

— S O U T H E A S T E R N —

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# *Southeastern Theological Review*

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## Introducing the *Southeastern Theological Review*

David S. Hogg  
*Editor*

This issue marks the inauguration of a new journal published by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC. Southeastern formerly published the journal *Faith & Mission* under the competent guidance of Dr. D. Lanier and Dr. D. Beck. These men faithfully served the faculty of Southeastern by publishing articles and reviews of interest to Southern Baptists at large and the Seminary community in particular. To be sure, the scholarship represented in that journal was read by a broader spectrum of readers than just Southern Baptists, and for that we are grateful. Over time, however, it became apparent that the desire of the faculty and administration was to more proactively appeal to a broader readership. The changes required in order to accomplish this were deemed sufficient to warrant the creation of an entirely new journal.<sup>1</sup>

The *Southeastern Theological Review* is dedicated to publishing articles of high quality by young and established scholars. As is evident in this first issue, we desire to publish material written not only by those living inside and outside of the United States, but also by those actively involved in denominational life that extends beyond the Southern Baptist Convention. Our hope is to facilitate lively and informed conversations on a wide variety of topics of interest to Christians around the globe.

Our intention as we begin is to publish two issues per year, one in the late Fall and one in the late Spring. Although not all issues will be organized around a theme, the first two issues are. In this issue the theme is reading the OT theologically. In the Spring 2011 issue the theme will be preaching the OT as theology. We are grateful for those authors who have kindly submitted their work for the inaugural publication of this new venture and look forward to reading submissions by scholars in all disciplines related to the Christian faith in the coming years.

In what follows, Jamie Grant of the Highland Theological College in Scotland explores questions and concerns relevant to the interpretation of the Psalms. This portion of Scripture has, of course, enjoyed a long and vibrant history of analysis and scholarly interest in addition to being held in high esteem in the life and liturgy of the church. Among the debates that swirl around this collection of

inspired poetry is the extent to which we can or should assign historical settings. To what degree do such determinations help or hinder the contemporary believer in appropriating and applying them? Part of what fuels this discussion is a growing desire to read the Psalms theologically and canonically. Is there evidence that the Psalms have been purposely positioned in the order we now have them? Jamie Grant deftly guides us through these matters.

Moving on from the much loved Psalms, David Firth of Cliff College in England presents us with an intriguing approach to interpreting the book of Esther. This somewhat enigmatic book has caused not a few to wonder at its inclusion in the canon of Scripture. Why should a book that does not mention God be incorporated into the Bible? To this question Firth challenges us to think about the narrative strategy of Esther and, additionally, to the intertextual links with the books of Samuel. The grounds for following these well worn hermeneutical tenets is persuasively expounded and helpfully explained in this enlightening essay.

While Psalms may be a popular part of Scripture and Esther considerably less so, the book of Genesis remains a perennial favorite for just about any discipline. Whether one wishes to address creation, ethics, history or theology, it seems Genesis is a necessary stop. In Brian Howell's essay, however, his purpose is to inquire about the use of anthropomorphic language. Specifically, how are we to understand the comment that Jacob's mysterious attacker "sees" that he has not prevailed over Abraham's grandson? Here is a figure who might be construed as another human in so far as Jacob is able to match him in combat, but who ends the conflict by exercising divine power and prerogative. What are we to make of this figure discovering, as it were, that he had not prevailed against Jacob? Through a careful study of a number of relevant factors endemic to the narrative itself, Howell engages us in a struggle with divine metaphors that changes us even as Jacob was changed.

Last in order, but not in quality, Ryan O'Dowd of Cornell University asks us to consider the OT background to the opening chapters of Acts. The relationship between Acts 1-4 and especially Acts 2 to parts of the OT has been studied before, but O'Dowd believes we are remiss if we do not consider Deuteronomy 14-16 as an essential part of the OT foundation for Luke's narrative. The Sabbath and festival laws contained in that portion of the Pentateuch provide a theological context against which the birth of the church as well as implications for its nature and character are more clearly appreciated. Not only does this article challenge our thinking about intertextuality, but it also forces us to think more carefully about what Jesus meant when he said that he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it.

We hope to add new sections to our journal as it evolves over time, but even now at the start of this endeavor we trust that as you read these articles in addition to the reviews you will grow increasingly aware of the lively conversations and developing debates that inform and shape our study of God's revelation.

David S. Hogg  
Editor, *STR*

## *Determining the Indeterminate: Issues in Interpreting the Psalms*

Jamie Grant

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Writing a commentary on the psalms is a funny business. No, not “funny ha-ha” but it is “funny strange.” It is not just the challenges of the length of the book and the time that needs to be devoted to it. It is not even a matter of the complexity of the text or the lack of certainty regarding the meaning of so many poetic and liturgical idioms. Nor is it the problem of poetics and cola and defining stanzas and structure and all of the vagaries and uncertainties that come with any poetic text. The issue that strikes me as strange in writing a commentary on the Psalms is, as the title of this article suggests, the practice of trying to define that which is purposefully left vague in the psalms themselves. Allow me to develop this observation a little further by asking a question: Why is it that we look to the psalms commentaries to suggest background information that the psalms themselves do not provide for us?

Were one to pick up and read through almost any Psalms commentary it is likely to tell us that this psalm (for example, Psalm 88) is a “sickness psalm” or that another psalm (for example, Psalm 15) is an “entrance liturgy.” Now, my intent is not to question the veracity of such statements—each and every such assessment, in so far as they are not contradictory, may well be entirely accurate. Rather the question swimming around my head is this: Why do we feel the compelling need to determine the indeterminate? To define that which is deliberately left undefined in the biblical text? Let me unpack this thought a little further.

### **The Psalms and Indeterminacy**

There can be no doubt regarding the lasting popularity of the Book of Psalms. Throughout successive generations of communities of faith, both Jewish and Christian, the Psalter has retained a powerful place in the hearts of many believers. Robert Alter’s observations illustrate this point ably: “Through the ages, Psalms has been the most urgently, personally present of all the books of the Bible in the lives of many readers. Both Jewish and Christian tradition made it part of the daily and weekly liturgy. Untold numbers have repeatedly turned to Psalms

for encouragement and comfort in moments of crisis or despair.”<sup>1</sup> Susan Gillingham’s excellent study of the reception history of the Psalms strikes a similar chord throughout, but her concluding comments add a significant element of explanation regarding the phenomenon of the psalms’ lasting popularity: “. . . whether one looks at the reception history of psalmody from a historical, literary or theological point of view, the rich vibrancy of the Psalms, and their capacity to offer such a wide variety of interpretations, will be recognised not as a hindrance to reasonable faith but as a vital assistance to it.”<sup>2</sup> Gillingham’s words here, which echo the approach that she takes throughout the study, shed light on the continuing importance of the Psalter for the people of God. Firstly, it is possible for readers today to ask questions of the psalms that are historical, literary or theological in nature and as such there is a great depth in the reading of this literature and a wealth of answers to be found. The questions that can be asked of the religious poetry of Israel are practically inexhaustible because of the diversity of approaches with which one can interrogate the text. Secondly, the psalms—by dint of their historical vagueness—offer “such a wide variety of interpretations” that it is easy for the later reader to associate with the language and emotions of the original authors in one way or another. The indeterminacy of these poems gifts the reader a type of hermeneutical luxury that is simply not available in other biblical texts.<sup>3</sup> It seems that these are the very reasons for psalmody’s enduring significance: (1) the variety of approaches with which one can come to the text, and (2) the fact that the psalms lend themselves to constant reappropriation in a wide variety of settings in human experience.

Patrick Miller comments helpfully on this matter:

[The psalms] are not bound to the experiences of one individual and her or his personal history. They are by definition *typical*, universal. They were composed, sung, prayed, collected, passed on because they have the capacity to articulate and express the words, thoughts, prayers of *anyone*, though they do not *necessarily* do that. They speak to and for typical human situations and thus have the capacity to speak to and for us as typical human beings. They have to do with the experiences of human existence, not just Israel’s existence or that of one human being.<sup>4</sup>

1. Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (W. W. Norton: New York/London, 2007), xiii. It is, however, interesting also to note that Alter goes on to comment in the same paragraph, “But for all the power of these Hebrew poems to speak with great immediacy in many tongues to readers of different eras, they are in their origins intricately rooted in an ancient Near Eastern world that goes back to the late Bronze Age (1600–1200 b.c.e.) and that in certain respects is quite alien to modern people.” This too is important to our consideration of the interpretation of the Psalms and we will return to this issue later in this paper in our consideration of possible historical settings for psalms.

2. Susan E. Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries*, vol. 1 (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 312.

3. Or, at least, not with many other texts. Although, it could of course be argued that the similarly ambiguous settings of the OT’s wisdom literature provide equivalent flexibility for the reader.

4. Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 23.



And this is my point: if the power of the psalms is found in their indeterminate setting and their typical nature, why then in our analysis of the psalms do we so often seek to determine a setting when none is given? In this very act do we not—in some sense at least—contradict an important aspect of the communicative power of the OT's poetry? On the other hand, the discussion could be framed in more positive terms by asking the question: what benefit is there in positing a concrete historical setting or rubric in the discussion of a psalm? Essentially, the hermeneutical question discussed in this paper revolves around issues of benefit and cost. Interpretative comment on the psalms frequently calls upon a hypothesized historical setting, and the issue under consideration is whether the hermeneutical benefits of this reconstruction outweigh the potential costs of just such a practice.

### The Problem with “Historical” Settings

At the risk of friends and colleagues being careful of what they say to me in the future, allow me to relate a conversation that I had with Prof. J. Clint McCann of Eden Theological Seminary at the SBL Conference in Philadelphia in 2005. We had been discussing a recent publication which took a canonical approach to the study of the Book of Psalms. The work had been positively reviewed, broadly speaking, but one reviewer had commented on her disappointment that the author had not interacted with certain key issues of historical background to the psalms under consideration in this book. I felt that the reviewer's point was reasonable enough and well made; however, Prof. McCann responded, “Well, yeah, but you wouldn't want to stake your house on any of these reconstructions, would you?” And, of course, Clint McCann is absolutely right: only the most foolhardy of home owners would wager his house against the accuracy of the reconstructed settings for psalms that we find in the commentaries.

This is clearly illustrated by the diversity of opinion that we see regarding the settings of psalms in the various commentaries. For example, Psalm 88 is frequently described as one of the *Krankenpsalmen*, a “sickness psalm,” yet clear indications of the cause of Heman's lament are hard to find in the poem itself.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, he describes himself as “afflicted and expiring from his youth” (88:16 [15])<sup>6</sup> but need

5. Klaus Seybold does number Psalm 88 amongst the “psalms of the sick person” in his *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament* (BWANT 99; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 117. However, more recent commentators tend to be cautious in attributing a particular setting to Heman's plea. A. A. Anderson, for example, comments: “The situation portrayed is life-long trouble (see verse 15)—perhaps some grave illness, although it would be pointless to speculate as to its exact nature. . .” (*The Book of Psalms, Volume II, Psalms 73–150* [NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972], 623). Equally, quoting Krieg, Zenger notes that “nowhere is any sickness mentioned” and “in view of the highly poetic form of this psalm, the attempts that have repeatedly been made to give a concrete biographical context to the origins and genre of the psalm are superfluous,” (Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 393).

6. Translations throughout are mine unless otherwise stated.

the “affliction” (the generic and multivalent *‘āmi* in Hebrew) necessarily be physical? Most of the psalmist’s assessments of his condition point to the psychological turmoil that he faces rather than referring to any specific sense of physical ailment. So, although a root cause in physical sickness is certainly possible, it is also at least possible to see Heman as depressed and potentially suicidal based on the text of Psalm 88. Could it be a desire to take his own life that brings him “close to death from his youth up” (ESV)? Perhaps such a scenario is “less likely” than the poem being rooted in long-term physical sickness but it is certainly not impossible. This dubiety regarding the specific biographical setting of Heman’s poignant lament leads Goldingay to comment that Psalm 88: “actually tells us nothing concrete and specific about the nature of the suppliant’s affliction, even whether or not it involved illness. It focuses more on a wide range of ways of expressing the implications of the affliction, especially abandonment by Yahweh and by other people (though there is no reference to attacks by other people, only by Yahweh). It is the lament of an outsider.”<sup>7</sup>

It might be argued that choosing Psalm 88 as a counterpoint for this discussion skews the discussion because, as an illustration, it is particularly oblique or difficult. However, this question of the dubiety of historical reconstructions of the psalms struck me in particular when writing on Psalm 89. It has become commonplace for the commentators on the psalms to point to a post-exilic setting for Psalm 89. Weiser, for example, notes: “Most commentators seek to identify the catastrophe, which gave rise to this lament, which exposed the country to destruction and looting, and deprived the king of his autonomy, with the downfall of Judah in 587 b.c.; they therefore regard the psalm as belonging to the exilic or postexilic period.”<sup>8</sup> And, in some sense, the natural reading of the text seems to be as a lament over the collapse of the Davidic line of promise in the fall of Jerusalem. Yet, even regarding a poem where it might be said that a more general sense of agreement prevails, there is still no reconstruction that is universally held by commentators.

Nahum Sarna, for example, argues from OT intertextual connections that Psalm 89 is best read as a lament over an attack on the Davidic king and not as a city lament over the ending of the Davidic line together with the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup> The textual links with the Deuteronomistic History, especially Nathan’s oracle, point to the lament being over a personal attack on the Davidide

7. John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 2, Psalms 42–89* (BCOTWP 2; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 645.

8. Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (OTL; trans. H. Hartwell; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 591, although Weiser goes on to question this conclusion. See also Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 212–14 and “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JOT* 35 (1986): 85–94 or Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2 [Psalms 51–100]* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 405–6, for thorough discussions of the historical reconstruction that locates Psalm 89 as a post-exilic response to the loss of the Davidic king.

9. Nahum M. Sarna, “Psalms 89: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis,” in *Biblical and Other Studies* (ed. Alexander Altmann; Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies 1; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 29–46.



rather than a threat to the integrity of the nation, he argues. Sarna, therefore, sees the most likely historical setting as being the Aramean-Israelite coalition attack on King Ahaz (Isa. 7; 2 Kgs. 16; 2 Chron. 28).<sup>10</sup> To many this may seem an unlikely reading of Psalm 89 and some will balk at Sarna's degree of specificity in his reconstruction. However, Sarna is able to put together a credible argument to such an extent that he is confident enough to comment that, "There cannot be the slightest doubt that the lament must reflect some situation prior to the Babylonian invasion."<sup>11</sup> And we must also bear in mind that several other commentators point to an original setting that predates the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> So, if we cannot be absolutely certain even regarding the historical setting of the "clearest" of psalms, the question springs to mind: what value is there in these historical reconstructions of the settings that gave rise to psalms?

### The Value of "Historical" Settings

From a hermeneutical perspective, then, just what is the value of positing historical settings to psalms that are purposefully ahistorical? If, as Miller and others argue, a good measure of the psalms' communicative power is to be found in their lack of historical specificity, why do scholars expend so much time, effort, paper and ink trying to establish a specific historical setting? There are probably two reasons that contribute to this norm: one sociological reason and one theological reason.

First, it is very difficult to buck the trend of community expectation. Psalms commentaries have, from the beginning, suggested a diversity of historical settings as the *Sitze* that ultimately led to the poetic expression of these events in praises or laments which were eventually included in the canonical Psalter. Every commentary from the Enlightenment onwards suggests possible historical backgrounds behind the contextless psalms. Therefore, a clear sense of expectation has developed over the years, making it nigh-on impossible to write on the psalms without making reference to questions of background. Thankfully, scholars tend now to be much more circumspect with regard to their historical assertions. Whereas, during the period in which form criticism dominated the study of the Psalter, one frequently encountered extensive and elaborate argumentation regarding the historical or cultic setting of a psalm or the layers of a poem's development, such discussion tends to be much more conscious of its own uncertainty in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

10. Nahum M. Sarna, "Psalm 89," 42–45.

11. Nahum M. Sarna, "Psalm 89," 43.

12. See, for example, Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms* (NIBCOT; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 355, and Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans Critical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 639.

13. Analyses of the Psalter focussing strongly on questions of historical setting date back at least as far as the early work of Gunkel and Mowinckel where the dominant aim of form-critical studies was to establish the cultic role and the identity of the speaker of each psalm (Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der religiösen Lyrik Israels*

For example, it is refreshing to read in Goldingay's recent commentaries on the psalms the simple comment: "There is no indication of a date."<sup>14</sup> Of course, this is absolutely true of many of the psalms, but that has never prevented scholars from writing several pages discussing the various possible scenarios rather than simply acknowledging that the psalm is silent on the question of date or social setting. Thus, one reason for the practice of suggesting historical settings is simply the expectation that such discussion will be a part of any academic study of the Book of Psalms. Sociology definitely plays its part in forming the present approach to psalmic interpretation.

Second, there are also good *theological* reasons for suggesting historical settings to guide the interpretation of indeterminate psalms. The primary such reason is that the canonical Psalter itself sets such an example for us by the addition of historical superscriptions to psalms that would otherwise be of completely indeterminate setting.<sup>15</sup> Now, the origin of the superscriptions is a notoriously difficult topic to pin down, and this is not the place for a full or even extensive discussion, but it does seem that thirteen historical superscriptions have been deliberately added to their texts in order to provide the later reader with a suggested rubric for the interpretation of those poems.<sup>16</sup>

Gerald Wilson comments, "[t]he historical notices were appended possibly as the result of exegetical interpretation of the texts in the light of the presumed author's life setting."<sup>17</sup> In making this statement, Wilson essentially summarises Brevard Childs' lucid suggestions regarding the exegetical nature of psalmic super-

[Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933] or Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* [Vols. I & II; trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962]). This trend dominated Psalms studies up until the 1980s–90s and the development of the canonical approach to the Psalter. More recent examples of this type of study of historical background includes John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (2nd ed., SBT, vol. 32; London: SCM Press, 1986) and Steven J. L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (JSOTSup 44; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

14. Goldingay, *Psalms* 2, 645.

15. Historical superscriptions set the scene for Psalms 3, 7, 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63 and 142. There is some diversity in this numbering. Some scholars would also include the superscription to Psalm 30—"A Song at the Dedication of the Temple" (*šir-lānukkat habbayit*)—as a historical title. However, this does seem to be somewhat different from the other titles of this type which draw upon much more specific events from the life of David.

16. It would be inappropriate in an article of this length and nature to offer a complete consideration of the historicity, authorship, originality and editorial function of the psalmic superscriptions. So, for present purposes, it is probably sufficient to comment that the approach to the superscriptions applied in this article broadly reflects the suggestion of Gerald Wilson that: "The most usual scenario suggested [regarding the introduction of superscriptions to the text of the Psalter] sees three layers of accretion. (1) The liturgical elements were added—perhaps while the psalms were still in use in temple worship (thus the reference to the director), but perhaps representing notes appended when the psalms were gathered into more literary collections before inclusion in the Psalter. (2) Traditions of "authorship" were added, with collections developing around specific authors. (3) The historical notices were added—possibly as a result of exegetical interpretation of the texts in the light of the presumed author's life setting." (*Psalms—Volume 1* [NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], 80).

17. Wilson, *Psalms—Volume 1*, 80.

scriptions.<sup>18</sup> Unpacking Childs' argument a little more fully sheds some light upon the question under discussion. First, Childs suggests that:

The titles represent an early reflection of how the Psalms as a collection of sacred literature were understood. The titles established a secondary setting which became normative for the canonical tradition. In this sense the titles form an important link in the history of exegesis.<sup>19</sup>

Childs' suggestion that the historical superscriptions established a secondary setting that influenced later exegetical practice is significant to our discussion here and we will consider this further below. Before going on to do that, however, it is important to pick up on two further features of Childs' argument that also speak to the question of historical reconstructions. Firstly, he suggests that "the psalm titles do not appear to reflect independent historical tradition but are the result of an exegetical activity which derived its material from within the text itself."<sup>20</sup> Second, Childs considers the effects of the historic superscriptions:

To summarise: the most important factor in the formation of the titles appears to be general parallels between the situation described in the Psalm and some incident in the life of David. Linguistic parallels, especially word-plays, were of secondary importance. There are signs to suggest a process of scholarly study of the Psalms in relation to other Old Testament passages, in which historical inferences and logical combinations were made and which went beyond a simple reading of the text. However, there is nothing to indicate that a set of hermeneutical rules had been developed as yet. At most one can recognise analogies in an exegetical method of inner-biblical interpretation which later developed into a full-blown midrash.<sup>21</sup>

This all leads Childs to conclude:

The learned tradition of the study of Scripture which lay behind the formation of the titles would point to a type of scribal school but the purpose of the titles was far from academic. By placing a Psalm within the setting of a particular historical incident, the reader suddenly was given access to previously unknown information. David's inner life was now unlocked to the reader, who was allowed to hear his intimate thoughts and reflections. It therefore seems most probable that the formation of

18. Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16, no. 2 (Autumn 1971): 137-49.

19. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 137.

20. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 143. Following a study of the inter-textual links between the Psalms that bear an historical superscription and the accounts of the events referred to from the life of David as presented in the Deuteronomistic History, Childs comments the psalms' titles reflect "considerable study of Scripture which goes much beyond noticing obvious allusions," ("Psalm Titles," 147).

21. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 147-48.

the titles stemmed from a pietistic circle of Jews whose interest was particularly focused on the nurture of the spiritual life.<sup>22</sup>

Brevard Childs' thoughtful consideration of the historic superscriptions helps to unpack the theological value of suggesting historical settings to specific psalms. The main point is not whether the suggested setting is verifiable but rather is it *helpful* in opening up our understanding of the sense and meaning of the poem? Childs' suggestion is not that there was a definite historical link between the events of David's life and the psalms that bear these superscriptions. Instead, he suggests that the historical titles reflect a tradition of detailed study of the psalmic text and comparison with events from David's life as they are presented in the history books. Clearly, this practice is analogous to the academic quest for an historical setting lying behind the psalms. In suggesting possible historical backgrounds that could have led to the penning of a particular poem, scholars conduct a similar practice to the one carried out by the editors of the Psalter in adding historical titles to certain psalms. Looking for a possible *Sitz im Leben* is grounded in the detailed analysis of the text and, I would suggest, its intent is not simply historical. As is the case with the historical titles in the Psalter, the suggestion of a setting in life opens up the text to fuller investigation and deeper understanding. The value of suggesting background is not rooted in whether or not we can verify historical accuracy, it is rather found in the close reading of the text and the way in which such suggestions open up avenues for appropriation of that text.

Let me attempt to illustrate. The suggestion of multiple authors that Psalm 88 is rooted in the long-term sickness of the poet is ultimately unverifiable. We simply cannot tell. Nevertheless, that suggestion opens up a particular avenue for interpretation. The reader of those Psalms commentaries suggesting a background in physical sickness finds the poem opened up to them in new ways, offering particular avenues for appropriation. But what if the Psalm is not rooted in sickness? Does this not lead to inappropriate appropriation? Following Childs' argument above, the answer to that objection would have to be: "No, not really." For, although the historical titles suggest the rubric for interpretation based on events in David's life, that suggestion does not ultimately limit the multiplicity of potential avenues of appropriation in a wide variety of settings. So, the fact that Psalm 18 purports to be rooted in Yahweh's deliverance of David from the hand of Saul, in no way limits the song's relevance to a thousand other settings were God's divine intervention can be celebrated. Miller comments thus on the historical titles: "They suggest a circumstance in which the introduced psalm would be appropriate and thus provide an illustrative clue to interpretation."<sup>23</sup> And such is the net effect of proposing historical settings to the psalms. This is a practice that provides an "illustrative clue to interpretation" but does not necessarily limit interpretation to that particular context. It provides a framework, and in doing so, opens the text up to a variety of interpretations even beyond that setting. It

22. Childs, "Psalm Titles," 149.

23. Miller, *Interpreting*, 26.

is, of course, important to be honest regarding the lack of certainty with which we propose historical reconstructions of psalmic backgrounds, so that interested readers do not read “best guesses” as some sort of absolute, but even proposing a best guess in some way *opens the psalm to appropriation* rather than diminishing its communicative power.

### The Priority of Canonical Settings

So, despite all of the difficulty that is inherent to the task of rooting psalms in a concrete historical setting, we can see that there is value in suggesting such potential frameworks for interpretation. However, historical settings must be read in the light of canonical settings and, if priority is to be given to either, it seems that there is a degree of definiteness in the latter which is often lacking in the former. Therefore, the canonical voice of a psalm should be clearly heard and, in some sense, that voice must take precedence over putative historical reconstructions.

A word of explanation is in order. Throughout many generations of Psalms scholarship it was simply supposed that the Psalter is an anthological collection of disparate individual compositions. The assumption was that each poem is an entity in its own right and therefore constitutes an insular pericope for the purposes of interpretation. The question of context was seldom, if ever, applied to the Book of Psalms. Such was the scenario up until the 1980s and the publication of Childs' *Introduction to the Old Testament Scripture*<sup>24</sup> and Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (cited above). Childs' general suggestion that there are indications of purposeful editing within the Psalter was developed much more fully by Wilson in his published PhD dissertation. Again, detailed discussion of the development of a canonical approach to the Book of Psalms can be found elsewhere and lies outwith the purposes of this paper.<sup>25</sup> The net effect of the canonical reading of the Psalms is that each composition is now read within a literary context. As Clint McCann suggests, the Psalms are no longer to be read as the song book of Israel, they are instead to be read as a book like any other book of the Bible.<sup>26</sup> Summarising, this means that each poem is influenced by the context within which it is found—either simply by its juxtaposition alongside a neighbouring psalm or neighbouring psalms, or by its inclusion in a collection such as the Songs of Ascents, or by its placement

24. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

25. See, for example, David M. Howard, “The Psalms and Current Study,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (ed. Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth; Nottingham: Apollos, 2005), 23–40, for an analysis of the development of the canonical approach to Psalms studies. See Jamie A. Grant, “Poetics,” in *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory* (ed. David G. Firth and Jamie A. Grant; Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 187–225, for a summary and description of how the canonical method works.

26. J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Books of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); “The Psalms as Instruction,” *Int* 46, no. 2 (April 1992): 117–28.

and positioning within one of the five books of the Psalter.<sup>27</sup> As always, the context within which a passage is read will have an impact upon its interpretation.

How then do the questions of historical context and canonical context interact? And how does this impact interpretation? Let us take Psalm 89 as our example. The question of the historical setting of Psalm 89, as discussed above, is open to some debate. Many see it as a psalm that is either exilic or post-exilic that reflects upon the demise of the Davidic line following the fall of Jerusalem and (possibly) the “inglorious” return from exile. Other scholars reject this reading and see the psalm as reflecting on an attack on the Davidic line during the period of the Judean monarchy’s existence. In terms of historical setting there is merit on both sides of the discussion and it is very difficult to come to a conclusive decision based on the content of the psalm alone. When we take canonical context into account, though, it becomes clear that—regardless of the original historical setting that led the poet to write the psalm—Psalm 89 should be read as a post-exilic psalm lamenting the loss of the Davidic line.

The historical setting of Psalm 89 is ambiguous, but its canonical setting is not. Psalm 89 is the concluding psalm of Book III of the Psalter; therefore, it is placed at a key editorial position in the book as a whole.<sup>28</sup> It concludes an editorial division (Book III) that is dominated by the imagery of exile. Psalm 73 laments—perhaps in the more generic sense of theodicy—the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous, but the ensuing psalms make it clear that this lament is specifically drawn from the events surrounding the destruction of the city and the temple. Psalm 74 responds to the destruction of the temple. Psalm 75 looks for God’s divine judgement at the time he ordains. Psalm 77 seeks God’s help in the time of trouble and torment. Psalm 78 decries the covenant unfaithfulness of God’s people and longs for a day of covenant faithfulness under the shepherd, David. Psalm 79 laments the destruction of the city and the loss of life when Jerusalem finally fell to the Babylonian siege. Psalm 80 recounts the Exodus from Egypt and seeks the same from Babylon. Psalm 85 seems to be a psalm of return from exile. Psalm 87 resonates with the imagery of a restored Zion, once again at the heart of God’s purposes for the nations and the earth. There can be no doubt that Book III is a collection dominated by lament over the exile and the removal of all of the external signs of Yahweh’s covenant with his people.

This, therefore, is the canonical context within which we interpret Psalm 89. In terms of its original authorship, it is practically impossible to establish with any degree of certainty for its historical setting. But, on an editorial level, it is quite clear that Psalm 89 is to be read as a psalm that laments the passing of the Davidic line of promise. This is the literary context in which the psalm is placed and so provides a greater degree of certainty to any discussion of historical background.

27. See James L. Mays, “The Question of Context in Psalm Interpretation,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 14–20 and Grant, “Poetics.”

28. Wilson, “Use of Royal Psalms.”



Although Psalm 89 *may* have been written in response to a pre-exilic assault on the house of David, we read it now as a composition that questions God's faithfulness because yet another of the external signs of the covenant promise has been removed. This canonical setting opens a line of appropriation grounded in honest prayer as a response to God's frequently mysterious plan and purpose. Yahweh had promised David an eternal line and yet, at the time of editing, that line was no more. How then was God going to keep his promise? Christian readers read from the perspective of knowing the *denouement* of the story, but the canonical interpretation of this psalm encourages the reader to place himself in the shoes of one who is both baffled and troubled by the dark providence of God. This is an experience that may come upon anyone in the community of faith, at the most unexpected of times, so it is important that we allow the voice of the editors to speak. There is often greater clarity to be found in this voice than there is in the quest for historical setting, useful as this may be.

