

BOOK REVIEWS

Beginning Biblical Hebrew: A Grammar and Illustrated Reader by John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt. Illustrated by Philip William. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. 324 pp., US \$28.70, softcover.

As many students of a second language can attest, pedagogical methodology in language classes is often inadequate to the task. Rote memorization of terms and rules may work for a small percentage of students, but not for all (or even most). Fortunately, in many modern second language classes teaching practice is shifting toward more solid pedagogical ground. Instead of memorization, many teachers and textbooks are embracing the insights from modern research in second language acquisition (SLA). The results are classes that encourage collaboration, active student engagement, and a focus on how language learning works. As a former secondary Spanish teacher, I can attest to the effectiveness of these methods.

Unfortunately, this has not often been the case in the study of the biblical languages. John A. Cook and Robert D. Holmstedt seek to address this concern in their *Beginning Biblical Hebrew: A Grammar and Illustrated Reader*, which unabashedly embraces SLA methodology. Both of these authors have worked and taught extensively in the Hebrew language. John A. Cook is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 2007. Robert D. Holmstedt is Associate Professor, Ancient Hebrew and NW Semitic Languages at the University of Toronto. *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* developed out of these authors mutual dissatisfaction with the limits of Hebrew grammars. The resulting text comes at the end of several years of practical adaptation in the classroom. As they state, *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* “has been guided by the goal of *acquiring* the ancient Hebrew language as opposed to simply *learning* its grammar” (p. 10). The hope of such a goal is that it would lead to a contextual grasp and understanding of the Hebrew language in use, as opposed to knowledge of a list of grammatical rules that become jumbled together when a student is faced with the Hebrew in its natural environment—the biblical text.

Beginning Biblical Hebrew is separated into two parts. The first part, which contains the introductory material, reads from left to right and presents fifty grammatical lessons, five appendices, a Hebrew-

English glossary, and an English-Hebrew glossary. The grammatical lessons are short (sometimes only a page or two), contain brief explanations, and some exercises. The lessons do not always follow a “traditional” order for a Hebrew grammar. For instance, the prepositional *lamed*, which is usually included in a chapter on the prepositions (lesson 13), is actually introduced in the ninth grammatical lesson. Cook and Holmstedt do not present it for its prepositional function, but rather its use in possessive clauses. While verbs, and the *Qal* perfect conjugation, are presented in chapter 19, students learn about copular sentences in chapter 6. This also includes the verb *היה*. Such ordering, which many traditional teachers will no doubt find strange, is based on the recognition “that language is learned in small chunks of information that alternate through the various aspects of grammar” (p. 10). The result is that students are to be reading and interacting with full Hebrew sentences in a textual context much earlier than with the traditional presentation of concepts, which require concepts to be compartmentalized until they are connected much later.

The second part of the book is the Illustrated Reader. It begins at the “back” of the book, and reads right to left, just as the biblical Hebrew text. The Reader uses very little English, as it is meant to give the student specific contextualized interaction with the Hebrew language. The table of contents indicates the places the Reader should be used. The Illustrated Reader provides further vocabulary lists, and gives the students activities that require more than simple translation. The exercises in the reader require students to organize vocabulary according to type (e.g., animals vs. buildings) and use that vocabulary in actual communication. The Illustrated Reader also uses images as much as possible. Vocabulary words are not presented in lists, but with pictures. Best of all, students are provided with a graphical presentation of select stories from Genesis. These presentations resemble comic books, and contain just enough exposition and dialogue (in Hebrew) to allow the story to be told. The exercises give students a helpful context by which they can interact with and acquire the Hebrew terms and concepts with which they are working. Such centering of the acquisition process around the storytelling process fits nicely with the findings in SLA research.

Those using *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* as a textbook should be prepared for a steep learning curve at the beginning of the adoption process. The authors do not provide much advice for instructors on how to use the textbook effectively. Because of the radical shift in methodology that they employ, this is an oversight that should be addressed in a future edition. Further, Cook and Holmstedt do not use the terminology that is common in the field of biblical Hebrew. For instance,

they use the term “bound nouns” instead of the “construct.” Their reason for avoiding jargon—the language is “idiosyncratic and archaic” (p. 11). Nevertheless, anyone who wants to study biblical Hebrew seriously will have to learn some of the specialized language in the field. This text’s approach may be valid from a student’s perspective, but I am not convinced that we do service to our students by avoiding such terms. Failure to do so at the introductory level may lead to confusion for students later on.

This text is not for everybody, and should be used deliberately and strategically. Those adopting this book should use it as the primary textbook for the class. I attempted to adapt this text as a supplement to another text in my undergraduate Beginning Hebrew class. This did not work as well as it could have. Further, to use this text, class objectives must shift from a “covering” mentality. That is to say, instead of making the course goal “covering up to the strong verb,” the instructor’s goals must shift toward those like “students will be able to read basic Hebrew texts.”

By embracing SLA practices, Cook and Holmstedt have provided a road map for further work in this direction. Cook and Holmstedt treat the language acquisition process as a contextual, whole-brained process, and in doing so, they provide a great service to their students. *Beginning Biblical Hebrew* is a cool breeze in what has often been a desert of biblical Hebrew pedagogy.

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Isaiah by David W. Baker. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. xii + 227 pp., US \$19.99, softcover.

This commentary on Isaiah is a separate reprinting of what formerly appeared in volume 4 (*Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel*) of the five-volume series *The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Several of the more popular biblical books, such as Genesis (John H. Walton), Psalms (John W. Hilber), and Isaiah (David W. Baker), have been pulled out as stand-alone commentaries. The series itself was written by excellent scholars and fills an important niche. It provides cultural background information and interesting illustrations to highlight concepts in the biblical books that other

commentaries often do not include. The commentary on Isaiah by David W. Baker is no exception.

This commentary provides valuable information on the historical and cultural foundations of the book of Isaiah, which helps to confirm the accuracy of the people, nations, historical events, and the cultural characteristics noted in this book. For example, a picture of a rock relief recording Sennacherib's capture of Lachish adds a certain reality to the events and depicts how Sennacherib accomplished it—it is the closest thing to a snapshot of this historical event that we will ever get.

If “a picture is worth a thousand words,” then this commentary is truly a vast library. This well-written, well-illustrated work (over 2,000 illustrations) is primarily aimed at the layperson who wants to know more about the customs and history behind the biblical book. Some of the very useful illustrations include: Tiglath-pileser III (p. 4); a family and their oxen taken prisoner from Lachish (p. 5); an ancient butter churn (p. 42) to illustrate the passage speaking about “curds and honey”; the six-winged figure from Tel Halaf to illustrate the six-winged seraphim of Isa 6 (p. 35); the pictures of Lachish's defeat at the hands of Sennacherib (pp. 122–23); and pig bones from Tell es-Safi to illustrate the offensive offerings described in Isa 66:3 (p. 187). Having said that, there are a few things that could help the reader have a better understanding of the ideas this book is trying to present.

First, sometimes it is unclear why certain pictures were included or at least placed where they are. This could be improved by more consistency between the text and some of the illustrations and provide a more detailed description of the illustrations used. For example, why is the very first illustration a picture of “Sargon”? Would not a picture of Sennacherib or possibly Cyrus be more appropriate at the beginning of a commentary of Isaiah? But at the very least include a more detailed explanation as to why Sargon would be important. Another, lesser example of inconsistency appears on page 8, which features an illustration of “horses feeding at a manger”; however, chapter 1 does not mention “horses,” but does refer to “a donkey” and “a bull” knowing his master's manger. However, to be fair, sometimes they do an excellent job of showing the connections, like on page 21 where they use the words “trading ships” in both the text and the illustration. Another place where they clearly show the connection is on page 25 where they have the “Allegory of the Vineyard (5:1-7) and right under it the picture of winemaking from ancient Egypt.

Second, the endnotes are very complete and contain a great deal of helpful information. But because of their placement at the end of the book, it is very cumbersome for the reader to access them, especially

when there are 1,466. It would be far easier for the reader if each note were to appear on the page where it is actually referenced.

Third, sometimes it is hard to make the connection as to how a particular cultural example helps us to understand the text better. For example, how does the Ugaritic incantation on page 110 help us to understand the “bread of adversity”? Or how does the comment about a Neo-Assyrian seal that depicts a god standing on the back of a horse help enlighten the passage in Isaiah 66:20 where the remnant is returning “by horses” (p. 188)? At first it is difficult to see the connection between the picture of Ashurnasirpal standing by a sacred tree (p.16) and the context of Isaiah 1:29 which speaks about the trees on the high places that they have desired; but the general description that follows helps link them somewhat. The explanation given concerning Isaiah 49:16 suggesting that this passage does not mean “ownership,” but a plan for the reconstructed city as illustrated by the inscribed brick from the palace in Larsa, is unconvincing (p. 163). Also many examples intended to illustrate a passage come from significantly different time periods. For example, on page 9, the Old Babylonian text describing the medicinal use of oil dates at least 1,000 years earlier. One would hope that in 1,000 years they would have learned much more about the healing properties of oil; for example, frankincense or other spices may have been augmented with oil (Tutankhamen [1336-1327] had frankincense placed in his burial tomb). Having said that, sometimes there is simply a lack of specific information from the ancient Near East and there is little we can do about that.

Though most of the vocabulary in this book is geared to the lay reader, there are certain technical terms that should be defined: extispicy (“prophesying future events by using animal entrails,” p. 138); xenophobia (“fear of another nation,” p. 166); and Demotic script (“a stage in Egyptian writing,” p. 184).

There are also a few needed corrections, such as on page 20 the impression is technically from a “stamp seal,” not a cylinder seal. The depiction of the weighing of the heart on page 29 could use further explanation so that the reader can more fully understand the illustration: if the heart is not equal in weight to the feather of truth, it will be devoured by Ammit (“devourer” or “soul-eater”).

There is no doubt that this book fills a niche for the lay reader that is largely untouched and its numerous illustrations and some of the cultural materials are invaluable. However, as a commentary for biblical studies students, it does not provide enough discussion of the text of Isaiah to be required as the main textbook. Thus it is more likely to be

relegated to supplemental reading in the library as opposed to a required textbook.

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Journey to Joy: The Psalms of Ascent by Josh Moody. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013, 181 pp., US \$14.99, softcover.

Journey to Joy is a psalm-by-psalm exploration of the main themes of the Psalms of Ascent (Pss 120–134), with a keen eye for how these themes have significance for one’s spiritual life in the twenty-first century. Its author, Josh Moody, is the senior pastor of College Church, in Wheaton, Illinois. He is a former pioneer missionary to Georgia and Azerbaijan, and did his doctoral work at the University of Cambridge, where he wrote about Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment. He is also well published, having edited the volume *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (Crossway, 2012), with three other books: *No Other Gospel: 31 Reasons from Galatians Why Justification by Faith Alone is the Only Gospel* (Crossway, 2011), *The God-Centered Life: Insights from Jonathan Edwards for Today* (IVP UK, 2006), and *Authentic Spirituality* (Kingsway, 2000). The author emerges as passionate about contemporary Christian spirituality and its vitality in the church today. His experience with the Psalms appears to be more pastoral than academic.

Moody approaches the Psalms as a collection of poetry which is meant to “help us put our feelings in the right place” (p. 14). By this, he means that psalms are tools which help us to “feel truly the truth,” giving us a place to express and bring our emotions into line with God’s will and God’s way. He colloquially calls his approach to the Psalms “Psalmothrapy”—a fitting term—as he has a broad therapeutic and existential concern for one’s own personal journey towards God and one’s experience of God through the Psalms. This approach is also apparent in how Moody understands the historical context of the Psalms. After reviewing several speculated historical settings (p. 14–15), he advocates the idea that these fifteen psalms were arranged in a purposeful order, designed to challenge the emotional feeling of the worshipper as she journeys towards Jerusalem or God. One may agree or disagree with him, but the advantage of this setting is somewhat convenient for his aims.

The book is structured much like the Psalms of Ascent themselves. After a brief preface, each of the fifteen chapters is devoted to one of the fifteen psalms. A thematic title has been given to every chapter matching his exposition of the psalm. For example, chapter 1 is called “Peace” (Ps 120), while chapter 9 is titled, “The Blessing of Family” (Ps 128). Chapters are roughly ten pages in length, well-suited for their intended purpose as daily devotionals. Moody seems to have used this material within the church he pastors, and writes for a typical American, conservative evangelical Christian. Structurally, each chapter follows the same template. The full psalm is printed at the beginning of the chapter, using the English Standard Version. This is followed by a few page introduction to the theme explored in the chapter. The remaining section of the chapter is an expository walk through of the psalm, usually taking one or two verses at a time.

