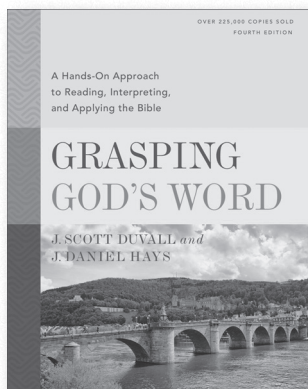


BOOK REVIEWS

J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*. 4th ed. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2020. ISBN: 978-0-310-10917-4. Pp. 592. Hardcover. \$109.99 (USD).

Applying oneself wholly to the text of the Bible (and applying the text of the Bible wholly to oneself) is paramount in a Christian's life. The Bible, however, is a complex and in some ways a foreign book. Veritably, effective biblical interpretation is no easy task: "The whole earth is covered by a flood . . . fire and brimstone rains down on cities . . . the mighty river Nile turns blood red . . . this is strange stuff indeed!" (i). Enter *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, authored by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays—now in its fourth edition.



Duvall and Hays state that the intended goal of this text was to provide readers with a "resource that combines reliable hermeneutical theory with clear, practical explanations and interpretive examples from the Bible" so as to help "serious believers (especially college and beginning seminary students) learn how to read, interpret, and apply the Bible" (see xii and xiv, respectively). Though succeeding in this matter, to what degree does the fourth edition of this volume differ from the previous versions and in what capacity do the authors utilize and/or leverage some of the most recent resources that are available? Before answering these questions in this review, it may be helpful to first provide a general orientation to the textbook as a whole.

Grasping God's Word is divided into five main parts: (1) "How to Read the Book- Basic Tools," (2) "Contexts-Now and Then," (3) "Meaning and Application," (4) "The Interpretive Journey-New Testament," and (5) "The Interpretive Journey-Old Testament." Aside from a thorough set of indices (scripture, subject, and author), the volume also includes three useful appendices: "Inspiration and Canon," "Writing an Exegetical Paper," and "Building a Personal Library" (more

on this later). *Grasping God's Word* is organized “pedagogically rather than logically” (xv). That is to say, generally speaking, Duvall and Hays “begin with practice, move to theory, and then go back to practice. We have discovered in our teaching that after students have spent some time digging into the process of reading the Scriptures closely, they begin to ask more theoretical questions. We are extremely encouraged by the positive reception our students have given to the pedagogical arrangement” (xv). Each chapter begins with an attention grabbing “hook” followed by a non-technical presentation of the topic. After the conclusion, several assignments appear that are designed to help students apply the content of each chapter.

As noted above, it is beyond question that Duvall and Hays have succeeded with *Grasping God's Word* in producing a book that helps to “bridge the gap” between “popular guides to understanding the Bible” and so-called “graduate-level hermeneutics texts” (xiv). The pedagogical sensitivity that the authors have given throughout the text to “plain-language explanations” is highly commendable as is the strong emphasis on the Bible being “more than a deposit of static truth that must be manipulated. It is God’s great story that is understood and lived out. Our approach underscores careful reading and wise interpretation, culminating in commitment to apply what we know (John 14:21). A person who truly grasps God’s Word will find that Word grasping them” (xiv).

The layout and presentation of *Grasping God's Word* is also quite pleasing and user-friendly. There is ample white space, wide margins, and clear graphics, diagrams, charts, and graphs throughout. The stories and illustrations are also quite poignant and “pitched just right” for most students. Its length is also a boon as few instructors would feel that a student was arduously burdened even in assigning a supplementary text (or two). Mention should also be made of the excellent supplementary resources that are also available, such as the Workbook, Laminated Sheet, and Video Lectures (Zondervan).

In light of these strengths, though, it pains me to state that unlike the fairly substantial and rather innovative changes that occurred between each of the prior editions of *Grasping God's Word* (for example, it was only in the third edition that “consulting the biblical map,” i.e., the fourth step of the interpretive journey, appeared), most of the changes that occur in this fourth edition are fairly uninspiring.

To illustrate, Duvall and Hays have changed some of their pop culture references from Lady Gaga to Carrie Underwood and from Jason Bourne and Chuck Norris to Iron Man and Captain Marvel (see 141–42). Alongside this, Assignment 11-2 “Using the ESL Bible Code” has also been deleted (see chapter eleven, “Levels of Meaning”).

Likewise, in their listing of various volumes pertaining to historical-cultural

contexts (see 122–33) and “Building a Personal Library” (see 509–46), certain new books do appear (and a few old ones have also been removed). Such routine changes, however, though expected (and welcome) remain fairly inconsequential in the whole, as most specialist in various fields will undoubtedly still note the conspicuous absence of notable volumes throughout each of these sets of list(s). For example, throughout *Grasping God’s Word*, the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, Cline’s Hebrew dictionary (Sheffield, 1993–2016), and HALOT are all not mentioned.