## Conclusion

And so we return to the quotes of Alter and Gillingham with some observations: (1) Clearly, indeterminacy has opened and continues to open the psalms to continued appropriation and reinterpretation by each succeeding generation of faith. There can be no doubt that the lack of historical setting aids the applicability of the psalms to ever-new settings. This indeterminacy should be embraced hermeneutically and never removed by over-confident claims of historical certainty. (2) Suggestions of possible historical settings, such as the historical superscriptions, can provide frameworks that help readers to embrace the compositions of the Psalter as their own prayers and praises and pleas, by suggesting possible settings with which they can relate. (3) The canonical positioning of the psalms into collections and books provides another helpful layer of study that gives insight into how the editors of the Book of Psalms interpreted the individual compositions theologically. Nevertheless, in every investigation of the Psalter the primary task of the interpreter, as Gillingham suggests, is to embrace its great diversity. It is entirely appropriate when reading the psalms to ask questions of an historical nature, or of a literary nature, or of a theological nature. It is appropriate because we will find answers to all of these questions in this book that is "an anatomy of all parts of the soul."<sup>29</sup>

29. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), 1:xxxviii.



# When Samuel Met Esther: Narrative Focalisation, Intertextuality, and Theology

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The book of Esther continues to be regarded as one of the strangest books of the Bible. Quite apart from being the only book in the Bible that definitely does not mention God,<sup>1</sup> it seems to go out of its way to avoid obviously theological statements. Even its most famed comments in 4:14 about help arising for the Jews from 'another place' and asking whether Esther has come to power for 'such a time as this' are more oblique in their theology (if indeed there is any theology) than we might wish.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, we only need to reach 4:16 to find Esther ordering a severe three day fast that excludes any reference to prayer, though this has not stopped the GNB from including it.<sup>3</sup> In short, Esther not only does not mention God, it seems to do its best to avoid mentioning God, and in this way can be distinguished from any other book of the Bible. Indeed, although it seeks to validate the feast of Purim as a continuing element within Jewish life, its reason for doing so is not overtly theological.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, its place within the Bible suggests that, from the perspective of the canon, it is regarded as a theological text, albeit one that seems to avoid that which is generally regarded as central to a theological process.

This has not stopped scholars and popular readers deploying any number of methods for finding something theological in Esther. If we set aside the purely

1. Song of Songs 8:6 might mention Yahweh, but this is disputed.

2. See John M. Wiebe, "Esther 4:14: 'Will Relief and Deliverance Arise for the Jews from Another Place?'," *CBQ* 53 (1991): 409-15.

3. There is no reference to prayer in either MT or LXX, though curiously AT 5:11 (the equivalent verse) has prayer but no fast.

4. Many scholars dispute the historical link between the book of Esther and the feast of Purim, most recently Jona Schellekens, "Accession Days and Holidays: The Origins of the Jewish Festival of Purim," *JBL* 128 (2009): 115-34. There are important historical issues involved, but the important point is that even if Esther does not provide the historical basis for Purim (and this is the point that is debated) its function as literature is still to provide that foundation. However, this debate is linked to the larger question of the historicity of the narrative, and since there are no points at which its history can absolutely be rejected there remains sound reason for also assuming that the association with Purim has a basis in history. Cf. Barry G. Webb, *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther* (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), 112-13.

allegorical as an exegetical process which lacks any control,<sup>5</sup> then we are left with varying approaches which seek either to recognise the ‘God shaped holes’ left in the narrative<sup>6</sup> or to seek the theological intent of the narrative through its literary form, in particular through its intertextual relations with other parts of the canon. By far the most popular suggestions here are that Esther draws on themes of wisdom<sup>7</sup> or that there are links with the Joseph story, the Exodus or the book of Daniel.<sup>8</sup> In reality of course, since there is no necessary limit to the number of texts with which a text may create intertextual allusions, we need not rule out any of these, though exactly how the presence of such intertextuality creates theological intent is somewhat complex and under-explored. Of course, neither are the concepts of ‘God shaped holes’ and intertextuality contradictory to one another since these intertextual links may help readers recognise the theological discourse evident within the narrative, though they are not necessary to the intertextuality.

So, we can reasonably suggest that some progress has been made in exploring how Esther develops its theological intent. Nevertheless, we need to take this one step further and ask how it is that intertextuality develops theology within the book. The answer developed here is that Esther develops its theology through its narrative technique, specifically through limiting the field of vision available to us as readers, so that the intertexts to which it alludes become the theological prism through which we are to read the narrative. We will consider this through the book of Samuel since this is an important intertext for Esther, though to date the relationship between Esther and Samuel has not been raised as an important one for the book despite some often noted key links between Esther and Samuel.

### Narrative Focalisation in Esther

That Esther is a narrative text hardly needs proving, and its narrative skill has been widely recognised, especially as it has been an important text in testing out literary models of interpretation. Even 9:20–10:3, which is much more a record of letters and notes from various sources than a narrative in the classic sense, contains narrative elements that develop the themes of the main story even if these verses are much more concerned with the institution of Purim as an ongoing festival within Judaism than the main story as such.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that the main narrative lacks problems – such as why Esther seems to delay her request for a

5. Seen, for example, in Major Ian W. Thomas, *If I Perish, I Perish: The Christian Life as Seen in the Book of Esther* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1967).

6. J. A. Loader, “Esther as a Novel with Various Levels of Meaning,” *ZAW* 90 (1978), 417–21.

7. See, for example, Robert Gordis, “Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther – a New Solution to an Ancient Crux,” *JBL* 100 (1981), 359–88, and S. Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 13 (1963), 419–55.

8. See W. Lee Humphreys, “A Lifestyle for the Diaspora: A Study of the Tales of Esther and Daniel,” *JBL* 92 (1975), 211–23.

9. Esther 9:24–25 does contain a summary of the main plot, though it differs in numerous

reversal of Haman's decree – but on the whole it is a well developed narrative with a clear introduction and a neatly developed theme of the reversal of fortunes motif.

Since this much is generally recognised we can focus more specifically on narrative techniques employed. Although consideration of narrative technique can draw on a range of options, one aspect that merits particular attention is the use of narrative perspective, especially what Genette has called focalisation,<sup>10</sup> though this is sometimes considered as a point of view. As we shall see, focalisation is a matter worth considering because Esther employs it in a distinctive manner, standing outside the more typical approach of Old Testament narrative. Although Genette recognises the possibility of multiple modes being employed within a given narrative, he notes three basic modes of focalisation which show a sliding scale of knowledge on the part of the narrator relative to the characters within the narrative. Focalisation is thus concerned with how much the narrator knows (or at least chooses to disclose) relative to that known by the characters within the narrative. The three options he develops are:

*Zero focalisation*, where the narrator knows more than the characters, and is thus the traditional omniscient narrator. This is the model that Sternberg regards as normal within the Old Testament apart from those circumstances where the narrator is a character within the narrative such as we find in the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>11</sup> But as we shall see, Esther represents a much more restrained model that is broken directly only in 6:6 where we read of what Haman 'said in his heart,' though in 1:11 we do read that Vashti's beauty was the reason for inviting her to the royal party. Although this suggests that the narrator could have operated with zero focalisation, it is clear that the narrator has chosen not to do so. It is, in effect, the narrative equivalent of 'I have more to tell you than I have space for here', a nod to readers that there is more to be said than actually will be said. Readers are thus invited to reflect on the events narrated to see what hints are provided as to their meaning.

*Internal focalisation*, in which the narrator knows only as much as the characters. As a model this is best suited to those who narrate from within a narrative (though this is not strictly necessary), but is not employed in Esther apart from reports by characters within the narrative, such as Esther to Ahasuerus in chapter 7. The obvious examples in the Old Testament are found in the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah.

*External focalisation*, in which the narrator knows (or discloses) less than the characters, following them around but not showing or developing insights into their character or motivation that cannot be deduced from their direct actions.

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details from the main plot. However, these differences are probably because of the emphases of the summary rather than matters of substance.

10. Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 185–211. See also his responses to criticism of his work in, idem, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 72–79.

11. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 12, 84–87.

This, apart from the direct observation at 6:6, is the principal mode employed within Esther, meaning that Esther's mode of narration stands outside the dominant approaches of the Old Testament.

*External Focalisation: Ahasuerus & Vashti*

To demonstrate the use of external focalisation we need to note a few examples as proving this comprehensively would require us to work through the entire text, which is plainly impractical. Hence, two examples will need to suffice. First, we read in Esther 1:1–9 of a sequence of parties thrown by Ahasuerus, initially one lasting six months which is perhaps better thought of as a festival, and then one for one week for the palace staff, the latter of which apparently involved a great deal of drinking. In passing, we should note that this establishes both a recurring motif through the book, which is particularly interested in feasting, and also key elements in Ahasuerus' characterisation, but we are never told this directly. We are left to infer from the way the story is told that he is fond of a feast, and especially of a drink since the book's preferred term for feast (מִשְׁתֵּה) is particularly associated with drinking, though we will later read of the 'banquet of wine' (5:6, 7:2), a term which adds emphasis to their normal process. The narrator thus points to elements of his characterisation which could be developed by making direct comment but which is developed through the narrative. As this is relatively common in the Old Testament we do not need to develop it here.<sup>12</sup> But the point is that this is consistent with the refusal to tell us anything about the motivation of the characters. Thus, at the end of the second feast Ahasuerus decided to send for his queen, Vashti, to show her beauty. Exactly what this means is left unsaid, and rabbinic texts develop the point, with some suggesting she was to come naked apart from the royal crown. However, the important point for the narrative as a whole is that Vashti refused to come and we are never told why this was so. Here is a pivotal moment in the narrative that fundamentally affects all that happens since it opens the way for Vashti's removal and Esther's arrival, but it is never explained, and contrary to the more common patterns of the Old Testament we are not given hints that allow us to fill the gap. Hence, by adopting external focalisation the narrator refuses to fill the gap for readers, though as we shall see, provides hints by reference to the books of Samuel that give us guidance of both a practical and theological nature on this event, but not on Vashti's own intentions.

*External Focalisation: Mordecai & Haman*

As a second example we can note Mordecai's refusal to offer homage to Haman in 3:1–6, even though homage had been ordered by the king. Of course, in indicating that the king had ordered homage be given there may be a hint that Haman was hardly worthy of respect since it would normally be given anyway, and the

12. Reticence in developing characterisation is not unusual in either the Old Testament or the New, and that we are usually only given sufficient information about particular characters as is needed to develop the plot is normal. See Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 88–91.



other officials in the king's gate do offer the respect required. Indeed, so strange is Mordecai's behaviour that the narrator notes that even the other officials were troubled by it, constantly asking him why this was the case, but that he refused to answer them. According to most translations, the only response he gave is that he was Jewish, though it is not impossible that 3:4 should be understood impersonally so that it was the fact that they knew Mordecai to be Jewish that led to them taking their question to Haman. In either case, practically all commentators note that being Jewish is no reason for failing to give proper respect. The narrator knows Mordecai has not given homage, but does not provide a direct answer to the question of why, adopting the position of external focalisation. Similarly, we are not told why Haman then decided to launch a pogrom against all Jews within the empire. Adopting external focalisation means that we are left to ask questions, just as we are also left to ponder why Esther decided to have two banquets. But, again, we shall see that the way the story is told is specifically designed to allude to other parts of the Old Testament because of the narrator's hints that more can be known. Although this includes many parts of the Old Testament, these passages make particular reference to Samuel, so readers are directed to those intertexts which provide us with a mechanism for reflecting on both the motivation of the characters and the theology of the book.

Adopting an external focalisation is thus an important strategy for the book of Esther and may provide at least one reason why God is never mentioned directly within it. Put simply, barring some form of prophetic insight, as readers we can generally only recognise God's involvement in events retrospectively. But since prophetic insight is comparatively rare, retrospective recognition is the situation in which God's people generally find themselves. External focalisation is not a denial of God's involvement in the narrative world created by the book, but rather a key device for encouraging readers to identify its theological concerns through the intertextual allusions it makes.

## Intertextuality and Theology

Although intertextuality can mean many things in contemporary literary theory, it is enough for our purposes to think of the term as an intentional reference or allusion to another text that is in some way significant for the meaning of the text under consideration. The term, of course, is only of relatively recent coinage, reaching back to the work of Julia Kristeva (though building on the concept of dialogism in Bakhtin),<sup>13</sup> but it adds to the older concepts of allusion or influence

13. For an overview of the development of the concept, see Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, "Introduction" in Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (eds.), *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 3–29. On the specifics added by Kristeva, see Roland Francois Lack, "Intertextuality or Influence: Kristeva, Bloom and the *Poésies* of Isidore Ducasse," in Michael Wornton and Judith Still (eds.), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 130–42.

in that the text is recognised as intentionally doing something through a reference to another text – it is not simply a matter of being clever for the sake of it. Texts are taken up and redeployed in subsequent texts, so that the meaning of the intertext is also shaped by the reading of it in subsequent texts. As a result, the reading experience is much richer. Readers may also initiate intertextual considerations, though we will not consider this aspect here because such concerns are much harder to control when looking at the intertextual relationship of two specific texts. We should also recognise that although the term ‘intertextuality’ is a recent one, the concept is not – as Still and Worton note, the concept is ‘at least as old as recorded human society.’<sup>14</sup> What is new is recognising that it contributes to the processes of analysis available to us, not the practice itself because authors have almost always been saturated in other texts. The question for us is how that saturation expresses itself and its import for reading a particular text.

An important reason for employing intertextuality within the composition of a text is to place it within a tradition. This is a well known technique among novelists and poets,<sup>15</sup> but is equally plausible within the biblical material. Indeed, where there might be reasons not to express one’s theological perceptions too directly, intertextual allusion might serve as a primary means of alerting readers to the framework with which they are to read a text. Thus readers encounter a new text, but the intertextual framework it creates, a framework which might be reinforced by the history of its interpretation for subsequent readers, is itself of considerable importance for its interpretation. That is, author-introduced intertextuality becomes a primary pointer that guides readers on how they are to interpret a text. Poststructuralist critics, such as Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida take intertextuality far beyond this, but their concern is with reader-introduced intertextuality and once we have taken this step we have surrendered the possibility that the text itself might mean something. Although it is fair to suggest that ancient texts employed intertextuality as a compositional technique, there is no evidence that they did so with the expectation that readers would simply make them an object of play.<sup>16</sup> Rather, meaning is intended to exist within the text, but that meaning may itself be intertextual. As readers, therefore, we are to be attuned to the intertextual references that the text initiates, but we can no longer claim to be practising exegesis if we move to other forms of intertextuality. This is because doing so means moving away from the pointers to the tradition in which the text wishes to be read. It is, of course, a perfectly legitimate reading strategy to read a particular text against the grain, but one can only do that once we have established what that

14. Judith Still and Michael Worton, “Introduction” in Worton and Still (eds.), *Intertextuality*, 2. They then demonstrate (pp. 2–7) that the concept was already being analysed by classical writers, usually in terms of imitation.

15. Still and Worton, “Introduction,” 19.

16. But see George Aichele, Peter Miscall, and Richard Walsh, “An Elephant in the Room: Historical-Critical and Postmodern Interpretations of the Bible,” *JBL* 128/2 (2009), 403, on the value of reader introduced intertextuality.

grain is. As readers concerned with the interpretation of a particular text, therefore, we need to establish the tradition within which a text seeks to place itself.

Such an approach therefore leads us back to the author and the possibility of authorial intent. But is this possible within an intertextual framework? Theorists differ here, but unless all texts are indeterminate and thus subject only to free play it is not unreasonable to assume that texts were composed with the intention of communicating something. What that is can only be determined on the basis of the evidence of the text itself – we cannot attempt to enter the author’s psychology through anything but the text – but barring obvious evidence of sloppy composition we can work towards understanding that intent, though we should certainly guard against some of the excesses of the past.<sup>17</sup> Not least, we should note that a text may intend to be open in its meaning, as Thistleton argues happens with the parables,<sup>18</sup> though this is not quite the same as saying that all texts are indeterminate, merely that there may be more than one level of meaning possible, each of which is valid in its own terms.

Although one could expand this considerably, the presence of some degree of intertextuality that serves to establish the tradition within which a text like Esther is to be situated can be seen in a similar light. One can read the narrative of Esther perfectly well without seeing the varying levels of intertextuality and still appreciate the meaning communicated by the text, but at the same time it is the intertextuality that enriches our reading of the text. Indeed, given Esther’s apparent eschewing of overt theological language it will be seen that it is through the intertextual links it employs that we can see both its theological tradition and the particular ways in which it interprets this tradition.

The question of how to identify such intertextual allusions has been effectively addressed within Biblical studies generally by Richard Hays.<sup>19</sup> Hays has noted that intertexts move on a spectrum from direct citations through to very faint echoes, and that within the spectrum the demands on the reader to identify the intertext varies inversely with the extent of the allusion.<sup>20</sup> In the case of Esther we do not find direct citation, but it will be seen that there are a number of direct allusions to other texts that informed readers can recognise. Hays has established seven criteria by which he recognises these echoes,<sup>21</sup> though as Sim has observed, only

17. On the restoration of both author and text within a communicative model, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), 197–366 and, more accessibly, Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 79–99.

18. Anthony C. Thistleton, “‘Behind’ and ‘In Front of’ the Text: Language, Reference and Indeterminacy,” in Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene and Karl Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 103–6.

19. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

20. Hays, *Echoes*, 14–16.

21. Hays, *Echoes*, 29–32, proposes availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation and satisfaction.

the criteria of availability and volume are strictly necessary.<sup>22</sup> By availability we simply mean that the proposed intertext was available to both author and readers (since intertexts not available to readers cannot develop meaning). By definition, this means that author-initiated intertextuality can only work from a later text back to an earlier one. The criterion of volume is concerned with whether or not there are enough points of verbal or thematic contact for an intertextual allusion to be capable of being recognised.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, intertextuality works best when both author and readers share a pool of common literature so that the later text can develop a web of reference that readers can identify and thus enrich their reading experience of that text. This is particularly important in the case of canonical literature since later readers can identify not only the tradition within which a piece of literature stands but may be more aware of the subtleties of the earlier texts than would be the case with non-canonical traditions, though this would not preclude a writer including elements that are relevant to at least some of the more literate readers of that text.

### Samuel in Esther

We have suggested that one text of considerable importance for the book of Esther is the books of Samuel. Coming as a later text in the Old Testament, this is of no immediate surprise, since Esther has a high probability of knowing a wide range of texts. In terms of Hays' criterion of availability, few would doubt that Samuel was a text available to the author of Esther. Moreover, given the importance of the Davidic covenant across a wide range of texts within the Old Testament,<sup>24</sup> we can reasonably assume that, by the time Esther was written, Samuel would already have had some form of canonical recognition even if we cannot quite express that in terms identical to a modern notion of the canon of Scripture. So, Samuel is certainly an available text, but there is also a particularly high concentration of references to Samuel. Although these allusions can also include other texts,<sup>25</sup> our focus will only be on the way Esther develops themes from Samuel. Interestingly, when alluding to David and Saul's story, Esther almost never makes verbal connections to events recorded in Chronicles. This means that where an echo might be from either Samuel or Chronicles within their shared

22. David C. Sim, "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus: A Preliminary Intertextual Study," *JNT* 31.4 (2009), 404. Sim builds on the work of Robert Brawley, though I have not been able to access his work.

23. With Yitzhak Berger, "Ruth and inner-Biblical Exegesis: The Case of 1 Samuel 25," *JBL* 128/2 (2009), 254, we can note that the larger the cluster of allusions we can definitely observe to one text, the greater the probability is that others can also be observed, though this does not mean that any and every allusion can be considered an echo of an earlier text.

24. See, for example, William M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception-History of 2 Samuel 7:1–17* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

25. Some of the references to Samuel continue through Samuel to Deuteronomy or other parts of the Pentateuch, though this does not limit the impact of the association with Samuel.

tradition we can rule out Chronicles as the relevant intertext. The only possible reference to Chronicles occurs in 1:13 where there may be an allusion to 1 Chronicles 12:32 [MT 12:33], but this is so slight that it may simply reflect a common idiom. Indeed, to take one example, Esther 9:16 alludes to 2 Samuel 7:1, 11 (and through it to Deut 12:10 and Josh 23:1) since we find here the combination of the verb נִוּחַ plus a reference to the enemies, but this phrasing is absent from the parallel in 1 Chronicles 17.<sup>26</sup> One could therefore argue that Esther thus excludes Chronicles from its intertextual field, but this would be an argument from silence, and we can be content with noting that where an allusion might be to their shared tradition it is in fact an allusion only to Samuel. Although Esther never cites Samuel directly, we will see that its allusions are seldom indistinct echoes. Rather, like the allusion to 2 Samuel 7:1, 11 in 9:16, there is enough volume present for readers to recognise the intertext though of course the criterion of volume needs to be considered on a case by case basis.

*Focalisation and Intertextuality: “Merry with Wine”*

We can note how this affects our two sample texts for focalisation. At the point where Ahasuerus summons Vashti in 1:10, we are told that his heart was ‘merry with wine’ (טֹב לִב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בַּיַּיִן). Within Esther, we will find a similar comment about Haman in 5:9, but although there is a reference to the Philistine leaders (Judg 16:25), only two other individuals are ever said to have hearts merry from the consumption of alcohol. These are Nabal (1 Sam 25:36) and Amnon (2 Sam 13:28). In both instances, the individual whose heart was merry from alcohol made a foolish decision, a decision that led to their downfall. In Nabal’s case he had resisted David and so would be struck down by Yahweh after Abigail had prevented David from killing him, whereas Amnon was struck down by Absalom for raping Tamar, though this in turn began to fulfil the punishment announced by Nathan in 2 Samuel 12:10–12 for David’s sin in 2 Samuel 11. The motif of a heart merry from alcohol (טֹב לִב) thus occurs within narratives that show the powerful being made powerless. Nabal had been a wealthy landowner and grazier whilst Amnon was the king’s son. Within the books of Samuel such changes in position are placed in a narrative context through the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1–10) which introduces the motif of the reversal of fortunes as a central element in its theology (1 Sam 2:4–8). This element works itself out within Samuel through the fall of the houses of Eli and Saul as well as the more specific cases of Nabal and Amnon. Readers attuned to the placement of this motif in Samuel are thus aware that it points beyond itself to offer a further reflection on how the reversal of fortunes might occur. Both Nabal and Amnon appear to act independently of Yahweh and

26. Admittedly, a similar construction does occur in 1 Chronicles 22:9, but an allusion to Solomon here is less likely because although the perfect verb is used in each instance, the Chronicles text clearly has a future reference, whereas both Esther and Samuel refer to an established fact. Hence, this text, like Esther, refers back to 2 Samuel 7 and through it to the earlier passages in Joshua and Deuteronomy, and not Chronicles. It is also possible that Chronicles was not an available text, thus precluding it from being employed as an intertext.

might be deemed simply to reap the outcome of their own folly. But the structure of the books of Samuel indicates instead that although Yahweh might act to bring down someone independently, the reversal of fortunes might also come about as a result of their own actions. Even so, it is no less an example of Yahweh reversing fortunes for all that.

Thus, when Ahasuerus acts in this condition, the narrator points us to other texts, because those who are in this condition act with folly.<sup>27</sup> The king's reversal of fortunes is not so immediately apparent until we recognise the element of satire that has run through the presentation to this point. He has so far been presented as all powerful, the one whose power is so vast that he can entertain his army for six months and can even give orders at the subsequent palace party requiring all to drink whatever they want (1:8). But all his pretensions to power are about to be shown for what they are, and this will happen through a woman simply refusing to come to the party. Ahasuerus' claims to power are completely shot through when his wife refuses to do his bidding, though this in turn prepares for him to be completely dominated in turn by Esther. Indeed, that his actual power level is very low becomes evident as he engages in discussion with his advisers who must tell him what, according to law (דִּת), is to be done when the queen will not come to the party (1:13–15). In reality, his advisers are unable to answer the king's question, notably avoiding the fact that Persian law provided no guidance on this particular issue, and so come up with an unenforceable decree (1:19–22). The king has not lost his position, but the narrative has already changed his fortunes. The intertextual allusion to Samuel in turn provides a theological reading of this reversal, a reading that is of value within the Diaspora because those schooled in the literature can recognise it without having to take the politically dangerous step of expressing such thoughts about a monarch directly.

But the allusion to Samuel is more precise because the same phrase (טֹב לֵב) is also applied to Haman in 5:9. Just as two characters are brought down when drunk in Samuel, so also two are brought down in Esther. In Haman's case, he was drunk after his first banquet with Esther and the king at which Esther had effectively convinced the king to grant her request – up to half the kingdom – if he turned up to the next day's banquet (5:4–8).<sup>28</sup> Here again is a key example of external focalisation as we simply do not know why Esther decided to follow a strategy of two meals to request her people's deliverance. Yet, an allusion to the reversal of fortunes motif through this reference to Haman immediately after this may be a hint that God is at work in the story. In any case, Haman's drunkenness is also about to initiate his own downfall. In his case, it led him to be angry that Mordecai continued to ignore him so that he accepted the advice of his wife and other friends to erect an absurdly high stake in his garden on which to have Mordecai impaled the following day so he could enjoy the next banquet with the king

27. As is also true of the Philistine leaders in Judges 16:25 who also experience a dramatic reversal of fortunes.

28. See Frederic Bush, *Ruth / Esther* (Dallas: Word, 1996), 407.



and queen (5:14). But although Haman stayed up all night and then arrived at the palace at an unconscionably early hour the next day, he could not know that this would be the night on which the king's sleep fled from him (6:1), and that having decided to have the chronicles of the kingdom read to him,<sup>29</sup> he discovered that Mordecai should earlier have been rewarded for his part in preventing an assassination attempt on him (6:2–3). It is this that triggers the comic encounter between the king and Haman that leads to Haman having to honour Mordecai for the king (6:10–11). More explicitly, on his return to his wife Zeresh, she feigns surprise that Mordecai was Jewish before declaring therefore that Haman's fall before him was inevitable (6:13). Zeresh's speech, though at one level ignorant of Hannah's Song, thus points straight back to it. A theological interpretation of Haman's fall, which is complete the following day when he is impaled on the stake he erected for Mordecai (7:10), is thus provided in advance. Zeresh can see this only as something inscrutable about the Jews of the empire, but by situating the story within the traditions of Samuel, the narrative fills that out to point to Yahweh's concern for the weak. The reversal of fortunes motif becomes important for the narrative of Esther as a whole, but the key point is that these intertextual allusions point to God as the one who acts. We are not told this directly because the use of external focalisation holds it back, asking us as readers to explore further what is meant by these events, but at the same time we are guided to these intertexts as the points where this exploration needs to take place.

*Focalisation and Intertextuality: Haman the Agagite*

Our second example of external focalisation is also enlightened by reference to Samuel. In his introduction we are told that Haman is an Agagite, a title that refers directly to Agag the Amalekite king that Saul failed to destroy as directed by Yahweh (1 Sam 15). Evidence for this comes from the fact that the personal name Agag definitely occurs seven times in 1 Samuel 15, but not elsewhere unless we are to interpret it that way in Numbers 24:7. However, the textual difficulties there suggest either a gloss from a later reader or a corruption of the name,<sup>30</sup> but on either of these alternatives the current text in Numbers exists in response to the text in Samuel and not the other way around. As such, the link for Haman, who is called an 'Agagite' five times (3:1, 10, 8:3, 8:5, 9:24) must be to 1 Samuel 15. But when introducing Mordecai his genealogy (Esther 2:6) is deliberately linked to that of Saul (1 Samuel 9:1). Thus, we are brought face to face to the point of Saul's failure, though of course the account in 1 Samuel 15 has its own intertextual links to Exodus 17:8–15, with Yahweh's perpetual enmity towards Amalek declared following

29. In passing, it is worth noting that this is another example of external focalisation as we do not know why Ahasuerus asked for them to be read. It could be that he hoped that a droning voice reading what was an undoubtedly very boring text would put him to sleep, but although this is highly probable we are simply not told, and in any case that sleep had fled from him (rather than the prosaic 'could not sleep' of NIV) suggests he was not going to get any sleep anyway.

30. LXX has 'Gog'. See Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 492–93.

their attack on Israel on the way to Sinai. We are thus introduced through intertextuality to a conflict that remained at the core of Israel's identity, but one that is of particular importance for subsequent narratives in Samuel where Amalekites are invariably a problem (e.g., 2 Samuel 1:1–16). Thus, although Jews typically have no problem in offering homage where it is due, we are offered an insight into both Mordecai's refusal to bow and Haman's seemingly excessive response, matters that the use of external focalisation otherwise seemed to leave unresolved. Faithfulness to Yahweh is at the heart of Mordecai's otherwise truculent attitude whereas Haman simply represents the typical actions of Israel's enemies. But given that Amalek stands under the ban relative to Israel, we are already given a hint of the outcome because where Yahweh's faithfulness is challenged it must be vindicated. But again, although this is theologically at the heart of the narrative, the use of external focalisation holds it back.

What is striking is that this allusion also leads us to the reversal of fortunes motif in Samuel. For Saul, it was his failure to destroy Agag and the best of the Amalekite spoil that saw his final rejection for David even if that rejection took some time to work itself out. Saul there took on an adversary from a position of power and then fell. But in Esther, it is initially Mordecai, the Jew aligned to Saul, who operates from the position of weakness, and it is Haman who is powerful. But this story is one where the Agagite falls and if it is not an exact reversal of 1 Samuel 15, then it still serves to point to the reversal of fortunes. Indeed, within Esther, the title 'Agagite' is used twice of Haman when he rose to power (3:1, 10) and twice when he has fallen and is replaced by Mordecai (8:3, 5), with only one other reference in the summary account of 9:24 which also points to the reversal of fortunes. Hence, in spite of Saul's failure, Yahweh's declared enmity against Amalek (Ex 17:16) will see them defeated. External focalisation means these points are not declared, but the use of intertexts points readers to ponder the theology behind these events.

