

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Since the Beginning: Interpreting Genesis 1 and 2 through the Ages.* Edited by Kyle R. Greenwood. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. ISBN: 978-0801030697. Xxiv Pp. + 308. \$26.99 (USD).

It is difficult to underestimate the influence of the first two chapters of the canonical Hebrew Bible on both Judaism and Christianity. Countless books have attempted to draw out its meaning in various contexts—especially in the last century as contemporary issues of human origins, sexuality/gender, and similar facets of anthropology take center stage. What has not been given as much attention is the *history of interpretation* (and/or “*reception history*”) of Gen 1–2.

Old Testament scholar Kyle Greenwood assembled a chronological selection of articles on this very subject in *Since the Beginning*. After he explains how Gen 1–2 functioned in the rest of the Old Testament, the book continues through time to see how Genesis was received and understood in Second Temple Jewish Literature (Michael Matlock), then the New Testament (Ira Driggers), early Rabbinic Judaism (Joel Allen), Ante-Nicene Fathers (Stephen Presley), Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (C. Rebecca Rine), the Medieval era (Jason Kalman in Judaism and Timothy Bellamah in Christianity), the Reformation (Jennifer McNutt), modern scholarship (David Tsumura), and finally a “post-Darwinian” era (Aaron Smith). To further structure the book, each contributor was asked to deal with (1) treatment of days, (2) cosmology, (3) creation and nature of humanity, and (4) the garden of Eden.

Readers can effectively trace the movement and meanings these portions of Genesis engendered for various audiences throughout church history because of this systematic format and other features. Each chapter has an introduction, body, and conclusion with “For Further Reading,” “Primary Texts in Print,” and “Primary Texts Online” appendices. It is clear from these materials that Greenwood’s selection favored specialized scholars for their essays, making for a particularly juicy read.

As one might expect, readers come away with a deep appreciation to the wide variety of interpretation Gen 1–2 had and continues to have. This includes textual, theological, and philosophical dimensions. I wish I could provide a summary of the overall “movement,” but the diversity *within* each era makes this complicated. One does find, of course, what one might expect of biblical interpretation in

general—such as more allegorical readings in the early Medieval period and more literal/propositional in the modern. But these kinds of generalizations remain too simplistic to be of much help.

It was striking, however, to see how much contemporary philosophy and thought had on the impact of readers. The same goes for the impact of texts—e.g., the role the LXX and DSS had to play in the Greco-Roman period, and the Vulgate in the Medieval period. There were also memorable nuggets of correction or insight that stuck out. One of these was the observation that “Adam” in Hos 6:7 doesn’t even refer to a person, but a city (Josh 3:16), a “toponym alongside the other covenant-breaking cities of Israel” (15). Greenwood also notes in the conclusion to his article the strange absence of Eve in the rest of the OT (21).

*Since the Beginning* comes as a second major volume from Greenwood on the broader subject of Genesis, cosmology, etc. His earlier monograph *Scripture and Cosmology* contains his own digest on the popular Bible-and-science subgenre.<sup>1</sup> His other publications point to a particular interest in this field—no doubt spurred by some of the inner battles still being waged within evangelical universities.<sup>2</sup> Among other issues, “What will inevitably become clear by following the conversation,” writes Greenwood in the preface, “is that a ‘literal’ reading rarely meant a univocal reading, where one word is assigned one and only one meaning” (xxiii).

*Since the Beginning* is a superb work of both biblical studies and Christian scholarship that deserves a wide reading for anyone who dares to cite from Gen 1–2 with any degree of hermeneutical depth. We thank Greenwood and the contributors for their laborious hours on such a worthwhile volume bound to become a standard work on this subject. This book is highly recommended.

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*Who’s Afraid of the Unmoved Mover?: Postmodernism and Natural Theology.*  
Andrew Shepardson. Eugene: Pickwick, 2019. ISBN: 978-1532656774. Pp.  
186. Paperback. \$24.00 (USD).

In his recent book, Andrew Shepardson provides a defense of natural theology, as well as the practice of “positive apologetics,” from its postmodern detractors. He defines nature theology as “that branch of human inquiry which seeks to discover

1 Kyle Greenwood, *Scripture and Cosmology: Reading the Bible Between the Ancient World and Modern Science* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

2 I am referring in part to the disturbing, theological cleansing of the theology/biblical studies department that took place at Colorado Christian University around 2015–2018, where a number of full-time professors (and first-rate scholars) were relieved from duty because of their “unacceptable” views of “biblical creation,” “inerrancy,” etc. Despite (or, because of) their excellent scholarly work on biblical interpretation, Greenwood and Smith (contributors to chapters 1 and 11) were among those cut down in this contemporary “heresy-hunt”.

knowledge about the existence and nature of God apart from sources of revealed theology” (1). To accomplish this task, Shepardson critiques the work of three evangelical philosophers who are sympathetic to postmodernism and are critical of most forms of natural theology: James K. A. Smith, Myron B. Penner, and Carl A. Raschke. After providing a summary of the contents of *Who’s Afraid of the Unmoved Mover?*, this review will respond to Shepardson’s constructive proposal.