One will also notice the thorough absence of annotations. This loss makes each of the above-mentioned listings—particularly those that are marked with an asterisk in the text as being “especially recommended” (see 509)—far less useful than if the authors had made extended comments about their decision-making processes and rationale. Perhaps reference(s) to specialized volumes in that area, such as John F. Evan’s superb (and affordable) volume, *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works 10th ed.* (Zondervan, 2016), would have helped alleviate some of these problems.

In addition to the above, other (fairly minor), changes also include the fact that the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) and the Common English Bible (CEB) are now both briefly mentioned in the first chapter on “Bible Translations.” That being said, however, it is lamentable that there is still no clear discussion of the “New World Translation” by the Jehovah Witnesses or any other “sectarian” translation(s), such as those works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), or even the increasingly popular “Passion Translation.” Alongside this, most of the references about the venerable KJV still need to be significantly bolstered to reflect more up-to-date content and academic scholarship, as does the overall discussion of the Septuagint/Old Greek and the Apocrypha, particularly in light of the fact that the appendix “Inspiration and Incarnation” remains largely unchanged since its introduction in the second edition.

Alongside the above, it is also disappointing that *Grasping God’s Word* continues to inordinately refer to the Bible’s original languages as being Hebrew and Greek, with very little reference being made to the not insignificant role of Aramaic (see, for example, 4, 8, 166, 174, 176, 178, 186; cf. 6). It is also sad to see the consistent lack of attention that is given to the genre of Old Testament apocalyptic, as the only reference in the subject index to “Apocalyptic Literature” actually pertains to the book of Revelation (see 151, 555; cf. 325–50, 435–62). In brief, is it not reasonable to assert that these not inconsequential matters ought to have been effectively addressed by this fourth edition?

The most substantial (but not necessarily the most welcome) change of the fourth edition of *Grasping God’s Word* involves chapter nine: “Word Studies.” To be clear, unlike the previous three editions where students were shown

step-by-step how to use a basic hard-copy concordance and certain other lexical tools, Duvall and Hays now recommend using the STEP tool (Scripture Tools for Every Person) developed by the scholars at Tyndale House Cambridge (see 176). To be clear, while STEP is, indeed, fantastic and the specific implementation of this particular resource in *Grasping God's Word* is a fine decision, the author's failure to provide readers with detailed explanations as to how to also properly use hard-copy concordances (Hebrew and Greek) categorically mars this otherwise excellent add-on.

What truly compounds the problem, though, is this: Duvall and Hays explicitly state, for example, that "G1377 . . . is the concordance number . . . but you don't need to worry about that for now" (see 177) and yet, despite this assertion, nowhere in the entire chapter (unlike the previous three editions) is a student actually given clear directions (or a specific tutorial) as to how a concordance number should be used. In point of fact, Duvall and Hays still retain a full-page facsimile from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Abridged Edition*, edited by Verlyn D. Verbrugge (Zondervan, 2003) and still encourage all students to "check their work" using that particular resource but without the assistance of the accompanying tutorials, graphs, charts, and guides (see 186–87). To this end, I am persuaded that it is prudent for those things pertaining to doing actual hard-copy concordance work (both of the Old and New Testaments) to be retained and even expounded on at length. Even if only for the sake of better orientating those who may be uninitiated to the subject, in general, and to better facilitate engagement with the resources to which they are coded.

Irrespective of these things, it remains inexplicable why (in light of Verbrugge's volume still being present) why the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* 2nd ed., edited by Moisés Silva (Zondervan 2014), fails to make an appearance, not to mention, his *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* (Zondervan, 1995), which, in my estimation, at least, ought to be required reading in any course on effective biblical interpretation, alongside Benjamin L. Baxter's *In the Original Text It Says* (Energion, 2019). Lastly, one regrets that there still remains no effective discussion about how the field of linguistics influences and effects exegesis. As such, true discourse analysis (involving register, field, tenor, mood, etc.) is brushed to the side (cf. 81).¹

To summarize, despite the (not insignificant) dearth of similar, evangelical, up-to-date, resources currently available on the topic and despite the remarkable benefits that Duvall and Hays have provided to all beginner-intermediate students of the Bible with the initial and subsequent publications of *Grasping God's Word*, the need for further specificity, substance, clarity, and nuance in not a few key

1 Minor errata (mostly typographical and bibliographical in nature) do appear throughout the volume (see 5, 17, 59, 111, 126, 132, 147, 156, 242, 271, 307, 409).

areas, make it something of a challenge to wholly commend this new fourth edition release. One can only hope that a future edition might be able to correct some of these matters so that all serious students of Scripture can benefit as much as possible from Duvall and Hay's notable work.