### *Focalisation and Intertextuality: Mordecai's Rise*

One more example should be offered since it does not appear in the standard commentaries, but is of particular importance for our theme. In Esther 8:2 we are told that after Esther had introduced Mordecai to Ahasuerus, he was set over Haman's house, formally completing their individual reversal of fortunes. But before this, Mordecai had clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes (אָפֶן Esther 4:1–2), in contrast to Haman who had been advanced above the other princes (or 'officials' שָׂרֵי) in 3:1, and who apparently felt it necessary to report this fact once again to his wife and friends in 5:11. Moreover, when advising the king on how to honour someone Haman had insisted that one of the king's 'most noble princes' (6:9) should go before the honouree announcing that 'This is what the king does for the man he delights to honour'. Although Esther clearly recognises many 'princes' in the realm,<sup>31</sup> Haman is clearly the most outstanding. Mordecai's position, by

31. Cf. Esther 1:3(x2), 11, 14, 16 (x2), 18, 21, 2:18, 9:3.

contrast, is comparatively low, even if he might be understood as a minor palace official, but after Haman's decree for the annihilation of the Jews (3:12–15) he adopted the lowest position when he clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes. His change from this position is gradual as he is first re-clothed by Haman as part of the requirements of his public honouring (6:10–11) until he emerges in royal robes after issuing his counter-decree to Haman (8:15). All of this can be understood within the narrative world of Esther on its own, fulfilling its own narrative arc of the reversal of fortunes so that Mordecai moves from sackcloth to royal robes, from ashes to the seat of the most elevated prince of the empire. But in light of the other allusions to Hannah's Song we are challenged to read this experience in light of it too, though on Hays' scale this is a thematic echo rather than a point of close verbal reference. In 1 Samuel 2:7–8, Hannah had specifically celebrated the fact that Yahweh not only brings low and exalts, he also raises the poor from the ash heap and seats them with princes. In English, at least, this looks like an exact match to Mordecai's situation since the fact that the weak are given a seat of honour (כבוד) matches Haman's self-description in 5:11. The specific language both for the princes (נריב) and the ash heap (אשפה) is, however, different. Nevertheless, although the language is more distant, the intertextual allusion is precise in that Mordecai's experience is indeed one where the poor are exalted and made rich while the powerful are brought down. The volume of this intertextual echo is not as strong, but the narrative world of Esther still points us to Hannah's Song as the mechanism for interpreting this reversal of fortunes, and in particular of pointing to a theological interpretation of it. Hence, even though we do not actually know why the king promoted Mordecai as he did (another example of external focalisation), we are provided with an intertextual reference that points to the underlying theology – it is Yahweh who has acted because this is how Yahweh acts, even if in practice we usually realise it only with hindsight.

## Conclusion

Thus, narrative method and intertextuality combine to point to a central theological theme within the book of Esther. It not only tells of a reversal of the Jews' fortunes, it does so in a way that alludes to other texts (and for our purposes Samuel in particular) that reveals its theological concerns. Esther presumes an informed readership, people who are able to note key terms and themes, but at the same time tells its story in a way that even those who do not recognise them all can still appreciate God's actions through the holes it leaves in the narrative, such as the king's sleepless night in 6:1. But for those who attend to its narrative artistry, it employs a sophisticated range of techniques that allow its theological concerns to become gradually manifest. In particular its preference for external focalisation while hinting that there is more to be told pushes informed readers to appreciate the tradition in which it places itself and thus the interpretation required of the narrative through intertextuality. The need to read Esther theologically is thus not simply a matter of faithfulness to its place in the canon. It is something required

by the way the story is told, both through what it says and (more particularly in this case) through what it does not say; for even in what Esther does not say, the author is communicating with a wink to the informed amongst its readership. Hence, amongst other intertexts, Esther looks across the banquet table to Samuel's theology of the reversal of fortunes and says, 'I'll have what they're having.'

## *God's White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 32*

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### **Introduction**

Fording his family across the river in two companies, Jacob remains on the other side of the Jabbok. Here, he becomes locked in conflict with a mysterious attacker till daybreak, at which point the stranger “sees” he does not prevail over Jacob. After an entire night of grueling physical combat, he suddenly exhibits divine power and prerogative in wounding and then blessing Jacob. This development is as enigmatic as it is astounding. What can it mean for an apparently divine being to “see that he did not prevail” over a mere mortal? Could a mere mortal have pinned the Almighty, or subdued him through unexpected tenacity?

The fact that biblical texts unapologetically describe divinity in such language creates an exegetical quandary. As Kenneth Matthews succinctly summarizes,

Much ancient Jewish and Christian speculation arose from this fascinating encounter of Jacob and the “man.” Targumic and rabbinic interpretations identified his assailant as an angel in the appearance of a man, not a theophany, and sometimes recognized the angel by name (Michael and Sariel). That a man could wrestle and prevail over God created a theological tension in Jewish interpretation, resulting in the substitute of an angel (e.g. *Gen. Rab.* 78.1). Philo’s allegorical reading transformed the wrestling’s meaning into the human soul that prevails over the human passions and wickedness (*Leg.* 3.58.190). Augustine’s *City of God* (16:39) represented the popular interpretation that the angel was a type of Christ. The blessing bestowed on Jacob was meant for his descendants, who would believe in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As can be seen, interpreters typically lean toward one of two approaches. As with the Targumic and rabbinic sources, texts are sometimes reinterpreted to exempt the divine from such base implications. We also find this tendency in more modern

1. Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2005), 560.

commentators such as Gunkel, who sees in the mysterious wrestler analogies to semi-divine beings in the ANE.<sup>2</sup>

A second approach, similar to Philo, is to dismiss these anthropomorphic assertions as “poetic flourish” – as language which either cannot make, or is not intended to make, truth-conditional statements regarding the deity. Rather, this language is used for “heightened emotional impact” or occasionally to give human worshipers access to a transcendent deity by making him appear “personal.” Or, they represent something else entirely. In Philo’s case, the wrestling match is re-interpreted wholesale as speaking not of the divine, but merely the engagement between the human and itself. One modern commentator, Thomas L. Brodie, extends this existential wrestling match to include the divine and demonic, “The one with whom one wrestles is human – to some degree it is oneself – but it involves aspects of both the divine and demonic, for within the human there is both the original divine blessing and also demonic deviation, beginning with a desire to be a god.”<sup>3</sup> Hence the episode becomes a metaphor for an internal struggle.

In this essay, we shall briefly examine these two approaches, before suggesting a third alternative based on the approach to metaphors advocated by linguistic philosopher Josef Stern. Hence, we will begin by looking at the identity of Jacob’s attacker, to determine if this is indeed a divine metaphor. We then examine the sense in which this character “sees,” in order to further refine the nature of the metaphorical ascription, and finally, we turn to the object of this sight to illuminate the function of this verb within the narrative. As Stern’s program involves determining metaphorical meaning by virtue of the context in which a metaphor is used, these three areas of discussion will also serve to provide an example of his approach. Finally, we examine the implications of this theory on the exegesis of the above mentioned passage from Genesis 32.

## A ‘Dodge-y’ Character: Identity of Jacob’s Opponent

There have been several suggestions as to the identity of the “man” Jacob wrestles. The attacker is undoubtedly quite strong, as Fokkelman observes, “The fight is long and violent. Characteristic of his enormous commitment, Jacob cannot be overcome. But the adversary must be a doughty fighter, if we remember the force Jacob was able to muster in 29.1–14! [by removing a large stone from a well].”<sup>4</sup> However, he displays more than human strength, for he injures<sup>5</sup> Jacob’s

2. Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (trans. M. E. Biddle; MLBS; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 349, 352; cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36* (trans. John J. Scullion; London: SPCK, 1981), 516–17; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; London: SCM: 1972), 321.

3. Thomas L. Brodie, *Genesis as Dialogue: A Literary, Historical and Theological Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 332.

4. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 214.

5. Jerome A. Lund, “On the Interpretation of the Palestinian Targumic Reading of *WQHHT*

hip merely by 'touching' (נגע)<sup>6</sup> it, and consequently, Gunkel, Westermann and von Rad see indications that he is a "river demon." Westermann finds a parallel with Exod. 4:24–26 where Yahweh attacks (lit. "sought to kill") Moses, but, "The magical encounter shows that in [Ex. 4:24–26] also the attacker is a demon. The two texts are very alike. The lethal attack precedes a dangerous meeting in both cases (Ex. 4, a meeting with Pharaoh)."<sup>7</sup> This interpretation seems to follow other parallels in ancient literature,<sup>8</sup> and reflects a reluctance to ascribe divinity to Jacob's attacker because of the very focus of our examination: the attacker "sees" that he does not prevail over Jacob, and later requests to be released.<sup>9</sup> A deity should have no problem overpowering a mere mortal.

However, we find his solution to be a bit strained for several reasons. First, the proposed demon is supposed to be "the embodiment of the danger involved in crossing the river,"<sup>10</sup> but by all accounts, Jacob has crossed the river at least twice before meeting him (vv. 23–24).<sup>11</sup> Second, Westermann's appeal is based partially on a desire to absolve the deity from the appearance of weakness. "The attacker's request to let him go is prepared by and follows on v. 26a. It shows that the demon is one who is powerful only by night and loses his strength with the breaking of day."<sup>12</sup> However, this answer is insufficient for, it is purely speculative that a demon would have had any trouble subduing Jacob, at least during the night. Also, as von Rad himself admits, "the request to Jacob to be released is now poorly motivated, since Jacob is, after all, crippled."<sup>13</sup>

Rather, it is this request that demonstrates the full measure of Jacob's commitment. Even having been wounded, he will not release his opponent. Other

in Gen 32:25," *JBL* 105 (1986): 99–103, finds "numb" to be the preferred translation of the versions.

6. Westermann notes, "But נגע cannot mean 'strike.' [ . . . ] One can speak of some sort of magical touch here which has its aftereffect in v. 32b" (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517). It is not clear whether the "man" "touched" or "struck" Jacob's thigh. As Hamilton observes, "[נגע] is often 'touch' (cf. Gen. 3:3), though in Job 1:19, the wind 'flattens' [נגע] a house (cf. also Josh. 9:19 and 1 Sam. 6:9). However, for supernatural beings touching a mortal, see Isa. 6:7. He actually makes a case for the thigh actually being Jacob's scrotum (cf. Exod. 1:5; Deut. 25:11–12). However, this view does not seem to fit with Jacob's permanent injury and the resulting cultic abstinence regarding the thigh sinew. For discussion, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 330–31.

7. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 516.

8. For example, Westermann says, "Jupiter says in the *Amphitryon* of Plautus, 532f.: *Cur me tenes? Tempus est: exire ex urbe priusquam lucescat volo* (Why do you hold me? It is time: I want to leave the city before daybreak)." Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517.

9. Most commentators nearly universally see the assailant not wanting Jacob to see the face of God, which is deadly for humans (Exod. 33:20). Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1994), 296; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 332.

10. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 516.

11. Jacob escorts his family across, leading the way, and then doubles back to camp alone on the northern side of the Jabbok.

12. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517.

13. von Rad, *Genesis*, 321.



commentators suggest a more plausible reason for the attacker's demand for release: to keep his identity hidden after daybreak.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, in the parallel Westermann finds in Exod. 4:24–26, the attacker is clearly presented as Yahweh, though Westermann attempts to replace him in the “original” story with yet another demonic being. Although the magical nature of the encounter promotes a supernatural identity for these “attackers,” there seems no compelling reason to find in them the demonic. This is especially true in light of the blessing rendered to Jacob in Gen. 32:28. Here, the attacker changes Jacob's name from one that means “deceiver” to one whose explanation he gives as, “For you have striven with God (לֵא) and men and have prevailed.” As Jacob's opponent is clearly supernatural, and God is the only such being mentioned, the attacker is evidently referring to himself as God (לֵא).<sup>15</sup> In the Exodus passage, the attacker's issue is with the sign of the covenant (circumcision) made by Abraham with God (אֱלֹהִים; Gen. 17:9–10). Again, this is an unlikely concern for a lawless creature like a demon.<sup>16</sup> Although Westermann finds “Jacob's question about the name in v. 30 would make no sense if he knew that his opponent was God,”<sup>17</sup> there are other occasions in the Bible where a being initially presented as a man turns out to be God (cf. Gen. 18:2, 22, Judg. 6:22; 13:16, 21, 22, John 20:15, 16; Luke 24:16).

Nahum Sarna, following the midrash (Gen. R. 77:2; 78:6; Song R. 3:6), alternatively suggests that Jacob's attacker is, “The celestial patron of Esau.”<sup>18</sup> He finds this solution to mediate between the fact that the “man” who wrestles him apparently possessed a desire similar to Esau, to prevent Jacob's return to the homeland (Canaan) and yet possessed divine qualities. This also plays upon Jacob's later statement to Esau, “I see your face as one sees the face of God, for you have received me favorably” (Gen. 33:10). However, this too seems a bit speculative, as we do not have conclusive evidence that Esau sought to prevent Jacob's return, as he does embrace Jacob quite warmly (Gen. 33:4). Furthermore, Jacob's statement in 33:10 does seem to require that he had indeed seen the face of God in a positive light (at least in the ultimate blessing), to which he then compares his meeting with Esau.<sup>19</sup>

14. For example, Brueggemann says, “Is it because he loses his power when seen or because he must preserve his hiddenness? Perhaps.” Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 267. See also Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 296.

15. Otto Eissfeldt refutes Westermann's river demon theory in part by noting the references to the Canaanite supreme deity “El.” Thus, there would be no need to posit such a being, and the inference, if any, is that this is the high god of the pantheon, not a lower one. Of course, the Hebrew author/redactor would have made a connection between this deity and Yahweh. Otto Eissfeldt, “Non Dimittam Te, Nisi Benedixeris Mihi.” In *Kleine Schriften* (Band 3; eds. R. Sellheim and F. Maass; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1966), 415.

16. “[T]he notion of eliciting and receiving a blessing from a demon is unexampled and inconceivable in a biblical context”: Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 403–4.

17. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 519.

18. Sarna, *Genesis*, 414, note 3.

19. “The reference to the visual act also anticipates 33:10” (Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 336).

Somewhat delayed in his realization, Jacob himself concludes that his attacker was no less than God Himself, for in 32:30 he names the place Peniel (“face of God”) saying, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” Mark Wessner attempts to demonstrate that this simply meant “neither an ordinary man nor God himself, as is often assumed, but rather a messenger acting on behalf of God.”<sup>20</sup> Wessner contends, “The concept of ‘God and man,’ as used in Gen 32:29, is used elsewhere in the OT, with some scholars seeing it as an expression of totality rather than referring to two separate entities (i.e., the identification of אלהים as representative rather than as a distinct individual).”<sup>21</sup> Thus, he implies, Jacob is said to wrestle with everyone and prevail.

However, Wessner’s conclusions seem questionable. He looks to early post-biblical commentary for support while admitting they have biases against anthropomorphic ascriptions of the deity; yet he uses their conclusions to support his own, that the “assailant” was not God but an angel representing Him.<sup>22</sup> Would not the biases in the texts against this language be the reason they interpret the wrestler as other than God Himself? His primary evidence, the fact that the Samaritan Pentateuch does *not* alter this text where one might have expected it to do so, remains an argument from silence. Furthermore, his example to demonstrate that “God” (אלהים) can refer to men (cf. Exod. 7:1) does not cohere with the text under investigation. Exod. 7:1 does not refer to Moses as “God” Himself, but as the role or office of God “to Pharaoh” (נתתיך אלהים לפרעה). This is clearly different than Jacob encountering a man whom he later deems to have been the being called God (not God “to him”).<sup>23</sup> While we acknowledge debate over the use of אלהים in passages such as Ps. 82:6, we note that, unlike Genesis 32, there is clear demonstration that the addresses are *not* divine (cf. Ps. 82:7 “You shall die like men”). In any case, Wessner’s assertions do not take into account Jacob’s own conclusions revealed in his naming of the place, Penuel, as discussed above.

Similarly, the prophet Hosea appears to mediate this interpretation of this being saying, “He [Jacob] wrestled with the *angel* and prevailed” (Hos. 12:4, emphasis mine). However, as Fokkelman notes, “This does not mean that ‘angel of God’ differs from ‘God’ in content, as Hos. 12.3, ending, shows.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, Hos. 12:5[6] unambiguously insists that it was “Yahweh, the God of Hosts, Yahweh is his Name.” Rather, this points to the conflation of the ideas of angels and God, as in many cases, the identity becomes blurred. For example, although Hagar has encountered the “angel of the LORD” (Gen. 16:7), Yahweh is explicitly identified as, *the One who spoke to her* (Gen. 16:13). Thus, at least in this instance, the “angel of the LORD” (מלאך יהוה) was a manifestation of God Himself, speaking *in person*,

20. Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of ‘Face to Face’ (פנים אל פנים) in Genesis 32:23–32,” *RQ* 42 (2000): 176–77.

21. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding,” 174. Wessner refers here to Westermann, *Genesis* 12–36, 518.

22. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding,” 170–77.

23. Note the lack of the ל preposition in Gen. 32:30.

24. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 214, note 13.

not a separate divine being relaying a message. Similarly, Jacob seems to equate the man with whom he wrestled with God (as do others who encounter the “angel of the LORD”; cf. Exod. 3:3, 4, Judg. 6:22–23, Judg. 13:16–22). As Moberly says, the angel is a character “who is virtually indistinguishable from YHWH himself (22:11).”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we conclude that according to the text, and its parallel in Hosea, it was indeed God whom Jacob wrestled, appearing in the guise of a strong (but not invincible) man, and who “saw that he did not prevail [against Jacob].” This conclusion has a couple of implications. We are now faced with a divine being who does not win a physical contest with a human. Establishing the nature of the opponent also has implications for the ultimate result of the encounter – a change in Jacob’s name and character. We will return to this point later. First, however, we look at the nature of “seeing.” In reviewing yet another element of the context, we hope both to evaluate another approach to the dilemma of a non-prevailing God, and at the same time explore the nature of the encounter: was it real, was it a metaphor, and so on.

### Metaphorical Approach: Nature of the ‘Sight’

A second approach to this quandary is to accept the divinity of Jacob’s assailant, but to interpret “seeing that he did not prevail” as “metaphorical,” thereby relegating what is said concerning the deity to the eccentricities of human language, which is inherently anthropocentric, rather than making straightforward assertions about the deity. For example, Calvin suggests that “while he [God] assails us with the one hand, he defends us with the other; yea, inasmuch as he supplies us with more strength to resist than he employs in opposing us, we may truly and properly say, that he fights *against* us with his *left* hand, and *for* us with his *right* hand.”<sup>26</sup> This sort of interpretation reads into the text the fact that God was empowering Jacob to fight and in so doing mollifies the idea that God “saw that he did not prevail.” Instead of a realization of a lack of success, it becomes a pre-conceived and indeed intentional plan in which God works both sides of the struggle. However, as this is not indicated in the text, it remains speculative.

As with Brodie’s approach mentioned earlier, Robert Alter contends that this fight is representative of other struggles in Jacob’s life.

He [Jacob’s attacker] is the embodiment of portentous antagonism in Jacob’s dark night of the soul. He is obviously in some sense a doubling of Esau as adversary, but he is also a doubling of all with whom Jacob has had to contend, and he may equally well be an externalization of all that Jacob has to wrestle with within himself. A powerful physical metaphor is

25. R. W. L. Moberly, *Genesis 12–50* (Old Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 20.

26. John Calvin, *Genesis* (trans. John King; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 196.

intimated by the story of wrestling: Jacob, whose name can be construed as “he who acts crookedly,” is bent, permanently lamed, by his nameless adversary in order to be made straight before his reunion with Esau.<sup>27</sup>

As this shows, Alter adeptly discerns the irony and deeper themes running throughout the Jacob narratives, but his focus says little about what this meant for God himself in the passage, who is at least an equal partner in the wrestling match.

These approaches tend to view the claim that God “saw that he did not prevail” as a metaphorical, rather than literal statement, and hence one that does not make assertions about an actual, physical wrestling match with the deity, but about Jacob’s existential condition or even his analogous struggle with Esau. While such approaches can reveal important connotations and literary allusions within a text, they often employ an inadequate view of figurative language as a medium for making assertions about the deity. They imply that figurative statements cannot be used to express assertions that can then be judged to be true or false (truth-conditional). Hence, they end up finding a different meaning altogether for the expression.

### *Josef Stern’s Approach to Metaphors*

Josef Stern deals with figurative language somewhat differently. Key to his understanding of metaphor is the fact that “strictly speaking, there are no literal or metaphorical *expressions* per se (except as terms of art); there are only literal and metaphorical *interpretations* of expressions.”<sup>28</sup> Because the usage of an expression is what makes it metaphorical, Stern characterizes metaphor as “a special kind of context-dependent expression, an expression whose character is sensitive to its context set of presuppositions.”<sup>29</sup> For example, if we take the predication “is the sun,” we can find a literal interpretation such as, “The closest star to the earth is the sun” based on the contextual understandings of the situation in which it is uttered or written, such as an astronomy text. The statement, “Juliet is the sun,” is determined to be metaphorical only because we know from Shakespeare’s context that Romeo is referring to his beloved and not a cosmic ball of burning gas (as opposed to a particular star which might have happened to be named “Juliet”).<sup>30</sup>

If metaphorical meaning is context-dependent, we must determine whether there is some semantic incongruence from the way that terms, such as our case in point of “sight,” are applied to God. On what basis is “sight” considered anomalous when applied to God? For instance, “seeing” or “walking” are not considered anthropomorphic metaphors when used of dogs, because they are normal ascriptions of that activity for dogs, despite the fact that they use four legs instead of two and display different patterns of walking. In other words, “walking,” and likewise “seeing,” are not *essentially* human. This is what Janet Soskice calls “linguistic

27. Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 181, note 27.

28. Josef Stern, *Metaphor in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000), 307.

29. Stern, *Metaphor*, 308.

30. See this example used throughout Stern, *Metaphor*.

analogy” which “concerns stretched usages, not figurative ones.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, an analogy is simply a straightforward usage of a term, though originally used for another category – such as “riding bicycles” derived from “riding horses.”<sup>32</sup> The point here is that human actions are not necessarily inappropriate, and thus non-literal, simply because they are used of God. They may point to activities or traits that can be ascribed to both the human and divine, despite the different manner in which each is enacted or held for each type of being. Rather, the idea of biblical anthropomorphisms arises from the assumption that a predicate such as “seeing” or “walking” would be incongruous with the nature of a non-corporeal being. And yet in our present case, God has manifested himself in a distinctly corporeal way.

Such a statement would not necessarily have any bearing on God’s being “as he is in himself.” That is, just because in this particular theophany he may have physically and literally seen in this way, it does not then mean that God must always or only does so in this manner. On the other hand, it is important to remember that when he reveals himself in a particular way (as he does in this theophany) it does not mean the limited power he reveals is not real or significant.<sup>33</sup> His infinite nature does not, and by definition cannot, prevent him from choosing physically to “see” at that moment. This is much the same argument as used to discuss the incarnation of God in Christ. His manifestation as a fully human being neither curtails his transcendence, nor does the latter render his incarnation less than real. Although this is not necessarily part of his true essence,<sup>34</sup> it is crucial for examining what God, in human form, does in the passage. We could therefore take these terms for sight quite literally of the “man” whom God chose to reveal himself.

However, the nature of the subject of such typically physical verbs does not alone make them literal. Even naturally corporeal beings can “see” in a metaphorical sense. This is usually the case when there is no physical way of attributing the concept of these actions to their subject. When we speak in contexts of discussion and learning where there is no physical illumination mentioned, expressions like “seeing the light,” “seeing what you mean” or “seeing through an argument,” do not refer to literal sight as if dependent on light waves and visual organs. In these contexts, we have a metaphorical use of the term “seeing” because one semantic field (physical sight) is being applied to another (cognition). Again, this is context-dependent, for if one is at sea at night looking for the shore, “I see the light” may mean something quite literal as the beacon from the lighthouse comes into view.

This may raise the question: is sight in Genesis 32 not a common metaphor for cognition, and hence could be translated with something like “realized?” Cognitive

31. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 66.

32. Soskice, *Metaphor*, 66.

33. This discussion touches on kenotic theories of God “emptying” himself (cf. Phil. 2:5–11), ultimately beyond the bounds of this paper. Suffice it to say, however, that divine expressions, whether limited or not, are still significant for the meaning of a narrative, whether or not they express God’s full capabilities.

34. Cf. Isa. 31:3; John 4:24.

linguist Eve Sweetser claims such an interpretation would result from what she calls the Mind-as-Body metaphor,<sup>35</sup> whereby abstract thought processes are conceptually viewed in terms of physical ones. Hence, abstract ideas such as “knowing” are interpreted along the conceptual lines of human sight. Thus, our semantic expressions reflect conceptual frameworks with which to grasp these difficult concepts.

However, David Aaron argues this is not conceptual, but semantic. “The word *שמע* means ‘understand,’ just as the word *ראה* sometimes means ‘understand’; These are not instances of metaphor, they are instances of [Wittgenstein’s] wordfield extension. The fact that cognitive processes are associated with the perception of stimuli only speaks to the fact that human beings intuited that epistemologically, sight and hearing are identical to certain cognitive functions.”<sup>36</sup> Aaron’s approach would then view God’s “seeing” as simply another way of saying “thinking.”

The problem with both of these approaches lies in their sense of what a metaphor is and how it functions. For Sweetser, a metaphor is a figure of speech which reflects cognitive frameworks, not assertions of truth with respect to the actual world. Thus, there is nothing asserted about God in this “metaphor,” for it is only a humanly created framework for understanding a divine concept and does not pertain to reality: only human conceptual (mental) grids. Divine knowledge here would be viewed in terms of sight, but this would not indicate that there is any necessary relation between the two. Aaron appears to understand “metaphorical” in the sense of unreal, as opposed to literal, or real. Hence, he denies that references to divine sight are metaphorical. Rather, for him, these terms are simply synonyms for [real] cognition. However, as Stern observes,

Some writers take “literally” to mean “actually,” and then use this assumption to argue that metaphors, not being literally true, are also not (indeed cannot be) actually true [. . .]. [W]hat is “actually” true is simply a proposition that is true in the actual world, namely, the circumstances of the context in which the utterance is performed. Contraries of the actual are the merely possible and the contrafactual [. . .]. The distinction between the metaphorical and the literal, on the other hand, is a distinction between two kinds of interpretations or uses of language, not between kinds of truth, or between the circumstances in which what is said is true or false.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to this misunderstanding of metaphor, Aaron’s default reduction of “seeing” to a cognitive process such as “realizing,” leaves us in the same quandary. If “seeing” equates simply to “knowing,” did God *not know* of Jacob’s resolve beforehand?

Metaphors, rightly understood, are more than mere conceptual frameworks and more than wordfield extensions. They carry different content in different

35. Eve E. Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), 30.

36. David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002), 108.

37. Stern, *Metaphor*, 304.

contexts. For example, although sight is closely related to thought (“I see what you mean”), it can still indicate visual perception<sup>38</sup> preceding and providing the basis for said thought. Both the visual and cognitive realms may be involved. Consider the case of observing an instructor physically demonstrate a new dance move that she has just verbally described. “Seeing” what she meant is both visual and cognitive, but this can only be derived from its context. This contrasts with Sweetser’s cognitive linguistic notion that sight here would only be a case of a solely cognitive framework for understanding mental processes based on the concept of physical sight, not generated by any actual instance of physical seeing. Furthermore, according to Stern’s theory, the metaphor of “sight” draws its content from the particular context – especially that of the consequent naming of Jacob, rather than being a static, generic mental conception applied in all cases.

Hence, the way to approach attributions of what are typically human actions/traits to the divine, as advocated by Stern, is to look at the context in which they are used. By determining the entailments (subject, object, context of use, effects of, etc.) of such terms within their setting, one can then determine both whether or not an expression is being used metaphorically. And if it is, then one can determine the meaning of the metaphor within that particular context. This is not necessarily transferable across all usage of a term as would be the case with Sweetser’s approach to metaphor. In another context, a metaphor for divine sight might mean something significantly different from the case at which we are looking.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Metaphor of Sight in Genesis 32*

How does “sight” function with Jacob’s assailant? It appears to include both physical and mental aspects, and as such, constitutes a significant (actual) action within the unfolding of the plot. God is not said to know of Jacob’s resolve going into the confrontation with him. It is only after wrestling with him that this is mentioned. Something within the contest itself must have precipitated the “seeing.” Perhaps this is seen in the length of the contest, from dusk till dawn, a fact underscored through repetition (vv. 21, 22, 24, 26). The “man” “saw that he did not prevail” by both visually experiencing Jacob’s tenacity as well as cognitively assessing the situation. This then informs his subsequent naming of Jacob. Hence, the plot turns on this revelation. According to Stern, this instance of sight would be metaphorical in its primary sense regarding cognition, yet it retains some of the entailments of physical sight, such as basis for the cognition, but expresses an actual event in the narrative nonetheless.

38. Eve Sweetser suggests that sight and thinking are one and the same: “hearing is connected with the specifically communicative aspects of understanding, rather than with intellection at large. (It would be a novelty for a verb meaning ‘hear’ to develop a usage meaning ‘know’ rather than ‘understand,’ whereas such a usage is common for verbs meaning ‘see’).” Sweetser, *From Etymology*, 43.

39. Cf. Brian Howell, “In the Eyes of God: A Metaphorical Approach to Biblical Anthropomorphic Language,” (PhD Diss., University of Bristol, 2009).