In chapter 1 Shepardson introduces his primary argument. In it he notes the presuppositions that will flow into the rest of the volume, mainly a defense of a correspondence theory of truth and the helpfulness of Western logic to the development of a “reasonable epistemology” (3). He also provides definitions to key terms used throughout the volume, such as evangelical, postmodern, general/natural theology, and apologetics.

The second chapter begins by summarizing the perspectives of some key figures in the background of the intra-evangelical debate on natural theology (Abraham Kuyper, B.B. Warfield, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, C.S. Lewis, Cornelius Van Til, Carl F.H. Henry, and William Lane Craig). It then turns to a description of the three main figures in postmodern philosophy—Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michel Foucault—before closing with a discussion of three significant Christian respondents to continental postmodern philosophy—Paul Ricoeur, Merold Westphal, and John Caputo.

The third and fourth chapters summarize and provide rebuttals to the work of Smith, Penner, and Raschke. Chapter 3 responds to the critique of universal reason and the correspondence theory of truth. Here Shepardson defends the law of non-contradiction and argues that Enlightenment rationality should not be identified with universal reason. He also defends a “modest foundationalism.”

In chapter 4, Shepardson draws upon Paul’s sermon at the Areopagus (Acts 17) to defend the “permissibility of arguing for a minimalistic theism” (112). After critiquing fideism, he argues that critiques of natural theology that emphasize the effect of sin on reason lack an adequate account of the *imago dei*. Lastly, Shepardson concurs with some of his interlocutors that apologists have at times sought to defend the Christian faith unethically. He, however, says this is not a problem with apologetics itself, but with apologists.

Then the final chapter further develops Shepardson’s constructive proposal. In it he calls upon evangelicals to be apologists for truth (in particular, the correspondence theory of truth), hold to a balance of humility and confidence, to be apologists for science, and encourage the practice of natural theology within its educational institutions.

The constructive argument of Shepardson’s volume has a few blind spots. First, he lacks a discussion of the apologetics as an *ad hoc* practice. While Paul appeals to the “unknown god” in Acts 17, he called upon the Philippian jailor to “[b]elieve

in the Lord Jesus Christ” in order to be saved (16:31). Second, appeals to universal reason have a tendency to universalize one’s own cultural perspective, to expect others to conform to one’s own rationality. Third, it seems dangerous to ground the Christian faith in one understanding of truth and rationality. While there are indeed perspectives on truth and rationality that are in tension with or blatantly contradict the Christian faith, one should not make one perspective on truth and rationality a prerequisite for accepting the Christian faith. Closely connected with this, Shepardson does not recognize that knowledge is historically conditioned. Attention to the historic conditionality of human knowledge does not mean one denies the existence of truth, but rather is a recognition that people in different times and places bring different perspectives to their search for truth. For example, in Smith’s work, he does not deny realism per se, but rather critiques a naïve realism that does not recognize that one is always interpreting information within a horizon.

Despite these criticisms, Shepardson’s volume has much to commend. First, he ably sets the terms of the current debate about apologetics and natural theology within evangelicalism. Second, Shepardson does not discuss the debate about natural theology in the abstract, but in connection with a particular community, evangelical Christians in the west, and seeks to demonstrate the implications of the debate for the church’s mission. *Whose Afraid of the Unmoved Mover?* would benefit readers interested in philosophy of religion, apologetics, and natural theology.

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*The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion.* N. T. Wright. New York: HarperOne, 2016. ISBN 978-0062334381. Pp. 440. Hardcover. \$28.99 (USD).

By six o’clock in the evening on the first Good Friday, the world was a different place. A revolution had begun, although Jesus’s earliest disciples hadn’t the slightest inkling. As they would come to understand in light of the resurrection and after years of reflecting on the meaning of Jesus’s crucifixion, the kingdom of God had overthrown the powers of sin and death and the new creation had been inaugurated. That is the thrust of the argument in N. T. Wright’s exploration of the meaning of Jesus’s crucifixion.