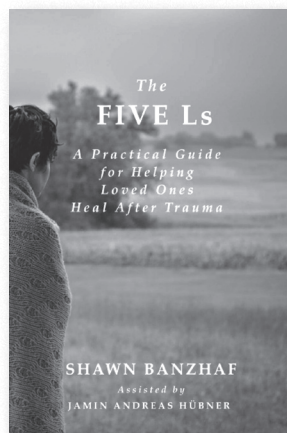
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The Five L's: A Practical Guide for Helping Loved Ones Heal After Trauma. Shawn Banzhaf. Rapid City: Hills Publishing Group, 2021. ISBN 978-0-9905943-7-6. Pp. 127. Paperback. \$11.99 (USD).

The *Five Ls* arrives at a critical moment in global history. First, we all battle grief. Grieving is not limited to the experience of death. As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all of humanity is dealing with some form of grief. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, the loss of some movement and other freedoms associated with the lockdowns, job loss, school closures, or anticipatory grief of what may come next, over the next few years people will be seeking help to navigate their grief. This book is a key tool that will help us prepare to navigate our own grief as well as help those around us wrestle through their own experiences. It is designed to serve as both a stand-alone book that anyone can read and as a group study book where many can come together and heal collectively.

Banzhaf is a National Guard veteran who has been caring for fellow veterans as they battle their grief. *The 5 L's* is a compilation of the most important lessons he has learned.

His guidance begins with love and the simple question of what can I do to help? This question “shows the heart of the person asking” (27). It opens yourself up to spending time and energy with the person and, potentially, on any actions that come from their answer. Banzhaf gives us a “bold and shameless challenge” (31) to love with reckless abandon. As he wrote, we need to “love like there is no tomorrow the people who are placed in your path” (31). He goes on to give us two key reasons why we should love those who are grieving. The first is that we love because we all need it. The second is because “healthier and happier people around us means we can be healthier and happier” (34). The world is now an interconnected community, and we cannot simply say that something is not our problem. We cannot separate ourselves from those around us who are grieving.



This may be the single most profound lesson we learned through COVID. There was hardly a country on earth that was not impacted.

Finally, we are reminded that love is active and selfless. Love is patient. Love is hard and can be dangerous at times. Banzhaf ends this section with a look at true forgiveness and a “word to Dudes” about toxic masculinity. Ultimately, he “can’t stress enough the importance of love in the process of healing for people in trauma” (51). Perhaps most important is his reflection that he doesn’t “think society’s problem is ‘too much compassion’” (47). Learning to truly love others is the starting point for grief recovery.

The remaining 4 L’s give practical steps to walking alongside those suffering from trauma or grief. These steps begin with listening. When we listen, we need to be focused on entering the experience of those talking rather than finding solutions as they speak. In sharing his own experience with trauma at the end of his tour of duty, Banzhaf lets us into his world to demonstrate the difference listening made in his healing. He speaks of how his wife listened to him while he wrestled with his grief caused by serving in the military. Her willingness to not offer solutions but to simply listen allowed him to process his grief, regardless of how long that took.

It is possible that the next section, learn, is the hardest one to accept. This is because it takes a lot of time to learn new things. Banzhaf sums up the need to learn as being to eliminate fear. In his words “understanding can dispel fear, because we fear what we do not understand” (72). In my experience, few people take the time to learn about both the trauma people endure or about the people themselves. Learning can be a burden as it takes time, and we are increasingly living in a world that is moving at breakneck speed.

Banzhaf offers that we all need to learn about trauma to help us better understand those who go through it. He reminds us that this is a balancing act between learning about trauma but not becoming so overconfident in our understanding of trauma that we are no longer able to learn about the experiences those around us are enduring. It is worth reading the entire chapter as he gives some great insight into the nature of trauma.

Chapter 4 guides us through the process of lessening the potential for our loved ones to be exposed to the triggers of their trauma. In relating his own story of how his wife did this for him, Banzhaf explains that we need to learn what triggers our loved ones and then work to lessen those triggers. This is entirely to protect and give space for healing. Often victims of trauma are not aware of when they are going through it again. Thus, the role of the caregiver becomes very important in offering this protection.

Banzhaf’s final L is to lead. He explains that this comes from doing the first 4 L’s. To lead means to bring order to the chaos. People dealing with trauma and

grief are living in chaos. By practicing the first 4 I's we naturally begin to remove the chaos from their lives. As he said in his concluding thoughts, this brings about hope for those who have been deeply wounded.

I am convinced that this book is a must read for everyone, especially those serving in leadership. As I said in the opening paragraph, the world is experiencing grief as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to bring illness and death across the globe. For those of us in the Western world, the process of grieving has been largely left to individuals to deal with on their own. This book makes it very clear that real healing will only happen when we as family, friends, and communities rally around those who have suffered trauma and are dealing with the grief that left behind. It is a great work, an easy read, and a profound contribution to the practical side of ministry.

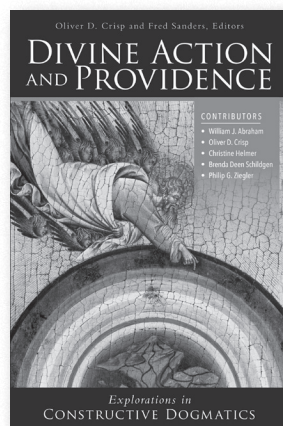
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Divine Action and Providence. Ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. ISBN 978-0310106883. Pp. 239. Softcover. \$34.99 (USD).