There are a few tendencies of each chapter that were somewhat striking to me, and hint towards an underlying problem for the book, which may simply be true of devotional books generally. The aim of every chapter is to point out a potential problem in our contemporary spiritual experience, and then show how the psalm was designed to address that specific problem. An example comes from the third chapter on Ps 122, a chapter which Moody thematically summarizes as “church.” For him, the value of the psalm is the analogy between the love that an Israelite was to have towards Jerusalem and the love a Christian is to have towards the church. Both Jerusalem and the church provide a place for loving community, fulfilling a deep need for connection—a place where not only God’s people can connect, but also where God and his people meet. In his exposition of the psalm, Moody shows how this theme connects to the two main ideas of the psalm: resisting individualism (vv. 1–4), and rejecting cynicism (vv. 5–9). While these two points are important words to hear in the contemporary church, Moody did not make it clear just how different our contemporary experience is from that of ancient Israel. For instance, in the first half of the psalm, Moody does not acknowledge that our modern view of individualism finds no parallel in ancient Israel. It is simply not true that “the first part of this psalm is a very clear rejection of any individualistic notion of what it means to have a relationship with God” (p. 43). Such an idea could have never crossed the psalmist’s mind, and no attempt is made to show how cultural notions of individuality and community in the ancient world are related to our modern views. Similarly, in the second half of the psalm it is the author who rejects cynicism, not the psalmist himself. Certainly, cynicism may have been a response to the worshipful affirmations of the psalm, but a number of other reactions could have also existed. The problem is that Moody makes it seem like

the psalmist wrote the psalm to confront these particular twenty-first century concerns. Similar concerns were also found in other chapters.

To conclude, Moody is certainly a wonderful communicator. He is able to connect well with the reader in each chapter, as his introductory sections draw in the reader. What he has to say for the church is quite helpful, and I found myself on my own journey of theological reflection as I read through the book. But given the concerns above, I would also recommend supplementing this book with a close study of the Psalms using other commentaries or guides. With that caveat, I would recommend this book for use in the contemporary church.

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From Conquest to Coexistence: Ideology and Antiquarian Intent in the Historiography of Israel's Settlement in Canaan by Koert van Bekkum. *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East* 45. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011. xxi + 691 pp., US \$249.45, hardcover.

A lightly revised version of his 2010 doctoral dissertation completed under the supervision of G. Kwakkel at the *Theologische Universiteit Kampen*, van Bekkum's *From Conquest to Coexistence* is an ambitious project. It explores in significant detail "the plausibility of the historical truth-claims of Joshua 9:1–13:7 by appreciating [this section's] literary forms and ideology and by bringing the historical implications of this text into dialogue with the relevant artefactual evidence" (p. 594). Van Bekkum's choice of Josh 9:1–13:7 as his focus text is motivated by the fact that this section comprises a "clear textual unit," presents a "unified conquest," is of a style that can be compared to "non-biblical conquest accounts," and names more than thirty conquered cities, which makes the unit "more suitable for the interdisciplinary dialogue with the artefactual evidence than a passage like Josh 6–8, which tells about the conquest of only two cities with a disputed archaeological reputation, namely Jericho and Ai" (p. 91). The volume is structured in four parts.

Part I, "Text and Artefact" (pp. 7–92), addresses a number of issues surrounding the much debated topic of Israel's conquest of/emergence in Canaan. Importantly, along the way van Bekkum lays out a clear understanding of history writing as "a kind of representational art" in which "artistic construction, simplification, selectivity and suggestive detail" are not merely "literary embellishments within some

referential constraints,” but “essential elements” in the way narrative historiography works (p. 36). This conviction leads van Bekkum to a three-stage methodological approach to biblical texts: (1) study literary artistry and genre conventions; (2) formulate and define historical truth-claims; (3) test truth-value by bringing the results into dialogue with artefactual evidence (pp. 36–37). With all this the present reviewer is in hearty agreement (cf. my *Art of Biblical History*, 1994). What distinguishes van Bekkum’s volume is not only the soundness of his approach but its *thoroughness*. Recognizing that historical analysis requires that “text” and “artefact” be brought into dialogue *only after each is thoroughly investigated in its own right*, van Bekkum shapes the remainder of his volume accordingly.

Part II, “Monologue of Text” (pp. 95–423), offers a linguistic and literary analysis of Josh 9:1–13:7, including a meticulous, annotated translation as well as separate chapters on synchronic and diachronic concerns. This textual work leads van Bekkum to formulate an “historiographical hypothesis” that the text under consideration is, indeed, “full of artistic construction, selectivity and suggestive detail mirroring the aims and beliefs of its scribes” and is a “transmitted,” not a “found,” text, but all the same constitutes genuine ancient historiography composed by scribes who “respected their oral and textual sources” (p. 411). On the question of provenance, van Bekkum avers that this “piece of ancient Hebrew historiography [was likely] composed in Judah between the late 10th and the early 8th century B.C.E. with [the] help of Late Bronze memories” (p. 575; cf. pp. 409–10).

Part III, “Monologue of Artefact” (pp. 427–572), comprises a thorough-going review of cities and regions mentioned in Josh 9:1–13:7. The archaeological exploration, as van Bekkum notes is “not purely independent and objective,” inasmuch as “the selection of sites under discussion is given by the text” and “the period under review is marked out by the historiographical hypothesis” (p. 427) formulated in Part II. This being so, van Bekkum is scrupulous in treating the archaeological data on their own terms and in their own contexts. Additionally, regular sections addressing the “regional perspective” provide a broader perspective. Two of the more controversial sites with respect to the biblical account of Israel’s entry into Canaan, i.e. Jericho and Ai, do not figure into van Bekkum’s textual unit and so receive only the occasional passing comment that they are problematical. He sensibly suggests that discussion of the archaeology of the Book of Joshua should, in any case, not rest on only two sites but on the other “31 identified locations mentioned within the boundaries of the Cisjordanian ‘conquered land’ of Joshua 9:1–13:7” (p. 461). His survey of these sites is commendably detailed, especially considering the necessary breadth of his project. In

the course of his survey, van Bekkum cautiously addresses a number of controversial issues such as Finkelstein's proposed "low chronology," the dating of the famous gates at Hazor, Gezer, and Megiddo, Eilat Mazar's "large stone structure" in Jerusalem, the proliferation of Central Hill Country villages in Iron I, and others.

In Part IV, "Dialogue of Text and Artefact" (pp. 575–592), van Bekkum harvests the fruit of his labours. While recognizing that problems remain with Jericho, Ai, and Gibeon (only the latter of which is treated in any depth), he concludes that "the overall pattern is quite positive," in particular in view of correlations "between archaeological excavations and the Egyptian New Kingdom texts describing Asiatic campaigns." He concludes that "the possibility of some late 10th or 9th century B.C.E. scribes writing about the conquest of the land by a group called 'Israel' during the Late Bronze Age cannot be ruled out from an archaeological point of view" (p. 579). Indeed, for van Bekkum, "the overall pattern of historical truth-claims of Joshua 9:1–13:7"—"a story going 'from conquest to coexistence'"—offers the best explanation of the complex archaeological picture (pp. 584–85). In short, "there is no considerable distance between story and history" (p. 592).

There is much to commend in this sensible and erudite volume, but it is not without its minor flaws. A fair number of typos, grammatical/syntactical mistakes, malaprops, non-standard spellings (e.g., "Rehabeam and Jerobeam" [p. 402]), and instances of "Dutch-English" (e.g., the occasional occurrence of "en" in place of "and," or of the uncommon "decennia" in place of "decades") managed to survive the editing process. Given the complexity of the volume, such survivors are, perhaps, to be expected, but given the importance of the volume, it is too bad that they hinder the reading process slightly. These minor flaws aside, the volume is very attractively produced with helpful maps and illustrations sprinkled throughout, and with an extensive bibliography and excellent indices. An added bonus is an epilogue in which van Bekkum offers a brief account of who he is, where he stands on certain philosophical and theological issues, why he has chosen to avoid unhelpful terms such as "maximalist" and "minimalist," and so forth. Understanding amongst those engaged in debates surrounding Israel's history and historiography would be enhanced if more scholars were similarly self-aware and forthcoming.

In a day and age in which there is too much to read and long books in particular are daunting, perhaps the best way to conclude this review is to say that I am glad to have read this long book. It is a well-conceived, thoroughly researched, well-ordered and executed, packed with useful information, and duly cautious and sensible in its judgments.

It is a book that I shall keep on my shelf and return to often, especially for its archaeological summaries.

V. PHILIPS LONG
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Jerusalem and the Nations: Studies in the Book of Isaiah by Ronald E. Clements. Hebrew Bible Monographs 16. Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2011. xii + 248 pp., US \$90.00, hardcover.

R. E. Clements is a well-known commentator on the Hebrew Bible, having contributed commentaries on Exodus, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, as well as his *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach*. This collection of essays focuses on the development of the book of Isaiah, and more specifically, on the Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C. Clements is revisiting his *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Israel* (JSOT, 1980), updating and occasionally modifying some of his views. Studies on the Assyrian invasion usually focus on historical problems presented by the various siege reports of Jerusalem and Hezekiah's survival. Clements maintains that failure to recognize the literary and theological aspects of the deliverance of Jerusalem prevents the reader from fully appreciating the story in the context of the collection of prophecies in the book of Isaiah.

This first part of the book concerns the formation of the book of Isaiah. Clements comments in a later chapter that Isaiah must be considered one of the most complicated writings in the Hebrew Bible (p. 226). Few scholars read the book as coming from a single, eighth-century prophet, and even the idea of a simple scheme of two Isaiahs is difficult to maintain. Clements sees the prophetic books as "piecemeal assemblages put together from a number of ancient documents" (p. 9). The main purpose of assembling the prophetic books was to "present an overall picture of God's plan and purpose for Israel" (p. 5). But he would resist calling a book like Isaiah an anthology since there is a careful plan and structure to the book.

Recent studies on the prophets have suggested that later writers interpreted the words of a prophet in light of new situations, so that prophecy became a "living dialogue between God and Israel" (p. 13). In current prophetic studies this dialogue is often called "intertextuality"—a popular term in biblical studies that ought to be defined carefully. Clements points out that his view of intertextuality in Isaiah is not merely word-games, but a serious attempt to re-read older prophecy and apply it

to new situations. As the prophecy moved from spoken word to written books, the words of the prophet would naturally be understood in light of present realities.

The most obvious “historical reality” for the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible is the fall of Jerusalem. Unlike the Assyrian invasion in 701 B.C., God did not protect the city in 587 B.C., and thus the story of God’s rescue of Jerusalem “took on a different complexion later when the city was destroyed” (p. 15). There is perhaps another episode in the Persian period that forms the background to another re-reading of the earlier prophecies of Isaiah. In this final edit of Isaiah, chapters 1–4 and 65–66 were added in response to this conflict. Clements discusses the evidence for this final edit in chapters 3 and 15. Only Isaiah 5–35 is in response to the two political crises of the eighth century. It is likely that many evangelical readers will not accept Clements’ discussion of the formation of a prophetic book since he does not think the whole book came from an eighth-century prophet named Isaiah.

Since he is suggesting later layers of the book of Isaiah interpret the earlier ones intertextually, Clements is open to the criticism faced by intertextual studies. The later interpretations are only valid if the earlier text is in fact earlier. Clements argues in his third chapter that Isa 1–4 and 65–66 were added in the final edition of the book and that they interpret the whole book in the light of events at the time of the final edit. But if it can be shown that these chapters were not the last to be added to the book, then this re-reading of an earlier Isaiah cannot be maintained. Someone might argue that chapters 1–4 come from the original eighth-century prophet, not a Persian-era prophetic editor. Intertextuality works best when applied to separate books that are clearly datable, or better still, the New Testament use of the Hebrew Bible. Within a smaller canon like Isaiah, it is much more difficult to prove which text is the earliest in order to determine the direction of the intertextual link.

The second section of the book (chs. 6–10) focuses specifically on the Assyrian invasion of 701 B.C. Some elements of the story told in 2 Kings, Isaiah, and the Sennacherib Chronicle are certain (for example: Sennacherib invaded Judah but Jerusalem was not destroyed). The main problem is the biblical claim that the Angel of the Lord destroyed much of Sennacherib’s army. The biblical material sees this as a divine intervention to preserve the kingdom of Judah, while the Assyrian records simply do not explain why Sennacherib did not destroy Jerusalem. Clements argues the miraculous rescue story developed over a long period of time in response to growing threats to Judah in the sixth century B.C. (p. 81). The theology of the story is that Mesopotamian imperialism is a direct attack on Yahweh’s authority over Judah. When

the Assyrians invaded, God miraculously defended his city Jerusalem. When the story is told in the sixth century, Jerusalem is threatened by Babylon, another blasphemous Mesopotamian empire. Clements suggests the story of God's deliverance influenced the disastrous policies of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. The "final form," however, consciously contrasts the events of 701 (preservation of the nation) with the events of 587 (p. 82).

