the Psalter. Wenham begins this section by describing the concept of “law” (*torah*) and the attitude toward it taught in the Psalter. After pointing out the centrality of *torah* in the final form of the Psalter, Wenham works inductively through Ps 119. He concludes that the Psalter’s concept of law is much broader than legal codes and ethical imperatives. Rather, the law is “the whole of God’s revelation” (p. 88). The worshiper should not simply obey or honor the law, but delight in it because it leads to a blessed life. Chapters six and seven analyze connections between the Pentateuch and Psalms. In chapter six, Wenham illustrates the Psalter’s dependence on the commands in the Pentateuch through examining its appropriation of the Ten Commandments. Even though the psalms rarely quote the Ten Commandments, they do

presuppose them. For example, the psalms do not directly command one not to take the name of the Lord in vain. However, the Psalmists do show reverence for this command by illustrating how the Lord's name should be used (p. 103). Additionally, in line with the Pentateuchal legislation, the psalms also advocate for the poor and needy. Chapter seven focuses on the narratives of the Pentateuch and their reception in the Psalter, demonstrating that the Psalms often retell the Pentateuchal narratives from a theological and ethical perspective (p. 119). In chapter eight, Wenham paints a portrait of the “wicked” and the “righteous” as described in the Psalter, ultimately concluding that the “imitation of God” is the key theme of the ethics of the Psalter (p. 158). In chapter nine, Wenham incorporates the imprecatory psalms into his discussion of ethics. He utilizes canonical, reader response, and speech act methods to address this thorny issue (p. 168). One benefit of these psalms for contemporary audiences is that they “teach their users to reflect on their own complicity in and responsibility for violence and oppression” (p. 178). In his final chapter, Wenham examines how the ethics of the psalms influenced the ethics of the New Testament writers. He shows how many of the central NT ethical themes are grounded in Psalms, including: the doctrine of sin, the bias toward the poor, and the suffering and vindication of the righteous.

Wenham articulates that the goal of this book is “to demonstrate the importance of the psalms particularly in molding Christian ethics and to offer an initial exploration of the ethics of the psalms” (p. xi). He accomplishes this goal admirably. The book is well-written and clearly laid out. The way he utilizes David Carr's work on memorization in the ancient world and Paul Griffiths work on religious reading is a model for how to apply interdisciplinary research. Particularly helpful is Wenham's extended discussion of how the Psalter has the potential to shape the ethics of the worshipper.

One way the book could be strengthened is regarding methodological clarity. It was not clear if Wenham's primary goal was to describe Israelite ethics as embodied in the Psalter, or if it was to identify a standard for contemporary ethics. His purpose statement for the book makes it sound like both are in view (p. xi). Certainly the two areas are not unrelated, but if his goal was the former, some diachronic considerations should have been made. For example, how did the exile affect the ethics of the Psalmists?

Overall, the book is illuminating and brimming with fresh insights and readings of various psalms that will be helpful to students, pastors, and scholars. Perhaps most importantly, Wenham has opened a new path for scholarly inquiry. As he often states in the book, the ethics of the Psalter is a much neglected area of study and his work opens the

door for more detailed and comprehensive analyses. Wenham has reminded us that the Psalms are *Torah* and have a profound shaping influence on the communities that pray them.

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Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament edited by David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011. 414 pp., US \$30.00, softcover.

In addition to the introductory essay by Firth and Wegner, *Presence, Power and Promise* is comprised of twenty-one essays by a number of noteworthy evangelical scholars. Firth, the director of extension studies at St. John's College in Nottingham, England, and Wegner, professor of Old Testament at Phoenix Seminary, seek to address the relative shortage of treatments of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. Firth has authored commentaries on Samuel and Esther, as well as co-editing works on the Psalms and Isaiah. Wegner has written on textual criticism, translation techniques, Isaiah, and the use of the Old Testament in preaching. Firth's and Wegner's introductory chapter discusses the issue of the Trinity in the Old Testament, as well as the possibility of development between the Old Testament's conception of the "spirit of God" and that of the New Testament. The treatment, while brief, serves as a methodological statement for the subsequent investigations.