The book, which began as a series of lectures drawing upon much of Wright’s earlier scholarship, picks up the theme in *Surprised by Hope* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), in which he argues that the Christian hope is properly located in the resurrection and new creation, not in a Platonized, disembodied, and

other-worldly “heaven.” Our eschatology and soteriology are intimately related, he argues, and both have become similarly distorted by the influences of Platonism and gnosticism. Reconsidering our eschatology, what we are saved for, requires reevaluation of how we are saved (28). Thus, his assessment of atonement theology diverges significantly from that found in his earlier work, particularly in his treatment of Romans.

The book is divided into four sections. In the first section, Wright introduces readers to the topics of the crucifixion and atonement theology, and specifically to the reason why he feels a need to add to the discussion: the current understanding of the meaning of Jesus’s crucifixion as simply “God saving me from my ‘sin,’ so that I [can] ‘go to heaven’” was not the primary interpretation held by Jesus’s earliest followers, but was part of a much larger story (4). This larger story is one of revolution—the dark powers that held the world captive have been overthrown—and of restoration of the human vocation as the image-bearing royal priesthood over God’s creation. Salvation, then, was never strictly a personal affair, but had far-reaching implications for the entire cosmos and the human role within it.

In his second chapter, Wright challenges readers to take up the task of theology (which need not be made overly abstract and irrelevant in its service to Christians) rather than to be content with oversimplifications, domestications, or distortions of the meaning of the crucifixion. We must, as Paul warned the church in Corinth, be mature in our thinking, lest we fail to grasp its meaning and make “ourselves immune to its ultimate and life-changing challenge” (23). He then dives into an overview of historical models and doctrines pertaining to atonement, explaining that the doctrine of “penal substitution” was developed specifically in reaction to the Roman Catholic doctrines of purgatory and the Mass. The Reformers, as Wright argues, were unfortunately providing the right answers to the wrong questions in their failure to question the underlying assumptions of Heaven, Hell, and the need to satisfy God’s wrath. This problem, which began with the influence of Platonism in the church’s early centuries, was exacerbated by Enlightenment Epicureanism, which emphasized a disembodied, spiritual heaven rather than the biblical eschatology of new creation. This has led to a common perception that “the cross has nothing to do with social and political evil” (36).

In the second section, Wright explores what it meant to the earliest Christians for Jesus to have been crucified “in accordance with the Bible”—meaning, of course, in accordance with the Jewish scriptures. First, he sets out to prove that the commonly-held understanding of atonement within the context of a “works contract,” in which Jesus’s moral achievements are transferred onto Christians through faith (thus allowing them to enter heaven), is misplaced, and ought rather to be located within the “covenant of vocation.” The vocation is that of “being a

genuine human being, with genuinely human tasks to perform as part of the Creator's purpose for his world," namely as the image-bearing royal priesthood, "the people who are called to stand at the dangerous but exhilarating point where heaven and earth meet" (76). This vocation has been inverted through our idolatry: we have relinquished our own God-given power to created things by worshipping them rather than the Creator, thereby enslaving ourselves to them rather than acting as God's stewards over them. Our sin—our idolatry—leads to slavery, exile, and death. This thread, Wright demonstrates, runs throughout the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation.

Still in the second section, Wright discusses the importance for Israel of the divine Presence, its departure with the exile and the destruction of the Temple, and its longed-for return that would signal the end of exile, the forgiveness of sins, and the renewal of creation. He identifies several major themes that further characterized the Jewish hope, and so also colored the way the early Christians interpreted Jesus's crucifixion: the kingdom of God established on earth, redemptive suffering, and covenant love. The forgiveness of sins and end of exile were characterized as a "final great Passover" and would be accomplished "through the personal, powerful work of Israel's God himself" (138). The phrase, Wright reiterates, "for our sins in accordance with the Bible" was shorthand for the entire, multifaceted hope in the end of exile, of redemption, of the return of God's Presence, and of the salvation and renewal not just of Israel but of all creation.

The third section begins with a review of the eschatological "goal" of salvation: a renewed human vocation exercised within the new creation, rather than the "Platonized," "moralized," and "paganized" theology that currently holds sway (147). Wright then explores how Jesus's crucifixion was understood in the four gospels and Paul's letters, highlighting the themes of Passover, the representative substitution of Jesus as Israel's messiah, and "the power of self-giving love" in inaugurating God's kingdom and overthrowing the powers of the world (222). He stresses again and again that the meaning of the cross must remain rooted within Israel's story, as it was for Paul and the gospel-writers. It must find its meaning in the context of God's self-giving, covenant love.