## Object of the Sight

By concluding that the attacker was in fact God, and his seeing as a metaphor which conveys contextually dependent meaning, we are now placed back on the horns, if not of a demon, of the dilemma from which Westermann attempted to escape. Upon “seeing” that he did not prevail, God, almost inconceivably, requests to be released from a human’s hold. Having established the “see-er’s” identity as God, we turn now to the object of the sight to determine the function and meaning of divine sight in this passage.

Some try to downplay any sense of divine defeat. Hamilton separates the verbal phrases in Gen. 32:29, from, “You have struggled with God and man and have prevailed,” to “You have struggled [שרית] with God, and with men you have succeeded [רתוכל].” He says, “Note the chiasm in v. 29b: verb / prepositional phrase // prepositional phrase / verb. The change in sequence possibly reinforces the change of name that has just been disclosed to Jacob.”<sup>40</sup> In this way, he implies that Jacob did not prevail over God. However, this seems to provide inadequate explanation for the earlier statement in 32:25[26] and the parallel passage in Hosea 12:4[5].

One possible solution to the anomaly of having God see his own defeat may be found in the nature of the object God is claimed to have seen. Perhaps these words are not as inappropriate on divine lips as might initially be supposed. The object of the attacker’s sight is set in a *ki* phrase which, in v. 26, indicates a state of affairs – “that he did not prevail against him” (וירא כי לא יכל לו).<sup>41</sup> Despite Jacob’s unusual displays of strength on occasion (Gen. 29:2, 3, 10), God should be infinitely stronger. So what can it mean for God not to have “prevailed” (לא יכל לו)?

### *To Prevail*

Two closely related instances that shed light on the sense of “prevailing” include that of Rachel and Hosea. Just two chapters earlier, Rachel proclaims, “With the wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed (יכל)” (Gen. 30:8). As opposed to Jacob’s combat (אבק, v. 25) with the angel, the sister’s “wrestling” is a different verb (פתל),<sup>42</sup> and is obviously being used figuratively for their struggle, as there was no expressly physical contact between them. However, “to prevail” (יכל) is used in both pericopes, and thus informs both the angel’s lack of, and Rachel’s sense of, victory.

For her, there is a competition with her sister to have the most sons.<sup>43</sup> Oddly, the arrival of her second surrogate child (Naphtali) causes Rachel to proclaim that she has “prevailed,” despite Leah having birthed four sons by this point – all

40. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 334–35.

41. Cf. Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 3:6, 6:2, 5; 29:31.

42. For discussion, see Bruce Waltke and M. O’Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 391, section 25.3a.

43. For Leah, this is ultimately in service of winning Jacob’s favor (Gen. 29:32–34; 30:20). Rachel seems more envious of her sister than desperate for Jacob’s love (Gen. 30:1–2, 8).

naturally.<sup>44</sup> So, this instance of “prevailing,” which lies within the same larger narrative as chapter 32, indicates both nonphysical rivalry, but more importantly, a mere shadow of victory rather than an actual one. Jacob, like Rachel, “prevails” not by an ultimate triumph – by incapacitating or pinning the angel but merely by refusing to be overwhelmed and beaten himself. He may have no chance to win outright, but he will never surrender (cf. Gen. 32:26). Thus God’s “seeing he did not prevail” is less a statement of defeat than an observation of a lack of surrender on Jacob’s part.

Interestingly, though, the prophet Hosea (12:4[5]) casts the event in Genesis 32 slightly differently. Hos. 12:4[5] reads:

“Yes, he wrestled with the angel and prevailed (כָּל); he wept (בִּכָה) and sought his favor (חָנַן). He found him at Bethel and there he spoke with us.”

Here we find Jacob to be prevailing in a positive sense, rather than God “not prevailing.” However, for several reasons this verse demonstrates that “prevailing” does not necessarily imply unilateral, unqualified dominance.<sup>45</sup> First, one seeks favor only from those of higher rank or position than one’s self. Thus, Jacob’s “prevailing” is limited to the contest, and does not apply to his ultimate position *vis à vis* his wrestling partner.

Second, wrestling itself provided a manner of defeating opponents without annihilation.

Joseph Azize, in an in-depth study on wrestling in Ancient Mesopotamia says,

It would seem that wrestling was conducted according to definite rules, and the fact that it was conducted as part of a festival would militate in favor of thinking that victory could be obtained short of utterly crushing the opponent: in fact, there is, as we saw, a theory that one could win by removing the opponent’s belt. It is certain that the Mesopotamian art of wrestling rested upon holds and throws, not punches and kicks. The evidence seems to show continuity in the Mesopotamian tradition, in this respect.<sup>46</sup>

With these insights serving as an analogue to Jacob’s wrestling match, it is likely that the angel did not desire to kill Jacob at all (different to the situation in Exod. 4:24–26). Nor did Jacob necessarily seek to crush the angel. Rather, victory was won in a rule-guided manner and limited to the contest.

This is also evident in that the “man” in chapter 32, upon “seeing that he did not prevail,” supernaturally injures Jacob simply by “touching” him (נגַע). Matthews says, “Jacob’s power over the divine intruder was only apparent, however, for at the

44. At this point in the narrative, that is. Eventually Leah has two more sons and a daughter Dinah, plus the two surrogate children by her maid Zilpah.

45. “And this is just what v. 26a<sup>o</sup> says: the attacker (who alone can be the subject of אָרָב) sees that he cannot overpower him (Jacob). One expects him to yield, but this comes only in v. 27” (Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, 517). A crushed opponent would have had to yield immediately; Jacob’s victory over the angel is not unilateral.

46. Joseph Azize, “Wrestling as a Symbol for Maintaining the Order of Nature in Ancient Mesopotamia.” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 2 (2002): 1–26, esp. 10.

breaking of dawn his life was in jeopardy at any time the 'man' wished to take it. The passive voice of the Hebrew verb, 'was spared' (*niph.*, *wattimmās ʿl*) suggests that Jacob admitted that he lived only because God's grace preserved him.<sup>47</sup> God (אלהים) did not lack power over Jacob.

However, this demonstration of power follows the contest itself. Perhaps in limiting himself to the form of a man,<sup>48</sup> אלהים must have constrained his power for the duration of the wrestling match. In Genesis 32 it is the "man" who sees he does not prevail, and in Hosea 12, it is the "angel" over whom Jacob prevails. These terms may be serving to underscore not a different being, but a different manifestation – one corresponding to Jacob's humanity.<sup>49</sup> It was this over which Jacob prevailed, not ultimately over God in his fullness.

Furthermore, while in Genesis 32 the emphasis is negative (the angel did not prevail), in Hosea it is positive (Jacob did prevail). Yet, the match was at most a draw. These emphases thus point to the differing thrusts of the individual passages. In Hosea, the stress is on the success of Jacob in (initially) pursuing God rather than other nations (Hos. 12:1–6). He is held up as an exemplar for his descendants in that he sought God's blessing to the point of personal injury. In Genesis, however, the emphasis on God's failure to prevail over Jacob, rather than Jacob's success, rules out any thought of the patriarch's dominance. In fact, this could even potentially be construed as the result *desired* by God, as with Abraham's test in Genesis 22. As Fredrick C. Holmgren suggests, "A positive view of Jacob's name change casts a different light on his demand for a blessing (32:26). If he was given the name 'Israel' *because* he was strong over against God and men, then his demand for a blessing should not be seen as a grasping for what did not belong to him. The narrative is affirming that if one is to receive blessing (or is to inherit leadership) then one must be assertive – even against God!"<sup>50</sup> Thus, Jacob's blessing came as a result of his persistence in seeking a blessing from God rather than his strength over God.

Another illuminating instance of "prevailing" is found in Judg. 16:5. This case is revealing, as it involves discovering a weakness in a person in order to exploit it:

"The lords of the Philistines came up to her [Delilah] and said to her, 'Entice him, and see where his great strength *lies* and how we may overpower (כִּלּוֹ) him that we may bind him to afflict him. Then we will each give you eleven hundred *pieces* of silver'."

Ironically, Samson's weakness was not simply bound up in his hair, but in his eye for foreign women and his misplaced trust. Like several other occasions (Jer. 20:7, 10; Obad. 1:7), this passage implies that "overpowering" or "prevailing" can be the

47. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 560–61.

48. Cf. Gen. 32:25 and the use of אִישׁ.

49. Notice a similar case with the Ancient Sumerian tale of Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Enkidu is divinely designed to be the match for the irascible Gilgamesh, and though Gilgamesh bests him, he remains his equal.

50. Fredrick C. Holmgren, "Holding Your Own Against God!: Genesis 32:22–32 (In the Context of Genesis 31–33)," *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 11.

result of a treacherous move rather than a straightforward attack. However, this sort of action is notably absent in Jacob's contest. The one who formerly deceived his way into blessing, and was deceived himself, finally faces his problems head on.

Hence, by looking at the literary context as well as ANE wrestling practices, we have found that "prevailing" does not necessarily mean "vanquishing." Rather, it can refer to a victory of spirit rather than numbers (Rachel) or persistence in seeking (Hos. 12:4–5). It is notable that the connotation of deception is not present, for Jacob's very name and life have been bound up with such behavior. Having stolen a human blessing, and been deceived himself, he found he could no longer win a worthwhile blessing by these means. What God saw when he "saw that he did not prevail," was that Jacob would not give up his pursuit of blessing – he refused to be "overcome." Instead he came to seek God's blessing, and though he did not "force" God into it, he refused to let him out of it. Though he had always been a cheat, he finally played by God's rules in seeking a blessing, and came out a victor. Jacob may not have prevailed *over* God in an ultimate sense, but his single-minded pursuit of blessing has now prevailed *upon* Him.

### The "Sight" Effects

Having determined the meaning of the object of sight, we now turn to its effects upon the narrative. If it was simply "poetic flourish" we would expect to find such a term to be inconsequential to the plot. If, however, the term is pivotal, we must interpret its substance accordingly.

Jacob's hanging on for a blessing is significant as an action in that he, like his grandfather Abraham, went through a test (Genesis 22). However with Jacob the test itself brings about a change in him. As Speiser notes,

The encounter at Penuel was understood as a test of Jacob's fitness for the larger tasks that lay ahead. The results were encouraging. Though he was left alone to wrestle through the night with a mysterious assailant, Jacob did not falter. The effort left its mark – a permanent injury to remind Jacob of what had taken place, and to serve perhaps as a portent of things to come. Significantly enough, Jacob is henceforth a changed person. The man who could be a party to the cruel hoax that was played on his father and brother, and who fought Laban's treachery with crafty schemes of his own, will soon condemn the vengeful deed by Simeon and Levi (xxxiv) by invoking a higher concept of morality (xlix 5–7).<sup>51</sup>

Not only was the test a crucible for forming Jacob, but God's act of acknowledging Jacob's unrelenting pursuit of blessing also informs the very name he now gives his covenant partner. Fokkelman notes insightfully,

That obstinate, proud, grim resistance to God is what he now displays on the banks of the Jabbok – and there it is also . . . knocked down. Liter-

51. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (ABC; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 257.

ally. At the same time, however, it is, as it were, countenanced. It is true, the “man” has, just for a while, shown unambiguously that every human effort pales into insignificance as soon as supernatural, no divine, power manifests itself; but on the other hand he accepts defeat (“you have prevailed”) from that gnarled, irreducible, primeval will of Jacob’s, who does not want to pass under any yoke and who wants to be ruler, not servant. He expresses his appreciation and admiration of this undivided will and commitment. He adorns him with the name “Israel” on the ground of (*kīl*) his recognition of Jacob’s unique nature. The name “God fights” may then mean: God fights with you, because he is forced to by your stubbornness and pride. And also: henceforth God will fight for you, for he appreciates your absolutely sincere and undivided commitment.<sup>52</sup>

It is in God’s “seeing” that he did not prevail – that his resistance would not deter Jacob’s pursuit of his blessing – that he is now able to give him the name “Israel.” According to von Rad,

the ancients did not consider a name as simply sound and smoke. On the contrary, for them the name contained something of the character of the one who bore it. Thus in giving his name, Jacob at the same time had to reveal his whole nature. The name Jacob (at least for the narrative) actually designates its bearer as a cheat (cf. chs. 24.25; 27.36).<sup>53</sup>

Now, however, he has striven with God and men and not cheated, but *prevailed*. Hence, the act of seeing in this passage is integral to the name which Jacob is given, for it serves to establish God as a witness of Jacob’s change in character. If God had simply “known” of this change omnisciently, there would be no need for the wrestling match, no struggle to bring this character out in Jacob occasion to establish his character.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, there would have been no witness to his determination. He could only have been called, “the one whom, if he did struggle with God and men, would likely prevail.” By this act of seeing, God establishes the reality of Jacob’s change in character (his “prevailing” in a straightforward manner) as rooted in (and drawn out by) his own experience. Hence Jacob’s new name – Israel – is grounded in a historical event, established by divine witness, and accompanied by physical proof (or reminder!).

In view of his current journey – to reconcile with the man whose blessing he stole – human blessing is shown to be insufficient for Jacob. He required something more, and was finally willing to chase it at all costs. This commitment changed Jacob, even as his new name reflected. Before wrestling with God, it is emphasized twice that Jacob sent gifts *before him* (פניה; Gen. 32:20–21). Furthermore, he sends

52. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 216–17.

53. von Rad, *Genesis*, 321.

54. This is not to argue that God didn’t know of this event beforehand, but to draw out the significance of God’s engagement with Jacob, both in wrestling and ‘seeing that he did not prevail,’ with respect to the narrative and the etiology of “Israel.”

his family across before him.<sup>55</sup> However, after wrestling God, and receiving the blessing in the form of his new name, Israel, we find him going before his family (33:3). He is now the man who has wrestled with *God* and men and prevailed (32:28).<sup>56</sup> he has nothing to fear.

## Jacob's Sight

It is crucial to the text that Jacob claims to have “seen the face of God,” yet not been destroyed (32:30). This is why he names the place “Penuel.” He has fought with God himself and survived – though not untainted. He seeks a blessing, and receives a name, but has to face his brother to get the full effect: “Permission to be Israel (and not Jacob) depends on wrestling and prevailing. But it also requires meeting the brother.”<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, immediately following the wrestling match, he meets Esau, and says, “your face is as the face of God.” How was this so? Jacob saw the face of God, and expected to die, but did not. Similarly, he expected Esau to kill him (27:41–42), but Esau did not. Seeing God was also the route to blessing, but reconciling with Esau was the only way to put the “deceiver” moniker behind him, to stop running from his past, and truly embrace his future as Israel. Brueggemann notes,

The narrator knows this interrelatedness by the way he has arranged the statements on the motif of *face*: (a) “Afterwards I shall see his *face*. . .” (32:20). (b) “For I have seen God *face to face*, and yet my life is preserved” (32:30). (c) “For truly to see *your face* is like seeing the *face of God*” (33:10). It is hard to identify the players. In the *holy God*, there is something of the *estranged brother*. And in the *forgiving brother*, there is something of the *blessing God*. Jacob has seen the face of God. Now he knows that seeing the face of Esau is like that. We are not told in what ways it is like the face of God. Perhaps in both it is the experience of relief that one does not die. The forgiving face of Esau and the blessing face of God have an affinity. Perhaps it is to meet the dread that can be measured. In both cases, there is a prevailing, but also a crippling. The crippling is not to death. The forgiving is not unqualified.<sup>58</sup>

55. Serge Frolov makes an argument that, the narrator tried to make it clear, without abandoning the laconic mode of discourse, that *two rivers had been crossed*.: cf. Serge Frolov, “The Other Side of the Jabbok: Genesis 32 as a Fiasco of Patriarchy,” *JSTOT* 91 (2000): 47. However, there is no mention of another “stream.” Furthermore, the *hiphil* of עבר can simply mean to “help across” (cf. Num. 32:5; Josh. 4:3,8; 7:7; Ps. 78:13; 2 Sam. 2:8; 19:16, 19, 41). Verse 23[22] simply describes the move of all of Jacob’s family across the ford. Verse 24[23] looks in more detail at his sending the entire family across and his remaining on the other side. This can further be seen after his wrestling match in 32:31 where he again “crosses over” (עבר) at the place he has just named Penuel. He then meets up with his family and rather than using them as a shield, he precedes them to meet Esau.

56. This refers to Jacob’s previous struggles with Esau and Laban, but is now embraced with confidence as he approaches his estranged brother.

57. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 273.

58. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 272–73.

Jacob has seen the face of God and survived, and is now unafraid to meet his brother. Furthermore, the one who formerly stole the blessing, now insists on being the bless-er. Although Esau initially and gracefully declines his gifts, Jacob insists (33:10). This is reminiscent of the tithe which he promised to God if he would bring him back to Canaan safely (28:20–22). Unlike Abraham's gift to Melchizedek after God granted him success in battle (14:20), we never read of Jacob giving a tenth to God, nor do we find out how much he has, just "two companies" (לשני מחנות; Gen. 32:7[8]). However, the detailed listing of the amount he gives to Esau in Gen. 32:13–15 slows down the narrative, emphasizing the gift. Furthermore, Jacob's prayer of deliverance from Esau (32:11) complemented by the subsequent vision of his brother's face "as the face of God" makes it likely that although he did offer it initially as appeasement (32:5), he now offers the gift as a tithe, just as he had promised. Like the face of God, Jacob has now seen Esau's face and lived. His response is one of gratitude, and staying true to his promise of a tithe for safe passage (cf. Gen. 28:20–22).

This marked change in Jacob's character, of course, is a result of his wrestling with God and God's "seeing" Jacob's undeterred passion for his blessing. The "seeing" establishes the reality of Jacob's prevailing, for there was no other witness, and hence his new identity. It is this new identity that is now borne out in his approach to and humility before Esau. Only one who has the confidence of having been seen to prevail over God and men can now face his past actions in a straightforward and nondefensive posture. This is required for his full reconciliation.

## Conclusion

In this narrative, divine sight presents a final conundrum. How can an almighty God "see that he did not prevail" over a mere man? Although Westermann posits a river demon (cf. Gunkel and von Rad), the context of the renaming of Jacob, his blessing, the etiology of Penuel, and allusions to the high god (אל) indicate otherwise.

The problem then shifts to what it might mean for God not to "prevail" and to see this as the case. In examining other biblical uses of this term (יכל), we discovered that it can indicate more a lack of defeat than an outright victory (e.g., Gen. 30:8). However, this still entailed a particular set of circumstances. For God to "see" that he did not prevail, there had to be a contest and an opponent. These elements function not merely to illustrate divine knowledge, but to form Jacob's character. Notably, there was no hint of deception in his "prevailing" here – a marked change from Jacob's earlier struggles with Esau and Laban. Rather than employing sleight of hand and crafty maneuvering, he wrestles face to face (Gen. 32:30), accepting the wound he so feared, and feeling blessed to have survived the fiercest opponent of all – his God.

The changes wrought in Jacob can further be observed in the marching order of his family. Before the match at the Jabbok, Jacob is skulking behind, using his family as a shield, whereas afterwards, he boldly goes on before them, in humility



and confidence, even demonstrating how his family should act towards others as well.<sup>59</sup> Jacob has not abandoned prudence, as he still takes precautions (Gen. 33:2), but he is a changed man, trusting not Esau, but God's protection.

All of this is facilitated by God's recognition of his "prevailing." Jacob, limping away, had obviously neither overpowered God, nor forced his hand. But his indomitable pursuit of blessing now from God, not men, had prevailed upon God. Seeing that no struggle would deter him, God caps off the contest with a final proving blow to Jacob's hip. Unable to continue the fight (or life) as he had previously known it, Jacob's true heart is borne out – he will never let go. It is the depth of Jacob's commitment which God "sees," and in "seeing," God both draws out and confirms this commitment.

In doing so, God established the reality which became Jacob's new name and character. Had God not entered into the fray with Jacob, causing there to be something to see, and duly recognized it, there would be no Israel – one who struggles with God and man and (is "seen" to have) prevailed.<sup>60</sup> The fear Jacob felt toward his brother was now dissipated by the fact that he had encountered God himself standing in his way and had prevailed upon him to give him the blessing he had always sought. What more was there to fear or to lose? Now he could approach Esau boldly, humbling himself before him, and insist on being the blessing God had always seen Jacob to be (cf. Gen. 28:14).

This passage demonstrates that the metaphor of divine sight functions as far more than an aesthetic background or prop to make God seem "personal." It is crucial to both the development of Jacob's character and the lynch pin upon which the greater plot hangs. Here also, we find the aspects of wrestling and naming to shape the metaphor. Within this struggle God, by seeing, rather than confessing a man to be stronger, confirms Jacob's true heart – his unconquerable desire for blessing. Like Genesis 18–19, there is an element of witnessing in the sight, but the naming itself pushes it beyond mere legal connotations. There is a new character being formed here, and it is initiated and confirmed by God's act of seeing.

What we find then is that one is able to draw out the fuller meanings within the text only by wrestling with the tension caused by metaphorical assertions concerning God. Instead of averting the question either by shifting the identity of the divine actor or by re-characterizing the action as existential or "metaphorical" (in the sense of "unreal"), a firm understanding of Stern's metaphor theory enables one to discover the meaning of metaphors by examining them in their context. This often leads us to discover nuances of the expressions and relationships within the text, and ultimately, more of what they claim about God in the narrative.

59. After Jacob bows seven times before Esau, his family follow suit (Gen. 33:2, 6).

60. "The name 'Israel' emphasizes that it was God who initiated the struggle, and the explanation that the 'man' gives emphasizes the outcome. Both are true. There is no other person who could legitimately bear the name 'Israel,' and it is not used of another person in the Old Testament (cf. Matt 1:16)" (Matthews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 559).

## *The Work of the Sabbath: Radicalization of Old Testament Law in Acts 1-4*

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Jesus' relationship to the normative Old Testament thus reflects both continuity and radicalization. His disciples are not yet finished with the structured righteousness of the law and the prophets. Yet this structured righteousness of the Old Testament must always be interpreted and applied in the light of fulfillment in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

So argues David Holwerda in his book *Jesus and Israel*, a study of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in the light of post-Holocaust Christian theology. Holwerda's study, however, is particularly focused on Jesus and, perhaps for this reason, does not address the important passage in Acts 1-4 where it is the anointing of the Spirit that provides the lens to issues of OT and NT continuity. This essay seeks to extend Holwerda's programmatic question "who is Jesus?"<sup>2</sup> (and what is his relationship to the OT?) to ask "who is this Trinitarian God" in the light of Acts 1-4.

In what follows I argue that these early chapters in Acts should be read, among other things, largely within the context of the theology of the Sabbath and festival laws in Deuteronomy 14-16. Such a task, I believe, opens for us a window into the way the early church *experienced, understood, and responded* to the resurrection and the coming of the Spirit.

The scene in Acts 2-4 is easily familiar with its scenes of repentance, baptism, speaking in tongues and prophecy that accompany the experience of a new communal identity and the radical acts of mission and fellowship that arise within that community. NT scholars generally acknowledge that Luke's Pentecost narrative borrows a vision from Joel 2 as well as OT laws of Sabbath and Pentecost – some even citing Deuteronomy 15 or 16. But no one to my knowledge has attempted to read this passage in Acts with careful attention to the literary and theological aspects of Sabbath laws in Deuteronomy 15-16, leaving the passage and the NT

1. David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, UK: Eerdmans; Apollos, 1995), 133.

2. *Ibid.*, 25-26.

theology of Sabbath underdeveloped. I imagine that such a reading would require a full monograph and this essay merely seeks to lay a three part foundation for such a study. It is first necessary to introduce the theological and structural uniqueness of Deuteronomy's presentation of the Torah as it joins the authority in Moses' sermons to Yahweh's speech on the mountain. A second related step is to develop the theological connections between the Sabbath and festival laws in Deut 14–16 as they relate to the fourth commandment (Deut 5:12–15).<sup>3</sup> Only then can we return to Acts 1–4 to reconsider Luke's theology of Sabbath and the Spirit.

## The Arrangement of Laws in Deuteronomy

The combination of historical, parenetic and legal material in Deuteronomy make it a uniquely sophisticated book, especially among the books of the Pentateuch. Having been "rediscovered" in nineteenth century scholarship, study of Deuteronomy's historical and literary features has understandably exploded in countless directions. One very important direction has been in the structure and arrangement of the laws in chapters 12–26, a development which contributes significantly to the argument here.

Taken as a whole, Deuteronomy is presented as a narration of Moses' final sermon as inspired by his experience with God on the mountain (1:6; 5:22; cf. 12:32). The purpose of the sermon is to renew Israel's covenant with Yahweh established at Mt. Horeb (Sinai).<sup>4</sup> In this way, its history gives the didactic framework for teaching future generations (4:14, 40); its laws inscribe Israel's moral and sacrificial obligations to uphold the covenant; and its Decalogue embodies the heart of the history and law (Deut 5:6–21). By design, therefore, Deuteronomy is a carefully blended collection of the law of Yahweh and the words of Moses which gives the whole book the power of divine authority in human speech.<sup>5</sup> Notice that, even from the start, the narrator elevates Moses as the authorized interpreter of God's law:

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness. . . .(1:1)

3. In Roman Catholic and Lutheran divisions of the law, this is the third commandment.

4. This presentation of Moses is typically taken as fictional today with scholars dating Deuteronomy to the 8th century or later. In the process, Moses' central role as the voice of God is lost and with it much of Deuteronomy's literary and rhetorical construction. For a discussion of these issues, see Calum M. Carmichael, "Deuteronomic Laws, Wisdom, and Historical Traditions," *JSS* 12 (1967): 198–206 and Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book Within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), 4–6.

5. Though not all agree. Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1980), for example, argues that the narrator of the book tells the story to trump Moses and set himself up as Israel's chief prophet. For the necessity of seeing Moses' prophetic authority elevated, see Sonnet, *Book*, 27–40 and Ryan O'Dowd, *The Wisdom of Torah: Epistemology in Deuteronomy and the Wisdom Literature* (Forschungen Zur Religion und Literatur Des Alten und Neuen Testaments 225; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 25–44, 59–70.

Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses carefully expounded all this law, saying . . . (1:5)

The law of God, given on the mountain, “out of the midst of fire” (5:22) comes to Israel only by way of the sermons of Moses, his chosen mediator and prophet (cf. 1:3).

Moses’s sermons are even more intricately linked to God’s words on the mountain by way of the *Doppelausdruck* or double legal term, **הַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים**.<sup>6</sup> The first use of this word pair in 4:1–2 broadly indicates all the commands which God has commanded Moses to teach to Israel. The *Doppelausdruck* is then used more specifically in 5:1 and 31 to identify God’s “words” (5:22) in the Decalogue. It is used yet again in 11:32, 12:1 and 26:16 – and *yet nowhere in between* – in order to frame the laws in chapters 12–26.<sup>7</sup>

This careful placement of legal terms around Deuteronomy’s Decalogue and legal code thus yields a distinct relationship between the primary laws and their finer application in chapters 12–26. This relationship between the Decalogue and the rest of the law has been suggested by ancient Rabbis, Philo, and Jewish and Protestant Reformers.<sup>8</sup> More detailed efforts to link the Decalogue to OT laws have been helped along by studies in other ANE legal codes like Codex Hammurabi and The Laws of Eshnunna which both show clear signs of literary and thematic arrangement.<sup>9</sup> Thus while at the surface ancient legal collections initially betray a random arrangement, closer study reveals the likelihood of careful literary crafting which ties foundational laws to specific application. At this level Sabbath theology is most significant.

## The Sabbath Law and Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17

Kaufman cites Fr. W. Schultz in 1859 as the first modern writer to attempt to connect the Decalogue to the laws to the Deuteronomic Code (DC) in chapters 12–26. Kaufman’s own work in 1978 was one of several important studies of that

6. There are actually a number of legal terms and verbs of promulgation that make this relationship stand out. See Georg Braulik, “Die Ausdrücke für ‘Gesetz’ im Buch Deuteronomium,” in *Studien zur Theologie des Deuteronomiums* (IDEM; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1988), 11–38 and Norbert Lohfink, “Die *Huqqim Ūmišpatim* im Buch Deuteronomium und Ihre Neubegrenzung Durch Dtn 12,1,” in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur Deuteronomistischen Literatur 2* (IDEM; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 229–56. I am merely interested in the broad relationship at this point.

7. See O’Dowd, *The Wisdom of Torah: Epistemology in Deuteronomy and the Wisdom Literature*, 59–66.

8. Georg Braulik, “The Sequence of the Laws in Deuteronomy,” in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song* (ed. D.L. Christensen; Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 317 and Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law,” *MAARAV* 1/2 (1978–79): 110–11.

9. See Braulik, “Sequence,” 319 and Calum M. Carmichael, *The Origins of Biblical Law: The Decalogues and the Book of the Covenant* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1992), 17–18.

time that were all tackling this same issue.<sup>10</sup> Another was Calum Carmichael's attempt to show how the minor laws and casuistic formulas (for example, laws on slaves or murder) arose as a literary way of critiquing the Abrahamic history: "What if Jacob's status under Laban *had been* that of a slave? or "What if Esau *had* murdered Jacob?"<sup>11</sup> Reading laws and narratives together in this way explains many so-called "problems" related to the eclectic nature of the laws and the different arrangement of laws in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. They also help confirm the level of sophistication that went into ANE legal codes.

Braulik's research, meanwhile, was closer to Kaufman's, aiming to find meaning in the *sequence* of the laws in chapters 12–26. Using the Catholic divisions of the first four commandments, he suggests the following possible sequential pattern:

*First Commandment: The one temple and the one God of Israel, 12:2–13:19.*

*Second Commandment: Taking the name in vain, 14:1–21.* YWHW's holy people in its ritual difference from the peoples of other gods.

*Third Commandment: Keeping the Sabbath holy, 14:22–16:17.* Cult and brotherhood in sacred rhythm – Israel's gathering together at the three pilgrimage feasts.

