

BOOK REVIEWS

Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters. By James K. Hoffmeier, Gordon J. Wenham, and Kenton L. Sparks. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 176 pp., \$16.99 paper.

OT scholars, claimed Edwin Good some years ago, are a “notably quarrelsome lot.” Quarrel and debate are different things, of course, and the Hoffmeier-Wenham-Sparks book under review shows well how to contend earnestly without being contentious. The discussion presents three major chapters of lively and rigorous exchange about whether Genesis is history (Hoffmeier), proto-history (Wenham), or historiography (Sparks)—more specifically, whether Genesis 1–11 mainly declares the past (chap. 1), attests to the past artistically (chap. 2), or constructs the past through fictional stories (chap. 3). Each of these chapters offers a major essay by one scholar and responses by the other two, reflecting the format of the Counterpoints collection. Book-ending these three chapters are an editor’s introduction to genre theory and a conclusion urging that scholarly disagreement proceed with mutual deference and edification. This book is eristical but not combative, the disputation made with the best of gracious candor.

Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? (hereafter *Genesis: HFN*) has other strong points as well. Its copious documentation and lucid writing invite, not just instruct, readers to consider some new as well as long-held assumptions about the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Also, the general tone enhances a substantive engagement with literary features of the biblical passage. This dialogue is noteworthy in two respects. First, the *Genesis: HFN* authors’ definition of literature as artistic writing is current, a welcomed update of the older definition, that is, written texts in any discipline. This distinction matters in Genesis because the methodology goes well beyond the once-dominant source criticism and posits theses about genre as it relates to plot, structure, motifs, themes, and (at times) authorship. Second, such robust integration of literature and Scripture has not come easily in biblical scholarship, stretching across a half century of sometimes confusing efforts to deal with literariness and its treatment by different literary theorists and critics. Since the 1960s, Leland Ryken, Robert Alter, and others have had to address, on the one hand, the very relevance of literary studies to biblical scholarship and, on the other, the problematic effects of radical types of literary criticism in vogue. Their task may not have rivaled the Jews’ rebuilding the city walls in Nehemiah’s day, with tool in one hand and weapon in the other, but the twentieth-century project has been difficult enough, and *Genesis: HFN* calls attention to the positive results of some well-placed and firmly-set stones.

Another strongpoint of the book is the high level of synthetic argument. *Genesis: HFN* goes beyond a methodological mix of traditional historical criticism and form criticism, demonstrating how three different readings of Genesis 1–11 can

involve academic specialties in a scholarship that is more complementary than polarizing.

Let there be no mistake, however: Hoffmeier, Wenham, and Sparks critique one another directly and clearly. Nowhere does conviction or integrity give way to some sort of academic ecumenicalism that sacrifices truth for harmony. Space limitations for this review permit only one example, but it accents the authors' respectful candor. Sparks' thesis about Genesis 1–11 as historiography draws from details in evolutionary biology and from assumptions about how the biblical passage was composed. The latter assumptions claim that an antiquarianist and an apologist wrote different parts of chapters 1–11; and a third figure, the anthologist, combines those chapters with chapters 12–50. All told, for Sparks, the details from science along with the idea of anonymous authors dissociate Genesis from the signature clarity and precision that characterize facts and history, and hence, Genesis is myth (i.e. fiction) rather than a report of actual events. While agreeing with Sparks on some points, Hoffmeier and Wenham reject Sparks's thesis about Genesis as historiography. For Hoffmeier, Sparks errs in preempting science over revelation (p. 140), failing to allow that Adam and Eve can be historical persons as well as archetypes (p. 145), and being inconsistent by conceding that myth is quite difficult to define but then using one particular definition to make his case (p. 147). For Wenham, Sparks's "dogmatism" about Genesis as fiction is unjustified because it relies upon source criticism instead of the final text (pp. 150–51) and it presumes that textual inaccuracies disqualify Genesis as history (p. 154). All of this notwithstanding, edifying critique goes beyond stark rebuttal and suggests ways to strengthen an argument to advance the debate. This Wenham does (p. 154), noting that history has at least two definitions (i.e. past events and written records of those events) and wishing that the distinction could have been given more attention in Sparks's essay.

The clarity and bounty of evidence in *Genesis: HFN* requires readers to be hermeneutically agile. The chapters and responses raise crucial questions about the dense relationship among history, proto-history, myth, and theological discourse. For example, if Genesis 1–11 is mainly history, should we treat the literary artistry of the text as extraneous, as ornamental, or as essential to what is true, and based upon what hermeneutical principle(s)? If the biblical passage is mainly proto-history (i.e. writing that occurred between a culture's earliest past and its development of literacy), are textual time and place the same or different from material time and place? How so? And is the sameness or difference inevitable? Finally, if Genesis 1–11 is primarily historiography, can myth and theological discourse adequately connect a culture's prehistory and its acquisition of literacy? Does either myth or theological discourse constitute the nature, i.e. the expression, the "revelation," of what is true? If so, are history and literature subsidiary elements?

These heady questions lie beyond the purpose of *Genesis: HFN* but may easily arise from a careful reading of it and from further analysis of how history, literature, and theology should interact to substantiate a valid reading of the book of Genesis. These discussions must advance with mutual respect, but the process requires another principle. Scholars (and book reviewers) are flawed and imperfect, maybe at times quarrelsome; but debate must address biblical inerrancy and inspiration,

which ever point to the only perfect Author whose Word is always true and trust-worthy.

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Job: The Wisdom of the Cross. By Christopher Ash. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014, 489 pp., \$37.99.

Christopher Ash, an ordained minister in the Anglican Church, member of the council at Tyndale House, and Principal of the Cornhill Training Course in London, has invested over a decade studying and preaching the book of Job. While the first fruits of his study came in a short introduction (*Out of the Storm: Grappling with God in the Book of Job* [2006]), a harvest of insight can be found in this full-length commentary.

Ash divides his commentary into three sections, each beginning with the introduction of a new character (1:1–2:10; 2:11–31:40; 32:1–42:17). In the first section, we are introduced to Job’s person and plight as well as his protest. Ash begins with a succinct summary of Job’s character, highlighting both his godliness and his greatness (1:1–5). He rightly notes the fitting nature of this opening scene, “a good man being a great man, a pious man being a prosperous man. It is a picture of the world as the world ought to be, a world where the righteous lead” (p. 35). He also aptly observes Job’s “extreme” fall (1:6–2:10): “Job is extravagantly rich, wonderfully happy, and extremely great.... But he goes from extravagant riches to absolute destitution” (p. 54). Yet, despite his opening title “Welcome to a Well-Run World,” Ash neglects to discuss here the biblical basis for an expectation that the pious would prosper. Even a short summary of his later discussion on retribution theology (p. 95), derived in part from Deuteronomy and Proverbs, would better help the reader to sense the tension between Job’s proverbial blessing and his profound suffering.

Concluding the first section, Ash highlights the “power and poignancy” of Job’s first lament (p. 65)—cursing the day of his birth, wishing for the undoing of his own creation, and questioning the control of his Creator (3:1–26). He rightly notes the importance of this chapter for believers today. “We have a tendency to focus on Job’s faith (1:21, 2:10) ... but this is far from the end of the story. Job goes on lamenting and protesting chapter after chapter. We must not soften this” (p. 69). With a valuable note of pastoral advice, Ash reveals, “When I first preached this chapter at the church where I was pastor, we did not sing at all in the service. Not a hymn, not a song. Although some of us had come to the service feeling quite cheerful, our own circumstances full of hope, we needed to weep with one who wept” (p. 66). Unfortunately for pastors, such methodological insights are rare elsewhere in this volume.

In the second part of his commentary, before discussing the speeches of Job and his friends, Ash summarizes their undergirding theology. Often labeled “retribution theology,” Job and his friends believe the following: (1) God is absolutely in

control. (2) God is absolutely just and fair. (3) Therefore, God always punishes wickedness and blesses righteousness (soon and certainly in this life). (4) Therefore, if I suffer I must have sinned and am being punished justly for my sin (p. 90). In addition to the pastoral blunders, Ash concisely captures their theological errors. With no place for forces of evil and no place for exceptions to retribution, Job's friends have no place for innocent suffering (pp. 94–97).

In his exposition of their speech cycles (chaps. 4–31), Ash balances the truth and error in the words of Job and his friends. For example, concluding Eliphaz's first speech (chaps. 4–5), he asks, "What is wrong with exhorting Job to be consistent, realistic, humble, and submissive to God? What is wrong with preaching to him a sermon that is quoted with approval by the apostle Paul? The problem is that Job's experience is extreme" (p. 113). Later, Ash compares the words of Zophar (chap. 11) to the words of Jesus and Paul, "We love to hear Jesus promise us life in all its fullness (John 10:10). And yet Zophar offers Job something not dissimilar in verses 15–19 of this speech But the same concepts and remarkably similar words may have different implications and alternative meanings depending on the contexts in which they are spoken" (p. 153).

In contrast to the common tendency to whitewash Job's character, Ash rightly acknowledges his incorrect and immoral portrait of God. He aptly concludes his summary of Job's words in chapters 3–31:

Again and again as we have listened to Job, we have had to gasp at his audacity in accusing God of injustices. However sympathetic we may be to his plight and however strongly we believe his protestations of innocence, something in us hesitates when we hear him speaking of God with disrespect. It is not true that he is suffering because he has sinned. But it is true that because he is suffering he has said some sinful things (p. 329).

Yet, this apt insight about the severity of Job's words should have been applied to two specific passages often seen as "glimmers of hope" (13:13–19; 19:25–26). In these passages, Ash neither wrestles with textual difficulties nor the dissonance between his positive reading and the negative context. In the former (13:15), any interpretive debate is given only cursory treatment in an endnote. On the latter (19:25), any discussion is destroyed with this bold claim, "This Redeemer can be none other than God himself Many modern commentators reject this conclusion ... but their alternatives are pathetically inadequate" (p. 216).

In addition, Job's repeated assault on God's justice also raises questions about Ash's redemptive hermeneutic, highlighted frequently in the book's early chapters. For example, Ash suggests, "The relatively innocent sufferings of Job foreshadow the utterly innocent sufferings of Jesus Christ, and those sufferings make grace possible in human experience. In principle, therefore, the story of Job is the story of redemptive suffering, the suffering of one that makes redemption possible for others" (p. 177). But how does Job's suffering offer redemption to others? Does Job not also need such redemption? Job desires vindication based on his own righteous innocence, not redemption based on the imputed righteousness of another. Certainly, Job's need for a mediator to stand before God and contend on his

behalf (9:33; 16:19; 19:25) is ultimately met in the person of Jesus, but there is no indication in the text that the author of Job intends to highlight this point. Even if one agrees with Ash's typological reading of Job, the reader would have benefited from further discussion of the ways the suffering Job was not like the suffering Jesus.

In the third section of his commentary, Ash discusses Elihu's monologue, YHWH's speeches, and Job's restoration (32:1–42:17). Since Elihu is never interrupted or rebuked, and in light of the number and critical position of his speeches, Ash views Elihu positively, as a prophetic figure defending YHWH's justice and preparing for his address (pp. 327–28). He also helpfully distinguishes YHWH's two speeches in light of their content and reaction. In his first speech, YHWH highlights his wise rule of the world, resulting in Job's silence, whereas YHWH's second speech focuses on his justice, compelling Job's repentance (p. 407). In the latter, Ash contends, based on Fyall's work (*Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job* [New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002]), that Behemoth and Leviathan are not just creatures but symbols of chaos, addressing the problem of supernatural evil in creation (pp. 417–20). Finally, Ash expounds on Job's restoration, with a good balance between God's vindication, proving Job innocent of sin that would cause suffering, and God's rebuke, humbling Job for his sinful words in suffering.

Although the many typological parallels drawn between the suffering of Job and the suffering of Jesus often result in a lack of focus on God's instruction for Job, Ash ends his exposition of YHWH's speeches with one very helpful lesson, both for Job and for today's reader. God's response "does not answer our questions. It does not give us a philosophically tidy schema that can explain the problem of suffering and evil. But it does something deeper: it opens our eyes to who God is" (p. 422).

The commentary concludes with a brief bibliography (three-quarters of a page) and short endnotes, as well as Scripture, subject, and sermon illustration indexes. For such a complex book, a bibliography with less than twenty sources is disappointingly short.

Despite the criticisms detailed above, Ash has produced a thorough, expository commentary. As a volume "written by pastors for pastors," this commentary will surely help many pastors wade through the difficult waters of Job.

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Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary. Tyndale OT Commentary. By Tremper Longman III. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014, 479 pp., \$18.00 paper.

With understandable fear and trembling, Tremper Longman has offered a revision of the Tyndale OT Commentary volume on Psalms. This large, single-volume work replaces the two small volumes by Derek Kidner. Of course, replacement commentaries must happen from time to time, but it is often sad when

it does, especially for this reviewer, who, during my undergraduate and early graduate studies, learned to love the incisive, judicious, and sometimes witty commentaries of Derek Kidner. One feels empathy for Longman when he writes, “I shudder to think that my commentary will be compared with his” (p. 9).

The Tyndale series is not the place for innovative or faddish interpretation, and we will not find any in this volume. Longman’s work maintains the series’ goal of “commentary writing that [is] committed to both the importance of the text of the Bible as Scripture and ... to engage with as full a range of interpretative issues as possible without being lost in the minutiae of scholarly debate” (p. 7).

Longman’s brief introduction (about 30 pages) covers the following: (1) Title of the Book; (2) Titles to the Individual Psalms; (3) Composition, Collection, Organization, Use; (4) Genre and Types of Psalms; (5) Poetic Style; (6) The Theology of the Book of Psalms; (7) The Psalms as a Mirror of the Soul; and (8) Worship. He includes three helpful Excursuses: (1) The words *Selah* and *Higgayôn*; (2) Imprecations; and (3) Psalms of Ascent.

I will comment on two aspects of his introduction. First, under “Composition,” Longman seems somewhat conflicted about the current debate surrounding an editorial intention to the structure of the book (sometimes called the “redactional agenda”). On the one hand, he writes that he is “not persuaded by recent attempts to discover an overarching structure to the book of Psalms” (p. 35). Nevertheless, he goes on to note that Psalms 1–2 constitute an introduction to the book, that Psalms 146–150 conclude the book, that the editors divided the Psalms into five books, and that “there are some intentional placements of certain psalms” (p. 35). These observations are not far from embracing an interpretative framework for each psalm rather than treating each psalm individually, isolated from its context or Psalter themes. (For a summary of recent scholarship on this issue, see the helpful review of J. Kenneth Kuntz, “Continuing the Engagement: Psalms Research Since the Early 1990s,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 10/3 [2012] 321–78, esp. pp. 347–54.)

Second, under “Poetic style,” Longman abandons the traditional discussion of parallelism (synonymous, antithetic, etc.) for the more contemporary, “A, what is more, B” (see Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry* [1981]). This is acceptable, of course, though I had to chuckle when I read in a footnote to his discussion of parallel lines in Psalm 2, “An older terminology would name them ‘synonymous parallel lines’” (p. 61). For some of us, that older terminology will forever be in our heads.

In terms of structure, this second series of the TOTC includes a clearer organization than the first series. Each psalm (except Psalm 117, the shortest) receives treatment under three headings: Context, Comment, and Meaning. *Context* is where Longman discusses issues of original (historical) setting, genre, and structure. In terms of length, this discussion ranges from two and a half lines (Psalm 100) to a page and a half (Psalm 2). *Comment* usually consists of a paragraph or two, sometimes several, for each literary division of the psalm. *Meaning* is where Longman addresses issues of broader biblical theology, NT use, and Christian appropriation. In terms of length, discussion ranges from four lines (Psalm 92) to almost two full pages (Psalms 2 and 8; Psalms 19, 46, 47, 48, 69, 82, and 118 all get about a full

page). In general, there is little space devoted to scholarly *reportage*, though Longman frequently cites NIDOTTE when discussing individual words and is clearly up-to-date on Psalms scholarship. Also, commentary seems to be longer in the earlier psalms, gradually becoming shorter in the later psalms.

For the remainder of this review, I will interact briefly with some of Longman's treatment of individual psalms. Longman recognizes the importance of Psalm 1, a wisdom psalm standing at the head of the whole collection. He likens it to a Levitical gatekeeper, inviting the righteous but warning the wicked about entering into the "literary sanctuary of the Psalms" (p. 15), an image Longman returns to from time to time.