In two chapters dedicated entirely to expounding the soteriology of Romans, Wright challenges the widely held "Romans Road" interpretation in favor of "the new Exodus" through which God's covenant faithfulness to the promises made to Abraham and his descendants is at last fulfilled. In a chapter focused exclusively on Rom 3:21–26, he addresses the interpretation of the Greek words *hilastērion* and *dikaïosynē*. Typically translated as "sacrifice of atonement," *hilastērion* refers to the lid of the ark of the covenant, the place where God would meet with his people through their representative, the high priest, who would make the appropriate cleansing of the "blood of the covenant" on the Day of Atonement. The

latter, *dikaiosynē*, often translated as “righteousness,” is better understood as “covenant justice” and refers to God’s faithfulness to his covenants with Abraham and Israel. Wright explains that “Jesus in himself, and in his death, is the place where the one God meets with his world, bringing heaven and earth together at last, removing by his sacrificial blood the pollutions of sin and death that would have made such a meeting impossible” (336).

In the final section of the book, Wright addresses what he sees as the necessary implications for missions and evangelism of the preceding reappraisal of atonement theology. His hope is that it will spur a new, holistic movement in missions in which both social concern, through the renewed human vocation as the priesthood of God’s renewed creation, and personal evangelism are embraced. This is a natural outworking of a Christian self-perception as “Passover people,” by which he means that Christianity is not a religion, but “a complete new way of being human in the world and for the world” (362). Therefore, it is imperative that we avoid the self-defeating and anti-Christian temptation to “make the world a better place” through the world’s own power games, but must rather remember that “*the victory of the cross will be implemented through the means of the cross*”—through the self-giving, suffering love of Christ’s people (366; italics original). This suffering love is revealed as the essence of true power in the new creation and the means by which the revolution is advanced.

Though admittedly “popular” in style, this book provides critical insight for preachers, teachers, and theologians as they seek to understand the meaning of Jesus’s crucifixion and how it ought to affect our interactions with the world. Through its attention to the rich tapestry of biblical motifs found in the Old Testament and the gospels as well as for its reappraisal of Romans, the book presents a view of atonement that defies easy systematization or simplification into doctrinal statements. In a climate in which Christianity could reasonably be characterized as “too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,” this book offers a refreshing and energizing perspective on what it means to live in the world as one of Jesus’s followers: as an agent of his kingdom furthering the revolution through self-giving love, as a member of the royal priesthood over the new creation, and as part of the new Temple in which God’s glorious Presence has at last returned, joining heaven and earth together once more as a “new Eden,” reconciling creation to himself through Jesus Christ. Highly recommended.

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*Understanding Christian Doctrine*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ian S. Markham. London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017. ISBN: 978-1118964736. Pp. xii + 228. Paperback. \$52.00 (USD).

There aren't many new "liberal orthodox" or "progressive Christian" textbooks on theology out there—much less systematic theologies from Episcopalians. But Ian Markham, Dean and President of Virginia Theological Seminary and Professor of Theology and Ethics, offers a unique synthesis along these lines in *Understanding Christian Doctrine*. His broader orientation can be captured in three theses, which he summarizes in the opening Introduction. First, "natural theology is a legitimate enterprise that supports and underpins religious experience" (2). Second, "Christian doctrine is the Christian response to the problem of evil," and finally, "this is a liberal theology." He contends that the word "liberal" needs "to be reclaimed." As an Episcopalian, Markham comes with a deep appreciation for traditional doctrinal emphases and ideas. Hence his remarks: "I defend the Trinity and the Incarnation as indispensable aspects of the Christian understanding of God and God's relations to the world. But this book is liberal in the sense of affirming the generous heart and disposition of Christian orthodoxy" (2–3). In other words, he integrates a variety of theological sources and traditions.

Readers therefore come across a thorough discussion of all the basic corpora of theological ideas in the context of contemporary developments. Feminist, liberationist, process, and post-modern theologies are seamlessly part of the conversation. Unlike other textbooks that simply add on sections for each of these developments, he just assumes these newer voices need to be listened to—and that theological developments in the last two centuries have, in a sense, something to say about everything. We cannot exclude certain voices from the outset just because of "tradition."

The book begins with various theories of religion, covering everything from Emily Durkheim's social theory, to Ludwig Wittenstein, Thomas Huxley and the rise of Modernism, Descartes, and the challenges and logic behind agnosticism. The second chapter lays out "the theistic claim," critically analyzing arguments for God's existence, and offering analysis about religious "experience" and its place in epistemology. The third chapter, entitled "The Nature of God," covers all the different theories and models of God from Barth, Schleiermacher, Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures, Classic accounts, Process, Feminist views, and otherwise. The fourth chapter looks at the "Trinity," covering biblical roots, developments, three dangers in interpretation, and modern accounts.