Clements interprets some of the Oracles of Woe (Isa 28:1–31:9) in the context of the political uncertainty just prior to the Assyrian invasion, but others seem to reflect a time after the invasion. Reliance on Egypt as a worthless illusion is a main theme of the unit and the prophet warns against any alliance with Assyria. Both were options for Hezekiah prior to the crisis, but after the miraculous delivery of Jerusalem, reliance on God is the only real option. Clements once argued that the collection of messages was perhaps made in the sixth century during the nationalistic revivals of Josiah's reign. Now he sees these chapters as part of the original eighth-century prophetic material (a so-called "Isaiah Memoir"), albeit edited and revised in the light of later events (p. 97).

The third section of the book examines Isaiah in the light of a Persian context, although the essays are not as cohesive as those in the second section of the book. Chapters 11–14 are reprinted articles dealing with specific texts. Chapter 12 concerns Isa 14:22–27. Two chapters study elements of the servant songs: Isa 53 and the restoration of Israel (ch. 12) and the "light to the nations" (ch. 13). In chapter 14 Clements suggests that the symbol of Zion-Jerusalem is an intertextual link between the two major sections of the book. Rather than looking for two sequential prophetic calling experiences in either half of the book, Clements suggests that the central theme of Zion links the halves. Just as God delivered Zion in the past, so too, will he rescue Zion again in the future.

In chapter 15 Clements builds on many of the observations found in the book and suggests Isa 1:1–31 functions as an introduction to the book. He has already argued that Isa 5–35 form the earliest unit of Isaiah, and many scholars now follow Marvin Sweeney, who argued chapters 1–4 are an introduction to Isaiah. Clements sees chapters 2–4 as a self-contained unit that he calls "The Little Book of Zion." The confident hope of a restored Zion is threatened in this introductory message as the leaders of Israel are described as rebels and are threatened with destruction.

In conclusion, this collection of essays is a valuable contribution to the study of Isaiah. It is always convenient for essays originally published in obscure *festschriften* to be collected and reprinted, but the essays produced specifically for this book are what make this volume

particularly valuable. Despite the cogency of his arguments, Clements will likely not convince some evangelicals on aspects of the formation of prophetic books like Isaiah. Nevertheless, his observations on the final, canonical form of Isaiah are excellent and ought to be integrated into any serious study of the book of Isaiah.

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Psalms 1–2: Gateway to the Psalter by Robert L. Cole. Hebrew Bible Monographs 37. Sheffield: Phoenix, 2013. ix + 182 pp., US \$80.00, hardcover.

In this monograph Robert Cole follows up on his published dissertation, *The Shape and Message of Book III (Pss.73–89)* (Sheffield Academic, 2000) by studying the first two Psalms as a canonical introduction to the entire Psalter. What sets this study apart from other similar monographs is Cole’s application of his method to the third Psalm. After providing a close analysis of Pss 1–2 in order to show that they are intended to be read as an introduction to the book, he examines Ps 3 in order to show that there are verbal and thematic connections between the first three Psalms. Cole argues that the canonical arrangement of the first three Psalms is intentional. Furthermore, Cole argues that the first two Psalms have broader connections to other canonical seams in the Psalter as well as connections to the canonical arrangement of the Hebrew Bible.

As his first chapter makes clear, the notion that the first two Psalms are an introduction to the whole Psalter is not a new idea. In his exhaustive literature survey, Cole shows that while many previous writers have spoken of Pss 1–2 as an introduction to book of Psalms, few see the “fundamental and irreconcilable opposition that exists between a serious grappling with the canonical shape of the Psalter and Gunkel’s explicit rejection of it” (p. 44). In fact, a major motivation for Cole is his rejection of form critical categories since these categories obscure the canonical shape of the Psalter. He concludes that Gunkel’s rejection of canonical order is based on the categories of form criticism. Since the order of the Psalter did not conform to Gunkel’s own categories, he rejected any shaping of the Psalter (p. 157).

In chapter 2, Cole examines the details of Ps 1 in order to show the lexical lineages to Ps 2, as well as many other links to canonical seams in the Psalter. For example, Pss 1:2 and 40:9 [ET 40:8] both

feature “delighting in the will of God and his Torah.” Cole identifies this as “an inclusio across the initial division of the Psalter” (p. 61). He examines the structure of the psalm, pointing out the minimal acrostic pattern and clear structural features marking it off as a clear unit. He then provides a detailed commentary on the psalm in which he detects a number of close parallels to Josh 1:7–8. While he follows the work of Botha on intertextuality and Ps 1, Cole does not describe the parallels between Ps 1 and Josh 1 as an “intertextual relationship,” although one could easily use the term. In both contexts there is an admonition to meditate on the Torah both day and night as well as a promise of success for the man who makes such a commitment.

For Cole, the one who is to “meditate on the Law day and night” is the ruler of the people. Since Ps 1 was described by Gunkel as a “wisdom psalm,” the verbal connections to Ps 2 were obscured. By connecting the righteous man of Ps 1 to Josh 1:7–8, Cole can argue that Ps 1 is more like a royal psalm, providing further evidence of a connection to Ps 2. But he goes beyond this by suggesting that Ps 1 looks forward to a future, conquering king in the pattern of Joshua—the monarch of Ps 2. Psalm 1 is a description of an eschatological future in which the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will be preserved (p. 78). He finds support for this eschatological reading of the Psalm in the shape of the Hebrew Canon, where Malachi is immediately followed by Ps 1. He offers a number of lexical and thematic parallels between Mal 3 and Ps 1 (p. 73). In fact, with Josh 1:7–8 as the introduction to the Prophets and Mal 3 as the conclusion, these themes form an inclusio for the Prophets as well as an introduction to the Psalter.

Cole provides a similar analysis of Ps 2 in chapter 3. While Ps 2 is certainly different than Ps 1, there is ample evidence of purposeful juxtaposition of the two. Cole provides a comprehensive list of the verbal links between Ps 1 and 2. Like the first Psalm, Ps 2 has a number of “overt verbal connectors” appearing in the canonical seams of the Psalter (42, 72, and 89) as well as the conclusion to the book (Pss 146–50).

Having shown the close links between Pss 1 and 2 as well as numerous lexical links to the other canonical seams in the psalter, Cole examines Ps 3 in his final chapter to show that this Psalm takes up further topics raised by the first two psalms (p. 163). He provides numerous verbal links as well as thematic links such as the human King David threatened by his enemies. The fate of the enemies in both psalms is similar, for example, and both Ps 2 and 3 begin with similar questions (why? how long?). This reading of Ps 3 in the light of the first two psalms has been obscured by Gunkel’s dismissal of a purposeful arrangement of the Psalter as well as his description of Ps 1 as a wisdom psalm and Ps 2 as a royal psalm. The verbal and thematic connections

between Pss 1–2 and Ps 3 indicate that the “Psalter’s order deserves, like any other book, to be seriously considered on its own merits” (p. 157).

This conclusion is not unlike Gerald Wilson’s *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Scholars, 1985). Cole’s motivation to move the study of the canonical shape of the Psalter out of the long shadow of Gunkel is commendable and he is able to assemble a great deal of evidence from Pss 1–3 for the canonical shaping of the Psalter. But Cole’s monograph is only a first step in the exploration of the formation of the Psalter. As Cole concludes, a similar detailed study of each Psalm is required in order to determine how they were intentionally arranged.

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Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament by John D. Currid. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013. 153 pp., US \$17.99, softcover.

Awareness of the similarities between ancient Near Eastern literature and the Old Testament is growing in popular culture. More and more programming on television, not to mention internet sources, addresses topics of archaeological and ancient textual interest. This comparative material rarely receives comment in the context of teaching and preaching in today’s evangelical churches. As a consequence, most Christians, especially young people engaged in university studies, are clueless what to think when they first encounter these similarities. Currid writes for this audience, offering a work that “is *introductory* and, therefore, is designed for those who know little about the topic of polemical theology” (p. 10). He is careful to note that polemics are not the only relationship between the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern backgrounds (p. 141); but this is a dominant literary technique underlying much of the biblical text. His book, therefore, is a help for educating the church and broader culture.

Chapter 1 provides “a cursory outline of the history of ancient Near Eastern studies” and its “relationship to the field of biblical studies” (p. 11). This overview captures the essential movements in clear and helpful fashion. Currid could have been more careful, however, when addressing current discussions within evangelical studies. His one paragraph describing accommodationist hermeneutics lumps together Peter Enns and John Walton. He concludes that such scholars “do not recognize, to any great degree, the foundational differences between [Old

Testament theology and ancient world perspectives]” (p. 23). This representation is unfair to the diversity within the evangelical guild as well as the clear statements by such comparativists regarding significant worldview differences. Perhaps some reductionism is necessary in this sort of cursory treatment, but I think more care is necessary when representing others who are personally close to the tradition of the intended audience. Personal reputations aside, the complexity of this issue deserves a more thorough and nuanced introduction for the “uninitiated” (later discussion in chapter 3 notwithstanding).

Chapter 2 defines polemics: “*Polemical theology* is the use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meaning” (p. 25). Further discussion in this chapter clarifies this definition when Currid highlights that polemics “demonstrate essential *distinctions* between Hebrew thought and ancient Near Eastern beliefs and practices” (p. 26). The remaining pages of this chapter illustrate this definition with a few simple examples, thereby setting the stage for in-depth treatment of more complex cases in the chapters that follow.

Genesis 1 and ANE creation accounts are the topic of chapter 3. Currid contrasts his own view not only with that of the older pan-babylonianism represented by Delitzsch, but also with Peter Enns, John Walton, and Bruce Waltke, who, in his terms, illustrate a recent evangelical trend to “drift” and “wane” on opposition to older critical perspectives (p. 34). In particular, he is concerned about affirmations that the Old Testament accommodates itself to an ancient Near Eastern view of the cosmos while only demythologizing the polytheistic religious associations. Such a posture in his view differs little from Delitzsch. Having lumped these evangelicals with Delitzsch, Currid critiques the whole position:

It undervalues and undercuts the originality and exceptional nature of the Hebrew world-and-life view. Thus sits the question in a nutshell: is the Hebrew creation account distinct thought at its very core or not? Is it merely another ancient Near Eastern myth that has been cleansed, or is it a radical, unique cosmogonical view? Or is it something in between? (p. 35)

This frames the question, but unfortunately, Currid never answers it clearly. When he analyzes key differences between the Bible and ancient Near Eastern accounts, he notes the unique transcendence of the Bible’s Creator-God, *ex-nihilo* creation, the dignity of humanity’s purpose in the Bible, and the means by which Israel’s God creates in contrast to the diverse portraits of other ancient accounts. These surely are “radical”

differences in biblical theology. But in the end, it seems that his “radical” distinctions are not much different than the views expressed by evangelicals whom he has criticized. There is disagreement on whether *ex-nihilo* creation is clear in Gen 1 (exegetically, it is only inferential), but all evangelicals with whom I am familiar would affirm creation *ex-nihilo* at the level of biblical theology, even if needing to draw from outside of Gen 1 to do so. His mention of creation by word in the Memphite theology needs more elaboration, as this is a key similarity that often shocks people on first encounter. His contrast on page 46 could be strengthened by the observation that in this text, the creator-god, Ptah, is himself identified with the cosmic waters (compound name Ptah-Nun).

Chapter 4 treats the flood account, chapter 5 the spurned seductress motif in the Joseph narrative, and chapter 6 the similarities between the birth of Moses and stories of other persecuted children who rise to fame and power. Currid’s expansion of discussion in chapter 6 beyond the Sargon legend to include Egyptian and Hittite stories is particularly helpful. Chapter 7 compares the flight of Moses to Midian with the Story of Sinuhe. Currid maintains that both utilize a well-known “exile-return” motif, only rather than Moses longing for Egypt and Pharaoh’s court, he exhibits the opposite of the expected Egyptian “virtues.” Whether the ancient audience would have reflexively thought of Sinuhe when hearing the Moses story is questionable in my judgment, but the polemical commentary by Exodus on Egyptian *values* espoused by Sinuhe would have been stark.

Chapter 8 introduces a “little known parallel” (p. 97), indeed new to me. A line in the Egyptian “Book of the Heavenly Cow” reports the words of Re: “I am that I am. I will not let them take action” (p. 100; referring to humanity’s rebellion in “The Destruction of Mankind”). Following the lead of Egyptologists Hornung and Fecht, Currid argues that since both the Egyptian text (Egyptian *ywy ymy*) and Exod 3:14 (*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*) use the *idem per idem* formula with similar sound, morphology, and semantic intent, there is an intertextual play between Exodus and the Egyptian text. Each reader will need to judge the merits of this interesting suggestion. The parallel is not close phonetically or morphologically (contra Currid), but a semantic similarity is there. Nevertheless, the cogency of any proposed literary allusion is dependent upon the target audience’s sphere of relevance. For me, the association remains doubtful. The possibility that Yahweh’s speech co-opted the words of Re is difficult in that it assumes a *Semitic* audience would appreciate this very subtle, semantic allusion. Currid’s preferred explanation, that a Pharaoh polemicized against the name “Yahweh” (p. 107, 109), is more problematic, since even Currid recognizes that the

“Book of the Heavenly Cow” most likely pre-dates Moses (p. 98). Even if not of Middle Egyptian origin, the appearance of this text in the tomb of Seti I precludes the possibility if Moses dates to the thirteenth century. For this suggestion to work, the explication of the divine name using the *idem per idem* formula must have existed alongside the name itself in patriarchal times.