Does God really do anything? And if so, how?

These questions have come under considerable scrutiny for the past quarter century—and recently, in the last few years.¹ Two theologians assemble together a collection of essays by various scholars addressing different angles on this subject of “divine action” and “divine providence.” The symposium was assembled from lectures given at the Seventh Los Angeles Theology Conference in early 2019.

The subject matter is fraught with complications. On the one hand, the religious claim of divine action (across traditions) is basic and essential to each faith: God is real, and “does stuff.” It therefore has to find some kind of articulation, even if extremely provisional, limited, and pragmatic. On the other hand, divine action and providence is perhaps the most speculative of all questions. It



¹ See, for example my reviews of William J. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, volume 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) for *Reading Religion* (June 1, 2018); review of William J. Abraham, *Divine Agency and Divine Action*, volume 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018) for *Reading Religion* (April 11, 2018); review of Sarah Ritchie, *Divine Action and the Human Mind (Current Issues in Theology)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) for *The Canadian-American Theological Review*.

requires much guess work and inferences based on layers of what sometimes amounts to little more than conjecture. Proof-texting within the Christian faith is never adequate and sells itself short, as is the case with other authoritarian moves.

Philosophical engagement is therefore a central approach of the essays. This also naturally requires historical re-positioning, which chapters 4–8 do quite well. Chapters 1–3 attempt to lay out some of the basic issues surrounding the subject, while the last chapters, 9–11, make specific arguments in developing the doctrine. For example, Jonathan Hill in “Should a Christian Be an Occasionalist?” is pure philosophical theology, arguing “yes” to strong occasionalism (God causes all physical and mental events, whereas “weak occasionalism” only affirms God as the causation of physical events). Similarly, Ziegler in “The Devil’s Work” attempts to reposit the doctrine of providence in terms of unmasking the evil one (185–86).

These types of essays are in response to more blunt and critical ones, like Christine Helmer’s “Providence.” Perhaps the most interesting and provocative of the book, she argues that the doctrine of providence has become a serious problem:

The crisis of modernity is evident around us. The avatars of death have charted the next phase in the linear progress narrative. With modern reality spiraling out of control, the doctrine that created it in the first place has become a theodicy. The doctrine once used to uphold God’s sovereignty has become misused to legitimate the progress of history with its nationalism, white supremacy, sexism, and economic colonialism. Providence has become dystopic, the final act of the human drama. (93)

Helmer finds an earlier critique in Martin Luther, for “Luther’s God is the one who unmasks providence as a theological delusion. The intervention we need to learn from Luther is that we need to get theologically real” (94). Also critical is the essay by Brenda Deen Schildgen (“Divine Providence”), which argues that “the idea of a providential theory of heaven on earth would have struck Augustine as perilous ground on which to stake one’s temporal or eternal felicity” (156).

In reading the book I was reminded of Gordon Kaufman’s reflections in his *In Face of Mystery* regarding theological breakdown.² The classical models don’t

2 E.g., “Claims are often made, by both Catholic and Protestant theologians, that theological work must begin with Christian faith, that it is essential to accept the Bible as God’s revelation in order to do Christian theology, that the church’s fundamental affirmations must be regarded as authoritative for faith and life. I want to argue, however, that all such authoritarian moves actually express not the vitality of faith but its threatening breakdown. It is necessary to make an authoritarian demand of this sort only when a conceptual frame no longer makes sense of experience and has thus begun to seem useless or meaningless. Appeals to divine revelation as the ultimate authority in theology,

need a dust-off, but perhaps replacement. I was therefore somewhat disappointed that there was little discussion of mystery, and little to no engagement of the panentheist tradition (McFague, Moltmann, et. al) that (in my view) has some of the most compelling and practical models developed on this subject. There, the perspective is one of constructive theology—recognizing how metaphors work in theologizing, and how we have to ask what our metaphors are *doing* to those people who utilize them in life and prayer. This is particularly important given how prominent “providence” plays in the life of religious adherents and practitioners, and how prominent it has played in leading the modern world intoologies of escapism and complacency in the face of (for example) ecological disaster. Being steeped in Reformed theology and classical theism, however, most of the book unfortunately didn’t venture far in those directions. The kind of philosophizing in the book is not, in other words, like of that of the spirit of Cornel West and inspires people to hit the streets, but more of cloistered academics resolving medieval theological disputes.

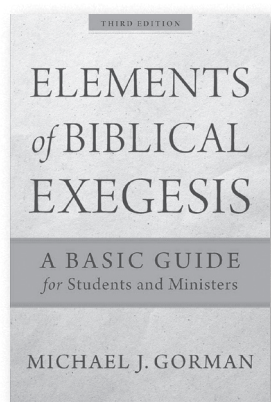
At any rate, I think readers will find something interesting on this subject within the pages of *Divine Action and Providence*. The quality of the essays and writing are generally good, and never too long.