Chapter 5 concerns "the problem of evil and suffering" and examines the inadequacies of traditional responses, and various Christian responses (e.g., from Job). He examines closely the point of Ivan in *Brothers Karamazov*, which represents a



kind of “protest atheism.” Chapter 6 explores “Creation and the Significance of Humanity,” giving special attention to traditional assumptions about “the fall” and “sin,” while dialoguing with Darwin’s story and its impact. Markham favors the universal reading of Anne Primavesi (in conjunction with Tillich), where “humans are inevitably exercising freedom in ways that create tension with the rest of creation and God; it is both a growing up and a fall. Indeed, as every child learns, growth leads to autonomy and often leads to tension” (113).

Chapter 7 is entitled “God Incarnate.” Here, Markham touches on Christian origins (comparing and contrasting the views of Bart Ehrman and Larry Hurtado) and traditional Christological claims. His discussion is straightforward. “Early Christians were not stupid. The idea of one God becoming human was a difficult one to sort out” (124). He elsewhere reflects and concludes, “God was in Christ. This is the distinctive claim that Christians want to make” (131). The chapter also includes many reflections on gender and the radical implications of the Christ-event. The next chapter sorts out all the hairy issues regarding the atonement and other facets of the “redemption” category; particular stress is given on forgiveness.

Chapter 9 covers the “Holy Spirit and the Church,” while chapter 10 concerns the “Sacraments and life of Virtue;” the latter is almost entirely centered on the Reformation debates. Both, again, touch on the problem of evil throughout. For example, Markham says in chapter 10 that “God’s redemption was made possible by a cruel act of an occupying power against an innocent man. All Christians are required to remember the act and celebrate it afresh in the Eucharist” (177).

Chapter 11, entitled “Religious Diversity: What is God Up To?,” reminds readers that religious diversity was always a challenge for Jews and Christians. It also brings to bear new problems brought about by evolution: “Exclusivism . . . seems to forget that the central claim is that there is one God who is the creator of the whole world. For thousands of years before Christ, this God was interested in the lives of humans who emerged on earth some 300,000 years ago” (187).

Chapter 12 looks at “Hope Beyond the Grave,” examining resurrection, hell, and other related topics in dialogue with Wright’s *Resurrection of the Son of God*, among other contemporary works. Chapter 13 is entitled “The End of the Age.” Here, Markham first situates American readers to the fundamentalist and dispensationalist fanaticism surrounding the rapture. After a longer discussion about divine action and God’s kingdom, he says, “the end of the age will be divine action analogous to creation. Indeed, as we have just seen, this is precisely what Jesus claims. In the same way that God worked with the forces of gravity and expansion to enable life to emerge, so God will work with those forces at the eschaton (the end of the universe)” (214).

Finally, Markham concludes with reflections on the work of doctrine and all Christians' role in participating in the conversation.

*Understanding Christian Doctrine* is in many ways a smaller, more rationalist, and less Barthian version of Daniel Migliore's excellent book *Faith Seeking Understanding*,<sup>3</sup> and overlaps with Placher's similar work, *Essentials of Christian Theology*.<sup>4</sup> It's format also feels more like a classroom textbook. It is remarkably deft in its implementation of first-rate theological primary sources of both the church tradition and high-caliber contemporary monographs. I found myself unexpectedly adding quite a number of unheard-of books to my Amazon shopping cart. Even more impressive was how penetrating Markham's discussion managed to be in such a short 200-page book—and not a sentence was boring. It packed no little punch.

While some of his discussions could have used a healthy dose of biblical-studies—and his reliance on Bart Ehrman for the Jesus subjects was somewhat surprising (and needless, though I realize he wanted to implement an antagonist into the discussion), Markham does manage to plug in some contemporary New Testament scholarship where helpful. He also doesn't fail to be genuine with his audience—especially given the interesting theme of evil and theodicy throughout the whole book. Philosophical and abstract debates are present but not distracting, and the familiarity with classic Christian themes and books keeps the discussion grounded in the past as much as in the future.

*Understanding Christian Doctrine* is a wonderful introduction to Christian thought that aims to be both convincing to the contemporary mind but doesn't "sell the farm" in the process. Markham is fully aware of what he is doing, of the landmines surrounding his pen, and does an excellent job of going from A to B—even while the whole discussion has a handful of idiosyncrasies (e.g., his particular lenience towards the thought of Keith Ward).

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*Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11.* C. John Collins. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018. ISBN 978-0-310-59857-2. 336 pp. Paperback. \$36.93 (USD).