Longman spends considerable space explaining the probable historical context of Psalm 2 and its gradual development into a psalm of messianic importance. And he rightly concludes that Psalm 1–2 together give the entire collection a wisdom and royal flavor.

On the topic of immortality (see especially Psalms 16, 49, and 73), Longman cautiously accepts the idea that the authors of psalms believed in a post-death existence, but only as "a glimpse" (p. 215) and he regularly refers to Johnston's work (*Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the OT* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002]).

Sometimes the commentary is painfully brief. It is a testimony to Longman's restraint that he deals with Psalms 23 and 63, favorites of many believers, in six pages total!

Longman gives a helpful summary of ANE mythology and literature (Ugaritic/Canaanite) that form the background for Psalm 29. This is a great service to pastors and students, the intended readership of this series.

Standing near the center of the collection and at the head of Book III, Psalm 73 towers in importance. I am not sure that Longman appreciates the power of this poem, a psalm in which the author narrates his journey from a prosperity-based faith to one in which relationship with God trumps all forms of earthly blessing. Is this what the post-exilic community needed to learn as well?

As for Psalm 89, Longman interprets this "community lament" historically, not contextually as the conclusion of Book III. Wilson and others may not yet have clearly explained the structure of the book of Psalms, but surely it is hermeneutically significant that Book III ends with pointed questions about the failure of the Davidic kingship, questions that demand eschatological answers, and that Book IV celebrates the kingship of Yahweh. Should that not receive any comment?

One should almost certainly read Psalms 109 and 110 together. This is one of the places in the book of Psalms where a failure to read psalms together is most egregious. Psalm 109 is a lament in which the person praying asks for God's vindication because, although he has treated his fellow countrymen with friendship, his gestures have been rejected and responded to with libelous accusations by people who are now essentially his enemies. The psalm ends with no resolution and with an appeal for God to stand at the right hand of the psalmist in defense. It is hermeneutically significant that Psalm 110 begins with a divine invitation to a Davidic king to sit at God's right hand as he vindicates him over his enemies. Longman

does not consider this approach, but it seems to me that the editors of the collection intended this reading.

Again, restraint rules the day in Psalm 119 as each of the twenty-two sections of this great torah psalm receives only one paragraph of comment. Longman classifies it as a wisdom psalm, despite the many indications of lament. Perhaps genre classifications fail us here.

Longman recognizes the importance of Psalm 150, which functions as a conclusion to the whole collection and “sends the reader out of the book in a joyful attitude of worship” (p. 476).

In terms of criticism, then, I do not really have much. Most of the criticism above revolves around a failure from time to time to read psalms in their literary context, something Longman has neither the inclination nor the space to do. In terms of space, I think Longman needed more of it to develop arguments and to tease out the theology and unique contribution of each psalm; a two-volume work of, say, 350 pages each, would have helped. Be that as it may, in light of his own fears of comparison, I will refrain from any direct comparisons between Kidner’s work and Longman’s, and instead happily conclude that Longman’s contribution is a solid, sober, and up-to-date revision of an influential commentary on the book of Psalms in a series designed for pastors, students, and laypeople and will serve that readership well for the next generation.

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The Psalms, vol. 1: *Psalms 1 to 41: Rejoice, the Lord is King*. By James Johnston. Preaching the Word. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015, 480 pp., \$34.99.

James Johnston, the author of this commentary, is senior pastor of Tulsa Bible Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. According to the dust jacket, the Preaching the Word series is “written by pastors for pastors, as well as all who teach or study God’s Word.”

In a short but informative introduction, Johnston likens the study of the Psalms to “opening the door to a treasure chamber” (alluding to Charles Spurgeon’s well-known commentary on Psalms, *The Treasury of David*). He makes three summary observations about the Psalms: they are truth; they are poems; and they are a book. The “Psalms Are Truth” section highlights the connection of the book of Psalms to the Hebrew word *torah* (e.g. Psalms 1:2), arguing the Psalms are intended to be read as instruction from God and that they encapsulate the entire OT story. The “Psalms Are Poems” section of the introduction highlights the nature of Hebrew poetry (parallelism, not rhyme, rhythm, or meter; figurative language) and its capacity to express deep emotions. The “Psalms Are a Book” section highlights the intentional ordering and shaping of the five smaller books of the Psalter (e.g. Psalms 1–41) and the Christocentric focus of the book of Psalms. Johnston summarizes, “Fundamentally, this book is about Christ” (p. 18). Psalms 1 and 2, which serve as the introduction to the book of Psalms, describe the ideal

man (Psalm 1) whom God puts on the throne as his anointed ruler (Psalm 2). Citing both Augustine and Kidner, Johnston argues that Christ is central to the Psalms both in terms of specific, messianic predictions and also the way David throughout the book prefigures the coming Messiah.

The introduction ends with an overview of the five smaller “books” that make up the book of Psalms. Books I and II highlight God’s deliverance of David and Israel from their enemies before the exile. Books III and IV focus on the question of God’s apparent abandonment of his king and people during the exile, and affirm that God is still king over the world. Book V was shaped after the exile and intended to call God’s people back to his word (e.g. Psalm 119) and to the messianic hope (e.g. Psalm 110). The individual psalms, while beneficial when read in isolation, should be understood as part of a larger whole that tells a story from beginning to end.

After this ten-page introduction, Johnston dives into a psalm-by-psalm analysis that is clear, consistent, and generally well-informed by contemporary scholarship. Each chapter covers one psalm, typically beginning with a story or analogy that introduces some of the key content in the psalm under examination. His analysis then proceeds verse by verse or section by section, with illustrative anecdotes and stories scattered throughout the commentary on each psalm. In some ways each chapter functions as an intelligent devotion, almost a sermon, on the psalm in question, complete with headings and subheadings that organize and explain the material. Johnston in this manner effectively models his own approach to the exposition of the Psalms and provides valuable material for those preparing to preach from the Psalms. The commentary concludes with 25 pages of endnotes, a Scripture index, a general index, and an index of sermon illustrations used in the commentary organized by theme (e.g. blessing, faith, forgiveness).

While Johnston’s comments on the Psalms are clear and helpful, there are some inconsistencies between the introduction to the commentary and the commentary itself, especially with regard to the Christocentric focus of the Psalms. This focus is sometimes obscured by moralizing as he applies the different psalms to contemporary readers. For example, in an otherwise generally strong commentary on Psalm 1, Johnston gives some examples to flesh out what it means to “walk in the counsel of the wicked.” These examples include laughing at sin on talk shows and in movies, looking up to an ungodly woman at work, admiring a celebrity that is not close to God, spending time with a questionable friend, and listening to music that makes sin sound appealing. While a believer in Christ might do best to be careful of these activities, they hardly begin to express the depth of error implied by the words “walk in the counsel of the wicked,” especially in what Johnston identifies as an introductory and programmatic psalm. Granted, Johnston sees these activities as the first steps of a dangerous downward descent that leads next to identifying with sinners and finally to spreading sin to others. In his commentary on Psalm 1 and in other places throughout the commentary, however, he sometimes uses superficial examples that can make sin sound trivial rather than being a pervasive darkness of the human heart.

The tendency toward moralization, and more broadly toward anthropocentric understandings of Psalms 1–41, leads to a related problem. While Johnston repeatedly affirms that Christ is central to the Psalms, that they are in fact *about* Christ, his commentary on individual psalms regularly focuses on *how believers should act*. For example, using again his comments on Psalm 1, Johnston does a great job of highlighting Jesus Christ as the subject of this psalm. Jesus, he asserts, is the blessed one who avoids the ways of sinners, meditates on God’s *torah*, is like a fruitful tree planted by streams of water, and whose way God knows. Instead of seeing this Christocentric meaning as sufficient and reading the psalm as a beautiful hymn in praise of Jesus Christ, however, Johnston repeatedly returns to make the reader the center of the psalm. He reads Psalm 1:2, for example, not only as a picture of Jesus’ *torah*-centric life but also as an exhortation urging believers to read and memorize God’s word. Doing so will lead them to be fruitful trees described in verse 3. While this is a common way of reading Psalm 1, it subverts Johnston’s statements that this psalm and the book of Psalms are fundamentally about Jesus Christ. This pattern of weakening the Christocentric focus of the Psalms by emphasizing anthropocentric meaning occurs throughout the commentary.

Finally, Johnston rightly states in his introduction that individual psalms should not be isolated from one another, that they are in fact part of one book. While Johnston regularly and beneficially observes literary relationships among various psalms (e.g. Psalms 32 and 33), his overall tendency is still to treat psalms in isolation from one another.

Johnston’s commentary generally fulfills its purpose of being “written for pastors,” especially those who appreciate a commentary with some solid scholarly undergirding that is not overly technical. While the commentary sometimes seems directed at preaching to the reader rather than explaining the biblical text, it would nonetheless serve as a good textbook for English Bible students and for other motivated lay persons who want to encounter God in the book of Psalms. Its aim is not to contribute new scholarly knowledge to the study of Psalms, but it does make other scholars’ work accessible to a broad audience.

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Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook. By Gary V. Smith. Handbooks for OT Exegesis. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014, 214 pp., \$22.99 paper.

Fitting well into the growing number of works devoted to responsibly exegeting biblical texts in light of their literary context, this book by Gary V. Smith serves as the fifth installment in the Handbooks for OT Exegesis series edited by David M. Howard. Written with students and preachers in mind, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books* is very readable and accessible. Perhaps more so than the other books in this series, even a reader without a substantial background in OT or hermeneutics can easily follow the content of this work. One finds an author who cares that his recipients will be better communicators of the text by the end of the book.

The book is organized into six chapters. First, Smith explores “The Nature of Prophetic Literature.” Here, he delineates among the three temporal spheres of prophecy (present, future, apocalyptic), explicates various genres within prophetic discourse, and discusses some of the most important literary devices upon which prophecy depends, namely, parallelism and imagery.

Chapter 2 highlights what Smith sees to be the “Major Themes of the Prophets.” Each of the major and minor prophets, along with Lamentations and Daniel, is treated briefly and individually with a primary focus on their literary and theological contexts.

Chapter 3, “Preparing for Interpretation,” serves as a preview to the coming pedagogical half of the book and reads much like a typical exegetical handbook, albeit focused on the particularities of the prophets. This section begins with a breakdown of the historical context for each of the aforementioned prophets (the book of Lamentations is omitted here) where Smith arrays each within the historical framework of pre-exilic prophets to Israel, pre-exilic prophets to Judah, exilic prophets, and post-exilic prophets. This section concludes with brief introductions to ANE parallels, textual criticism, and navigating various kinds of historical, literary, and theological resources for study. Here one will find a six-page selected bibliography highlighting introductions to the prophets, ancient Near Eastern studies, and commentaries for each prophet.

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to “Interpretive Issues in Prophetic Texts.” Here Smith proceeds through the normal gamut of issues, but the lion’s share of time is given to the concept of prophetic fulfillment, especially the concepts of conditional/unconditional fulfillment, near/far fulfillment, and NT fulfillment.

Chapter 5 serves as an instructional guide to cross the gap between interpretation and “Proclaiming Prophetic Texts.” Equal attention is given to encouraging readers to apply the previous chapters and to oration-related issues such as shaping a presentation around the message of the text and appealing to an audience.

Lastly, Smith devotes chapter 6, “From Text to Application,” to demonstrating the principles of his guide with two examples, one “near future prophecy” and one “distant future prophecy.” Keeping students in mind, Smith’s final chapter is followed by a glossary of bolded technical terms readers will encounter throughout the book.

One of the greatest strengths of Smith’s work is its broad treatment of many specific exegetical issues tied to the prophets while operating within the familiar framework of other exegetical introductions. Especially for the greener reader, the interweaving of exegetical method into the prophetic content could supplant a more general introduction to exegesis.

Another strength of the book is its pedagogical thrust. Along with the other volumes in the Handbook for OT Exegesis series, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books* lives up to the claims of the series preface: “These handbooks are designed to serve a twofold purpose: to present the reader with a better understanding of the different Old Testament genres (principles) and provide strategies for preaching and teaching these genres (methods)” (p. 15).

Two weaknesses deserve mention. First, perhaps this is a preferential issue, but it often went unstated whether Smith was writing about the historical prophet or the prophetic book. This may have been intentional but led to some confusing transitions in thought, especially when dealing with the larger divisions within the Major Prophets compared to the smaller text sections of the Minor Prophets. Second, the book lacked any real discussion of canon. With the exception of short statements admitting that Daniel appears in the Writings within the Hebrew canon and that Lamentations is associated with the prophet Jeremiah in the LXX, there was no satisfactory treatment of canonical order, e.g. Joshua-Malachi in the Prophets within the Hebrew canon.

This book can easily serve different contingents of readership. The pastor, student and layperson alike will find a very helpful resource with enough to whet the appetite, a decent breadth of information, and a foundation to serve as an introduction for further and deeper study.

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The Song of Songs. By Iain M. Duguid. Tyndale OT Commentaries 19. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015, 160 pp., \$18.00 paper.

This book is volume 19 of the Tyndale OT Commentaries series, a series initially published beginning in the mid-1960s (p. 7). Some of the currently available series are simply the original editions that have been newly typeset (e.g. the Genesis volume), while other volumes are newly authored contributions that replace volumes in the original series. Such is the case for the volume being reviewed here.

Duguid's treatment of the Song of Songs is developed in four parts: Introduction, Analysis, Translation, and Commentary. Duguid's fresh translation of Song of Songs is a new feature of the series in the current volume. The format of the commentary includes three sections for each unit: Context, Comment, and Meaning.

This review will largely focus on the introduction, which offers five sections. The first covers title, authorship, and date. The title, *The Song of Songs*, should be understood as a superlative, i.e. "the best of songs," in analogy to the use of the term "Holy of Holies" to refer to the most holy place of the OT tabernacle or temple (p. 19). Duguid views, rightly in my opinion, that the issues of authorship and date are closely related. While the use of a Hebrew *lamed* in Song 1:1 could indicate authorship, Duguid holds that the relationship between Solomon and the song is more general (pp. 19–20). He deals with a number of difficulties that would be encountered if Solomon were considered to be the author of the book—in particular, various linguistic features of the work that do not seem to fit well with the time Solomon lived.

The second section of the introduction deals with interpretation of the Song. Duguid begins with the helpful observation that the book is a song, that is, an example of biblical poetry. He defines poetry as the "art of condensation," and he adds that it is often more evocative than explicative and often is open-ended (p. 24).

He then deals with the main interpretational approaches to the Song in history, that is, the allegorical, the natural, and the typical (pp. 25–27), but combines allegorical and typical and categorizes them as “spiritual” and contrasts them with a “natural” approach. He then states that he sees both of these two approaches to the text as covering a range of interpretive schemes that move from serious attention to the text of the Song to the importation of a free association of ideas that are brought to the text from the outside (pp. 29–30). To counter these “free” interpretive schemes, Duguid suggests that a key interpretive move is to see Solomon and his relationships with both wives and concubines as a foil that is contrasted unfavorably with the idealized couple whose love is celebrated in the Song. He is quick to distinguish this view from the three-character interpretation. He locates the Song firmly within the wisdom literature of the OT.

The third section discusses the issue of canonicity. The section is short, but covers the matter sufficiently. Duguid holds that the book’s canonical status provoked an allegorical approach to interpretation rather than the opposite possibility that allegorical interpretation gained for the book an entry into the canon (p. 39).

The fourth part of the introduction deals with the themes and message of the book. It is here that, for this reviewer, Duguid’s approach is most helpful. He holds that the Song serves to counteract both a hedonistic approach to love and marriage in society at large as well as an emphasis on asceticism as often being a preferred manner of life within the church (pp. 40–46). Along with this teaching, the author sees the presence of love and marriage in a fallen world, with its attendant problems, as directing the reader to focus attention on how marriage is a divine metaphor given by God to help human beings better understand the relation between Christ and the church (pp. 47–52).

The fifth element of introduction focuses on the structure and unity of the work. Duguid allows for possible use of earlier poetic materials in the composition of the Song, but he adds that “the Song as a whole exhibits the marks of a conscious composition” (p. 53). He holds that the unity of the Song is “a lyric or poetic unity rather than that of a strict, chronological narrative” (p. 53). The author sees the Song as made up of seven parts: title (1:1); prologue (1:2–2:7); before the wedding (2:8–3:5); wedding (3:6–5:1); after the wedding (5:2–6:3); contemplation and renewed consummation (6:4–8:4); and epilogue (8:5–14).