Chapters 9 and 10 consider the Rod of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea, respectively. As one might have already observed, most of Currid’s discussions engages polemics involving Egyptian background. Considering the preponderance of attention usually given to Canaanite and Mesopotamian background, this welcome treatment redresses an imbalance for those already familiar with Old Testament polemics. However, the final chapter (ch. 10) does offer concise discussion of several commonly recognized polemics against Canaanite religion.

In sum, I find helpful discussion in Currid’s book. Explanations are basic and clear (well-suited to the intended audience). One may wish for more extensive discussion or inclusion of other examples, but given the nature of the target audience and the subject matter, this book is of good length (i.e., brief). It *can* be read tolerably by a popular audience, hopefully whetting the appetite for more comparative study that similarly enriches one’s understanding and appreciation of the message of the Old Testament.

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Jewish and Christian Approaches to the Psalms: Approaches and Convergence edited by Susan Gillingham. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. xix + 271 pp., US \$125.00, hardcover.

This volume assembles the published papers originally presented at a conference on the Psalter at Worcester College, Oxford, in the fall of 2010. The contributors represent scholars from both Jewish and Christian traditions. Throughout the collection the scholars from each tradition respond to one another. The varieties of scholarly traditions draw out the very conflict and even convergence alluded to in the subtitle.

The work contains an introduction by Susan Gillingham, followed by 20 essays divided into three parts, and concludes with three indexes (i.e., names, subject, psalms). The work also includes 16 full color plates. The range of topics and the interaction between scholars

make this collection a fruitful addition to the current state of Psalms studies.

The first part of the volume, “Jewish and Christian Responses to the Psalms,” includes 10 essays. This part reflects the convergence of ideas between Jewish and Christian scholars. The first six essays show a collaborative effort and exchange between the presenters. The first two essays, Peter W. Flint’s “The Dead Sea Psalms Scrolls,” and Geza Vermes’s “Reflections on the Canon and the Text of the Bible,” suggest the idea that there was not a uniform or *Urtext* for the Psalter. Both of these scholars, especially Flint, work through multiple Psalms manuscripts from the Judean desert to point to “textual elasticity,” variant readings, and different ordering of individual psalms as the rationale for challenging the assumption of an original Hebrew Psalter.

The second round of essays in Part 1 consists of Adele Berlin’s paper “Medieval Answers to Modern Questions,” followed by Corinna Körting’s response “Medieval Psalms Exegesis as a Challenge to Modern Exegesis.” Berlin’s paper was a delight to read. As a means of representing the nuances of medieval exegetes, Berlin presented an imagined interview with Saadi, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and David Qimhi. Körting’s response attempted to establish how modern exegetes struggle with the same issues as their medieval counterparts—cultural situation, tradition, and the relationship and understanding of divine and human language within the Psalter.

The third round of essays in Part 1 consists of two essays focused on the reception history of Ps 137 within both Jewish and Christian traditions. Susan Gillingham’s essay surveys the reception of this psalm in both traditions throughout the centuries. She suggested that the psalm does not lend itself to either a “David-centered” reading or a “Christ-centered” reading (p. 79). Thus, this psalm is an illustration of a “life-centered” approach to the Psalter, whereby the “I” of the psalm is anyone who “maintains integrity of faith even when the going is hard” (p. 80). Jonathan Magonet expands upon the previous essay and suggests the implications of the closing section of the psalm—the expression of anger and curses—when incorporated into a holistic reading.

The final four essays in Part 1 are Elizabeth Solopova’s “The Liturgical Psalter in Medieval Europe,” Aaron Rosen’s “True Lights: Seeing the Psalms through Chagall’s Church Windows,” David Mitchell’s “How Can We Sing the Lord’s Song? Deciphering the Masoretic Cantillation,” and John Sawyer’s “The Psalms in Judaism and Christianity.” All four of the essays focus on either the use of the psalms in art or in music and how these observations can assist in creating dialogue between Christianity and Judaism. Mitchell’s essay was a joy to

read and the insights he provided were interesting. I would venture a guess that many scholars of the Psalter have experienced the awareness of the “absence of music” as they read the Psalms, and have even asked the question, “Where is the tune?” (p. 119). Mitchell surveyed the cantillation system of Haik-Vantoura and provided a full transcription with musical notations for Pss 23, 95, and 122. I am not trained in music; however, I am currently working on a project with a church musician. I am providing translations for some key psalms and pointing out how I believe the Masoretic accents may function to establish lines that may prove useful for putting these psalms to music. Mitchell’s essay opened the door for further research as to how to bring the words of the Psalter into the music of the modern church (it may be more correct to say, bring the singing of the Psalter back into the church).

The second major section “Reading the Psalter” includes six essays. These essays return to the format of a paper from one tradition followed by a response from the other. In the essay “The Psalter as Theodicy Writ Large,” Bill Bellinger suggested that the “questions raised by the trouble and woe of exile and its aftermath as pervading all the parts of the Psalter” (p. 157). For Bellinger the idea of theodicy is expressed in the issues of the kingship of Yahweh and the tradition of protest expressed in Books Four and Five. Thus, the approach of interpreting the Psalter as a book can have a major impact on a reading community, especially one attempting to understand the relationship between faith and reality, whether in the Jewish or Christian tradition. Dirk Human responded to Bellinger in his essay “The Psalter and Theodicy: Perspectives Related to a Rhetorical Approach.”

The next set of essays represents different approaches to reading the Psalter as a book. Klaus Seybold’s essay “The Psalter as a Book” once again brings up the issue of an *Urtext*. Seybold offers the idea of “a scroll of texts” as the “first elusive scroll of the book of Psalms” (p. 169). He gives seven suggestions which point to the possibility of a type of *Urtext*. In David Howard’s response to Seybold, “The Proto-MT, the King, and Psalms 1 and 2,” he discusses the competing perspectives of the “Psalter of Moses” and the “Psalter of David” brought up by Seybold (pp. 178, 185–87).

The final set of essays in Part 3 consists of Nancy deClaissé-Walford’s paper “On Translating the Poetry of the Psalms” and Philip Johnston’s paper “Traduttore Traditore, Beowulf, and the Psalms.” deClaissé-Walford’s essay was, at least in my mind, one of the more thought-provoking papers. Her insights were developed initially in her work with the Bible translation project “The Voice” and the forthcoming Psalms volume in the NICOT series. Her work in the latter project brought up four issues, each of which she discusses in detail. Though

these issues are not new to anyone who has worked in Hebrew poetry, her reflections on the translation of certain Hebrew words; the repetition of Hebrew sounds, verbal roots, and words and phrases; maintaining the word order of Hebrew poetry; and the use of gender neutral language, were valuable and to be considered by scholars of the Psalter. Her insights are providing fodder for the project I previously mentioned—singing the Psalms. Johnston’s critique of deClaisé-Walford’s paper is fair and he does find exceptions for most of her suggestions. He seems to suggest that translation must be on a case-by-case basis. He notes, “In translation there is never a correct version” because in a sense we will always prove the proverb *Traduttore traditore* (p. 208).

The final part of these collected essays focuses on the Psalms from the perspective of the past and the present. In two separate papers John Day and Erhard Gerstenberger deal with the correspondence and similarities between some of the psalms and other ancient Near Eastern hymns. Day discusses Ps 104 and Akhenaten’s “Hymn to the Sun.” Gerstenberger opines on the correspondence between Sumerian hymns and forms in the Psalter. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Till Magnus Steiner compare the Psalter to a great house in their essay “Problems and Prospects in Psalter Studies.” The authors note that the Psalter “in its final form, is complex and cannot be restricted to viewing it in just one dimension: we encounter several different corridors and floors, and each offers infinite opportunities for the reception and delivery of different messages” (p. 241). They suggest that the future study of the Psalter must be one in which synchronic and diachronic study enlighten each other (pp. 248–49). John Barton provides a postscript for these collected essays. Barton’s insightful comment that seems to be a natural observation from these essays: “I am surprised no one has organized a theology of the Old Testament around the Psalter” (p. 259).

The aim of this collection and the conference from which it came was to open the door for dialogue between the Jewish and Christian traditions and their understandings of the Hebrew Psalter. The range of ideas and issues presented in these papers cover the spectrum of scholarship related to the Psalms. The dialogue, at least in print, was considerate and constructive. This volume shows, that in many ways, there is convergence between the traditions. Yet, the conflict, or maybe “differences” is a better word, is just as obvious. These collected essays are a good example of how listening to those from another tradition could very well advance the scholarship of any given area of biblical studies.

Any serious scholar or student of the Psalter should read this work. A Psalms scholar may not be familiar with some of the material in

the book, such as Chagall's art or musical notations. Any paper in this volume may just open a door they did not even know was there to be opened.

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Invitation to the Psalms: A Reader's Guide for Discovery and Engagement by Rolf A. Jacobson and Karl N. Jacobson. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013. 184 pp., US \$15.00, softcover.

Rolf Jacobson, associate professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary, has written several books, journal articles, and conference papers on the Psalms throughout his career. His brother, Karl, is an assistant professor of religion at Augsburg College. Karl has written a study guide on Jonah for the Book of Faith series published by Augsburg Fortress. In their previous collaboration, *Crazy Book: A Not-So-Stuffy Dictionary of Biblical Terms*, the Jacobson brothers interpret Scripture in an informal and humorous tone. The purpose of present volume is to teach about the psalms in a simple way so that believers "may learn to read, pray, sing, shout, chant, and wonder the psalms" (p. 2).

The authors present the psalms with a fresh outlook in order to create a deeper appreciation of the book in the reader. By focusing on the construction, genres, voice, metaphors, and theology of the psalms, the reader will gain a better historical understanding of the psalms. This book is intended for those who have not studied Psalms but are open to learning the significance of this book and what it means to the rest of the Bible and its practical application to the Christian life.

Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the book of Psalms. The first chapter covers the basic construction of Hebrew poetry such as the repetition of certain words, phrases, or ideas in order to emphasize importance. The authors explain the different kind of parallelisms that occur in Psalms. Several examples are given throughout the chapter clarifying the different types of parallels showing diversity among the composition, message, and theme of the different songs.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the different genres. Chapter 2 introduces the idea of the psalms being diverse in their meaning and message. Much like songs today, the biblical songs of the Bible have different meanings and purposes. The authors emphasize that the form of a psalm changes based on its historical context. The Jacobsons explain the situation, language, and audience for the different songs in the Bible.

In Chapter 3, the authors delve deeper into the idea of the types of genres. They emphasize that other scholars may categorize the psalms differently, but the genres they choose are royal, enthronement, wisdom, creation, historical, Zion, imprecatory, penitential, and liturgical. For every genre, the Jacobsons give examples of the different psalms and explain why they match the chosen archetype.

Chapter 4 focuses on the voice and life situations of the psalms. The authors explain that the psalms were not written by the same author or in the same time period. They also accentuate that a persona or life situation defines the meaning of a poetical work. The Jacobsons explain that the psalmists use a particular persona in order to convey a specific message. By emphasizing the impact of the persona, the Jacobsons allow the reader to make a more personal connection to the poems. The authors describe how the message of popular songs today can change based upon the life situation of the performer because songs will be expressed differently based upon the experiences of a particular person.

In Chapter 5, the Jacobsons seek to explain to the reader the significance of metaphors throughout the Psalms. This chapter analyzes how the metaphors in the Psalms reveal deep biblical truth by using familiar imagery. God is not a rock, a literal shepherd that tends sheep, or a massive light. However, metaphors such as rock, shepherd, and light all explain aspects of God's personality and his divine power.

Chapter 6 examines the theology of Psalms. The Jacobsons illustrate how all the psalms ultimately point to God's faithfulness, love, and his role in creation. Since God is all of these things then He is worthy of praise and songs of trust and thanksgiving. The authors conclude their book by stating that the psalms are not meant to be studied or analyzed. Ultimately the authors believe that the psalms are meant to be read, sung, and experienced.

The casual language of the book may bother more advanced students of the Old Testament. The book also does not engage debates about various interpretations of Psalms, nor does it interact with the Hebrew text. However, the authors make clear that this book is not intended for scholars, but rather for those who are interested in learning more about the significance of the psalms. Laypeople will appreciate that the Jacobsons do not use a plethora of theological terms but explain their arguments in plain language.

This book would also benefit those who may have trouble reading the psalms because of cultural and literary barriers. Through the authors' explanation of the significance of the literary styles, the reader will gain a deeper appreciation of the psalms and poetry. Another goal of this book is to enlighten the reader on how to *experience* the psalms as

opposed to simply *reading* them. One way that the authors engage readers is that they allow readers to practice writing psalms based on the types of examples found in the Bible. These exercises allow the reader to appreciate the psalms in the Bible as a form of artwork. The book also contains several case studies that examine biblical songs or modern songs that challenge the reader to understand the voice, audience, or theme that the writer intended.