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Michael J. Gorman. *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, Baker, 2020.
ISBN: 978-1-5409-6031-3. Pp. 352. Paperback. \$22.49 (USD).

Effective biblical interpretation plays a central role in the life of every believer. As disciples of Christ Jesus the Lord, those who are regenerate are not only commanded to teach others the life-changing message of Scripture and the Gospel (Matt 28:20) but to do so aright in a God-honoring, well-studied, judicious fashion (2 Tim 2:15). At the same time, however, whether one is reading the Bible for the first time or has been since early childhood, there are always those passages that seem “nearly impossible to understand” and also those passages that “you think you understand but that your instructors, classmates, fellow church members, parishioners, or friends from other religious traditions or cultures interpret quite

therefore, should be regarded as a warning flag: they are made when the theological conceptual frame is not working as well as it should.” Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).



differently (3). Enter *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* by Michael J. Gorman now in its third edition.

Although this (third) edition has much in common with the first (Hendrickson, 2001) and second editions (2009, Baker, 2010 Baker Academic edition) of *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, it is also quite different. According to Michael J. Gorman:

Every sentence of every paragraph has been reread and sometimes modified, either for greater clarity or to nuance what was there. New paragraphs and examples have been included on various topics, sometimes reflecting developments in the field or in my own thinking. The chapters with discussions of various interpretive approaches (including theological interpretation and missional hermeneutics), in particular, have been slightly revised and expanded. Furthermore, additional material on the importance of both the text's canonical context and the interpreter's social and ecclesial contexts has been included. In that regard, the book is more attentive to the global character of biblical interpretation. This focus is reflected in the inclusion, for the first time, of a sample paper from a student in the Majority World. Both this paper and a new sample exegetical summary page include theological and missional perspectives on the text. Finally, the section of resources for the various elements of exegesis has been updated and expanded, and it includes resources from the Majority World. (xvi)

That being said, it is also important to note that Gorman explicitly states that the purpose of this book (and its intended audience) remains the same, namely, to provide “students and ministers with an unapologetically practical approach to exegesis that is built on a strong theoretical foundation” (xviii). Unequivocally, Gorman succeeds! Prior to commenting any further, however, it is best to offer a general orientation to the text.

Aside from the preliminary acknowledgements and introduction(s), *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* is divided in three main parts: (1) Orientation, (2), The Elements, and (3) Hints and Resources. Four helpful appendices (Tables of Exegetical Method, Practical Guidelines for Writing a Research Exegesis Paper, Sample Exegesis Papers and Sample Exegetical Summary, and Selected Internet Resources for Biblical Studies) and a combined subject/author index round out the volume (there is no Scripture index).

Readers will notice that the bulk of the book is comprised of Part Two (seven chapters as compared to two chapters a piece for part one and part three). The length of the chapters also varies considerably in proportion to the nature of the topic under consideration (see xxi). For example, “Detailed Analysis” (109–37) is

substantially longer than the one entitled “Survey” (69–74). From a pedagogical perspective, students will surely appreciate the helpful ‘works cited’ bibliographies that are provided at the end of every chapter. This is not to mention the immensely clear ‘chapter summaries’ in addition to the ‘practical hints’ and ‘further insights and practice’ sections as well. The writing style throughout the volume is lucid and clear and the examples provided are appropriate for its target audience. With respect to this last point, one notes that *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* “does not require, nor does it preclude, knowledge of the Bible’s original languages” (xx). Penultimate, the text itself is also quite pleasing to the eye. There are ample tables/graphs/charts copious headings and subheadings, and an effective use of bold-face type and shading. The length itself will also prove most welcome for both students and instructors, as no one would feel it onerous to read the book in its entirety, even alongside other texts. Lastly, some mention should also be made here of *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible* (Baker Academic, 2017). To be clear, Gorman explicitly states that he had edited this particular volume, in part, as a companion to *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* (see xiii).

To critique, there is very little to quibble with in this book. Although some users may regret that there is little to no effective discussion concerning “true” discourse analysis (register, field, tenor, mood, etc.) or certain other aspects of linguistics, one must recognize that the text was made “*deliberately* basic, not to curtail further study but to stimulate it and, in the meantime, to prevent disaster in the classroom and the pulpit” (xxi; italics original). In this way, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis* was never “intended to replace more detailed books on interpretations of the Bible, on specific literary genres, or on hermeneutics” but rather “to help prevent exegetical illiteracy among everyday readers, teaches, and preachers of biblical texts” (xxi).

