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Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution From Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?

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The title of this essay raises a question that is quite current, though the question it raises might sound strange to evangelicals who specialize in fields other than the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible. The present currency of the question derives not only from nineteenth century critical scholarship that many evangelicals consider methodologically suspect, but from the text of the Hebrew Bible and archaeological discoveries in ancient Syria and Canaan. The focus of this contribution is on the former. Certain sets of assumptions brought to the biblical text that contribute significantly to manufacturing interpretive problems that allegedly compel the idea that Israelite religious evolved toward monotheism. The first set of assumptions concerns the phenomenon of divine plurality in the Hebrew text; the second involves an argument for divine plurality that is imported into the text. I will address both in order.

KEY WORDS: Monotheism, Evolution, Divine Names

DIVINE PLURALITY IN THE TEXT OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Summary of the Problem

Scholars of the Hebrew Bible know that there are a number of instances where אלהים (‘ĕlōhîm, “God, god”) is accurately translated by the plural (“gods”) and where such translations are used of an Israelite divine assembly or council under the authority of Yahweh (Ps 82:1). Other terms like אלים ( fils) אלהים / אלים / עליון (“sons of God,” or “sons of the gods,” and “sons of the Most High”) also occur in the
Hebrew Bible, several of which are used in the context of a heavenly divine council.¹

Since the concept of a divine council is witnessed throughout the ancient Near East among polytheistic religions, it is assumed that a divine council of plural אלים in the Hebrew Bible is evidence of antiquated polytheism in Israel’s religion. Historical circumstances, we are told, eventually propelled a theological change in the mind of Israel’s religious elite. The divine council disappeared as Israelite religion achieved the breakthrough to monotheism. To cope with the reality of exile, Israel’s religious leadership came to believe Yahweh was intrinsically superior to other gods. Yahweh had used the other nations and their gods to punish Israel. Hence the biblical writers cast Yahweh as the sovereign of all nations who sentenced the gods of the nations to death (Ps 82). Yahweh thus emerged from the exile as the lone God; no others existed. An alleged editorial agenda driven by monotheistic zealot-priests and scribes during and after the exile enforced and assured this religious transition via their work on the final redaction of the Hebrew Bible. This new monotheism went beyond monolatry, which allows the existence of other gods but forbids their worship. It is reflected in denial language where the writers have Yahweh proclaim, “There is no god besides me,” interpreted as meaning Yahweh is the only god that exists. Prior to this evolutionary leap, such statements must be hyperbole, since such language is known in the religious literature of other cultures, such as polytheistic Mesopotamia.²

One could ask several questions at this juncture: What is the linguistic justification that denial statements in pre-exilic texts must surely be hyperbole, while the same phrases deny the existence of other gods after the exile? Is it really coherent to say that a pre-exilic Israelite did not truly believe Yahweh was unique and that any language suggesting as much was a deliberate exaggeration? Is not an appeal to hyperbole to superimpose a modern skeptical dismissal on an ancient Semite? Why are some of the clearest examples of a divine council of בני אלים (“sons of God”) found in texts that are dated to the exile by most scholars (e.g., Job 1–2)? Did it really never occur to Israelites before the

1. See Gerald Cooke, “The Sons of (the) God(s),” ZAW 76 (1964): 22–47; Lowell K.

exile that Yahweh had command over all nations and their gods? If that presumption is true, why is Yahweh’s kingship over the nations found in pre-exilic texts? How could early biblical writers presume that Yahweh could deliver foreign nations to Israel? If the idea that no other gods existed emerged only in the exile, why are there 200 references to plural אלהים in the Qumran sectarian literature, many of them in the context of a divine council? Were the Jews of Qumran not monotheists?

It is the view of this writer that the consensus reconstruction of an evolution toward monotheism is not compelled by the presence of a divine council of אלהים in the Hebrew Bible. Consequently, the consensus view lacks coherence.

The Meaning of Elohim for the Biblical Writers

The proposition put forth here is that biblical writers understood the word אלהים in a way that never created the tensions that motivate the consensus view that what we commonly consider the orthodox monotheism of the biblical writers was the climax of a religious evolution. We are confronted with two phenomena in the Hebrew Bible that propel this misunderstanding. First, the Hebrew Bible does in fact witness to plural אלהים. Second, the existence of those plural אלהים was assumed by the biblical writers and even embraced as part of their theology.

Psalm 82:1 is the parade example for both phenomena:

אֱלֹהִים נַצְבּ בְּעַדְתֵּי הַאֲלֹהִים בְּכָרְקֵב אֱלֹהִים יְשֵׁם

“God (אלוהים) stand in the divine assembly; in the midst of the gods (אלוהים) he passes judgment.”


4. See Exod 15:11; Deut 32:17; Pss 29:1; 82:1; 86:8; 89:5–7 [MT vv. 6–8]; 95:3; 96:4; 97:7, 9; 136:2; 138:1. Ps 58:11 should likewise be included. For text-critical reasons, as well as literary parallelism, the MT consonantal אֵלִם in Ps 58:11 should be vocalized אֵלִים or emended to אֵלִים. See Marvin E. Tate, Psalms 51–100 (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 2002), 82; Mitchell Dahood, Psalms II: 51–100 (AB 16; New York: Doubleday, 1968), 57.
But how could the biblical writer tolerate the existence of multiple אֱלֹהִים (אֱלֹהִים) and yet write denial statements in other passages? Some scholars seek to argue that the multiple אֱלֹהִים of Ps 82:1b are humans, but this approach suffers from numerous difficulties. The issue and any related interpretive consternation are resolved by letting the biblical writers inform us as to how they understood אֱלֹהִים by virtue of its usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

There are six figures or entities referred to as אֱלֹהִים ("gods") in the Hebrew Bible:

A. Yahweh, the God of Israel (over 2000 times)
B. The divine beings of Yahweh’s heavenly council (Ps 82; Ps 89; cf. Deut 32:8–9, 43 [with LXX, Qumran])
C. The gods of foreign nations (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:33)
D. "Demons" (שׁדים; Deut 32:17)

5. For an overview of the problems, see Michael S. Heiser, “What is / are (an) Elohim?” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, GA, 17 November 2010). This paper is accessible at http://www.thedivinecouncil.com/WhatisareanelohimETS2010.pdf.


7. There are perhaps no more perplexing translation choices as those one will find for Deut 32:17. Regarding Deut 32:17, English translations reflect disagreement over primarily two issues: whether to render בָּהָן as singular or plural and how to translate the verbless clause in which it appears לֹא אֱ. The first issue that needs to be addressed is whether בָּהָן is more accurately translated as a singular or plural. The word בָּהָן is a defective spelling of the lemma בָּהָן. A computer search of the Hebrew Bible (BHS) reveals that the lemma בָּהָן occurs 58 times. There are in fact no occasions in the Hebrew Bible where בָּהָן is contextually plural or is used as a collective noun. The only place where such an option might appear to be workable is 2 Kgs 17:31, where the text informs us that “the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim (בָּהָן).” The pointing here suggests that the lemma is not בָּהָן but rather בָּהָן in a misspelled or archaic plural construct form. That the Qere reading for this form is אֱלֹהִים argues forcefully that the lemma is not בָּהָן but
E. The disembodied human dead (1 Sam 28:13)
F. The Angel of Yahweh (Gen 35:7⁸)

This listing alone should inform biblical scholars of something critical to the discussion, but which seems to have gone unnoticed. The fact that the biblical writers could use אלהים of more than one entity or figure—all of which are elsewhere described in far lesser terms than Yahweh—tells us clearly that they did not exclusively associate the term אלהים with a set of unique attributes. For moderns that assumption is reflexive; the word “g-o-d” immediately takes the mind to the singular Being conceived of as the God of the Bible. Consequently, the mention of other אלהים conjures unease for the modern interpreter no matter how clear the biblical text is in regard to this variegated usage. However, the biblical writer did not think about אלהים the way moderns think of “g-o-d.” It would have been absurd to the biblical writer to suggest that a dear, departed relative, now an אלהים in Sheol like Samuel, was on an ontological par with Yahweh and the אלהים of His council. But any argument that insists that toleration of plural אלהים evinces polytheism assumes this logic. If one assumes the biblical writer had a specific set of attributes in mind when describing an entity with the word אלהים, then there is no escape from this point of incoherence. And if one retreats to the argument that אלהים differed their attributes, then the term אלהים can no longer be associated with a consistent set of attributes. As such, the term can no longer be a proof for polytheism; that worldview would have to be argued on some other basis. This would in turn rob the consensus view of its argument, that passages describing plural אלהים demonstrate polytheism.

The most straightforward way to understand the biblical use of אלהים is to divorce it from attribute ontology. אלהים is more coherently understood as a “place of residence” term. The word does not label its referent with a specific set of attributes; it identifies the proper reality domain of the referent. All אלהים are members of the unseen spiritual world, which is their place of residence. In that realm there is rank, hierarchy, and differentiation of attributes. Yahweh, one of the אלהים, rather אלהים. Lexicography therefore offers no support for a plural translation. For a treatment of the verbless clause syntax, see M. Heiser, “Does Deuteronomy 32:17 Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods?” BT 59 (July 2008): 137–145.

8. This last identification is uncertain. The plural predication with אלהים as subject is very possibly designed to blur the distinction between God and the Angel of Yahweh (cf. Gen 48:15–16 and its dual subject with singular verb), who elsewhere appears in human form. See M. Heiser, “Should אלהים (ʾēlōhîm) with Plural Predication Be Translated ‘Gods’?” BT 61 (July 2010): 123–136. Additionally, some scholars would presume that Gen 32:1–2 also identifies angels (מלאכים) as אלהים (e.g., Stephen Geller, “The Struggle at the Jabbok: The Uses of Enigma in a Biblical Narrative,” JANES 14 [1982], 54).
was considered incomparable and unique in terms of his attributes. But that superiority was not conveyed by the word אֱלֹהִים. Other descriptions of Yahweh and other אֱלֹהִים oblige that conclusion. Succinctly, Yahweh is an אֱלֹהִים, but no other אֱלֹהִים is Yahweh. Yahweh was not one among equals; he was species unique. But all אֱלֹהִים were members of the spiritual realm, the realm whose inhabitants are by nature disembodied. This was the theology of those who composed and edited the Hebrew Bible.

In view of the intellectual distance between the present time and the milieu of biblical Israel, the modern term “monotheism,” coined in the seventeenth century as an antonym to “atheism,” is deficient for describing the beliefs of the ancient Israelites who produced the Hebrew Bible since it carries the baggage of identifying “g-o-d” with a single set of attributes held only by Yahweh. However, the intention behind the term—to affirm the existence and uniqueness God of Israel—reflects beliefs the biblical writer would have embraced.

This simple but profound shift in perspective undercuts most of the arguments upon which a presumed evolution toward monotheism is considered necessary. There is no need for orthodox Yahwism to have evolved anywhere. While archaeological material and the testimony of human experience convincingly demonstrate that human beings will invariably hold a wide range of conceptions about any deity presumed to exist, it is flawed thinking to presume that because some Israelites would have thought in polytheistic or henotheistic terms, where Yahweh was not unique in his attributes, that all Israelites, inclusive of the biblical writers, must have thought in such terms. This notion requires the incoherent assumption that the biblical usage of אֱלֹהִים always telegraphed the same attribute ontology no matter the referent.

The Meaning of the “Denial Statements” in the Hebrew Bible

If the above understanding of אֱלֹהִים is intelligible, what do we make of the various statements on the part of the biblical writers that there was...
“no god besides” Yahweh? What follows is a brief summary of material this writer has put forth elsewhere regarding this question.10

The evolutionary consensus with respect to Israelite monotheism regularly proposes that passages in which plural אֱלָהִים or בְּנֵי אֱלָהִים (“sons of God”) are found constitute proof of vestigial polytheism in the Hebrew Bible. One passage that is absolutely critical to the evolutionary view is Deut 32:8–9, where the Most High divides the nations and distributes them according to the number of the sons of God (with LXX, Qumran). This theology is echoed in Deut 4:19–20. Deuteronomy 32:17 adds the notion that lesser divine beings, the “demons” (שְׁדִים), are אֱלָהִים. That the “host of heaven” mentioned in Deut 4:19–20 are to be identified with the gods of Deut 32 is made clear by Deut 17:2–3, where God forbids the worship of the sun, moon, and host of heaven since they are “other gods” ( Artículo). It is clear, then, to the consensus adherents, that these portions of Deuteronomy embrace the vestigial polytheism out of which Israel eventually was to evolve.

What is at times omitted from the discussion, however, is that both Deut 4 and 32 contain denial statements, declarations that the consensus argues reflect the climax of the monotheistic evolutionary trajectory:

Deut 4:35: “You were shown these things so that you might know that the LORD, he is the God (הָאֱלָהִים); besides him there is no other (אָדָם שֵׁדֶד מְלוּכֵי ).”

Deut 4:39: “Know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that Yahweh, he is the God (הָאֱלָהִים) in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other (אָדָם שֶׁדֶד ).”

Deut 32:39: “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me (אֶלָהִים עַמי); I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.”

These sorts of denial statements constitute the heart of the idea that, by the time of Deutero-Isaiah, in whose material (Isa 40–55) such denials are frequently found, Israelite religion had dispensed with the belief that other אֱלָהִים existed. How, then, can these same statements appear in passages that, according to the consensus view, point readers to the older polytheistic worldview of Israel?

The juxtaposition of such denial statements alongside affirmations of many אלהים is typically dismissed as editorial predilection, where a late redactor who had reached the intellectual realization that only one God existed interjected these denials as a means to inform or remind those reading older biblical material that the only god was Yahweh. In effect, rather than change the text, a redactor would guide readers to the monotheistic conclusion by such insertions. This explanation fails, though, when one considers the fact that texts considered late in Israel’s history, such as the book of Job, include unambiguous divine council scenes (Job 1–2) without any accompanying monotheistic rhetorical “correction.” It is also inconsistent with Second Temple texts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls that have over two hundreds references to plural אלהים. Additionally, some consensus scholars would object to the idea entirely, since they believe that during and after the exile a zealous scribal campaign was undertaken to remove polytheistic material from the Hebrew Bible.

It is much more coherent to say that the biblical writers believed in the existence of many אלהים (that is, after all, how they use the term) but that the God of Israel was incomparable with respect to other אלהים. That faith assertion would seem to be the clear point of the definite article prefixed to אלהים in both Deut 4:35, 39—Yahweh was the God, par excellence. The same pattern follows through Isa 40–66, the other section of the Hebrew Bible considered fertile territory for asserting that Israelite religion came to believe no other gods existed.

If one examines the use of denial formulae in the Hebrew Bible, the approach proposed in this article is shown to be quite workable.

11. See n. 3. On Job, though the book is set in a pre-Mosaic setting, linguistic features of the book strongly suggest that it was written much later, perhaps the sixth century B.C.E. or later. See A. Hurvitz, “The Date of the Prose Tale of Job Linguistically Reconsidered,” HTR 67 (1974): 17–34.

12. Gnuse, Emergent Monotheism, 201–205. Gnuse and others who share this view do not clarify how certain passages now used to prove polytheism were missed by this alleged campaign.
Drawing on the work Nathan McDonald, C. H. Williams, and Hans Rechenmacher, it can cogently be argued that these formulae are used in contexts that either affirm the existence of other gods in some way, or that require interpreting the formulae as statements of incomparability, not denials of existence. Two illustrations of the latter will suffice here.

In Isa 47:8, 10 Babylon proclaims אני ואפסי עוד (“I am, and there is none else beside me”). It would be nonsensical to take the denial formula as speaking of non-existence. The claim is not that Babylon is the only city in the world but that she has no rival. That is, the formulaic expression points to incomparability. It is noteworthy that these passages are part of Deutero-Isaiah, the corpus upon which the consensus view relies most heavily for its insistence that denial formulae prove that the biblical writers have rejected the existence of other deities. The same circumstance is found in Zeph 2:15, where Nineveh makes the identical claim (אני ואפסי עוד). Once again the formula cannot constitute a denial of the existence of other cities. The point being made is very obviously incomparability.

By way of summary on the first set of assumptions that drive the consensus view, the fact that certain passages in the Hebrew Bible include plural אלהים only constitutes proof for polytheism if one binds the term to a specific set of attributes. This approach has been shown to be flawed. The resulting allowance for plural אלהים does not contradict denial statements in the Hebrew Bible since those statements speak of Yahweh’s incomparability rather than denying the existence of other אלהים. This is quite agreeable to the view of this paper that the biblical writers saw Yahweh as without ontological equal among אלהים. The discussion now moves to the second set of assumptions.


DIVINE PLURALITY IMPORTED INTO
THE TEXT OF THE HEBREW BIBLE

Summary of the Issue

Those who see an evolution toward monotheism in Israelite religion also argue their case from a presumed distinction between Yahweh and Elyon (“the Most High”) in the Hebrew Bible, namely in Deut 32:8–9 and Ps 82. In both passages it is alleged that the biblical writers drop hints that Yahweh and Elyon were once separate deities, a view that leads to the conclusion that orthodox Israelite theology was once polytheistic.17

Distinguishing Yahweh and Elyon: Deuteronomy 32:8–9

When the Most High (Elyon) gave the nations as an inheritance,18 when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of [the sons of God]. But YAHWEH’S portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.

17. Once again, Mark Smith’s comments are representative: “The author of Psalm 82 deposes the older theology, as Israel’s deity is called to assume a new role as judge of all the world. Yet at the same time, Psalm 82, like Deut 32:8–9, preserves the outlines of the older theology it is rejecting. From the perspective of this older theology, Yahweh did not belong to the top tier of the pantheon. Instead, in early Israel the god of Israel apparently belonged to the second tier of the pantheon; he was not the presider god, but one of his sons” (Smith, The Origins of Biblical Monotheism, 49).

18. Deut 32:8a reads בְּהַנְחֵל עֶלְיוֹן גּוֹיִם. בְּהַנְחֵל is pointed as a Hiphil infinitive absolute, but should probably be understood as a defective spelling of the infinitive construct: בְּהַנֵּחל (Paul Sanders, Provenance of Deuteronomy 32 [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996], 154). The object of the infinitive form is גּוֹיִם As Sanders notes, the Hiphil of the verb נחל can be “connected both with an accusativus personae (the inheriting person(s); hence some translations render: “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance”) or with an accusativus rei (the object inherited by this person; and so rendering, “When the Most High gave the nations as an inheritance”). Instructive parallels include Deut 1:38; 3:28; 21:16; 31:7; Josh 1:6; 1 Sam 2:8; Zech 8:12; and Prov 8:21 (Sanders, Provenance of Deuteronomy 32, 154).

19. See n. 6.
The evolutionary view argues that these two verses describe Elyon giving Yahweh His portion (Israel) among the nations. Thus two deities are in view; Yahweh is one of the many sons of Elyon, and it is Elyon who gives Yahweh Israel.

One obvious retort to this perspective is the parallel passage of Deut 4:19–20. Elyon is not mentioned. In verse 20, Yahweh is not given Israel by a presumably higher deity. Rather, the text specifically says Yahweh took (ָּלָ֑חָה) his own inheritance. This is cast as a sovereign act and would seem to nullify the assumption of two deities.

It is at this point that the card of the presumed dating of Deuteronomy and its constituent parts is played. Although minor disagreements exist among scholars, the formation of Deuteronomy is broadly conceived as including an original core, the codification of religious reforms in Deut 12–26. This core is framed by an introductory exhortation (Deut 5–11) and the addition of the curses and blessings of Deut 27–28 during the exile to explain that horrible event. Chapters 1–4 and 29–34 are thought to have been added during the exilic or post-exilic periods, but Deut 32–33 are considered independent pre-exilic poems repurposed by the exilic or post-exilic editor.20 This would mean that Deut 4:19–20 is more recent in Israelite history than Deut 32:8–9. This then is a crucial presumption for arguing that the theology of Deut 4:19–20 is more enlightened in light of the monotheistic evolutionary leap.

Another argument used to prove an older, polytheistic theology in Deut 32:8–9 is the fact that at some point the original reading “sons of God” was altered to “sons of Israel” preserved in the MT.21 Verse 43 also contains a reference to plural האלהים that was removed from the MT. We know about these alterations because the Qumran material preserves the polytheistic reading. The LXX translation of בני האלהים (“sons of God”) by ἄγγελοι θεοῦ (“angels of God”) also allegedly illustrates a theological downgrading of the gods to angels in the wake of the rise of pure monotheism.

Assessing the Coherence of this Presumed Separation and Evolution

Both the arguments offered in defense of a pre-exilic polytheistic distinction between Yahweh and Elyon and a movement toward monotheism are tenuous in that they are driven by assumptions that have readily discernible weaknesses. The text-critical argument is the most obvious, and so provides a convenient starting point for assessment.


21. See n. 6.
The Text-Critical Issue

Although the deletions that occurred in Deut 32:8, 43 do not directly relate to the Elyon and Yahweh separation, it is presumed that the alterations of the text were only made because the polytheistic content of the original readings offended scribes who had adopted a militant monotheism. This argument has two weaknesses: it assumes that the monotheistic biblical writers could not abide plural אֱלֹהִים in the first place, and its argument falls prey to circular reasoning by assuming what it seeks to prove.

Regarding the first weakness, the understanding of אֱלֹהִים covered earlier in this paper undercuts any perceived need on the part of Israelite scribes to rid the text of plural אֱלֹהִים. The usage of אֱלֹהִים by the biblical writers demonstrates that they did not connect the term to a unique set of attributes. In fact, even after this presumed editing campaign, both the MT and the LXX retain a number of references to plural אֱלֹהִים, even in perceptibly late material (e.g., Job 1–2). This is no surprise if the writers thought of אֱלֹהִים as indicating residence in the unseen spiritual world.

Though it is beyond dispute that a scribe altered the text, the facts of the matter are that no one knows when the changes occurred and why, especially when other instances of divine plurality are left untouched. Those who want an evolution to monotheism assume the deletions happened during the exilic or post-exilic period near the point of the alleged monotheistic leap. There is no secure evidence for this. The earliest textual data we have are the Qumran scrolls, which do not witness to the MT reading, the reading supposedly created by the zealous monotheistic scribe in the post-exilic period. Consequently, it could be argued that the allegedly polytheistic Qumran reading preserved the original reading, which survived well after the post-exilic period. The alteration could have been made much later in the Common Era, at the time when the MT as we know it was created (ca. 100 C.E.) in the process of textual standardization. The current data do not allow a specific conclusion, and so one ought to be avoided. Even if such evidence was forthcoming and showed the alteration was made in the exilic or post-exilic period, it would not address why the change was made, which is the fundamental issue. Why this passage would receive such a change when others did not would remain an open question. Moreover, it is logically flawed to presume that one scribe’s reason for

22. On Job, see n. 11.

an alteration means that all scribes or all Jews shared the editor’s theology. The argument that the altered text shows a zeal for militant monotheism against an antiquated polytheism is thus defended on the basis that it must have occurred at a time of monotheistic zeal. The circularity of the argument is transparent.

Finally, in regard to the “downgrading” of plural אלהים figures to angels in the LXX, the motivation is likewise unclear and the data are inconsistent. It is simply a fact of observation that the LXX is uneven in its treatment of plural אלהים, as it uses θεοὶ (“gods”) and νεοὶ θεοὶ (“sons of God”) in passages where the Hebrew would be plural אלהים. The use of ἄγγελον θεοῦ (“angels of God”) therefore cannot be coherently defended as indicating a theological shift in Jewish thinking about divine plurality. If that were the case, one would expect to find theological consistency in the text of the Hebrew Bible in that regard, especially at a time period as late as that of the creation of the LXX, at least two centuries after the presumed rise of pure monotheism. The Qumran material also mars the neatness of the picture offered by the consensus explanation due to the numerous instances of plural אלהים, often in divine council contexts, in that corpus.24

Distinguishing Yahweh and Elyon

Moving on to whether Yahweh and Elyon are separated in Deut 32:8–9, this writer has addressed this issue in more detail elsewhere, so what follows are summary points, with some new points of critique.25

First, one notices immediately how Deut 1–4 are conveniently dated as post-exilic, and Deut 32–33 are likewise conveniently considered independent and pre-exilic. Those who see Deut 1–4 as post-exilic would say that the reason Deut 4:19–20 has Yahweh taking his inheritance and no mention of other gods is that Israelite religion had evolved away from that belief by the end of the exile. It is therefore utterly crucial for the consensus view for Deut 1–4 to have been composed during the monotheistic innovation. But on what basis is the post-exilic period for Deut 1–4 proposed? While there might be textual reasons to see Deut 1–4 as written after Deut 32, both could still be pre-exilic. That is, it could also be the case that textual indications of a later hand might only be brief editorial adaptations, so that both sections could

24. See n. 5.

have been largely composed at the same time, the eighth–seventh century B.C.E.