How does God's revelation in the Word illuminate His created world? How do Christian faith and science relate? What does it mean to be a faithful reader of the Bible? How do we take seriously the Hebrew stories that are contained within Gen 1–11? These are critical questions that are facing many Christians today. Esteemed

3 Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

4 William Placher, ed. *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

Hebrew Bible/Old Testament scholar, C. John Collins, effectively answers these queries (and more) within *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11*.

Collins begins his volume by noting that one's view of the biblical text wholly depends on one's interpretive approach. Regrettably, however, this "hermeneutic," i.e., one's interpretive position or stance, is often assumed rather than clearly demarcated. What's more, Collins maintains that "it is even controversial whether any such warranting is itself warranted or simply 'explaining away!'" (17). In light of this, Collins seeks to remedy the situation through developing a "reading strategy for Gen 1–11 that draws its ideas from theories in linguistics, literary study, and rhetoric" (17).

The author states that the goal for *Reading Geneses Well* is two-fold: "the first is to provide guidance to those who want to consider how these Bible passages relate to the findings of the sciences. The second is to establish patterns of good theological readings, patterns applicable for other texts" (32). To this end, Collins also asserts that "those who focus on one of these more than the other should understand that to me the two are intertwined, each playing a role in what it means to be a responsible audience" (32).

Collins' primary conversation partner in this endeavor is C. S. Lewis, a twentieth-century literary scholar and Christian writer who, according to Collins, has an intuitive grasp of the topic at hand that is not only unique with respect to its rigor and consistency but also its theological acumen. In brief, Collins maintains that C. S. Lewis, by means of his varied academic work and other writings, is able to "help us to *formulate a critically rigorous reading strategy for Genesis 1–11*" (18; emphasis original).

*Reading Genesis Well* is divided into eleven chapters of varying length. Chapter 1 is comprised of a short introduction, a concise history of nineteenth century literalism (with a special emphasis being placed upon the work of James Barr in dialogue with Benjamin Jowett), a few comments that explicate why Collins believes C. S. Lewis to be such an invaluable guide on these matters, and a final word about Collins' own educational background, persons of influence, and particular interest in this subject.

Chapter 2 delineates more clearly Collins' special "Lewisian, critically intuitive approach to hermeneutics" and discusses "pragmatic linguistics" alongside "rhetorical" and "literary" criticism (27). Chapter 3 elaborates on different types of language and the process of effective biblical interpretation through a systematic, in-depth engagement of an unfinished essay of Lewis' entitled "The Language of Religion." Chapter 4 details more precisely how communication takes place against a backdrop of shared experiences of the world. In this, Collins seeks to answer: "What makes an act of communication 'true'? How do rhetorical and

poetical features affect our answer—can we even apply a word like true to items with poetic and rhetorical devices? What do we mean by the word ‘true’? Is something like ‘trustworthy’ a better rubric?” (95).

Chapters 5 and 6, together, treat various aspects of how to read Gen 1–11 well; that is, considering the different kinds of context (ch. 5) and the function (ch. 6) of these specific portions of Scripture. In chapter 7, Collins offers what he calls an “integrated rhetorical-theological reading” of Gen 1–11 (158). Chapter 8 relates what certain other readers (both ancient and modern, but especially canonical ones) have also seen in the text of Gen 1–11 on select topics and “what that tells us about how to read these passages well” (107). Chapters 9 and 10 examine various passages from Gen 1–11 using the specific method and tools that Collins developed within the preceding chapters. The final chapter specifies in greater detail how one is to undertake a “responsible appropriation for the ancient and the modern believer” (28). Within his conclusion, Collins states that Gen 1–11

should not be pressed into a scientific theory, whether of the young-earth or old-earth or evolutionary kind; at the same time, I do see them as providing grounds for a proper critique—or at least pushback—for certain kinds of scientific theories, particularly those that overstep their empirical bounds and begin to make worldview assertions. (290)

The volume also includes a robust 19-page bibliography as well as three thorough indexes—subject, author, and ancient texts (including Bible, ancient near Eastern texts, deuterocanonical books, pseudepigrapha, ancient Jewish writers, rabbinic works, early Christian writings, and Greco-Roman literature). Scholars will note that most Patristic texts are cited from *ANF*, *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> and *NPNF*<sup>2</sup> editions (218) and that most Greco-Roman texts are cited from the *LCL* editions (78).