The commentary section will help the careful reader to better understand the Song. As a brief example, Duguid calls attention in the context section for Song 1:1 to two features that clearly set it apart from the rest of the Song. It is in prose, in contrast to the rest of the book which is poetry. And it uses the relative pronoun *’āšer* in contrast to the consistent use of the short form of the relative pronoun *šē* in the remainder of the work.

As one who found the original Tyndale OT Commentaries extremely helpful, this reviewer can only express the desire that all volumes from the original series will be rewritten with the same clarity as the volume that has been reviewed here.

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Isaiah 56–66. By R. Reed Lessing. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 2014, xxxvi + 577 pp., \$54.99.

Commentaries on Isaiah have often been fragmented into several volumes, not because of Isaiah's sixty-six chapters, but reflecting the prevailing scholarly opinion that the book is not a single eponymous work. In contrast, R. Reed Lessing affirms Isaianic authorship throughout all sixty-six chapters, and proposes that chapters 56–66 are not post-exilic but serve to unite chapters 1–55 theologically. Lessing's work is immensely helpful for both the academy and the church. His exegesis of the Hebrew text is detailed, always keeping in mind the wider context of Isaiah's structure and developing themes.

This is Lessing's fourth volume for the Concordia Commentary series (*Amos*, *Jonah*, *Isaiah 40–55*), and is not his last (*Zechariah* is forthcoming). The purpose of the Concordia series is to assist "pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God's Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text" (p. ix). It is worth noting some of the series' presuppositions here because they reflect Lessing's own approach. First, the commentary is *trinitarian*, *Christ-centered*, and *Christological*. Second, the Scriptures (OT and NT) are God's vehicle for communicating the gospel, and are entirely inerrant, infallible, and inspired. As a result Scripture is *sacred*, and calls for *theological* exposition. Additionally, the Scriptures are for the church, and thus Lessing's expositions are *ecclesiological* and *sacramental*, with a distinctively Lutheran flavor.

The introduction is short (37 pp.) and establishes Lessing's approach to Isaiah. After a brief selective survey of scholarship from Bernard Duhm (1892) to the present, he explores the relationship between Isaiah 40–55 and 56–66. Two key themes are identified. First, the righteousness that is both required (specifically, *צְדָקָה* paired with *מִשְׁפָּט* in chaps. 1–39) and promised (*צְדָקָה* paired with *יְשׁוּעָה* in chaps. 40–55) now appear "intertwined throughout chapters 56–66" (p. 15). Isaiah 56:1, where both word pairings surface for the first time together, functions as a hinge and allows both kinds of righteousness to stand side by side. Lessing sees this as solving the tension between chapters 1–39 and 40–55, thus demonstrating the function of chapters 56–66. Second, chapters 56–66 "announces that the Suffering Servant's mission continues through his servants" (p. 19). Thus Lessing identifies the most dominant question raised in chapters 56–66 as "What will happen to the new community that is formed by the Suffering Servant?" (p. 1). Development in the Isaianic corpus is most clear in the use of "righteousness" and "servant(s)," so chapters 56–66 should be viewed as necessary to the overall theological unity of Isaiah (p. 15). As to the historical background behind chapters 56–66, Lessing prefers not to reconstruct a speculative *Sitz im Leben* but interprets within their context in the canon of Scripture (pp. 24–26). The focus of Lessing's commentary, then, is on Isaiah 56–66's literary, theological, and canonical functions.

Lessing understands the structure of chapters 56–66 to reflect "careful and deliberate arrangement" (p. 32). He identifies a large-scale chiasm (A-B-A') with the faithful remnants' glorious future at the center (Isaiah 60–62, B), flanked by acute divisions within the community, Isaiah 56–59 (A) and Isaiah 63–66 (A'). Lessing

prefers to understand the internal conflict between the faithful and the apostate with an “eschatological thrust” (p. 30) rather than assign a postexilic setting. The faithful remnant consists of those who embrace the salvation of the Suffering Servant, and they will live in turbulence until Yahweh ushers in the new heavens and new earth (p. 35). These competing groups demonstrate there is a question regarding the identity of true Israel, and “foreshadows the debate in the [NT]” (p. 30). Lessing reads Isaiah theologically, through the lens of the NT, and sees in chapters 56–66 “the birth of the NT church, along with its challenges and glories, lows and highs, and final eschatological victory” (p. 25).

The pattern of the commentary proper is as follows: (1) translation of the text, and (2) textual notes, a phrase-by-phrase commentary of the Hebrew. Attention is given to grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology, and brief word studies. Text-critical issues are also addressed, with clear preference for the Masoretic Text. (3) Commentary: this section usually starts by placing the passage in its wider context and provides a clear outline for the verse-by-verse commentary which follows. Connections are also made to the wider context and to the NT. (4) Reflections, a short addendum which concludes each section. Here, Lessing makes further biblical-theological connections or adds pastoral thoughts, though this is also present in the Commentary section.

As to formatting, the book, though large, is firmly bound. The content is laid out well with excellent typography, especially the Hebrew font (there are no transliterations). My main formatting complaint is with the tables/charts, which are not clearly distinguished from the text proper (e.g. p. 413).

The work concludes with two indices. The subject index is detailed and extensive (e.g. offering is broken down further into burnt, drink, grain, guilt). The passage index covers the Bible, early Jewish and Christian literature, and Ancient Near Eastern Literature, as well as Lutheran Confessions, Fathers, and Hymnals.

Lessing has produced another Isaiah volume that is to be highly commended. There are several strengths worth pointing out. First, the Hebrew text is handled with detail. About half the commentary is comprised of translation and textual notes, and this does not take into account that the section on textual notes utilizes smaller fonts. In addition to syntax and grammar, he explains anomalous Hebrew forms, examines text-critical problems, and makes good use of ancient translations. There has not been a recent evangelical exegetical commentary of this depth on the text of Isaiah.

Second, he consistently provides contextual and theological synthesis. His textual analysis does not get bogged down in details, but informs the overall picture he believes Isaiah is painting. His discussion on the word pairs righteousness/justice in Isaiah 1–39, and righteousness/salvation in Isaiah 40–55, is excellent and proves to be a good example of his work. Although his analysis in this instance does not break new ground, it provides a fresh reading sensitive to the larger context and theological message of Isaiah. Summary statements and paragraphs abound throughout the work, and help the reader understand how the passage fits into the greater message and structure of Isaiah.

Third, his commentary is pastoral and confessional. The work takes on a distinctly Lutheran flavor, and Lessing's heart for the church is evident even in his textual notes. He moves effortlessly from textual description to current-day application. His commentary ends with a reference to Rob Bell, the Athanasian Creed, and a pastoral statement: "There are finally two truths about hell. First, we deserve it. Second, Jesus suffered it in our place (Mt 27:46). And because he did, all the glorious gospel promises in Isaiah 56–66 are ours, now and forevermore!" (p. 501). Lessing provides an unabashedly Christian reading of Isaiah, and refuses to leave the significance of the text to history.

Lessing's commentary is by no means perfect, but it is a rare jewel amidst Isaianic scholarship. He does not give enough discussion to the issue of the apparent subservience of the nations, and his emphasis on the eschatological thrust of these chapters leads him to jump too quickly to post-resurrection application. Those who are not of Lessing's confessional persuasion may not agree with some of his presuppositions or conclusions. Nevertheless, he has provided a clear and thorough analysis of the Hebrew text, along with a coherent theological synthesis of Isaiah. The Concordia Commentary series is proving to be a valuable resource for both pastor and scholar, especially for those who hold to an evangelical view of Scripture.

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Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness. By Richard B. Hays. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014, xxii + 155 pp., \$34.95.

Almost a year before the release date of *Star Wars Episode VII*, fans received a one-and-a-half-minute preview. The teaser was just enough to keep curiosity and anticipation at fervid levels for fans waiting to see what happens next in the galaxy far, far away. Likewise (and certainly more significantly), Richard Hays has given us an appetizer for a coming sequel. *Reading Backwards* is in many ways a follow-up to his seminal *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989) in which Hays made a strong case for the metonymic effect of OT echoes in the NT with steps for how to hear them legitimately and how to interpret them in Paul's writings. This latest volume is an initial exploration into the same hermeneutical concerns in asking how the Evangelists read Israel's Scriptures and what we as readers should look for. A more fully developed treatment is still in progress. For this shorter work Hays zeros in particularly on what the Gospel writers' hermeneutical approaches reveal about their understanding of Jesus' identity. In the final analysis Hays concludes that, through careful attention to their figural hermeneutical strategies, it is evident that "each of the four Evangelists, in their diverse portrayals, identifies Jesus as the embodiment of the God of Israel" (p. 107). Thus, he rejects the categories of "low and high Christologies" that have governed much Gospel scholarship for generations, as he does the methods through which such conclusions are made.

This “exercise in intertextual close reading” (p. x) begins with definitions of important terms: *figural interpretation* and *reading backwards*. Following Erich Auerbach, Hays defines figural interpretation as an “act of retrospective recognition” (p. 3) that perceives multiple figures as events in history within a correspondence of patterns that is only clearly discerned in light of the more recent event. That is, this sort of reading does not concern itself with the predictive nature of the OT, but with the reception of the OT in NT texts. The significance, then, of the first figure/event is more fully illuminated only with the advent of the second. Thus the interpretive channels flow in both directions. The OT both informs and is informed by its NT appropriation. The significance of the OT figure, therefore, *needs* the later NT figure to cast the retrospective illumination onto it, which in turn is also reflected back. This, then, leads directly into what Hays means by reading backwards. To read backwards is to allow the Gospels to teach us how to read the OT. The assumptions, theological motivations, and hermeneutics of the Evangelists (as evinced in their writings) become ours, and we read the OT through the lens of the Gospels. “The literal historical sense of the OT is not denied or negated; rather it becomes the vehicle for latent figural meanings unsuspected by the original author and readers” (p. 15).

This sort of reading can be identified in the Evangelists’ use of the OT in two ways. First, interpreters must take careful note of how “all four canonical Gospels are deeply embedded in a symbolic world shaped by the Old Testament” (p. xii) and how they draw upon that symbolic world to embed their own narratives, in turn, with OT imagery. Such embedded images evoke the context and theological contribution of the OT text/symbols being used. This, of course, can only be appreciated if contemporary readers themselves are as immersed in the language of Israel’s Scriptures as the Evangelists were. Second, texts like John 5:39, 46 and Luke 24:13–35 make the whole task of reading backwards explicit.

Chapters 2–5 explore each Gospel in turn to see just how the authors did such reading backwards. “Mark’s . . . hermeneutical strategy for reading Israel’s sacred texts is analogous to his understanding of the function of parables” (p. 28) as seen in Mark 4:11–12, 33–34. The Second Evangelist encrypts his OT usages so as to hide it from some, but brilliantly reveal Jesus’ divine identity to those with the ears to hear it. Ultimately, as in Mark 4:22, that which is hidden will come to light. Without ringing a bell every time he invokes the OT, Mark has quietly superimposed Jesus’ story on top of Israel’s story to present to the reader “the Crucified Messiah who is also paradoxically the embodiment of the God of Israel” (p. 31). Yet Mark would have us read backwards in another way too. The use of Dan 7:13–14 at the end of the narrative in Mark 14:61–62—Jesus’ own declaration of sharing everlasting dominion with the OT’s jealous God—is the Gospel’s clearest affirmation of Jesus’ divinity. This, then, drives the reader *backwards* to reconsider texts like 1:2–3, 2:7, 4:35–41, 6:34, and 6:45–52 for equally powerful claims of Jesus’ divinity.

Matthew is more overt. He will not let the reader miss his references to the OT, introducing them with “fulfillment formulas” (though he is often more subtle than is sometimes appreciated). Matthew too would have us not only read backward from the Gospel to the OT, but also read his own story backwards. The nar-

rative's very last sentence proclaims that Jesus will be "with" his people always (28:20). To Hays that is enough to evoke the pervasive OT concept of God's promise to be "with" an individual, group, or Israel herself (some 114 times by one count). Thus, with his final words, Matthew has cast an interpretive light back over the rest of the Gospel to bring other texts like 1:23, 2:15, 2:18, 18:20, 24:35, and 25:40 into intertextual focus, "adding much material to make Mark's affirmation of Jesus' divine identity more explicit and robust" (p. 52).

Luke also has a unique backward-reading strategy that, just as the other Synoptics, "subtly but insistently portrays Jesus as the embodied presence of Israel's Lord and God" (p. 58). Through some direct quotations, but more often allusions and echoes, Luke has created "a narrative world thick with scriptural memory" (p. 59), in which Jesus acts in the ways of the God of the OT, particularly through "visiting" (1:76–78; 7:16; 19:44; cf. Exod 4:31; LXX Ps 105:4; 79:15) and "redeeming" (24:21; cf. Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:24; 49:7) his people. Again, as in Mark and Matthew, this hermeneutic and its effects are most clearly seen at the end, only after Jesus' resurrection (cf. 24:25–27). The reader is therefore compelled to reread the Gospel "in the hopes of discerning more clearly how the identity and mission of Jesus might be prefigured in Israel's Scriptures" (p. 56) in texts like 3:4–6, 13:17 (cf. Isa 45:16a; 45:15–17), 13:34 (cf. Deut 32:10–12; Ps 91:1–4), 21:14–15 (cf. Exod 4:11–12), 24:52 and the common use of the term "Lord."

Finally, John does not wait until the end of the narrative to play his cards. The prologue (1:1–18) and Philip's certainty to have found "the one about whom Moses wrote in the Law, and also the prophets" (1:45) invite the reader to see in the ensuing discourse "the true referent to whom Israel's Scriptures point" (p. 75). John 5:39–40, 45–47 is equally explicit. The Fourth Evangelist's strategy for demonstrating this does not depend, as in the Synoptics, on citations or chains of words; "instead it relies upon evoking *images* and *figures* from Israel's Scripture" (p. 78, italics his). "The beginning" and light/darkness of Gen 1:1–5 (cf. John 1:1–9), the bronze serpent of Num 21:8 and the "lifted up" servant of Isa 52:13 (cf. 3:14), the constant echoing of the Psalter, the persistent focus on the temple and Israel's festivals, the shepherd motif (cf. John 10 and Ezekiel 34), and the exodus "are verbally faint ... but symbolically potent, evoking a rich theological matrix within which the Fourth Gospel's presentation of Jesus is to be understood" (p. 79). Yet, even this frontloaded Gospel is to be read backwards; it is only after the resurrection that understanding—particularly of the OT—ensues (1:17, 22). "Even more explicitly than the other Gospel writers, then, John champions *reading backwards* as an essential strategy for illuminating Jesus' identity He is teaching us to read *figurally*, teaching us to read Scripture *retrospectively*, in light of the resurrection" (pp. 85–86, italics his).

In summary, Hays states that "a figural Christological reading of the OT is possible only retrospectively in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection" (pp. 93–94). The distinct ways in which each Gospel contributes to this conclusion are outlined above. Mark is cryptic in revealing the eschatological mystery (p. 96); Matthew reconfigures the Torah around Jesus (p. 97); Luke narrates the story of Israel and the story of Jesus (and the church) in mutually recognizable patterns (p. 99); and

John elucidates the “pre-incarnational traces of the Word in his self-revelation to the world” (p. 101). Therefore, “to read Scripture well, we must bid farewell to plodding literalism and rationalism in order to embrace *a complex poetic sensibility* ... [and] pay primary attention to large narrative arcs and patterns in the OT” (p. 105, italics his).

The strengths of *Reading Backwards* are obvious, and it will prove fruitful for anyone interested in Gospel studies, but also for studies in biblical theology and Christology more generally, as well as modern debates over what stratum of the Christian tradition first recognized Jesus’ divinity. On the hermeneutical level, those familiar with Graeme Goldsworthy will notice several common themes (see especially chaps. 4–7 in his *According to Plan* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991]). This book does have one slight limitation, however. While I agree that “it is precisely through drawing on OT images that all four Gospels portray the identity of Jesus as mysteriously fused with the identity of God” (p. 108), it is more than Jesus’ identity that emerges from such intertextual awareness. Yet, as mentioned above, *Reading Backwards* is a sampling of a forthcoming larger work on figural reading in the Gospels. I have little doubt Hays will address other concerns of the Gospel writers then.