*Fourth Commandment: Honoring parents, 16:18–18:22.* Offices in Israel.<sup>12</sup>

The sequential patterns are highly suggestive, but just as highly debated because little of the legal material fits neatly into this paradigm,<sup>13</sup> though Kaufman's answers to this problem deserve more attention.<sup>14</sup> In any case, it may be appropriate here to separate the precise *sequence* from the less controversial observation that the *content* of the laws can be aligned to the commands in the Decalogue. In this case there is a very well recognized affinity between the Sabbath Commandment (5:12–15) and the sets of laws in 14:22–16:17. Connections in this respect go back at least a millennium to Abraham Ibn Ezra.<sup>15</sup> These laws, what Braulik calls Israel's "sacred rhythm," include four parts: (1) the annual and triennial tithes, 14:22–29, (2) the cancellation of debts every seven years, 15:1–11 (3) The release of slaves every seven years, Deut 15:12–18,<sup>16</sup> and (4) prescriptions for the three annual pilgrimage feasts (16:1–17). The relationship between these laws and the Sabbath in Deut 5:12–16 can be seen in a number of parallels:

10. See Kaufman, "Structure," 111–12.

11. Carmichael, *Origins*, 15.

12. Braulik, "Sequence," 321. The other commandments are covered as well.

13. Of course the degree to which to pattern seems to fit is tied to one's willingness to see aesthetic craftsmanship at work. To my mind, the sophistication of a sequential pattern is a style well attested in the ANE and, while closer thematic and linguistic scrutiny reveals the great complexity of the legal material, it does not undo the broader literary framework.

14. Kaufman, "Structure," 122–47.

15. *Ibid.*, 132.

16. The consecration to the firstborn in 15:19–23 contains links to the firstborn, chosen, family provide a link between the release laws and the festival laws that follow. See Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15* (SBLDS; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1992), 109.

- Symbolic rituals of time in ones, threes, and sevens
- Redemption from Egypt as the motive clause
- The themes of being slaves and releasing slaves
- The themes of being sojourners and caring for sojourners
- Rest for land and all classes of people<sup>17</sup>
- Generosity and joy

Today, however, the Sabbath is most commonly reduced to a *ban* on work and its injunction to remember along with its grounding the festival theology have both been displaced or *forgotten*, not least in connection with the Sabbath and Pentecost themes that emerge in Acts 1-4. It is therefore necessary to revisit these laws in more detail and revive the spirit of the Sabbath in Deuteronomy as one of expansion, overwhelming joy, generosity and gratitude which inspired the early church's writing about its experience of Jesus and the Spirit. The following five points outline the laws and draw together their theological significance.

### (1) *Deuteronomy 14:22-29*

This law outlines the annual family tithe and the triennial tithe given to the Levite, the sojourner, the orphan, and the widow. The annual tithe (vv. 22-27) has the ritual effect of offering the first fruits of labor back to God, embedding work in the cultic and religious context of the Sabbath. Meanwhile, the triennial tithe (vv. 28-29) mirrors the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5:12-15 in its expansive list of beneficiaries who share a right to rest and enjoy the fruits of the land. As Mayes rightly notices, this is a sign of the unique humanitarian concerns which pervade all of Deuteronomy's laws.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, both laws share Deuteronomy's spirit of generosity, rejoicing, eating and being satisfied (vv. 26, 29).<sup>19</sup>

### (2) *Deuteronomy 15:1-11*

This law presents a command to release debts in the seventh or Sabbath year. The Sabbath year, which appears differently in its three appearances in the OT seems

17. See Calum M. Carmichael, *The Laws of Deuteronomy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1974), 91-95.

18. *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, London: Eerdmans; Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 246.

19. But cf. Harold V. Bennett, *Injustice Made Legal: Deuteronomic Law and the Plight of Widows, Strangers, and Orphans in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 168-69 who argues that the onus is put on local peasant farmers, serving "the interests of cultic officials in the Yahweh-alone movement. . . ." Bennett's thesis is fascinating, but highly speculative. I cannot begin to address it here except to say that it requires (1) that the historical conditions in his hypothesis occurred in the way and at the time he imagines, (2) that the Deuteronomic code was written at this time, and (3) that it was written by this group of cultic officials whose purpose was to expand their control and oppression of Israelite classes through a highly subversive Mosaic guise. There are too many hypothetical variables to stand up to the rhetoric of genuine idealism and humanitarianism which is largely a consensus among scholars today; one must read against the grain of the text at too many points to get to Bennett's reading. See here David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands?: Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 194-95 for a brief critique of Bennett and bibliography on the issue.

to have developed from Exod 23:10–11 to the Sabbath and Jubilee in Lev 25:1–7 and then to Deuteronomy's application to debts.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the exact historical and social development, we can be certain that they share a common theme of a royal and/or divine “release” whether of land, people or debts. Such releases occurred throughout the ANE for well over a millennium and Israel's particular uniqueness is its repetition of release in the seventh and forty-ninth year (or fiftieth).<sup>21</sup>

Hamilton further suggests that like ANE release laws, the laws in Deuteronomy are less concerned with actual observance than with establishing “some correspondence between social reality and the order that underlies that reality.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed this text emphasizes many times both extreme statements of the real and the ideal alongside the assurance that Yahweh will richly bless you. Two polarities or tensions of this sort are worth pointing out. First, the explanation and motivation for the law rests on two seemingly opposite statements. On the one hand, there is the ideal vision that “[t]here shall be no poor among you” (v. 4a). The reason for this command/claim is to motivate the Israelites to give generously in light of the ideal order that Yahweh maintains in the world: “for Yahweh will surely bless you in the land that Yahweh is giving you as a possession”(v. 4b).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the passage ends with the warning that “[t]he poor will never cease to be in the midst of the land” (v. 11a), returning to an image of social reality. Read in this way, verses 4 and 11 need not be seen as contradictory. The first is a command about people in Israel's immediate midst while the second is a statement about the reality that there will always be people with needs in the “land” – likely a broader geography than the first “among you.” The ambitious vision in verse 4 is thus complemented by the statement of perpetuity of the law in Israel's daily life in verse 11. Second, need and generosity simultaneously provide this same tension between social reality and ideal order. Verse 8 presents two emphatic pairs of verbs: “open . . . generously” and “lend liberally.”<sup>24</sup> The first phrase is repeated in the conclusion in verse 11. The latter phrase, meanwhile, is more difficult to translate, though the suggestion by the NRSV comes close to the spirit of the law: “willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.” The greater the need, the more one should remember Yahweh's blessing and the more one should be open handed and generous. Sabbath memory of God's *ideal* intentions results in social outreach in a *real* world.

20. See Christopher J. H. Wright, “Jubilee, Year of,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1026.

21. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 152–78.

22. *Justice*, 8. But the laws are also a sign of the divinely ordained continuity in the law throughout generations. See Bernard S. Jackson, *Studies in the Semiotics of Biblical Law* (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* Supplement 314; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 146–70.

23. See Hamilton, *Justice*, 56–61 on ideal visions of justice and creation order behind ANE lawcodes.

24. Compare J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (AOTC; Leicester, Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 256, 260 and Hamilton, *Justice*, 13 who says, “the density of commands which use [emphatic] infinitives is without parallel elsewhere in Deuteronomy.”



**(3) Deuteronomy 15:12-18**

This law requires slaves or hired workers to be freed in the seventh year, similar to the release in Exod 21:1-11 and the more extended Jubilee laws in Lev 25:1-43.<sup>25</sup> The Jubilee, or *yobel*, is a word possibly derived from flowing water. It envisions the “release” (Heb וְרָדַף; Gk ἄφεσις) (Lev 25:10; Is 61:1) corresponding to the “extending of freedom” שְׁלַח הַפְּשִׁי in Deut 15:12, 13, and 18. The version of this law in Deuteronomy contributes three insights to our understanding of the Sabbath. First, the law again uses emphatic language to encourage generous provision for the departing worker. Just as the generosity encouraged in the debt release law (vv. 8-11), this law envisions open handed giving:

You shall surely adorn him with gifts from your flock and your threshing floor and your wine press. Just as Yahweh your God has blessed you, so you shall give to him. (v. 14)

Notice here the recurring Sabbath pattern of divine imitation (future blessing) as the motivation and basis for human generosity.<sup>26</sup> But second, just as in the Decalogue Sabbath law (5:12-15), this law appeals to past redemption from Egypt as an additional motivation for generosity (v. 15). Furthermore, the blessing of the freed worker is in generous proportions; “adorning” the slave with all the needs of eating, celebrating and starting a business is an extravagant act. Wine and grain in and of themselves are foods that symbolize safe land and surplus of wealth and reinforce the generous spirit throughout.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the law ends with an unexpected situation that echoes the vision of ideal world order in verses 1-11.<sup>28</sup> In this case the worker now becomes the judge of ideal order in that, given the possibility that he might want to remain with the master after the release, he decides it is better than freedom. And why? Because “he loves you and his house is well off because of you” (v. 16b). In other words, the abundant love of Yahweh, remembered by the slave-holder and extended to the slave, results in a rebounding of excessive love from the needy Israelite.

**(4) Deuteronomy 16:1-17**

Whereas Leviticus refers to all seven annual feasts, Deuteronomy only gives the laws for the three pilgrimage feasts held in Jerusalem: Passover, Weeks and Booths. One of the likely reasons for this, suggested by Wright, is that while the

25. No doubt more than one slave law applied and the Torah probably envisioned both a six-year term limit for a slave and a seventh year national Sabbath release for all slaves. There might even have been another calculation for the year of Jubilee. For a fuller treatment of these laws see Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Exeter; Grand Rapids: Paternoster; Eerdmans, 1990), 249-59.

26. It is significant that, in the face of masses of oppressed workers after the exile, Nehemiah demands that they be sent back to their land with a similar list of provisions (5:11).

27. See Leon R. Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1999), 121-26.

28. See Hamilton, *Justice*, 20-21.

earlier laws in Exodus are focussed on redemption of family land and rights, the pilgrimage festivals are a reminder that Israel itself is a family who belongs to God as his “firstborn” child redeemed from Egypt (Exod 4:22).<sup>29</sup> In this light, Braulik too observes that the community gathering is the ideal place of nationally experienced joy – each person’s joy in part results from the joy of others and in fact the joy given to these others.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, as in Deuteronomy 5 and 15, redemption from Egypt continues to play a motivating role in the festival laws (16:12). Sonnet rightly associates the ideal festival gathering in Jerusalem as an ever new “Horeb-like experience” which actualizes Israel’s memory of God’s theophany before Moses.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps most significant of all, the summary law in 16:16 rehearses all three festival laws and demands that “no one shall appear before Yahweh empty-handed.” The final word here  $\text{רֵקֵם}$  is also used in 15:13 where the slave released is not to be set free “empty handed.” Similar phrasing occurs in both Acts 2:45 and 4:35, thematic parallels we revisit below.

### (5) *Joy in the Laws of Deuteronomy 14–16*

In 16:1–17 the Sabbath is again reinforced by the repetition of the term “seven” or “seventh” a symbolic seven times, uniting the section to chapters 14 and 15 and to the theology of Sabbath as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Braulik picks up on the conspicuous fact that only Deuteronomy’s festival laws are associated with “joy.”<sup>33</sup> Carmichael’s work, too, more than confirms Deuteronomy’s unique character as an “expansive” book characterized by its “eloquence” and its legal “largesse” in application to society.<sup>34</sup> Most scholars account for this unique spirit by assigning Deuteronomy to Josiah’s legal reform in the seventh century.<sup>35</sup> There is no need to dispute dating here so long as two points are not lost. First, the original dramatic and rhetorical force of Deuteronomy was an urgent sermon from Moses meant to remember redemption from Egypt on the verge of entering the promised land – between the salvation in the past and the blessing in the future.<sup>36</sup> And second, the reconstruction of Josiah’s reform is still hypothetical as far as its historical connection to Deuteronomy is concerned, and in no way eliminates the possibility that joy and festive celebration occurred much earlier in Israel’s history.

All that said, Braulik is certainly correct that “In the book of Deuteronomy,

29. *People*, 86–89, 99–103.

30. Georg Braulik, “The Joy of the Feast,” in *The Theology of Deuteronomy* (idem; Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1994), 52.

31. *Book*, 142.

32. See McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 270.

33. See Braulik, “Joy of the Feast,” 59.

34. *Laws*, 34–35, 55–56.

35. See Braulik, “Joy of the Feast,” 29–34 and Georg Braulik, “Commemoration of Passion and Feast of Joy,” trans. Ulrika Lindblad, in *The Theology of Deuteronomy* (idem; Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1994), 68–71.

36. See Sonnet, *Book*, 27–40 and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 198–201.

cultic joy becomes a central part of faith in YHWH.<sup>37</sup> But even more than that, Deuteronomy is distinct in the way it creatively consolidates the seven year release and cancellation of debts together with the festival laws as a singularly expansive view of Sabbath. Not only is it unique in the Pentateuch but, as Hamilton suggests, it also represents a “perpetual quality” in contrast to the “conceivably random event-subject quality of the *misarum* and *andurarum* edicts of the ancient Near East. It is as if to say that these relationships must be given the same sort of regular pattern as the yearly festivals which define the people’s ongoing, perpetual (and perpetuating) relationship with YHWH.”<sup>38</sup> Rhetorically the overall effect is both powerful and captivating: everyone enjoys the rest and celebration of a festival but not necessarily or even likely the release of a benefit fortuitously obtained. Deuteronomy’s Sabbath motivates the reader to make the joy and privilege enjoyed in the festival as desired, as expected and as regular as the practice of giving joy and privilege to those in need – even those we do not know.

Furthermore, when compared to similar laws in Leviticus and Exodus, Deuteronomy’s language, vision, and homiletical delivery appear more “expansive,” idealistic,<sup>39</sup> and urgent by far. This expansive and even eschatological vision – which I will argue is central to the theology of Acts 1-4 – is even more conspicuous when compared to other ANE laws of the time. Scholars widely recognize the extraordinary similarities between the Sabbath and Jubilee laws in the Pentateuch – laws for cancelling debts, and releasing slaves as well as restoring lost land – to the *misarum*, *durarum* and *andurarum* edicts of Mesopotamia. Edicts in Egypt, Persia, Greece, and elsewhere share similar, though less significant parallels with the biblical release laws. Yet the distinctiveness of the Israelite laws among these ancient codes points most clearly to Israel’s unique theology of Sabbath and release. And according to Weinfeld, this chief difference can be found in the way the biblical laws have been “woven into a literary framework and have thereby received a utopic coloring.”<sup>40</sup>

Provocative as it is, the characterization “utopic coloring” is too vague to get at the real memorial significance of the narrative framework of the laws. Here I find more useful Paul Ricoeur’s philosophical study of memory in which he says more directly that the cultural act of narrating a tradition, particularly when reenacted within a festival cycle like Israel’s, “charges” history with unique meaning.<sup>41</sup> Israel’s narrative “coloring,” therefore, is a way of interpreting history in a specifically theological and memorable way. Here at least three unique features of Israel’s theology in the laws stand out: (1) Israel’s redemption from Egypt was the supreme motive for obeying the law, (2) Yahweh’s divine and perpetual declaration of the law was largely independent of a human king, and (3) the liturgical codification of the

37. “Joy of the Feast,” 28.

38. Hamilton, *Justice*, 108.

39. See Carmichael, *Laws*, 34-35.

40. *Social Justice*, 156.

41. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 398-99.

law fixed it as a memorial in Israel's festival calendar. The liturgical codification of law, as Ricoeur notes, gives Israel's history the power to transform the treatment of land and slaves through the memory, reenactment and imitation of God's acts – creation and redemption from Egypt in particular.<sup>42</sup>

Deuteronomy 8 is perhaps the most salient example of Deuteronomy "charging" history with memory of redemption.<sup>43</sup> The chapter uses the memory of God's redemption and provision in the past (8:2) as a warning to "remember" and "not forget" once the Israelites have received the land from Yahweh and "eaten" its food and been "satisfied" (vv. 10–14). Many scholars trace this memory lesson in chapter 8 back to the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, which is certainly a proper association. But I would argue that the verb זָכַר "remember" is rooted more historically and structurally in the verb's first appearance in Deuteronomy, in the Decalogue no less, where the Sabbath law requires rest in remembrance of Israel's redemption from Egypt.

The Sabbath law is in fact of supreme importance in understanding the "Ten Words" and the law as a whole. For one, its position in the Decalogue bridges the "two tablets" between love for God (commands 1–3) and love for society in God's world (commands 5–10). It is also positioned at the head of the festival calendar in Leviticus 23.<sup>44</sup> The principal of Sabbath thus flavors the Decalogue and the whole OT law as a whole with a quality of festival remembrance of creation and redemption. This combination of liturgical, memorial and redemptive material is also what allows the Sabbath law to provide a foundation for the seven year, or Sabbath, release laws in Deuteronomy 15 and the Sabbath and Jubilee laws in Leviticus 25. Such a connection helps us to understand how Deuteronomy's Sabbath motivation to remember redemption with Egypt stands in a complementary relationship to the motivation in Exodus 20 to rest and remember God's work and rest in creation. Weinfeld's research is perhaps the best at bringing this point to light. He observes that the blowing on the horn on the Day of Atonement in the fifty year Sabbath, or Jubilee, occurs on New Year's Day in the Israelite calendar – "which is the anniversary of the creation of the world."<sup>45</sup> When the Sabbath is thus viewed in the context of the of the whole law, we find a framework for Israel's redemptive story and self-understanding where creation, festivals, food and social justice all appear as intertwined threads in this story. It is the Sabbath that has the principal role of holding this story together, both in its literary placement, and in its liturgical role in the community. And, in this way, the weekly Sabbath, which celebrates Yahweh's release of Israel's captivity, results in a corresponding ritual in Israel's calendar to bring release, redemption and joy throughout the land until the new creation is realized.

42. On the connection between the motive clauses and divine imitation, see Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 104–6.

43. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle; London: University of Washington, 1996), 109.

44. See McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 128–29.

45. *Social Justice*, 207.

## A Pentecostal Sabbath Experience in Acts 1-6

All this has put us in a place now to expand our understanding of the theological role of the Sabbath in nurturing the church's encounter with Jesus and the Spirit in Acts 1-4. Such a task raises an endless variety of questions. My own way forward here is to gather these questions into three groups and then attempt to begin to answer them in the analysis below. (1) *Historical*: How did the early church experience Pentecost? Were there several Pentecosts? And did this or these Pentecosts occur in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem? (2) *Theological*: to what degree do the "Sinai tradition" and the Torah provide a basis for Luke-Acts? Is Luke portraying a new giving of the law? Is Jesus the prophet like Moses? Is the curse in Genesis 11 reversed by the miracle of hearing in diverse languages in Acts? What significance do the number 40 and Jerusalem play in Luke's theology? How do the OT texts cited in Acts 1-6 inform the theological vision of Luke-Acts? (3) *Broadly hermeneutical*: What weight do Luke's authorial intention and the historicity of Pentecost play in interpretation? How do divine inspiration and spiritual illumination influence interpretation of these texts? Is it possible to identify a layer of "theological meaning" which stands alongside and remains consistent with the layers of intentionality and historicity? In the brief analysis below, I will seek to attend to these issues in an interpretation of the theology of Sabbath and Pentecost.

### *Second Temple Context*

A good first step is to set these issues in the historical and theological context of the Second Temple period. I have already made frequent reference to the releases edicts proclaimed in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia which go back at least as far to the second millennium B.C.E Israel's biblical release laws share many patterns with these laws and likely emerged over an extended period of time, perhaps ending with the reference to Zedekiah's release in Jeremiah 34 (vv. 8, 15, 17) in the sixth or fifth century B.C.E<sup>46</sup> or else Nehemiah's release in Neh 5. The expectation of releases thus seems to have been sustained throughout Israel's entire First Temple period.

Release edicts continued to be proclaimed throughout the next several centuries. Weinfeld provides an extended list of edicts between the time of Jeremiah to Jesus life and beyond: Dionysius the Younger of Syracuse (367-66 B.C.E), Perseus, King of Macedon (179-78 B.C.E), Ptolemy V Epiphanes (197 B.C.E), Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (118 B.C.E), Nero (54 C.E), Hadrian (117 C.E), Marcus Aurelius (178 C.E), and Caracalla (212 C.E).<sup>47</sup> It is particularly telling that several of these edicts show up in Jewish post-biblical literature. The freedom proclaimed by Demetrius I is recorded in 1 Macc. 10:25-45 and the letter of Demetius II (142 B.C.E) in 1 Macc. 11:30-37. Weinfeld also alerts us to the peculiar fact that while 1 Macc. 13:37-39

46. Whether or not this was intended to enact the Levitical Jubilee is really irrelevant at this point.

47. See *ibid.*, 141-51.

attributes liberation proclaimed by king Demetrius II to the request made by Simon the Hasmonean, Josephus meanwhile gives all the credit for the liberation to Simon (a Jew). Centuries later, Weinfeld notes, "Nachmanides cites Josippon as saying that the Jubilee was proclaimed in the time of the first Hasmonean king."<sup>48</sup> So even though Jubilee had probably never been fully observed, its theological and eschatological hope continued to provide a way to understand these releases as a fulfillment of the law and promises of Israel's God to deliver through a future king.

In his commentary on Luke 4:16–18, to which we will return below, Joel Green observes this same pattern in the Qumran scrolls: "11Q Melchizedek is of particular import for the way it weaves together jubiliary and Sabbath motifs from Leviticus 25; Deut 15:2; Isa 52:7; 61:1–2; Pss 7:8–9; 82:1–2."<sup>49</sup> One must admit of course that most of these edicts were highly politicized and brought little relief to the mass of oppressed classes. But it is just as certain that this political rhetoric and the corresponding hope in a future release kept the liberation edict at the heart of Jewish self-understanding. The Jewish social imaginary was, among other things, structured by a strong expectation of a messianic king who would establish the justice promised in the Sabbath laws.

### *Lukan Context*

Next we consider the passage in Acts 1–4 in the context of Luke's Gospel and specifically in light of Lk 4:16–19:

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (NRSV)

There is little debate that the Jewish culture of the day lived with strong expectations of messianic deliverance, whether divine, human, military or otherwise. The main question here is whether and how these passages in Luke-Acts might speak both out of and back into that cultural context. It is not a simple question and I can only begin to suggest a developing line of inquiry.

We should first want to inquire into the way Luke begins Jesus' public ministry, on the Sabbath no less, with a quotation from Isaiah 61:1–2 that likely draws from Isaiah 58:6 and perhaps Deut 15:1–2 and Lev 25:10–13. How these could have been together in one place on a scroll is an interesting but secondary matter at this point. What is more significant is that Luke uses OT Sabbath and release

48. *Ibid.*, 148–49. Weinfeld also addresses the issue of Jubilee and Sabbath dating which are not important at this point.

49. *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997), 213. Cf. also Luke 13:10–17.

themes to characterize Jesus' first public words. The debate begins here as to how and what we should hear in these OT citations. Joel Green gives perhaps the best synopsis of the often overlooked hermeneutical issues involved.<sup>50</sup> Suffice it to say that much depends on what we believe about Luke and what he intended to say in light of the historical context and the surrounding literary co-text of Luke-Acts. Presuppositions and interests are unavoidable, though some are more warranted than others. I have argued here that there is more than sufficient warrant to read Luke-Acts in the light of the Sabbath and Jubilee release themes in these OT texts.

A second step is to address the implications of Luke's choice of Isaiah's Jubilee imagery as opposed to those in Deut 15, Lev 25 and Psalm 105. The clear advantage of the prophetic passage in Isaiah seems to be that it shows Jesus' awareness that he has been anointed by the Spirit for his ministry.<sup>51</sup> This gives the scene as much the sense OT fulfillment (a critical aim for Luke),<sup>52</sup> as it does the power of an "eschatological epoch of salvation."<sup>53</sup> N.T. Wright further observes that having a prophetic text rather than a legal text suggests that Luke (Jesus) does not intend a real Jubilee – as if going back to the law – but "Jubilee *imagery*." There is, he continues, "the possibility that, although Jesus did not envisage that he would persuade Israel as a whole to keep the Jubilee year, *he expected his followers to live by the Jubilee principle among themselves*. [And to] "live as 'as if' the Jubilee were being enacted."<sup>54</sup>

A final line of study that would have to be taken further is spelling out how this jubilee imagery speaks to Luke's history and Christology. Fitzmyer rightly says that "Luke has a clear awareness that a new era of human history has begun in the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus."<sup>55</sup> And yet, Fitzmyer is among the majority who doubt that there is any royal significance to Christ's identity in the Luke 4 passage. Nolland too, while agreeing that Lev 25 and Deut 15:1-2 are in the background still concludes that "[t]he Lukan Jesus is no social reformer and does not address himself in any fundamental way to the political structure of his world, but he is deeply concerned with the literal, physical needs of men (Acts 10:38), as with their directly spiritual needs."<sup>56</sup>

This avoidance of political readings tends to go along with a strong attraction to Jesus' *moral* teachings and *works of compassion*. Scholars thus often voice concern about readings like Yoder's *Politics of Jesus* which claims, among other things, that Jesus called for "radical political action."<sup>57</sup> Yoder's vision is no doubt politically

50. See *ibid.*, 12-16.

51. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (The Anchor Bible 28-28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981-85), 529.

52. *Ibid.*, 180.

53. Green, *Luke*, 212. Cf. Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 243-44.

54. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 295.

55. *Luke*, 175.

56. *Luke 1-9:20* (Word Biblical Commentary 35A; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 197.

57. *The Politics of Jesus; Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 12.



interested, but so is every hermeneutic in one way or another. Yet Yoder's arguments remain faithful to the co-text and context of the texts in question. Notice how Luke reports Jesus' birth "in the city of David" along with the title *christos kyrios* – the anointed Lord (or King) (2:11).<sup>58</sup> Luke also associates Jesus' anointing by the Spirit in 3:21–22 with the royal imagery of the king's son in Psalm 2.<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere Yoder points to Luke's use of Royal Psalms to accentuate the "confrontation of two social systems" in Luke 19–22<sup>60</sup> – a pattern which continues in Acts 1–4 as we will see below. Here it seems that the burden of proof is clearly against those who would suggest that Jesus as an anointed Lord, or king, of a kingdom has no "fundamental" connection to politics and social reform. But we will have to turn to Luke's second book to see this truth more fully.

### *Sabbath–Jubilee Context*

The final step now is to expand and enrich typical interpretations of Acts 1–4 on the basis of the Sabbath and Jubilee theology studied thus far. The well acknowledged theological linkage between Luke and Acts is obviously essential to this task; Acts is the second part of the Jesus story after the resurrection.<sup>61</sup> In this sense, Acts is a theological history of the early church coming together. The book's scene choices, OT allusions and use of repetition, are at the same time both descriptive of the church and prescriptive for the church.<sup>62</sup> But even as the book gathers people around a common story, it is above all the story of the fulfillment of *God's promises to Israel*. Fitzmyer says, "Though it is not the main purpose of Acts . . . one cannot deny that Luke has a concern to depict Christianity as a logical outgrowth and continuation of Judaism, and especially of the Pharisaic form of it."<sup>63</sup> Fitzmyer understates or perhaps under-describes the way the OT story of God's kingdom and expectation shape Luke's writing, and there are several places where we are able to articulate Luke's development of the Jewish story in more specific ways than he does.

Turning to the first chapter of Acts, we find a very natural transition from the resurrection in Luke 24 to a time when the disciples have gathered in Jerusalem as Jesus instructed them.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, these opening chapters, with the references to the anointing of the Spirit and the 40 days, also link the introductions of the two books. The gospel's scene in the desert prepares Jesus for his ministry

58. See Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 409–10 for issues related to varying manuscripts and translations.

59. Yoder, *Politics*, 30–32. See also Turner's more extended argument that Jesus is both a Mosaic and a Davidic Messiah, *Power from on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 240–44.

60. Pss 110 and 118 in Lk 20:9–18, 41–44. *Politics*, 52–53.

61. See Green, *Luke*, 9.

62. See Haenchen, 136–38 on signs of advanced literary "forms" and culture evident in Luke's writing.

63. *Luke*, 178.

64. See Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009), 32–33 for a more technical analysis on the parallels between Luke 24 and Acts 1–2.

and Act's post-resurrection scene in Jerusalem prepares the church for the sending of the Spirit.<sup>65</sup> The work that Jesus began in his own anointing in his hometown – David's royal city – will now go out to all the nations of the world from Mt. Zion – Israel's royal city. Turner insightfully reconstructs this picture this way: "The location is not determined simply by Joel's promise of the Spirit and salvation 'in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem' (2:32 ESV), nor by a cheap attempt to secure salvation-historical continuity in purely physical terms by having Christianity at least begin in the city of the region from which it departs, but by the fact that it is a salvation that has all along concerned Zion/Jerusalem's restoration, and will spread thence to the nations (1:8)."<sup>66</sup>

Naturally it makes sense for the disciples to ask in Acts 1:6, "Lord, is this the time you are going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" They can see the geographical and theological significance of the moment: "the creator would act again within history, to bring the kingdom fully to birth."<sup>67</sup> But rather than taking them simply or only back to Israel's hopes of renewed national identity, Jesus instead promises the Spirit as the agent who will make Israel the universal blessing they were always meant to be (Acts 1:7–8). If there were still any doubt for Luke's audience, Peter's sermon in Acts 3 completes the picture as it interprets the anointing of the Spirit both in terms of the promise to Abraham and the fathers but also to Jesus who is now the expected prophet like Moses promised in Deuteronomy 18:15. The connection to the developing storyline of hope in the Pentateuch is often overlooked here. Bearing in mind that the Patriarchs are mentioned some fifty times in Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy, we are able to see the giving of the law in Moab as a continuation of the first promises to Israel. Luke introduces Jesus in a way that fills and empowers this long, unfolding narrative by reference to Abraham, Moses and David. And, as we saw above in Deuteronomy, Luke is further charging the church's history with narrative structures to shape the liturgical formation of their memory, now around Jesus.