To bring this initial objection into focus, there are certain essential elements for defending a post-exilic date for Deut 1–4. Without explicit data arising from the morphology, grammar, or syntax found in Deut 1–4 (and especially chapter 4), the argument becomes circular: the wording of Deut 4:19–20 shows an evolution from polytheism because Deut 1–4 is to be dated to the post-exilic era, as demonstrated by the monotheistic wording of Deut 4:19–20. Precisely what is it, then, apart from an a priori assumption of a post-exilic provenance, that compels us to see Deut 1–4 as not only later than Deut 32, but deriving from that time period that the consensus view believes birthed intolerant monotheism?

On another front, there must be no evidence that would suggest with high clarity that both Deut 1–4 and Deut 32 are both pre-exilic. It matters not that Deut 4:19–20 is later than Deut 32:8–9. The crucial issue is that Deut 4:19–20 was composed in light of the religious impulse toward intolerant monotheism that allegedly occurred in the late exilic or post-exilic era. In fact, the central theological idea of Deut 4:19–20 (and Deut 32:8–9), that Yahweh alone has sovereign authority over the nations so that he can take Israel as his own to the rejection of the others, is found in pre-exilic texts. There is therefore no need to view the idea as a late religious innovation that was the result of an evolution out of polytheism (see below).

Second, I think it is worth noting that Deut 32:8–9 never actually says Yahweh received or was given anything. That is, there is no actual description of any interaction between Yahweh and Elyon; it is simply assumed. Deuteronomy 32:9 merely reads: “But Yahweh’s portion was Israel; Jacob his allotted inheritance.” These are verbless clauses. The idea of Elyon giving the subordinate Yahweh his portion actually has to be read into the passage. It is nowhere stated. This is allowing one’s presuppositions to guide interpretation.

Third, Deut 32:6–7 utilizes vocabulary associated with El and Baal in Ugaritic material to describe Yahweh. This is no surprise since, as is well known by Hebrew Bible scholars, the biblical writers associated epithets and other descriptors of both Canaanite El and Baal with Yahweh, a phenomenon at times used as evidence for an original Israelite polytheism. By all accounts in critical scholarship, this conceptual fusion occurred prior to the eighth century B.C.E. But note that this fusion is not a fusion of Elyon and Yahweh, but of identifying
certain attributes of El and Baal with Yahweh. Some would object at this point that since Canaanite El was the high sovereign and father of the other gods, it makes good sense to have Yahweh subordinate to El (Elyon). But it is actually Baal, not El, who has the title Elyon in Ugaritic material and above whom is no other, and so the neatness of the presumed correlation is again marred.

Fourth, presuming a source-critical approach to the Pentateuch, I have to wonder what scholars who distinguish Yahweh and Elyon on the basis of Deut 32:8–9 do with the J source. Specifically, is J later than Deut 32? Had J evolved to monotheism? I raise the issue because the event Deut 32:8–9 draws upon for the division of the nations is Gen 11:1–9, part of the J source. The point is that the ancient J source has Yahweh doing the dividing. How could J have missed the polytheistic outlook known to whoever wrote Deut 32 when both were pre-exilic? Perhaps it is premature to conclude that the pre-exilic writer of Deut 32:8–9 was a polytheist.

**Distinguishing Yahweh from Elyon: Psalm 82**

Despite the tenuous nature of using Deut 32:8–9 and Deut 4:19–20 to argue an evolution from polytheism to monotheism, those who hold the consensus view are unmoved, for the assumption is absolutely crucial. Without it, there is little in the way of an evolutionary pinnacle. That

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26. This writer argued in his dissertation that Israelite religion retained a divine council structure with a co-regency at the top that mirrors the relationship of El and Baal, but that the biblical writers fill both slots with Yahweh. This conceptual decision reflects a binitarian approach to Yahweh found elsewhere in the Tanakh, featuring an invisible and a visible Yahweh, closely co-identified, which involves appearance in human form and, at times, embodiment. The literary strategies reflect an aversion to polytheism—rule by a co-regency of two distinct deities—in favor of rule by Yahweh, enacted in many instances by a co-regent or agent who “was but was not” Yahweh. This was the conceptual framework for the Two Powers in Heaven theology that emerged in Second Temple Judaism and the high Christology of the New Testament. On the Two Powers in Heaven theology of early Judaism, see Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977).

brings us to Ps 82.

Ps 82 is part of the Elohist psalter, and so it is assumed that where אֱלֹהִים is used for a singular deity (Ps 82:1, 8) the psalm originally read Yahweh. The consensus view argues that the first verse has Yahweh standing in the council of El (the high sovereign in Ugaritic religion). The Elyon (“Most High”) in verse 6 is presumed to be El from verse 1. The verbal lemma translated “stand” in verse 1 (נצב) is often used in texts whose genre is the covenant lawsuit and depicts one standing before a judge to bring a charge against the plaintiff. In Ps 82, then, Yahweh is presumed to be playing the role of prosecutor, decrying the corruption of the gods of El’s council, implying that Yahweh and El are distinct deities. When the reader comes to verse 6 the prosecutor Yahweh refers to the gods as “sons of Elyon” not as his own sons. This also implies a separation of Yahweh and Elyon, the latter of which is seen as the seated judge in the council courtroom scene. The last verse is then read as the psalmist pleading for Yahweh (אֱלֹהִים in the Elohist text) to rise up and inherit the nations after judging the gods in verse 7 (but see below for an another view). The supposition is that Yahweh was not previously viewed as the global sovereign of the nations. The psalm therefore casts Yahweh’s elevation as a new idea and a shift in Israelite religion. Not surprisingly, the psalm is taken as post-exilic. The message of the psalm is that Israelite religion had evolved to kill off the gods and the divine council in favor of the new monotheistic innovation, where no god but Yahweh existed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psalm 82</th>
<th>Flow of the Psalm (Evolutionary View)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he passes judgment:</td>
<td><strong>Yahweh</strong> standing in the council of <strong>El</strong> (<strong>Elyon</strong>), who is the seated judge (v. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 “How long will you judge unjustly And show partiality to the wicked and fatherless;</td>
<td><strong>Yahweh</strong> brings the charge against <strong>elohim</strong> of the council (vv.2–5), the sons of <strong>Elyon</strong> of v. 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Give justice to the weak and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28. S. Parker states that, "There is no question that the occurrences of elohim in verses 1a, 8 refer (as usually in the Elohist psalter) to Yahweh . . . Yahweh is actually just "one of the assembled gods under a presiding El or Elyon . . . the psalmist then balances this with an appeal to Yahweh to assume the governance of the world” (Simon B. Parker, "The Beginning of the Reign of God – Psalm 82 as Myth and Liturgy," *Revue Biblique* 102 [1995]: 546). Mark Smith echoes this view: “‘[A] prophetic voice emerges in verse 8, calling for God (now called elohim) to assume the role of judge over all the earth. . . . Here Yahweh in effect is asked to assume the job of all the gods to rule their nations in addition to Israel” (Smith, Origins of Biblical Monotheism, 48).
fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and destitute.  
4 Rescue the weak and the needy; Deliver them from the hand of the wicked”  
5 They have neither knowledge nor understanding. they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.  
6 I said, “You are gods, Sons of the Most High all of you;  
7 nevertheless, like men you shall die, And fall like any prince.”  
8 Arise, O God, judge the earth; For you shall inherit the nations!

Yahweh (“I said”) refers to the council elohim as sons of Elyon and pronounces judgment upon them (vv. 6–7) The psalmist cries out to Yahweh to “rise up” and inherit all the nations as their own (v. 8), in the wake of the gods who have been stripped of their immortality (cp. Deut 32:8–9 where the nations were given as inheritances to the sons of God)

Distinguishing Yahweh from Elyon: Psalm 82

Incoherence in the Presumed Flow of Psalm 82 that Produces Distinct Deities

The logical incoherence of the evolutionary view is readily evident. If we presume Yahweh is the standing prosecutor and Elyon is the seated judge in Ps 82, things seem workable through verse 5, as Yahweh is bringing accusation. But at verses 6–7 there is a problem. The first person “I said” in verse 6 would be Yahweh speaking—but that would in turn mean Yahweh also pronounces the sentence (the role of the judge) in verse 7. It seems odd to have Yahweh be both prosecutor and judge if a distinct El is present.

This observation is important because the evolutionary view wants to distinguish between the prosecutor and judge to achieve two deities in the passage. The solution for the evolutionary view cannot be that Yahweh is doing both tasks, for that begs the very obvious question of why you would need two deities in the scene in the first place. If Yahweh is also doing what the judge is supposed to do, why do we need Elyon as the judge? Verse 8 also presents a coherence problem. The psalmist pleads for Yahweh to “rise up” and inherit the nations—but was it not Elyon who was supposedly seated in the heavenly courtroom as judge?
This coherence problem was perceived by David Frankel in a recent article on Ps 82. Frankel asserts that Yahweh is the speaker in verses 2–5 but then “El is the speaker, who plays the role of high judge in vv. 6–8.” He also believes that it is El who calls upon Yahweh in the last verse to rise up and rule the nations. Unfortunately, Frankel offers no grammatical or syntactical reasons for a change of speaker in verses 6–7 from Yahweh to El. He cannot be blamed for oversight because there are no grammatical or syntactical features to support the argument. Frankel’s argument is made on the basis of need, not exegesis.

With respect to verse 8, Frankel argues that the speaker in verse 8 cannot be Yahweh since it is Yahweh who is addressed. This new speaker appears in verse 6 for Frankel, thus accommodating the issue of verse 8. This writer agrees that verse 8 requires a new speaker, but contra Frankel, that speaker is not El, nor is there a need for a change of speaker in verse 6. Frankel wants El to be speaking in verses 6–8, and this need is essential to his attempted solution for resolving the incoherence of seeing two deities in Ps 82. But there is not a single textual cue that compels this identification that Frankel can marshal. His attempt thus fails if the concern was to root interpretation in the text, as opposed to defending the idea of an evolution from polytheism to monotheism.

At this point, Frankel and others would ask this writer to make sense of his own view that Yahweh is both prosecutor and judge in the psalm, as well as the speaker in verses 6–7. If Mark Smith and many others who argue with him are correct in their assertion that Israelite religion had successfully identified both El and Baal with Yahweh by the eighth century B.C.E., this writer’s position is on solid ground. Smith argues for this date on the basis of archaeological data: “Asherah, having been a consort of El, would have become Yahweh's consort . . . only if these two gods were identified by this time.” This means that El and Yahweh would have been seen as the same deity in Israelite religion by that time—before the exile. Popular religion expressed that belief by hailing Asherah as Yahweh’s wife (she was formerly associated with El),

30. Ibid., 7.
31. Ibid.
32. Smith, Origins, 49.
an idea known from inscriptions at Kuntillet ʾAjrud and Khirbet el-Qom. As such, casting Yahweh in the El role of judge in Ps 82 seems quite mundane, especially if the Psalm is dated later than the eighth century B.C.E. Even the designation “in the council of El” is not at odds with this writer’s view. While הָא (“god, El”) in the phrase רֵעֵי-אֱלֹהִים could be adjectival in force (“in the divine council”),\(^{34}\) that is not essential to this writer’s view. Since Yahweh and El would have been the same for the psalmist, the use of הָא (“god, El”) would of no necessity prevent Yahweh from being in view.

Against this writer Frankel would charge that if Yahweh was head of the council at the beginning of the psalm there would be “little new in the call of verse 8 that YHWH take up rule of the world.”\(^{35}\) This writer disagrees. The new element is not that Yahweh suddenly becomes sovereign—that idea is pre-exilic, as we shall see momentarily—but that Yahweh is pronouncing his eschatological will to take back the nations he disinherit at Babel, as described in Deut 32:8–9.

Yahweh’s Supremacy Over the Nations and Their Gods in Pre-Exilic Texts

The idea that Yahweh’s kingship over the gods and their nations is post-exilic—a notion crucial to any defense of an evolution toward monotheism—ignores evidence to the contrary in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the idea is transparently stated in several enthronement psalms that date to well before the exilic period. Ps 29:1 is instructive. Some scholars, such as F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, date the poetry of this psalm between the twelfth and tenth centuries B.C.E.\(^{36}\) The very first verse contains plural imperatives directed at the בני אלים (“sons of God / the gods”), pointing to a divine council context. Verse 10 declares, “Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.” In Israelite cosmology, the flood upon which Yahweh sat was the watery covering thought to be over the solid dome that enclosed the

34. See Ps 36:7. The noun אלהים is also occasionally used this way (e.g., 1 Sam 14:15; Jonah 3:3).
round, flat earth. This throne obviously did not cover only Israel! As such, it cannot coherently be denied that the author viewed the Gentile nations under the dome and flood as being under the authority of Yahweh. This verse thus reflects the idea of world kingship. The thought is echoed in the Song of Moses, also among the oldest poetry in the Hebrew Bible. In Exod 15:11 we encounter the rhetorical “Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?” followed in verse 18 by “Yahweh will reign forever and ever.” As F. M. Cross noted over thirty years ago, “[t]he kingship of the gods is a common theme in early Mesopotamian and Canaanite epics. The common scholarly position that the concept of Yahweh as reigning or king is a relatively late development in Israelite thought seems untenable.”

This writer would agree, but would add this question: If pre-exilic Israelites in fact believed that the nations were under the authority of other gods (Deut 32:8–9), how is it that scholars who promote the evolutionary view presume that the biblical writer’s statement, “Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?” would exclude Yahweh’s supremacy over the nations of those gods?

Other pre-exilic texts can be brought to the discussion. Ps 47:2 not only declares that Yahweh is a great king over all the earth, but in so doing it equates Yahweh with Elyon: “For the LORD (YHWH), the Most High, is to be feared, a great king over all the earth.” Verse 7 adds, “God is the king of all the earth.” This psalm belongs to the category labeled by scholars as “enthronement psalms.” J. J. M. Roberts argued that the psalm should be situated in the “cultic celebration of Yahweh’s imperial accession, based on the relatively recent victories of David’s age.”

Other psalms likewise equate Yahweh and Elyon in the process of declaring him king of the nations and their gods. Ps 97 is illustrative, though most critical scholars classify this psalm as late. As with Deut 1–4, however, there are no morphological or grammatical criteria for doing so, only the presumption that the religious outlook of the psalm must be post-exilic since it contains an idea associated with enlightened

37. Cross tended to date the Song of Moses earlier than scholars do today, though the material is certainly pre-exilic (see Yigal Bloch, “The Prefixed Perfective and the Dating of Early Hebrew—A Re-Evaluation,” VT 59 [2009]: 34–70). After a lengthy examination Bloch concludes: “‘[T]he use of prefixed verbal forms to signify past situations in the Song of the Sea, in the Song of Moses and in the psalm of 2 Sam. 22/Ps. 18 (or at least in the narrative parts of the latter) justifies dating these poems a couple of centuries before the Babylonian exile—i.e., to the eighth–seventh, or perhaps even the ninth, centuries B.C.E.

38. Cross, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, 99 n. 30.

monotheism (Ps 97:7). The fact that Ps 97 utilizes storm theophany imagery associated with the divine warrior motif, known to be early, is lost in the discussion. Ps 108:5 is also noteworthy, as it proclaims, “be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!” Critics take the psalm as exilic or post-exilic, but then apparently ignore the similar phrasing in Isa 6:3. One is forced to ask why this language in Ps 108:5 dictates a post-exilic date when the same thought is communicated First Isaiah, which is clearly pre-exilic? It could be posited that the psalmist adopted the language from the earlier Isaiah, but that is precisely the point—the content is early.

A narrative sampling of the same idea is readily available in the Deuteronomistic History (DH). The writer(s) of the DH presumed that Yahweh controlled the destiny of the nations targeted for removal from Canaan. How could Israel’s pre-exilic writers express the belief over and over again that Yahweh would defeat and banish the nations in Israel’s land if they had no inclination to believe that he was supreme over the nations and their gods? No scholar would date the DH to after the exile.

Finally, an Ugaritic parallel is worth consideration. If we assume with the evolutionary view that Israel’s early polytheistic divine council theology comes from Ugaritic material (or at least is closely related), then why is it that we cannot also presume Yahweh was king of all the nations—when Baal is referred to as “lord of the earth”? 40 Was not

40. See Context of Scripture, 1.86 (the Ba’alu Myth) where the relevant phrases associated with Baal are ‘il klh (“god [over, of] all of it [earth in context] and Baal’s title zbl b’l ars, “the Prince, lord of the earth”). The phrases are somewhat controversial, but most scholars would presume they denote a cosmic-geographical rule extending from Baal’s council mountain of ʿapānu over the affairs of all humankind—something quite in concert with Ps 82 (and by extension, Deut 4 and 32). Dennis Pardee notes in relation to the issue: “The phrase here is ‘il klh, precisely the same as was used twice above with reference to Kōtaru-wa-Ḥāṣīsu’s hegemony in Memphis (see note 19). Because they assume that Ba’lu is king of the earth, some scholars have felt constrained to take ‘ars here as denoting a particular land (cf. Caquot, Sznycer and Herdner 1974:258, n. o). On the other hand, a formal claim to kingship of the earth is not to be found in the various statements regarding Ba’lu’s kingship. The closest one comes to the expression of such a concept is in one of his standard titles, zbl b’l ars, ‘the Prince, master of the earth,’ and in the phrase ‘ars drkt, ‘the land of (his) domain’ [CTA 4 vii 44]). Because of the very specific terminology used in this passage, viz., that ʿAṭṭaru climbs (‘ly) Mount ʿapānu to take Ba’lu’s throne and descends (yrd) from there when he abandons that throne, it does not appear implausible to interpret ‘Aṭṭaru’s rôle as king of the earth as referring to the earth as flatlands. Such a limited kingship may already have been referred to in CTA 2 iii 17–18 (see above, note 50). This hegemony, though ultimately granted by ʾIlu, may have been seen as a vice-regency under Ba’lu’s control (in normal times, of course, when Ba’lu is in control). The facts that (1) goddesses have claimed Ba’lu as their king (CTA 3 v 40 [here line 32]; 4 iv 43); (2) Ba’lu’s kingship is stated in this and other passages to be ‘on the heights of ʿapānu”; (3) the members of one of the so-called ‘pantheons,’ the best known, are described as ‘the gods of Ṣapānu’ (RS 1.017:1 = CTA 29:1), lead to the
Yahweh identified with Baal before the exile? It is hard not to suspect that the answer would be that the data do not fit the picture and are not admissible as evidence.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to highlight the major arguments used to assert the evolution of Israelite religion from polytheism to monotheism. This writer rejects this view because the arguments are based on flawed presuppositions brought to terms like אֱלֹהִים and passages like Deut 32:8–9 and Ps 82. His own view is that the biblical writers affirmed an unseen world filled with אֱלֹהִים, but that term is not to be linked to a specific set of attributes that would result in a denial of the ontological uniqueness of Yahweh and his exclusive worship. This, then, was the orthodoxy of the biblical writers throughout the time of their writing. However, that is not to say that all Israelites or even a majority of Israelites believed this at many points in Israelite history. Both the Hebrew Bible and the archaeological remains inform us that there was a broad spectrum of beliefs about Yahweh and his nature among the people. As is the case today, despite the fact that all Jews and Christians have full access to the books they consider canonical, there is still diversity of belief about God. How much more in ancient Israel?

**Appendix: Thoughts on γγελοὶ (“angels”) versus אלהים**

1. This presumed “downgrading language” comes from the LXX—יהוהalahim (or בני אלהים [“sons of God”]) in their Hebrew text to γγελοὶ (“angels”). This cannot be viewed as a theological statement for Judaism because:
   a. Elsewhere the LXX translators retain plural אלהים via plurals of θεος (“god”).
      • E.g., Exod 15:11; Deut 32:17; Pss 50:1 (LXX 49:1); 82:1 (81:1; twice—even for עדת־ אלהים; 82:6

conclusion that Ba’lu was somehow seen as the king of the earth in the context of divine contact with the earth at Mount ʿapānu. Descriptions of his activities also indicate that the link between mountain tops, storm clouds, and his function as provider of rain were inextricably linked (see particularly the link between the window in his palace and the phenomena of thunder and lightning, above *CTA* 4 vii 25–37). It appears plausible, therefore, to posit a Ug. conception of Ba’lu as king of mountains and storms and ‘Aṭṭaru as king of the flat earth, under Ba’lu’s control” (William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *The Context of Scripture* [Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997], 269–70, note 250).
(LXX 81:6); 85:8; 94:3; 97:9 (LXX 96:9); 135:5 (LXX 134:5); 136:2 (LXX 135:2); bringing in other MSS of LXX adds to the “inconsistency” here.

b. Plural θεοὶ (“gods”) is translated in places where one would not see אלהים in the Hebrew text.
   - E.g., Ps 83:8 (LXX 84:7)

c. The LXX also retains “sons of God” in places with (οἱ) γυῖοι (τοῦ) θεοῦ (“sons of God”), not ἄγγελοι (“angels”):
   - Deut 32:43 (in parallel to ἄγγελοι θεοῦ [“angels of God”]); Ps 29:1 (LXX 28:1); 89:6 (LXX 88:7); Odes 2:43 (in parallel to ἄγγελοι θεοῦ [“angels of God”])

2. I do not believe ἄγγελοι (“angels”) was used in Jewish literature as a “theological downgrade term” in light of this usage (and in other Greek sources). While I would never say no Jewish writer thought in downgrade terms, I think it is more coherent to say that the LXX and other sources reflect a blurring of אלהים and ἄγγελοι (“angels”; not a displacement of the former by the latter). I think it is more coherent to say that the latter becomes a generic “place of residence” term as the former was in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., an ἄγγελος is a being from the unseen spiritual world who delivers a message; his attributes and rank are designated by other terms and descriptors; the term is not connected to a set of attributes).

3. I believe the NT followed this paradigm, though it is hard to tell in places due to preference for the LXX in general. At any rate, the LXX uses a range of terms for the gods of the nations that emerge from the Babel event (Deut 32:8–9; cf., Dan 10). That is, the NT writers assume the cosmic geography of the OT but use a variety of terms to express it.  

Deuteronomy and de Wette:
A Fresh Look at a Fallacious Premise

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ABSTRACT

The premise to be re-evaluated here is that Deuteronomy, in part or in its entirety, was the product of pious scribes of the Divided Monarchy period, who, recipients of certain oral and perhaps fragmentary written traditions, were intent on delivering Israel from political, social, and religious disintegration. They therefore integrated their sources and composed the book, attributing it to Moses and thus investing it with authority necessary to address in most specific terms the circumstances that threatened the existence of the covenant community.

KEYWORDS: Deuteronomy, W. M. L. de Wette, Divided Monarchy, Moses, Authorship

IDEOLOGICAL AND INTELLECTUAL SETTING

The Origin and Rise of the Critical Method

The matter of the authorship, setting, date, and purpose of the book of Deuteronomy has preoccupied critical scholarship for more than 300 years.1 Originating with Spinoza and his peers in the Enlightenment of the seventeenth century, the theory was advanced that the book was not the work of Moses but of an unknown composer—perhaps a priest, or more likely a prophet—of the seventh century B.C.E. Concurrently, in 1753 Jean Astruc, a physician layman with inordinate learning and interest in the Scriptures, produced a pamphlet which, though methodologically naïve, laid the foundation for what would become

known in the next century under Wellhausen as the Documentary Hypothesis.

By the late eighteenth century, alleged documents designated E (Elohist) and J (Jahwist) had been assigned to a post-Mosaic era but with an unclear terminus ad quem. As for P (Priestly), this putative source was only dimly recognized at the beginning as a separate source, and it was furthermore of uncertain provenance, though most scholars considered it late. The cutting of the Gordian knot is generally conceded to be the 18 page essay of a young German scholar, W. M. L. de Wette (1780–1849).² Among other matters, de Wette proposed that the scroll found in the Temple early in the reign of King Josiah of Judah was nothing else than the book of Deuteronomy, a long-lost treatise self-ascribed to Moses that in a most timely manner abetted the spiritual reformation that Josiah had just begun.³ Though this notion long preceded de Wette’s essay, his contribution solidified the hypothesis and made it common currency. Succinctly, the proposition argued that Deuteronomy must actually have been written by a scribe or scribes of a priestly or (alternatively) prophetic community, perhaps from the Northern Kingdom, whose intent was to foment a reactionary return to the ancient Mosaic faith. It thus must be dated to the early or mid-seventh century, likely in the reign of the apostate king Manasseh (696–642). With this chronological datum,

2. This was presented as a thesis to the University of Jena in 1805 with the full title “Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi Libris diversum, alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur.” [“A critical-exegetical discussion which shows that Deuteronomy is a work that differs from the first books of the Pentateuch, and is the work of another, later author.”] The most convenient access to the work is de Wette’s *Opuscula Theologica* (Berlin: G. Reimerum, 1830, pp. 149–168). For recent essays on de Wette’s thoughts on other aspects of biblical study, see Hans-Peter Mathys and Klaus Seybold (*Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette. Ein Universaltheologe des 19. Jahrhunderts;* Basel: Schwabe, 2001). De Wette’s singular contribution to the stream of critical scholarship is outlined well by Paul B. Harvey and Baruch Halpern (‘W. M. L. de Wette’s ‘Dissertatio Critica…’: Context and Translation,’” *ZABR* 14 [2008]: 47–85).