Surely there will be images and one-liners in the new *Star Wars* movie to make us look back to catch the meaning. However, that will only be effective for those immersed in that symbolic world. The NT is also a much anticipated conclusion whose sight is cast backwards through Jesus to the OT. Only those who appreciate “the figural literary unity of Scripture, OT and NT together” will also glimpse “the climatic fruition of that one God’s self-revelation” (p. 109).

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The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus. By Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, xiv + 394 pp., \$30.00 paper.

Michael F. Bird, lecturer in theology at Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College in Australia, has written widely in the past decade or so on early Christian mission, Pauline studies, the Gospels, and the historical Jesus. In the present work Bird pursues the question of how the early church wrote the story of Jesus. He notes in the preface, “I am concerned primarily with the questions of how the Gospels came to be, what kinds of literature they are, and how they relate to Christian discourse about God. I want to explore how the Gospels were shaped by the Christian movement and how they also came to shape that movement themselves” (viii–ix). What follows is a broad introduction to formal Gospel studies. The book has six chapters of content, each of which closes with an excursus.

In chapter 1, “Introduction: From Jesus to Gospels” (pp. 1–5), Bird focuses on four big questions that need to be addressed in any account of the origins of the Gospels. The first concerns why the Jesus tradition was preserved. The second is how the Jesus tradition was transmitted. Third is a series of three interlinked ques-

tions related to the sources, literary genus, and the purposes of the Gospels. Fourth is why there were four Gospels. In an appended excursus, "From Oral Gospel to Written Gospel" (pp. 5–20), Bird looks at the meaning of the term "Gospel" (Lat. *evangelium*; Gk. *euangelion*) in the ancient world and the process by which Jesus the proclaimer became textually embodied initially in Mark's narrative. Bird maintains that the Gospels constitute "a strong continuity with the oral Gospel, different only by virtue of development of the content by argumentation from the Jesus tradition, overlaid with interpretation of the Old Testament, and placed in the literary form of a biography" (p. 20). In short, the Gospels announce the victory of God in biographical narrative.

Chapter 2 focuses on "The Purpose and Preservation of the Jesus Tradition" (pp. 21–67). Here Bird looks at the purpose of the Jesus tradition (to conserve and preserve Jesus' message and biography) and the differing means of preserving that tradition (by means of a combination of pedagogical devices, notebooks, eyewitnesses, and community). He maintains that the cumulative evidence supports the existence of a tendency in the early church to preserve the Jesus tradition. In a brief excursus, "An Evangelical and Critical Approach to the Gospels" (pp. 67–73), Bird characterizes his own approach to the Gospels as "believing criticism." He sketches three implications related to this approach: (1) it begins with a hermeneutic of trust; (2) it engages in history; and (3) it explores the impact the Gospels intended to make on their implied audiences and how they intend to shape the believing communities who read them now.

In chapter 3, "The Formation of the Jesus Tradition" (pp. 74–113), Bird surveys various models of oral tradition. Bird is sympathetic to Kenneth Bailey's theory of informal controlled oral tradition, though not uncritically so. At the same time, Bird offers his own new paradigm of formation, admittedly dependent on James D. G. Dunn's work, *Jesus Remembered* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003). Bird suggests that the phrase "Jesus in social memory" is a useful signifier for the intersubjective nature of the remembrance of Jesus shaped by individual, collective, and cultural forces across a variety of oral and written media "since it highlights that the tradition is ultimately a memory and that memory is transmitted and transformed by a mnemonic process of both individuals and groups" (pp. 112–13). In the excursus, "The Failure of Form Criticism" (pp. 113–24), Bird highlights four major failures: (1) an overdrawn distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic settings; (2) an erroneous view of the nature of oral tradition; (3) the assumption that Christian prophets added to the dominical tradition; and (4) the assumption that the Gospels tell us more about the situation of the primitive church than they do about the historical Jesus.

Chapter 4, "The Literary Genetics of the Gospels: The Synoptic Problem and Johannine Question" (pp. 125–214), is the longest chapter of the book. In the first portion Bird discusses various explanations proffered to make sense of the similarities and differences among the Synoptic Gospels. He also offers his own literary explanation (a modified four-source hypothesis). He holds to Markan priority and Q, both of which he believes were used independently by Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke also had their own unique material at their disposal (M and L re-

spectively). In addition, however, Luke also used Matthew. Bird believes this last point accounts for the minor agreements between Luke and Matthew over against Mark and also explains the anomaly of the Q-Mark overlaps. With regard to the Johannine question (the relationship between John and the Synoptics), Bird adopts an increasingly favored view that John was familiar with the general storyline of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark, perhaps Luke, maybe Matthew). It provided John with the framework for his own creative narration of the Jesus tradition. At the same time, however, John's story was *literarily* independent and relied predominantly on non-Synoptic tradition. In the excursus, "Patristic Quotations on the Order of the Gospels" (pp. 214–20), Bird includes a series of citations of varying lengths of better-known references to the origins of the Gospels stemming from early Christian tradition: Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Anti-Marcionite Prologues, Origen, Augustine, Jerome, and the Muratorian Fragment.

In another lengthy chapter (chap. 5), "The Genre and Goal of the Gospels: What Is a Gospel and Why Write One?" (pp. 221–80), Bird examines three topics: the genre of the Gospels, the various early designations for Jesus books in the early church (sayings, memoirs, Gospel), and the purpose of the Gospels. Bird maintains that the Gospels are a form of biographical kerygma. As a corollary, the purposes of the Gospels are as multivalent as Greco-Roman biography. They are purposed for a mixture of apologetics, instruction, social legitimization, worship, and evangelism. The excursus, "What about the 'Other' Gospels?" (pp. 281–98), offers a brief inventory of non-canonical "Gospels." Bird organizes them under the following descriptive categories: Jewish Christian Gospels, Nag Hammadi Gospels, Pseudo-apostolic Gospels, Death and Resurrection Gospels, Infancy Gospels, Dialogues with the Risen Jesus, and Some Gospel Fragments. He also discusses kerygmatic, historical, and literary definitions of Gospels, all of which he views as problematic. Bird prefers to think of a Gospel as "a distinct type of Jesus literature based on a kerygmatic narrative account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The best criterion for what amounts to a 'Gospel' is the 'gospel'" (p. 289). The exclusion of the "other" Gospels was not geared toward the exclusion and oppression of minority voices, but was rather driven by a desire "to be faithful to the apostolic faith and to define the consensus of the worldwide church on the writings that will make up its register of sacred books" (p. 291).

The final chapter (chap. 6), "The Fourfold Gospel of Jesus Christ: Why Four Gospels?" (pp. 299–330), delineates a fourfold answer to the twofold question, "Why *four* Gospels and why *these four* Gospels?" First, the four Gospels constituted the writings thought most to reflect the preaching, practice, and piety of the majority of churches. Second, they were shared and copied the most frequently around various Christian networks. Third, they were believed to have had connections to the apostolic generation: either to the apostles themselves or their associates. Fourth, other writings presented a portrait of Jesus that was not as appealing as the four Gospels, since it did not accord with the faith inherited from the earlier generation. The concluding excursus, "The Text of the Gospels in the Second Century" (pp. 330–35), offers some brief comments on the early papyri. Bird notes that the bulk of the "second-century" Gospel papyri according to the Alands' categorization

fit either into the strict or normal category. Only P⁶⁶ fits into the free category. (Here, however, the dating for many of the papyri is disputed, as Bird's chart on p. 331 demonstrates. Moreover, many of the papyri are only very fragmentary; it would have been helpful had Bird delineated the scope of the contents of the thirteen papyri he includes in his charts.)

The Gospel of the Lord offers a helpful introduction to formal Gospels studies. Bird has read broadly and synthesized a great deal of past and particularly contemporary Gospels-related discussion. He sets forth his results in a readable and winsome style. Bird also attempts to move beyond an informed synthesis of contemporary discussion. He consequently offers some of his own creative suggestions, including a new paradigm for the transmission of the Jesus tradition (pp. 95–113) and a fresh take on the Synoptic problem (pp. 154–87). I find neither suggestion particularly persuasive. With regard to his new paradigm of “Jesus in social memory,” our most direct sources do not substantiate a model of memory transmitted and transformed by a mnemonic process of both individuals and groups as the driving force behind the Gospels. The Lukan prologue attests a process from the events themselves to written narratives as transmitted through *eyewitnesses and servants of the word* (Luke 1:1–4). Additionally, the earliest Gospel headings (*KATA MAPKON*, et al.) and colophons as well as early, consistent, and geographically widespread patristic testimony cohere in identifying *authors* as the moving force behind the Gospel narratives. While the resultant Gospel narratives are technically anonymous, they were not typically read that way from the second century onward. With regard to the Synoptic problem, while Bird's model is theoretically possible (as are many others), I am still doubtful whether any solely *literary* and *linear* explanation does full justice to the complex phenomena we find in the Synoptic Gospels. What Klyne Snodgrass said of the two-source hypothesis could apply here too: “The ... hypothesis may be correct, but I am not convinced, and I do not want a theory about the text to determine analysis of the text” (*Stories with Intent* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008] 35). While I have some demurrals with some of Bird's points, at the same time I also admire the good job of synthesis of contemporary discussion that he does throughout, and I do welcome his creative suggestions. This volume will prove useful to advanced undergraduate students as well as graduate and seminary students. It will serve well as an introductory course text. I plan to adopt it as a text in forthcoming Gospels-related seminary courses.

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Mark 1:1–8:26. By James W. Voelz. Concordia Commentary. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2013, xxxv + 588 pp., \$49.99.

The most distinctive feature of James Voelz's commentary on *Mark 1:1–8:26* is the emphasis placed on grammar. In fact, I am unaware of any recent major commentary with so much formal space devoted to this topic. Voelz himself states,

“First and foremost, it is *linguistically* and *grammatically* driven with close attention paid to even minor features of Marcan Greek” (p. xvi, italics his)

After a short paragraph, the introduction of the commentary immediately launches into an extensive 38-page section on the “Linguistic Features of Mark’s Gospel” (pp. 2–39). This section contains Voelz’s main discussion of Mark’s Greek (pp. 2–24), a discussion on the Greek text of Mark (textual criticism; pp. 24–27), and two excursuses (pp. 28–39). Thus, linguistic discussion comprises almost half of the 88-page introduction. The remainder of the introduction discusses literary features (pp. 40–73) and traditional introductory issues such as authorship, date, and recipients (pp. 74–88). Concerning the latter, with good scholarly caution, Voelz maintains that a man named Mark, a companion of Peter (p. 77) on whose testimony the Gospel is dependent (p. 81), wrote this Gospel in the late 50s or early 60s (p. 78) to Christians in Rome (p. 79). We cannot know for sure if this Mark is the same as any Mark mentioned in the NT (p. 77).

The introductory material on grammar begins with “Basic Characteristics of Mark’s Greek” (pp. 2–9), which contains lists of specific grammatical features that occur various numbers of times in Mark. These are divided up between those characteristics that occur throughout the Gospel (“global”) and those that occur in more specific portions of the Gospel (“restricted distribution”). Within each of these categories, Voelz classifies characteristics as prominent (more than 20 occurrences), distinctive (10–20 times), and infrequent but noticeable (5–10 times). Given the time it may take us to read through the Greek, it is not always easy to spot such grammatical emphases. Voelz has done this helpful service for us. For example, he lists eleven global Greek characteristics (e.g. introductory *καί*, genitive absolutes). He also lists four characteristics that are used prominently in specific sections of Mark (e.g. *εὐθὺς/εὐθέως* used extensively as adverbs in chaps. 1–7). Students who take the time to work through this material will receive significant payoff as they use the commentary.

The next portion of the introduction is an attempt to classify Mark’s Greek (pp. 10–15). In order to do this, three areas are developed. First, building off of what was written previously, Voelz classifies various Marcan grammatical features including some of the characteristics described in the sections on global and restricted distribution as specifically Semitic or Hellenic. For example, Mark’s use of *καί* is a Semitic feature, and genitive absolute usage is a Hellenic feature (p. 10). Second, the Gospel reveals a rather complex distribution of features. Most features that are restricted to a single section occur in chapters 9–16 with some representation in chapters 5–7. The first half of the Gospel is generally more Semitic, and the latter half is more Hellenic (pp. 11–12). Finally, in a section entitled “Sophistication,” Voelz demonstrates that the Gospel shares a number of features with Classical Greek or if not Classical Greek proper, at least standard literary Greek. To do this, he compares Mark with Plato’s *Phaedo* (pp. 12–15). Voelz shows grammatical characteristics shared by both. This is especially illuminating since both books share similar themes, namely, the death of a group leader (Jesus and Socrates) and misunderstanding among those in the group (p. 12). This thought-provoking argument suggests potential future work for anyone interested in pursuing it (as Voelz him-

self acknowledges, p. 15). I found the discussion here persuasive; however, I also felt the need to have more comparison data with other literary works to embrace all that is being suggested. This task, of course, is beyond the scope of the commentary.

The final part of this section goes beyond grammar and considers Mark's usage as a means of conveying literary effect ("Elements of Linguistic Usage for Literary Effect" [pp. 15–22]). Voelz suggests that Mark "chooses his forms and linguistic structures not only for the specific semantic content that they convey, but also to demonstrate artistic skill and particularly for the effect that such forms and constructions have on the reader/hearer" (p. 15). Among other things, this includes Mark's use of the present tense to describe the past (historical present). This serves to foreground the action of these verbs in the narrative (pp. 15–16). This approach reveals the sophisticated nature of Mark's language. Voelz should be commended for this emphasis. Language can no longer be limited to specific syntactical usages. It is much more than that. Voelz is on the cutting edge of attempting to use such features in a comprehensive way. At this point, it is difficult to know whether or not all of his conclusions will be ultimately persuasive or stand the test of time. However, his venture into these less-charted areas is welcome and important. Voelz concludes this language-focused section with a brief assessment of Mark's Greek (pp. 22–24). Based on his discussion of the various features of Mark's language usage, he runs counter to much of NT scholarship and rejects the notion that Mark's Greek is "primitive" (p. 22).

The introduction on Mark's Greek concludes with two excursuses. The first is a grammatical review (pp. 28–36), which is a handy overview of important grammatical concepts that one would learn in intermediate and higher-level Greek classes. It is selective and not intended to replace grammars and other such resources (p. 28 n. 1). The second excursus, "Basic Linguistic Categories and Principles of Interpretation" (pp. 37–39), is a brief statement about the importance of linguistic study, the complexity of language, and the complexity of interpretation. Biblical interpretation is not a simplistic task. I know we all realize this but it is refreshing to be reminded by someone sharing the results of his own interpretive process.

Within this section on grammar is Voelz's discussion of the text of Mark and textual criticism (pp. 24–26). Voelz is not confident that our standard critical text (NA²⁸) is a faithful witness to Mark. It "give[s] a hopelessly incomplete picture of what readings actually exist" (p. 24). Voelz believes that before text-critical work can be done, one must examine the author's linguistic usage and he suggests a spiral approach with four steps to accomplish this goal: (1) gain a general understanding of the author's usage by looking at characteristics that are common to almost all manuscripts; (2) evaluate tendencies of individual manuscripts; (3) with the author's usage in mind, evaluate different readings to establish a text; and (4) with a text established, revisit the previous general understanding of the author's usage (p. 25). Voelz's process has led him to conclude that Vaticanus, along with similar manuscripts, is the best representation of Mark's text (p. 25). Therefore, Voelz tells us that he will depart from the NA²⁸ in a "rather large number of places" (p. 26).

Voelz's textual approach may not satisfy many, especially those interested in textual criticism.

In Voelz's section of literary features, a number of issues are discussed including characterization, narrative, and story (pp. 40–73). It is here that he discusses literary evidence for ending the Gospel at 16:8 (pp. 55–60) and the overall message of the book (p. 61). Essentially, the message is that “in this age, *the reign and rule of God in Jesus Christ* has come in power, but in hiddenness, as it were, *in humility and lowliness*” (p. 61, italics his).