The final chapter, “Resources for Exegesis,” is worth the price of the book alone. Gorman’s lists are extensive and cover a wide variety of material. Of course, specialists are sure to find some not insignificant “gaps” within Gorman’s delineations, such as the conspicuous absence of Cline’s Hebrew dictionary (Sheffield, 1993–2016), Porter’s *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* (Bloomsbury, 1992), or various resources that pertain to the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran) or the LXX (Old Greek/Septuagint). One may also, perhaps, have wished that Gorman had pointed out some other sources of bibliographic information, at large, such as John F. Evan’s superb (and affordable) volume, *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works 10th ed.* (Zondervan, 2016),

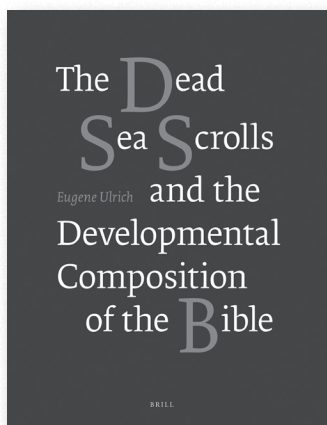
Clearly, though, the most welcome change of the third edition of this book is Gorman’s remarkably acute sensitivity to the “global character of biblical interpretation” and his extensive engagement with the Majority World, including

theological/missional perspectives (see xvi). While space precludes a full analysis, suffice it to say that Gorman's changes effectively "allow Western readers to benefit from Majority World perspectives while also helping Majority World interpreters do better work" (back cover).

To conclude, given the dearth of similar, up-to-date, ecumenical resources that are available, Gorman is to be especially commended for the outstanding service he has rendered to all beginner-intermediate students of the Bible with the initial and subsequent publication(s) of *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*. The extensive revisions that were appropriated in this third edition make it easy to wholly commend this text even to owners of any of the first two editions. Highly recommended!

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Eugene Ulrich. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. ISBN: 978-90-04-27038-1. Pp. 368 pp. Hardcover. \$143.18 (USD).



The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible is written by Eugene Ulrich (O'Brien Professor emeritus of Hebrew Scriptures at the University of Notre Dame and Chief Editor of the Biblical Scrolls). This book is self-described as a sequel to Ulrich's work, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (Brill, 2010) (xi), and serves as a summation of Ulrich's own understanding of what scholarship has learned from the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls concerning the development of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (hereafter HB/OT). The book is divided into four major sections comprising a total of

nineteen chapters. The introductory section (chapters 1–2) offers a "general map of the landscape," (15) concerning scholarly perceptions of the development of the text of the HB/OT.

In chapter 1, Ulrich writes that the "text of the Hebrew Bible is an abstract entity" (1)—it is not static, but pluriform. Ulrich identifies three reasons for this pluriformity, namely: (a) the adaptability of subject matter inherent in the texts themselves, (b) the problem of oral culture, and (c) the long periods of time between the transmission of the text from this oral culture into writing and the process of copying (see 2). Ulrich states: "the literature grew as community

literature” (5), being formed as a way to impact the nation of Israel throughout its history. As such, these works were not originally understood as “Scripture,” but rather as “national epics” (6). At some point in the Second Temple Period priestly narrative frameworks and divine commands were introduced into the texts, shifting the text into a new category from (merely) literature to Scripture. As Ulrich puts it, “in a sense, the word about God became the word of God” (7).

Chapter 2 deals with a paradigm shift that Ulrich labels “post-Qumran thinking” (15). Ulrich explores the need to rethink one’s modern notions concerning the HB/OT and the terminological imprecision or bias that proliferated early scholarship (16–18). In particular, Ulrich deals with the question of whether there was a “standard biblical text” in early Judaism (18). To be clear, the author notes that this very question poses troubling presuppositions in that it assumes that the existence of a category called a “standard text” that may not have actually existed during this period (21–24). Moreover, what does one mean by the word “standard”? Does one mean normative? Common? Ulrich is careful to remind his readers about the coincidental historical preservation of the MT over other text forms (24–25).

Section 2 (chapters 3–10) consists of a broad survey of the evidence from the biblical Qumran scrolls and how they contribute to our understanding the development of the Hebrew Bible. The evidence from Qumran supports Ulrich’s thesis that the HB/OT was, indeed, pluriform in early Judaism. These chapters are approached by four categories of textual variation, all of which occur on differing strata of the texts themselves: (a) variant editions, (b) isolated insertions, (c) individual textual variations, and (d) orthography (40).

Chapter 3 describes the developmental growth of the Pentateuch in the Second Temple Period. More than one hundred fragments from the Pentateuch survived at Qumran and, although early textual critics thought that the Pentateuch had become stable around the time of Ezra, the material at Qumran suggests this is not, in fact, the case (29). This chapter focuses on 4QPaleoExod^m, 4QExod-Lev^f, 4QNum^b, 4QLev^d, and 11QPaleoLev^a, which are compared and contrasted with the MT, SP, and Old Greek/Septuagint, i.e., the LXX. Based on the evidence collected, Ulrich concludes that the text of the HB/OT was still very much in flux during the Second Temple Period and that differing literary editions of books of the Pentateuch coexisted and were circulated and accepted in Palestine.