3. De Wette argued that since worship was permitted at local shrines despite the prohibition of Deuteronomy to the contrary (*Opuscula Theologica*, 163), Deuteronomy and its notion of a central sanctuary must reflect a later, Josianic era (ibid.,164–165, n. 5: “Hic in collibus sacra faciendi mos posteriori tempore nefas est habitus, sed adeo inveteraverat, ut losias demum, Deuteronomio, tune iu temple inverno, admonitus (illium enim codicum legum ab Hilkia sacerdote inventum [2 Reg. XXII] Deuteronomium nostrum fuisse haud improbabilie coniectura assequi licet) penitus eum tollere posset (2 Reg. XXIII).” However, with John Rogerson it is only fair to note that de Wette’s central thesis in this respect was that Deuteronomy, because it embodied “later” theological ideas than the rest of the Pentateuch, must be a later composition and thus might be the temple scroll (W. M. L. de Wette. *Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1992], 40–41).
Deuteronomy thus became the “Archimedian point” around which the other alleged documents could be oriented.\(^4\) Deuteronomy (D) presupposed E and J, which thus must be earlier (likely ninth–eighth centuries B.C.E.) whereas P, with its priestly and temple foci, presupposed D, making P the latest of all, probably post-exilic fifth century B.C.E. The upshot was that D was asserted to be the keystone to the arch of the documentary hypothesis without which it would either collapse or become something entirely different.

This is not to say that had the hypothesis proven to be wrong, older and even contemporary critical scholarship would and will abandon its denial of Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy and, indeed, of Torah as a whole. In fact, a great number of modern scholars have themselves reexamined the hypothesis and found it to be an inadequate way of addressing the complexities endemic to Pentateuchal studies.\(^5\) Nevertheless, de Wette’s contribution continues to be acknowledged and appreciated with little fundamental alteration of its basic tenets.\(^6\) The purpose of this essay is once more to raise objections to these tenets on historical, geographical, cultural/sociological, and theological grounds and to place back into the hands of Moses the text which itself testifies to his authorship.\(^7\)

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7. Passages such as Moses’ account of his own death (Deut 34:5–12; cf. 33:1) have since Talmudic times been denied to Moses but examples like this are exceptional and usually self-evident (cf. Sifre Deuteronomy 357, 427). For a proponent of “essential” Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch who concedes that it evidences anachronistic adjustments and other types of minor redaction, see John H. Sailhamer, The Meaning of the Pentateuch (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 48–54.
De Wette: His Times, Circumstances, and Motivations

By 1780, the year of de Wette’s birth near Weimar, Germany, Jean Astruc had published his brief work on the sources of Genesis, and A. Geddes, J. S. Vater, J. G. Eichhorn, and other scholars had begun to pursue the logical extension of the so-called documentary hypothesis that followed in its wake. Their influence is obvious in de Wette’s Dissertatio submitted to the University of Jena in 1805 and in his subsequent publications. De Wette’s methods and conclusions were in line with prevailing hypotheses regarding the identification and isolation of Pentateuchal sources except for his almost incidental linking of Deuteronomy to the temple scroll found in the course of the aforementioned reformation of King Josiah, a view held, as we have noted, by a minority of other scholars as well.

8. The most authoritative biographical study of de Wette is Rogerson, W. M. L. de Wette. Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism. See note 3 for full documentation.


10. The identification of the scroll as Deuteronomy was in a footnote incidental to de Wette’s main point in the Dissertatio, which was to demonstrate that the book was much later than E and J and thus not Mosaic. He argued that since worship was permitted at local shrines despite the prohibition of Deuteronomy to the contrary (Diss., p. 12; Opuscula Theologica, p.163), Deuteronomy and its notion of a central sanctuary must reflect a later, Josianic era (Diss., 14-15; Opuscula, pp. 164-165, n. 5: “Hic in collibus sacra faciendi mos posteriori tempore nefas est habitus, sed adeo inveteraverat, ut Iosias denum, Deuteronomio, tune iu temple invento, admonitus (illium enim codicem legum ab Hilkia sacerdote inventum [2 Reg. XXII] Deuteronomium nostrum fuisse haud improbabili coniectura assequi licet) penitus eum tollere posset (2 Reg. XXIII) [“This custom of making sacrifices on the high places was considered sacrilegious at a later time, but the practice had become so ingrained that Josiah was able (sic) to thoroughly eliminate it, as admonished by Deuteronomy—this having been discovered in the temple at the time that the code of laws found by the priest Hilkiah (2 Kgs 22) was our Deuteronomy one may conclude by a far from improbable conjecture.”] For the translation see Harvey and Halperin, “W. M. L. de Wette’s Dissertatio,” 82. As noted above, however, with Rogerson one should reiterate that de Wette’s central thesis was that Deuteronomy was likely to be the temple scroll precisely because it embodied ‘later’ theological ideas than the rest of the Pentateuch (Rogerson, W. M. L. de Wette, 40-41). However, in his later Beiträger zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament (1806–1807) de Wette revised his opinion, concluding that the scroll was not the genuine Deuteronomy after all but was likely a “forgery” designed to bring about national reformation. As he put it, “der Priester Hilkia untergetoshen hat” and, a few lines later, “sieht einem angelegten handel nicht unähnlich, woran, äußer Hilkia, besonders Shaphan und die Prophetin Hulda gehabt haben konnten”; Vol. I: 179).
This seemingly peripheral observation became in fact the key to the critical formation of the Documentary (in his case initially the Fragmentary) Hypothesis that continues to underlie (even if unstated) contemporary understanding of how the Pentateuch achieved its final form. As late as 2009 Michael Coogan can say, “A majority of scholars, if by no means all, continue to follow some version of the classic formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis [including de Wette’s contribution] summarized here.”11 In fact, Rogerson goes so far as to call de Wette the “founder of modern biblical criticism.”12 One may quibble over the weight of this honorific, but as to the profound significance of de Wette’s work there can be little debate.13

The necessary brevity of this paper requires at this point consideration of de Wette’s singular contribution to the issues of Deuteronomy’s conception, composition, and dating, as well as reasons for rejecting the bases for the hypothesis he erected and which had (and continues to have) persuasive power.

De Wette: His Premises and Arguments

Caught up as he was in the mainstream of Enlightenment thought regarding the Old Testament, and especially the Pentateuch, de Wette had come to embrace its major tenets as outlined by Astruc, Eichhorn, and other late eighteenth-century scholars. However, as noted already, he advanced critical thinking on Deuteronomy by proposing initially in the Dissertatio that the hitherto unidentified scroll found in the temple in Josiah’s time was none other than the book of Deuteronomy, an idea he later abandoned.14 He thus introduced a new current that turned the mainstream in a slightly different direction.


12. Thus, the title of his biography: W. M. L. de Wette: Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism.


14 This he did in his Beiträger, Vol. I:179. See n. 10 above.
Josiah’s accession to the throne in 640 B.C.E., 18 years before the finding of the scroll, had already engendered renewed hope among the faithful that a new day was dawning, one that would see the end of national apostasy and a return to YHWH and Torah (2 Kgs 22:2). Though only an eight year old when he was enthroned, by the time he was 16 he had begun to “seek the God of David” and in his 12th year (628 B.C.E.) undertook the purging of the cultic installations devoted to the Baalim and Asherim (2 Chr 34:1–7). Six years later the young king commissioned Shaphan the scribe and Hilkiah the priest to undertake a thorough refurbishment and repair of Solomon’s pagonized temple (2 Chr 34:8–13//2 Kgs 22:3–13). In the course of doing so they came across a scroll described as ספר התורה (“scroll of the Torah”), a term used outside the Kings and Chronicles Josiah narratives only in Deut 28:61; 29:20; 30:10; 31:36; Josh 1:8; and 8:34. The references in Joshua, in their canonical and historical context, are exclusive to Deuteronomy.

Further evidence of the linkage is seen in Josiah’s reaction to the reading of the scroll. He tore his clothing in deep conviction (2 Kgs 22:11) and then consulted Huldah the prophetess as to the genuineness of the document (2 Kgs 22:14–20). Her response clearly affirmed that it was Torah, and thus Mosaic, and that it warned of judgment to come but yet deliverance for the young king. Josiah next read the scroll to all the people (23:2; cf. Deut 17:18–20), and renewed with them the Deuteronomic covenant. That this is the case is clear from the use of the technical terms מצוה, עדה, and חק, all of which in combination are found most pervasively in Deuteronomy. Moreover, Josiah ordered the demolition of the idols and their shrines and the high places and their altars, and commanded that the wicked cultic personnel be put to death (2 Kgs 23:4–14; cf. 2 Chr 34:3–7).


16. Her assurance seems clearly misguided for Josiah died in an ill-advised battle when only 31 years old (2 Kgs 23:29). However, the text (2 Kgs 22:20) reads לא נין אספו ע”ל Everett Fish’s translation: “not one of his fathers’ tombs.” The idea is that even though Josiah may suffer a violent death, his ultimate end will be peaceful as he is buried with his ancestors. Thus C. F. Keil, The Books of the Kings (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1950 [1883], 481).

17. The Chronicler’s rendition seems at odds with the account in Kings in that the latter suggests that Josiah’s reform movement began before the scroll was found whereas the Chronicler places it afterward. The resolution most likely lies in the convention in the ancient Near Eastern world of placing the great deeds of kings early in the records of their reigns thereby laying emphasis on them. See Eugene H. Merrill, “The ‘Accession Year’ and Davidic Chronology,” JANES 19 (1989): 106 – 07.
limited to Jerusalem and its vicinity. The king also directed that the pagan paraphernalia of the north be removed, including the altar of Jeroboam against which a prophetic curse had been uttered at the very beginning of the Divided Monarchy (2 Kgs 23:15–20; cf. 1 Kgs 13:1–3).

Finally, Josiah authorized that a Passover be held according to the prescriptions of ספר הברית (“scroll of the covenant”) (2 Kgs 23:21–23//2 Chr 35:1–19). The observation is made that such a Passover had not been seen since “the days of the judges” (Kings) or “the days of the prophet Samuel” (Chronicles). Clearly both traditions were aware of some kind of Torah teaching mandating Passover and providing instruction as to how it should be carried out.

Reaction to the Hypothesis

De Wette’s arguments for the non-Mosaic authorship and lateness of Deuteronomy were, as we have noted and as he freely admitted, founded on the works of numerous scholars; ancient (the Gnostic Ptolemy and Ibn Ezra), Enlightenment (Isaac ben Jasos, Carlstadt, Masius, Hobbes, Peyrerius, Spinoza, and Simon), and early contemporaries (Fulda, Corrodi, Eckermann, Bauer, and Paulus). With Wellhausen later on, de Wette conceded that it was to his own student Vatke that he owed most in constructing his own position: “The investigation [of Mosaic authorship] was, for the first time, thoroughly made by Vatke.” Other later contemporaries with similar views were Gesenius, Augusti, Rosenmüller, and Berthold. Now, of course, virtually all critical scholars embrace what has come to be a settled conviction no longer in need of argument.

At the same time, de Wette acknowledged that in his own time weighty arguments against the critical position were levied by such conservatives as Michaelis, the early Eichhorn, Jahn, Hasse, Ranke,

18. For this term see Exod 24:7, the only place outside Kings and Chronicles it occurs. Both Dtr (the so-called Deuteronomist historian) and the Chronicler were obviously aware of at least this part of Torah.


20. DeWette, Introduction, 163. Cf. the famous tribute by Julius Wellhausen to Vatke: “from whom indeed I gratefully acknowledge myself to have learnt best and most” (Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel [Cleveland: World, 1957 (1878)], 13).

21. For a leading representative, see Eissfeldt, Introduction, 241: “This understanding of the material [of Pentateuchal analysis] will maintain itself no matter how manifold are the variations which come in the future, just as in previous centuries it has been expressed in very varied ways.”
Hengstenberg, Hävernik, and Thomas Horne. Modern scholars who contend for the (essential or full) Mosaic tradition are not lacking, and in doing so implicitly at least make the case for an early Deuteronomy. This is in line with our own contention that Deuteronomy was not a text fabricated in the seventh century B.C.E. to serve the agenda of putative reformers but one created by Moses to provide both covenant guidance to his own community and a blueprint for the nation as it lived out its covenant responsibility among the nations. Evidence for this proposition must now be elicited from the book’s own testimony.

**THE HYPOTHESIS VIS-À-VIS RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

The two most important elements of ancient Israel’s national life were its religious and political institutions. Related questions have to do with the origination, shape, and development of each and their coherence to either the early traditional or late putative settings ascribed to them.

*Religious Institutions*

The concept of a central sanctuary is at the heart of this debate. Did Moses prescribe such a thing (Deut 12:5–14) or was it the outcome of Josiah’s reformation that, among other things, called for an exclusive central sanctuary (2 Kgs 23:4–20)? The answer is quite clear. Though the historian appears to date the onset of the reformation to Josiah’s 18th year, coincident with the discovery of the Torah scroll (2 Kgs 22:3), the Chronicler makes clear that it had begun at least ten years earlier, with no knowledge of such a scroll (2 Chr 34:3–7). The same is said of


24. Much of the following is derived from my previous publication “Deuteronomy and History: Anticipation of Reflection?” *Faith & Mission* 18/1 (2000): 57-76. Space limitations preclude exhaustive listings of the discords that a late Deuteronomy exhibits with reference to a late (seventh century?) date. See Excursus 1 below.

25. The apparent disparity here is easily resolved. Dtr is virtually silent about Josiah’s first 12 years (640–628 B.C.E.), noting only that “he walked in the ways of David his father” (2 Kgs 22:2). The Chronicler, on the other hand, emphasizes that in Josiah’s 12th
Hezekiah nearly a century earlier and in virtually the same words (2 Kgs 18:3–8, 22; cf. 2 Chr 29:2–19). One must assume that both Hezekiah and Josiah were aware of the Mosaic teaching of a central sanctuary, legislation for which comes only from Deuteronomy. Thus, Deuteronomy, even if not identical to the Josiah scroll per se, must have been known and, indeed, was attributed to Mosaic influence long before Josiah’s time (Josh 1:7–9; Judg 1:20; 1 Kgs 2:3; 8:9, 56–61; 2 Kgs 14:6; 18:4, 6, 12; 21:8; 23:25).26

**Political Institutions**

Contrary to the consensus, the references to monarchy in Deuteronomy need not by any means presuppose a monarchy existent at the time the book was written anymore than the multiple references to an impending exile proves that all prophets were post-exilic.27 From Abraham’s time onward kingship was promised in his line of descent (Gen 17:6, 16; cf. 35:11; 49:10; Num 24:17) and regulations were established for that institution (Deut 17:14–20).

Throughout Israel’s monarchical history the prophets and historians invoked Mosaic (specifically Deuteronomic) law to remind the kings of their covenant responsibilities and of the punishment that would ensue in the event of their disobedience.28 The rejoinder that the historical accounts are, in fact, largely fabricated reconstructions of the year (628 B.C.E.) he began to purge Judah of its heathenism. This was six years before the discovery of the scroll (622 B.C.E.), the event that set in motion special attention to the need for not only a central sanctuary, but a solitary one. Thus J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC 5; Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2002), 219–22.


27. See E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 80–81. Speaking of Deuteronomy’s author, Nicholson states: “he was dealing with an existing institution which, whatever his own wishes, had to be reckoned with as part of the life of the people among whom he lived and for whom, presumably, he was legislating.”

past designed to create a Mosaic and thus authoritative basis for anti-monarchic political and religious movements not only smacks of *petitio princeps* but runs contrary to common sense and lacks any objective textual or historical foundation. The reverse—that the “temple scroll” was created as a paradigmatic model to which kings of pre-eighth century B.C.E. times were expected to adhere—has even less to commend it. Why and how could pre-Dtr rulers be expected to conform to a non-existent protocol and how could so much time have elapsed before the community did, in fact, produce a document whose intent was to rein in the wickedness of the monarchy of its own time? The notion that restraint of royal excesses such as the multiplication of horses and wives (Deut 17:16–17) first came to mind in the seventh century B.C.E. is absurd on its face. Moreover, virtually all ancient Near Eastern societies had sanctions against evil and oppressive regimes long before the beginning of Israelite monarchy, a point insinuated even in the biblical text (1 Sam 8:5, 10–18).29

David himself was guilty of breaching the “Deuteronomic” limitations (2 Sam 3:2–5; 8:4; 1Chr 3:1–9) to say nothing of Solomon who famously accrued vast numbers of both horses and wives (1 Kgs 4:26; 10:26–29; 11:3–4). In each case there followed implicit or explicit prophetic indictments and threats of judgment for violating the word of Yahweh, a reference primarily to Deut 17 (2 Sam 12:9–10; 1 Kgs 11:9–13). This is crystal clear in David’s injunctions to young Solomon to keep the מצות (“commandments”), חק (“statutes”), and משפטים (“judgments”), all of which are *termini technici* drawn straight from Deuteronomy.30 The narrators, at least, are making the point that Deuteronomy preceded the monarchy, an outright falsehood or, at best, display of ignorance if in fact their claims were not based on genuine historical traditions. And to assume, further, that these traditions were only oral is to fly in the face of overwhelming ancient Near Eastern evidence to the contrary from the Late Bronze (Mosaic) age and even earlier.31

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30. The collocation of these three terms together occurs 7x in Deuteronomy (5:28; 6:1; 7:11; 8:11; 11:1; 26:17; 30:16; and משפטים 10x (4:1, 5, 8, 14, 45; 5:1; 6:20; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16); and חק and משפטים 8x (4:40; 6:2, 17; 10:13; 27:10; 28:15, 45; 30:10). Interestingly, משפטים and מצות as a pair never occur together in the book. Moreover, no other OT books display such a concentration of these terms.

THE HYPOTHESIS VIS-À-VIS CRITICAL MOMENTS AND MOVEMENTS IN ISRAEL’S HISTORY

Two options immediately surface when evaluating standard critical approaches to Deuteronomy and the temple scroll: (1) From the critical point of view, if Deuteronomy was an early work, in the nature of the case it could hardly have addressed the various historical circumstances and practices of much later times that make up its subject matter. (2) However, if it was a late work whose compilers exploited oral or written traditions about persons, places, and events of six or eight centuries earlier—much of which had little or no relevance to the community of the alleged eighth–seventh century date of the book’s composition—its purpose would have to be understood as a historical exercise rather than paraenetic or theological. Moreover, those alleged “traditions,” if known to the writer of the scroll, would almost certainly have been known to the community at large from the days of their origins to the present, thus obviating the need for the scroll in the first place.32 Only a few of the more important examples must suffice.

Jerusalem and the Central Sanctuary

Deuteronomy is striking by not only what it says, but also by what it omits or covers over. A notable example is the lack of any reference at all to Jerusalem, to say nothing of its being the location of the central sanctuary. However, to appeal to the subterfuge of presenting Moses as ignorant of such a place and its importance is to fly in the face of Jerusalem’s significance in early biblical tradition, to say nothing of


32. In fairness, many scholars have recognized the problem here and thus conclude, with Nicholson, “that we are dealing in Deuteronomy not with an ad hoc literary and theological creation of the seventh century B.C. Rather, we must see the book as the final product and expression of a long history involving the transmission and constant adaptation of the old traditions of early Israel upon which it based” (Deuteronomy and Tradition, 121). But even this is unsatisfactory since it is the overall hypothesis itself that is in question, the very hypothesis that permits Deuteronomy and the scroll to be considered in this manner. For a clear analysis of this “co-dependency” see R. K Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 640.
ancient Near Eastern texts. A scribe writing in the seventh century B.C.E. could hardly resist the temptation to mention Jerusalem as the Mosaic cult center if he was trying to fabricate a “Mosaic” document.

Second, both the DtrH and Chronicles are replete with references to multiple worship centers, most of which, of course, were either pagan or paganized Israelite sites. Such information is not surprising and has little relevance to the question of a central sanctuary. More troubling are those shrines that appear to be not only attended by the covenant people, but to be sanctioned by their leaders. How can these exist alongside the strict Mosaic injunctions against them, particularly in Deuteronomy?

The answer lies in the historian’s observation that “the people of Israel sacrificed their offerings at local altars, for a temple honoring the name of the LORD had not yet been built” (1 Kgs 3:2). Solomon’s task was to build such a temple and thereby bring into existence the central sanctuary of which Moses had spoken centuries before (Deut 12). However, Moses in fact had authorized the erection of local altars until the “place where he caused his name to dwell” (Jerusalem, as it turned out) would become operative. Exodus 20:24–26 provides explicit permission and instruction concerning the erection of “earthen altars” (“בכל מקום”) I record my name.

Major Historical Events: A Few Examples

Beyond question, the two most significant events in ancient Israel’s post-exodus history were the conquest and the exile. The two share much in

33. Cf. Salem, generally understood to be an alternative form of Jerusalem (Gen 14:18; Ps 76:2; Heb 7:1, 2). See also Josh 10:1, 3, 5, 23; 12:10; 15:8, 63; 18:28; Judg 1:7, 8, 21; 19:10. For the Egyptian “Excreation Texts” (ca. 1850 B.C.E.) and references to “the Ruler of Jerusalem (“wš:mm”),” see William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, ed. The Context of Scripture (vol. 1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 50–51; for Úrusalim in the Amarna texts (ca. 1350 B.C.E.) see ibid., (vol. 3, 2002), 237–38. EA 289 renders the name ʾāḫḫû-sa-limki (“city of Jerusalem”) whereas EA 290 refers to it as mât ʾāḫḫû-sa-limki (“Jerusalem district”). Thus, W. A. Albright in The Hap/biru (Moshe Greenberg; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1955), 48–49. This suggests that by as early as 1350 B.C.E. Jerusalem was not only a city but the “capital” of a region, thus well-known internationally.

34. E.g., 1 Kgs 12:31, 32; 13:32; 14:23; 2 Chr 15:17; 17:6; 28:25; etc.

35. An alternative translation for כָּל here is “any,” that is, “in any place.” The meaning is not fundamentally changed. In the first case, “all the place” likely refers to the entire land of Israel, whereas the second applies to each and every place in the land. See my discussion in Deuteronomy (NAC 4; Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994), 223–24.
common vis-à-vis Deuteronomy, but there also exist major differences. We shall address these *seriatim*.

(1) Whereas mainstream criticism supposes that the narrative of the conquest was composed long after the event, Deuteronomy clearly anticipates the event (Deut 6:10–15; 7:1–5; 8:1–10; 11:8–12; 12:1–14; 26:1–11; 31:1–8) and Joshua reads as though it were an eye-witness account (*passim*). Of the consensus view, several questions must be posed: (a) Of what relevance to the exilic or post-exilic community of Jews would be the detailed account of Canaanite conquest with the subsequent allocations of territories to the respective tribes? By the seventh century B.C.E. the Northern Kingdom had fallen to Assyria and the Babylonians were virtually knocking at the door. Survival of Judah was at stake, not the reconstructed or imaginary account of long ago victories over now non-existent peoples. (b) Who could care about Sihon, Og, and the Amorites, all shadowy figures of a misty past? (c) How could the seven “Canaanite” nations of Deut 7 and the pre-histories of folk like the Rephaim, Zamzummim, Avvim, and Caphtorim (Deut 2:20–23) be relevant to Yehud when it was preoccupied with Assyrians, Babylonians, Medes, and Persians, none of whom are mentioned in Deuteronomy?

(2) Does explicit reference in Deuteronomy to an exile not favor the lateness of the book, particularly if the book underwent major redaction in the exilic period?\(^\text{36}\) The “if” about redaction should evoke caution first of all, since the matter is disputed by many critical scholars.\(^\text{37}\) One response could be—and it is legitimate—that Moses as a prophet could foresee the latter day exiles. On the other hand, Deuteronomy is a covenant document, as nearly all scholars contend, and invariably such documents in the surrounding world contained lists of curses that would devolve upon the vassal party should the terms of the covenant be violated. Not to be overlooked, though it cannot be expanded here, is the literary form of the book. Though debate continues on the matter, the form and structure of Deuteronomy fits best in comparison to texts of the same genre from the Late Bronze age as opposed to the seventh-century Neo-Assyrian models.\(^\text{38}\)


omissions in the latter include a historical prelude and a list of blessings, both of which are found in Deuteronomy (1:6–3:29; 28:1–14).  