Voelz's approach to the text of Mark is not the only controversial notion revealed in this introduction. As already alluded to above, Voelz believes that Mark is a well-crafted Gospel. Indeed, if Voelz is correct, he poses a challenge to accepted solutions to the Synoptic problem that find Mark and his “primitive” Greek to be early. Mark's Greek does not need to be refined by Matthew or Luke. In fact, Voelz argues that Mark is the final Synoptic Gospel written and that it is written without literary dependence on the others (pp. 81, 85–88). This is a controversial notion and an excursus is devoted to the subject at the end of the introduction (pp. 85–88). In addition to the discussion of Greek above, Voelz briefly discusses a number of other issues that support his thesis (e.g. importance of oral tradition, Clement of Alexandria's suggestion that the Gospels with genealogies are the earliest). Like Voelz's discussion of the text, much more detail needs to be presented to defend his position. A commentary is probably not the best vehicle for such a task.

The discussion on each pericope begins with a brief introduction, the Greek text, and an English translation. The Greek text indicates where it departs from NA²⁸, and the English translation uses various fonts to reveal grammatical issues (explained on pp. 26–27). This is followed by a three-part Greek-oriented section entitled “Linguistic Essentials in the Pericope,” which draws from the introductory material and the translation. It includes grammar basics, Marcan usage, and features for literary effect. For this information to be most helpful, the introduction is necessary. Some, especially Greek learners, will find this information helpful. Others may find it a bit redundant. Given the structure of the commentary, these sections can be used or easily skipped. Next is a section called “Textual Notes.” This is a highly detailed discussion focused mainly on the Greek text. It is also where difficult interpretive issues are handled. For example, the problematic reference by Jesus to “Abiathar” as high priest at a specific time in David's life is discussed here; unfortunately, the issue is surfaced but not resolved (pp. 217–18). After the “Textual Notes,” a final “Commentary” section provides a more synthetic interpretation of the passage. One can read only the “Commentary” section and come away with an understanding of the passage; however, to get the most out of this work, both the “Textual Notes” and “Commentary” should be read.

In addition to the excursuses in the introduction, there are four in the commentary proper: baptism (pp. 138–40), OT quotations and allusions (pp. 141–43), the Son of Man (pp. 197–200), and the interpretation of parables (pp. 297–304). The volume includes an index of subjects (pp. 525–51) and an index of passages, including both biblical and other ancient sources (pp. 553–77). Finally, there is a

nice addendum on biblical coinage with color plates (pp. 581–85), followed by two color pictorial icons of Mark (pp. 586–88).

This is a unique commentary. It is well-written, and its focus on grammatical elements makes it an ideal choice for use in classes that are teaching intermediate or advanced syntax. It is fairly easy to use but one must read multiple sections to benefit most from the volume. Many will not agree with his text-critical approach (and decisions) or his view that Mark was the final Synoptic Gospel to be written. However, in a class or similar context, these issues can be supplemented and discussed as necessary. There are already a number of helpful handbooks and other such works that describe the Greek of specific NT books. However, this volume can meet this same need (albeit without as thorough a treatment as some of the handbooks) and do much more. The advantage of this commentary is that the grammar and syntax are discussed within the larger context of applying the exegetical process. The Greek of Mark is emphasized to such a degree in this book that it can function as a Greek learning tool. However, it also places grammar and syntax into the larger exegetical process. If I were to criticize this commentary's approach to Greek, it would be that it is overemphasized in the interpretation of the book. Other features of the exegetical process can appear to fade into the background (although I do not think this is the author's intention). Nevertheless, this commentary helps the student to see the role of grammar in interpretation, while avoiding the misconception that grammar essentially equals interpretation.

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Aposynagōgos and the Historical Jesus in John: Rethinking the Historicity of the Johannine Expulsion Passages. By Jonathan Bernier. Biblical Interpretation Series 122. Leiden: Brill, 2014, x + 172 pp., \$119.00.

This published dissertation, written in McMaster University's Department of Religious Studies and defended in October 2012, develops further the critique of the interpretive approach to John that centers upon the reconstruction of the Johannine community. Since the 1960s readers of the Fourth Gospel have been primarily tutored by the influential proposal of J. Louis Martyn to interpret the Gospel through the life and circumstances of the audience through whom the Gospel originated. The key to this interpretation is the term *apōsynagōgos* ("expulsion from the synagogue;" 9:22; 12:42; 16:2), which has been assumed to communicate to the reader that people and events later than the time of the historical Jesus are being referenced by means of the Johannine narrative. This approach to the Fourth Gospel has had a monopoly on its interpretation for decades, but has recently been reevaluated and critiqued. Bernier is the newest member to join a small group of dissenters.

In chapter 1, Bernier offers a helpful taxonomy of the interpretation he calls "the Martyn Tradition" (p. 6). According to Bernier, this tradition can be divided into two distinct positions: the "Classic Martyn Tradition" and the "Neo-Martynian

Tradition.” The former is based upon the original Martyn hypothesis that the *aposynagōgos* passages refer to the formal expulsions of Christians from the synagogue in the post-70 era. The latter modifies the former by agreeing with the numerous historical critiques that deny a formal expulsion but at the same time maintains an allegorical reading of the Fourth Gospel that is still Martynian in nature. In contrast to these two Martynian approaches is a third approach, which Bernier calls the “Post-Martynian Alternative.” If the two Martynian approaches read the Fourth Gospel on two levels, the alternative approach reads it on one level; the Gospel is speaking quite intentionally about people and events related to the historical Jesus. The “Post-Martynian Alternative,” which Bernier offers as the preferable approach, is based upon the earlier work of Richard Bauckham, who offered the first critique of the Gospel community approach (p. 5), and more specifically Edward Klink, who first applied such a critique to the Fourth Gospel, and who, according to Bernier, “anticipated much of the argumentation in this study” (p. 13).

In chapter 2, Bernier provides a collation of contemporary synagogue studies that offer what he considers severe criticism to the “expulsion” theory that is central to the Martyn traditions. Using more recent research on Judaism and synagogues, Bernier argues that there is “very good reason to doubt the understanding of the *Birkat-ha-Minim* held by Martyn and those who follow him on the matter” (p. 41). Thus, to read the *aposynagōgos* passages in John as an intentional anachronism that expects to be read allegorically is a misreading of the Gospel’s narrative and intention. Bernier shows an important distinction, however, between the classic and neo-Martynians. While the classic Martynians hold firmly to the formal expulsion theory, the neo-Martynians “typically suppose that no such expulsions ever occurred, and that the *aposynagōgos* passages are primarily about identity-formation” (p. 75). The neo-Martynians continue to read the Fourth Gospel on two levels, that is, allegorically, but not for the same reasons as the classic Martynians. The neo-Martynians appropriate the evidence from contemporary synagogue studies and therefore have come to interpret the *aposynagōgos* passages not as definitive statements of first-century Jewish and Christian relations, but as more localized expressions of social and religious identity. The expulsion need not be formal; for its determination and function is rooted in the perception of the Johannine community. For Bernier, the neo-Martynian adjustment is both stronger and weaker: “stronger in terms of how it handles the data extrinsic to biblical text, but weaker in terms of how it handles the data intrinsic to the text” (p. 51).

In chapters 3 and 4, Bernier argues against both Martynian traditions that the accounts of conflict over Jesus’ messianic identity during his lifetime in the *aposynagōgos* passages are plausible and to be taken at face value and not read as allegories. Bernier argues that the post-Martynian alternative has plausible historical reasons for determining the religious assumptions applied to Jesus by the first-century authorities depicted in the Fourth Gospel regarding his status as the Messiah, so that the *aposynagōgos* passages can be read as describing actual social-religious conflicts during Jesus’ lifetime. For example, there is no need to assume that only the Martynian traditions are able to speak to the broader Roman imperial context, since Bernier argues that even when read as a one-level narrative the Fourth Gospel

speaks overtly about matters of empire—the literal Roman empire that tried and crucified a political revolutionary accused of messianic and royal intentions (see p. 105).

In chapters 5 and 6, Bernier concludes his argument by applying the evidence he presented in the previous chapters to the historical standards of inference suggested by Ben Meyer (*The Aims of Jesus* [London: SCM, 1979]). Using Meyer, Bernier argues that the Fourth Gospel communicates both direct and oblique patterns of inference that display intention, knowledgeability, and veracity, so that the interpreter may receive the people and events as narrated by the Gospel to be historically probable (not just plausible). Bernier's primary argument against the Martynian traditions and for the post-Martynian alternative is that the two-level reading unavoidably favors the second level, the level of the Johannine community, and therefore obscures or neglects the literal sense (the first level) of the text, the story of Jesus and the historical referents to which the literal sense attests. Quite simply, Bernier asks, "What does John aim to do in his gospel?" (p. 109). The Martynian paradigm, according to Bernier, is forced to argue that the Gospel is to be understood as the Johannine community's witness to its own history (classic Martynian) or its own identity (neo-Martynian) and not as a witness to the historical Jesus (post-Martynian). Bernier claims the Gospel itself and the history to which it relies and refers supports a one-level, literal sense interpretation.

Bernier's published dissertation makes a valuable contribution to the interpretation of the Gospel of John. While at times his argumentation is too emphatic in regard to the obviousness of its conclusions, this monograph continues the growing movement of scholarship that challenges the dominant paradigm that has controlled the interpretation of John for nearly a half century. There are several aspects that are worthy of comment, but three will serve to conclude this review.

First, Bernier provides a helpful taxonomy of the interpretation of John in relation to the influence of J. Louis Martyn. He is correct to see a distinction between classic and neo-Martynians, and he rightly sees a related and yet different hermeneutical intention in both approaches. Even the "post-Martynian" category helpfully situates this alternative approach from the last several decades of Johannine interpretive history. The taxonomy and its insight into contemporary Johannine interpretation is its most significant contribution.

Second, Bernier offers a helpful integration of recent research in several areas attached to the study of the biblical texts, including synagogue studies and their application to the first century, historiography and its application to patterns of inference and referentiality, and the nature and function of eyewitness testimony. By using such an eclectic method, the monograph presents a cumulative argument that adds new insights into the audience debate regarding the Fourth Gospel.

Finally, Bernier adds a worthy contribution to the contemporary debate in Gospels studies, and the study of the Gospel of John in particular, regarding the audience and origin of the Gospels and their relation to interpretation. Since 1998, Bauckham (*The Gospel for All Christians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998]) and others have argued against the "community" or specific audience interpretation. This debate has extended quite naturally to the Fourth Gospel (see Klink, *The Sheep of the*

Fold [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007]). While Bernier is more deconstructive of Martyn and less constructive of a post-Martynian alternative than he is willing to admit (see comments on p. 13 n. 42), he does advance the critical movement against the Martynian traditions and offers further proof that a literal-sense reading of the Fourth Gospel's narrative is innate to the Gospel's intention and context.

This monograph by Jonathan Bernier is a worthy contribution to the academic discussion regarding the interpretation of the Fourth Gospel. Unfortunately, the Martyn paradigm may still be too entrenched in the contemporary scholarly opinion and practice to receive the insights presented by Bernier. It is important, however, that we clarify one thing: what Bernier refers to as the "post-Martynian alternative" is more accurately pre-Martynian. That is, although Martyn's two-level reading may have held sway the last two generations, for the last two millennia the Fourth Gospel was correctly read according to its one-level witness to its literal-sense subject matter: the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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The Acts of the Apostles: A Newly Discovered Commentary. By J. B. Lightfoot. Edited by Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014, 397 pp., \$40.00.

J. B. Lightfoot was a singular luminary in the world of nineteenth-century biblical criticism. With an unmatched mastery of primary source material and an unwavering dedication to patient and thorough exegetical reasoning, Lightfoot's work to this day remains a model of careful biblical scholarship. It is a great delight, therefore, that a trove of Lightfoot's lecture notes, having long lain undisturbed in the Durham Cathedral Library, is now being shown the light of day through the Lightfoot Legacy Set, published by InterVarsity Press. Lightfoot's notes on Acts are the first volume in this new series, with two additional volumes (John's Gospel; 2 Corinthians and 1 Peter) to follow.

For the book of Acts, two sets of lecture notes have been collated into a single commentary. The notes are fragmentary and incomplete, extending only through the first 21 chapters of the book. Even here, some passages (e.g. the death of Judas) are treated in detail, whereas other significant passages (e.g. the conversion of Cornelius) receive only scant remarks. Such is to be expected with a collection of notes not composed for publication, but from the available material the reader can nonetheless deduce Lightfoot's general perspective toward those parts of Acts that are left unaddressed in the notes.

What the commentary lacks in completeness, it makes up in personality. The notes are succinct and suggestive, terse signposts awaiting the lecturer's more developed exposition. Lightfoot finds "an interesting word" here (συναλιζόμενος in 1:4), an "absurd" explanation of a passage there (Alford on 5:38–39). What did Lightfoot have in mind with remarks such as these? At many points, one wishes

that Lightfoot would have been more verbose in his annotations, but the volume affords a rare opportunity to glimpse a preeminent interpreter's thoughts in process, complete with occasional directives to look into a given matter further.

In terms of what one might judge to be the distinctive features of the commentary, the notes reflect Lightfoot's characteristic historical rigor and encyclopedic knowledge of ancient sources. The lecturer moves with ease through early Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman literature. In his remarks upon the introduction of Saul in Acts 7:58 and 8:1, for example, Lightfoot expounds upon the age and name of Saul by cross-referencing (1) several passages from the OT; (2) relevant passages in Josephus, Philo, and rabbinic sources; (3) a number of NT passages; (4) a handful of Greco-Roman authors; and (5) a few church fathers for good measure (pp. 137–38).

Some of the most enjoyable parts of the commentary come when Lightfoot reasons through the available data to reach conclusions upon historical matters, such as in his discussions of Pauline chronology (e.g. p. 189). Working without the benefit of the significant archaeological finds of the 20th century, Lightfoot nevertheless utilizes his considerable powers of deduction to reach precise and reasonably accurate conclusions about the dates of the events and figures depicted in Acts. Lexical insights abound throughout the commentary, and Lightfoot also shows a special interest in the historicity of the Acts sermons and in the relationship between the contents of Acts and the rest of the NT. In particular, Lightfoot labors to show the continuity between the speeches of Acts and the Pauline and Petrine epistles.

Unfortunately, Lightfoot's notes are very demanding of the reader. Though Lightfoot's English prose is engaging and accessible, the commentary contains a fair amount of untranslated Greek, Latin, Hebrew, German, and French. Moreover, Lightfoot is constantly referencing and addressing the positions contained within a number of works produced during his own era, and often these references presume a certain knowledge of the works in question. Hence, the reader of the commentary must either track down a number of works that have long been out of print, or one must engage in a fair amount of mirror-reading to try to discern the views of Lightfoot's interlocutors. Moreover, with the exception of the excurses that treat a number of isolated topics in some detail, the majority of the notes are so brief that they will be of only limited practical benefit for the interpretation of the overarching narrative of Acts. For all of these reasons, the main body of the commentary is a resource that is suited much more for the scholar than for the pastor.

However, while the body of the commentary itself may be a demanding text, the editors of the volume have included alongside the notes in the commentary a number of items that will surely be of use to a wider readership. Preceding the commentary itself, Witherington and Still provide an entertaining explanation in the foreword of how Lightfoot's notes were discovered and prepared for publication, and they also present a helpful introduction to Lightfoot as a churchman, scholar, and commentator. Additionally, prior to the discussion of Acts within the commentary, the editors have included a prefatory lecture by Lightfoot, to which they have given the subtitle, "Reflections on the Necessity of a Clear and Proper View

of the Inspiration of Scripture as a Presupposition for Correctly Approaching the Bible.” As the subtitle suggests, the lecture explains how the nature of Scripture’s inspiration ought to influence our approach to the text of the NT. Lightfoot presents a compelling appeal for the necessity of rigorous historical-critical exegesis alongside a high view of Scripture, and this brief lecture would make excellent required reading for incoming students at evangelical seminaries and Bible colleges.