This book would assist young students who are interested in studying the different types of psalms in the Bible. By analyzing the Scriptures and carefully explaining their significance, the authors shed light on questions that a reader may have about the Psalms. This book provides as a general guide through the Psalms that could be used in either a personal or corporate Bible study. Old Testament professors may find that this book provides a textbook to use in their classes as a way of allowing modern students to engage the psalms on a more practical level.

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Reading with the Faithful: Interpretation of True and False Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah from Ancient Times to Modern by Seth B. Tarrer. Journal of Theological Interpretation Supplement 6. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013. xi + 209 pp., US \$34.95, softcover.

Seth Tarrer's *Reading with the Faithful* is a slightly revised version of his doctoral dissertation which focuses on "representative interpretations of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and theological works dealing explicitly with the question of true and false prophecy in an effort to present a 'sampling' of material from the span of the church's existence" (p. 2). In the desire to keep his survey brief, he limits his study to the Protestant tradition. His aim is to determine whether his historical survey might resolve the current impasse concerning the notion of false prophecy by helping modern interpreters consider whether those from earlier history might provide assistance in resolving the issue. His study seeks to answer two questions: (1) "What was at work historically, politically, and personally in various interpreters' attempts to delineate criteria within and throughout the prophetic books?" (p. 3) and (2) in light of modern pluralism and the effect of historical-critical approaches, "is it reasonable to posit that the need for criteria fell away as the interpretive environment of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries was increasingly marked by a lack of urgency and an increased sense of tolerance" (p. 4)?

What differentiates Tarrer's study from others is his focus on the issue of false prophecy. He limits his interaction to those who have written on Jeremiah or false prophecy in the OT. Thus, he covers Jerome and Theodoret from the early church (ch. 2); the *Glossa Ordinaria* and Thomas Aquinas from the medieval period (ch. 3); Calvin from the Reformation (ch. 4); Hobbes, Spinoza, Vitringa, Calmet, and Thomas Newton from the Enlightenment era (ch. 5); Seiler, Hengstenberg, Keil, von Orelli, George Adam Smith, Ewald, Duhm, and Kuenen from the nineteenth century (ch. 6); von Rad, James Sanders, and Childs from the twentieth century (until 1986; ch. 7); Brenneman, Lange, and Moberly from 1986 to the present (ch. 8).

Though the study is more expansive than this review can cover, a few conclusions are in order. Tarrer argues that the early church and medieval tradition appealed to some form of association with Jer 28 and the prophetic warnings in Deut 13 and 18 (p. 4). Prior to the Law, Calvin saw the main feature of the prophetic office as foretelling future events. However, with the writing of the Book of the Law, Calvin saw the Law as the means to interpret prophecy.

With the rise of the Enlightenment, Vitringa and Calmet gave several criteria by which the prophet's revelation should be evaluated. Spinoza saw morality as the foundation of any true prophet. The nineteenth century saw the separation between the Prophets and the Law as the JEDP theory arose and placed the writing of the Law in a post-exilic context. Interpreters saw different theological themes as the loci around which true prophets gathered (e.g. the messianic ideal suggested by Hengstenberg). Duhm and Kuenen emphasized the discord between Isaiah's prophecies of salvation and Jeremiah's of judgment. Later interpreters sought to explain the discord between these two. Von Rad saw the submission of the prophet to Yahweh's word as the evidence of true prophecy, and he emphasized the transcendence of Yahweh. Childs's commitment to the shape of the canon forced him to see some relation between the Prophets and the Law that von Rad failed to highlight.

In more recent times, Brenneman argues that the criteria for true and false prophecy is determined by the reader and interpretive community, thus championing a more postmodern reading of the text (p. 172). Moberly emphasizes Jer 23 to highlight three criteria for identifying false prophecy: 1) the lack of character in the life of the prophet, 2) a failure to urge repentance, 3) and the false prophet's absence from the divine council.

Tarrer concludes his study by noting common features that emerged throughout the history of the literature. He sees traces of

Aquinas picked up by Calvin as well as commonality between Moberly and Spinoza's assertions about the morality of the prophet. He concludes by advocating the canonical approach of Childs as the way forward. Childs make use of redaction criticism's observations concerning the lack of harmonization, allowing him to ask questions of the text which pre-moderns did not ask.

Tarrer's work deserves a number of commendations. First, he distills a vast amount of research and history into a concise, informative survey. Second, he insightfully points out similarities in the history of interpretation (e.g. Moberly and Spinoza as well as Calvin and Aquinas, as mentioned above). These similarities show the modern interpreter the roots of (some) current interpretations, and demonstrate in many ways that there is "nothing new under the sun." Third, he weaves throughout his work an understanding of the political and historical atmosphere of each interpreter discussed. A major benefit of the work is that it maintains clarity of focus in answering the first question posited in the introduction.

Though the work is successful in achieving many of its purposes, there are a few minor areas where it could be improved. First, it would have aided the reader if Tarrer had given even a brief overview of the texts in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy in his introduction in order to set the context for the subsequent discussion as the conflict in perspectives is not always clear to the reader.

Second, while the introduction is helpful in providing an outline of the remaining chapters, Tarrer could better orient the reader to the discussion on the whole. It is clear that he will be discussing the history of interpretation of true and false prophecy, but it is not clear as to *why* this discussion is necessary other than the fact that it has (and continues) to be debated. He could have included a brief overview of the conflict between Jer 28 and Deut 13 and 18 that some have posited. Instead, he assumes that the reader is familiar with the debated passages and plunges into the differing ways that Christians have understood the difference between true and false prophets. Thus, it does not seem like the introduction adequately brings the reader into the topic at hand.

Third, while Tarrer mentions that Childs's approach is the best way forward, it would help if he gave more specific explanation as to why. Though an in-depth discussion of the way forward would be beyond the scope of this work, it seems that it would aid the reader in understanding some specific ways that this work might be useful for future studies in this field.

Finally, while he returns to his second question—whether the need for criteria fell away based on later developments in biblical studies—in the conclusion, it is not clear how he would answer it. From

his introduction, he seems to imply that it *is* reasonable to assume that the need for criteria dissipated because of a lack of urgency and an increased sense of tolerance. However, he does not present an effective case for this contention.

Tarrer's study assists OT scholars in understanding the history of how Christians have understood true and false prophecy and is a valuable resource for one seeking a concise, in-depth survey about the major works and figures in this field. It would primarily aid those OT scholars who want to study the field of prophecy and need a resource that will give an overview of the history of research in this area.

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Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel's King by Herman W. Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012. 527 pp., US \$36.99, hardcover.

Messianism is one of the most popular and one of the most important concepts present within Scripture. In their recent volume, *Jesus the Messiah*, Herbert Bateman, Darrell Bock, and Gordon Johnston enter into the discussion with a book that “offers contextual-canonical, messianic, and Christological developments of God’s promise of ‘messiah’ within the larger framework and unfolding of Jewish history in canonical and extra-biblical literature” (p. 20). The authors are all well-respected evangelical scholars who are more than qualified to take on such an endeavor.

In the introduction Bateman lays out the approach of the book. In doing so he notes that the work assumes a canonical reading that includes the New Testament. He describes the biblical unfolding of messianic revelation as a puzzle that becomes clearer with each successive piece. The approach that the authors advocate takes into account “God’s progress of revelation through the writings of human authors” (p. 32). The discussion of messianism is done through the lens of kingship “because the anointed deliverer is tied to a kingdom and the rule of a king” and because “the key features about Messiah surface in claims tied to kingship and kingdom” (pp. 31–32). The main argument of the book is broken into three major sections: promises of Israel’s king (the Old Testament writings), expectations of Israel’s king (the Second Temple

period literature), and the coming of Israel's king (the New Testament writings).

The first section of the book is concerned with Old Testament expectations of the coming of the Messiah. This section is authored by Johnston and is comprised of seven chapters that cover messianic content in the Old Testament books of Genesis, Numbers, Psalms, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. There is also a chapter on the Davidic covenant. The content of these chapters is described in terms of "Messianic Trajectory."

Bateman is responsible for the second section, which is focused on messianic anticipations/expectations within the Second Temple period. This section begins with a discussion of four obstacles that need to be overcome. The first obstacle is that there are limited Second Temple resources that focus specifically on the concept of messianism. The second obstacle is that the reader often comes to the Second Temple period with "blurred vision" because there is a tendency to read messianic terminology back into the Old Testament without accounting for a development of meaning as it relates to the terminology within the Second Temple period. There is also "blurred vision" because the church distanced herself from Judaism in her formative years, which has led to a lack of familiarity with this period. This has led to the third problem, which is a lack of historical and social sensitivities of this time period. The fourth obstacle is the literature of this time period is seldom taken seriously. The remaining three chapters in this section are concerned with discussing competing portraits of the Messiah from this time period. The portraits that Bateman discusses are based upon the designations used to describe the future Messiah. The portraits that he discusses are: the one called Messiah, the one called Branch and Prince, and the one called Son.

The final section of the book is written by Bock and focuses on the New Testament texts. Bock begins this section with a discussion of Revelation and the Catholic Epistles and then works backwards in the remaining chapters. He does this because by "working backwards, we go from ideas that have a larger consensus back to those that are more disputed" (p. 336). This section is concerned with three things: tracing the term Christ through the New Testament, to make a case for linking this term and its usage to Jesus himself, and to point out places where the New Testament uses the Old Testament in an explicit messianic fashion. After his discussion of Revelation and the Catholic Epistles, Bock then moves through the Pauline epistles, Acts, and then the Gospels (with a discussion on the historical Jesus).

The book also includes an appendix where Johnston discusses Gen 3:15 and messianism. This is dealt with separately because he notes that it is not an explicitly messianic text.

Since this journal focuses in on the study of the Old Testament this review will largely be focused on Johnston's section of the book, which deals with the expectation of the Messiah in various Old Testament books.

There are multiple features of this book that are commendable. First, there are not many treatments of messianism in the Old Testament, Second Temple period, and the New Testament from an evangelical perspective. The few other evangelical volumes that do this are edited volumes with articles written by various authors such as *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Baker 2003, repr. Wipf and Stock, 2011) and *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (Eerdmans, 2007). *Jesus the Messiah* is both more cohesive in its argument and more thorough in its presentation than these other recent volumes.

Second, since the authors narrow the discussion to only include kingship, this work is focused and allows for more detail on this specific aspect of messianism. As Bateman notes in the introduction, there are other topics and themes that have messianic implications, but the most prominent is that of king/kingdom. While a discussion of servant or prophet would have been helpful, it would have complicated the work's focus. And while messianism has many facets, the focal point in the New Testament (looking back on the Old Testament) is kingship and kingdom.

A final commendable feature of the book (though by no means the last) is its readability. Most other academic works on this subject are too technical to be serviceable to the layperson. This work often combines the benefits of scholarly content in an easily understandable presentation. The numerous charts help in this respect. The readability of Bateman's section is particularly welcome. One of the reasons why there is such "blurred vision" about the Second Temple period is because there are few works that discuss this period of time in non-technical terms. I hope that this book, but especially the section by Bateman, gets into the hands of more people in the pews so that this time period can become clearer.

There are three weaknesses worth mentioning: The first concerns the lack of a bibliography and (at times) interaction with other sources. This book does not contain a bibliography, which would serve as a good tool for further study in this area to readers who may enter into the world of messianism for the first time with this book. Beyond the bibliography there are times when this work would benefit from more scholarly

interaction. I do not want to detract from my previous comment that this work is readable and yet often has very good scholarly content; this is true. But there are chapters, especially in the Old Testament section, that have little to no interaction with other scholarly literature on the subject of messianism. This is most apparent in the first two chapters. In the first chapter Johnston only references one scholarly work (p. 46 n. 6). In the second chapter he references two works on page 71, but neither of them deal with messianism. While these chapters contain a lot of very good information, and have extensive biblical cross-referencing, the lack of scholarly interaction diminishes the value of these chapters. The lack of referencing in these chapters is particularly strange because other chapters that Johnston writes are heavy with citation and interaction. This is the case in his chapter on Isaiah where he has multiple interactions on most pages (on the first two pages of this chapter he references over ten sources). This gives the feeling that the first few chapters were rushed and makes Johnston's chapters feel lopsided in their presentation.

Second, since the focus of this book is on messianism through the presentation of kingship there were several important Old Testament texts on kingship that are not examined in sufficient detail. For example, there is only passing reference to the law of the king in Deut 17:14–20 and there is no sustained discussion of the refrain in Judges that laments the lack of a king (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). I am assuming that the author might note that these texts do not explicitly deal with messianism. This may be true, but these are texts that establish an understanding of kingship within the Old Testament and since king/kingdom is the focal point of messianism these texts warrant interaction.