Historical Irrelevancies and Anachronisms

By this is meant items in Deuteronomy that had little or no practical value to seventh-century Judah but great significance to Late Bronze Israel. How could these disparities have been recorded by late scribes as major themes or notations in the book? Only a few can be cited.

1. Why is Deuteronomy so preoccupied with the issue of Ḥayyim ("holy war") when the latest clear example of it in the historical record is Jehoshaphat’s campaign against Moab and Ammon ca. 850 B.C.E., nearly 200 years after the discovery of the temple scroll (2 Chr 20:5–30)? Did seventh-century Yehud anticipate the waging of holy war against the Assyrians or Babylonians?

2. How could a writer of Deuteronomy in the seventh century make the laughable claim that “Yahweh your God has multiplied you and today you are as numerous as the stars of heaven” (Deut 1:10)? Add to this the command by Yahweh to annihilate Amalek at some future time (25:17–19). As far as can be determined, Amalek no longer existed in the seventh century B.C.E. How about the name Nisan for the first month in late Israelite history but Abib in Deuteronomy (Deut 16:1; see Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7)? The commentaries are strangely silent on the matter, suggesting only that the later name Nisan was modeled after the Babylonian term Nisannu.

3. What pertinence does Deuteronomy’s expansive warnings about Canaanite idolatry and its punishment have for a community that was already in process of dealing with the issues and by the post-exilic period had done away with them forever? What value have prohibitions about cutting oneself in mourning (Deut 14:1–2), boiling a young goat


40. The latest reference to the Amalekites is in the list of peoples whom David conquered (2 Sam 8:12). Otherwise, they remain an unknown people, not only to modern times but certainly to the seventh century B.C.E. as well.


42. For an attempt to argue that all these illicit practices survived into the late monarchy, see Rainer Albertz, A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period (vol. 1; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 210–16. However, he offers no textual
in its mother’s milk (14:21), and sacred prostitution (23:17–18)? There is no record of these surviving among the Jews in the Southern Kingdom in the late Divided Monarchy.

(4) “Unto this day.” This phrase (עד הים הזה), used copiously in Deuteronomy, sounds strangely foreign in a late age, given the things that are thus described. Almost always the narrator describes things anterior to his time of writing and indicates that the after-effects are still in play. For example, he speaks of the Esauites (Deut 2:22), the recent defeat of King Sihon of Heshbon (2:30), the place name Havvoth-jair (3:14), the recent expulsion of the Trans-Jordan Amorites, and the destruction of the Shappened in the generation of the writer makes the author either an eye-witness (like Moses) or a forger (like the anonymous creator of the temple scroll) who may or may not have gotten his facts correct.

CONCLUSIONS

In search of the keystone to the construction of the edifice of the source critical method, scholars as early as the seventeenth century proffered various hypotheses, none universally satisfying until W. M. L. de Wette burst upon the scene in 1805. His dissertatio, brief as it was, encapsulated and simplified the hunches of previous scholars, so much so that he became known in some quarters as “the father of higher criticism.” Remarkably enough, the dissertation was not directed explicitly to the question of whether or not the scroll found in Josiah’s temple was Deuteronomy or a recension thereof. In fact, he made the assertion in just one footnote, almost in passing as it were. From that innocuous beginning, however, the notion took root and remains to this day the key tenet of the so-called Documentary Hypothesis, expressed in its classic form by Julius Wellhausen seventy years after de Wette’s seminal work. Though greatly altered here and there by modern scholars, its essential ideology and framework remain intact and remain standard fare in university and seminary classrooms.

Close examination of the actual biblical data themselves reveals quite a different alternative and that is a return to the ancient Jewish, New Testament, and Christian traditions of Mosaic provenance and

or archaeological evidence for this supposition, citing primarily texts from Deuteronomy itself, which is the matter in dispute to begin with.

authorship. Only a mindset willing to bend to critical consensus or oblivious to the issues involved and their damaging implications for young Christian scholars and the Church can, it seems, continue to ignore the tradition in favor of unproven and unprovable hypotheses to the contrary.

**EXCURSUS 1: TEXTUAL DISCORDANCES WITH THE LATE DATE HYPOTHESIS**

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EXCURSUS 2: PERSONS, PLACES, AND THINGS DISCORDANT WITH A LATE DEUTERONOMY

In the Cultus

- Central Sanctuary not named but in view (Deut 12:5–14); cf. earlier local shrines (Exod 20:24–26; cf 18:12)

- Josiah’s destruction of local shrines before the discovery of the scroll suggests they were in violation of a well-known prohibition (2 Chr 34:8)

- Previous kings had also removed paganism: Asa (1 Kgs 15:11–15; cf. 2 Chr 14:1–2 [H]; Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:1-8; 2 Chr 29:3; 31:1); Josiah (2 Kgs 23:4–20; 2 Chr 34:3–7)

- Technical terms of Deuteronomy (2 Chr14:3; 17:4; 31:21; 34:31; 1 Kgs 2:3; 3:14; 6:12; 8:58, 61; 9:6; 11:11, 33, 34, 38; 2 Kgs 18:6; 23:3; 2 Chr 19:10; 29:8; 30:9)—especially “book of the covenant” (2 Kgs 23:2, 21; 2 Chr 33:8; 34:14, 15, 30); “book of the law” / “book of Moses” (2 Kgs 14:6; 22:8, 11; 2 Chr 17:9; 35:12)

- Lack of concern about multiple altars/high places (Exod 20:22-26; Deut 27:5-6; Josh 8:30-31; Judg 6:24; 13:20; 1 Sam 7:17; 9:11–14, 35; 21:1–6; 2 Sam 24:18, 21, 25; 1 Kgs 3:4; 2; 18:30–32; 19:10; 2 Chr 1:1-6)

In the Monarchy

In Historical Events

- The Conquest—viewed as future
- The Exile—viewed as future (Deut 4:25–28 [cf. 28:36–37, 49–50; 29:25–26; 30:1; 32:26])

Allegedly Late Legal Practices

- Prohibition against foreign marriage (Ezra 9:1–10:44; Neh 13:23–31; Deut 7:3–4; cf. Exod 34:15–16); clearly, both Ezra and Nehemiah based their actions on ancient pre-existing law (Ezra 10:2–3; Neh 13:26)

Geo-Political Realities

- Living in tents (Deut 5:30; 33:18) in a heavily forested land (Deut 19:5)
- Setting is the Transjordan (Deut 1:3; 3:25) with Gerizim and Ebal being in the west (Deut 11:30)
A Narrative Reading of Solomon’s Execution of Joab in 1 Kings 1–2: Letting Story Interpret Story

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The morally problematic story in 1 Kings 1–2 of Solomon’s rise to power—particularly his execution of Joab—has troubled scholars for years. Such questionable brutality seems to fly in the face of the commonly held picture of young king Solomon as a wise and godly ruler. This problem reflects not so much a problem with the text or history itself, but rather with our reading and understanding of both Solomon and the text itself. Perhaps the most significant contribution narrative criticism has had on the field of biblical studies is its stress on allowing the story itself to shape our understanding of the people and events in question. The events of 1 Kings 1–2, in actuality, serve both as the conclusion to David’s reign and the introduction to Solomon’s reign. Therefore, given the fact that Solomon’s stated reasons for killing Joab hearken back to earlier episodes concerning Abner and Amasa, the story itself impels us to interpret the circumstances surrounding Joab’s death in the light of those of Abner and Amasa. When we do that, we find numerous literary clues in the text that help shape our understanding of both Solomon’s actions and the state of the kingdom itself.

KEY WORDS: Narrative, Literary Reading, Solomon, Joab

The narrative of Solomon’s ascension to the throne of Israel in 1 Kgs 1–2 is one of the most intriguing narratives in all of Scripture. In it, an aged and possibly senile David is, or is not, manipulated by Bathsheba into declaring Solomon to be the next king, despite the fact that Solomon is not David’s eldest son. Not only that, but the text specifically states that David never showed any displeasure toward his eldest son Adonijah when he went about declaring that he would be the next king. Once Solomon becomes king, despite his reassurances to Adonijah that he would not kill him, Solomon accuses Adonijah of plotting to take over
the throne because Adonijah has asked permission to marry Abishag the Shunammite. Solomon then proceeds to execute his brother, to banish David’s long-time high priest Abiathar, and to execute Joab, David’s commander who had been at David’s side throughout his entire reign.

Solomon’s actions in 1 Kgs 1–2 have troubled many scholars for years. Iain Provan calls Solomon’s purge of Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab “a fairly sordid story of power-politics thinly disguised as a morality tale.”[^1] The fact that 1 Kgs tells us that it was David himself who told Solomon to deal “wisely” with Joab—not to let “his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace” (1 Kgs 2:6)—is so shocking that C. L. Seow speculates that this passage was nothing more than a “pro-Solomonic apologist attributing to David the decision to eliminate Joab, who posed a threat to Solomon.”[^2]

Despite David’s supposed speech to Solomon, when one considers that both Abiathar’s banishment and Joab’s execution came on the heels of what Solomon perceived to be a grasp for power by Adonijah, it is no wonder why so many scholars view Solomon’s actions with suspicion. After all, if the bloodguilt that Joab supposedly brought upon the Davidic house was so severe, why was his execution not carried out sooner? Even though the murders of Abner and Amasa may have been the stated reason why Solomon had Joab executed, the real reason seems to have been that Solomon saw both Abiathar and Joab, having originally backed Adonijah, as a threat to his power. Jerome T. Walsh puts it this way: “[Solomon] is always attentive to the niceties of legal observance, yet he is not above twisting evidence, and, if need be, falsifying it in order to gain what he wants.”[^3]

Nevertheless, although we would be right to view Solomon’s actions with a high degree of suspicion, we would be wrong to assume that 1 Kgs 1–2 is nothing more than a poor piece of propaganda to justify Solomon’s bad actions. After all, to claim that Solomon is merely twisting evidence for personal gain, or that a pro-Solomonic apologist simply put the decision to kill Joab in David’s mouth, is to claim something for which there is no textual evidence. Try as we might, we cannot get behind the text to “what really happened.”

Upon discussing the nature of written texts and their relationship to history, Jacques Derrida has famously stated that “there is nothing outside the text.” One cannot get behind the text to the actual event because, for all practical purposes, the text is the only window that allows one to see any glimpse of that historical event. In other words, that “textual window” to a historical event is not really even a window—it is the history. All history is interpreted, and the text is the interpreted history we have. There is no other. This realization has a significant impact on how we read biblical texts in general, and in this case, 1 Kgs 1–2 in particular. When evaluating Solomon’s actions in 1 Kgs 1–2, the only window we are allowed to look through—the only history we have—is that of 1 Kgs 1–2.

This article will focus specifically on Solomon’s execution of Joab and ask the question, “Was Solomon’s execution of Joab just?” In attempting to answer this question, though, we must assume that the writer of 1 Kgs was a competent writer who intentionally framed his story in such a way as to convey a specific point of view regarding the events surrounding both Solomon’s rise to power in general, and Solomon’s execution of Joab in particular. Therefore, what is needed is a close literary reading of the text in order to let the story itself provide the clues that might help put the situation in a clearer light.

Fortunately, the author of 1 Kgs gives us two narrative clues that help interpret and understand exactly what is going on with Solomon’s execution of Joab. In both David’s final speech to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:1–9 and Solomon’s order to execute Joab in 1 Kgs 2:31–33, references are made to the earlier episodes in which Joab had killed two other commanders: Abner, the general of David’s rival Ishbaal who was in the midst of switching his allegiance from Ishbaal to David (2 Sam 3:6–37), and Amasa, Absalom’s former general whom David promoted to take Joab’s place as the general of his army, but who had delayed in putting down Sheba’s rebellion Sheba (2 Sam 20:1–12).

This article will argue that the narrative of 1 Kgs 1–2 invites the reader to interpret Solomon’s execution of Joab in light of the two earlier episodes of 2 Sam 3:6–37 and 20:1–12. When this is done, we find that all three episodes center on a question of loyalty surrounding each murdered man that is not clearly resolved in the biblical text itself. Indeed, even though the stated reasons concerning all three murders are clear, the biblical text seems to intentionally subvert itself by providing additional information in each murder that questions those stated reasons.

The overall effect of all three biblical narratives, therefore, is that it is impossible to read them as only political propaganda or morality tales.

**BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PAST SCHOLARSHIP**

We must first pause, though, to discuss the ways in which scholars have labeled the Succession Narrative. As Simon DeVries has pointed out, it was German scholar Leonard Rost who “persuasively argued that 2 Sam 9–20, 1 Kgs 1–2 was a propaganda piece legitimizing Solomon’s selection over David’s other sons to be his father’s successor.” This view of the Succession Narrative as a pro-Solomon work of propaganda, consequently, became largely accepted by most scholars.

Nevertheless, there have been generally three basic challenges to this view. First, in direct contradiction to Rost’s theory, Lienhard Delekat argued that an “anti-Davidic and anti-Solomonic polemic pervades the whole narrative.” Although David Gunn applauds Delekat’s work, he still questions—rightly so—Delekat’s claim that the entire narrative is anti-Solomon. Second, a number of historical-critical scholars (Wirthwein, Veijola, and Langlamet) challenged Rost’s theory by arguing that the narrative has gone through various stages of redaction. As Gunn explains, these scholars claimed that “[t]here was originally an anti-Solomonic (and to some extent anti-Davidic) primitive text which has been supplemented by material favourable to the dynasty in order to transform it into its present, pro-Solomonic, edition.” Simply put, whereas Rost argued that the Succession Narrative was pro-Solomonic from the start, and Delekat argued that it was really anti-Solomonic, Wirthwein, Veijola, and Langlemat argued that it was originally anti-

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6. DeVries, *1 Kings*. 8. Dietrich echoes this analysis when he states that Rost argued that the entire Succession Narrative culminated with 1 Kings 1–2, “the report of how Solomon, not a member of the house of Saul and not one of Solom’s older brothers, rose to the throne. The narrative was concerned with explaining and legitimizing this somewhat surprising outcome” (*The Early Monarchy in Israel*, 231).


9. Ibid., 23–24.
Solmonic, but then was redacted to where it is now, in its present form, pro-Solomonic.

Similarly, Walter Dietrich holds that the narrative was written shortly after the actual events by someone who was “from among democratically minded Israelite citizens where basic norms of human behavior were still important and where the behavior of the royal family was met with a mixture of anger and disgust . . . This cynical original succession narrative was dulled and mitigated by later redactors who placed these narratives in the service of quite different intentions”—namely, that although David and Solomon were clearly flawed individuals, they still “would prove God’s faithfulness to his promises to David.”¹⁰ He concludes with, “The precise relation of these added redactional layers, including the texts that belonged to each, has not been fully clarified.”¹¹

The problem with all these proposals, though, has been best articulated by both Gunn and DeVries. Regarding the view of scholars like Veijola, DeVries gives perhaps the harshest, albeit well-warranted, criticism when he says:

[Veijola] neglects the structure of the elemental units, hence has no eye for their function and aim, whether in isolation or in early combinations. He little perceives the skill of the throne-succession document in introducing narrative elements, creating tension and dramatic effect. He loses much of the element of subtle irony in this document’s way of resolving the rivalry between various contenders for the throne. All that seems to disturb a simplistic image of David’s reign is assigned to Dtr, which is of course much too late to be taken as the original, creative author of this particular material.¹²

Simply put, in their rush to dissect the text into two hypothetical “anti-Solomonic” and “pro-Solomonic” sources, these scholars have failed to consider that perhaps the Succession Narrative is, in fact, a work of literary artistry by a single author, that contains both “pro” and “anti” points of view regarding Solomon, and thus invites the reader to live within that tension in the story.

This leads us to the final challenge to not only Rost’s view, but also the view of the redaction scholars. David Gunn suggests the entire

¹⁰ Dietrich, *The Early Monarchy in Israel*, 236.

¹¹ Ibid.

Succession Narrative, as extending from 2 Sam 2 to 1 Kgs 2, should be regarded first and foremost as a “story in the sense of a work of art and entertainment.”

Dietrich questions the extension of the beginning of the Succession Narrative from 1 Sam 9 to 2 Sam 2, on the grounds that such a narrative could hardly retain the title of “Succession Narrative,” and states, “[i]n this case, we would not be dealing with two separate narratives, a succession narrative and a narrative of David’s rise, but one unified Davidic narrative.” To that observation, we say that if individual passages like that of Joab’s killing of Abner in 2 Sam 3 can be shown to share a vital literary connection to those passages within the traditional Succession Narrative, then perhaps it is best to reconsider the validity of the traditionally-held division Dietrich has mentioned. Perhaps it is a unified narrative after all.

In any case, for lack of a better title, Gunn deems the Succession Narrative as serious entertainment; he does not go so far as to call it “fiction.” Neither does he deny the essential historical foundation for these stories. His fundamental point is that what we have is first and foremost a story, and therefore we should read and interpret it in the same way we would read and interpret any work of literature, reading the text closely and taking our interpretive cues from clues that are in the actual text. To pigeonhole the text in neat categories like “political propaganda” or “morality tale,” potentially shuts oneself off from layers of literary play and interpretive meaning within the text. Yet the ambiguities and tensions in the text may be there for a reason.

Therefore, as Gunn states, “[w]hy must we be looking for neat ‘solutions’ which ‘do away with’ the tensions? Why should the text be expected to be simply and neatly ‘pro’ anyone?”


15. “It is in this latter sense that I would speak of our narrative as a work of art and serious entertainment. But if the purpose of the story is serious entertainment, there is no clear indication that the author regarded the work as one of fiction” (Gunn, The Story of David, 61).

16. “…the narrative is not best described as history writing. Perhaps I should add here, lest I be misunderstood, that this does not amount to a blanket denial of the historicity of the events described in the story” (Gunn, The Story of David, 21).

17. “It is quite possible that an author might be content to leave us with a great deal of ambiguity in his presentation of characters even to the extent of leaving a large question mark hanging over the nature of God's activity” (Gunn, The Story of David, 25).

What we have before us, therefore, in 1 Kgs 1–2, 2 Sam 3, and 2 Sam 20, are three narratives within a much larger unified narrative that reveal the bloody and sordid mess of politics and warfare, where the ability to judge between good and evil actions is often hampered by one’s limited point of view, and where the legitimacy of certain acts seems to lie in the eye of the beholder. Yet far from being mired in postmodern moral relativism, the story of Solomon’s execution of Joab, like the stories of the killings of Abner and Amasa to which it refers, displays a clear faith in a God who, in the midst of the ignorance and sin of deeply flawed human beings, still works His will.

A PRELIMINARY GLANCE AT SOLOMON’S REASONS FOR THE EXECUTION OF JOAB

The essential question surrounding Solomon’s execution of Joab is, “Was this execution justified in the eyes of YHWH, or was it simply a blood-thirsty act on the part of Solomon in order to wipe out any potential threats?” There are a number of factors in 1 Kgs 1–2 that need to be considered when answering this question. First, there is the official reason, supposedly given by David on his deathbed (1 Kgs 2:5–6), and reiterated by Solomon when he commanded Benaiah to strike Joab down in the sanctuary (1 Kgs 2:31–33): Joab must receive the retribution of YHWH for his unjust murders of Abner and Amasa. If they were, in fact, unjust, this would certainly seem to justify Solomon’s actions. The problem, of course, is that it is not so clear that they were unjust. Although the claim is that Joab killed these men “in peace time,” Eschelbach disagrees. He states, “This is clearly exaggeration which leads the reader to consider the opposite . . . the blood of Abner and Amasa was hardly innocent nor were their deaths without cause.”

A second factor is the implied reason for Joab’s execution. One cannot help but notice that Joab’s murder comes on the heels of Adonijah’s request for Abishag, which Solomon sees as a treasonous act punishable by death. The implication, therefore, is that since both Joab and Abiathar had originally supported Adonijah’s claim to the throne, both were equally suspect of treason along with Adonijah. If Adonijah really was attempting to take the throne, it would be understandable to suspect Joab and Abiathar as being co-conspirators. And if that were true, then it would seem that Solomon’s actions would be justified as well.

A third factor to consider, though, is found specifically in Solomon’s speech to Benaiah (1 Kgs 2:31–33). When told by Benaiah that Joab refused to leave the altar in the tent of YHWH, Solomon not only orders Benaiah to go into the tent of YHWH and kill Joab, but he also reiterates and expands upon what David had told him in 1 Kgs 2:5–6. Solomon says that striking down Joab would “take away from me and from my father’s house the guilt for the blood that Joab shed without cause” (1 Kgs 2:31). He then emphasizes David’s innocence regarding Joab’s killings of Abner and Amasa by saying, “the LORD will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head, because, without the knowledge of my father David, he attacked and killed with the sword two men more righteous and better than himself” (1 Kgs 2:32 NRSV). He concludes his speech by further distancing himself and his father David from Joab by saying “So shall their blood come back on the head of Joab and on the head of his descendants forever; but to David, and to his descendants, and to his house, and to his throne, there shall be peace from the LORD forevermore” (1 Kgs 2:33 NRSV).

Such an emphasis on Joab’s killing of Abner and Amasa, though, seems rather odd. After all, if Joab was truly conspiring with Adonijah, why is this official reason even necessary? Treason is a pretty justifiable reason for execution. Why the need for putting forth Joab’s killing of Abner and Amasa as the reason for Joab’s execution? As Eschelbach asks, if those actions were so heinous, “. . . why hadn’t David dealt with Joab earlier? Why was it that only after Joab appeared in support of Adonijah that he had to die?”

Despite these understandable suspicions of Solomon’s justification for killing Joab, we must realize that what Solomon’s speech reveals is that Joab’s execution was not simply because he had killed two innocent men. It reveals that Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa had a much deeper impact on David’s reign than one might have originally thought. If one reads the entirety of 2 Sam, one finds that the “peace and unity” of David’s kingdom was largely a myth. Whether it was his battles with Ishbaal, or the rebellions of both his son Absalom and Sheba son of Bichri, turmoil and war characterized David’s reign. And, not surprisingly, as Solomon’s speech indicates, much of that turmoil was brought on by the actions of Joab himself. Therefore, before we come to a conclusion regarding 1 Kgs 1–2, we should first look more closely through the two windows that the author of 1 Kgs 1–2 opens for us: the


21. “I question David’s description of this time being one of peace. The kingdom had been continually unsettled, full of rebellious plots inside and outside of David’s house” (Eschelbach, Has Joab Foiled David?, 64).
events surrounding Joab’s murder of Abner in 2 Sam 3:6–37, and the events surrounding Joab’s murder of Amasa in 2 Sam 20:1–12. As we will see, all three episodes share a surprising number of narrative parallels.

2 Samuel 3:6–37: Joab’s Murder of Abner

In order to understand the controversy surrounding Joab’s murder of Abner, one must first understand the back-story that leads up to the murder: Abner originally supported Ishbaal and the House of Saul (2 Sam 2:7–10); Abner killed Joab’s brother Asahel in an early battle with David’s men (2 Sam 2:19–23). Later, Abner “made himself strong in the House of Saul” and “went into” Rizpah, one of Saul’s concubines. Ishbaal then essentially accused him of treason (2 Sam 3:6–7). Although Abner vehemently denied the charge of treason, he did not ever deny going into Rizpah. Nevertheless, he was so outraged at Ishbaal that he declared he would switch his allegiance (and the power of the northern army of Israel) to David (2 Sam 3:8–10). Abner then met with David and promised to “rally all of Israel” to David (2 Sam 3:12–21).

With these things in mind, we can now better assess Joab’s murder of Abner. Although David clearly believed Abner, we are told that Joab did not. In fact, he tells David that Abner came to deceive him, and to learn of David’s movements (2 Sam 3:24–25). In other words, we are told that Joab suspected Abner of political treachery. Surprisingly though, when Joab murdered Abner without David’s knowledge only a few verses later, we are told that Abner died for the killing of Joab’s brother Asahel, the clear implication being that Joab killed Abner out of a personal sense of revenge (2 Sam 3:26–27). The reader is thus left with two reasons for the murder of Abner—one political, one personal—and the text does not definitively resolve the tension. Joab’s stated reason in 2 Sam 3:24–25 is that Abner is deceiving David; while David’s stated reaction to Joab’s murder of Abner was that Joab did it out of revenge. Which one should we believe? This “double vision” forces the reader to raise further questions of perception concerning a number of other key events in 2 Sam 3.