After the main body of the commentary, the editors have included four useful appendices. The first is a 47-page article by Lightfoot on Acts for Smith’s *Dictionary of the Bible*. The article offers a good discussion of introductory matters such as the title, contents, authorship, and early reception of Acts. Indeed, though much has happened in scholarship on Acts since the article’s production, Lightfoot’s introduction nevertheless remains a useful resource today, surpassing in style and erudition many of the introductions of a more recent vintage. The second appendix is a short article entitled, “Illustrations of the Acts from Recent Discoveries,” originally published in 1878. Here Lightfoot discusses how historical investigations published in the preceding year have shed new light on the situations in Cyprus and Ephesus at the time of Paul’s missionary journeys. The third appendix is a lecture addressing the likely activities of Paul following the ending of Acts. This is another enjoyable exercise in historically informed guesswork, as Lightfoot presents a reasonable reconstruction of what may have happened to Paul after Acts. Finally, the last appendix is a lengthy obituary/homage to Lightfoot. In this piece the reader gains a real sense for Lightfoot’s breadth of interests and commitment to the church, and the obituary is a fitting conclusion to the volume as a whole.

With regard to layout, the volume is well-arranged, with author and Scripture indices in the back of the book. Minor typographical errors appear at a few points in the commentary (p. 98: רב for בר; p. 119: Gal 3:4 for Gal 4:4; p. 136: “there” for “their”), and on these occasions it is unclear whether the errors belong to Lightfoot or the editors. For the most part, however, the work is well-presented, and Jeanette Hagan, the scholar who transcribed the material, is to be commended for what must have been an arduous task.

Editors Witherington and Still have compiled a volume that has something for everyone. The pastor and seminarian will benefit from the articles and lectures that both precede and follow the main commentary. The scholar will thoroughly enjoy this candid look into the personal notes of a towering figure in biblical scholarship and will find in the concise commentary a number of suggestive observations that merit further exploration. Had Lightfoot developed his reflections upon Acts into a proper commentary during his lifetime, one wonders what its effect would have been upon the path of subsequent scholarship on Acts. As it stands, we can be grateful to the editors for unearthing Lightfoot’s notes, making them available in this unique volume, and acquainting us with a man whose learning and piety is an inspiration to scholar and pastor alike.

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Thinking through Paul: A Survey of His Life, Letters, and Theology. By Bruce W. Longenecker and Todd D. Still. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014, 408 pp., \$44.99.

Readers will immediately be struck by the attractive presentation of this textbook, designed to introduce readers to the great apostle Paul. It fits the requirements of an introductory course text superbly, providing students (the primary audience) with all the essentials for grasping the fundamentals of Paul's life and literary output. As to format, after a box that provides an overview of the chapter, the authors list key verses (when they cover the Pauline letters) before they launch into the topics. Each chapter ends with a list of key people, places, and terms; questions for review and discussion; contemporary theological reflections; and a bibliography for further study—which is often subdivided into appropriate sections. Also striking are the copious maps, charts, and pictures—both of landscapes, art, and icons that add color and interest to the presentations. At the end of the book is a helpful glossary of key terms. The book's layout is attractive, employing a single-column format with a limited number of footnotes mostly used for clarification of points. Both authors are affiliated with Baylor University, Longenecker as Professor of Religion in the University, Still as Professor of Christian Scriptures at the Truett Seminary connected with Baylor.

As the title suggests, part 1 consists of a survey of Paul's life both before he met Jesus on the Damascus road and subsequent to this life-changing encounter. They chart Paul's missional commitment and the nature of the Christian communities that he founded on his journeys and to which his letters are addressed. Though there are places where the authors speculate about what we can know, their conclusions are certainly defensible and are based on the best of contemporary scholarship.

In part 2 the authors survey Paul's letters in mostly chronological order. They locate Ephesians just prior to the Pastoral Letters, probably because of debates about its authorship. For each letter they discuss the historical context in which it emerges before proceeding with a survey of the letter's content. Along the way, the authors include a discussion of pertinent topics that the letters raise or background helpful to understand features of what Paul says. So, for example, they discuss sexuality in the Greco-Roman world (p. 63) and Paul's instructions on silencing women in 1 Tim 2:8–15 (pp. 276–77).

On the issue of pseudonymity to account for the authorship of some of the disputed letters, the authors present both sides and decide to leave it to readers to grapple with the issues and implications and to decide for themselves. They adopt this tactic with many other issues, in places referring readers to the standard critical commentaries for more details or discussions of problematic matters. They make an important observation at various points when they remind readers of what is at stake when they decide for or against an interpretive option, pointing out that readers will need to adjust their readings of Paul's letters on the basis of the options they adopt. For example, one will need to read 2 Corinthians in different ways depending on the view one adopts about its alleged partitions. As to the issue of the authorship of Ephesians they remain agnostic—allowing that Paul may well be the

author or that the book may derive from one of his companions (pp. 243–44). As another example, they discuss the pros and cons of the two main ways to understand the phrase “faith of Christ” (*pistis Christon*). They show the virtues of understanding this as faith *in* Christ or as the faith that Jesus exhibited, though they prefer the latter (pp. 312–13).

As they move through the letters in part 2 they also give succinct summaries of controversial, as well as what they deem to be important, issues within the scope of Pauline studies. A prime example is the so-called “new perspective,” which they mention briefly (p. 99), but then unpack more thoroughly towards the end of the book (pp. 326–33). Instead of seeing the issues between the traditional view of Paul and the law (often termed “legalism”) and the “new perspective” (based on “covenantal nomism”) as either/or propositions, they see virtues in both positions. Both illuminate important aspects of Paul’s teaching about Israel and the law. The authors discuss the Lord’s Supper, where they compare Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 11 with the three Synoptic versions; the topic of slavery in the ancient world (p. 216); and the Colossian philosophy. They tackle the issue of whether Romans 16 was a part of Paul’s original document, citing the manuscript evidence before they come down on the side of the letter’s full integrity (pp. 165–66). On their understanding of Paul’s statement that “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), they say, cryptically and controversially, “In that eschatological event, any lack of faith among the people of Israel will be transformed by the covenant-making God into faithful allegiance, as one manifestation of his mysteriously awe-inspiring ways” (p. 187).

Part 3 moves to a consideration of Paul’s theology—where they take an unusual but productive approach. It certainly leads to some promising and fruitful avenues of discussion, though it may also result in some liabilities. Most attempts to understand Paul’s theology compress the findings into rather predictable categories. For example, they might include the doctrine of God, humans and their predicament in sin and under the law. Then comes the solution in the provision of Jesus and the good news about his incarnation, death, resurrection, and new life in him. This often leads to various topics such as the nature of salvation, including justification, participation in Christ, the role of the Spirit, followed by the church, eschatology, and perhaps sanctification—the life of faith in the Spirit. For some typical examples embracing this type of approach see James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), or Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975). True enough, Thomas R. Schreiner, in his *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), goes his own way using different rubrics.

Longenecker and Still, instead of providing this type of collection of Paul’s main theological themes, describe Paul’s theological contribution in terms of Paul’s overall narrative framework and how that “apocalyptic narrative” engages the two primary “macro-narratives” in Paul’s own context. This part consists of three chapters. As to Paul’s “apocalyptic narrative” in chapter 11 they conclude, “For Paul, theological solutions to corporate and individual issues were to flow from the nar-

rative of God's invasion in Christ into a world being torn apart by dark forces that conspire to reduce God's good creation to chaos through the imposition of self-interest in a battle of the survival of the fittest" (p. 316). Chapter 12 sets Paul's narrative against the two prevailing narratives with which he interacted: the ethnic people of Israel and their covenant with God; and the Roman imperial narrative where Caesar is lord. They list ten insightful contrasts between the values of Roman imperial ideologies and the good news that Paul preached (pp. 337–38). They say that while he eschewed violence in any form, "Paul was probably not at all averse to unmasking the underbelly of Roman imperial ideologies as deceptive and deficient" (p. 342).

The final chapter (chap. 13) consists of five case studies in which the authors seek to show how Paul's narrative impacts these macro-narratives in the lives of Jesus followers and Jesus groups in Paul's world. Rather than simply pick random or popular "hot topics," they base their selection of cases on three crucial criteria: issues that occur across Paul's letters so as to allow the authors to "triangulate" his comments; issues in which Paul seems to speak with a somewhat constant voice; and issues that do not seem to be impacted by Paul's expectation of "eschatological imminence" (p. 351). The cases they engage are: (1) freedom, responsibility, and self-giving; (2) wise interpretation of Scripture at "the culmination of the ages"; (3) moral pageantry as Satan's undermining of ethical balance; (4) care for the poor; and (5) problematizing violence.

This is a useful conclusion that points the way for modern interpreters to allow Paul to speak to issues of our day. Instead of proof-texting Paul to derive applications, their approach forces interpreters to seek how Paul addresses issues more broadly and consistently given his larger commitments and overall missional narrative.

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Election of the Lesser Son: Paul's Lament-Midrash in Romans 9–11. By David R. Wallace. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014, xiv + 320 pp., \$34.00 paper.

This book is written at an intermediate lay level in the main text with footnotes at the advanced lay to expert level, occasionally including Greek text that is not transliterated or translated. David R. Wallace seeks to explain Romans 9–11 section by section with special reference to Paul's literary form and style, convinced that such a focus can yield greater insight into the meaning of the text. In particular, Wallace contends that Paul's argument combines the Jewish literary forms of lament and midrash in a theological narrative about the salvation of Israel. The author divides Romans 9–11 into five major sections, treating each in its own chapter, all of which is bookended by a chapter of introduction and a chapter of conclusion. There is a bibliography followed by Scripture and subject indexes at the end of the book. Unfortunately, there is no author index, and Wallace uses commas to bracket

references to Romans rather than parentheses, a most unwelcome formatting decision.

The introduction gives an overview of the book and discusses the need for the study, its methodology, Paul's literary style, the genres he uses in Romans 9–11 (lament and midrash), the broad outline of Romans, and general introductory matters to the letter including Paul's identity, purpose, and epistolary audience. Wallace contends that, while much helpful work has been done on Romans 9–11, "a one-volume work is needed that explains the biblical text, section by section, giving attention to Paul's literary forms and meaning, leading to a clear perspective of God's faithful and *merciful* character in his impartial election of Israel, the son in the *humble* position" (p. 4, italics his). The author conveniently lists what he sees as the other major contributions of the book: (1) Paul's intercessory experience "in Christ" is evidenced throughout Romans 9–11; (2) Paul uses the names "Israel" and "Gentiles" to refer to works and faith respectively; (3) various poetic structures in Romans 9–11 are delineated; (4) Romans 9–11 is integral to the letter, neither an addendum or a climax, and leads to the practical admonitions in the latter part of the epistle.

Wallace rightly adopts a traditional view of Paul's identity and background based on the depiction of him in the NT, but it is surprising that he does not show awareness of controversy over the matter. He lays out his basic view of Paul's literary method in Romans 9–11 as structuring the chapters according to the pattern of an OT lament with midrashic elements integrated into the argument. However, the presentation is not as clear as one would hope at this critical point. Wallace's discussion of the lament pattern does not delineate much detail on how Romans 9–11 fits a lament pattern and does more to show how it deviates from that pattern, without addressing the problem this creates for his thesis (though I do agree that Paul drew on the OT lament pattern in structuring Romans 9–11). It is also surprising that he cites no support of the lament thesis from secondary literature when it is available in no less a work than Richard Hays's renowned *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* ([New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993] 64). As for the introductory discussion of midrash, it fails to set out clearly what midrash is, mixing an unmarked basic description of the form with discussion of other aspects of Paul's style.

Regarding background to Romans 9–11, Wallace takes Paul as seeing himself as "serving in a priestly role before God on behalf of the gentiles" (p. 18). He contends that Paul had a singular purpose in Romans ("to bring about the humility of Christ in the Roman church, particularly among the gentile Christians," p. 21) aiming at a multipurpose effect (but does that not amount to multiple purposes after all?), but he cannot help betraying the more likely primary purpose of Romans—support for Paul's mission (see p. 22). Finally, Wallace believes the audience of Romans to be made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians with a majority of Gentiles, who are the main target audience.

Chapter 1 analyzes Rom 9:1–5. Wallace notes that Paul begins with lament over Israel. He gives substantial attention to Paul's use of the "in Christ" phrase, concluding that it connotes union with Christ and indicates that Paul has been giv-

en the perspective of Christ, which is compassionate towards Israel. Wallace recognizes an allusion by Paul to Moses' intercession on behalf of Israel in Exodus 32 and understands Paul's reference to prayer for Israel in 9:3 to be to prayer actually offered (though I find a hypothetical nuance is more likely), expressing God's heart with the past-continuous aspect of the imperfect tense. As for Rom 9:5, it refers to Christ's divinity. Wallace seems to believe that Paul regarded unbelieving Jews to be under eternal divine condemnation yet as possessing the benefits of election. However, he does not address the crucial question of how these two positions relate to one another or whether they can cohere or not. Towards the end of the chapter there is an enlightening demonstration of intercession as a consistent theme in Romans 9–11 and the rest of the letter with insightful attention to Paul's use of the OT in connection with the theme.

Chapter 2 analyzes Rom 9:6–29. Wallace conceives of the challenge to God's faithfulness that Paul addresses to be about whether God's election was defective, missing that it is actually about whether God's rejection of unbelieving ethnic Israel and their separation from his covenant blessings violate God's promises to Israel. Moreover, Wallace takes the questions of God's faithfulness (9:6a) and his righteousness as distinct, when they are better taken as roughly synonymous (unfaithfulness being an expression of unrighteousness). Yet he rightly sees that Paul views the true Israel as believing Jews and Gentiles. For Wallace, Rom 9:6–13 emphasizes something that is central to Romans 9–11 and the entire epistle, God's election of the son in the weaker position apart from his doing, which shows that God is merciful and impartial, requiring humility and obedience from all in a way that opens God's blessing to all. Moreover, God's wrath/judgment is impartial and merciful, warning God's covenant people and leading to goodness for the Gentiles, such as in the case of Israel, who had come to be in the same position as Pharaoh. Paul's use of the potter metaphor further communicates his mercy and impartiality, showing patience to both Israel and the Gentiles as well as a willingness to judge Israel. All of this theological argumentation serves Paul's practical purpose of warning the Gentile Christians of Rome against pride over their Jewish-Christian brethren.

A glaring omission from Wallace's work is a failure to address the theological significance of one of his primary findings vis-à-vis traditional theological concerns over Romans 9: that God elects those in the humble position. What is striking about this finding is that it is a form of conditional election, an election that is based on something about the person or people elected. It is an intriguing suggestion that merits further research and theological reflection.

Chapter 3 analyzes Rom 9:30–10:21, which “depicts the cause of Israel's stumbling and how they respond unfavorably to God's word” (p. 106). Paul contrasts Israel pursuing the law of righteousness and failing to obtain it with the Gentiles not pursuing righteousness but receiving it by faith. He personifies righteousness, setting forth a relational understanding of justification. The Law of Moses and the word of faith preached by Paul contain the same message about Christ, who is to be believed and confessed and is also the stumbling stone, the cause of Israel's stumbling. Israel rejected faith in the Messiah, “choosing pride instead by trying to attain purity through self-effort” (p. 150). This line of argument accords with Paul's

purpose of humility for the Roman Christians, which is God's impartial desire for Jew and Gentile alike. Indeed, God's acceptance of the Gentiles compassionately reaches out to Israel by provoking jealousy. One puzzling aspect of this chapter is Wallace's use of the concept of hearing, which he seems to equate with obedience. Yet he acknowledges that Israel heard God's word but did not obey. He finds faith to be defined as hearing the word of Christ, a definition that calls for further explanation.

Chapter 4 analyzes Rom 11:1–32. Wallace believes 11:1–10 to be a transitional section meant to move the reader from thinking in terms of "Israel" vs. "the Gentiles," a contrast Paul had used to highlight Israel's works-righteousness, to thinking in terms of "hardened Israel" vs. "the remnant called by grace," which includes Jewish Christians. According to Wallace, "Paul identifies with Elijah as a 'remnant' Israelite in order to reveal God's compassionate character in response to Israel's disobedience" (p. 242). Paul also sets forth Israel as disobedient and deserving of God's wrath. God desires humility from Jew and Gentile alike, and in response to Israel's disobedience God has put out a call to salvation for any who will humbly submit to Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. However, Paul leaves the final verdict on Israel unstated, creating suspense in Paul's argument.