With respect to some of the specifics that are relatively unique to Collins’ work (particularly as they relate to matters concerning Gen 1–11), Collins states that though the literary form of Gen 1:1–2:3 is, indeed, narrative, the “style or register is *exalted prose* . . . these factors indicate something about the language type that we may expect, namely, that it will lean toward the poetic side of the spectrum from ordinary language” (157; emphasis original). Concerning the three enigmatic, first-person plurals by which God converses with “us” (Gen 1:26; 3:22; and 11:7), Collins takes them to be a “plural of self-address” and not a reference to the angelic council (111). It is also worth noting that Collins maintains that the seven days of creation should be understood “analogically,” that is, they work together to convey the idea that “God’s work and rest are *like* human rest and work in some ways and *unlike* it in other ways” (163; emphasis original). Alongside these things, Collins also asserts that the account of Gen 2:4–25 should not be understood as a second creation story altogether, a point of view that is in

contrast to “the conventional reading in the modern era” (168), but rather as something that is complimentary to Gen 1:1–2:4, i.e., an “expansion of the creation of humankind on the sixth day of Genesis 1” (225). Collins is also persuaded that the incident involving the so-called *Nephilim* (Gen 6:1–4), whom he takes to be the offspring of demonic, evil, angelic beings (187–90), is best understood as being within the Noachic Deluge narrative proper along with the pericope of Gen 9:18–29 (110, 185–94). In addition, though many recognize that there are a number of New Testament texts that relate directly to the Flood (such as Matt 24:37–39, Luke 17:26–27, Heb 11:7, 1 Pet 3:20, and 2 Pet 2:5, 3:6), Collins believes that Rom 8:21 should also “be added to the list” (235).

On a slightly different note, Collins also perceives *Enuma Elish*, i.e., the “Babylonian Epic of Creation,” as having somewhat lesser value than the Mesopotamian story of Atrahasis for doing comparative analysis (114). Finally, concerning John Walton’s view that the “interests of the creation story lie with the origins of the *functions* of the things described rather than with their *material origin*,” Collins denounces the idea that “material and function are really inseparable” (168; emphasis original).

While some people may think the author to be “splitting hairs” in his discussion of what constitutes the differences between “antiquarian history” and “rhetorical history,” Collins is prudent in insisting that “*history is not a literary form*; it is rather *a way of referring to persons and events* with a proper moral orientation . . . there is no reason to suppose that ancient Near Eastern writers and audiences required historical verisimilitude in literary compositions dealing with prehistory and protohistory in order for them to be credible” (141–42; emphasis original).

By way of critique, it should be noted that almost a third of the entire volume is an “orientation” or “guide” as to how to achieve an increased competency with respect to biblical interpretation and exegesis in general, i.e., how to be a better reader of Scripture *as a whole* (beyond the immediacy of Gen 1–11). Though this is something that some readers may begrudge, Collins states:

Since I am contending for a way of reading biblical passages and also arguing that this way of reading has not received full attention in recent biblical scholarship, I offer what I take to be reasonable amounts of documentation on that score. I do not claim completeness nor do I claim to have written a critical commentary on the passages I address. I hope, however, that my readers will judge that I have given reasons for the positions I take. (33)

Some readers are also likely to take umbrage with the lack of any type of sustained discussion concerning evolutionary theory (in point of fact, the term “evolution”

does not even appear in the subject index of the volume!). Given that the subtitle of *Reading Genesis Well* is “navigating history, poetry, science, and truth in Genesis 1–11” this “oversight” seems to be quite amiss. Surely it would have behooved the author to have made more than just a few, passing comments about a topic that plays such an integral role with the subject matter as a whole, especially when he explicitly states that “there may be reasons, scientific and philosophical (and even theological) to subject the various kind of evolutionary theory to critical review. After all, there are several versions of the theories out there, and the idea of an impersonal and pointless process does not suit the data, either of biology or of the Bible” (288). Such statements clearly require more detail and analysis than what Collins has provided within his work. In brief, it is deemed insufficient and inadequate to avert the matter by stating “my attention here is on what the faithful are supposed to be getting from Genesis; that is, on the perspective of faith, that all of this comes from God and reflects his purposes for humankind” (288).

The above critiques notwithstanding, it is otherwise hard to find fault with this volume. The effective use of charts/tables, diagrams, and other images, alongside an ample amount of illustrations and poignant, clear examples (not to mention a high degree of pastoral awareness and sensitivity) make for a stimulating and engaging read. The author’s engagement with some of the more complex or challenging topics (such as the connection between a world picture and a worldview, for instance, and the charge “hasn’t explaining become explaining away?”) is lucid and cogent. In addition to this, Collins’ deftness and respect (without pomp or grandstanding) towards those with whom he disagrees or “wrangles” (96) is also commendable, as each of the comments made towards his detractors were fair and circumspect, free of *ad hominem* attacks, etc.