First, one must wonder whether or not Abner’s going into Rizpah really was an act of treason. Immediately before we are told that Abner went into Rizpah, we are told that “Abner was making himself strong in the House of Saul” (2 Sam 3:6). When one considers that in that culture “a king’s harem may become a trophy for his challenger or successor,”22 one must certainly suspect that Abner’s actions toward Rizpah were a grasp

for power. After all, one only has to read David’s demand in 2 Sam 3:13 to have his wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, delivered to him before any deal is struck between David and Abner. Why would David want Michal back as his wife, if for nothing else than as a way to legitimize his claim to the throne of Israel? In any case, even though Abner’s denial of acting treacherously toward Ishbaal suggests that his “going into” Rizpah was not a grasp for power, it is clear that the perception was there.

Second, in light of Abner’s questionable actions concerning Rizpah, as well as the fact that he was, after all, the commander of Ishbaal’s army, we must ask: “Did Joab really think Abner was deceiving David, or was Joab’s murder of Abner simply a cold-blooded act of revenge?” Now although the biblical text states Joab’s murder of Abner was an act of revenge, it also states that Joab perceived that Abner was deceiving David. While there is no doubt Abner’s killing of Asahel colored Joab’s suspicion of Abner, one still must conclude that Joab’s suspicion was legitimately felt. If Joab had simply been bent on seeking revenge on Abner, why had he stopped pursuing Abner in 2 Sam 2:26–28?

Furthermore, this causes us to read David’s words to Solomon in a different light. David said that Joab killed Abner and Amasa “in peace time” (1 Kgs 2:5). Though David believed Abner, and received him in peace, if Joab saw Abner’s actions as an act of deceit in the midst of David’s war with Ishbaal, Joab would not have seen his murder of Abner as being “in peace time.” As Gunn has said, “[p]erhaps . . . from Joab's perspective the incident is merely an extension of the battle at Gibeon.” This by no means justifies his going against his own king’s wishes, but it does point to the fact that if one perceives that someone’s actions are deceitful, it makes it that much easier to justify action against that person.

Third, what are we to make of David’s public mourning of Abner and his cursing of Joab (2 Sam 3:28–39)? There is nothing in the text that suggests David secretly wanted Joab to kill Abner, so we must believe that David was legitimately upset over Joab’s actions. But we must also consider that David’s concerns were not only personal, but political as well. Politically speaking, it seemed that Abner was about to unite all of Israel under David. Therefore, from David’s perspective, his murder upset those plans, and potentially cast David in a bad light in the eyes of Israel. From Joab’s perspective though, he no doubt thought that his murder of Abner, while avenging his brother, would also be the fatal blow against the House of Saul.

23. “With Michal in his house again, David could be almost certain of the support of the northern tribes” (Eschelbach, Has Joab Foiled David?, 25).

And in fact it was. 2 Sam 4 tells us that when Ishbaal, along with Israel, heard that Abner had been killed, their courage failed. This led to Ishbaal’s assassination, which in turn paved the way for David’s rise to power over all Israel and Judah. We can only speculate about what would have happened if Abner had lived. Since he was killed by Joab, the questions concerning his trustworthiness and loyalty can never be answered. We have no way of determining whether or not David’s faith in Abner was a wise political move. What we do know, though, is that Joab’s murder of Abner (a) went against the wishes of David, (b) paved the way for David’s rise to power over all of Israel, but (c) also created a dangerous powder keg for David. The real power behind Ishbaal had been murdered by David’s commander while visiting David under the promise of safe passage. Therefore, David’s public mourning for Abner and his public cursing of Joab served an obvious political purpose.

Evidently, it paid off, for 2 Sam 3:37 tells us that “all the people and all Israel understood that day that the king had no part in the killing of Abner son of Ner.” Nevertheless, the severity of David’s curse on Joab clearly marks a rift between the two men at the beginning of David’s reign. Although they held to the same political goals, this instance would only be the first of many where David and Joab butted heads on how to run the kingdom. For now though, we must state two key points concerning Abner that will have ramifications for our assessment of Solomon’s execution of Joab. First, Joab’s murder of Amasa clearly went against David’s wishes, and clearly caused friction between the two men. Second, the justification, or lack thereof, of Abner’s murder clearly depends on whose perspective one takes. If Joab was correct in suspecting Abner (and indeed Abner’s incident with Rizpah does raise questions about his trustworthiness), then he did David a great service by killing Abner. If, though, David was correct in trusting Abner (yet we will never know if he was, since Abner was killed), and accusing Joab of murdering Abner out of revenge, then Joab deserved David’s curse.

2 SAMUEL 20:1–12: JOAB’S MURDER OF AMASA

A very similar situation can be seen concerning Joab’s murder of Amasa. Like Abner, Amasa was the commander of the army of David’s rival, in this case his own son Absalom (2 Sam 17:25). After entering Jerusalem with his army, Absalom “went into David’s concubines in a clear attempt to lay claim to David’s kingdom (2 Sam 16:20–22). Eventually, though, Joab killed Absalom in battle, despite the explicit orders by David not to do so (2 Sam 18:5, 10–15).

Unlike the events surrounding Abner, where Abner may very well have been trustworthy, one has to side with Joab’s decision to kill
Absalom, for Absalom was an obvious traitor, and thus that suspicion would undoubtedly be carried over to Amasa. Nevertheless, one sees once again that Joab and David had different ideas of how to run a kingdom and how to deal with political threats. In fact, Joab went so far as to threaten David with desertion of himself and the army if David continued to mourn for Absalom and shame the very people who saved his life (2 Sam 19:5–7). Though David heeded Joab’s warning, he still found a way to get back at Joab. Once Absalom’s rebellion was crushed, David appointed Amasa as his commander and essentially fired Joab in an attempt to win back Judah. With Abner, Joab received a curse from David. Now with Absalom, Joab received a pink slip.

Amasa’s subsequent actions in 2 Sam 20, though, cause the reader to wonder if this was the wisest move on David’s part. For when Sheba began his revolt in northern Israel, David called upon Amasa to assemble the men of Judah in order to crush this revolt. Amasa, though, delayed to carry out David’s order (2 Sam 20:5). The obvious question is, “Why?” We are not told. Yet, when one considers that Amasa was the commander of the traitor Absalom’s army, one has to think that perhaps Amasa’s true loyalties were with Sheba. After all, immediately after we are told that Amasa delayed on David’s orders, we are told that David tells Abishai, “Now Sheba son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom” (2 Sam 20:6). Does this betray the fact that David now suspected Amasa of treason, or that David was disappointed in the job Amasa was doing?

Either way, be it a traitor or an inept commander, Amasa is not portrayed in a positive light. The fact that Joab found and murdered him in Gibeon, a city in Benjaminite territory, the homeland of Saul, the place where Sheba’s rebellion first broke out, raise further suspicions about Amasa’s loyalty to David. Such doubts have been raised by other scholars as well.25

Consequently, one must ask, “Did Joab kill Amasa because he saw he was a traitor to David, or because he was jealous that Amasa had taken his place as commander over David’s army?” Again, the biblical text does not tell us either way. If nothing else, it seems quite clear that David’s appointment of Amasa was a political mistake and that he was better off with Joab as his commander. The fact that 2 Sam 20 does not tell us that David was upset with Joab for his killing of Amasa seems to imply that David was relieved Amasa was out of the way. The fact that

Joab is reinstated as David’s commander (2 Sam 20:23) seems to indicate David’s approval of Joab’s actions.26

On the other hand, one could read 2 Sam 20:11, where Joab’s man takes his stand by Amasa’s corpse and urges, “[w]hoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab,” and make a case that Joab had the army’s loyalty behind him after his murder of Amasa. Consequently, David saw that he was in no position to challenge Joab, and was essentially forced to retain him as commander. Again, the biblical text does not spell the reasons out for us. The fact that Amasa’s murder is part of David and Solomon’s charge against Joab seems to imply this second perspective though. In any case, it does not take much to see that Amasa’s death would have created a certain amount of resentment among some of his own followers toward David, and thus, as with Abner, caused later problems for David.

**INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF 2 SAMUEL 3 AND 20**

Based on what we have seen concerning Joab’s murder of Abner and Amasa, we have seen a similar pattern that should shed light on Solomon’s execution of Joab in 1 Kgs 2. Both Abner and Amasa had been commanders of David’s rivals, and in 2 Sam 3 and 20, there were actions with concubines or wives that had clear political implications. Although both Abner and Amasa had seemingly made peace with David, a cloud of suspicion and disloyalty still hung over both men. As Walsh has stated, “[i]n both cases Joab may have had a legitimate political mistrust of his victim. But he also had strong personal reasons for doing away with them,”27 namely revenge for his brother’s death in Abner’s case, and jealousy over losing his job in Amasa’s case. Joab also personally benefited in both cases. Abner could have very well been appointed the commander of David’s army, and therefore Joab’s murder of Abner insured his own appointment. Similarly, Joab’s murder of Amasa allowed him to regain his original post as commander over David’s army. In both cases, David’s political power was strengthened. Because of Joab’s actions, Israel was demoralized with Abner’s death

26 “This appointment by David is clearly unjust toward Joab and the fact that Joab killed him with impunity argues that Joab’s hostility was justified. Joab’s actions find further justification in taking seriously the narrator’s comments about Amasa’s delay in dealing with Sheba’s revolt. David himself bore witness to Amasa’s failure since he appointed Abishai to do what Amasa should have already done” (Eschelbach, *Has Joab Foiled David?*, 34).

27. Walsh, *1 Kings*, 41.
and Sheba’s rebellion was crushed. As J. W. Wesselinus has noticed, whether David approved or not, the fact was Joab’s questionable actions are what established David in the first place.\(^{28}\)

Nevertheless, despite Joab’s fierce loyalty toward David, these two events show that he would do what he thought was best for David, even if it meant defying David’s own wishes. As Frank H. Polak states, “Joab embodies the best interests of David’s kingdom, even though he also acts without restraint for his own personal good, even when his actions counter David’s wishes and explicit orders.”\(^{29}\) From Joab’s perspective, his actions were not only personally expedient, but also politically beneficial to David. At the same time, it is easy to see that Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa were sparks in what were already volatile political situations. Therefore, from David’s perspective, Joab’s actions not only went against his wishes, they also ended up causing more trouble for David in the long run, for it caused resentment and distrust among David’s opponents in Israel. Nevertheless, Joab had the power of the army behind him, and he was going to solidify David’s reign the way he saw fit, regardless of the fact that his way might occasionally go against the wishes of the very king for whom he was working.

1 KINGS 1–2: SOLOMON’S EXECUTION OF JOAB

With a clear understanding of Joab’s murders of both Abner and Amasa, we are now in a better position to assess Solomon’s execution of Joab in 1 Kgs 1–2. 1 Kgs 1 states that Joab, along with Abiathar, had supported Adonijah’s bid for the throne. One can debate whether Adonijah’s action was a subversive act, or whether it was a reasonable assumption, given that Adonijah was, after all, the eldest son of David. For our purposes, though, we must realize that when all was said and done, Joab had backed the wrong horse. Solomon had ended up on the throne, and Joab ironically found himself in a position similar to Abner and Amasa. He was now the man who had supported the rival of Israel’s king, and his loyalty to Israel’s king would now be held in suspicion. Despite his loyalty to David in the past, this one act of supporting Adonijah no doubt called into question his loyalty to Solomon.


Just as in the cases of Abner and Amasa, the initial conflict had seemingly been resolved, and Adonijah, along with Joab and Abiathar, was allowed to live. Yet when Adonijah asked for Abishag the Shunnamite, Solomon’s suspicions were raised regarding Adonijah’s loyalty: was Adonijah’s asking for Abishag an act of treason? If seen in light of Abner’s going into Rizpah, one would be tempted to say that Adonijah was not committing treason and that both Adonijah’s and Joab’s murders, as well as Abiathar’s exile, were truly reprehensible acts on the part of Solomon.

Yet if seen in light of Absalom, the man who appointed Amasa, one would definitely interpret Adonijah’s request as treason. Furthermore, if Adonijah truly was making an attempt at the throne, it would be foolish to think he was acting on his own. One man having sex with one of the former king’s concubines will not be worth much if that man does not have the backing of a powerful commander and an influential priest. Therefore, Solomon’s actions would be justified after all. One must, therefore, question Iain Provan when he says, “there is no evidence . . . that Abiathar and Joab had anything to do with Adonijah’s initiative. We do not know whether they did or not. We do know, however, that Solomon has been waiting for the right moment to kill Joab, and Adonijah gives him his opportunity. Joab and Abiathar are pronounced guilty by association.”

Although it is true that we do not know for certain if Abiathar and Joab we co-conspirators with Adonijah—for that matter it is even questionable as to whether or not Adonijah was actually committing treason—Provan’s depiction of Solomon as the blood-thirsty villain and Joab as an innocent victim may be going further than the text allows.

In any case, we can be certain of how the execution of Joab was explained by Solomon. He believed that Adonijah, Abiathar, and Joab were plotting to overthrow him, and thus had them punished for treason. In Joab’s case, though, Solomon’s speech emphasizes that YHWH was returning the blood of Abner and Amasa onto the head of Joab. There is one thing we must be clear on: the charge that led to Joab’s execution was one of treason. He was not officially being killed for two questionable murders he committed early in David’s reign. In this respect, Wesselius is wrong in his assessment that “the grounds which they [David and Solomon] mentioned for condemning Joab to death were weak.”

Joab was executed because he was suspected of treason. The murders of Abner and Amasa were further justifications for it, but they

30. Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, 38.

were not the charges that led to his execution. From Solomon’s point of view, Joab’s brutal actions towards David’s enemies in Israel had made him look bad, and therefore had detrimental political ramifications throughout his reign. It was therefore imperative that Solomon, at the beginning of his reign, clear David from any suspicion of murdering Abner, the commander of northern Israel who originally supported Ishbaal, and Amasa, the Judean commander of Absalom’s army, in order to try to bring peace to a kingdom that had been on the brink of chaos for over forty years. In a very pragmatic way, one can see that executing Joab could very well satisfy certain northern factions and southern factions who were resistant to the Davidic House precisely because of what was perceived to be unjust murders of their former commanders. Solomon’s decision to execute Joab, in the sanctuary nonetheless, though it may seem bloody to us, was to a certain extent politically justified, especially if Joab was indeed involved in a plot with Adonijah and Abiathar to overthrow Solomon.

Ultimately, the blood Joab shed came back on his head. He was killed for the very same suspicions he held against Abner and Amasa. In all three cases, there was the perception of treason and disloyalty that we will never be able either to discount or verify, as well as an obvious political and personal benefit for the murderer in each case. Nevertheless, the question of loyalty, and thus the legitimacy of each murder, ultimately remains unanswered and unanswerable. One thing is certain, though: Joab was eventually dealt with in the exact way that he had acted toward Abner and Amasa. As Provan has stated, “Joab had lived by the sword, killing . . . two army commanders who happened to be his professional rivals. Now he dies by the sword and is immediately replaced by his killer as commander of the army.”

Gunn, too, sees the poetic justice in Joab’s death, which he describes as “a fitting one for a man who epitomized the use of violent means in the cause of political expediency and who happens now to be on the losing side, the story as it concerns him having come full circle.” Eschelbach puts it this way: “The narrator forces the reader to consider the justice of Joab’s fate as irony. The loyal general who protected the lives of many against traitors now receives the condemnation of a traitor and has no one to protect him.” Ultimately, Joab eventually got what he gave out.

32. Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, 39.
34. Eschelbach, Has Joab Foiled David? 64.
CONCLUSIONS

In the realm of politics and warfare, there are rarely ever black and white issues. One man’s hero is another man’s war criminal, and those assessments are often based on incomplete information. The fascinating thing about the account of Solomon’s execution of Joab (along with the accounts of Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa) is that the biblical text does not attempt to cover over those informational gaps and give a whitewashed version of the events in question. Instead of taking the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the text chooses to relate these episodes from a limited perspective, thus leaving the reader to wrestle with the messy and difficult decisions that faced David, Joab, and Solomon.

What the account of Solomon’s execution of Joab reveals is that the justification for the execution, as well as the murders of Abner and Amasa, entirely depended upon the perspective of the character in question. Scholars are rightly suspicious of Solomon’s execution of Joab, but they should be wary of condemning him.\(^35\) The politics of warfare will always be an ugly business, and in the larger scheme of things, no one is completely free from bloodguilt in those kinds of situations. Such seems to be the testimony of 1 Kgs 1–2.

One thing is certain, though. All three episodes discussed in this article were written in such a way as to invite the reader to ask, “What if?” If Joab had not killed Abner, and if Abner was deceiving David, would it have led to more bloodshed? If Joab had not killed Amasa, and if Amasa really was a traitor, would it have led to more bloodshed? If Solomon had not killed Joab, and if Joab really was trying to overthrow Solomon, would it have led to more bloodshed? Conversely, if Joab had not killed Abner and Amasa, and both men really were trustworthy, would they have helped bring peace and unity to the kingdom?

These questions simply cannot be answered, though, because ultimately they are speculative. The author instead has chosen to display the confusing and clouded reality that surrounded Solomon’s rise to the throne. By means of analogy, we can look at the current Israeli-Palestinian crisis. What would happen if Israel pulled completely out of the occupied territories? One might hope that this would bring peace to the region, but at the same time, one would be justified in worrying that the Hamas world would seize the opportunity to try to eliminate the nation of Israel. At the same time, what would happen if Israel decided to launch a full-scale offensive against the Gaza Strip and the West Bank?

\(^{35}\) For that matter, the same goes for Joab. As Gunn states, Joab “is no more villain than he is hero. The fraudulent blacks and whites against which he is finally pictured serve only to highlight the greyness of those who do the picturing” (The Story of David, 108).
and try to completely wipe out Hamas? Some might think this would solve the problem once and for all, but most would probably think it would spark a greater war with the Arab world. Either decision could be disastrous. In reality, it is difficult to completely trust the leaders on either side in the conflict, for both have political agendas and personal motives that often cannot be distinguished from each other. Whatever each side does will be praised by some and condemned by others. In the real world, political decisions are rarely black and white. Such is the situation we see in Solomon’s execution of Joab, as well as Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa, where personal agendas and political concerns seemed to intertwine into one.

In the end, we come back to the question as to whether or not Solomon’s execution of Joab was justified. Should we agree with Seow when he states, “Solomon’s actions—even if politically and legally justifiable—are morally reprehensible”? Or does the biblical text even allow us to come to a conclusion either way? Iain Provan is quite correct to ask the question, “Is morality entirely a matter of technicalities?” The answer is of course not. Yet it is quite easy to make moral judgments when one is watching from the sidelines. When one is right in the middle of a political and military crisis that can blow up at any given moment, the distinctions are not so clear. It seems that the biblical writer thought Joab’s execution was justified, and that Joab’s murders of Abner and Amasa were truly reprehensible. At the same time, though, the biblical writer is also honest enough to provide us with information to the contrary, and thus admitting his own limited perspective. The reader is left with a stark picture of reality, and a realization that although we may be forced to make decisions based on our own limited perspectives, and although those decisions may be praised by some and condemned by others, we must trust ourselves to the God who sees everything, and pray that we will be shown grace for any evil that may come about because of our ignorance.

Although 1 Kgs 1–2 attempts to make sense of the mess ironically called the “United Kingdom of Israel” and explain the sordid events that took place within it, perhaps its greatest achievement is that it paints a very realistic picture of that mess, and does not allow us to naively think that anyone involved was perfect and completely good and honorable. Therefore, we are challenged to extend a certain amount of grace to these characters, for if we were in their shoes, we would be forced to make those very same controversial decisions, and we would


37. Provan, 1 and 2 Kings, 40.
inevitably stand condemned by someone. We would inevitably find ourselves standing with blood on our hands before God himself, and hoping that God would extend His grace to us. Such is the ultimate lesson surrounding this most troubling account of Solomon’s execution of Joab.
DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE
IN DEUTERONOMY 24:1–4

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Deuteronomy 24:1–4 records the only law in Deuteronomy on remarriage and has generated much discussion on the enigmatic phrase “nakedness of a thing” (24:1) as well as the purpose for the creation of the law. Yet, the long discussion on the purpose for the creation of the law seems to have been misguided. Scholars have confused the rationale behind the law with the purpose for the creation of the law. In seeking the purpose of the law, interpreters have sought the meaning of “nakedness of a thing” and the rationale behind labeling the woman’s actions an “abomination” (24:4). They have ignored the explicitly stated purpose of the law in verse 4. The primary concern of this law on divorce and remarriage is to protect the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh, thereby protecting Israel’s position in their inherited land of Canaan. While the rationale behind the law is important for biblical ethics, the purpose for the law contributes to the Deuteronomic theme of blessing and curse as it relates to Israel’s covenantal obedience.

KEY WORDS: Divorce, Remarriage, Adultery, Law, Covenant, Deuteronomy

INTRODUCTION

Deuteronomy 24:1–4 is one of several laws in Deuteronomy that speak of divorce, but it is the only law that specifically deals with remarriage. Historically, the passage has been interpreted anthropocentrically in order to derive ethical teaching for divorce and remarriage. Yet various exegetical issues have created conflicting conclusions. What is the meaning of the “nakedness of a thing” (עררות דבר) in verse 1? Why is a woman’s third marriage an abomination if the bridegroom is the first husband who divorced her (Deut 24:4)? These issues are indeed important for understanding the passage, but they have dominated the discussion and created an anthropocentric understanding of the law. One
aspect that seems to have been overlooked in the discussion on this passage is the biblical-theological aspect of the relationship between law-keeping and covenant; between Israel’s obedience to Yahweh’s law and covenant safety in Canaan. The Deuteronomic perspective of blessing and curse is a bigger factor in 24:1–4 than has been acknowledged in former discussions. This perspective is particularly evident in the phrase “and you shall not defile the land which the LORD your God is about to give to you as an inheritance” (24:4),1 which is generally neglected and treated as an aside. We suggest that the anthropocentric focus on 24:1–4 is unbalanced and a Deuteronomic covenantal framework provides a better perspective on the theological significance of this law.

One reason for the overly anthropocentric focus of 24:1–4 and the neglect of the defilement of the land is that scholars have failed to make a distinction between the “rationale behind the law” and the “purpose of the law.” The rationale behind the law answers the question, “what makes the described action illegal?” Thus, the rationale behind this law explains why the woman’s action is an abomination. The purpose of the law answers the question, “what is this law trying to prevent?” Thus, the purpose of the law in 24:1–4 is the overarching concern for preventing something detrimental. Almost all those involved in the discussion on this law have confused the two by asserting that the purpose of the law is to prevent the abomination described. This elevates the anthropocentric element (the abomination of the woman) to the status of “overarching concern,” and asserts that the purpose of the law is to prevent the abomination. With this distinction between “rationale” and “purpose” in mind, part two will discuss the law and its interpretation. Part three will determine the rationale behind the law while part four will determine the purpose of the law. Part four will include a survey of the discussion on the purpose of the law from the time of C. F. Keil to the present, although according to the definitions here each scholar was actually attempting to find the rationale. Part four will then attempt to refocus the discussion by focusing on the explicitly stated purpose in 24:4, which has so often been relegated to a Deuteronomic footnote.

CONCENTIONS OF APPLICABILITY (24:1–3)

Grammatically, verses 1–4 form one long conditional sentence with verses 1–3 acting as the protasis and verse 4 as the apodosis.2 If the

1. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise specified.

2. Verses 1–3 contain twelve consecutive waw conjunctions, while verse 4 begins with the negative command, לא יכהל (“he shall not take”). KJV translates an apodosis into
woman commits the specific acts explicated in 24:1–3, then her actions are an abomination (24:4). This is important for understanding the law correctly because of the multiple inferences that may be drawn. First, this means that the law is addressing only a very specific situation, i.e., it is not a broad law on divorce and remarriage. The law only addresses the specific situation in which all conditions described in verses 1–3 are met. For this law to apply, a woman must have been married, divorced, remarried to a second man different from her first husband, and then either divorced from or widowed by her second husband. Second, it follows that this law does not condone a man divorcing his wife, but presupposes that Israelites are already doing so. Third, that this law addresses such a specific situation shows that it was probably already occurring among Israel in the wilderness.

Since the law presupposes the practice of divorce among the Israelites, this passage exhibits the standard method of divorce in the nation. First, the wife would fail to find favor in the husband’s eyes. The cause would be that he had found nakedness of

verse 1, “let him write her a bill of divorcement.” But modern interpreters unanimously understand verses 1–3 to be the protasis and verse 4 to be the apodosis, which is the most natural way to take the string of waw conjunctions. So also Joe M. Sprinkle, who states “I have not run across any modern interpreter who defends the KJV. Deuteronomy 24:1–4 appears to be a single complex law rather than two laws (as the KJV makes it)” (“Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage,” JETS 40 [1997], 529).