The final weakness of this work is that Johnston does not discuss the problem of the supposed anti-monarchial texts in the Old Testament. Since the trajectory of messianism within this book is founded on the concept of kingship there needs to be a discussion and explanation of the texts that are viewed by many as anti-monarchial: Judg 8:23, 9:7–15; 1 Sam 8, 11; and Hos 13:11. These texts are commonly taught as saying that kingship is an illegitimate and sinful institution within ancient Israel. If kingship is illegitimate then how is messianism (which is to be seen through the lens of king/kingdom according to this book) to be understood? The fact that Johnston does not discuss the problem of these anti-monarchial texts is made all the more evident in that Bateman and Bock are both concerned with resolving problems in their respective sections (Bateman with his discussion of obstacles and Bock with the order of his presentation from clear to disputed texts). The lack of interaction with these supposed anti-monarchial texts seriously compromises the claims of the book and weakens the argument.

Despite the above criticisms this book is the most thorough evangelical treatment of the concept of messianism in recent years and would serve as a great textbook for college and seminary classes. This book would also be a great introductory text for laypeople. I would suggest that it be supplemented by a volume edited by Satterthwaite, Hess, and Wenham entitled *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Baker 1995, repr. Wipf and Stock, 2012).

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A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New by Gregory K. Beale. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2011. 1072 pp., US \$54.99, hardcover.

Beale's project begins with a reflection on the Old Testament story that undergirds the New Testament. His rendition of this story must, by nature, be rather focused. He provides two chapters to establish his perspective on the Old Testament story: the first focusing on the creation-fall story of Gen 1–3 and the second on the eschatological character of the Old Testament witness.

The first of these two chapters is more easily accepted by an Old Testament scholar. Genesis 1–3 is at the beginning of the Old Testament canon and identifies the global setting for the epic of Israel, which begins in earnest in Gen 12. He uses these key chapters to lay a foundation for all that follows in the Old Testament, drawing in the kingship theme in an early phase to make sense of national Israel and texts which do not fit the narrative scheme as neatly. Creational theology, however, is hardly a dominating force in Old Testament theology; it is not even present in the earliest narrative creedal formulations (Deut 6, 26; Josh 24). More controversial, however, is the second chapter, which searches for the eschatological dimension of the Old Testament, even as early as Gen 49. For a scholar who devoted much early energy to the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, it is not surprising that his focus would be on Gen 1–3 with its creational themes which reappear at the end of Revelation. But it does raise the question of whether Beale has retold the Old Testament story in a way most conducive to his New Testament denouement. Thus one may say that this work is not New Testament theology arising from Old Testament theology, but rather a New Testament Old Testament Theology. One may want to hear some of the

“untamed theological witness” and “discrete voice” of the Old Testament, those elements in Old Testament theology that may not fit so neatly with certain dominant renditions of New Testament theology (on these terms, see e.g. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* [Fortress, 1993], 76.). It raises the question of what contribution the Old Testament can make to Christian theology, especially in its details. It appears that there are key elements of the Old Testament witness that are helpful for Christian theology and which are not dealt with in the New Testament at least in terms of its details.

The biggest concern for Old Testament scholars, however, may be over the chapter which reads the Old Testament as eschatological. Much of this concern is related to how one defines the word eschatological, and it appears that Beale is careful in this regard. He has sought to highlight a future orientation which envisions a new day coming which is in some ways discontinuous from the present day. It may be that this focus on the eschatological is a gift that Beale has given to the Old Testament guild, a function of what Wolterstorff once called “Privileged Cognitive Access” (“Does Truth Still Matter?” *Crux* 31 [1995], 17). Some may say he is merely imposing his eschatological lens on the text, finding eschatology “behind every bush.” But what he does may be legitimate, reading the Bible through the lens of the final form of the canon, that is, a canon which has Revelation at its conclusion, and so prompts “rereaders” (Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah* [Sheffield, 2003]) to read the canon again as if for the very first time. Of course, earlier voices in this canonical redaction can be lost in the mix and the question endures as to what we do with the main thrust of these earlier voices which are not given expression in descriptions of a final “canonical redaction” as Beale provides. But this prompts a reflection on the future and restorative vision of the final canonical forms of the Old Testament.

Although “eschatological” may be eschewed as too strong a word, a future orientation is clearly in view in the final canonical divisions and collections of the TANAK. Ending the Torah at Deuteronomy, prior to Joshua, places reading Israel at the brink of possession of a land, that is, anticipation, a future hope, looking for something beyond the present disaster which is described in Deut 4 and 30 (On this future orientation see Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament* [Eisenbrauns, 2009]). Or ending the Former Prophets at Kings with the release of Jehoiachin creates anticipation, as does the Latter Prophets which look to something new beyond the failed penitential project of the earlier prophets, one that would involve a divine intervention and transformation of both humanity and creation. Even the Writings (*Kethubim*), which has so often been denied future orientation, possesses this potential, whether in Psalms,

Daniel, or Chronicles, and even Ezra-Nehemiah leaves the reader looking for something more. This, of course, is even more obvious in Old Greek orderings. This “future” perspective may indeed be key to the canonical shaping of the Old Testament, as the community living in the wake of the exile and the disillusionment over the lack of progress in restoration reads these texts with hope for a better tomorrow. The challenge of such an approach as I have noted, however, is that it brings into question the value of so much in the Old Testament which is not future in orientation, and how this material relates to the Christian theological project.

Beale’s focus on story is, not surprisingly, attractive to many within the Old Testament guild, partly because of our enduring interest in history on the one side, and in the literary form of narrative on the other. Leveraging story for laying an Old Testament foundation for the New Testament is easily affirmed in that story plays such a key role in the Old Testament canon, dominating books from Genesis–2 Kings as well as Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Esther. The ubiquity of Von Rad’s “short historical creeds” in the Old Testament reveals that the dominating presence of narrative as a form of biblical expression was a reflection of a theological impulse. Redemptive-historical event as communicated through narrative captured the heart of Israelite faith and Yahweh’s revelatory purposes.

Interest in the value of story and especially the short historical creed for biblical theology, is related to the concern that we not formulate biblical theology merely in the categories of systematic theology, but allow our formulations to arise from the expression of the canonical text. What is helpful with a narrative approach to biblical theology is that it appears to reflect in a greater way the dominating form of the biblical canon. In addition, the narrative approach avoids the tendency toward the abstract logical expressions of the western traditions which have often seemed to lose much of the punch of the biblical witness as it transformed the witness from its original narrative form into abstractions. However, this is not the exclusive avenue of revelation in Scripture, and it raises questions about the role of three other dimensions of biblical revelation that seem to be underemphasized in any Biblical Theology that preferences narrative.

First, there is canon. The focus on the redemptive-historical is helpful in that it provides a deeper structure to bring cohesion to a diverse witness. However, it risks playing down the unique emphases of the various literary units of the canon. Even within those books most conducive to the storied approach there is a risk that these books are merely windows to view the underlying story, rather than theological

works in their own right that are developing theology based on the events. For example, in the storied approach it is easy to plane out the differences between Kings and Chronicles. The events are important, but the writer of Kings may be developing theodicy and penitence, for instance, while the Chronicler is developing worship and penitential agenda for their audiences. Of course, this is problematic for those books that do not fit within the storied category. As has been the case throughout the history of writing biblical theology based on story, there is a risk of creating a canon of story within a canon and making the other pieces fit, which usually means losing the contribution of non-storied sections of the Old Testament to biblical theology. This discussion does not even take into account the shape of the Old Testament canon and whether it really reflects a continuous story.

The second dimension of biblical revelation is related to another key creedal expression in the Old Testament witness. While von Rad's short historical creed is certainly ubiquitous throughout the Old Testament as a key centre of theological reflection on the Old Testament, a fixation with this creedal expression seems to miss a second major creedal formulation in the Old Testament, what I have called the "character creed," that which is found in Exod 34 and which not only reverberates throughout the Old Testament but weaves its way into the New Testament as Jesus fully reveals the character of Yahweh in flesh (e.g., John 1:14–18) (Knowles, *The Unfolding Mystery of the Divine Name* [IVP Academic, 2012]).

The final concern I have with allowing story to dominate biblical theology arises from the concern that is apparent throughout Beale's work that he not miss the value of the poetic books of the Old Testament. I appreciate his honesty at each juncture, and my thought is that his constant defense reflects an honest concern that he not lose the value of these key canonical witnesses. But one wonders if "he protesteth too much." One of the dangers of adopting a narrative approach is that while it does ensure we do not impose modern abstractions to create propositions, it remains a system that is used to bring order to theology; it is just a different order. But on the level of genre there are other modes of theology and I am wondering if it is not time for us to take seriously the other dominating genre present in the Scriptures: poetry. The theological implications of poetic forms and expressions have been explored especially by the Christian interpreter Patrick Miller in his 1994 article "The Theological Significance of Biblical Poetry" and Jewish interpreter Stephen Geller in his studies published in 1996 as *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible*. John Goldingay offers further reflections on the theological significance of poetry based on his studies of Isaiah ("Poetry and Theology in Isaiah 56–66"). These studies

highlighted for me the possibilities of poetics for theological reflection and prompted this question: Why is it that the two most direct and intimate forms of communication between God and humanity, psalms and prophecy, are dominantly cast in poetic form? It is true that we seem to have moved beyond mere propositions to embrace narrative as key to theological reflection, but why not poetics? Possibly the reason is that poetry contains so much ambiguity, image, even mystery. I find in Beale's biblical theological project a narrative structure used to communicate propositional truths, but possibly it is time to pursue a form of theology that shares qualities with poetry: releasing the imagistic power of the Word and embracing the ambiguity typical of poetic forms, which may take us further in the project of giving glory to this transcendent one who is beyond human understanding.

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An Introduction to Ugaritic by John Huehnergard. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012. 250 pp., US \$69.95.

This volume is the latest publishing effort to produce an introductory grammar for Ugaritic. Chronologically, it has recently been preceded by William Schniedewind and Joel Hunt's *A Primer on Ugaritic* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Michael Williams' *Basics of Ugaritic* (Zondervan, 2012). Although *A Manual of Ugaritic* by Pierre Bourdieu and Dennis Pardee (Eisenbrauns, 2009) might be used to introduce students who have a command of Hebrew to Ugaritic, it is something of a hybrid introduction-reference grammar-chrestomathy. As such this volume won't factor into the comments that follow.

My thoughts on Huehnergard's grammar will of necessity be filtered through both my experience as a graduate student and as someone who has taught Ugaritic. I deliver a video-based introduction to Ugaritic online and have used the volumes by Schniedewind and Hunt and by Williams. Since this course is not for formal credit, students may or may not have had any exposure to biblical Hebrew or any other Semitic language. As such, one size doesn't fit all.

I am in agreement with other reviewers that Huehnergard's introduction is now the best introductory volume for learning Ugaritic if one has had prior exposure to Biblical Hebrew. If that is not the case, Williams' *Basics of Ugaritic* is a better place to start. Williams does a

fine job of simultaneously presenting general grammar and the basics of Ugaritic. The professor might lament Williams's "folksy" language and illustrations to teach grammatical terms and concepts, but the strategy works. It serves no purpose to protest that students should have learned that material in high school or as undergraduates in English class. The argument is silenced by the contrary reality. The major flaw in Williams's introduction is the lack of exposure to actual Ugaritic texts. There are brief but serviceable exercises in Williams, but no primary text selections. I use Williams for teaching my course and fill this void with texts found in Bourdieuil and Pardee. In the future I plan to continue my use of Williams and require Huehnergard for his exercises and text selections.

As a graduate student I was fortunate that our professor had access to Huehnergard's classroom notes that became the basis of his grammar. Our class used those notes to supplement Segert's *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (University of California Press, 1985), for many years the only introduction available. Segert has been superseded by Huehnergard. The latter is more coherently structured, and the explanations much more lucid. Students who have gone through a year of Biblical Hebrew, taught deductively, will feel right at home with the format, as opposed to Segert's disjointed and, in places, cryptic presentation.

This familiarity of presentation is also what makes Huehnergard preferable to Schniedewind and Hunt, which attempts a more inductive strategy. In my experience, the effort of that volume fails in clarity and coherence for students, whether they have had Hebrew or not. Schniedewind and Hunt simply presuppose too much for most beginning students. For example, explanations cite forms and vocabulary from Akkadian. Explanations of grammar are moved to the back of the book. (If they are needed, why the inductive approach?) It also has too many irritating typographical errors.

With respect to the content of Huehnergard's introduction, In Part I we find an adequate introductory overview of the Ugaritic language, text corpus, genres, tools for studying Ugaritic, and points of comparison with Biblical Hebrew. I would like to have seen Huehnergard provide a substantive essay on the intersection of Ugaritic material with Israelite religion and other points of biblical research. This is something Williams included, albeit in quite simplified form, as well as Schniedewind and Hunt. I suspect that omission of this sort of material stems from a resistance to "justifying" the study of Ugaritic. The reality is that most students of Ugaritic come from the world of biblical studies, and so connections with the content (not just the language) of the Hebrew Bible is not only appropriate, but desirable.