But the liturgical beginning to Acts is also political: the Creator-King of the Old Testament is acting in an eschatological way. Jamie Grant's study on Luke's use of the Psalms confirms not only the fact that the Psalms are the most cited of OT texts by NT writers, but also that there seems to be an extremely selective use of "Royal Psalms" as the means to interpret and remember Christ's resurrection.<sup>68</sup>

65. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 55, with a few others, sees no significance in the number 40, believing that 40 years, rather than 40 days is the important symbolic pattern to attend to. This opinion seems to be largely out of touch with the Pentateuch and its 40 days of rain in Gen 7:17 and Moses' staying on Mount Horeb and falling on his face to pray for Israel's forgiveness, both for 40 days (Deut 9–10), not to mention Elijah's recovering under a juniper tree for 40 days after facing Jezebel (1 Kgs 19). 40 days and 40 years go hand in hand in the OT.

66. Turner, *Power*, 298.

67. N. T. Wright, *Jesus*, 215. Cf. also Turner, *Power*, 296.

68. "Singing the Cover Versions: Psalms, Reinterpretation and Biblical Theology in Acts 1–4," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25.1 (2007): 27–49.

Here Grant makes use of Herman Gunkel's identification of royal psalms which are based not upon form, but on the content and superscriptions which ground these psalms in the Judean monarchy.<sup>69</sup> For Israel, moreover, these royal psalms carried an eschatological element that pointed Israel forward to a coming Messianic king.<sup>70</sup>

Acts 1–4 alone has five citations from royal psalms. Three of these depict the rule, favor and strength of the king's "right hand": Ps 2 (Acts 4:34–35); Ps 16 (Acts 2:25); Ps 110 (Acts 2:34–35). Ps 118 is used here (4:11) and throughout Luke and Acts to depict the Jewish elite who would reject the Messianic king. Finally Pss 69 and 109 are used in Acts 1:20 in the context of the developing *history* of the anointed king.<sup>71</sup> The fact that Luke portrayed Christ explaining all things about himself from the OT scriptures (Lk 24:27), leads us to believe that Luke's choices in these cases are anything but haphazard; these psalms have been chosen to authenticate the arrival and royal line of the Messiah.<sup>72</sup>

We should thus have good confidence that the early church developed a liturgical tradition which enthroned Jesus as the anointed King and who anointed his church as his emissaries for the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. This is where the vision and power of the Sabbath theology – and the Jewish Torah more broadly – are typically oversimplified or undervalued for their role in understanding Acts 1–4. Notice Pervo's own reluctance on Luke's theology of the Torah and even the whole OT at this point: "Demands that believers keep Torah (e.g., 15:1) are just that. They are not linked to the Abrahamic covenant. . . . Acts does not seek to justify the acceptance of gentiles by appeal to Scripture or other formal norms. The Spirit validated acceptance of gentiles (10:1–11:18)."<sup>73</sup> His statements are presupposed rather than argued, however, and create a false dichotomy. Why is it not possible that the Spirit and the Torah together justify mission to the gentiles?

Turner's study, cited above, provides the nuanced approach this question demands. For one, it offers a helpful review of the controversies in play here. But it also provides a means to retrieve both the prophetic significance of the Spirit and the joy-filled and festival spirit of Israel's legal tradition which is renewed in Acts 1–4. In other words, the overwhelming rhetorical power of Luke's argument arises out of his appeal to the whole of the OT, just as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus with "Moses and all the prophets" (Luke 24:27). In these first three chapters of Acts, then, we are met with the newly resurrected Davidic king (1:6; 2:25–36) and the Prophet like Moses who was promised to Abraham's children (Acts 3:11–26). In his ascension, this Jesus anoints and transforms his church into new "covenant life" and "sonship"<sup>74</sup> to carry out the proclamation and mission of forgiveness and

69. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

70. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

71. See *ibid.*, 39–44 for a fuller explanation of the role of these psalms in context.

72. A point fairly widely accepted today. See Pervo, *Acts*, 74 and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 248–49.

73. *Acts*, 23–24.

74. Turner, *Power*, 35–37.

release of debts. It is this final missional stage for which the Sabbath theology is most significant and in the short space that remains I will point to several signs of its theological role in Acts 2-4.

### *The Significance of Sabbath Theology in Acts 2-4*

First of all, the temporal context of the anointing scene takes place *on the festival day of Pentecost* (Acts 2:1-4; 37-47). Jesus' resurrection appearance in Acts 1 was appropriately on the Sabbath, sometime toward the end of forty days of appearances. As in Deut 16:1-27, the families of Israel are gathered together, or represented, *all in one place*. The festal gathering is a traditional theme that ties Israel to a new redemptive moment in its history. In his study of the Deuteronomic festivals, Braulik points out on the one hand that the festivals are all carried out in the presence of, or for, "Yahweh your God."<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the festivals are a *joy-ful* gathering of the people together before God: "The joint meal and unity with God in joy are indissolubly amalgamated as the apex of the life in 'peace' in the 'land which God allots them as patrimony' (cf. 12:9-10), a life which expresses the presence of salvation. The 'care for others' has found its deepest cause in an extensive koinonia communion."<sup>76</sup> The Hebrew for joy (*smh*) typically appears in the LXX as εὐφραίνω, a root that appears sixteen times in the LXX of Deuteronomy. But it is important to note here that εὐφραίνω is very closely related to ἀγαλλιάω and that the majority of the uses of both word groups are in Luke-Acts,<sup>77</sup> making the connection with the LXX of Deuteronomy all that much stronger. In any case there is no doubt that Deuteronomy and Luke-Acts share the habit of intertwining of food, fellowship, and joy in God's presence in defining a liturgical rhythm.

Furthermore, in this context, the debate about which Jews were present and which languages were spoken is clearly secondary to the fact that *all kinds of people* who lived under the law of Moses were there for the start of a new covenant people. Turner explains: "As the Word of Moses was constitutive for Israel of old, so now the messianic word of the prophet-like-Moses is constitutive for the 'Israel of fulfilment.'"<sup>78</sup> All kinds of people gather around the New Prophet, his new word carried by the apostles, and a new, more powerful salvation-historical event.

Second, the Spirit's power is highlighted as he begins the work of transforming, healing and bringing release – clearly a parallel to Jesus' anointing (by the Spirit) before his reading of Isaiah 61 to carry out these same acts in his ministry (Luke 3:21-2; 4:16-20).<sup>79</sup> In Acts 2 the Spirit's powerful entrance unites the Jewish people

75. "Joy of the Feast," 61-62.

76. Ibid., 62.

77. Bock, *Acts*, 123.

78. *Power*, 311.

79. For a discussion of Luke's various ways of describing filling and baptizing of the Spirit, see I. Howard Marshall, "The Significance of Pentecost," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977): 352-57.

by bringing down the linguistic walls among dispersed Jews. Clearly these tongues acted both as cultural and ethnic means for identity, but also for discrimination. By God's Spirit, Israel is now reunited for the purpose of carrying out its original mission of being a light to the nations.<sup>80</sup>

For now I pass over the climactic scene in 2:42–47 in order to emphasize the ripple effect of the Spirit's work in chapter 2 as it slowly spreads throughout the imagined "world" in Acts. In Acts 3:1–10 we encounter the healing of a blind beggar who happened to be *about forty years old* (it does not seem beyond Luke to use this man as a type or metaphor for Israel – new life is emerging in the presence of the Spirit both for blind individuals and lost nations). Among other places, healings occur elsewhere for a physical need (5:16) and in the case of spiritual possession (16:16–18). In this latter case we encounter all the Jubilee themes of healing, salvation, baptism, release from prison and joy in God's wonders, which serves to unite Paul's work in the Spirit with the Pentecostal work of the Apostles in Acts 1–12. Furthermore, the contrast to the Jews imprisoning the wrong people (as with Jesus), and yet the prisons, like the grave, being unable to hold the apostles from going free again (5:17–20; 16:26–27), adds a clever irony to the early chapters of Acts. The message of Jesus and the work of the Spirit are reversing all the broken and confining structures of the world.

We should also pause here to consider the fact that, while the ἄφεσις word-group in the LXX of Deuteronomy was used to refer to financial and physical release (15:1, 2, 3, 9; 31:10), its use in Luke-Acts refers the release from sins. From this arises the commending tendency to suggest a kind of typologizing in the NT which puts away the physical and national concerns of the Torah for the benefit of a spiritual salvation in the new covenant. But Luke-Acts does not support such a dualistic reading. In what we have seen in Acts 1–5 alone, those physically blind and needy, those in need of forgiveness, and those in real prisons are all given release. Furthermore, in his sermon Peter commands baptism for the forgiveness of sins along with the gifts of the Spirit. The gifts, though not explicitly stated, are happening in the physical-social world all around them.

We turn at last to the two climactic scenes in Acts 2:37–47 and 4:32–37 where these spiritual gifts are perhaps most evident. The first scene is clearly tied to Pentecost, though the date of the second – and its relation to the first – remains in question. Tying these two together is possible if we read them in the context of the Sabbath theology in Deuteronomy 14–16. The Sabbath release of debts and workers required generosity and renewed life, just as did the concern that one not come to the annual festivals empty handed. The point of Deuteronomy joining them together in liturgical patterns was to create a perpetual behavior among the Israelites. The move from Pentecost in Acts 2 to perpetual time in Acts 4–28 does the same thing.

80. See Turner, *Power*, 297–303; James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 153.

Returning to the Pentecost scene (2:27-47), we find a response to Peter's sermon of an ideal community of love in action. Luke is careful to describe the scene with repetition at many points. There is teaching and fellowship, food, prayer, awe and wonder, sharing of possessions and joy. It is highly significant that joy and food are mentioned several times – perhaps even in a chiasmic structure<sup>81</sup> – pointing decisively back to the Feast of Weeks in Deuteronomy. Here, Braulik explains,

This joy is a work of the Holy Spirit which at Pentecost, that is, at the Feast of Weeks, descended on those assembled in Jerusalem. But "in this case, the joy is not only the result of a messianic miracle, it is also . . . a consequence of the stipulation in Deut 16:10-12 to rejoice in the company of one's entire 'house' at the Feast of Weeks."<sup>82</sup>

As in the Torah, and in human culture in general, food here has the unique ability to unite a community liturgically. Anthropologist Margaret Visser observes, "We use eating as a medium for social relationships: satisfaction of the most individual of needs becomes a means of creating community."<sup>83</sup>

The parallel passage in Acts 4:32-37, repeats the same themes of gathering and sharing within the community. But in verse 34 it also adds the clause, "there were no poor among them." The Greek word for poor (ἐνδεδειγμένος) is not found elsewhere in Luke-Acts, but it does appear three times in the LXX of the Deuteronomic Sabbath law (15:4, 7, 11) and in Deuteronomy 24:14 amidst a long collection of laws focused on social justice and generosity (24:10-22). The two appearances in 15:4 and 11 are virtual opposites, "there shall be no poor" and "there will always be poor." Luke seems to have no need to mention the second phrase; the Spirit-led church has radicalized the Sabbath's legal mandate for the seventh year into a perpetual and joyful community motivated by the good news of the Lord Jesus being preached among them. It is important not to overlook the significant connection between joy and generosity here. It is the needy stranger who reminds us most of our own blessedness and in whose presence we find the fullest presence of God among us (cf. Heb 13:2).<sup>84</sup> Raphael Schulte says it beautifully:

Human beings are created in order to see their God (that is, in order to live in a personal dialogue with him), in order to search for his face without ceasing (that is, in order to desire continually to taste the joy of divine friendship) and to live in the festal joy of this love (that is, in God's love for human beings and in human love for God).<sup>85</sup>

81. This was first suggested to me by Syd Hielema.

82. "Joy of the Feast," 65, citing Bo Reike from *Diakone* (1951), 219.

83. Margaret Visser, *The Rituals of Dinner* (Toronto: Harper, 2008), 1. And not just food in general, but food in the practices of festival and ritual.

84. See Kass, *The Hungry Soul: Eating and the Perfecting of Our Nature*, 103.

85. "Zum christlichen Verständnis von Religion und Kult," *TPQ* 115 (1967), 44, cited in Braulik, "Joy of the Feast," 63.

## Conclusion

Clearly this essay has only begun to consider a topic in need of further study. While one may never be able to conclude that Luke, the human writer, had all of this history and theology in mind, neither can we rule it out. Furthermore, the historical and literary connections argued here strongly suggest that Acts 1–4 should be read in light of the Sabbath laws of the OT and their liturgical and political role in framing a national story. The Psalms, the prophets, and the Gospels find their life in this national consciousness as they progressively carry along a promise that will point to a messianic deliverer – a king who will fulfill the legal expectations to bring release, provision of need, and unity among all peoples, all the while empowering his people, by the Spirit, to continue this work perpetually among others.

This study also brings greater clarity to Jesus' proverbial statements on the continuity of the law in Matt 5:13–48. For Jesus, the OT Torah provided a way to understand the work the messianic king would establish in this world. As the symbolism and national divisions of the law pass away, the power of his Spirit brings the shalom of the Sabbath into full realization.



## *Book Reviews*

**Eric A. Seibert.** *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ix-xii + 347 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8006-6344-5. \$22.00. Paperback.

While people of faith typically ignore Old Testament texts that portray God as violent, angry or destructive, in this book Seibert boldly engages these problematic texts. He thinks it is crucial to examine disturbing divine behavior in the OT and develop principles to understand and interpret these texts. He argues convincingly that it is important to think rightly about God because a person's view of God will shape not only their relationship with God, but also their own behavior.

In his introduction (pp. 1-12), Seibert narrates how he became interested in the Old Testament and specifically in the problem of its violent portrayal of God. He explains why he focuses on narrative texts (more familiar, more straightforward) and why it is important to ask questions of the text about its portrayal of God. Seibert begins chapter 1 (pp. 15-34) by listing many of the troubling texts by category and then moves on in chapter 2 (pp. 35-52) to discuss the perspectives of various groups of people who have problems with the OT's portrayal of God including pacifists, feminists, the dispossessed, atheists and people of faith. In chapters 3 and 4 he examines approaches to the problem, both ancient (e.g., changing, rejecting or salvaging the OT) and modern (e.g., divine immunity, just cause, greater good, permissive will) showing how none are fully adequate (pp. 53-88).

In chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 91-129) he first raises questions about the historicity of the OT using both biblical and archaeological evidence, and then addresses many of the concerns raised by asking the historical question. Chapter 7 (pp. 131-44) explains why OT narratives were written and chapter 8 (pp. 145-66) discusses the theological worldview of ancient Israel. Chapters 9 through 12 (pp. 169-242) lay out Seibert's strategy for reading these texts responsibly: distinguish between the textual and actual God, use a Christocentric hermeneutic, use discernment and stop ignoring troubling texts.

In the appendices he discusses the theme of violence in the New Testament and the inspiration of Scripture (pp. 243-80). He also includes an extended section

of endnotes and exhaustive bibliography (pp. 281–334) as well as indices of biblical references and modern authors (pp. 335–47).

Many evangelicals will find Seibert's provocative titles for the role of God in chapter 1 as offensive (e.g., God as Mass Murderer, Genocidal General, Dangerous Abuser), but what is more disturbing is that he does not discuss in depth most of the problematic texts he lists in chapter 1. After his initial extensive list, he does little in the first eight chapters to help OT readers actually study and make sense of God's troubling behavior in these passages. His aversion to "justifying God" prevents him from taking these texts seriously and examining them within their biblical context. For example, Seibert claims that within the text God often "kills indiscriminately" (p. 32); however in the examples he cites the text does give reasons for the judgment but he either ignores or glosses over them.

Additionally, his Christocentric hermeneutical solution to the problem which he finally lays out in Part 3 (chapters 9–12) is unsatisfactory. He argues that OT passages that describe a violent God can be rejected since that behavior is inconsistent with the character of God as revealed by Jesus in the Gospels. His conclusion is attractive since the problem of a violent OT God conveniently disappears, but many readers of the OT (myself included) will be unwilling to reject large sections of the OT because the God it portrays does not fit a certain perception of what he supposedly should be like. Seibert claims that his rejection of these violent texts does not make him a Marcionite (pp. 211–12), but his approach still smacks of Marcionism since it deems significant portions of the OT as unreliable. To some readers of the OT (particularly Jewish), his Christocentric criterion for rejection may seem arbitrary. Why not reject portrayals of Jesus that seem incompatible with the character of Yahweh? Also, his perspective of Jesus as nonviolent does not always fit the New Testament, as Jesus speaks about hell and judgment more than any other character in Scripture.

While evangelicals will have significant problems with his view of Scripture, he is to be commended for a well-written and thoroughly researched discussion of an important but often ignored subject.

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**McDermott, Gerald.** *The Baker Pocket Guide to World Religions: What Every Christian Needs to Know.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 144 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-7160-7. \$9.99. Paperback.

In his *Baker Pocket Guide to World Religions*, Gerald McDermott provides a systemic sketch of the major doctrines of seven world religions: Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism / Daoism, Christianity, Shinto, and Islam. The progression of the volume is not based on similarity in ideology (such as Hinduism and Buddhism's historical similarities but different ideological conclusions), but the order in which these religions were solidified as a unique belief set—it

is a chronological recount of the systematizing of these worldviews. The aim of the book, as indicated in the title, is to provide an overview of the key doctrines within each worldview; it is not the aim of the book to provide the historical setting and natural progression of thought within each worldview. If the reader is looking for a volume to put each religion “in its setting,” then this is not an accommodating volume for that task. Another helpful insight about this volume is that it does not provide significant discussion about the nuances contained within each belief system (e.g., differences between Hassidic and Sephardic Jews). If the reader is looking for such a volume, again, this will not be a helpful resource. Neither of the two concerns mentioned here is intended to speak of a “downfall” in the volume’s preparation and presentation; rather, these comments are intended to show what McDermott set out to do in the volume, and as such may not accommodate a reader’s needs.

That being said, this volume provides an accessible and accurate portrayal of the essential beliefs contained within each religion. If you are looking to answer questions such as: why do Hindus believe in reincarnation (p. 20), what is significance of the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur (p. 41), what are the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism (p. 51), or why does Shinto believe in the inherent goodness of people (p. 104)—McDermott’s book proves valuable. A number of stylistic elements in the volume are amenable to a beginner’s understanding of certain beliefs and customs. For example, each chapter contains charts and sidebars that draw specific attention to: key terms, key figures, elicit quotes from contemporary practitioners, and (when applicable) major holidays and their significance. These effective stylistic moves make an already well-written book even more helpful for persons who need a good introduction to the worldviews represented in the volume.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of McDermott’s work is the chapter on why it is important for Christians to have a general understanding of what the major world religions believe. McDermott correctly notes that one manner in which Christians might extend respect is by trying to understand what people believe and why they find that belief satisfying—the types of questions people are asking and how these beliefs purportedly answer them. Moreover, just as the Christian does not appreciate the core beliefs of Christianity being misrepresented, so others do not like it when their beliefs are not given the proper attention and representation. As McDermott notes, only after we have the truth about what others believe can we have a meaningful discussion about how these beliefs contrast those found in Christianity. What is more, a true representation of each belief system provides the necessary foundation for meaningful *dialogue* about how each religion answers questions about what is real, how can we know, who is man, what is moral, and who is God really?

I highly recommend this volume for persons who need a quick study in the basic ideas contained within seven of the most prominent world religions.

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**David L. Turner.** *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. xx + 848 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2684-3. \$34.64. Hardback.

In recent years a number of new commentaries on Matthew have appeared, including those by Keener (1999), Green (2000), Luz (2001–2007), Schnackenburg (2002), Wilkins (2004), Nolland (2005), Witherington (2006), and France (2007). Joining the list is David L. Turner's *Matthew*. Turner is Professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1986–present). Previously he taught at Grace Theological Seminary (1980–1986) and Baptist Bible College (1976–1979). A self-described “generalist,” he recently completed a Ph.D. at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. His dissertation focuses on Jesus' role as the ultimate rejected prophet in Matthew 23:32. Turner has also published several articles and essays on Matthew.

His commentary is part of the BECNT series, edited by Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein. All contributors write from an evangelical perspective with the aim of providing quality commentaries for both pastors and teachers. Like other authors writing for this series, Turner is especially concerned that his work will serve the needs of the church (p. 8). The writing's clear style and thoughtful theological observations contribute to this goal.

A survey of Turner's conclusions on selected introductory issues shows that usually he follows either the evangelical conservative mainstream or the general consensus of Matthean scholarship today. In regard to genre, Turner sees Matthew's Gospel as a theological interpretation of “selected traditions” which its author viewed as historically reliable (p. 5). He specifically defines Matthew's genre as “theologically interpreted history” (p. 8). As to the Gospel's overall structure, he follows others (e.g., Carson, Davies and Allison, Hill, Meier) who identify five blocks of discourse material that are placed side by side five distinct narrative sections (pp. 9–10). Furthermore, Turner favors a pre-A.D. 70 date (p. 14) and contends that Matthew's audience is likely a “Christian Jewish community (or multiple communities in various locations)” (p. 15).

The author lists five distinguishing features of his commentary (pp. 3–4). First, he follows primarily a narrative-critical approach as opposed to a source-critical approach, which results in relating Matthew's parts to its whole rather than reading Matthew as an expansion of Mark. The benefit of this methodology is that Turner interprets the Gospel of Matthew on its own terms. Second, he seeks to explain Matthew within the context of Second Temple Judaism(s). This leads him to argue that the author of Matthew wrote to Christian Jews who were still in contact with non-Christian Jews in the synagogue. Third, in keeping with the goals of the BECNT series he provides both analysis and synthesis with the aim of supplying a comprehensive yet concise summary of historical-exegetical and literary-theological issues. By his own admission this methodology limits his interaction with current scholarship (pp. 3–4). Nevertheless, the reviewer found this to be one of the more commendable features of the commentary, for Turner succinctly

summarizes the most essential theological aspects of a passage (e.g., pp. 204–7, 486, 592–93). Readers desiring a more detailed discussion of a text are pointed to additional scholarship in the footnotes. A fourth distinctive feature of the commentary is its progressive dispensational perspective. Though this position differs with earlier classical dispensational views, particularly in regard to the nature of Scripture’s continuity, it nonetheless affirms key dispensational positions (e.g., imminence of Christ’s coming, pp. 593–94; future national conversion of the Jews, p. 476). Fifth, he attempts to provide a translation that follows the principles of dynamic or functional equivalence translation theory.

Those who follow a non-dispensational theological perspective will of course object to Turner’s conclusions on a number of texts. Nevertheless, he should be commended for producing a fine commentary for both scholars and pastors alike. Readers will find his discussion of Matthew’s use of the Hebrew Bible especially helpful (pp. 17–25), as well as his overview of the concept of “fulfillment” (pp. 19–25). The reviewer highly recommends his work.

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**Gordon D. Fee.** *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. xxviii + 366 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-6362-1. \$44.00. Hardback.

With this volume, the recently retired G.D. Fee offers his exposition of the Thessalonian correspondence. This work is vintage Fee: careful in his exegesis, clear in his theological interpretation, and seasoned in his pastoral reflections. Fee’s six-page introductions for each letter (as separate sections) cover the very basic details of authorship, date, setting, and occasion. Here he concludes that Paul wrote both letters (here he points to I. H. Marshall’s argument for the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians) and that they were written during Paul’s stay in Corinth. According to Fee, 1 Thessalonians was penned first to remind the church of his time among them, to encourage them in the midst of suffering, and to address issues that had come back from Timothy (cf. 4:1–5:24). Soon thereafter, Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to encourage them in what seems to be a heightened experience of suffering, to remind them of the timing of the “Day of the Lord,” and to rebuke those who were “walking in unruliness” (cf. 2 Thess. 3:6–15).

As expected from the NICNT series, the commentary on 1 Thessalonians contains a careful exegesis of the text, which is accessible to the lay reader whilst relegating most of the technical details to the footnotes. Obviously, it is beyond the bounds of this brief review simply to rehash his commentary in full, but it might be nevertheless helpful by way of critical engagement at least to summarize six of the more interesting interpretative issues in these two letters: 1 Thess. 1:9; 2:7–8; 2:14–16; 4:13–5:12; 2 Thess. 2:1–12; 3:6–12.

First, on the translation of the Greek word εἶσοδον in 1 Thess. 1:9 (cf. 2:1), Fee surprisingly does not discuss the NIV translation “reception,” which the TNIV attempted to improve by translating “what happened,” but which the KJV nevertheless renders more accurately “what manner of entering.” Here, Fee would have been well served by consulting B. W. Winter’s excellent discussion of this word as a technical term denoting the manner in which an orator entered into a new city for public declamation (“The Entries and Ethics of Orators and Paul [1 Thessalonians 2:1–12],” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44.1 [1993]: 55–74). Winter helpfully shows that Paul’s aim was to remind the Thessalonians that, unlike the many orators of the day, Paul didn’t peddle (the gospel) for profit and then take the midnight train out of Thessalonica when the going got rough. Fee’s discussion, to be sure, arrives at the same general conclusions, but the technical term εἶσοδον is pivotal in understanding Paul’s contrast between his *modus operandi* and those of the travelling orators so common in Paul’s day.

Second, it is worth considering Fee’s reading of the infamous textual/punctuation problem in 1 Thess. 2:7. The issue, of course, is whether we should read νήπιοι (“infants”) or ἡπιοι (“gentle”) and whether or not the second half of 2:7 begins a new sentence. Fee persuasively argues for νήπιοι (“infants”) as the original reading and that the second half of 2:7 indeed marks the beginning of a new sentence. That is to say, he rightly defends the TNIV against not only the NIV, but also every major English translation of these verses. Incidentally, he refers once in passing to T. B. Sailors, whose excellent article (*JST*, 2000) on this issue remains the best discussion and anticipates (and influences?) the eventual TNIV rendering of 2:7–8.

Third, on 1 Thess. 2:14–16 (which came from Paul’s hand), Fee concludes rather tentatively that the perplexing clause in verse 16 — “the wrath of God has come upon them at last” (TNIV) — was most likely “a prophetic word on the part of the apostle” (p. 102) and not an event that had already taken place. This explanation, of course, leaves the present reviewer wondering whether Fee should also have related these verses to Romans 9–11 and to the wider debate over whether Paul was “called” or “converted” on the road to Damascus (i.e., whether he wrote verse 16 as a Jesus-believing Pharisee or as one who had left Judaism behind).

It is no surprise that on 1 Thess. 4:17, Fee correctly argues against a “secret rapture,” but what is perhaps more surprising is that he does not make use of some very important recent literature in his wider discussion of 4:13–5:12. For example, on the nature of the questions raised by 4:13 and 5:1, he does not interact with the important monograph by C. Nicholl (*From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*. SNTSMS 126. CUP, 2004). Furthermore, on the various terms in 4:13–5:12 that overlap with imperial slogans (e.g., “peace and security”; “hope”) and for the theological ramifications of this language in the light of the church’s suffering, he does not engage with the landmark articles of J. R. Harrison (“Paul and the Imperial Gospel at Thessaloniki,” *JST* 25 [2002]: 71–96) and P. Oakes (“Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JST* 27 [2005]: 301–22). These recent discussions have opened up

fresh ways of understanding these letters, and it is unfortunate that Fee did not appropriate them in his exegesis.

Fifth, on 2 Thess. 2:1–12, Fee acknowledges the uncertainties of knowing precisely the answer to the two perennial questions: (a) who was the “lawless one” and (b) who was “the restrainer” of the lawless one? Although in the end he is wisely agnostic on both questions, Fee nevertheless suggests that the “lawless one” (which he dubs “the Rebel”) is identical with 1–2 John’s ἀντίχριστος and that the restrainer might well be the Roman empire/emperor (here, Fee does not weigh in on the hotly debated issue of whether Paul was counter-imperial).

Finally, Fee provides a helpful exegesis of the instructions in 2 Thess. 3:6–15. Fee rightly translates ἀτάκτως as “disruptive,” not “idle” (cf. the TNIV’s improvement: “idle and disruptive”), and he does well to rescue this passage from the popular but anachronistic view that some in the church had quit their jobs in anticipation of the imminent return of Jesus. Perhaps more unhelpfully, however, Fee simply throws up his hands regarding why some in the church were being disruptive, refusing to engage at all with the scholarly options. Indeed, after simply listing a few of the primary explanations, he concludes without further ado that “[w]e simply do not know; and in fact getting an answer to this question would hardly affect our understanding of the text at all” (p. 325). On the contrary, the similar explanations provided by B. W. Winter and R. Russell have significant implications not only on the understanding of the text, but also on its appropriate application in a contemporary context. For a scholar perhaps most famous for emphasizing the importance of the original contexts of the New Testament letters, Fee’s disinterest even in guiding his readers through the options—even if he ended up in the “uncertain” category—left the present reviewer at a loss for words.

Fee’s commentary succeeds brilliantly in providing his careful reading of these two letters in their original context. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of his work, of course, is that it is not often informed by the recent flurry of scholarly literature on these letters. To be sure, his method was understandably to write the commentary first and then to consult the secondary literature (p. x), but at several turns he did not engage with some of the more significant recent literature (as he admits on p. ix), which would have elevated this volume to an indispensable gem. Nevertheless, this commentary is a welcome revision of the NICNT commentary on the Thessalonian correspondence.

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**Craig G. Bartholomew.** *Ecclesiastes*. Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. 448 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2691-1. \$39.99. Hardback.