The כי at the beginning of verse 1 is translated variously as temporal (“when”; ESV, KJV, NAU), conditional (“if”; CSB, NET, NIV), and hypothetically (“suppose”; NLT; NRS). The temporal translation “when” probably renders a better sense than “if” or “suppose,” since the latter two connote a situation which may not have actually been occurring among the people (so also Guenther, “Interpreting the Silences,” 43). This situation probably was occurring, and thus the need to address it.

a thing," which shall be explained below. Second, if this “indecency” was found in her and the husband decided to divorce her, he had to write her a certificate of divorce (ספר כריתת). The same construction is used in Jer 3:8 and Isa 50:1 to refer to a certificate of divorce that the LORD handed to Israel because of her idolatry. This role of the man as the sole initiator of divorce is rare, if not unique, in the ancient Near East (ANE).

Also of note is that, under these conditions, the divorce could be carried out without the consent of the wife. In Judaism, this remained the case until the twelfth century, when Jewish law declared that divorce would be predicated upon the consent of the couple. Third, the man must give the certificate of divorce “into her hand” (Deut 24:1). This bill of divorce would act as protection for the woman if she decided to remarry in that it would be proof she was not committing adultery on her first husband. This is incredibly important since the legal punishment for adultery was the death penalty (Deut 22:22). The certificate of divorce therefore acted as a humanitarian form of protection for a divorced woman in case her former husband wanted to exact some sort of revenge by accusing her of adultery with her second husband. Fourth, after receiving the certificate of divorce, the woman would be sent out from the husband’s home. For a woman to be sent from her husband’s home would be a societal and economic disaster for her, in addition to bringing upon her a great amount of shame. The woman would again become dependent upon her parents and would seek a new husband to reestablish her societal and financial security.

5. Jeffrey Tigay suggests that, since דברי הרידה means literally “severance,” this could refer to the ceremonial act of divorce in the ancient Near East in which a man would cut the wife’s hem or garment to pictorially signify their divorce (Deuteronomy = [Devarim]: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation [The JPS Torah Commentary Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996], 221ff.; followed by Christensen, Deuteronomy, 567). Tigay only considers this “plausible,” however, but it remains a tantalizing suggestion which does not affect the meaning either way.


8. This remains Jewish law to this day (Reuven Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” JJS 17 [1966], 1).


If a husband could divorce his wife because he found in her "nakedness of a thing"; 24:1), what does this mean? This phrase has historically been understood as adultery, physical bodily defects or ailments, public sexual shame, or even any arbitrary reason the husband wishes. The Septuagint translates the phrase ἀσχήμων πρᾶγμα ("shameful thing"), suggesting a more active understanding of the phrase (i.e., the woman has done something shameful or indecent). The same phrase is used in Sus 1:63 (Theodotian revision): “therefore Chelcius and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, with Joacim her husband, and all the kindred, because there was no ἀσχήμων πρᾶγμα found in her.” The allusion to Deut 24:1 is unmistakable. In the context of Susanna, the ἀσχήμων πρᾶγμα ("shameful thing") refers to adultery, which is therefore the probable meaning that the author of Susanna attaches to the phrase in Deut 24:1.

The rabbinical schools of Hillel and Shammin took opposite positions on their interpretation of the phrase. Shammin’s school interpreted the phrase narrowly. Based on Leviticus’ description of incest as uncovering a relative’s ἐναύτη ("nakedness"), they believed this phrase should be understood as denoting sexually promiscuous or indecent behavior. Hillel’s school, along with Josephus and Rabbi Akiba, interpreted the phrase widely, allowing for a man to divorce his wife for any reason, even burning his food.

Modern commentators are just as divided on the meaning of the phrase. S. R. Driver believes this cannot mean adultery since that would require the death penalty (Deut 22:22). Since the use of the phrase in

11. All Septuagint texts are taken from Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009 [1851]).

12. The word ἀσχήμων denotes something that is “not openly done, displayed, or discussed in reserved society because it is considered ‘shameful, unpresentable, indecent,’ or ‘unmentionable’” and is used in such a way in 1 Cor 12:23 (Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, ed. Frederick W. Danker, William Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], s.v. “ἀσχήμων”). The word ἀσχήμων means “deed, thing, event, occurrence, matter” (ibid., s.v. “πρᾶγμα”).

13. ὅτι ἐδέχεται ἐν αὐτῇ ἄσχημον πρᾶγμα (Deut 24:1)
ὅτι οὐχ ἐδέχθη ἐν αὐτῇ ἄσχημον πρᾶγμα (Sus 1:63)

14. Tigay, Deuteronomy, 221.

15. Driver, Deuteronomy, 270; Tigay, Deuteronomy, 221.; cf. Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” 3. It was not until Rabbenu Gershom (ca. 960–1028) that a takkanah (rabbinic enactment) was issued to limit divorce to reasonably acceptable reasons, e.g. adultery or apostasy (Tigay, Deuteronomy, 221).
Deut 23:14 denotes something unbecoming rather than immoral, this usage should carry the same connotations. He offers “immodest/indecent behavior” as the proper translation. Peter Craigie says this obscure phrase may have been a legal expression, but we cannot be sure. The parallel use in 23:14 suggests that here it also denotes something impure, but cannot mean adultery since that was punishable by death. It could possibly be a physical deficiency in the woman, such as an unpleasing bodily appearance or barrenness. Jeffrey Tigay states that, since the phrase מארן ביה (“finds in her”) in 24:1 refers to finding some sort of conduct (1 Sam 29:3, 6, 8; 2 Kgs 17:4; cf. 1 Sam 12:5), then the phrase “nakedness of a thing” probably refers to some sort of obnoxious conduct, “not to an unpleasant quality or physical feature.” Duane Christensen believes the expression is here equivalent to the English “caught with one’s pants down.” He interpretively translates the phrase “caught with her pudenda exposed,” because he believes the phrase indicates a public shame to which the woman is exposed. Eugene Merrill believes this phrase refers to adultery. This wide diversity of opinions shows that no consensus has yet been reached.


17Craigie, Deuteronomy, 305; so also Cairns, Word and Presence, 210; Tigay, Deuteronomy, 221.

18. Tigay, Deuteronomy, 221, 386 n. 6.

19. Ibid., 221.

20. Christensen, Deuteronomy, 566.

21. Merrill, Deuteronomy, 315f.

22. John Murray suggests “some kind of shameful conduct connected with sex life” (“Divorce. 1,” WTJ 9 [1946], 42). Anthony Phillips suggests any unbecoming thing in a woman except adultery (“Another Look at Adultery,” JSOT 20 [1981], 14). Duane Warden suggests sexual misconduct (“The Words of Jesus on Divorce,” ResQ 39 [1997], 146). Anthony Garrett creatively suggests the phrase should be translated “an unclean word” and posits a scenario in which the woman proposes indecent sexual acts to the first husband, for which he is then permitted to divorce her (“A New Understanding of the Divorce and Remarriage Legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1–4,” JBQ 39 [2011], 248). The second husband, who would have investigated her sexual past, is unconcerned with her sexual perversion and consents to marry her and perform such acts, which defiles the woman. If the first husband remarried her, he would be consenting to the very proposition for which she was originally sent away and then defiled with the second husband. This remarriage would thus be an abomination. Garrett’s reconstruction does fit well the details of the law, but it is most likely that מארן ביה (“nakedness of a thing”) should be translated the same in Deut 23:14 and 24:1. Garrett acknowledges this objection but notes that the verbs are different: the “nakedness of a thing” is “seen” (ראה) in Deut 23:14 and
The most likely understanding of this phrase seems to be some sort of abnormal or displeasing physical or physiological abnormality in the woman.\(^{23}\) It seems clear that this phrase cannot mean adultery since the death penalty would be required (Deut 22:22).\(^{24}\) Reuven Yaron rightly criticizes those who would understand this phrase to mean adultery in order to harmonize this law with Jesus’ exception clauses in Matt 5:32 and 19:9.\(^{25}\) Also, since the phrase in Deut 23:14 denotes “found” (אמצ) in 24:1 (ibid., 249). But the verb “to hear” in 24:1 would fit Garrett’s proposal better; the verb “found” suggests the discovery of some behavior or physical abnormality. Moreover, Guenther argues that since legal terminology is precise, the term must have the same meaning in 23:14 and 24:1 (“Interpreting the Silences,” 46). Guenther argues the phrase refers to incest (ibid.).

23. So also Daniel I. Block, who believes this refers to some kind of physical issue, such as menstrual irregularity (cf. Mark 5:25–34) (“‘You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife’: A Study in Deuteronomistic Domestic Ideology,” \textit{JETS} 53 [2010], 469). Laney also mentions the possibility, but remains undecided (“Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Issue of Divorce,” 5).


25. Merrill argues that because Jesus refers to this passage and uses the Greek word πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) in the exception clauses in Matt 5:32 and 19:9, the phrase עירום דבר should be taken to mean “adultery,” even if not completely synonymous with the term (Merrill, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 315). This view is mistaken for two reasons. First, the term πορνεία should not be understood in Matt 5:32 and 19:9 to mean “adultery.” Πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) and μοικεία (“adultery”) occur side by side in Matt 15:19, while πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) occurs side by side with μοικύω (“commit adultery”) in 5:32. Jesus clearly distinguishes the two word groups, with μοικεία referring to adultery in a marital context and πορνεία referring to a more general sexual immorality, probably in a betrothal context. Since Merrill himself notes that a betrothal period in Jewish thought was tantamount to marriage itself, Matthew could validly use the word ἀπολύω (“to release,” “to divorce”) to refer to a man disposing of his betrothed (see BDAG s.v. ἀπολύω, which says that the construction ἀπολύω with τὴν γυναῖκα [“woman,” “wife”] as the object means “to divorce one’s wife, or betrothed” [emphasis added]).

Second, the use of the terms πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) and עירום דבר (“nakedness of a thing”) are different in their respective contexts and Jesus did not intend to equate them. The “nakedness of a thing” is something for which Moses says a man might divorce his wife, but πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) is something for which Jesus gives permission to divorce one’s betrothed. In other words, Moses is not giving the men permission to divorce their wives because of the “nakedness of a thing,” but Jesus is giving men permission to divorce their betrothed in the case of πορνεία (“sexual immorality”).
something indecent and lacks any sort of sexual connotation, the phrase here should not be understood as any sort of sexual misbehavior. If this understanding is correct, then males in ancient Israel had a great deal of freedom in initiating a divorce. A man had only to find some sort of physical or physiological displeasure or abnormality in his wife in order to divorce her. This may have had humanly noble motivations, such as allowing for a man to find a new wife if he marries a barren women who could not produce an heir for him. Surely, however, it was used with evil and selfish motivations.

It is because of the evils of divorce that it must be recognized that this law does not give a man the legal right to divorce when he finds some indecency in her. Rather, the law only recognizes what is already an allowed practice in Israel due to the hardness of their hearts (cf. Matt 19:8). From the beginning, God’s plan was for one man and one woman to be married by an unbreakable covenant, whereby they become one flesh (Gen 2:24). Jesus correctly expressed God’s will concerning marriage: “what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt 19:6).

**RATIONALE BEHIND THE LAW**

Verse 4 contains the apodosis of the lengthy conditional sentence that makes up verses 1–4. The apodosis contains the actual injunction that is mandated under the conditions of the protasis: the woman who has been divorced, then married to another man, and then divorced from or widowed by the second husband must not be remarried to her first husband. The reason that the woman must not remarry her first husband is that the woman has become defiled and for her to remarry her first husband would be an abomination before the LORD. This would defile the land which the LORD promised to the forefathers and was about to give to the people of Israel. But why is the woman’s action considered an abomination before the LORD? The answer to this question is what

26. Contra Merrill, who believes the abomination refers to the woman because she has become an adulteress (ibid., 318). The woman’s action should be understood as the abomination since (that”) is used rather than a relative pronoun (who) or the word “she”. Virtually all translations render the phrase “that is an abomination,” not “she is an abomination.”

27. At the time of Moses’ speeches to the people of Israel, he was standing on the region opposite the Jordan (Deut 1:1). The wilderness wanderings had ended and it was time for Israel to conquer the land. Thus, the participial forms of (to give”) that occur in the frequent expression “which the LORD is about to give to you” can be translated as an imminent action (e.g., Deut 1:20; 1:25; 2:29; etc.).
shall be considered the rationale behind the law.

The first issue to discuss is the nature of the defilement of the woman. After the woman’s second divorce, the first husband may not marry her again “after she has been defiled, because (כ) that is an abomination (תועבה) before the LORD” (Deut 24:4). It must be recognized that the abominable act should not be equated with the defilement of the woman. While the abominable act is the remarriage to the first husband, it should be recognized for two reasons that the defilement of the woman occurs through the second marriage. First, the defilement cannot occur by divorce (the first or second divorce), or else the law would have to acknowledge the first divorce to be defilement and thereby restrict all second marriages. Second, the defilement also cannot be the remarriage to the first husband since the preposition אחר in 24:4 shows that the remarriage to the first husband occurs “after” the defilement. The only option left is that the defilement occurs through the second marriage.

The defilement, which occurs through the second marriage, is based on the Hebrew concept of marriage. As stated earlier, marriage makes a man and a woman one flesh and for a woman to unite with a man other than her one-flesh-husband, even after divorce, is defilement. Precluding the situation of πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) of which Jesus speaks in Matt 5:32; 19:9, if a man divorces his wife and marries another woman he commits adultery. If it is considered that divorce was only allowed in Israel because of the hardness of their hearts (Matt 19:8) and it was never God’s intention (Matt 19:4–6), Jesus’s

28. Contra Cairns, who incorrectly believes the defilement is caused by one of the divorces rather than one of the marriages, which causes him to interpret “defiled” as meaning “taboo”—“by virtue of the divorce she is now ‘forbidden’ to her first husband” (Word and Presence, 211). Christensen believes this refers to the woman in relation to the former husband rather than to the latter husband, but gives no argument (Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12, 567).

29. Contra Craigie, Deuteronomy, 305. Laney makes the same point (“Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Issue of Divorce,” 8).

30. C. F. Keil (The Pentateuch [trans. James Martin; Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006], on Deut 24:1–5) and Driver (Deuteronomy, 272) both understand the second marriage to be the defilement, although Keil supplies no arguments and Driver simply quotes Keil. Murray concludes more tentatively that, although it is uncertain whether the second marriage defiles the woman, what is certain is that “the moment return [to the first husband] is envisaged, then, with reference to the first husband, the woman has been defiled (“Divorce. 1,” 45). But the text only says “she has been defiled” and does not seem to suggest that her decision to return to the first husband is what defiles her.

teaching is in perfect harmony with the teaching of Deuteronomy. It seems that, according to Moses and Jesus, a law court may dissolve an earthly marital contract with a “certificate of divorce,” but this does not dissolve the metaphysical entity that the husband and wife have become as “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Otherwise, how could the second marriage be considered “defilement” (Deut 24:4) or “adultery” (Matt 19:9)? It then makes sense why Deut 24:4 uses נטמא (“to be unclean, defiled”) to speak of the second marriage, the same verb used in Lev 18:20 and Num 5:13, 20, 28ff to speak of adultery.

The biggest problem for understanding the second marriage as the defilement is why the remarriage to the first husband is prohibited rather than the second marriage (or both). First, as already stated, the law does not condone the second marriage, but simply describes it as a condition already occurring. Second, the law presupposes that the second marriage defiles the woman and therefore has implicitly criticized the practice. Third, since the law is concerned with protecting Israel’s covenant and their position in the land (see “Purpose of the Law” below), this law seeks to prohibit the abomination that defiles the land. This abomination is the remarriage to the first husband, not the second marriage. But why is the third marriage considered morally worse than the second marriage?

While the second marriage is considered tantamount to adultery, the effect of the remarriage to the first husband is twofold. First, it increases the defilement of the woman, who has now been divorced and remarried twice. Second, the remarriage makes the analogy of adultery

32. Our point here is not to use Matthew 19 to interpret Deuteronomy 24, as Merill has done (see note 26), but to show that Jesus holds to the same underlying principle of the permanence of the “one flesh” union that Deuteronomy 24 presupposes. We do, however, agree with and defend Jesus’ authoritative interpretation of Gen 2:24, from which he derives both this belief on the permanence of the one-flesh union as well as the conclusion that divorce was not originally intended in God’s plan for marriage but was allowed because of the hardness of man’s heart (Matt 19:8f.).

33. If it is objected that this would be at odds with Jesus “excusing” divorce in the case of πορνεία (“sexual immorality”), see n. 30 above for the view that πορνεία refers to sexual immorality or promiscuity by a betrothed man or woman. During the betrothal period, the couple would not yet have become one flesh and could therefore “divorce” and marry a different partner without committing adultery.


35. Similarly, ibid., 6f.

complete and is therefore morally worse than the second marriage.\textsuperscript{37} The woman, by analogy, would be like a wife who slept with another man and then returned to her husband to sleep with him again. The act of returning to the first husband is what makes the analogy of adultery complete and is therefore the reason the offense of the third marriage is greater than the offense of the second marriage, meriting the status of “abomination before the LORD.” The rationale behind the law is therefore the double defilement of the woman as well as a complete analogy between, on the one hand, the woman’s action in Deut 24:1–4, and on the other hand, a woman who commits adultery and subsequently returns to and sleeps with her husband.

\textbf{PURPOSE OF THE LAW}

As already stated, most scholars in discussing the purpose of this law have looked for a utilitarian, anthropocentric motivation outside of the text for the creation of the law. Driver\textsuperscript{38} follows C. F. Keil,\textsuperscript{39} who believes that the woman’s marriage to a second man after a divorce from the first is tantamount to adultery. No argumentation is given to prove this claim, but they do mention that this paves the way for Jesus’s teaching on second marriages as adultery (Luke 16:18/Matt 19:9/Mark 10:11–12). Based upon this claim, Driver, again following Keil almost exactly, believes that the purpose of the law was (1) to prevent hasty divorces, (2) to cause a husband to consider taking his divorced wife back before she is married to another, and (3) to keep the woman from desiring her first husband over her second if she is indeed married to a second husband.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, according to Keil and Driver, this law functions with humanitarian concerns in order to improve the condition of Israelite society.

Yaron critiques this common view by claiming that the law would not have such an effect since a man would not weigh the legal consequences before dissolving a marriage. Rather, because of his emotional negativity toward his wife, he would weigh the practical reasons for divorce and would even be clouded in judgment by his anger.

\textsuperscript{37} Craigie, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 305, although he mistakenly believes the third marriage is what defiles the woman.

\textsuperscript{38} Driver, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 272.


\textsuperscript{40} Driver, \textit{Deuteronomy}, 272.
or frustration with his wife.\textsuperscript{41} He critiques the view that connects the “nakedness of a thing” with adultery because it is typically done by “retroject[ing] the New testament doctrine of indissolubility into biblical law,”\textsuperscript{42} mistakenly citing Keil and Driver as examples.\textsuperscript{43} He then makes his suggestion that the passage has not to do with adultery, but with the realm of incest. He describes the purpose of laws against incest as protecting the family from sexual tension that may disrupt it. He believes this law likewise seeks to protect the family from sexual tension that may disrupt it by prohibiting remarriage to the first husband. This prohibition protects the second marriage from sexual tension that may arise from the wife’s desire to return to the first husband or from the second husband’s jealousy and/or fear over the first husband.\textsuperscript{44}

Yaron is correctly criticized by C. M. Carmichael\textsuperscript{45} (followed by Gordon Wenham\textsuperscript{46}) for neglecting the case in which the second husband dies. There is no need for the law to protect the second marriage if it has been dissolved through death.

Wenham,\textsuperscript{47} following Yaron in connecting this passage to the incest laws in Lev 18 and 20, demonstrates that the incest laws prohibited marriages both to first and second-degree consanguines\textsuperscript{48} and to affines.\textsuperscript{49} Marriage to affines is prohibited in Lev 18 and 20 only in the case that the consanguine has died, otherwise adultery would be the issue. A man could not marry an affine whose spouse had died because the affine had become one flesh with their spouse, thus becoming a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” 5.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 7f.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Yaron is actually confused on this point. Keil and Driver believe that the woman has become defiled (24:4) through her divorce and subsequent marriage to another man, which is tantamount to adultery. Neither Keil nor Driver believes the “nakedness of a thing” refers to adultery because the penalty for adultery was death.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” 8.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Wenham, “The Restoration of Marriage Reconsidered,” 37.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 38f.
\item \textsuperscript{48} First degree consanguines would be mother, father, sister, etc., while second degree consanguines would be aunt, grand-daughter, uncle, etc.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Affines are in-laws and step relatives, e.g., the wife of a man’s brother.
\end{itemize}
consanguine with the man still alive. This logic is, in Wenham’s judgment, applied in the Deuteronomistic law. When divorce occurs, it does not dissolve the very close relationship that has been created by the marriage. She is in effect still the “sister” of the first husband.⁵⁰ For the two to remarry would then be tantamount to incest, which would certainly be an abomination before the LORD and would defile the land. The weakness of Wenham’s argument is that it does not take into account the second husband at all. Why even mention the second husband in the law if the true intent is to prevent any remarriage whatsoever?

Daniel Block finds the purpose of the law to be the protection of women from the abuse of men.⁵¹ This, however, fails to account for the description of the remarriage to the first husband as an “abomination” and why the woman obtains the status of “defiled” through her second marriage.

Bruce Wells suggests that the purpose of the law was to protect the woman from abuse by the first husband in his attempt to finagle monetary gain.⁵² According to Wells, due to the “nakedness of a thing,” the first husband would get to keep the wedding dowry. The divorced woman would then be married to a second man, her parents likely paying the dowry again. Since the end of the second marriage occurs through divorce or death of the husband, Wells supposes that this divorce must be arbitrary in either case and the woman would therefore receive back her wedding dowry as well as an additional amount from the husband. With this newly amassed wealth, if the woman remarried her first husband, he would now own two wedding dowries and divorce money from the second husband. The problem with Wells’s suggestion is that his explanation of circumstances under which the woman would receive back her wedding dowry and an additional divorce payment originates in ANE law.⁵³ He supposes that Israel followed the other ANE societies in this practice, which cannot be proven. He also supposes that the second divorce had to be arbitrary, but it is grammatically possible that the law also encompasses a situation in which the second husband also found the

⁵⁰. Wenham suggests that the Patriarchs’ description of their wives as their sisters was a more commonplace practice in the ANE; cf. Prov 7:4; Song 4:9f., 12; 5:1f.


⁵³. Ibid., 140f.
“nakedness of a thing” in her. This theory also fails to explain why the woman has become defiled, why the remarriage is an abomination, and why the land becomes defiled as a result. Thus Wells’ explanation of the rationale of the law solely in terms of protecting the woman from man’s financial ambition makes too many assumptions and fails to explain (or even mention) the important parts of the text.

As is evident, the search for the purpose of the law has generated great interest among interpreters. This entire conversation, however, seems misguided. The purpose of Israel’s covenantal law in Deuteronomy was to protect Israel’s covenant and, ultimately, their position and safety in the land of Israel. In Deuteronomy, declaring “You shall not murder” was not primarily for the purpose of stating what is moral or even for the purpose of preventing murder. True, these are inevitable effects of such a declaration. However, within the framework of Deuteronomy, the primary purpose is to inform Israel how to protect their covenantal status and their safety in the land of Canaan. This understanding of the law in Deuteronomy accords with the explicitly stated purpose of the law in 24:4: “and you shall not defile (חטא) the land which the LORD your God is about to give to you as an inheritance.”

The law sought to protect the covenantal status of Israel and their position in the land by placing a restriction on an abominable practice that threatened that position. It is probably correct, therefore, for Walter Brueggemann to state that the contamination of the land is the central issue in this passage (cf. Lev 18:25, 27, 28; Num 35:34; Jer 2:7; Ezek 54. Driver in fact believes that the second divorce could not be arbitrary, but rather the procedures laid out in 24:1 are presupposed for the second divorce as well (Deuteronomy, 271).

55. Guenther’s article espouses the same view, but he is more careful to explain these three issues (“Interpreting the Silences”). However, his theory is still open to the other criticisms that apply to Wells. Also, his hypothetical reconstruction of the situation is highly speculative and improvable.

56. In Exod 20, the Ten Commandments are given in a context which implies that Israel is to follow God’s covenant commandments from an overflowing abundance of gratitude for God’s gracious redemption of Israel from Egypt. In Deuteronomy, however, 4:23ff. threatens exile and destruction for breaking the covenant and the curses of 27:15–26; 28:15–68 provide detailed consequences for abandoning God’s law and covenant. Therefore, because of the blessing-curse framework of Deuteronomy, the commands should be seen as primarily seeking to inform the people how to protect their covenantal status and their position in the land.