Parts II and III briefly cover orthography (pp. 19–22) and phonology (pp. 23–30). The treatment of orthography is actually supplemented by an excellent essay (Appendix A) with hand-drawing illustrations on the alphabetic script of Ugarit by John Ellison (pp. 179–88).

Other than the space devoted to text selections, Part IV, which covers Ugaritic morphology, is the longest single section of the grammar (pp. 31–80). All the expected parts of speech are covered. Part V briefly surveys Ugaritic syntax (pp. 81–84). The remainder of the grammatical presentation concludes with Part VI, which addresses features of poetic Texts (pp. 85–87).

Exercises, vocabulary, and exposure to actual Ugaritic texts form the content of Parts VII and VIII. Exercises and vocabulary for memorization begin in Part VII (pp. 89–98). Text selections in Part VIII (pp. 99–138) include six letters, four legal texts, two economic/administrative texts, and short selections from Kirita and the Baal Cycle (Baal and Yamm, CTA 1.2.i.11–38). Every text is accompanied by commentary that deals with vocalization, morphology, and syntax.

Huehnergard includes a full answer key (Appendix B) for all the exercises and text selections for translation, Paradigms (Appendix C). Lastly, the volume includes 51 plates as illustrations of Ugaritic tablets, some of which are in color.

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When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible by Timothy Michael Law. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 216 pp., US \$24.95, softcover.

Timothy Michael Law is currently an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow in the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, a Junior Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, and Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *The Marginalia Review of Books*. He is also a co-editor of an Oxford University Press series on *The Apocrypha in the History of Interpretation* and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint*.

Although there are encouraging signs that interest in the Septuagint (LXX) is growing, the Greek OT still receives less attention

than it deserves in evangelical institutions. Seminarians devote countless hours to the Hebrew Bible, which is a worthy investment, but the Greek textual traditions most often employed by NT writers and by the Church during the first four centuries of her existence deserve increased investigation, especially since those textual traditions do not always precisely mirror the Hebrew texts represented in the Masoretic Text (MT). If Christians are to be informed about the nature of the biblical writings we cherish, we should labor to understand the relationships between ancient text forms, how they were employed by Jews and Christians in the Greco-Roman era, and why certain text forms came to be used by the church instead of others. To take one example, we should investigate such questions as why the quotation of Jer 31:32 in Heb 8:9 reflects the LXX, while Jer 31:32 itself reflects the MT in our English Bibles. The difference between the two textual traditions is one of substance and not merely style. Law's book rightly labors to redress the neglect of such investigations. In addition to reasons already mentioned, Law suggests that the LXX deserves increased interest because it (a) sheds light on Hellenistic Judaism from the third century B.C. to the first century A.D., providing insight into the world of the NT and early Christianity; (b) significantly shaped the theology of the earliest Christians, sometimes in directions not specified by the Hebrew Bible; and (c) often points not only to alternative, but perhaps even older, forms of the Hebrew text.

Law's narrative traverses a large amount of terrain for a slim volume. He provides historical background on the hellenized context that gave rise to a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures; argues for significant fluctuation and plurality in Hebrew textual traditions and the absence of an agreed upon canon prior to the second century A.D.; describes the original translators of the LXX, as far as can be known from legendary accounts and other sources, and the nature of their translation; highlights differences between Hebrew and Greek textual traditions of the OT; addresses the relevance of apocryphal writings to the discussion of the canon; narrates how a canon arose from the variety of text forms; discusses the extent and nature of the use of the LXX by the NT and the early church; and plenty more. He also includes a lengthy and helpful, though not exhaustive, bibliography for those who wish to pursue these issues further.

Although *When God Spoke Greek* has only been available for a short time, it has already garnered much praise from an impressive array of scholars. Law is to be commended for expressing himself clearly for non-specialists, for crafting a narrative that is both informative and delightful to read, and for exposing readers to significant issues regarding biblical textual traditions that too often remain unknown not

only to the rank and file in the church, but even to scholars and church leaders.

My commendations for Law's book come with some qualifications. Space permits mention of only three general ones. First, Law sometimes does not sufficiently make readers aware of thoughtful opposing viewpoints. For example, certain capable scholars in the field believe that an OT canon had more solidity prior to the second century A.D. than Law sees. We do not have to look only to conservative scholars to find those who would temper Law's suggestion that "Talking about the canon is . . . inescapably retrospective" (p. 82). Some would see Law's tendency to disallow canonical standing prior to the appearance of later lists to be itself anachronistic. Even if Law gets closer to the truth in his assessment of the evidence, his book would better serve uninitiated readers if he acknowledged the existence and arguments of alternative viewpoints more readily, even if only in endnotes. The purposeful brevity and intended audience of the book do not entirely excuse this tendency.

Second, Law too regularly expresses his conclusions in unrestrained terms when more caution is warranted. The pages teem with such expressions as "spectacularly different message" (p. 6), "extraordinarily fluid" and "multiple divergent textual traditions" (p. 31), "extensive textual plurality" (p. 80), "rich variety of biblical textuality" (p. 84), "dizzying variety of textual forms" (p. 86), "very much in flux" (p. 116), and "many diverse theological trajectories" (p. 170). The starkness of such language at times seems to over interpret the evidence. One example, among others that could receive mention, appears in Law's discussion of the textual traditions of Ezekiel. He suggests that P967, a Greek fragment discovered in 1931, "may shed light on the earlier form of Ezekiel." By the end of the same paragraph, Law confidently asserts that a passage that is missing from this fragment "was not originally in the older Hebrew text" (p. 53). Law may ultimately be correct in his assessment, but he jumps incautiously from acknowledged uncertainty ("may shed light on the earlier form") to confident conclusion ("was not originally in the older Hebrew text"). Hector Patmore has rightly urged caution when comparing P967 with texts found at Masada, suggesting that "unless new materials come to light, there is no credible way of establishing the historical precedence or originality of either" ("The Shorter and Longer Texts of Ezekiel: The Implications of the Manuscript Finds from Masada and Qumran" *JSOT* 32 [2007]: 242).

Third, Law regularly suggests that the variety of textual traditions prior to the second century A.D. was "normal and unproblematic for the earliest Jewish and Christian users of Scripture"

(p. 84; cf. 6–7) and “did not disturb the New Testament writers” (p. 116). But he does not adequately demonstrate that NT writers commonly had access to a variety of text forms or that they intentionally selected readings from known variations. In fact, Law himself seems to acknowledge uncertainty about what they had access to. He writes, “Whether or not [NT writers] were aware of the divergences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible is irrelevant [to the question of the extent of Septuagintal impact on the NT]” and “Whether consciously or not, they were transmitting a message based on a theological reading of the Jewish scriptures that was often different from the Hebrew Bible’s message” (p. 7). If he is unsure about how much access they had to diverging witnesses, how can he be sure that variations were “normal and unproblematic” or “did not disturb” them? Moreover, if most first-century readers/hearers would not likely have had the opportunity to compare and contrast textual traditions and we cannot yet be certain how much the NT writers themselves did so, the lack of “any indication of a debate over the textual plurality” (p. 86) in that time period cannot prove much. The concern of Matthew’s Jesus with jots and tittles may also strain Law’s argument here.

Another matter that gives me pause about Law’s assertions on this point is that, as some in the early church increasingly became aware of textual variations, especially as they interacted with Jews and their texts, anxiety did indeed arise. The existence of revisions of Greek versions toward Hebrew text traditions and of Origen’s Hexapla testify to some measure of anxiety over textual variation. Later, as Law himself acknowledges, “many readers were disturbed by Jerome’s new expressions [translated from the Hebrew]. . . . The novelty of Jerome’s language was unsettling to those who would have become comfortable with the language of the Old Latin [which largely followed the LXX]” (p. 161). Law also points to the bishop of Oea who “almost lost his congregation” when he read from Jerome’s rendering of Jonah 4:6. They “fumed upon hearing the new translation” (p. 164). Law concludes that this story “provides a window into the struggle of parting with the church’s Bible in favor of Jerome’s new translation” (p. 164). Such incidents do not portray a tidy milieu of appreciation for a diversity of text forms or a lack of concern over textual plurality. Law again does not handle the evidence cautiously enough when he claims most early Christians showed “no anxiety at the thought of not having the ‘original’” and that concern over textual plurality “is a distinctively modern theological anxiety” (p. 168).

For these and other reasons, I would encourage readers who are just beginning to wade into the issues treated here to consult other perspectives in dialogue with this one. For the important subjects it treats

and the clarity and verve with which it treats them, Law's book should be read by any and all, yet one will want to look elsewhere if a broader sweep of the field is desired.

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The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory by Jennie Barbour. Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. xv + 225 pp., US \$135.00, hardcover.

With this monograph, Jennie Barbour has shared with the world the fruits of her doctoral research carried out under such stalwarts in the field as Hugh Williamson, Stuart Weeks, and John Barton. Her writing is clear, concise, and easily readable. Furthermore, her arguments are lucid and well-developed, so that while the reader may disagree with her, it is certainly not because of the author's lack of clarity.

The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet adds to the ever-growing literature on allusion in biblical studies. Barbour draws from the work of Richard Hays, among others, as she attempts to demonstrate allusion in the book of Ecclesiastes. Barbour maintains that the allusions she finds within Qohelet more or less cohere with the seven guidelines proposed by Hays in his study of Pauline literature. Interestingly, Barbour moves beyond strictly literary allusions by arguing that Qohelet echoes not only previous literature, but also the broader cultural memory of previous kings and exiles that is reflected in the literature of Lamentations, the historical books, and the writing prophets. Moving beyond strictly textual relationships to applying studies on collective memory highlights Barbour's creativity and offers multiple insights into the text of Ecclesiastes.

Essentially, Barbour argues that the background against which Ecclesiastes was written can and should be found in Israel/Judah and the literature it composed. This is a sharp departure from the critical trends of the past two centuries that would locate influences on Ecclesiastes within Greece, Egypt, and the broader ancient Near East. Barbour's work, along with other recent work such as that done by Stuart Weeks, represents a significant step in the right direction by noting the importance of the literary tradition within Israel itself rather than searching for outside influence upon Ecclesiastes. Barbour finds the background to Qohelet in five primary areas: Qohelet as a composite of

all the kings of Israel (ch. 1); a recounting of history in the book's opening poem (ch. 2); portraits of Solomon, David and his sons, and Saul in Eccl 4 (ch. 3); exile (ch. 4); and the fall of Jerusalem (ch. 5).

Barbour's analysis of these five themes is impeccable. She demonstrates the textual relationships between Ecclesiastes and multiple other portions of the Scriptures in a way that sheds fresh light on the book of Ecclesiastes and the potential argument that it is making. Most interestingly for this reviewer, Barbour demonstrates significant linguistic overlap between the Chronicler's description of Hezekiah and the Royal Experiment of Eccl 2. Barbour also highlights the many linguistic and thematic overlaps between Ecclesiastes and prophetic literature, a lacuna that Raymond van Leeuwen highlighted some years ago. Finally, in her conclusion Barbour issues a well-crafted argument for a Christo-telic reading of Ecclesiastes, stating that, "The kingship of Qohelet has a continuity with the kingship of Christ, anticipating it positively rather than simply requiring it negatively" (p. 182). Her argument demonstrates how the book speaks to the coming of Christ in a positive sense, as opposed to the typical Christo-centric reading of the book as "without Christ, everything is meaningless." Her Christo-telic reading allows the book to be read in its original context as longing for the King who would finally fulfill all of the Davidic promises. In these respects, Barbour's work is to be praised.

Nevertheless, there are a few issues in Barbour's work that caused me pause. For example, Barbour's investigation into allusion in Ecclesiastes rests on the assumption that the book was written during the Hellenistic period (pp. 8–9). One would expect that such a significant piece of her argument would be demonstrated rather than assumed. Barbour might argue that her investigation of allusion undergirds her assumption. Nevertheless, even a cursory treatment of arguments regarding the book's provenance would have been helpful, especially given that her work argues for echoes of historical memory within Ecclesiastes. Furthermore, I found it interesting that in her discussion of city-laments in chapter five, Barbour states:

. . . certainly there are many central city-lament traits missing from Ecclesiastes, such as the personification of the city, the issue of Yahweh's agency, the direct address to the deity, or the question of the city's sin and possible restoration, but the resemblances particularly at the level of scenery and atmosphere are marked enough for us to suppose that the book of Ecclesiastes, while being a very different type of literature, does draw on city-lament material as part of its literary heritage and stylistic vocabulary. Generically, these works are completely

different, but as Qohelet elsewhere assimilates motifs and ways of speaking from other genres (prophecy, history, law), so too in this case coincidence of genre is less important than the presence of the same language in establishing a general relationship. (pp. 142–3)

Barbour's arguments regarding the influence of city-laments upon the so-called poem on death and dying in Eccl 12 are quite convincing, as her thesis solves the most common problems of allegorical readings. However, when criticizing the view that the text speaks of the Day of Yahweh, she notes that it lacks many of the key features of the motif. The difficulty with her criticism is that she makes the same concession in regards to her own theory that 12:1–7 is a city lament.