To conclude, *Reading Genesis Well* is a welcome addition to the on-going discussion concerning the Bible’s earliest chapters. Its primary readers will likely be bible college/seminary and Christian university students, the invested layperson, and, one hopes, studious pastors/ministers. This book is superbly done and highly recommended!

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*Reading Revelation in Context: John’s Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism.* Ben C. Blackwell, et al. Editors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. ISBN 978-0062334381. Pp. 208. Paperback. \$21.99 (USD).

Revelation is a book that has long been plagued by variegated, often bewildering interpretations, ranging from a synopsis of the history of the church to a play-by-play prediction of the coming end of the world. However, Revelation has not

received this treatment entirely without fault; it is exceptionally difficult to interpret, given its rich symbolism, elusive character, and its stylistic distinction from the rest of the New Testament. These interpretive difficulties often intimidate many readers from even attempting to understand the book. However, they are precisely what *Reading Revelation in Context* (henceforth *RRC*) is intended to address.

The editors of *RRC* state that “there exist virtually no nontechnical resources for beginning and intermediate students to assist them in seeing firsthand how Revelation is similar to and yet different from early Jewish apocalypses and related literature” (27–28). *RRC* intends to fill this void, by following a method that is broadly comparative-literary: (1) The “comparator” text is introduced, and significant nuances are discussed; (2) the similar text in Revelation is introduced, and its nuances discussed; and (3) the similarities and differences are explored.

*RRC* follows this method through a series of 20 essays approximately 7 pages in length, gathered from an impressive list of scholars from a variety of backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> The essays cover well-known controversial elements of Revelation (e.g., the so-called “Antichrist”) to those lesser discussed, but no less important (e.g., economic disparities). However, these themes are only ever explored within the context of specific passages of both Revelation and the comparator texts, rather than being traced throughout entire works. Given that *RRC* is intended for students, its language is deliberately simplified, and key terms are in bold, and defined in the back of *RRC*. The essays are short and sweet, with each passage only being given 3 pages of material (with approximately 1 page of comparison and conclusion). A short bibliography of suggested reading appears at the end of each essay, allowing eager readers to do further research into the topics discussed.

*RRC* has much to commend it. As stated previously, the list of scholars is impressive and various, allowing for a unique combination of voices and perspectives to be heard, as well as not coercing the reader to follow a singular interpretive approach. The essays are as diverse as the authors, allowing the reader to attain a broad understanding of various aspects of Revelation with Second Temple texts; they are also accessible, allowing those who do not have much prior knowledge to read without too much difficulty.

However, *RRC* falls short on several points. First, is oversimplification. While this is to be expected to some extent (since it is fruitless to coerce new students to immediately grasp all the nuances and complexities in a given field), it is at times done to an extent that is greater than necessary. For example, in the introduction, the Septuagint is treated as though it is one of many Greek versions, which seems to be an egregious misunderstanding of the term; additionally, it is suggested that

5 John K. Goodrich, one of the editors, is a Professor at Moody Bible Institute, a premillennial school, for instance.



it contains the “Greek translation of the Old Testament as well as other Jewish writings,” which greatly simplifies the state of the canonical process in the first century (31). This is no less true with the essays: 3 pages is simply not enough space to adequately address the various complexities of a text in a thorough manner.

The brevity also contributes to another major weakness of the work: it seems to be aimless in its target. It’s not clear how the book should be used. The essays are too specified to contribute to more thematic understandings of Revelation, yet they are too short to be considered a major contribution to the understanding of individual passages. A similar problem remains for *RRC* as a whole. The subject matter is both too broad to be considered an advancement in a particular field of study of Revelation, and yet not comprehensive enough to contribute to the study of Revelation as a whole. Additionally, the lack of space means that the authors must move very quickly, giving the book the feel of being rushed overall, jumping from topic to topic at a pace that even the most excited primary school children could hardly compete with.

These deficiencies make it difficult to find a secure position for *RRC* in the study of Revelation. Its breadth of topics would make it a difficult book to use in a classroom, and its limited scope means that it must be treated as supplementary material rather than a main textbook.

However, one space remains for the book, and that is with the curious reader who just wishes to understand what might be going on in Revelation. *Reading Religion in Context* is accessible and compelling enough to successfully achieve two tasks: (1) to convince the reader that John the seer was thoroughly acquainted with Second Temple literature; (2) to give the reader a taste for how fruitful the study of Revelation in light of Second Temple texts can be. While these accomplishments are not as great as they could be, they are valuable, nonetheless.

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