57. The verse is clear that the abominable act defiles the land. Thus, the כ (“for”) in verse 4 extends to the defilement clause: “for that is an abomination before the LORD and you shall not defile the land . . .”
Within Deuteronomy, the blessings and curses are intricately connected to the land. For disobedience to the covenant, God promises to exile Israel from their land and utterly destroy them (Deut 4:23ff.; 28:15–68). For obedience to the covenant, God promises blessing and fruitfulness in the land (Deut 4:40; 28:1–14). In the same vein, to defile the land was to defile the covenant, a consequence the law sought to avoid at all costs. That the curses enumerated in 28:15–68 are more than three times longer than the blessings in 28:1–14 shows the great concern for Israel’s obedience, so that the curses may not fall upon them. Also note that most of the curses in 28:15–68 are centered on the land, with the final curse being exile (28:68).

Exile from the land, which would be the eventual result of defiling the land, was devastating for the Israelites. Canaan was their “rest” (Ps 95:11), the end of forty years of wandering in the wilderness due to their rebellion (Num 14:21–23). God swore to Abraham that he would give the land to the patriarch’s descendants (Gen 17:8; Deut 1:8; 6:10; etc.). More importantly, however, Canaan was a restored Garden of Eden, the new location in which God would dwell with his people. This restored Edenic paradise was in fact one of the reasons God states that he brought them out of Egypt, “in order that [God] might dwell (לְשכַנְי) among them” (Exod 29:46). Expulsion from the land of Canaan, where God’s presence dwelt (in the tabernacle/temple), would be simultaneously a recapitulation of Adam’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

58. Walter Brueggemann, Deuteronomy (AOTC; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 236. Laney also seems to be an exception in that he notes briefly, “[T]he prohibition was designed to prevent the defilement of the land that God was giving His people as an inheritance” (“Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Issue of Divorce,” 9). But after noting that this is the purpose of the law, he begins a new section which seeks the purpose of the law, and concludes that the law had a two-fold anthropocentric concern (ibid., 13).

59. According to G. K. Beale, Genesis presents the garden as a sanctuary of God which was to house his presence, where he would dwell with man (The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God [NSBT; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004], 66–80); so also Gordon J. Wenham, The Pentateuch (Exploring the Old Testament; Vol. 1; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 23; Dumbrell, The Faith of Israel, 21. Gen 2:15 presents Adam as both a king (cf. Psalm 8) and a priest, the latter function being derived from the verbs שָבַע (“to serve”) and שָמַר (“to keep”). These two verbs, when occurring “together in the Old Testament (within an approximately 15-word range) . . . refer either to Israelites “serving” God and “guarding [keeping]” God’s word (approximately 10 times) or to priests who “keep” the “service” (or ‘charge’) of the tabernacle (see Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:13)” (Beale, Temple, 66f.).

60. Deuteronomy 12 speaks of the future place that God will choose to have his dwelling, a central location of worship (Jerusalem).
Eden and a reversal of Israel’s redemption out of the house of slavery (Egypt). Although Israel eventually is expelled from the land and destroyed by various enemies sent by the LORD,\textsuperscript{61} God causes the church to find its final resting place in his presence in the New Jerusalem described in Rev 21–22. In other words, the purpose of the law of Deut 24:1–4 will be fulfilled in the eschaton, when the faithful will find their covenant stipulations fulfilled by the righteousness of Christ and dwell with God forever, never to be exiled from their inheritance (cf. 1 Pet 1:4).

Interestingly, Deuteronomy does not provide any punishment for the violation of this law. Later Jewish law, however, does establish a legal retribution. According to \textit{m. Yebam}. 4.12 and \textit{t. Yebam}. 6.5, if the prohibited reunion occurs, they must separate. R. ‘Aquiva regarded the marriage as illegitimate and therefore did not require a bill of divorce, while the majority held the marriage to be legitimate and therefore required a bill of divorce.\textsuperscript{62} Philo, taking a more extreme position, ruled that both offenders should be killed.\textsuperscript{63} That punishment for violation of this law was only created later in Jewish law and was not given in Deuteronomy further suggests that the concern of this law was not so much horizontal (inter-human relations), but vertical (Israel-YHWH relation).

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Deut 24:1–4 describes a situation that was occurring in Israel in which women were compounding their defilement of a second marriage with the abominable act of a third marriage to their first husband. The law prohibits this remarriage because the effect of the abominable act is to defile the land of Canaan, Israel’s inheritance (24:4). Scholars have neglected this explicitly stated purpose in verse 4 because they have searched for a utilitarian, anthropocentric motivation outside of the text for the creation of this law. The main concern of this law is not with human relations, but with Israel’s covenant relationship with YHWH. While scholars inevitably deal with the rationale behind the law when seeking the purpose of the law, they have not clearly distinguished between the two. Driver and Keil, in this author’s judgment, have discerned the correct rationale behind the law, but have then sought the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item E.g., Isa 10:5ff.
\item Yaron, “The Restoration of Marriage,” 10f.
\item Philo, \textit{De spec. leg.} 3:31.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
purpose of the law solely in terms of horizontal relations rather than vertical relations. While the former should not be ruled out completely (there are obviously humanitarian concerns in Deuteronomy), the latter is the predominant concern of this law.

According to Deuteronomy, the defilement of the woman was an attack on the covenant between Israel and God and must be avoided at all costs, lest God bring upon them the curses of the covenant, exile them from the land, and utterly destroy them (Deut 4:23ff.; 27:15–26; 28:15–68; 28:68). The law presupposes that the second marriage of a divorced woman defiles her and by implication discourages it as well. However, as Keil wrote, Moses could not entirely stamp out all divorces by law because of the hardness of their hearts (Matt 19:8).64 Jesus later abolished all rights to divorce, except in the case of πορνεία (“sexual immorality”), the meaning of which is debated and which this paper was only allowed to discuss briefly. The end goal of the purpose of this law is finally realized in the permanent dwelling of God with his people in the New Jerusalem, from which he will never exile those who have entered the New Covenant through faith in Jesus Christ.

Critical Biblical Theology in a New Key
A Review Article*

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Der Gott der Lebendigen/God of the Living, co-authored by Hermann Spieckermann and Reinhard Feldmeier, succeeds in its attempt to demonstrate the value of writing a theology in which God’s attributes as described in biblical literature are the point of departure. The volume pays attention to commonalities and differences across the components of the canon. The authors conclude that the New Testament does not correct or relativize the witness to God of the Old Testament but “thickens” and particularizes it. The God who constantly gives life anew in the OT finds a congenial interpretation in the word and deed and cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The review essay nonetheless points out that this biblical theology fails to come to grips with biblical descriptions of God’s interaction with other beings of immense power, and fails to present a systematic exposition of the remedies God pursues to put an end to spirals of human violence. Three topics are singled out for extended discussion: vicarious suffering, forensic justification, and atonement. The shortcomings of the English edition of Der Gott der Lebendigen are judged significant enough to warrant a reissue in a corrected and more user-friendly version.

KEYWORDS: biblical theology, God’s attributes (middot), transcendent evil, wrath, mercy, vicarious suffering, forensic justification, atonement


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Der Gott der Lebendigen/God of the Living, hereafter GL, seeks to demonstrate the value of writing a theology in which God’s attributes as described in biblical literature are the point of departure. Its authors, Hermann Spieckermann, a professor of Old Testament at the Georg-August-Universität in Göttingen, and Reinhard Feldmeier, a professor of New Testament in the same location, succeed in that intent. Their description of the biblical God is attentive to theological commonalities and differences across the components of the canon. The point of departure of discussions of theological loci is most often an Old Testament text. Less often, a New Testament text, a classical text, or a contemporary question serves as a conversation starter. Almost without fail, the point of destination of discussions is a New Testament text. All roads lead to the New Testament in this theology. The NT is treated as the theological assembly point par excellence of previous theological reflection in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek literate Judaism. At the same time, the Old and New Testaments together are treated as a decisive critical standard against which current attempts to speak of God may be evaluated.

The New and Old Testaments, and the fields of academic study they have engendered, are understood to stand in need of each other if the goal is to do justice to the truth claims of the two-part Bible. For Spieckermann and Feldmeier, GL has the further objective of transforming disenchanted hearts into hearts burning with knowledge of the one who appeared to his disciples on the walk to Emmaus (pp. 11–12; ET p. 11). The God who encounters men and women in the Bible is understood by the volume’s authors to encounter men and women still. The authors’ approach is therefore far from being close-minded. They remain open to the possibility that biblical literature discloses truth. Moreover, they demonstrate repeatedly that the theology that finds expression in the Bible is not confined to it. For example, in their discussion of the affirmation of God as the Almighty, they point out that “it is not the mighty who speak of the Almighty. Victims, sufferers, who hold fast to the power of their God in their own powerlessness and who, thus, open themselves de profundis to a new confidence in God, cry out to the Almighty” (p. 177; ET p. 175; here and elsewhere, I tweak the ET for the sake of greater faithfulness to the Vorlage). The thesis is aptly illustrated from the Letter of Aristeas, Judith, Second Maccabees, and Third Maccabees (pp. 175–78; ET pp. 173–75). These texts are rightly seen as authentic witnesses to an understanding of divine power with
deep roots in the Tanakh/Old Testament. The authors’ conclusion, on a history-of-ideas analysis of Pantokrator in Greek-literate ancient Judaism, is trenchant and runs against current fashion: “Omnipotence receives emphasis as the condition for the possibility of God’s delivering activity. Criticism of the language of divine omnipotence as a deification of the power idea at the cost of human freedom and divine goodness inverts the point of biblical language about the Almighty into its opposite” (p. 178; ET p. 175). The same understanding of divine power as the power to save is shown to be characteristic of New Testament literature (pp. 180–99; ET pp. 178–96).

A variety of texts are treated in GL. The primary canon of reference in the case of the Old Testament is nonetheless the Tanakh of Jewish tradition. At the same time, considerable attention is paid to the Septuagint insofar as it represents the text form New Testament authors know and cite as Scripture (pp. 9–10; ET p. 9). The canon of reference in the case of the NT is the entire NT corpus, with ample attention given not only to all four Gospels and Paul but to Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 1 John, and the Apocalypse of John. The discussions of aspects of the theology of e.g., Tobit, Wisdom of Solomon, Serekh ha-Yaḥad, Psalms of Solomon, Joseph and Aseneth, Diogenetus, and Clement of Alexandria are germane to the discussion of theologoumena found in the OT more narrowly defined, and/or the NT.

GL traces the senses in which God in biblical literature is understood to be beyond our control (extra nos), yet always, even and especially under the form of its opposite (sub contraria specie), dedicated to our welfare (pro nobis), to the point of dwelling with us and within us (intra nos) and becoming one of us (incarnatio) (p. 247; ET pp. 244–45). The schema is flexible and allows the authors to offer a description of the God of the Old and New Testaments which does not drive unnecessary wedges between the divergent presentations found therein. The resultant biblical theology is not designed to prop up or shoot down a theology of later coinage; nor does it depend on the selection of one of the canons of the churches of the East and West over against another (p. 11, n.18; ET p. 10, n.18). At the same time, the discussion is framed in such a way that the continuity of biblical understandings of God’s attributes with those of Reformation and Catholic theology is evident.

A strength of GL is the careful way in which it discusses New Testament theology against the backdrop of Greco-Roman philosophical religion, and, to a lesser extent, texts which open a window onto the rich and variegated world of Greek-literate Judaism of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. For example, sources as various as the Letter of Aristeas, Jubilees, Josephus, Ps-Aristotle, Ovid, Macrobius, and Plutarch are cited.
in the treatment of Jewish monotheism and the trend toward monotheism in Greco-Roman philosophical religion (pp. 107–10: ET pp. 106–10).

Critical biblical theology is written with a sense of the reembedding of the Bible’s parts in metanarratives both like and unlike the metanarratives which engendered the parts in the first place. The embedment of biblical literature in more or less compatible metanarratives continues to this day. GL reads the biblical witness to God from within a specific set of cultural loyalties yet often succeeds in noting the extent to which distinct witnesses to that God within the biblical corpus cannot be completely harmonized with the tradition of reference of the authors, or with each other. GL’s lack of a need to harmonize, along with a willingness not to erect false antitheses, is a refreshing combination.

GL is sensitive to the rootedness of diverse theological traditions in biblical literature, even if its own indebtedness to an understanding and experience of God rooted in a form of Christianity determined by the Reformation is everywhere evident. GL is a demonstration of the fact that the metanarrative of one’s own tradition, insofar as it depends on a particular canon of reference received in text-forms of a particular type, need not lead to the anathematization of variant canons of reference, variant text types, and variant emphases.

Along the same lines, GL might have fleshed out the extent to which the doctrine of God (Gotteslehre) of New Testament Christianity dovetails with that of emergent normative Judaism of the same and later periods and of Judaism to the present. The literature preserved by the Sages, the targumim, midrashim, piyyutim, talmudim, and hekhalot literature, represent a theological assembly point in its own right, with wide-ranging commonalities and some crucial differences with the doctrine of God of Christianity. In that case the voices of Maimonides, Nachmanides, Buber, Rosenzweig, Heschel, Levinas, and Soloveitchik might have come to expression in the exposition, alongside the voices of Aquinas, Bonaventure, Luther, Calvin, Barth, Bonhoeffer, C. S. Lewis, and Pope Benedict. The volume would have benefitted from the concourse of a Jewish scholar with sufficient expertise in the Tanakh, Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament, the literature of the Sages, and Jewish thought to the present.¹ My point, stated in more general terms, is that the method employed in GL lends itself to extensions in more than one direction.

GL’s fundamental thesis is clear: the creator God who gives life anew by making the dead alive, to which the Old Testament bears

witness, found a congenial interpretation in the word and deed and cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The New Testament witness to said God does not correct or relativize the Old Testament witness. The New Testament “thickens” or particularizes the description of God found in the Old (p. 537; ET p. 541).

If the understandings of God contained in the Old and New Testaments hang together as well as Spieckermann and Feldmeier claim they do, GL effectively calls into question a great deal of fashionable theology and anti-theology, lowbrow and middlebrow dispensationalism; highbrow liberal theology à la Adolf von Harnack (the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men); and anti-theology à la Richard Dawkins for whom especially the God of the Old Testament is a moral monster. In my judgment, GL makes a persuasive case for theological continuity across the component parts of the Christian Bible; beyond that, across a larger corpus of literature treasured by Jews and/or Christians in Hellenistic, Roman, Parthian, Sasanian, and Arab antiquity. Still, I will argue below that the images of God in the Bible have less and more in common with images of God that dominate modern and postmodern thought than GL makes out.

The chief strength of GL is its chief weakness. Its authors are convinced that the God encountered in biblical literature wills a relationship with humanity to this day, on account of which the risk is run that this God is made more palatable to a set of modern tastes than, truthfully considered, this God actually is.

Der Gott der Lebendigen has four parts: (1) an overview of the endeavor (Das Unterfangen); (2) a “Part A” that seeks to identify God’s essential attributes as described in the Bible (Grundlegung); (3) a “Part B” that describes the unfolding of said attributes in God’s dealings with human beings and the world (Entfaltung); (4) a concluding essay that draws out the sense in which the God of the Bible can be characterized as the God of the living (Beschluss: Der Gott der Lebendigen).

Part A is divided six ways. Each chapter lays bare a foundational aspect of God’s being which works itself out in God’s constantly renewed will to relate to human beings and the world. Some 200 pages long, the discussion is rich and wide-ranging. The chapter headings: “The Name and Names”; “From God the Lord to God the Father”; “The One as the Creator of Oneness”; “The Loving One”; “The Almighty”; “Spirit and Presence.”

Part B of Der Gott der Lebendigen is divided three ways. The tripartite division, sadly, disappears in God of the Living. The titles interlock: Gottes Zuwendung; Gottes Zumutung; and Gottes Zuspruch. The translation equivalents in God of the Living retain the syntax and alliteration of the German but are not otherwise compelling: “God’s
Attention”; “God’s Audacity”; and “God’s Assurance”. Setting aside a dollop of the semantic complexity the authors intended to sum up with these expressions, one might paraphrase as follows: “a God who condescends”; “a God who challenges”; “a God who encourages”. Aside from the fact that the authors probably chose to avoid a term like condescension, the root of the problem lies in the use of the term Zumutung, a term that has taken on the meaning of a nervy, life-enhancing challenge to the status quo, something like Herausforderung, in ecclesiastical German. In this usage, Zumutung and Zuspruch, challenge and reassurance, are poles in a strategy of communication by which one person builds up another. At the same time, Zumutung retains the sense of an imposing negative response in the use to which Der Gott der Lebendigen puts it. Gottes Zumutung also refers to God’s punishment of those who betray his love. Thus (p. 13: ET p. 13):

Under the arch of God’s effective and declarative affirmation of a will to relationship—God’s effective condescension arching downward from one direction and God’s declarative encouragement arching downward from the other direction—God’s “challenge” finds its home. Denoted is both God’s reaction to negation of a relationship with God from the human side, and the resulting consequences for human existence. The challenge concept intentionally articulates the directional complexity of God’s punitive activity. The persistent challenge his will to relationship poses is at stake. God’s will to relationship repulses wanton human self-referentiality; at the same time, it encourages human beings who suffer from God’s remoteness to seize the opportunities life offers in relationship with God.

The offered translation includes unpacking and some restructuring; it depends on, but also diverges from, the translation of Biddle (ET p. 13). In an excursus at the end of this review, I examine the English edition and translation of GL in greater detail.

Three features of GL stand out. (1) It formulates its discussion of the biblical description of God’s nature and God’s acts of salvation in sustained dialogue with overlapping and sometimes divergent descriptions of divinity derived from abutting (a) Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions; (b) ancient and modern philosophies; and (c) ancient and modern theologies. (2) It is a theology of the Old and New Testaments which tries hard not to tear down the theology of one to build up the theology of the other. (3) It is open to the insights of ancient and modern theology and to the insights of traditional Christian theology. The combination sets it apart from all other examples of biblical theology currently available.

GL is more than a systematic presentation of the attributes of God described in biblical literature. It also endeavors to present the unity and diversity of the biblical witness to God in harmony with a reconstruction of the history of the religion of Israel and of early Christianity. Inevitably, histories of the religion of Israel, Judaism, and emergent Christianity depend on judgments about date, provenance, orientation, and textual relationships of the component parts of biblical literature. On these questions there is little accord among scholars. Given the difficulties involved in making sense out of the available evidence, disagreement on these matters is welcome and to be expected.

I point this out because the assignment of so much of the Old Testament to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E. in GL, including texts like Exod 15 and Deut 32, will be bewildering to a large number of North American biblical scholars—indeed, to a large number of scholars of all continents outside of Europe. Yet the assignment of a biblical text in GL to a mid- to late Persian period date is if anything an index of the formative importance GL attributes to it in the subsequent history of Judaism and the midwifing of Christianity.

The religion of ancient Israel of any given period, as well as the particular Judaisms represented by—for example—Qohelet, Ben Sira, Daniel, and Esther; the Qumran sect, Josephus, Philo, and the Psalms of Solomon; 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, and 4 Ezra; not to mention the various iterations of the Jesus movement reflected in NT literature; the Judaism of the Sages; and the Christianity of the Fathers, are first and foremost appropriations of a received heritage understood by the appropriators to be life-enhancing in the deepest of ways. To speak of any of the forms which Judaism and Christianity took in antiquity as a degeneration almost always signals a willful neglect of complexities and continuities and an exclusive focus on real or imagined discontinuities. Furthermore, over against a variety of coeval ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean religions, the emergent Judaisms and emergent Christianities which find expression in Old and New Testament, deuterocanonical, and
parabiblical literature share a strong family resemblance the nucleus of which consists precisely in a common presentation of the being and attributes of God. *GL* makes significant progress in the task of identifying the contours of that common understanding.

The chapter entitled “From God the Lord to God the Father” (pp. 51–92; ET pp. 49–91) is a case in point. Biblical theologies often overlook patterns of development that span canonical and extra-canonical literature. *GL* stands apart from that tendency. A line of continuity is traced relative to the experience of God’s proximity which finds expression in the address of God as “Father” across Isa 63:6–64:11; Ben Sira 51:1–12; Tob 13; Wisd 1–5; and the NT (pp. 61–66; ET pp. 60–65). Aside from the identification of three recurring elements in the use of the Father metaphor in the NT, the prehistory of which is not discussed—the mediation of Fatherhood through the Son, the soteriological result in the form of adoptive status as children of God, and the ethical consequences for those who now see themselves as “children of obedience” (1 Pet 1:14)—a fourth element, the cosmological connotation of divine Fathership, characteristic of Paul only, his students (the disputed Paulines), and other late NT writings, is assigned an origin in philosophical religion (p. 68; ET pp. 67–68). A further line of continuity is traced, in the concepts of rebirth and divine nursing through the milk of God’s word, a conceptualization which “integrates the maternal element into the father metaphor.” The line unites Philo, Ps-Philo, James, John’s Gospel, Titus, 1 Peter, and Clement of Alexandria (pp. 84–85; ET pp. 83–85).

There is much to disagree with in *GL*, and much to appreciate in terms of depth of insight and elegance of presentation. There is also more than one significant lacuna.

**THE SOCIAL LIFE OF GOD**

*GL* fails to offer a significant treatment of biblical descriptions of God’s interaction with other beings of immense power.  

2. Appreciation of the fact that *GL* is attentive to historical trajectories that span canonical and non-canonical literature is not equivalent to a call for a more inclusive canon. On the other hand, a lack of interest in such historical trajectories is indicative of an underestimation of the historicity of the Bible.

At first glance, the conceptualization of transpersonal evil and transpersonal good in terms of immensely powerful beings other than El Elyon/YHWH is underdeveloped in the Old Testament. On closer inspection, it seems more accurate to say that angels and demons and gods/angels assigned to individual nations play a conspicuous role in the Old Testament; a more conspicuous role in several extra-canonical Jewish apocalypses and Christian apocalypses; and a highly visible role in the God vs. Satan/the Devil/Beelzebub binary of the New Testament. The advantages inherent in conceptualizing evil and good in terms of powerful beings are commonly exploited in modern media: in comics; science fiction; supernatural thrillers; the genre of horror; and modern theology as expressed in (for example) Paradise Lost and The Screwtape Letters.

No wonder: good and evil are self-evidently more powerful than individual human beings. Moreover, it is clear from the generality of world religions that both good and evil and in fact a host of good and bad realities occur to people as endowed with personalities. One would have thought that any description of God as found in biblical literature would need to treat the fact that God is understood to consult with others in a heavenly court, the members of which are often referred to as his sons. At times he acts as spokesperson for all (Gen 1, 11; Isa 6). At times he negotiates a course of action with a member of his council (Job 1). He may simply overrule a member of the council (Zech 3:1–2); on the other hand, a sentence may be issued in the name of the council, not in the name of the Most High (Dan 4:14). YHWH apportions Israel to himself, the other nations to their respective gods (LXX and 4Q Deut1 32:8–10; MT Deut 32:8–10 demythologizes; as Judg 11:24 demonstrates, outside of the Torah it was not considered necessary to revise the text to accord with strict monotheism). The same gods are expected to praise him (LXX and 4Q Deut1 32:43; MT Deut 32:43 demythologizes, but not at Ps 29:1; 150:1; Job 38:7; the same beings are described as a choir of angels in Pss 103:20–22; 148:2). The entire council is understood to stand in awe of the one true God (Ps 89:8–9); none can compare to him (Exod 15:11); were one to turn to a member of the council to override a decision of its president, the endeavor would be foredoomed (Job 5:1). The assignment of a god to each nation stands in the background of the identification of Michael as the angelic prince of Israel in Dan 7; 10; 12.

The universal premise of biblical Yahwism is not the non-existence of other gods, but the exclusive assignment of YHWH to Israel (Deut 5:7; 6:4). YHWH leads the divine cohorts into battle; when he

marches out to war, “holy thousands” are with him (LXX Sam Vg Syr Deut 33:2; MT Deut 33:2 demythologizes). In one text, Elohim/Elyon browbeats his council/his sons and sentences them to death because they are derelict in their duties (Ps 82). In another, YHWH unleashes demons on his foes (Hab 3:5). When he appears to human beings, he is sometimes accompanied by others (Gen 18–19). It is often impossible to distinguish between YHWH and an angel of YHWH (Gen 32; Hos 12:4–6; Exod 3–4; 33:1–3; Judg 6). Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, on the other hand, distinguish easily between YHWH and members of his retinue when transported to his heavenly court.