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Having written his already published a valuable study on Old Testament exegesis and hermeneutical theory involving Ecclesiastes (*Reading Ecclesiastes*, *Analecta Biblica* 139, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998), Bartholomew has demonstrated his familiarity with the book. This commentary proves to be extremely accessible. It satisfies the demands of this commentary series whose primary audience is clergy and seminary students.

In the author's preface, he notes that Qohelet "is like an octopus – just when you think you have all the tentacles pinned down, you notice one still waving around" (p. 13). Bartholomew's Christological emphasis provides a coherent examination and interpretive framework for the book. He organizes his study of particular paragraphs with sections devoted to interpretation and theological implications. It is in the theological implications section that one will find reflections on current social issues and theological insight from Ecclesiastes.

Throughout the introduction, Bartholomew discusses the current issues of contemporary scholarship as well as the history of interpretation. He agrees that the internal evidence opens the possibility of Solomonic authorship, yet the weight of both internal and external evidence leads him to reject Solomon as the book's author. Holding to a postexilic date for the writing of the book, Bartholomew nonetheless concurs with Longman that language alone is not a certain indicator of the date of Ecclesiastes (p. 53).

Bartholomew tackles the structure of the book in favor of a frame narrative which divides Ecclesiastes into three sections: the introduction by the narrator (Eccl. 1:1–11), the main body with Qohelet speaking (Eccl. 1:12–12:7), and the epilogue by the narrator (Eccl. 12:8–14). He further concludes that the voices of the narrator and the implied author of the book are the same (p. 79).

The question of epistemology rests at the heart of Ecclesiastes, according to Bartholomew (p. 87). To understand Ecclesiastes, one must "engage with Qohelet's journey and to enter into the dialogue he evokes" (p. 93). This involves interaction with Qohelet's "autonomous epistemology," which Bartholomew identifies as the journey toward truth by means of one's perception, experience, and reason. In the end, Qohelet's journey of "autonomous epistemology" did not lead to wisdom but to Dame Folly (Eccl. 7:23–29). Bartholomew provides, in my view, the best and most profound lesson from Qohelet's journey; namely, that ontology must precede epistemology (p. 275).

The question must be raised as to whether Ecclesiastes presents primarily a positive, joyful or a pessimistic, despairing view of life. Bartholomew notes that scholars have ventured to either one or the other. He contends, however, that the either / or scenario does not consider sufficiently the journey of Qohelet. *Hebel* is used thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes and becomes the foundational ingredient to put a pessimistic brand on the book. Bartholomew rightly notes that the manner in which one translates the word influences his or her interpretive approach. He suggests that the term is used in different ways in Qohelet's journey, but he settles for "enigmatic." Bartholomew further notes that there are *carpe diem* confessions in Ecclesiastes which speak to a more optimistic view. For instance, Qohelet

declares: “For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart” (Eccl. 5:20, ESV). This *carpe diem* confession that God enables joyful living is balanced by the tension that many are unable to do so (Eccl. 5:13–17; 6:1–6). It is this tension that Qohelet seeks to unravel (p. 228). For Bartholomew, the pessimism of *hebel* is balanced by the *carpe diem* confessions of the goodness of life. Bartholomew therefore warns against reading the book as either joyful optimism or bare pessimism.

Finally, Bartholomew’s discussion on theodicy (pp. 258–62) makes this commentary exceptionally valuable to pastors and students. He concludes that God gave humans free will, and sin infests every person (Eccl. 7:20). Thus, human freedom accounts for the moral evil in the world, and God is omnipotent and wholly good (Eccl. 7:29). Bartholomew ends the discussion on theodicy, noting that Eccl. 7:20 is the only verse from Ecclesiastes quoted in the NT. Paul declares in Rom. 3:23 that all have sinned, and then he proclaims that sinners are justified by God’s grace through redemption in Jesus Christ. “This, indeed, is God’s means for making straight what has become crooked” (p. 262).

Eric J. Thomas  
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**Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles.** *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009. xxi + 954 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8054-4365-7. \$59.99. Hardback.

In this introductory volume on the New Testament writings, the authors provide a painstakingly thorough treatment of the New Testament texts, their background, and theology. The book is aimed at undergraduate and seminary students, although its breath (and depth) may well be more appealing to the latter. The beginning of each chapter outlines learning outcomes for three types of students (basic, intermediate, and advanced) and concludes with study questions and a helpful bibliography for further reading. The volume also includes helpful charts and maps, although it is slightly disappointing that a textbook meant for classroom use is, aside from the cover, entirely monochrome.

After an important introductory section that sets out the nature and scope of the New Testament and that provides a preliminary sketch of the socio-political background of the New Testament era, the book is divided into three major sections. Naturally, the first section is devoted to Jesus and the Gospels. Here there is much to be commended, including a comprehensive chapter (at seventy-five pages!) on the historical Jesus and the “synoptic problem.” The remaining four chapters in this section cover the themes of theology of each gospel (in canonical order).

In the subsequent section, “The Early Church and Paul,” the authors begin with the book of Acts before turning full attention to Paul’s life and letters. After a helpful introductory chapter on his life and theology, Paul’s letters—and they

argue for thirteen authentic letters—are arranged in chronological order (most notably, Galatians is first) with a penultimate chapter on the four traditional prison letters (Philippians being written from Rome) and a final chapter dedicated to the so-called “pastoral letters” (now arranged in canonical order).

The final section, of course, includes the non-Pauline letters along with the Apocalypse. As expected, these documents are set out in canonical order, except that Jude naturally comes forward with 2 Peter. In the final chapter of the book, the authors provide a preliminary sketch of New Testament theology, outlining three unifying beliefs, namely, “that there is one God, that Jesus is the Messiah and the exalted Lord, and that the Christian community has been entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ” (p. 890).

The arrival of this volume is welcomed on several fronts. First, the authors have sifted through a tangled mass of scholarly debate and have provided a balanced and accessible introduction for classroom and reference use. They are forthright in their confessional and conservative viewpoints, but even a cursory read reveals that they have engaged seriously with the best critical scholarship and have arrived at well-reasoned and judicious conclusions. Secondly, the introductory and concluding sections succeeded in providing the book with a “coherent shape” to the New Testament by surveying its nature and scope, its historical background, and its major theological themes. Of course, one might quibble with some of their conclusions (e.g., the extent to which the New Testament authors themselves were “canon” conscious), but as a whole, these chapters are instrumental in holding the volume together.

As a Pauline specialist, the present reviewer was most interested to see how well the authors would tackle some of the hotly debated topics on the Apostle Paul, in particular the so-called “New Perspective(s) on Paul” (NPP). After a thorough and clearly set out discussion (pp. 377–86), the authors concluded “that Paul’s letters do challenge Jewish exclusivism as Dunn and Wright contend, but they also clearly confront efforts to attain salvation by keeping the Law” (p. 386). Although one might have hoped to see more engagement with Wright (the critique of the NPP was aimed solely at E. P. Sanders), and although Simon Gathercole’s important contribution was altogether absent (even from their bibliography), their nuanced treatment here and more generally in this chapter was refreshing to read.

Of course, it is inevitable that an introduction as massive as this one might well miss the mark in some of its details. And this volume is no exception. On the so-called “Jerusalem Council” recorded in Acts 15, for example, the authors unhelpfully collapse “Gentile” and “Christian” and mistakenly state that this Council was about “the obligation of Christians to keep Jewish law” (p. 416) when it was precisely—and this is crucial—about the obligation of *Gentile* Christians only. Indeed, that there was a Council at all assumes that Jewish believers (and not just those who were “ultra-conservative”!) were still circumcising their children and thus keeping the Law (cf. Acts 21:17–26).

Despite their general adeptness in engaging the most recent scholarly advances, at other times the authors simply rehash traditional views by default. In the chapter

on Galatians—and I certainly welcomed their conclusions on the southern destination and early date—the authors simply assume without discussion that the “agitators” (a) asserted Paul was an inferior apostle; (b) had come from outside Galatia (presumably Jerusalem), and (c) actually believed their judaizing message. Several scholars (including the present reviewer!), however, have recently challenged these long-standing assumptions.

Perhaps more significantly, in their chapter on Hebrews the authors confidently assert, without providing any evidence, that this Jewish-believing community was in danger of “reverting back to Judaism” (p. 669). That they were in danger of turning away from Jesus is without question, but the author of Hebrews nowhere states they were returning to Judaism (why should we assume they ever left Judaism?!). Scholars such as David DeSilva (whose commentary is conspicuous by its absence) and Richard Hays have recently undermined this popular assumption. One could mention a handful of other examples where conclusions seem to be a result of time-honored views rather than actual argument, but even these glitches do not detract from the positive contribution this volume makes to the vast array of New Testament introductions.

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**Peter T. O’Brien.** *The Letter to the Hebrews*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. 629 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-3729-5. \$50.00. Hardback.

Peter T. O’Brien, senior research fellow in New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney Australia is perhaps one of the finest exegetes of this generation. He has already contributed several first-rate commentaries on Colossians–Philemon (WBC), Philippians (NIGTC), and Ephesians (PNTC) that are now standard among scholars. In the most recent addition to the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, O’Brien deftly approaches Hebrews with his characteristic exegetical acumen wedded to theological profundity. This commentary, six years in the making, will doubtlessly join the ranks of other top tier commentaries on Hebrews.

O’Brien devotes forty-three pages to introductory matters that helpfully form the foundation for approaching this challenging epistle. After a brief survey of the history of Hebrew’s inclusion into the canon, O’Brien judicially discusses the primary candidates for authorship including Paul, Barnabas, and Apollos by citing arguments for and against each of these candidates. His view of authorship ultimately comes down to focusing on internal traits about the author while asserting that anonymity does not hinder proper exegesis. Concerning the situation addressed, O’Brien concludes that the situation involves individuals abandoning the Christian community and returning to a reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant. When it comes to the question of genre, O’Brien convincingly argues that Hebrews is a “word of exhortation” (13:22), a homily or sermon, that

interweaves exposition and exhortation to encourage faithful perseverance to Christ.

One test for a good commentary on Hebrews involves the interpretation of the controversial warning passages. His interpretation of 6:4–6 represents an excellent example of sound exegesis coupled with a theological reading that is faithful to what the text actually says. He views it as a real warning against apostasy. O'Brien's interpretation may best be summarized by four observations. First, he performs a brilliant grammatical analysis demonstrating the main clause ("It is impossible for those . . . to be brought back to repentance") is separated by five parallel clauses expressing different aspects of Christian initiation. Second, he argues that the warnings correspond to the story of Israel's experiences from the wilderness wanderings in which the Israelites fell away from faith although they personally witnessed the exodus. Third, he connects this warning passage to the overall purpose of encouraging believers to persevere in their faithfulness to Christ. According to O'Brien, in Hebrews, a true Christian is not one who merely has an initial conversion experience, but rather one who endures in the faith over the long haul. The final point that O'Brien drives home is that the author shifts from the first person "we" to the third person "they" when describing those who apostatize. This is significant for O'Brien because he contends that the author is not addressing any specific case of apostasy, but is providing a stern warning that if one does turn away they cannot be restored to repentance. Interestingly, he makes the same case for 10:26–39 when he remarks, "for all its severity, our author has not asserted that members of the congregation have actually committed the sin of apostasy" (p. 374). The purpose of these warnings, then, is to pull some of the members back from the precipice of committing apostasy.

The strength of his interpretation is that it gives proper place to the warnings as genuine warnings and not merely hypothetical ones. What is more, his exegesis of the text is virtually flawless. The only potential problem with his interpretation is it opens some questions about the theological implications that he does not answer. For example, he does not address the question if it is even possible for a Christian to apostatize. While no one in the audience has fallen away, it is implied as a real possibility. It seems likely that he does not deal with this question because it is beyond what is immediately in the text. It would, however, be helpful to provide a little more interaction with alternative interpretations of these passages. Pastors who turn to this commentary will find it immensely useful, but it may not be as helpful for contemporary theological debates regarding the security of salvation or the possibility of losing one's salvation.

Although one would always want to leave a little wiggle room to express disagreement over minor interpretive issues, *The Letter to the Hebrews* by Peter T. O'Brien warrants full recommendation as a commentary that one reaches for first when studying this epistle. Scholars will find it stimulating with its penetrating insights, exegetical expertise, and interaction with current scholarship. Pastors will find this commentary to be accessible, faithful, and extremely quotable. In addition to exegetical excellence, this commentary represents a reservoir of biblical

theology. O'Brien manages to present the reader with a robust theology of the superiority of Christ and what that means for the Christian community.

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**J. Nelson Kraybill.** *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship Politics and Devotion in the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010. 224 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5874-3261-3. \$21.99. Paperback.

Few books of the New Testament seem to attract such a diverse range of interpretations as does the book of Revelation, but fewer introductions accomplish such a fresh approach as J. Nelson Kraybill's *Apocalypse and Allegiance*. Kraybill manages to address all the important issues one would expect in an introduction like authorship, date, and a presentation of its message. He accomplishes this with a very clearly defined hermeneutic and perspective. Kraybill weds socio-historical imagery of the late first century and the visionary symbols of the Apocalypse to produce a reading designed to elucidate the message as it was intended for the original audience. He maintains that Revelation is not "a catalog of predictions," but rather "it is a projector that cast archetypal images of good and evil onto a cosmic screen" (p. 15). These symbols pertain to the realities of the author's era and depict serve the ongoing interplay between good and evil in every generation. The pressing concern for John, according to Kraybill, was to address how Christians "should conduct themselves in a world where economic and political structures assumed that everyone would worship the emperor" (p. 15). He draws extensively from numismatic evidence, Roman historians, and knowledge of the imperial cult to demonstrate how John's vision contrasts allegiance to the Empire of Rome and the Empire of the Lamb.

The book is structured in a way that follows the flow of the book of Revelation. Since it is not a commentary it deals more broadly with certain sections of Revelation as it relates to its message of nonviolent resistance to the Roman Empire. The chapters tend to exhibit a topical focus on specific features of the life in the empire and how it is addressed in the Apocalypse. Rather than summarizing each chapter, it more helpful to flesh out some specifics of his hermeneutical approach. In the first chapter, Kraybill presents his approach to Revelation's symbols by utilizing the work of sign theory by Charles Sanders Peirce who argues that signs fall into one of three categories: (1) *icons* are signs that communicate by having recognizable similarity to the object or idea they represent; (2) *indexes* are signs that communicate because they are affected or changed by the very phenomenon they register; and (3) *symbols* are signs that communicate because of the arbitrary meaning assigned to them by a group or culture. All three, Kraybill argues, are evident in Revelation images, characters, and heavenly scenes.

In the second chapter, he uses Rev. 12:18–13:10 as a springboard to frame the call to passive resistance against the forced idolatry of the imperial cult. John uses the

images of a monstrous beast, according to Kraybill, as a symbol for the empire that has gone beyond its legitimate mandate by demanding idolatrous worship. These images, as in other apocalyptic writings, are likened to political cartoons by reducing nations, rulers, or events to a few symbols or characters. Kraybill maintains that John wanted his audience to see the spiritual drama with a cast of characters straight out of Jewish history and literature. The main point is that, for John, a beast represents an empire that rules with violence and usurps allegiance to God. The remaining chapters represent a reading of the signs in Revelation in light of imperial pretensions for allegiance.

More importantly, for Kraybill there is an important message for the church today with a vision of peace and social justice stemming from the index of worshipping the Lamb. He writes, “[a]n apparent mismatch of powers occurs today when followers of Jesus say no to popular war, resist destruction of the environment by powerful corporations, or oppose Internet pornography” (p. 95). The challenge for Christians is to reject Western consumerism, champion global interests, and minister to the marginalized and powerless. He sees this not just as resistance to an evil society, but as result of the worship of Jesus. He remarks that “[j]ust as worship in the heavenly court galvanized John for sustained witness in the face of empire, worship of the creator God gives believers spiritual and emotional resources to resist the powers of death today” (p. 95).

As with many books on Revelation, some of his interpretations seem constrained by a particular theological and political perspective that emphasizes a “this worldly” aspect of realized eschatology. While Kraybill affirms the future return of Christ to earth, he is primarily concerned with how Christians act in regard to politics, pacificism, and social justice. His insights are welcomed correctives to the brand of newspaper eschatology that reduces the imagery of Revelation to current events and modern technology. Kraybill’s views, however, sometimes appear a little lopsided by the lack of interaction with other interpretations that lend more creditably to a futurist reading of the text.

*Apocalypse and Allegiance* stands out among introductions to the book of Revelation for a number of reasons. First, Kraybill presents a reading of Revelation that seriously attempts to interpret the message in the context of the first century, but he also seeks to demonstrate how the message of Revelation speaks to modern day Christians. He succeeds in blending scholarship and practical application by showing the points of contact between the call for sole allegiance to Christ in the Roman Empire and the world of today. Second, his most significant contribution is that he provides a wealth of knowledge concerning life in the Roman Empire and how it intersected Christian living. Third, Kraybill writes lucidly and leaves no doubt about what he believes. Even if one disagrees with his interpretations, it is insightful, informative, provocative, and it challenges readers to examine their allegiances.

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**Dan G. McCartney.** *James*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009. xx + 335 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8010-2676-8. \$39.99. Hardback.

Dan McCartney is the professor of New Testament interpretation at Redeemer Theological Seminary, after spending more than twenty-five years at Westminster Theological Seminary. His years of teaching and research serve him ably in this volume of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the NT series. In his preface to the volume, McCartney hopes that this commentary will provide a platform for the epistle of James to be “heard more clearly in the church of our day” (p. xi).

McCartney’s introductory material provides the key to his interpretive framework for the letter. He concludes that James, the brother of Jesus, penned this epistle. He further contends that the letter was written quite early, prior to the separation between Judaism and Christianity (p. 30). McCartney also seeks to demonstrate that James was not written as a reaction against Paulinism. Rather, the recipients of the letter were Hellenistic Christians who were struggling to connect covenant obedience with God’s provision of salvation. He contends that the letter warns against a “workless faith.”

He also finds a “high degree of correspondence” with the Sermon on the Mount. That this correspondence is less than verbal suggests to McCartney that James, like Matthew, were disciples of Jesus, and that James was writing “prior to the formal solidification of the Greek tradition of Jesus’s words,” thus paraphrasing the ethical teachings of Jesus (pp. 51–52).

The structure of the epistle has been fertile ground of debate among scholars. McCartney notes that “it is often difficult to see the connection between the various components of the letter” (p. 58). This has led some to view the letter as a “paranesis,” a series of ethical instructions with little coherent structure. The author, however, argues for a structure that contains “cyclic thematic recurrence,” along the lines of “protreptic” discourse, which contains coherent arguments to persuade the recipients toward a change in lifestyle or behavior (p. 43).

The theme of the epistle, according to McCartney, is “genuine faith.” Indeed, it is apparent that this is the theme that he seeks to buttress throughout the commentary. Engaging the sentiments that James contradicts and stands in stark opposition to Paul, McCartney spends much energy to dismantle such a view. For McCartney, James is an epistle of faith, while others have deemed it an epistle of works.

The author does not avoid the distinctions between James and Paul. For instance, he concedes that James and Paul “appropriated the same Jewish heritage, the same vocabulary, and the same story of Abraham,” but their applications were different. This divergent application is not due to divergent theologies, but due to the different problems and concerns they are addressing.

Within the comments of Jas. 2:14–26 as well as two excursuses, McCartney diligently and thoroughly engages the letter, demonstrating that James is not contrarian to Paul’s teaching of justification by faith alone (Rom. 3:28). McCartney contends that “real faith, for both Paul and James, is not just a verbalization of

belief [Rom. 2:13; Jas. 2:14; cf. Matt 7:21], nor is it performing some assignment such as keeping the Ten Commandments. . . , or going to church, or going forward at an altar call. Effective faith is, instead, a life orientation, an ongoing disposition of the heart toward faithfulness to God or loyalty to his covenant” (p. 278).

Thus, the distinction for James is between genuine faith and a false faith. False faith is hypocritical and self-deluded, whereas genuine faith saves. From the author’s view, James contends throughout his letter that “the ‘faith said’ must correspond to the ‘life led’” (p. 57). Such an extensive and thorough study of a vexing question in James is both commendable in approach and exquisitely valuable for student and pastor.

There is much to be admired in this commentary. McCartney’s interaction with the original language is commensurate and not cumbersome to the reading of the volume. His consistent wrapping of the exegetical and theological concerns around the theme of genuine faith brings coherence to the interpretation of the letter, although some will disagree with his thoroughgoing connections. Finally, the contemporary applications offered throughout the commentary help McCartney’s hope for the epistle to be heard more clearly in today’s church.

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**G. Walter Hansen.** *The Letter to the Philippians.* The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 388 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8028-3737-0. \$44.00. Hardback.

The Pillar series has developed a reputation for reliable and solid commentaries mainly aimed at theological students and pastors seeking substantive engagement with the New Testament text. Each volume demonstrates an awareness of important textual and theological issues but avoids getting bogged down in extended discussions to the point of being unhelpful. Hansen’s commentary’s format is straightforward. A fifteen page bibliography precedes a thirty-five page introduction. The rest of the volume contains the verse-by-verse commentary on Paul’s letter, which is broken up into nine sections. Some commentary series, in an effort to meet the needs and desires of students, scholars, pastors, and textual critics, have opted for complicated formats, frustrating readers. The layout here is more traditional and far easier on the reader, making quick consultations on a passage more inviting. That Hansen’s commentary on the text runs to 295 pages for Paul’s four chapters means that such consultations will find a serious treatment of any passage.

Hansen labels Philippians as a letter of friendship (p. 8), noting parallels with other such letters in antiquity. Paul solidifies his partnership and friendship with them and “promotes the qualities of true friendship in their church” (p. 11). Hansen is careful to resist allowing this classification to do too much work, however. His treatment of rhetoric runs along the same lines. While acknowledging that the letter was written to be read aloud to the Philippian church, making rhetorical

categories and sensitivity important analytical tools, Hansen resists letting such analysis carry too much weight in interpreting what Paul has to say to them. This is refreshing, representing the best use of rhetorical analysis.

Hansen treats debates over the Christ-hymn in Phil. 2:5–11 at length, devoting 11 pages to the variety of discussions over its composition and pre-existence (pp. 122–33). He acknowledges the speculative character of the debate, since there is simply no evidence for the poem's pre-existence. But he does express support for Martin's suggestion that the hymn is the product of one of the early Hellenistic Jewish-Christian missionaries, perhaps Stephen (p. 133).

After an extensive discussion of *harpagmos* in Phil. 2:6, Hansen opts for reading this as "something to be selfishly exploited that is already possessed," so that Paul is speaking of the manner in which Jesus reveals the very character of God (p. 145). In contrast to the human predilection for utilizing privileges for selfish gain, Jesus "said No to the exploitation of his divine position and his unlimited power for his own selfish pursuits" (p. 146). Hansen rejects a straightforward *kenotic* view of Christ's "self-emptying," preferring to highlight the background of the "Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah 53 (p. 150). It is not that Christ emptied himself of his identity and character as God, but rather that he gave himself up to humiliation, suffering, and death (p. 151).

Because of the heat of recent debates over "perspectives" on Paul, Judaism, and the Mosaic Law, Phil. 3:1–11 has come under intense scrutiny in the last few decades. Questions about this passage abound, including the character of the "righteousness" Paul mentions in v. 9. Hansen mentions interpretations of Sanders, Dunn, and Wright, including Wright's view that when Paul speaks of a "righteousness of my own," he is referring to his own vindication within a socially constructed national standard of righteousness (pp. 238–39). Hansen prefers Kim's reading of this text over Wright's, though the reasons given will not satisfy everyone. In the end, Hansen's treatment of this extended text will likely survive the passing of a day dominated by debates over new and old perspectives.

Hansen's volume is an excellent addition to a series that has served evangelical pastors and theological students very well.

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**John A. D'Elia, *A Place at the Table: George Eldon Ladd and the Rehabilitation of Evangelical Scholarship in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xxvi + 271 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-1953-4167-6. \$36.00. Hardback.**

John A. D'Elia is the senior minister of the American Church in London. A native of California, he received a B.A. in English Literature from UCLA, a M.Div. and Th.M. in Church History from Fuller Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Stirling in Scotland under David Bebbington. D'Elia is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and previously served

as the director for development at the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary.

The purpose of the book is to examine the personal and professional motivations behind Ladd's contribution to evangelical scholarship. While the author analyzes Ladd's theology as expressed in his major writings, his central aim is to understand and assess the driving forces that motivated Ladd's effort to rehabilitate evangelical scholarship and gain a place at the table of critical scholarship. D'Elia surveys the major aspects of Ladd's life from his early years as an adolescent in New Hampshire where he struggled with feelings of extreme shyness, a deep sense of inferiority, and an obsession with status, to his later years at Fuller Theological Seminary where he engaged dispensationalists and labored to acquire a hearing for evangelicals in the larger context of critical scholarship. According to D'Elia, it was the combination of both negative personal experiences and positive professional incidents that drove Ladd. Though failing to achieve his lifelong goal of significantly influencing the broader academic world by publishing a work respected by non-evangelicals, Ladd's efforts had a dramatic impact on evangelicalism in the latter part of the twentieth century.

In chapter 1 D'Elia examines the early life and preparation of Ladd (1911–1950). Ladd grew up in poverty under an abusive father who favored his more handsome and athletic younger brother, James. These circumstances resulted in Ladd feeling genuinely excluded and isolated. He came to regard himself as a “freakish” outsider.

In his teen years Ladd experienced a conversion to Christianity under the preaching of Cora Cash, a student at Gordon College. Shortly afterward Ladd entered the ministry and enrolled at Gordon, earning two degrees. The academy greatly appealed to Ladd, and he went on to obtain a Ph.D. under Cadbury at Harvard Divinity School with a view toward a career in academia. A particularly interesting feature of this chapter is D'Elia's discussion of Ladd's struggle to find a school that would accept him for doctoral work. The rejections experienced by Ladd during his search wounded him deeply, adding further to his sense of inferiority and inadequacy. However, his later studies under Cadbury resulted in an intellectual awakening. While never abandoning his conservative positions, Ladd learned the value of employing critical methodologies.

The author chronicles Ladd's scholarly activities from his early years at Fuller Theological Seminary (1950–1954) to his establishment as a respected evangelical scholar (1954–1959) in chapters 2 and 3. With the larger aim of rehabilitating evangelical theology, Ladd began by engaging in a public critique of dispensationalism. In lectures and writings Ladd repeatedly grounded his critique in Scripture, arguing that one could hold non-dispensational beliefs (e.g., post-tribulation rapture) yet still be an orthodox Christian, a position rejected by many in Ladd's day. For D'Elia, the significance of Ladd's efforts was that he initiated the process of freeing a generation of evangelicals from a system that hindered true scholarship. The author's presentation of the strategy employed by Ladd during this period is alone worth the price of the book.

Chapter 4 traces Ladd's shift from focusing on issues within evangelicalism to matters related to critical theology (1959–1963). Perhaps the most enlightening feature of this chapter is D'Elia's discussion of Ladd's lecture at the North American Baptist Theological Seminary, titled, "Renaissance in Evangelicalism." In this speech Ladd criticized certain elements within the evangelicalism of his day (e.g., the tendency to dismiss rather than to engage the larger world of scholarship). Ladd called for evangelicals to return to a rigorous study of theology, to affirm right doctrine rooted in sincere Christian love, and to adopt a biblical doctrine of the church as demonstrated in a shared faith rather than a separate tradition. For the most part Ladd's professional experiences during this period were positive, and they inspired him to continue his dream of publishing a major work of scholarship.

In chapter 5 the author chronicles the events that led to the most devastating episode of Ladd's academic career, the harsh review of Perrin following the publication of *Jesus and the Kingdom*. Shattered by Perrin's blunt criticisms of a work that took more than a decade to write, Ladd at times lost touch with reality, lashing out furiously at those around him. He was never able to recover from the critique and felt that he had chased a "fool's dream" in attempting to publish a writing that non-evangelical scholars would take seriously.

The author surveys the final period of Ladd's life in chapter 6 (1966–1982). During these years Ladd's personal struggles (e.g., troubled marriage and alcoholism) became more visible. Though there were positive moments, such as the publication of *A Theology of the New Testament* (1974), these were painful years. D'Elia writes with sympathy toward Ladd and his trials, at the same time recognizing his personal failures as a man.

D'Elia's work is unique in at least two ways. First, he provides the first thorough investigation of Ladd's life and personal development. Several short essays and dictionary articles give an overview of Ladd's life; however, D'Elia supplies the most full-length treatment of the scholar's life to date. Second, *A Place at the Table* is unique in that it is the first examination of Ladd's life employing, among other sources, his vast personal writings (George Ladd Papers), interviews of Ladd's family members (conducted originally by Rebecca Jane Duncan), and archival collections from both Gordon College and Harvard University.

D'Elia has produced a fair assessment of the personal and professional motivations of Ladd, one of twentieth century evangelicalism's most significant figures. Also, he provides a thoughtful historical perspective into the conflicts experienced by evangelicals in America. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, D'Elia teaches that while a Christian should demonstrate a genuine commitment to excellence in regard to his work, he must never base his contentment or sense of success on anything but the realization that he works within the will of God.

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**John Sailhamer. *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation*.** Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010. 632 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8308-3867-7. \$28.00. Paperback.

John Sailhamer brings his tenured years of experience in Old Testament studies, the Hebrew Bible, and in particular, the Pentateuch in this accessible but profound analysis of the Pentateuch. Not content with merely sketching a method for biblical theology, he also illustrates exegetically and theologically the fruit from his method and studies in this modern day tome.