This section is diverse in scope, dealing not only with the Pentateuchal texts, but also the book(s) of Joshua (chapter 4), Judges and Kings (chapter 5), 1–2 Samuel (chapter 6), Isaiah (chapters 7–8), and Jeremiah (chapter 9). Two chapters in particular are especially significant: chapter 4 deals with the three divergent locations for where the altar was supposed to be built in the book of Joshua: (a) Ebal (MT Joshua 8:30–35), (b) Gerizim (SP Deut. 27:4), or (c) Gilgal (4QJosh^a).

Ulrich concludes that 4QJosh^a presents the earliest and most natural reading, whereas the SP is driven by sectarian theology and the MT as an apologetic against the SP reading. In chapter 6, Ulrich examines a series of readings in which the LXX is faithful to a Hebrew text similar to 4QSam^a that is “simply at variance with the MT” (80). He also demonstrates that a Hebrew edition similar to 4QSam^a most probably lies behind the source for both Josephus and the Chronicler (80).

Section 3 (chapters 11–16) is a summation of sundry new shifts in post-Qumran thinking and addresses the terminology and conceptualization of the biblical Qumran scrolls. One important aspect of this work is Ulrich’s reaffirmation that no “sectarian variants” exist in the biblical Dead Sea Scrolls (chapter 11) and that many scrolls, such as 4QReworked Pentateuch and 11QPsalms^a, that were originally labelled as “nonbiblical” in early scrolls scholarship, are now rightly to be viewed as Scripture (chapter 12). In this section, Ulrich reiterates the oft cited problem of a “rewritten Bible” and the unclear boundaries between Scripture and commentary (chapter 13). Additionally, he demonstrates the increased recognition of the Samaritan Pentateuch as not a “vulgar” (common) sectarian text, but as a common Jewish Hebrew recension (chapter 14). Furthermore, the Septuagint translators, whether through a strict or free rendering, were faithful to an edition of a Hebrew text no longer preserved (chapter 15). The final chapter of this section deals with the Masada scrolls, in which Ulrich argues that the fragmentary scriptural remains do not argue for or against any one edition, but that these correspond to both SP and MT readings.

Section 4 (chapters 17–19) is concerned primarily with the language and concept of a so-called “canon” in early Judaism. In chapter 17, Ulrich cites a variety of definitions for the word canon from theological dictionaries (270–72) and offers some important insights. Firstly, a book itself may be canonical in the sense of being authoritative, but its “textual form” is irrelevant to that work’s perceived authority (275). Further, a canon assumes a “closed list,” but since no evidence exists for canonical lists at Qumran or elsewhere, it must be assumed that the “canon” was open and that “as long as the list was open, there was a collection of authoritative books, a collection of Scriptures, but there was not yet an authoritative collection of books, a canon” (277). In chapter 18, Ulrich looks at how national literature became sacred Scripture by examining Genesis, Leviticus, Amos, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ezra, Daniel, Sirach, and Jubilees. He offers several suggestions for the shift from literature to Scripture: (a) Implicit references “(who but God could have provided the information on the creation of the world?)” (296), (b) explicit references (Jubilees), (c) direct or indirect revelation through angelic beings (Jubilees, Daniel) or human mediators (296), (d) Prophecy, and (e) “resignification” (297). In chapter 19, Ulrich explores the concept of “Scripture” despite the lack of a “canon.” He addresses the commonly made arguments for a

tripartite canon in early Judaism and deals at great length with a particular reading from 4QMMT, which mentions the law, the prophets, and a possible reference to David (300–304). The author concludes that the reading from 4QMMT requires significant reconstruction and interpretation to arrive at a reading for a tripartite canon. As evidence for the scriptural authority of a book, Ulrich gives “indicative evidence” including: (a) multiple copies of books, (b) citation formulae, (c) books quoted as Scripture, (d) commentaries on books of Scripture, and (e) translations of Scripture.

Ulrich himself admits that this work should not be considered the last word on the issue and in the preface notes that it will have served its purpose if it “provides a foundation for the next generation to build upon and envision the scriptural text more accurately” (xi). Since this book offers a broad overview, individual scholarly interpretations of scriptural passages are, for the most part, constrained. Despite this, bias is kept to a minimum and Ulrich approaches the data from a respectfully neutral and humble stance (e.g., 186 where Ulrich points out how his own interpretation of sectarian variants in the LXX may be mistaken but offers helpful criteria for future scholars to discover “true sectarian variants”). One of the major strengths of the volume is Ulrich’s clarity and presentation of material. Each section flows logically from one to the other with the main thrust of the raw data being supplied early on in section 2. The examples the author chooses as illustrations and the graphs and tables he supplies are pleasing to look at and sensible for the purposes of the given chapter (see, for example, the table comparing 2 Sam 24, 4QSam^a, and 1 Chr 21 on 104). One minor point of criticism is that in some instances tables of Hebrew are given with full translation (147–48) but (inexplicably), elsewhere they are not (149).