The book is divided into eight major sections: 1) Orientation to the Spirit in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East, 2) The Spirit and Creation, 3) The Spirit and Wisdom, 4) The Spirit and Creativity, 5) The Spirit and Prophecy, 6) The Spirit and Leadership, 7) The Spirit and the Future, and 8) The Spirit at Qumran. The book's arrangement around major topical areas is a helpful synthetic strategy. The topics chosen allow *Presence, Power and Promise* to engage a wide range of Old Testament texts and concerns related to the Holy Spirit.

Section six ("The Spirit and Leadership") includes four compelling essays related to the Spirit's empowering role in the lives of Samson, Saul, and Elijah, as well as a more synthetic essay by Firth. This section allows for a treatment of the Spirit in the Old Testament that acknowledges previous scholarship related to the work of the Spirit's empowering various Israelites while providing discussions of complexities such as the Spirit's role in the life of Samson. As Merrill notes, "The Samson narrative (Judg 13–16) is fraught with difficulties

from beginning to end, not least of which is the apparent paradox of God's powerful work through Samson against the backdrop of his obvious moral and spiritual failings" (p. 281–82). The mixture of broad overview and exegetical depth in this section is similar to that in parts three and five, which deal with the Spirit and wisdom and the Spirit and prophecy respectively.

Sections one ("Orientation to the Spirit in the Old Testament and Ancient Near East") and seven ("The Spirit and the Future") include two essays. Richard E. Averbeck's essay expands on his essay previously published in *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? An Investigation in to the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Biblical Studies, 2005). His focus is on the word *rûah* and its use in the Old Testament to denote the "closely related" concepts of breath, wind, spirit, and Holy Spirit (p. 36). This essay is paired with that of John H. Walton, which compares the Old Testament's conception of the Spirit of the Lord with endowments of ancient Near Eastern gods. Walton concludes, "anyone from the Ancient Near East would understand the divine endowment indicated by the role of the SOL [Spirit of the Lord]. Nevertheless, revelation to Israel qualified the immanence of God such that it would not have fitted the theology of the Ancient Near East" (p. 65). These essays offer unique contributions to the understanding of the Spirit in the Old Testament, as well as embodying different methodological approaches.

The essays in section seven offer useful treatments of the Spirit's role in ushering in the future redemption and restoration of God's people and God's creation. The first essay by VanGemeren and Abernethy evaluates the Torah, Prophets, and Writings to offer a canonical treatment of the Spirit's activity with regard to the future. Routledge presents the Spirit's role in the future primarily through the Old Testament prophets, particularly Ezekiel. The Spirit is linked to the restoration of Israel as a nation and, subsequently, to the coming new creation.

Sections two ("The Spirit and Creation"), four ("The Spirit and Creativity"), and eight ("The Spirit at Qumran"), are comprised of a single essay. While each of the essays included in the respective sections related to creation, creativity, and Qumran offer solid treatment of the topics in question, these sections would have benefited from the inclusion of multiple essays that could have provided differing perspectives on the topic.

Overall, the book offers a much needed discussion of the Spirit in the Old Testament, which is a relatively under-treated aspect of Old Testament theology. Each of the essays in the book provides helpful perspectives on the Spirit in the Old Testament, but the book could have been strengthened through a different organizational strategy. The

inclusion of sections with only one or two essays is problematic as only certain aspects of the Spirit in the Old Testament receive “further insight and depth” through “specific exegetical articles on significant passages” (p. 15) in these sections. Though the sections without “specific exegetical articles” add to the work's breadth, the unevenness in the depth of coverage creates a disjointed cadence with some sections feeling incomplete in comparison to others. Despite this shortcoming, *Presence, Power and Promise* offers an excellent survey of the topic of the Spirit in the Old Testament while providing useful exegetical treatments in certain cases. The book will surely inspire additional scholarly discussion of the Spirit in the Old Testament and represents a significant contribution to this area of Old Testament scholarship.

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[The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East](#) edited by John Curtis and St John Simpson. London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010. xvii + 626 pp., US \$99.00, hardcover.

The first aspect of *The World of Achaemenid Persia* (hereafter *WoAP*) that should catch the eye of those interested in Persian studies is the expertise of its editors. John Curtis is Keeper of Middle East Collections at the British Museum, while St John Simpson is Assistant Keeper and Curator of Ancient Iran and Arabia at the same institution. Their expertise is evident not only in their esteemed positions, but also in a wealth of prior publications and firsthand archaeological experience.