Romans 11:11–24 brings out a driving concern of Paul to reach his ethnic people with the gospel, which he seeks to accomplish by reaching the Gentiles with the gospel, making unbelieving Jews jealous and moving them to also embrace the gospel. Paul uses an olive tree metaphor to illustrate the impartial and merciful character of God, to accomplish his main purpose of engendering humility in the Gentile Christians of Rome, and to hold out hope for presently unbelieving Israel. In Paul's metaphor, the patriarchs are the root and Gentile Christians are the first fruits who benefitted from Israel's disobedience. Yet unbelieving Jews can certainly and most fittingly be grafted back in and made holy if they come to faith.

Wallace construes 11:25–32 as summarizing the body of Paul's argument and completing it. Paul reveals the mystery that some of ethnic Israel have been hardened (a numerically partial hardening) until the full number of Gentiles comes to faith, revealing the hardening to be temporary and giving hope for unbelieving Israel. Wallace rightly concludes that the phrase "all Israel" refers to a remnant consisting of Jews and Gentiles and is notable for giving one of the most extensive arguments for that position and for bringing new structural/stylistic evidence to bear on the question. While God's mercy does not mean universal salvation, Paul's speaking of God's gifts and calling as irrevocable refers to God's mercy in continuing to seek Israel's salvation. All of this erupts into praise in the concluding section, 11:33–36 (which is covered in chap. 5).

Election of the Lesser Son is a mixed bag. The author's translation of Romans 9–11 is often puzzling as are some of his arguments, his graphical layouts are unhelpful, and the style of his footnotes is clunky. Yet he offers helpful albeit brief interaction with OT background that he often applies fruitfully; helpful attention to structure and style in Paul's discourse; and some new, genuine contributions.

Anyone doing work on Romans 9–11 will want to consult Wallace even though there are some serious deficiencies in the book.

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The Second Letter to the Corinthians. By Mark A. Seifrid. Pillar NT Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014, xxxiv + 535 pp., \$50.00.

Mark Seifrid is known for his work on justification and his contributions to the two-volume *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001–2004). He continues his focus on the gospel in this new edition to the Pillar NT Commentary collection. The goal of the Pillar series is to expound the biblical text through rigorous exegesis and exposition. Although the authors interact with contemporary scholarship, they avoid getting distracted with unnecessary technical detail. The volumes seek to develop both a biblical theology and the modern-day significance of the text without confusing the two (p. ix). This review will proceed along the lines of this stated goal.

This is a different type of commentary. While most commentaries develop exegetical points in juxtaposition to an extensive statement and rebuttal of opposing arguments, Seifrid charts a new course by giving a flowing exposition of *his own* exegetical conclusions with only minimal interaction with variant interpretations. His focus is on the big theological picture with a constant review (marked by the ubiquitous “as we have said before”) of the location of a particular text within the larger Corinthian context. The usefulness of this commentary to the target audience of serious pastors and teachers of the Bible will be directly proportional to the expectations of the reader. If the reader is looking for massive interaction with the secondary literature or a technical syntactical analysis, other commentaries will be more desirable. However, if the reader is looking for a rich theological analysis of the text in light of Paul’s interaction with the Corinthians, this commentary will quickly rise to the top. Let me explain.

The goal of rigorous exegesis has been achieved, but the detailed exegetical work is often more implicit than explicit. The commentary does not contain the comprehensive analysis of syntax that is found in the technical commentaries of Thrall or Harris. For example, Harris wonders how the genitive absolute construction in 1:11 (“you join in helping”) modifies the main verb (“God will rescue”). After suggesting that the adverbial connection could be temporal, modal, or causal (citing versions and scholars who hold each), he argues for a conditional understanding based on theological and stylistic considerations (“provided you join in helping us”). In contrast Seifrid stresses the invitation to the Corinthians to participate in the gospel. Without detailed analysis, he offers the translation, “as you work together [with God]” (p. 44), noting only that the ESV translation as an imperative (“you must help us by prayer”) should be rejected in favor of an indicative reading.

This certainly does not mean, however, that rigorous exegetical analysis is absent. It appears to be given only when it contributes to the broader theological concerns of the flow of thought. One such exegetical gem is found in his discussion of the translation of $\delta\acute{\epsilon}\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$ $\tau\acute{o}$ $\mu\grave{\eta}$ $\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\omega}\nu$ $\theta\alpha\rho\rho\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ in 10:2. All contemporary translations and commentaries connect the negative to the infinitive. Consequently, the ESV reads, “I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness,” and understands Paul to be requesting a lack of boldness when he arrives in Corinth. However, Seifrid argues quite persuasively that the negative should be connected to the participle and translated as, “And I request, while not present, to be bold.” This understands Paul as asking ironically to be bold in an effort to disarm his opponents who argue that his presence did not match his boldness (10:10). This interpretation is supported by both an extensive footnote discussion of the syntax of the construction and detailed reference to context.

Seifrid has an extensive command of the secondary literature, but there is only an occasional interaction with that material (as the goal of the commentary series suggests). The reader is left with the impression that the focus is on the interaction between Paul and the Corinthians rather than on the interaction between a scholar and other contemporary scholars. For example, there is little interaction with the literature concerning the identity of Paul’s struggles in Asia (1:8–9; two views are presented along with an uncharacteristic four-point footnote argument against the view of Harris), the use of the present tense in 5:1 (he mentions that Thrall lists nine interpretations and Harris five), the identity of the unbelievers in 6:14 (where a footnote admits that most interpreters come to a different conclusion), and the identity of Paul’s thorn in the flesh (12:7). Opposing views in these sections are sometimes mentioned briefly with a reluctance to mirror-read and go beyond the content of the text. There is not extensive discussion of textual variants. An exception to this minimalist approach to secondary literature is found in a 20-page excursus on the paradoxical relationship between the letter and the Spirit in recent interpretation. Here Seifrid interacts extensively with the work of Richard Hays, Scott Hafemann, and Margaret Mitchell.

Introductory issues also lack extensive interaction with opposing positions. Only a little over one page is devoted to the “vexing conundrum” of the identity of Paul’s opponents (pp. xxviii–xxix), and this is supported by a 10-page excursus on Paul’s opponents in Corinth and the purpose of the letter (pp. 100–110). The opponents were unlikely to be either those who embraced Gentile Judaizing or those who identified themselves as Hellenistic “divine-men” of the Jewish variety. Although they bring another gospel, they present no unified message. The opponents were certainly not from Jerusalem, and they did not claim support from the Jerusalem church (the reference to $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\epsilon\rho\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$ $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\acute{o}\lambda\omega\nu$ in 11:5 and 12:11 is a “dry witticism” that should not be taken seriously, p. 412).

The integrity of the letter is fully embraced, but the reader will not find developed argumentation with those that oppose the unity of the text. The supposed incoherence of these sections is judged to be more apparent than real (p. xxx), and the exposition shows how the letter fits together into a coherent whole.

The strength of this commentary is certainly found in the theological exposition of the biblical text. Occasioned by Paul's decision to cancel his previously announced visit to Corinth, the basic theological problem, according to Seifrid, is that the Corinthian church had misunderstood the gospel of a crucified Christ. They were tempted to measure all things by appearance. This made a suffering and weak apostle suspect and the opponents of Paul attractive. The Corinthians assessed a legitimate apostolic mission on the erroneous basis of rhetorical skill, miraculous power, and ecstatic visions. The arrival of opponents only made things worse.

In light of this situation, the purpose of the letter is to defend the gospel and Paul's apostolic ministry in light of the Corinthian attacks against it. The Corinthians must realize that God's saving power runs its course contrary to all human judgments and reasoning. The glory of the new covenant ministry is the glory of the eschaton, which is presently unseen and hidden under weakness and suffering.

The rich theological discussion is perhaps best illustrated in the extended discussion of 5:21, which highlights the apostolic announcement of the gospel. Discussion involves (1) the Corinthian context of the "word of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18–25, 11:26), the new existence in Christ (1 Cor 1:30), and the event of God's work in Christ (1 Cor 6:11); (2) the immediate context of 2 Cor 5:19a and the forensic nature of reconciliation; (3) the ontological nature of the exchange between sin and righteousness; (4) the hermeneutical function of the gospel as it relates to human perceptions and communication; (5) the statement that this is not a Jewish issue or an issue concerning Gentile entrance into the church; (6) the nature of sin as related to the whole person and identity; (7) the theme of new creation; and (8) an extended discussion on the nature of justification by faith.

How does the commentary approach the goal of contemporary relevance? There are not separate paragraphs devoted to modern-day application along the lines of Hafemann's commentary in the NIV Application Commentary series. There are, to be sure, occasional statements that bring us into our world anew and afresh: "The life of an apostle, and thus the life of a Christian, is fundamentally passive. It is not a 'purpose-driven life' but a 'God-driven life'" (p. xxxii). However, rather than explicit statements of application, the reader feels constantly drawn into the life of Paul as a minister of the gospel who patterned his life after Christ. The mark of the crucified Christ as "power within weakness, righteousness within sin, life within death, and comfort within suffering" (p. 482; cf. 1:5, 4:10, 5:21, 12:9–10) transcends time as the mark of any true minister of the gospel living after the dawn of the eschaton in anticipation of the consummation of all things.

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Colossians. By Christopher R. Seitz. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2014, 217 pp., \$29.99.

Volumes in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible series aim to interact with biblical books while spanning the horizons of biblical studies and theological interpretation of Scripture. Each entry has attempted this task from a unique approach. In this volume, OT scholar Christopher Seitz comments on the NT epistle to the Colossians.

In *Prophecy and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), Seitz sought to re-evaluate the typical critical issues involved in an “introduction” to the prophetic writings. In this study on Colossians, he pursues a similar task for the NT letters. As part of the Brazos series, Seitz’s assignment was to “throw off” the “usual patterns of commentary design” and pursue “some fresh angles of vision” (p. 16). Seitz himself cautiously outlines his “canonical approach” as one that seeks to assure that the historical setting stays “in proper proportion to what the text actually highlights and prioritizes in its final total form” (p. 51). Accordingly, one of his guiding presuppositions is that “Paul’s letters come to us in a given canonical form” and that this form “foregrounds certain things and lets other things fall out of specific focus” (p. 20). In other words, the issues that need special attention are those that are especially emphasized in the text somehow. Otherwise, for Seitz, certain critical issues get “hyperextended” and receive a level of focus “arguably in disproportion to their significance for interpretation” (p. 20, 22).

This network of assumptions informs his “canonical reading” of the letter and also governs the critical issues he chooses to examine. Many in the field will immediately balk at Seitz’s downplaying of the relevance of historical background for the interpretation of the letter. In particular, many will want more examination of the contours of the “Colossian Heresy” that Paul is responding to in Colossians 2. Seitz demonstrates an awareness of the current scholarly discussion on this issue, but he focuses on what he sees as the more pertinent task, tracing Paul’s argument within the horizon of the letter itself. Thus, rather than reconstruct a profile of Paul’s interlocutors, Seitz argues that Paul himself is perhaps aware of a specific unified body of false teaching but intentionally does not address its details directly. Rather, Paul articulates the scope and impact of the work of Christ and then uses this blazing center to demonstrate the emptiness of any alternatives. Along these lines, Seitz detects three “factuals” about the one cross of Christ that refute three corresponding “counterfactuals” that represent salvific alternatives (see pp. 119–43). For some, this will be the most contested section of the commentary, but this careful way of perceiving the totality of Paul’s argument here is particularly cogent.

One question that hangs over any approach that seeks to take into account the broader canonical context is the question of authorship. Further, study of the NT epistles often wades through the quagmire of arguments regarding pseudepigrapha. On this account, Seitz contends that arguments for Colossians as pseudonymous have insurmountable difficulties with the textual presentation of the letter (see pp. 45–56). Beyond this, Seitz enters the question of authorship tentatively.

Part of Seitz's perspective is that the notion of authorship itself is much more complex than often admitted. As he notes, "authorship as meant in the antique world and in our own are very different conceptions" (p. 48). This grappling with authorship and composition is important, although Seitz's own solution also participates in this "agony of authorship." On the one hand, Seitz insists, "a text has an author of some description" (p. 55). For instance, he quotes a number of authors who speak of "Paul" as author with great hesitation and comments, "That is a lot of words to conclude that the use of Paul without scare quotes is an appropriate way to speak of the letter's author" (p. 55). However, his comment here might also reach his own articulation of this issue: "There are far fewer problems with simply using the word 'Paul' than the alternatives" (p. 55). In this discussion, Seitz convincingly demonstrates that even for those who reject the presence of pseudepigraphy in the NT, further work is needed in articulating the notion of authorship, the nature of composition, and the impact that a collection has on the concept of authorial intention when interpreting the epistles.

A further feature of Seitz's approach is his sustained attention to the impact of reading Colossians within an established Pauline corpus. He shares a pre-modern emphasis on Colossians as part of "a literary collection that orients" the individual letters "toward one another as a totality" (p. 23). Similar to the book of the twelve minor prophets, Seitz sees the letters of Paul "as individual writings subsisting in an ordered canonical collection" (p. 23). This move means first that he considers the shape of the Pauline corpus to have interpretive significance. Detecting development in Paul's thinking (early and late) is common fare in Pauline studies. From Seitz's approach, the Pauline corpus locates this development in Paul's maturing understanding of his apostolic office. The letter collection itself, Seitz insists, "guards the historical specificity" and also "allows for development and movement" (p. 42). This development is coherent and organic rather than contradictory or a sign of pseudepigraphic imposters toward the end of the collection. In other words, the shape of the Pauline collection highlights a shift in emphasis in Paul's thinking, one that accords with the historical transition in Paul's role from itinerant preacher to imprisoned letter-writer. Paul's apostolic mission, then, is embodied and made available for future generations by means of the "legacy of his letters" (p. 42). For Seitz, this type of movement is part of the "hermeneutical challenge of the canonical reality before us" (p. 37).

Along these lines, Seitz regularly utilizes other Pauline letters as interpretive aids in understanding what Paul is teaching about in Colossians. He rejects that this move is simply a synchronic harmonization but rather argues that it is actually rooted in the historical realities of the early church that received multiple letters from Paul. Indeed, for Seitz, the broadening scope of the intended audience of letters like Ephesians and Colossians indicates that "canonical shaping is extending beyond individual letters and has to do with the phenomenon of an emerging collection as such" (p. 37). These shared features are compositional and strategic rather than ancillary by-products of occasional correspondence. The "concern for preservation" and association in a collection, then, is possibly at work "in the very act of conceiving and composing a letter" (p. 37 n. 26).

To give an example, Seitz points out words, phrases, and theology in Colossians that are echoed in Ephesians. Seitz thinks that the “letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16) is the letter we know today as Ephesians (see pp. 109, 117, 180 [n. 6], and 190–91). In this view, then, the parallels with Ephesians are part of a compositional strategy where Paul envisions these letters as literary companions. The setting of Philemon and the other “prison epistles” also form a fitting and natural backdrop to a Colossian correspondence written “in chains” (see pp. 28–31, 179–84). Seitz notes the historical discussion that seeks to reconstruct and identify Paul’s specific imprisonment, but he then quickly highlights the way Paul himself accounts for his various imprisonments theologically. For Seitz, “the canonical form brokers basic historical information but at the service of theological significance” (p. 31). “The traditional position of Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians as written by Paul in Rome,” Seitz asserts, is the one “suggested by the presentation of the letters themselves, given what they choose to share with us” (p. 30).

The letter to the Colossians, then, is particularly suited to highlight the function of canon because it is written by Paul from prison to a congregation he has never visited. Part of the message of Colossians is Paul’s theological reflection on the way that the gospel will continue to spread after his apostolic ministry has ended (see pp. 32–35). His presence is mediated by his letter. In marked contrast to his wide-ranging missionary journeys, Paul’s final phase of apostolic ministry is prayer, intercession, and letter-writing. For Seitz, the fact that Paul is in prison shapes the way he understands his apostolic role: The apostle Paul is not traveling to new places with the gospel, but his letters are! These examples of Seitz’s perspective on the relationship between historical reconstruction and textual interpretation possess the most potential for fresh readings, but they also represent some of the most debated aspects of his approach.