Finally, temptation is experienced in terms of an interpersonal conflict in which the other person cannot be identified with another human being or with one’s alter ego, not only according to Gen 3 and 4 and the Gospel accounts of the temptation of Jesus, but in the phenomenology of temptation in most times and places to this day.

The claim that evil is outranked by the good and the concomitant claim that evil is harnessed by the sumnum bonum, God immortal, invisible, and all-wise, for benevolent ends (Gen 50:20), the essential claim of Judaism and Christianity, is repeatedly worked out, within and beyond biblical literature, in terms of a social life of God with beings like him who transcend time and space in ways that mortals do not. Beyond that, God is described as doing battle with—and sometimes sporting with—Godzillas and Blobs (Pss 74:14; 89:11; Isa 59:11; Job 40:15–32; Ps 104:26). There is a reason why the representation of evil in monstrous terms is constitutive of almost every human culture. Evil occurs to people in monstrous forms. This is another instance in which ancient and modern apprehensions of reality have much in common. The rare devotees of a rarified philosophical religion—Qohelet is a biblical example—are just that, in any age.

GL’s failure to topicalize the biblical descriptions of the social life of God with other transcendent beings is significant. In a recent volume, footnoted in the English but not the German edition of GL (p. 9; ET p. 9), Benjamin Sommer speaks of “scholarly avoidance” of an overlapping topic: the various incarnations YHWH was understood to have across the length and breadth of the history of the religion of Israel. One might also speak of a scholarly allergy to the topic of God’s interaction with beings endowed with abilities less than his but greater than ours. Nonetheless, these very topics stand in need of careful treatment.

IN WRATH REMEMBER MERCY

Running through biblical literature is a narrative in which defiance of God’s direction on the part of individuals and polities is highlighted. Time and again God’s counsel is met with rejection. Again and again God’s gifts are abused. Every abuse and every act of rejection is met with a fluid response from God’s side that runs from counter-rejection, protection along with rejection, to forgiveness with and even without prior repentance. It is not really possible to describe the forbearing and forgiving God of the Bible outside of and unattached from an account of the instances recounted in biblical literature in which someone who should know better wrongs God, yet God shows forbearance and mercy to the point of remitting punishment in whole or in part.

There are many originating sins to which the Bible bears witness, beyond the first pair recounted in Gen 3 and 4 on which *GL* focuses attention (pp. 309–10; ET pp. 309–10): that of the divine beings who mated with humankind and produced the nefarious heroes of old (Gen 6:1–4); that of the entire earth the inhabitants of which devise nothing but evil all day long (Gen 6:5); that of the residents of Babylon who sought to build a city able to dominate the four corners of the earth, and a tower able to reach into the heavens (Gen 11); that attempted by the men of Sodom against innocent strangers (Gen 19); that of Sarah against Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:8–21); that of Jacob against Esau (Gen 27); that of the brothers of Joseph against Joseph (Gen 37); that of Pharaoh against the resident aliens of his land (Exod 1); that of Aaron and the people against God and Moses (Exod 32); that of Nadab and Abihu; like others before them, they do precisely what they were told not to do (Lev 10). The parade continues in Numbers–2 Kings and beyond. The common denominator is not a will to power or a blurring of the Creator/creature distinction but the choice of using power for an unconscionable end. Every recounted act of wantonness is fraught with consequences. At the same time, the consequences are mitigated time and again.

*GL* fails to offer an exposition of this history, which is—from beginning to end—a history of violence. I would argue that the remedies God pursues to put an end to spirals of human violence cry out for systematic treatment. In a pattern of which the Exodus is an important prototype, God answers violence with superior violence. At the same time, he shows favor on whom he would show favor and mercy on whom he would show mercy (Exod 33:19). Pursuant to superior violence,

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5. See Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* (Siphrut 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009). The exposition I offer here is brief and one-sided and should be compared with his.
Torah, God’s direction and specific directions, is offered as an antidote to, and fence around, human proclivities of the self-serving kind. To be clear, the narratives of Genesis to Deuteronomy detail a longer series of provisions in the face of human need: the gifts of covenant, offspring, deliverance, land, law, a locus of God’s presence, and ritual. The withdrawal of the gifts of land, a singular locus of divine presence, and associated ritual, the fulfillment of the curses of covenant law, the consequent devastation of town and country and the dispersal of inhabitants, is also detailed. Nonetheless, restoration is promised, and restoration follows.

The pattern of mitigated punishment described in biblical narrative intersects with contemporary life more compellingly than an understanding of divine initiative which underplays the threat of violence, and actual violence, from God’s side. Life as we know it is characterized by violence, violent acts of God included. God in biblical literature participates in violence in a variety of ways. Much that needs to be said about divine violence receives scant treatment in GL.

Three loci I think GL treats unsuccessfully are “vicarious suffering,” “forensic justification,” and “atonement.” The expressions as I deploy them designate solicitous behavior one person accords another. There are circumstances in which one, the other, or all three are appropriate actions to take. There are actions which qualify as all three.

**Vicarious Suffering**

The life of animals and humans is flush with the experience of one individual or one category of individuals, leaders of a pack for example, taking the brunt of a bad situation on behalf of others. Vicarious suffering in this sense is a pervasive fact of social life. A parent will starve herself for the sake of her children; a policeman will put himself in harm’s way in order to protect the innocent. A king will offer his son to his god in order to stay the latter’s wrath against an entire people. Sons and now daughters are sent off to war or “Freedom Square” to be maimed and killed in the name of a metanarrative (the need to triumph over a tyrant; a national or international interest). They are thought to suffer on behalf of their elders and future generations. In the absence of a metanarrative that assigns meaning to suffering on behalf of others, a mother would not choose to put her health at risk and commit enormous time, energy, and financial resources to the raising of children. A fireman would not risk his life to save a stranger; an officer would not lead his men into battle; a nurse would not expose herself to risks for the sake of
A sick or dying person; a son would not reorganize his life and the life of his family in order to care for an elderly parent.

A father would not agree to sacrifice his son (Gen 22); a warrior would not choose to die in order to bring death on his adversaries (Judg 16:23–30); a prophet would not stand up to power come banishment, prison, or death (Amos; Jeremiah; 2 Chr 24:20–22); the suffering of a generation taken away into exile could not be seen as expiation for the sins of past and present generations (Isa 53; an interpretation of the “servant” as an epithet for the generation “taken away” accords well with the recurrent “we” in the passage and the “my people” of 53:8, with the prophet speaking on behalf of “my people”); the decision to accept death rather than renounce one’s faith could not be understood as a pivot point in the history of a nation (Daniel; 2 and 4 Maccabees); the death on a cross of the one who explicated God by word and deed, of God’s only begotten Son, could not be seen as a means to draw all human beings to God the Father (John’s Gospel).

6. A definitive fulfillment of Isa 53 in a servant individual is not thereby excluded.

The lines of continuity are strong. They cannot be undone by confusing the fact of vicarious suffering with the question of atonement, even if they are intertwined on those occasions in which suffering on account of and on behalf of others is seen as atonement for acts of omission and commission on the part of those others. Yet this is what GL does when it treats Isa 52:13–53:12 as an isolated passage (p. 146; ET p. 144; pp. 293–94; ET pp. 293; pp. 315–16; ET p. 316). The cost of placing a cordon sanitaire around Isa 52:13–53:12 would have been high indeed if it were not for the fact that GL treats the same passage elsewhere in a line of development that includes the witness of the books of Jeremiah, Job, Daniel, and 2 Maccabees before taking up NT understandings of the death of Christ at the intersection of suffering and lament (375–76; ET 374–75; also, 322, n. 164; ET 321 n. 35). Moreover, with respect to justification, GL notes the connection between Isa 50:8–9, wherein the definition of the servant’s salvation is vindication in the court of life from the side of YHWH, and Isa 52:13–53:12, wherein the servant’s obedient bearing of responsibility for a larger polity of reference brings salvation to many – once again, in the sense of vindication in the court of life (293–94; ET 293).

Still, the cost is unacceptably high insofar as GL walls Isa 52:13–53:12 off from the rest of biblical tradition with respect to atonement, with atonement construed in the narrowest of terms rather than as a subset of a larger category of social experience characterized by the transfer of the consequences of guilt and of paying an offsetting price from one party to another. A generation, group or individual often
understands the suffering it endures to be a consequence of someone else’s wrongdoing. In a precise sense it often is. At times that same suffering is understood by others to occasion a reprieve from suffering they might have otherwise endured. In a precise sense it often does. Isa 52:13–53:12 is best understood in light of that anthropological constant. Prophecy, ritual, and lived experience on this understanding encode or embody social expectations of just desert. Reflections thereof are found in Lev 18:28 and Num 35:33 on the one hand and Ezek 36:16–38; Dan 11:33 + 12:3; and 2 Macc 7 on the other. It is not helpful, as GL does (p. 146; ET p. 144), to play off the plea for, and prediction of, an end to the experience of punishment for the sins of past generations against the acknowledgment, found in Isa 52:13–53:12, that a full measure of punishment had been meted out (cf. Ezek 16:1–52, which construes the disaster to come upon Judah in one generation as the end consequence of the sins of previous generations). That it is expected that God will give new life to those who were until now as good as dead (Isa 57:17–19; 59:15b–20; 63:1–9; cf. Ezek 37) is not in contradiction with the realization that the negative consequences of human actions reverberate for generations. The controversy over the cross-generational transfer of the consequences of human behavior to which prophecy and lamentation in the wake of destruction and exile are a witness (Lam 5:7; Isa 40:2; 43:26–28; 50:1; Jer 31:27–30; Ezek 18) is resolved in Isa 53 according to a template—expiation for a multi-generational history of wrongdoing by a single generation, followed by restoration—that reaches analogous expression in Lev 26:27–45 and Deut 29:2–30:10. Expiation in the sense of this recurring template is seen by several NT authors, in relation now to all of human history, to reach definitive fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is hard to think of a more central axis of biblical theology. GL exaggerates the degree to which NT authors innovate on this axis.

7. On the general topic, see Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 51–88. The difficulty with treating Ezek 18 as if it invalidated the principle of cross-generational transfer enunciated in the Decalogue (Exod 20:4–8; cf. 34:5–7) is that, on the one hand, this does not appear to be Ezekiel’s own view (cf. e.g. Ezek 16; 23:47) and, on the other, the transfer principle finds obvious confirmation in our day no less than in Ezekiel’s. Nonetheless, the Decalogue’s insistence on the cross-generational transfer of the consequences of human behavior is of a piece with Ezekiel’s circumstantial denial thereof. The goal in both cases was to nurture strong moral agency. Stress on the transfer in the context of the Decalogue is meant to deter moral slackness. Denial of the transfer in Ezekiel’s moral tirades serves the same goal.
Forensic justification is a natural way of conceptualizing the vindication human beings seek in the court of their peers, before God, and in the court of life. It may be true (I think not), that *expressis verbis* “the concept of justification appears only in a few texts in the post-exilic Hebrew and Greek traditions” (p. 288; ET p. 287). There is no doubt however that requests for deliverance contingent upon the verdict of a god were commonplace in the ancient Near East long before the psalms of David would have been composed on any analysis. A close reading of Akkadian prayers such as those found in the volume edited by Alan Lenzi leads immediately to that conclusion. All the more reason to second GL’s conclusion: “The oft-asserted contrast in the history of scholarship between a juridical understanding of righteousness and the understanding of righteousness as God’s gift in the context of a more holistic understanding of life tears apart what belongs together. Both components participate inseparably in the Old Testament understanding of righteousness” (p. 288; ET p. 288). A verdict on one’s life at odds with the verdict that circumstances have dictated is the exact definition of salvation in countless prayers of the Jewish and Christian traditions, beginning with those found in intercessions scattered throughout biblical literature from Gen 4:10 to Rev 6:10, and including those uttered by mortals in the land of the living, e.g. Jer 12:1–3 and Ps 26. Ps 26 is explicit in its dependence on God’s kindness and reliability for a favorable verdict. It is not clear why GL drives a wedge between the declaration of a favorable verdict in the case of Abraham as a reward for his faith in Gen 15 (p. 294; ET pp. 293–94), and pleas for forensic justification by penitents found e.g., in Pss 51 and 143 (p. 295; ET pp. 294–95): “Gen 15:5 . . . hardly implies the concept of justification” (p. 294; ET p. 293). The point of departure in both cases is God’s presumed benevolence even if the latter is not mentioned *expressis verbis* in Gen 15. Justification, that is, a benevolent initiative or promise of God received as a favorable verdict on one’s life before, during, and after the effective turn in one’s life the verdict opens up, is a fair definition of the content of the message of salvation found throughout biblical literature, wherever and whenever human beings invoke God’s help *de profundis* and receive assurance in media res.

In that optic, the message of salvation Lev 16 and Isa 53 represent are variations on the theme of justification in the sense of a

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favorable verdict from God’s side. A particular means by which a favorable verdict is given is specified. Atonement for sin by a substitute (Stellvertreter) is, with Bernd Janowski, an accepted means of salvation in biblical literature. No wonder: the transfer of the consequences of sin onto an innocent party is an absolutely recurring feature of human existence. On the one hand, it is maddening when a drunk driver runs over an innocent child. On the other, it is considered an act of great virtue if someone takes the brunt of a situation compromised by sin and sickness in place of, and on behalf of, someone else. It is the latter virtue which is understood to merit God’s approval and result in salvation in Isa 53; Dan 11:33 + 12:3; and New Testament literature. Moreover, the principles of substitution and vicarious death inform Torah ritual at Exod 13:2, 11–15. Finally, willingness to practice self-denial for the sake of others, to intervene on behalf of the hapless at significant cost to oneself, and ultimately, to suffer and die for—to use a later expression—the sanctification of God’s name, are ideals held up throughout biblical literature and are thought to reach their highest realizations in a champion like Samson, a prophet like Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20–22), the martyrs of the Maccabean period and, by Christians, in Jesus most of all, with followers like Stephen encountering the same fate. With respect to atonement, justification, faith, and divine benevolence, to be precise, the intersection thereof, the lines of continuity across disparate components of biblical and extra-biblical literature are stronger than GL supposes.

The point of a critical biblical theology has to be an examination of the extent to which the God of biblical literature speaks the truth about life and lives up to the promises attributed to him. Theology that shies away from such questions gives the impression that the biblical God cannot stand up to critical scrutiny. A critical biblical theology is of particular interest if, at one and the same time, it retains biblical teaching as the ultimate criterion of its own description of God’s being and attributes. On this score, GL shines. It describes the truth claims of biblical literature from the vantage point of the literature’s understanding of the being and attributes of God. It explores the unity and diversity of said claims. It presents those claims in such a way that the option of taking those claims seriously remains open to people fully adjusted to life as understood by a cross-section of educated twenty-first-century individuals. That is no mean accomplishment.

Theological German is hard to translate. The register traffics in etymological figures and double entendre. Biddle’s attempt to render Der Gott der Lebendigen into comprehensible English merits respect. Nonetheless, the attempt is successful only in part.

An example: the ET of the opening lines of “Gebot und Gebet” (“Command and Plea”), the volume’s entrée into the topic of “Gottes Zuspruch” (“Divine Encouragement”), a key component of the exposition. The original (p. 424):


The ET (p. 425):

God’s audacious demand, the subject of the preceding chapter, has made it clear that the God who attends to human beings and the world is incapable of complacency. God’s passion for his creation tolerates neither his creatures’ betrayal of love nor their suffering, whether as the result of their own fault or as the result of evil in the world. God negates betrayal of love by countering an absence of love with the passion of his wrath so that human suffering becomes an experience of the God who hides himself. As important as it is for the section on God’s attention (chapters 7–10) to precede the one on his audacity (chapters 11–14), it is equally important that the section on God’s assurance (chapters 15–18) follow the ambivalences and the abysses in the experience of God encountered in God’s audacity.
The translation of Zumutung and related language by “audacity” and “audacious demand” is not compelling. An alternative translation, with problem areas highlighted:

God’s challenging behavior, to which the preceding chapter was dedicated, makes it clear that the God who attends to humanity and the world is incapable of indifference. God’s passion for his creation tolerates neither betrayal of love by his creatures nor their suffering, be it self-caused or caused by evil in the world. God enforces a “no” to betrayal of love by countering an absence of love with the passion of his wrath, such that consequent human suffering becomes an experience of a God who hides himself. As needful as it is for the chapter on God’s challenge (B II) to be preceded by the chapter on God’s caring attention (B I), it is no less needful for the chapter on the double edges and precipices encountered in the experience of God’s challenging behavior to be followed by the chapter on God’s encouragement (B III).

An additional issue. The use of non-standard translation equivalents of technical terms in the ET is de-familiarizing in a negative way. For example, the expression “the only born God” will be familiar only to those who read the NT in the translation of Richard Lattimore; “the only begotten God”—and Son—is the established equivalent (inter alia pp. 47, 81; ET pp. 47, 80). The expression “Lord YHWH Zebaoth” (p. 40; ET p. 39) might ring a bell with music lovers familiar with Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Heilig, heilig, heilig, ist der Herr Zebaoth.” For everyone else, “Lord YHWH Sabaoth” would serve the purpose. “Ben Sira” works well as a way to refer to the author of the book he wrote; in a pinch, Sirach; “Siracides” on the other hand sounds hopelessly baroque (p. 162; ET p. 160). “Jesus Sirach” (p. 500; ET p. 503) and “Jesus ben Sirach” (p. 615; ET p. 601) likewise have an odd ring. The creed speaks of “one, holy, catholic [small “c”] church”; in a pinch, a “universal” church; but not a “comprehensive” church (p. 203; ET p. 201)—here, however, the malapropism is in the Vorlage. There can be no doubt that the verbal expressions in Rom 3:26, 28 are to be translated with “justify,” not “make just,” even if the latter translation preserves the wordplay in GL whereby God’s righteousness in seen to clarify both who God is and what God does (p. 304; ET p. 303).10

10. As GL well explains, the righteousness of God according to Paul refers to the fact that God is just and benevolent and that he rules in favor of the one who puts his trust in him, apart from and before the one so favored keeps the commandments. The Letter of James and Matthew’s Gospel on the other hand put all the emphasis on parenesis, whereas
Unfortunately, the printed text of *God of the Living* seems not to have benefitted from a careful review for errors of omission and commission. A few examples. The transliterated Hebrew in two instances is unintelligible: not *loʾ-*ʾēl and *loʾ-*ʿām, but *lōʾ-*ʾēl and *lōʾ-*ʿām (p. 4; ET p. 4). It is not of course “beenknown,” but “been known” (ET p. 6). Not “1 Cor 6:16b,” but “2 Cor 6:16b,” 2x (p. 188; ET p. 185). God “hides himself,” not “God hides” (p. 339; ET p. 339). Not *Why, “YHWH,”* but “Why, <YHWH>”; YHWH is a conjectural emendation of the authors (p. 343; ET p. 343). “Do not forget the sufferers,” not the “sufferer” (p. 345; ET p. 345). Not “Mal 3:1–5; 4 Ezra 5:1–3,” but “Mal 3:1–5; 4 Ezra 5:1–3” (p. 356, n. 44; ET p. 356, n. 44). Not “the transition from becoming into become that occurs,” but “the transition from becoming into that which has become that occurs” (p. 404; ET p. 404). “Extraordinarily” before “disparate” seems to have dropped out (p. 406; ET p. 406). The sons of Jacob are “not (yet) at an end” according to Mal 3:6 on this volume’s interpretation, not “(not) yet at an end” (p. 472; ET p. 475).

A host of errors is found in one locus (p. 291; ET pp. 290–91). Isa 49:17–19 is not the passage cited; 48:17–19 is; the index is also wrong (p. 601). It is not “Your name” but “His name” that will not be cut off according to Isa 48:19. According to *GL*, the passage relates righteousness from Israel’s side to salvation from God’s side, through “[God’s] lament over its former blameworthy absence, no less than [through his lament] over [Israel’s] decimated progeny; [said progeny] is characterized [in language] not without a literary connection to Gen 22:7 and 32:13” (my translation, with unpacking), not through “the lament concerning it former blameworthy absence, as do [?] the decimated offspring characterized in a literary allusion to Genesis 15:5 and 22:17”—the added [?] marks the chief difficulty. In point of fact, a literary connection exists between Isa 48:19 and Gen 15:4–5; 22:17; 32:13; *not* Gen 22:7; 32:13 per *Der Gott der Lebendigen*; and *not* Gen 15:5; 22:17 per the ET.

The English edition is less than ideal on other grounds. The table of contents of the German edition, five pages long, is reduced to one page in the English edition, an unfortunate choice since the *Inhalt* is a perfect introduction to the volume’s contents. The “Ancient Sources” list parenesis has a subordinate place in Paul (Rom 12:1–15:13; Gal 5:1–6:10). The emphasis in James and Matthew is on the fact that a believer is expected to keep the commandments: love of God and love of neighbor and disciplines of piety that embody those commitments. Righteousness from the human side consists in *doing* (Matt 5:20). The divergent emphases—*GL* speaks of divergent concepts of God’s righteousness, but that does not seem right—cannot be completely harmonized but are not antithetical either (pp. 300–309; 308–309; ET pp. 299–308; 307–308).
(pp. 547–553; ET pp. 557–61) provides an incomplete picture of the sources on which the volume depends. For example, the theology of the Letter of Aristeas receives careful attention on two occasions (pp. 107; 175; ET pp. 107; 173), but the Letter is missing in the “Ancient Sources” list: to be clear, this is also the case in the German edition, but the problem is compounded in the ET because discussions of the Letter of Aristeas are not indexed therein. Due to “space restraints” (p. 599), the indexes were severely truncated. The Stellenregister of the original edition occupies fifty-six pages; the abbreviated “Index of Biblical Citations,” a paltry five; the Sachregister occupies 39 pages; the “Topical Index,” a mere eight. The abbreviation was ill-advised. The importance of comprehensive indexes in a biblical theology is difficult to overplay. It is especially so in the case of GL, given its attention to lines of development it traces within and without its canon of reference. For example, one cannot know from the index of God of the Living that the volume ably discusses the meaning of “God of the living” in relationship to Joseph and Aseneth and Shemoneh Esreh (pp. 521–522; ET pp. 525–26). To be sure, neither the German nor the ET contains an author index, an unconscionable decision given the way the volume’s authors support their arguments with copious references to secondary literature.

Other features of the ET’s index of biblical citations are unfortunate: (1) the elimination of the distinction between important and less important treatments of biblical passages; (2) the elimination of references to a number of quoted passages. For example, John 14:7 is quoted in extenso on p. 6 (albeit not in block quotes) but does not appear in the index. GL’s claim to have made a selection of exemplary biblical texts which capture the essence of the biblical testimony about God (p. 10; ET p. 10) is not easily verifiable given these omissions.

A questionable shortcut: the bibliography of the German edition is simply taken over in the ET, with the subtraction however of the valuable listing of secondary authors with appropriate cross-references, and the addition of occasional errors. For example, the German edition, under HENGEL, M., lists:


Under Hengel, M., the ET has:

If the entry adhered to the industry standard in American biblical scholarship, it would be listed under “Hengel, Martin,” and it would read as follows:


On the plus side, the hardcover volume produced by Baylor University Press is sturdy, a joy to handle. Footnotes are still footnotes (though not always on the correct page; e.g. n. 52 on p. 68 belongs on p. 67). Transliterated Hebrew appears as transliterated Hebrew (with errors here and there; e.g., read ʾeyeh not ʾeyeh in more than one instance (pp. 29–30; ET pp. 29–30). Greek appears as Greek; Latin as Latin; often but not always with accompanying translation.

Why I have spilled so much ink on the plusses and minuses of the English version of GL? If I were a Baptist I might appeal to Amos 3:1–2. I’m not, but I think Baylor University Press, precisely because it wants to position itself as a top-tier publisher in the field of academic biblical studies, would do well to reissue the ET in a corrected and more user-friendly edition.
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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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 innforung*. 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 lay-persons 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.

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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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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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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
- Amnon and Absalom
- Absalom and David
- Solomon and David

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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 Lukian 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 chiastic 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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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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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

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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 is 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 ’ĕlōhîm converts it to an abstract or the like—indefensible 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 bôqêd (sheep breeder) and bôlês (fig cultivator)
rather than rōʾēh (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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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 Deuteronomistic 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 *akītu* and *Enuma Elīš*, 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

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.

**Igal German**

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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* (*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 pesher: 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-Esene 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 Zorastrianism 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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Gordon Wenham, emeritus professor at the University of Glouchestershire, 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 is 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 ones 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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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.


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 into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Biblical Studies, 2005). His focus is on the word *rûaḥ* 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 works 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 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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