Another aspect of the work that catches the eye is its physical quality, which is superb. In a day and age in which academic works of this caliber often have a higher price tag coupled with shoddy production, I. B. Tauris is to be commended for the first rate quality of this volume. *WoAP* has a woven hardcover exterior, a high gloss dust jacket, a binding that approaches bulletproof strength, thick pages, and a nice, readable font. This book will bear up under many hours of academic inquiry.

Equally impressive is the material within the volume, which stems from an international conference at the British Museum in 2005. The authors of its fifty-one chapters represent leading research universities around the globe and include some of the most significant names in Persian studies (e.g., Pierre Briant; Amélie Kuhrt). For any

book of this type that decreases the weight of its purchaser's wallet by \$99.00, it is appropriate to expect superior scholarship. The collective expertise of the contributors to *WoAP* does not disappoint.

The chapters in *WoAP* are divided into eight larger units. Part 1 is "History and Historiography." It is worth mentioning that, in the first chapter, Pierre Briant recounts the concretization of the theme of Persian decadence in eighteenth-century European historiography. This stereotype has proven difficult to slay and wields considerable power even today. Part 2, "Religion," covers a variety of topics such as burial, deities, Zoroastrianism, and imperial ideology. Part 3, "Gender Studies," examines the place of women in Achaemenid society and art. Part 4, "Art and Architecture," examines not only foundations and sources of Persian art and architecture, but also provides interpretations and reassessments. Part 5 is "Archaeology." I am particularly delighted to see that the origin of the Achaemenids is still a vital topic of discussion in Persian studies. Part 6 is "Seals and Coins," a topic too often neglected in mere histories. Part 7, "Gold, Silver, Glass, and Faience," focuses on production and technology. Finally, Part 8 is "Regional Studies." I for one am thrilled at the amount of new pages devoted to Persia and temples in this unit.

As I reflect upon the totality of *WoAP*, two words come to mind: comprehensive and authoritative. This volume is not for everyone. Those looking for a history of Persia that focuses particularly on the Achaemenids would do well to look at the ones provided by Edwin Yamauchi (*Persia and the Bible*; Baker, 1990), Pierre Briant (*From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*; Eisenbrauns, 2002), and Amélie Kuhrt (*The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period*; Routledge, 2007); or, for a more accessible history, the one by Lindsay Allen (*The Persian Empire*; University of Chicago Press, 2005). For those students and/or professionals specializing in any aspect of Persian studies, however, *WoAP* is an essential reference work that belongs in one's personal library.

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BOOK REVIEWS INDEX

- Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar, Lexicon, and Annotated Text* by Miles Van Pelt (Reviewed by D. R. Watson).....103
- A Brief Guide to the Hebrew Bible* by Hans M. Barstad (Reviewed by J. West).....105
- The Character of Christian Scripture* by Christopher R. Seitz (Reviewed by K. Capps).....107
- A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Lamentations* by R. B. Salters (Reviewed by S. J. Park).....111
- David and His Theologian: Literary, Social, and Theological Investigations of the Early Monarchy* by Walter Brueggemann (Reviewed by M. Rogland).....113
- Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* edited by Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Reviewed by D. Wu).....117
- Disempowered King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature* by Yair Lorberbaum (Reviewed by D. Diffey).....119
- Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* by Victor P. Hamilton (Reviewed by D. Stuart).....122
- Festive Meals in Ancient Israel: Deuteronomy's Identity Politics in their Ancient Near Eastern Context* by Peter Altmann (Reviewed by M. Hamilton).....126
- Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers* by John Goldingay (Reviewed by I. German).....128
- Laws in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* by Samuel Greengus (Reviewed by S. J. Andrews).....131
- The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* edited by Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Reviewed by K. S. Baek).....134

<i>Psalms as Torah: Reading the Biblical Song Ethically</i> by Gordon J. Wenham (Reviewed by R. J. Cook).....	138
<i>Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament</i> edited by David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Reviewed by J. Spencer).....	141
<i>The World of Achaemenid Persia: History, Art and Society in Iran and the Ancient Near East</i> edited by John Curtis and St John Simpson (Reviewed by R. M. Fox).....	143