Sailhamer attempts to trace an approach back to what he considers a classical evangelical approach to Scripture which sees only the words of Scripture themselves as special revelation. As such, it is only these words which are necessary to understand the meaning conveyed in the Bible. He contrasts this view with both those scholars on the left such as Schleiermacher and those on the right such as Hengstenberg or Keil. Sailhamer credits Schleiermacher with much of the movement away from a focus on the text as the basis for meaning. As for Hengstenberg and Keil, Sailhamer demonstrates that in an effort to defend the historicity of the OT and its coherence with the events of the New Testament, nineteenth century evangelicals unwittingly gave ground on this uniquely evangelical aspect concerning the doctrine of Scripture and along with it a hermeneutical foundation.

In part 1, Sailhamer considers both of these aspects from an evangelical viewpoint. He defines an Old Testament theology as “the study and presentation of what is revealed in the OT” (p. 63). This is especially pertinent for an evangelical approach to Scripture because an evangelical theology “focuses on the text of Scripture. . .not Israel’s ancient religion as grounded in the Sinai covenant” (p. 66). In other words, “God’s word is not merely in the Bible, it is the Bible” (p. 66, notes 14, 63). Thus, for Sailhamer, revelation, and therefore, theology does not derive from God’s acts or events recorded in Scripture but from the words as they were intended by the author. As it relates to a hermeneutical foundation, he states that an approach with a single minded focus on the text coheres well with evangelicalism’s belief that the text is the locus of revelation. It is necessary for Sailhamer to trace evangelicals’ departure from a primary focus on the text and how it yields meaning to their tendency to focus elsewhere. According to Sailhamer, their focus has been on presumed socio-historical information in which the central characters of the narrative are depicted or similar types of socio-cultural information which prevails upon the presumed author whether he be a narrative character or anonymous. To do this, Sailhamer demonstrates a subtle reversal of one of the ablest exegetes and philologists of the evangelical tradition, Johann August Ernesti.

As he analyzes translations and explanations of Ernesti, Sailhamer shows that the translator’s own methodology actually overshadows the plain sense of Ernesti’s words. Other scholars, thinking they were following in the footsteps of Ernesti, unwittingly accepted methodological foundations that went beyond Ernesti and integrated critical scholarship’s movement away from its primary focus upon the text for understanding meaning from the biblical texts. Sailhamer goes to great

lengths to uncover the path which led evangelicals from the path of textual understanding. Along the way he interacts with such figures as Augustine, Calvin, Vitringa, Coccejus, and a host of others.

Another central component of Sailhamer's method involves a compositional approach to understanding biblical authorship. For Sailhamer, this approach "does not differ significantly from the classical evangelical" approach to Scripture. Composition involves an author using "written texts that he gathered from various sources and provided them with commentary, much like a modern producer of a documentary film" (p. 207). Of course, Sailhamer recognizes modern evangelicals' unease with the notion of sources and aptly points out their use by classic evangelicals such as Jamieson, Fausset and Brown and Campegius Vitringa. Moreover, Sailhamer clarifies a compositional approach and an author's purposeful integration of sources and contrasts it with other critical methods such as the Documentary Hypothesis (DH), a theory of the Pentateuch's layered development which evangelicals have rejected.

Along the way, Sailhamer discusses Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the prophets' retrofit of that document. Using the notion of effective history, Sailhamer argues that the Prophets read the Mosaic Pentateuch and provided commentary upon it eventually yielding the final shape which we now have. For Sailhamer, this differs from the DH in two ways. First, composition involves "intentional design and purpose," not an historical evolution void of any linguistically mediated intentionality. Second, a compositional approach does not attempt to discern the existence and subsequent meaning of independent layers or sources (p. 275). A compositional approach reads the final shape and seeks to understand the arrangement of its pieces within a whole.

In part 2, Sailhamer builds on previous works in an attempt to uncover the textual strategies of the Pentateuch. He does so by analyzing importantly placed passages such as Genesis 1–11, the poetic seams (Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 33), Exodus 15 and 19, and the Pentateuch's legal material. From these passages, Sailhamer discerns an emphasis on an eschatological king, faith, and a critique of the Sinai covenant. In part 3, Sailhamer further investigates these passages as they bear upon the relationship between such Old and New Testament themes as covenant, blessing, promise, salvation, and the biblical portrayal of the "seed." Sailhamer painstakingly demonstrates verbal links between these Pentateuchal passages and other texts from the second and third sections of the Hebrew Bible, namely, Jeremiah and the Psalter. In each of the discussions, Sailhamer interacts with prominent theologians from different theological systems critiquing them in light of his own understanding of his theology of the Pentateuch. Sailhamer concludes his discussion in part 3 with a consideration of the Law as it relates to the Pentateuch, the New Testament, and the theme of salvation.

While supportive of nearly all aspects of this work, one section, in particular, raised concern. In the chapter entitled "The Nature of the Covenant and Blessing in the Pentateuch," Sailhamer attempts to delineate subtle nuances to the notion of covenant and promise. While there has been misunderstanding and theological



depreciation of the Old Testament in particular models of prophecy and fulfillment, Sailhamer seems to overreach in order to demonstrate that the Old Testament has more value than merely “fulfillment.” He does this because, “The divine promise . . . is not merely a prophetic word about the future that must be fulfilled. The fulfillment of such a promise looks not toward a future event but toward an assurance of a present relationship. The fulfillment of such a promise is not a future event, but an assurance or commitment in the present” (p. 434).

Sailhamer attempts to clarify his position in the ensuing pages but leaves many questions unanswered. First, one might grant that God’s covenant with Abraham has present consequences for Abraham in light of his faith. Given the content of the Abrahamic covenant, however, how can the primary focus not be on future events or a future person, namely, the seed of Abraham? To further obscure the matter, in the subsequent section, Sailhamer exegetically argues the point that God’s promise to Abraham indeed concerns the seed of Abraham. Second, utilizing Sailhamer’s method involving text and event, even though God makes a covenant with Abraham in Genesis, the meaning of that covenant is not thoroughly or explicitly exhausted until the “final act” of the author in Deuteronomy 30 and forward. It is at this point that the covenant involving circumcision is explicitly about the future, namely Deut. 30:1–15: “And it *will be*.”

Finally, in adherence to Sailhamer’s appeal to trace compositional strategies in order to understand the purpose of book and canon “making” (p. 434), the Prophets speak with one voice when they echo Deuteronomy 30 and *promise* a time when God will make his people by giving them his own Spirit. Only then will “you be my people and I will be your God” (cf. Jeremiah 30–33, Ezekiel 36–37, Joel 2:28, Isa. 32:15).

In addition to this minor concern, other editorial errors include the following list: p. 101 “evens” instead of “events”; p. 143 – “depris” instead of “debris”; p. 158 – “curse” instead of “course”; p. 218 – “such such”; p. 293 – “tthat hey”; p. 360 – “Nun” instead of “Num”; p. 368–68 – “see figure 5” instead of “see figure 4.1”; p. 366 – reference to Numbers 11 should be reference to Numbers 10:29–32; p. 385 – n. 54, no period before “Refer”; p. 479 – n. 28, misspelled “awckward”; p. 487 – capitalized “Is”; p. 487 – misspelled “arive”; pp. 509–10 – “stophe” instead of “strophe.”

Notwithstanding these minor issues, for those who will learn from Sailhamer, this book has the potential to chart a new and invigorating course. Sailhamer himself would not say it charts a new course but rather follows a course on which evangelicals from a previous generation traveled often. For the reader of Scripture today, however, Sailhamer’s proposal would return them, both student and scholar alike, to a perspective where the locus and meaning of revelation is found within the pages of Scripture only, through the compositional strategies and literary structures which were left by the author himself through which one can hear the very message of God.

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**Andy Crouch.** *Culture Making: Rediscovering Our Creative Calling.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2008. 284 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8308-3394-8. \$20.00. Hardback.

The cover and flaps sport gushing blurbs, our first hint that *Culture Making* (hereafter CM) is a delicious delight. The three part book has three tasks (pp. 10–13): the creation of new vocabulary, a new approach to culture that unfolds in (one particular) reading of the biblical story, and “a new set of questions about” CM.

Chapter 1, “The Horizons of the Possible,” introduces three “beginnings” or points of origin, to orient us to begin reflection on culture. From our birth, we are “hard-wired for nothing but learning” (p. 19), constantly imitating. Humans are “radically committed to story” (p. 20), endlessly narrating our origins and destiny. Couched in history, Scripture itself is a third entity of origin. Crouch links the “image of God” to God’s own creativity displayed in Gen. 1:1–26. God provides “order,” boundaries within which creativity may be expressed, so that we may “make something more than we were given” (p. 23).

Culture is what “human beings make of the world” they inhabit, shape, and remake: what was unimagined and impossible becomes possible. Within this world-shaping and world-making enterprise of CM, our own contributions can be thought of as “artifacts,” part of the ever-changing cultural framework, or “world.” Crouch singles out omelets, chairs and interstates. In contrast to defining culture as *inter alia* politics, secular rap music, and the *Twilight* series, this approach asserts of the universality of culture: “Culture is inescapable. And that’s a good thing. Culture is what we were made to do” (p. 36).

In chapter 2, “Cultural Worlds,” culture and cultural impact vary widely; artifacts do not impact universally, but rather impact “specific groups of people who are affected by particular acts of making something of the world.” There is no “culture” somewhere out there; rather, there are many overlapping cultural spheres (family, vocation, etc.) where we “make something of” the world. CM is never a solitary affair, and our CM is limited by the ability of our work to “ship” (impact others).

In chapter 3 Crouch attempts the difficult task of navigating between “good” and “bad” appropriations of the world we inherit. He offers “integrity” as a key factor in evaluation: “We can speak of progress when a certain arena of culture is more whole, more faithful to the world of which it is making something” (p. 54). He applies this to poetry and buildings, particularly the home in which he and his family live, where a contractor made “the most of its history and its possibilities,” “minimized its limitations” (p. 54). This illustration shows the difficulties in making CM judgments: would a poor, extended-generation family of immigrants with more children make the same valuation?

Crouch closes the chapter with two typically brilliant, fundamental points: “There is an inverse relationship between a cultural layer’s *speed of change* and its *longevity of impact*” (p. 56). Even apparently momentary, epoch-shaping incidents usually have a long lineage (e.g., September 11, 2001). Secondly, in part because of emphasis on “worldview,” Christians have not in recent times been as good at

doing art as they have at art critique. (This is true for the arts; but the inverse may be true when it comes to business.)

In chapter 4, Crouch states that “the only way to change culture is to create more of it” (p. 67). Change comes via *doing*. Critique and analysis may influence CM, but they do not in and of themselves constitute change. And those who *do* CM well earn the right to have their criticisms heard.

Second, CM is never “from scratch,” and healthy CM requires knowledge of antecedent cultural traditions that facilitates creativity. Acquisition of this knowledge requires apprenticeship, a “cultivation” of best practices, which likely includes a good deal of imitation and rote work: thus musicians practice scales, and writers learn grammar.

Chapters 4 and 5 include “Niebuhr-ish” descriptions of various approaches to culture, or “postures,” which Christians sometimes strike. Crouch discusses possible “gestures” representative of these postures, ranging from condemnation to imitation. He rightly observes that Christians must engage in all these gestures at various points, avoiding excessive criticism or slavish, uncritical imitation.

In the second section, Crouch paints the biblical story as a story of culture. He leaves ample room for additional engagement (perhaps forthcoming from the present author), navigating a tricky balance between Scripture’s presentation of our innate cultural embeddedness and our sinful appropriation of culture. We must anticipate and rely on God’s decidedly unhuman work in eschatological restoration, while holding out hope that God can and does use our CM labors now and (somehow, relying on Richard Mouw) on into eternity.

In the third section, Crouch challenges the notion that we are likely to change the world in a radical way, and insists God may use power and powerlessness (with Jesus as the supreme model: p. 207). We should avoid “straining to change the culture” and amassing power (p. 252) focusing instead on what power we have, serving where we are. We can seldom reach many people, and should be content to reach a few deeply.

This book deserves additional interaction. In the estimation of the present reviewer, this text is a must read. Any reader of CM will wish for lengthy, thoughtful engagement with this text and its implication for many areas of Christian life and service.

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**Michael C. Legaspi.** *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies.* Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. xiv + 222 pages. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-1953-9435-1. \$74.00. Hardback.

What happened to the Bible in the Enlightenment? In answer Michael Legaspi argues that the traditional Bible died a kind of death in the eighteenth century, only to be brought back to life for an unexpected purpose at the university. Who

wrote the scriptural Bible's death certificate, then, and how did the project to revivify scripture as "text," as an academic Bible, first gain hold?

Legaspi's study falls into two parts. Chapters 1 to 3 set the stage for an account of Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791), often (and rightly, Legaspi contends) heralded as the founder of modern biblical scholarship. Accordingly, Michaelis is the focus chapters 3 to 6. A preface and conclusion frame the book's most important implications for current conceptions of the practice of biblical criticism.

First, following an important 2005 study by Jonathan Sheehan, an overview of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries considers the Reformation and its aftermath. Erasmus's demotion of the Latin Vulgate to mere translation was just the first step in a sequence of events that served to displace the role Scripture had played in a formerly catholic church. Sectarians searched the Scriptures not for unifying common ground, but to polemicize about the contested passages. The massive polyglot Bibles produced in places like Paris and London testify to the hope that establishing a new, authoritative text could resolve the violent religious disputes. It was not to be. Moving to the eighteenth century, Legaspi shows how civic-minded peacemakers developed a fresh strategy, one he characterizes as "academic ecumenism." The University of Göttingen, or Georgia Augusta, was established in the heart of Germany in 1737. Its inaugural faculty strove to embody Enlightenment ideals, and the school soon met with distinction. In the process theology was deliberately displaced from its formerly high position. But study of the Bible did not disappear at Georgia Augusta. To the contrary, it soon enjoyed special prominence in the socio-political project of *Bildung*—the shaping of moderate churchgoers, strong civil servants, nobility with good taste, and so forth. Third, before moving to Michaelis directly, Legaspi outlines the beginnings of philology and study of the classics at Georgia Augusta. Johann Gesner (d. 1761) founded the school's Philological Seminar for the purpose of training teachers. His vision of the classics was holistic, even totalizing. Teaching candidates were shown how to access antiquity—Greece in particular—to replenish the present. Christian Heyne (d. 1812), Gesner's successor, elevated the classics from something propaedeutic to a discipline with its own integrity, but he shared much of his predecessor's vision for the social utility of Greek and Latin works. Later classicists soon left this enthusiasm behind.

Gesner and Heyne are important not just because Michaelis's career falls between theirs. The links are much closer. Michaelis gave Gesner's eulogy in 1761, and even took over many of his professional responsibilities, including the Philological Seminar, until Heyne was in place. Heyne in turn eulogized Michaelis in 1791. And Michaelis, who wrote no less than four grammars of Near Eastern languages, never served on the theology faculty. His work was rather with "dead" languages—Hebrew to him had died at the close of the Old Testament period, never-mind the ongoing presence of the Jews—that could nonetheless feed life back into the present. What life, though? Legaspi astutely notes one result for Michaelis here. "To emphasize 'deadness' in this way was to deny that Hebrew was a vital linguistic medium for any living community." If the Bible could survive in

the Enlightenment order, it was at the expense of the synagogue *and* the church. Poetry, not prophecy, was the crucial means of actualization for Michaelis. In an illuminating chapter Legaspi traces how and why Michaelis curated the work of Robert Lowth, a contemporary bishop in the Church of England and professor of poetry at Oxford. Lowth is largely responsible for the distinctly modern idea of biblical poetry, and Michaelis brought that idea to Germany, heavily shaped by his commitment to comparative semitics. Curiously, one of the last in his domain to defend Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, Michaelis also held Moses to be the author of Job. By these lights Moses was a rational monotheist, a prudent governor of his people, and an aesthetic genius.

On some counts, as later scholars quickly saw, Michaelis had failed to be sufficiently rigorous in his method: he did not, for example, produce a plausibly historical portrait of Moses. Michaelis did, however, pave the way for an academic Bible, which came to prominence at state universities just when the old scriptural Bible might have been discarded. Legaspi's narrative is compelling and urgent especially for the way it prompts a reconsideration of biblical criticism's value to the Jews and Christians who for millennia have found in the Bible words of life.

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**Paul G. Hiebert.** *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. 224 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8010-3681-1. \$21.99. Paperback.

One of the first books I read on the subject of contextualization two and a half decades ago was Paul Hiebert's *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, and I have assigned that book to many beginning mission students since. That book wrestled with the insights of cultural anthropology for communicating the gospel in various cultural contexts. It summarized a broad area with the competence that comes from the mastery of a subject. Numerous illustrations in mission practice from Hiebert's personal experience made the book come alive. Since that book many more have come treating the inter-related issues of anthropology, gospel, cultural context, epistemology, and mission with the same skill of a scholar and practitioner. This book published posthumously stands as the last in a long productive career. Hiebert served as a Mennonite missionary in India, taught at Fuller Seminary, and finally served as distinguished professor of mission and anthropology at Trinity Divinity School until his death in 2007. The community of mission scholars is indebted to Hiebert for his decades of work on the subject of cultural anthropology and mission.

The book is loosely structured in three sections and gathers together a number of related essays, some already in print. Part 1 is entitled, "Theoretical Foundations." In chapter 1 Hiebert treats changing views of contextualization by advocating his now familiar, yet helpful view of critical contextualization over against

non-contextualization and uncritical contextualization. The second chapter is a shared chapter with Tite Tiéno in which mission theology is offered as a third way of doing theology parallel with and complimentary to biblical and systematic theology. Part 2 is entitled “Exegeting Humans.” Hiebert believes that “missionaries, pastors, and church workers” (p. 12) need to master the skill of human exegesis, a study of the cultural and social systems that shape human life. To that end he offers the insights of cultural anthropology. There are four chapters arranged historically. In the first he traces the way Western people have viewed the other. The next two chapters offer a historical survey of anthropology over the past two centuries before turning to a systems approach in the next chapter. A final chapter in this section analyses research methods used in anthropology. This section presents a helpful overview of anthropology with sporadic applications to mission and Christian analysis. Part 3 is entitled “Mission as Intercultural Mediation” in which two chapters articulate his vision of missions and missionaries as mediators among churches in various cultural contexts. Those who live in more than one cultural setting are able to bridge different contexts providing understanding, enrichment, and correction among churches.

The goal of this book is to equip the church for its mission by offering the insights of anthropology to help wrestle with the relationship of the gospel to cultural context. Most of the time, it appears that by missions Hiebert is primarily thinking about a verbal communication of the gospel in a foreign context. Yet his insights are important for an embodiment of the gospel in life, word, and deed in all cultures including the West. Indeed the wisdom of relating gospel to culture garnered in missiology is an important resource for the whole church, but I fear this book will remain within the bounds of cross-cultural missions.

Two questions remain in my mind about Hiebert’s approach—issues I have struggled with for some time that again appear in this book. First, Hiebert advocates a “metatheology” that will enable us to understand, translate, compare, and evaluate various contextual theologies. His diagrams on pages 48 and 185 highlight the problem: standing above and over various cultures is something he calls a “metacultural grid” and a “metacultural conceptual framework.” While I appreciate his concern to avoid cultural relativism and to keep the gospel as a final authority over all theologies, I cannot imagine who could formulate such a grid. Much more helpful is his call for dialogue in the church within all cultures as a hermeneutical community that will enable each one to see their own blind spots and deepen their understanding of the gospel (p. 100). Second, I continue to find much more compelling theories of culture developed by missiologists who see religion as the centre and directing dynamic of culture. Hiebert seems to be somewhat uncritical of secular anthropology’s bias to relegate religion to one structural component of culture rather than as an all-embracing power that arises from seeing all of human life in community as a response to God.

The book is a fitting capstone on a fruitful career. It is full of wisdom and insight, and will serve to help many struggle afresh with the urgent issue of what it means faithfully to embody the gospel in various cultural contexts. If it can

provide for a new generation of Christians what his first book provided for me it will have served its purpose well in God's kingdom. One only hopes these insights will move beyond foreign missions.

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**Michael V. Fox.** *Proverbs 10–31*. The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary. Volume 18B. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009. ix–xix + 728 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-300-14209-9. \$60.00. Hardback.

This volume completes the two-volume commentary on Proverbs by the same author in the Anchor Yale Bible Commentary series. Fox is known for his erudition, close exegetical detail, and attention to ancient Near Eastern backgrounds where it helps to illumine the biblical text. One finds this work lives up to that reputation. This volume indeed *completes* the first volume on Proverbs 1–9 and should be read, in a sense, alongside it. For instance the pagination of the main body of text in sequence with the first volume (e.g., the first page of *Proverbs 10–31* is p. 477), and the essays that follow the commentary section pick up where the first volume left off.

The commentary opens with an introduction to chapters 10–31. It follows with exegesis proper, in which there is an introduction to each particular section, followed by analysis on individual (or small groups of) proverbs. After the exegesis section, Fox includes the essays that follow on from *Proverbs 1–9*. Subsequently extensive textual notes are given (pp. 978–1068). Then Fox's translation of Proverbs 10–31 is included. The commentary finishes with bibliography and appendices.

Fox does not believe that the body of text from chapters 10–29 displays an overall structure or organizing principle, which differs sharply from both Proverbs 1–9, and 30–31. He suggests that there may be evidence of thematic grouping in chapters 10–29. These are recognizable when there are at least two or more sayings (proverbs) that share a common theme identifiable by topic or poetic catchwords. The proverbs in these chapters are a collection of sayings that are like pearls. They can exist independently, without necessarily forcing them into a larger organizational or compositional pattern. But they can also be set on a string. And when they are related in this way, they meet the criteria of association Fox identifies: common topic or catchwords.

This is a commentary well-served by attention to literary and poetic detail. As such, the reader will discover innumerable insights that will deepen understanding on the nature and varieties of Hebrew parallelism, the use of sound patterns that impact the meaning of the poetic line, and other poetic and rhetorical devices. Fox suggests that the rich poetic quality of these proverbs is resultant from their use in oral performance. It would take us too far afield to explore these in detail, but suffice it to say here that a slow and progressive read through the



commentary yields rich rewards due to Fox's close attention to poetry in chapters 10–31.

Because of their value to the commentary, it is in place to mention the content of the four essays that continues on from *Proverbs 1–9*. These essays center upon the theme of biblical wisdom. Essay 5 assesses the growth of wisdom in the book of Proverbs that mirrors the growth of the book. Fox believes that the focus on wisdom given in Proverbs 1–9 is a rather different concept of the same given in Proverbs 10–29. By conjoining them with, the book provides a rich and complementary vision of wisdom. Essay 6 explores virtue in Socrates' thought and relates it to wisdom and virtue in Proverbs. Essay 7 explores the way that wisdom is related to revelation in Proverbs, or how *torah* (law) relates to wisdom. Finally, Essay 8 assesses knowledge in Proverbs: its acquisition or confirmation. Fox suggests that Proverbs displays an implicit epistemology that is grounded in a coherence-theory of truth rather than an empiricist epistemology. In this essay, Fox advances the discussion on wisdom in a helpful direction. It leads him to the conclusion that wisdom is acquiring sensitivity to what is fitting, good, and right in all "realms of attitude and behavior" (p. 973). Ultimately, this skill does not derive from a personal quest (so Qohelet) but rather from the creator God.

This is a significant work of scholarship and one that should be welcomed. Not all will find certain portions of Fox's thinking or analysis persuasive, especially as it relates to the concept of wisdom in Proverbs. Yet this is to be expected and should not detract serious engagement with the commentary. To my mind, this is a must-read for scholars, pastors, and those who enjoy the Old Testament.

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**Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity*.** Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009. 256 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-8054-4820-7. \$19.99. Paperback.

There are many books on today's market about homiletics from a variety of perspectives both theological and methodological. They ebb and flow with respect to the contribution they make to the practice of preaching. Tony Merida's book, *Faithful Preaching*, exemplifies one of the better tomes on the subject. Merida is both pastor of Temple Baptist Church in Hattiesburg, Mississippi as well as Assistant Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, where he earned his Ph.D. Having one foot in the scholarly world and one foot in the pastorate is an effective combination that makes Merida's book a helpful, worthy read for pastors, regardless of their experience in preaching.

The book begins with a well-written foreword by Ed Stetzer. In chapter 1, the author asks three basic questions: What is a preacher? What is preaching? What is expository preaching? He gets the answer to all three questions right. His own descriptive proposal for faithful preaching is well thought out: "*faithful preaching*

*is the responsible, passionate, and authentic declaration of the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Spirit, for the glory of the Triune God*" (p. 6). He views preaching as "Word-centered" and "Word-driven" (p. 10), and defines expository preaching as "*the exegetical and Spirit-driven process of explaining and applying the meaning of a particular text or texts for the purpose of transforming people into the image of Christ*" (p. 10). Merida informs his readers that he believes the best way to build healthy Christians "is by moving verse by verse through books of the Bible" (p. 10). May his tribe increase.

Merida divides the book into four sections comprising fifteen chapters. Part 1 explores the Trinitarian theological background for exposition. Though not intended to present a detailed theological foundation for preaching, Merida succeeds in showing us just what kind of theology should undergird our preaching. The glory of God should be every preachers "passionate quest" and "goal" (p. 30). A high view of biblical authority is also prerequisite for solid expositional preaching. Merida treats the divine nature of Scripture under four headings: biblical inspiration, biblical authority, biblical revelation, and biblical sufficiency (pp. 32–40). Though these treatments are on target, they are somewhat out of order from a traditional theological standpoint. Better is (1) biblical revelation, (2) biblical inspiration, (3) biblical authority, and (4) biblical sufficiency. The latter is especially important in today's preaching arena as so many, even in the evangelical world, have abandoned the sufficiency of Scripture in preaching, thinking that any number of so called "culturally relevant" fat rabbits out of the sermonic hat will provide a better menu to feed the sheep than the very words of the Shepherd Himself. Merida also appeals for Christ-centered preaching from both the Old and New Testaments. Part 1 is rounded out with a chapter on the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the preaching event. I was pleasantly surprised to see Merida affirm the necessity of a "call" to preach (p. 48).

Part 2 is comprised of five chapters which treat the subject of sermon preparation. This chapter is standard fare on the subject and one will find little new that has not already been said in standard works on expository preaching. Nevertheless, these chapters provide the preacher with a solid methodology for preparing genuine, text-driven sermons. Especially important is what Merida has to say on p. 88 concerning application involving more than mere "action steps." He says, "Sometimes application includes *believing* something different or *knowing* something important." He continues: "I believe that people experience a greater and more genuine sense of 'life change' by having a thoroughly biblical worldview. And you cannot develop someone's worldview by offering one action step per week." Well said. Merida is a fan of "dense sermons," by which he means a sermon that has a lot of of good content. He generally preaches about forty minutes. One of the encouraging things to me about younger pastors like Merida is their commitment to getting the real meat of a text to their people. Tired of "cotton-candy" preaching to meet the felt needs of people, Merida and his cadre of expositors are not afraid to preach the word and take the time necessary to do it in a worship service. They are men after my own heart.

Part 3 addresses the all-too-neglected matter of personal holiness and a genuine walk with God which should characterize all God's preachers. Merida laments the decline of godly men in America and in the pulpit. The necessity of regular practice of the spiritual disciplines such as reading the Word devotionally, prayer, self-examination, fellowship with other believers, and so on, are stressed and encouraged. Most books on preaching either speak minimally of the preacher's prayer life or bypass the subject altogether. Merida offers us an entire chapter on "Faithful Praying" that explains why prayer is vital for the preacher, what we should be praying for, and how we can go about our prayer life.

In Part 4 of the book, Merida closes out with three chapters addressing the matters of sermon style and delivery, contextualization, and a brief summarizing historical sketch of preaching in the past. The chapter on contextualization is one of the most important in the book. This issue is something of a hot potato in theological and missiological contexts today. Merida argues, following Mark Driscoll, that when it comes to culture, there are some things we should reject, some things we should redeem and some things we should receive. With respect to that which we should receive, the author states: "We must receive that which is beneficial, such as causes like environmental concern and a heart for the poor. We also receive the use of music, technology, and language. These are avenues in which we can also bring biblical truth to the needs of the day" (p. 189). Here we need to hear more from Merida about what he means by these sentences. Should Christians be concerned about the environment? Of course! But if churches spend inordinate attention on making sure everything is "green," then less attention will be focused on the heart of the gospel. Should churches care for the poor? Absolutely! But one must be careful that this biblical concern does not degenerate into the social gospel. Should we receive *all* music as *equally* valuable in the communication of the gospel? Not in my book. The problem here is not so much what Merida says as what he leaves unsaid. Even cultural causes that are beneficial should be received by the church with a discerning eye. I suspect Merida agrees with this, he just needs to tease these things out more for the reader.

The book concludes with an Epilogue, two appendices (a sermon outline sheet and a sermon evaluation form), and a selected bibliography, all of which the reader will find helpful. The name, subject, and Scripture index stand ready to orient the reader as well.

There is little to find to critique in this book. It is generally well written, clear, concise, and to the point. It covers a lot of ground without ever losing sight of the forest for the trees. There is the occasional typo (such as a missing word following the word "pornographic" in the sentence ending with footnote 8 on p. 140), the rare grammatical error (such as incorrect subject/verb agreement in the last sentence on p. 198), and at least one factual error on p. 212, where Alexander MacLaren is said to be the author of the "thirty-two volume sermons in *The Expositor's Bible*." Actually, MacLaren was the author of the multi-volume *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, while *The Expositor's Bible* was a multi-volume collection of sermons by different scholar/preachers edited by the renowned W. Robertson

Nicoll. The footnotes are stylistically clean, with some quotations cited from secondary sources.

All things considered, this is one of the better books on expository preaching out there today. Buy it. Read it. Heed it. Then preach the Word!

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