A related contribution Seitz makes is his reflective account of Paul’s nuanced use of the OT in Colossians. Why does Paul only allude to the Hebrew Scriptures and not cite them directly? For Seitz, Paul does not present Jesus as a replacement of Torah, but rather, Paul makes theological moves that “accord” with the texts, theology, and themes of the OT. While he does not directly quote the OT, throughout the letter, Seitz explains, Paul embodies the theological judgments and scriptural logic that is present in important OT texts. In this sense, the allusions cannot be “mapped on a tidy exegetical grid,” but rather “indicate an allusive penetration of [Paul’s] thought and argument” (p. 45). In this way, Paul is able to bring the meaning of the Scripture to bear in a letter addressed to Gentile believers who would gradually encounter the OT through the preaching of the NT churches. Seitz also articulates an OT perspective on several interpretive and theological issues in the letter. To give just a few examples, Seitz explains the parallelism of Hebrew poetry that Paul echoes in the “Christ hymn” in Col 1:15–23 (pp. 86–101), demonstrates that Paul’s high Christology here is deeply compatible with the monotheism of the Hebrew Scriptures (pp. 100–101), and repeatedly points out the interpretive relevance of Genesis 1–3 as an intertextual backdrop for the letter.

The commentary itself progresses at a brisk pace with a clear focus on certain elements. For instance, Seitz consistently examines the nature of textual transitions.

As he moves through the letter, Seitz keeps the larger argument in view and relates the passage at hand to that broader purpose. In this vein, Seitz strategically uses the “excursus” to allow the commentary proper to flow and read as a “single sustained argument” (p. 56). Seitz is convinced that in Colossians there is a “coherence to the units when taken in relationship to one another” (p. 54). The commentary consistently reflects this concern for the design of the discourse. These features make the commentary refreshingly readable and appropriately succinct.

In my opinion, Seitz’s commentary on Colossians represents the kind of contribution that the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible envisions: a refreshing interpretation of the letter that is informed by multiple interpretive horizons and also makes several suggestive advances in Pauline studies. As Seitz memorably orients his readers, “At some point the canonical portrayal sits there before us and requests that we take it seriously as a factor in interpretation” (p. 25). This commentary will surely prove fruitful for those who are serious about pursuing this particular task.

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Recent Research on Revelation. By Russell S. Morton. Recent Research in Biblical Studies 7. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014, xii + 180 pp., \$95.00.

Russell Morton is Adjunct Professor of NT at Ashland Theological Seminary, Asbury Theological Seminary, and United Theological Seminary. He is well equipped to produce this review of recent research based on his prior monograph on Revelation (*One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4–5* [Studies in Biblical Literature 11; New York: Peter Lang, 2007]) and his love for NT bibliography which has been fostered by thirty years as a theological librarian (p. x). After the initial two chapters on the history of interpretation and genre of Revelation, Morton structures the book around historical, literary, theological, pacifistic, feminist, and political perspectives. Morton assumes that no scholarly defense of dispensational premillennialism exists and explicitly excludes popular millenarian interpretations from his survey (pp. 7, 12, 156).

Each chapter essentially consists of a collection of book reviews by Morton as he surveys the recent research on Revelation. This could be seen as a critique of the book, since a motivated reader could gain much of the same information, evaluation, and critical engagement by reading the individual reviews of monographs published in the past forty years or so. Morton, however, makes several important contributions. First, he provides a one-stop shop for reviews of a wide range of significant recent authors. Second, he structures and organizes the recent literature by providing a bird’s-eye view of how the different authors and perspectives relate to each other. Third, he allows the authors to interact with and critique each other. His chapters often provide a genuine dialogue between the various authors. Fourth, we are not dependent upon reviews written by a host of different authors but are

able to benefit from the seasoned evaluation of a single reviewer. These benefits cannot be gained by the isolated reading of individual reviews.

Morton describes the purpose of this volume in the preface as bridging the gap between popular readings of Revelation and how the book is being read in the scholarly community. Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the history of interpretation leading up to the first half of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 provides a short introduction to the scholarly debate about the genre of Revelation. Morton surveys the contributions of the Apocalyptic Group of the Society of Biblical Literature's Genre Project, David Hellholm, Christopher Rowland, David Aune, Hans Dieter Betz, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Frederick Mazzaferri, David Mathewson, Gregory Linton, and David Barr. He concludes that "the definition of Revelation's genre as an apocalypse remains elusive" (p. 26) and supports an understanding of apocalypse that includes the "unveiling of heavenly mysteries in a visionary context, with the function of leading the recipients to accept the authority of and act in accordance with the seer's message" (p. 28). In this discussion he rightly highlights the importance of the hortatory function of Revelation.

Chapter 3 begins the main survey of literature by looking at historical-critical perspectives. Morton divides scholars here between those who favor a "history-of-religions approach" that focuses on the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern background (Adela Yarbro Collins, David E. Aune, Gregory Stevenson, Franz Tóth, Christopher A. Frilingos, Colin Hemer, Steven J. Friesen, Bruce J. Malina, Jacques M. Chevalier, Sean Michael Ryan, and Rodney Lawrence Thomas) and those who focus on the Hebrew Bible and John's Jewish background (Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, G. K. Beale, Jean-Pierre Ruiz, Jan Fekkes III, Steve Moyise, Jon Paulien, Marko Jauhiainen, Alan S. Bandy, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Pilchan Lee, David A. Mathewson, and Håken Ulfgard). Morton succinctly reviews the main monograph(s) produced by each scholar while pointing out the essential contributions and any major weaknesses in their arguments. He concludes by noting that the tradition-historical "method can give the researcher insight into what the text meant, but it is limited in translating that message into what the text now means" (p. 74). The need thus exists for literary, theological, and ideological approaches to the text.

Chapter 4 surveys literary perspectives by analyzing the work of David Barr, Barbara Rossing, James L. Resseguie, Thomas Johann Bauer, Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani, Antoninus King Wai Siew, David A. deSilva, Robert M. Royalty, W. Gordon Campbell, and Michael Koch. Chapter 5 explores explicitly theological (Richard Bauckham, Joseph L. Mangina, Craig S. Keener, Felise Tavo, and Richard B. Hays *et al.*) and pacifist (Mark Bredin, J. Nelson Kraybill, Matthew Streett, and Loren L. Johns) interpreters of Revelation. Chapter 6 describes and interacts with explicitly ideological readings of Revelation. Feminist interpreters include Tina Pippin, Adela Yarbro Collins, Catherine Keller, Lynn R. Huber, Stephen D. Moore, and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, while political interpreters include Allan A. Boesak, Pablo Richard, Brian Blount, David A. Sánchez, Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, Greg Carey, and David Rhoads *et al.*

Many scholars resist being limited to a single perspective. Morton counters this difficulty by discussing some authors more than once (such as Adela Yarbro

Collins and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) or by noting within his discussion that a particular author could be understood as producing historical-critical, theological, or literary research (such as David A. deSilva). Morton's interaction with non-English scholarship is a further strength of the book (Franz Tóth, Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Jean Delorme and Isabelle Donegani, and Michael Koch). These are sources that could easily be missed by many readers in the English-speaking world.

The nature of the book inevitably involves the difficulty of which authors to include or exclude. Morton navigates this difficulty by explicitly excluding dispensational interpreters, discussing some scholars in footnotes (Robert Briggs on p. 73 and Allan J. McNicol on p. 101), listing works in footnotes with no discussion (Dal Lee, Peter S. Perry, Stephen Pattemore, and Ronald Herms), failing to mention important contributors (Paul Duff comes to mind), and not engaging unpublished dissertations (an understandable omission due to space constraints).

I would like to push back some against Morton's attitude toward the various perspectives. He notes in his conclusion: "I would argue that there is no single correct approach [to Revelation]. Rather, in the spiral of approaches mentioned we see that all of them unwind a certain truth" (p. 157). I would suggest that the various perspectives and approaches to Revelation do not unwind equally valuable truths nor do they all equally reflect reality. For example, Morton notes that Tina Pippin's feminist critique "is unconcerned with what John meant to express" (p. 125). An explicitly ideological approach that has no concern for John's intended meaning or what the text would have meant in its original historical context is not equal to an approach that is genuinely seeking to uncover these things (cf. John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005] 16–17). Morton implicitly acknowledges this fact when he critiques the political reading of Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther by noting that "John's call is truly counter-cultural, but with it is a vision of the God of Israel, who takes an interest in human affairs.... Any counter-cultural response to contemporary Babylons that appeal to Revelation must also be cognizant that John's vision is a call not simply to come out from the evil city (Rev. 18.4–5) but also to worship at the feet of the Lamb (5.9–11; 7.9–17)" (p. 152). Morton's response uses something about what John meant to communicate (the centrality of worship) to critique the ideological use of Revelation to support a counter-cultural movement opposed to global capital. More explicit discussion of the relationship between the perspectives would have been helpful at this point.

In conclusion, I would highly recommend this book to students considering a research project on Revelation. This would include master's-level and doctoral-level students and established biblical scholars who are beginning their first research project on Revelation.

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The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary. By Simon Gathercole. Texts and Editions for NT Study 11. Leiden: Brill, 2014, xii + 723 pp., \$250.00.

Simon J. Gathercole, Senior Lecturer in NT Studies at the University of Cambridge, has followed up his monograph on *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) with this 700-page commentary on the Greek and Coptic texts of the *Gospel of Thomas*. The commentary begins with a 186-page, 12-chapter introduction, followed by commentary on each of the 114 sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas*, a 55-page bibliography, an index of references to ancient literature, a modern author index, and a subject index.

Chapter 1 describes the Greek fragments and Coptic codex of *Thomas*. Gathercole discusses what these physical characteristics indicate about the text but “remain[s] agnostic on the question of whether a particular theological impulse lay behind [the Coptic] Codex” (p. 13). Chapter 2 examines the similarities and differences between the Greek and Coptic texts. Gathercole argues that the differences are often exaggerated and that they do not reflect a particular theological tendency. Gathercole also argues against the idea that *Thomas* was a rolling corpus. Here Gathercole raises a few good points but is not finally persuasive. On page 25 he states: “Given that there is no evidence that *Thomas* was regarded as permeable between c. 200–350 CE [the dates of the extant Greek and Coptic versions], why should one suppose that it had previously been?” This is problematic. First, *Gos. Thom.* 77.2 appears after *Gos. Thom.* 30 in the Greek, demonstrating that *Thomas* in fact *was* regarded as permeable. Second, how much evidence could we expect with how fragmentary the Greek is? We have nothing after *Thomas* 39 in Greek! Third, would we expect a work to be as permeable in the third century as in its earliest stages? Nevertheless, Gathercole successfully demonstrates how speculative Crossan’s and DeConick’s efforts at reconstructing earlier layers of *Thomas* are.

Chapter 3 catalogues thirty-nine named testimonia to the *Gospel of Thomas* in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Hebrew, and Coptic literature, followed by nine more possible cases. Each quotation is translated into English and is accompanied with a probable date for the work. This is tremendously helpful and is more extensive than any other such catalogue. The only weakness is that occasionally there is not enough context given for a quote (e.g. who are “these people” in the first quotation on p. 41?). Chapter 4 catalogues early references to the contents of *Thomas* that do not explicitly cite the material as coming from *Thomas*. Here, unlike in chapter 3, Gathercole gives the quotations only in English and adds his own comments on the parallels, allowing him to comment on the thorny issue of the literary relationship between parallels.

Chapter 5 argues that *Thomas* was originally composed in Greek rather than in Aramaic or Syriac. Chapter 6 considers the cases for a Syrian provenance and for an Egyptian provenance and concludes that we ultimately do not know and that the question is not really important.

Chapter 7 discusses the date of *Thomas*. He includes a helpful table of dates assigned by various scholars. Gathercole himself argues for a date sometime between 135 and 200 CE, since Jesus’ claim in *Gos. Thom.* 71 that “this house” will

never be rebuilt fits best after the Bar Kochba revolt (135 CE) and since *Thomas* is influenced by Matthew, Luke, and Romans. I found Gathercole's arguments unconvincing. His argument for dependence upon Matthew and Luke repeatedly assumes that Matthew's and Luke's changes to Mark were not influenced by non-Markan traditions, which in each example is unlikely.

Chapter 8 discusses the structure of *Thomas*, arguing for three structural devices: "(1) the general introduction to each saying with 'Jesus said', (2) an opening section, albeit of unclear length, and (3) the clustering of sayings by genre, catchword or thematic link" (p. 130). Particularly helpful in this chapter is Gathercole's three-page table of linkages between consecutive sayings. Chapter 9 considers various proposals for the genre of *Thomas* and argues that *Thomas* represents a mixed genre, namely a "sayings Gospel" (p. 142).

Chapter 10 considers the religious outlook of *Thomas*. Gathercole argues persuasively that *Thomas* "is not primarily about common wisdom" but "is fundamentally a soteriology," as can be seen in Saying 1: "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings *will not taste death*" (p. 145). He then considers the views expressed in *Thomas* concerning the Father, the kingdom, creation and the fall, the world, the body, the history of Israel, Jesus and revelation, self-knowledge, and salvation. This is followed by discussions of discipleship, social ethos and practices, and the rivals of *Thomas*. I found these 24 pages to be balanced, well-written, and informative. This is followed by an argument against *Thomas* as a Gnostic or proto-Gnostic text. (Gathercole's dating of *Thomas* would make it difficult for him to accept the proto-Gnostic view.)

In chapter 11 Gathercole argues against the idea that *Thomas* is helpful for historical Jesus research or for discovering more original forms of Jesus' sayings. Gathercole gives five reasons for this: (1) *Thomas*'s dependence upon Matthew, Luke, and Paul; (2) *Thomas*'s chronological distance from the historical Jesus; (3) *Thomas*'s cultural distance from the historical Jesus; (4) the implausibility of *Thomas*'s overall picture of Jesus; and (5) the weakness of the criteria normally used for identifying primitive versions of Jesus' sayings. Gathercole's third and fourth points offer strong reasons that should cause us to question the reliability of *Thomas*, but his first two points are questionable, and his fifth point is more stated than argued here. Almost everyone who accepts the primitivity of Mark's Gospel agrees that there are standards by which primitivity can be measured, and a close analysis of the Synoptics and *Thomas* reveals that *Thomas* has more original elements in some sayings. Gathercole's unfortunate conclusion here colors his entire commentary. Where other *Thomas* commentaries will discuss the tradition history of a saying, Gathercole is silent. He intentionally focuses on "the meaning of the sayings of *Thomas* in its second-century historical context" (p. ix), but most Christians read *Thomas* not out of curiosity of what some unknown, second-century, heterodox Christian group wrote but out of an interest in what value *Thomas* might have for our study of the canonical Gospels and of the historical Jesus. Therefore the value of Gathercole's commentary is decreased by his omissions of what many interpreters are most interested in.

Chapter 12 outlines the plan of the commentary, in which Gathercole offers for each individual saying a bibliography; the Coptic and, if available, Greek texts along with English translation(s); textual comments; interpretation; and notes. In the interpretation sections Gathercole summarizes the interpretations of previous commentators before giving his own reading, making this commentary a great first read on any saying in *Thomas*. Sometimes the summaries come by way of direct quotation of German and French sources, which will frustrate the reader not acquainted with these languages, but these examples are not too numerous.

In many sayings, Gathercole rightly underscores the Christology and soteriology of *Thomas* in ways that previous commentators have missed. I was also pleased to find that Gathercole often interprets a saying in light of its neighboring sayings, though sometimes I felt that he could have done this more. Gathercole wisely avoids the trap of reading Synoptic meanings into their *Thomas* parallels, but sometimes he may be too quick to accept an alternative meaning. For example, he reads the parable of the tenants (Saying 65) not as an allegory of the Father and Jesus but as “a tale of the woes of involvement in commerce” (p. 461), despite the fact that in the previous saying the host who invites people to dinner is the Father and in the following saying the rejected stone is Jesus. This failure to acknowledge times when the interpretation in *Thomas* agrees with the Synoptics may reflect the same poor estimation of the oral Gospel tradition that led Gathercole to conclude that *Thomas* is dependent upon Matthew and Luke.

Another place where Gathercole underestimates the role of oral tradition is in Saying 12, where he concludes that James must be symbolic since viewing James “as a historical figure is difficult within *Thomas* as it stands, unless one supposes that the work is extremely early” (p. 252). Must the collection have been composed early for the author to intend a reference to the historical James?

While I am disappointed with Gathercole’s low view of the oral Gospel tradition, I learned a great deal about *Thomas* and came to understand countless sayings better thanks to Gathercole’s meticulous work. For this I will return to Gathercole’s commentary often and would recommend it to others wanting to understand *Thomas* better.

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