Despite these reservations, Barbour has given readers much to consider when thinking through possible inner-biblical references in the book of Ecclesiastes. As noted above, the most problematic issue for evangelical readers will be her dating of the book of Ecclesiastes, which consequently calls into question the validity of the allusions she sees in the book. Nevertheless, those interested in how Ecclesiastes fits within the canon will do well to spend the time working through her arguments.

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Prophets before the Exile: Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk by Christopher R. Smith. Understanding the Books of the Bible. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2013. 114 pp., US \$10.00, softcover.

This book is part of a series of study guides designed to be used in conjunction with *The Books of the Bible*, a version of the Bible, in the translation of the NIV, without any chapter or verse numbers. Available from www.biblica.com/thebooks, this is intended to facilitate a reading of the biblical books in their natural form, without the chapter or verse numbers getting in the way. Another intention is for readers to engage with the biblical books in their entirety by studying them section by section in a reading and study group.

Smith's guide thus encourages readers to read the prophetic books aloud in the context of such a group and then engage with them a

few prophetic oracles at a time. Another point worth noting is that *The Books of the Bible* does not follow the traditional canonical order but arranges them according to their assumed chronological sequence. This is reflected in this guide to the pre-exilic Minor Prophets, which follows the order indicated by its subtitle.

It is just about possible to use this guide in conjunction with a traditional version of the NIV, but this is not advisable for two reasons: (a) readers will not be able to follow up the frequent references to the introductions to the individual prophetic books found in *The Books of the Bible*, and (b) in that version the books' "natural sections" are apparently marked off by white space. As there are no references to any chapter or verse numbers anywhere, readers of this guide are told to find passages with the help of their introductory words, such as "Sound the trumpet in Gibeah" or "Ephraim is oppressed, trampled in judgment." As the aim is to read the books in their entirety, this is not too much of a problem, but I imagine that the reading experience is facilitated by the presence of the white space included in *The Books of the Bible* but missing from other versions.

Smith's guide features some introductory instructions on how it is best used, including the encouragement to share deeply and agree on some ground rules, such as confidentiality and respect. It is designed for the Bible to be studied in community, and it encourages creativity by inviting people to share responses to the biblical texts in the form of "poetry, journal or blog entries, artwork, dramas, videos, and so on, and especially the creative retellings that are invited in some sessions" (p. 7).

There are twenty-one sessions in this guide, five on Amos, six on Hosea, four on Micah, and two each on Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. The first session on each book invites readers to read through the entire book in one sitting before engaging with some general discussion questions related to the book as a whole. Follow-up sessions are then designed to take readers through the book again, this time section by section, enabling deeper engagement with the particular issues raised by the prophets' words.

Each section includes observations, either on the prophetic books as a whole or on their individual parts. These observations provide something like a running commentary that is designed to offer some general guidance to and explanation of the main issues addressed in or raised by the text.

In my judgment, this is a very worthwhile project, and it deserves to be widely-known, supported, and adopted. To encourage Christian communities to engage with the biblical books as communities and to look at them as books that are to be read and studied in their entirety is laudable. While I did not have access to *The Books of the*

Bible, it seems to me that the experience of reading the Bible without chapter or verse numbers is likely to be stimulating and to encourage a fresh reading that moves beyond any preoccupation with individual verses, which has beset the traditional Christian reading of the prophets in particular.

The brevity of Smith's guide on the pre-exilic prophets does not allow him to offer detailed commentary, and in the case of difficult texts like these, this is likely to cause some frustration at times. Perhaps study groups should be advised to have access to at least one more detailed commentary for those times when further information and explanation are required. That said, it was evident that Smith is well-informed, not only concerning the prophetic books as such, but also with respect to the conclusions of biblical scholarship.

However, for me the highlight of this guide was the discussion questions. They were among the very best of such questions I have ever come across. They encourage readers to pay attention to what the prophets were saying in the context of their own time. They also encourage honest and unflinching engagement with the difficult questions raised by the texts, including divine violence and the nature of God as envisaged by the prophets. Smith's questions further promote reflective, thoughtful and creative engagement with current issues in the light of the prophets' message. In fact, this is an area in which the questions particularly excel. And they invite not only critical, but also positive engagement with today's world. What I mean by that is that Smith, for instance, frequently asks readers to find positive examples of where contemporary social injustice, obviously one of the key issues addressed by these prophetic books, has been alleviated by humanitarian efforts.

It is encouraging to come across a project that promotes the communal study of the biblical texts in their entirety, and I would highly recommend this guide to Christian readers wishing to engage with the prophetic books of Amos, Hosea, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk.

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Genesis by John H. Walton. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 176 pp., US \$16.99, softcover.

John Walton's *Genesis* is part of the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary series. This commentary on Genesis was previously released in 2009 as the first part of volume 1, bound together with the commentaries on each of the five books of the Pentateuch. Walton is the general editor of the series.

The commentary is written at a semi-popular level and is printed in full color on glossy pages. There is at least one image (pictures, maps, charts, and the like) on one of the facing pages in the entire commentary (most pages have two or more images). There are also more than 100 sidebars and/or charts spread through the commentary. The volume is visually pleasing, sporting a semi-glossy magazine look. Half of the 140 page commentary is devoted to the background of Gen 1–11 and the other half to chapters 12–50. The commentary ends with an annotated bibliography of about a dozen and a half titles and about 20 pages of endnotes.

The commentary does not provide an interpretation of the biblical text, but offers individual comments pertaining to background issues of selected verse fragments or phrases. It reads much like *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* by John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas (InterVarsity, 2000), but it is much more visually appealing. The background materials treated include: historical, cultural, religious, mythological, chronological, architectural, archaeological, and so on. Walton has written extensively on the background matters of Genesis previously; those familiar with his writing will not find surprises here.

For whom is this commentary designed? The student studying ancient Near Eastern context of the Scriptures interested in Walton's views might do better reading his *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Baker, 2006). The student or pastor studying the biblical text to prepare for a paper or sermon might benefit more from Walton's *Genesis* in the NIVAC series (Zondervan, 2001). The student or teacher interested in the research behind Walton's innovative views of Gen 1 would do better checking out of the library his *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Eisenbrauns, 2011). I can see how busy teachers and pastors could use the concise materials in this illustrated background commentary for writing sermons and lessons, yet we all hope they will indulge in more detailed study of the issues. Ideally, this book should only serve as first step in sermon research. However, the book appears as though it is meant for the lay reader.

Walton's *Background Commentary* lacks any statement about its purpose and approach, what is meant by "background," or about its basis

for comparisons. The theoretical explanation is handled by a promotional blurb on the back cover in terms of what readers can hope to avoid: “[W]ithout knowledge of the ancient context we can easily impose our own culture on the text, potentially distorting it.” Presumably this background commentary is meant as an antidote in the case of interpreting the book of Genesis.

The heavy lifting in Gen 1–11 is comparison to ancient myths and legends and in Gen 12–50 to short snippets regarding relevant aspects of ancient cultures. Historical, geographical, and theological comments are less of a focus but appear frequently through the commentary. The commentary offers no introductory explanation regarding methods or aims or basis of the comparisons, not even in the introduction. The commentary offers no thesis, no running argument, and no overall interpretation of Genesis. Walton simply begins comparing ancient things to Genesis. He regularly, but not always, affirms or challenges the relative viability of the elements he introduces to compare to Genesis. The reader is left to think that anything ancient that *seems similar in any way* is the necessary background for Genesis.

The discussion of “Genesis and Mythology” in the *Illustrated Background Commentary* does not define myth but points to myths’ functions. Walton infers that Genesis functions more like ancient myths than the normal ways moderns think (see pp. 9–10). He says Genesis “offers an alternative encapsulation of how the world worked” (p. 9). However, that is not necessarily the impression one gets when reading the comparisons he offers. Here is a representative sampling of the comparisons (usually presented favorably or without judgment):

- “Expanse (1:6)” is compared to the Mesopotamian views of “skins” and contrasted to Nut the ancient Egyptian sky goddess, and concludes that virtually all ancients thought of the firmament as “solid” (see p. 17);
- “Water above it (1:7)” is compared to the Marduk’s dividing of Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* and other myths (see pp. 17–18);
- “Seventh day ... holy (2:3)” is compared to the Near Eastern New Year’s festivals which celebrate the enthronement of the deity (see pp. 23–24);
- “Tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:9)” is compared to the hero’s sexual intercourse to a prostitute in the Epic of Gilgamesh (see p. 28);
- “Helper suitable for him (2:18)” is compared to the hero’s counterpart Enkidu in the Epic of Gilgamesh (see p. 31);

- “Serpent (3:1)” is compared to the magical plant in the Epic of Gilgamesh, serpents in Egyptian mythology, and other ancient mythic traditions (see pp. 33–34);
- the long lives of the genealogy of Gen 5 are compared to the Sumerian King List (see p. 42);
- “Married any of them they chose (6:2)” is compared to the deflowering of the bride in the Epic of Gilgamesh (see pp. 43–44);
- “Nephilim . . . heroes (6:4)” is compared to Gilgamesh (see p. 45);
- some of the details of Noah’s flood are compared to several ancient accounts (Epic of Atrahasis, Epic of Gilgamesh), but Walton concludes that the biblical account provides a different interpretation of the tragedy (see pp. 48–49);
- the Abrahamic covenant is explained in relation to Weinfeld’s distinctions regarding the treaty and grant forms (see pp. 76–77);
- circumcision is compared to ancient Levantine and Egyptian practices (see pp. 88–89);
- Nuzi texts which mention family gods are compared to the teraphim Rachel took (Walton emphasizes ancient females converting to their husbands’ gods but does not mention contrary evidence like the treaty marriages of 1 Kgs 11; see p. 112);
- “Fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law (38:8)” is compared Hittite laws (see pp. 124–26).

These kinds of comparisons attended on every page by images of associated ancient sculptures, reliefs, artifacts, and the like reinforces page after page that the book of Genesis shares much with the surrounding ancient cultures.

In many of Walton’s other writings he is explicit in what he does *not* say about the Bible and myths: “When we use the literature of the ancient Near East in comparison with the Bible, we are not trying to identify or suggest literary relationship” (*Genesis* [Zondervan, 2001], 27; also discussion on pp. 21–35). For other such deflections as well as reasoned explanations on wrong and right means of ancient comparative studies for biblical interpretations see, for example, “Creation,” *Dictionary of Old Testament: Pentateuch* (InterVarsity, 2003), 155–68; and the introductions to his *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* and *The Lost World of Genesis One* (InterVarsity, 2009). In other places Walton boldly claims ancient background as essential. “[A]t times the cultural

background of the text is an essential ingredient for deciphering the authoritative message and meaning of the text” (“Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document,” in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention?* [B&H, 2008], 299 [298–327]; also see Walton’s brief discussion on “Confessional Scholarship and the Role of Comparative Studies,” 301–3). In a carefully nuanced explanation of using ancient comparative studies in evangelical biblical interpretation, Walton offers similar bold claims under the heads “God did not reject the entire world-picture of Israel’s neighbors, but used much of its structure as a framework for revelation” and “Revelation did not always counter ancient Near Eastern concepts, but often used them in productive ways” (“Ancient Near Eastern Background Studies,” *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* [Baker Academic, 2005], 40–45).

Walton has written extensively on the use of ancient Near Eastern background for biblical interpretation. His contributions both to the theory and specific applications of ancient comparative studies to the Scriptures offer much to students and scholars. The colorful background commentary on Genesis under review here, however, provides no theoretical explanation of method and does not provide any extensive discussion of the comparisons. The many comparisons are simply there as suggestions, undifferentiated in value or significance for the laity. If the commentary were to have an introduction I would imagine it being along the lines of the picture-less *IVP Background Commentary* co-authored by Walton (cited above). The stated two-fold purpose of that commentary is to “help the interpreter avoid erroneous conclusions” and sometimes “simply to satisfy curiosity” (see pp. 7–9). The *IVP Background Commentary* comes short of acknowledging an incongruity between the intended nonprofessional readership’s lack of access to look up sources for further information and the lack of any such references to look up. The *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* under review corrects part of the problem by providing endnotes for many entries. However, the same incongruity between manifold suggested comparisons and lack of adequate interpretation for lay readers stands. Perhaps this problem could be solved by an introduction which advised lay readers to use the background commentary alongside other reliable published interpretations of Genesis.

The general reader could benefit by a careful reading of this book, especially if used alongside a reliable semi-popular commentary on the book of Genesis itself. Walton’s background commentary is attractive and fun. Perhaps the ideal reader is the lay person preparing to teach Bible studies or church classes. Walton’s illustrated background

commentary could well serve the general reader but only if used in concert with other reliable interpretive guides.

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