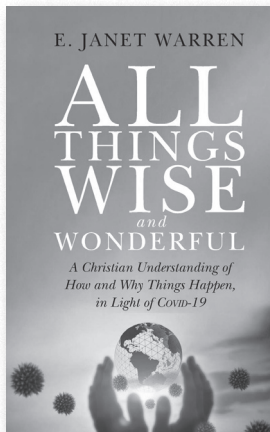
In terms of technical issues, this book, like many others of this nature, includes an index of ancient sources used, but unfortunately lacks a bibliography of any kind. The work is for the most part free of typographical and/or grammatical/spelling errors, though the title for chapter 14 “Rising Recognition of the Samaritan Pentateuch” is, in the header of the following pages, written as “Rising Recognition of the SP and LXX” (emphasis mine). The header seems to be correct, since the chapter contains an entire section dealing with the SP and LXX of Genesis 5 and 11. In the final sentence of the first paragraph on page 115, an indefinite article is missing from the sentence “rather they all witness to [a] single edition.”

Despite these minute issues, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Developmental Composition of the Bible* by Eugene Ulrich will easily become a standard introductory text on the issue of the development of the biblical text in early Judaism. The primary audience for this book is biblical scholars and the educated public, though it will also be of use to those interested in Christian origins and early

Christian scriptural interpretation as well as (to a lesser degree) theologians, and Bible translators.

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E. Janet Warren. *All Things Wise and Wonderful: A Christian Understanding of How and Why Things Happen, in Light of COVID-19*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021. ISBN: 978-1-7252-9203-1. Pp. 212. Paperback. \$27.00 (USD).



The title of this book is brilliantly descriptive of creation that is ineffably intricate in the inter-relationships of its diverse elements. Humans are the most unpredictable and incomprehensible element; they do not know themselves. Their role in most of what happens has been the subject of intense dispute both philosophically and theologically. Warren provides a stimulating review of impenetrable human actions within complex causations, both in their intention and effect, from an unapologetically theological and biblical viewpoint.

God created 'adam male and female to represent him as his image to care for his garden, a place of mountains, streams, and trees for animals and birds, a garden satiated with life and produce for the work of 'adam (Ps 104:10–14). Humans observe the work of God as he continues to grant life to his creatures, breath by breath (v. 29). From a biblical point of view, there is nothing natural about life on earth. In Israelite confession, life emerges from the *holy*, a realm outside of the common, as testified in the representation of creation in tabernacle / temple ritual (Lev 10:9, 10). Maintaining the distinction between life in the common and its dependent source in the *holy* was the essence of the work of the priest. It was made evident in Israelite daily life. Ritually they distinguished clean and unclean, that which belongs to life and that which is destined to death. Hebrews had their own logical understanding of what moderns call nature. Warren draws on numerous Biblical references to affirm this fundamental confession.

Warren begins by showing that causal relations are complex (12–20), effectually beyond explanation. Actions are taken on the basis of partially observed causes and are often unhelpful or even harmful. Most Christians over-simplify the divine role in events (Part 1). Professing Christians tend to be deists in practice and irrational theists in thinking. As a psychotherapist Warren observes a woman in depression declaring that this is where God wants her to be, though she is

taking medication to help her deal with her condition (22). If depression is the will of God, surely medication is not. Such analysis is common, even in the counsel of pastors, reflecting an inadequate theology of God and a misunderstanding of concepts of causation. According to John Piper, “not one virus moves but by God’s plan” (47). Reducing concepts of sovereignty to such platitudes may be good rhetoric, but it is completely misleading in dealing with a pandemic.

In part 2 Warren describes some elements of how science analyses causation. The chapter on probability is an instructive introduction in statistics to the non-specialist, the majority of people who calculate possibilities every hour completely oblivious to the inadequacy of their methods. The chapter on science explains the limits of science and the random aspects of nature: “Quantum theory suggests that uncertainty is inherent in the universe, and that causation can occur at a distance” (101). Humans have learned to benefit immensely from observed order, but tend to forget that “free choice,” whether individually or collectively, is always very restricted (105–106). Outcomes emerge quite outside of human control or understanding. The most mysterious is the emergence of the mind: “If mental processes are determined wholly by the motion of the atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true . . . and hence I have no reason for supposing my brain to be composed of atoms” (108; quote of neuroscientist Bill Newsome). There is a non-material world, not only a power of “mind over matter” as in biological systems, but the power of the Holy Spirit and a sovereign God.

At the level of decision making, part 3 may be the most important. Decision makers are oblivious to the multitude of limitations and controlling factors at work whenever a choice is made. As a functioning organ the brain is efficient and self-serving, often in defensive ways. Need for meaning, simplicity, and certainty serves to control thinking and behaviour, most often quite unconsciously. The brain determines what we see and how we see it (both literally and figuratively), creating illusions, biases, self-defence, and serving our desire to be right. This section concludes with some helpful guides for evaluating causation and the practice of true spiritual discernment in decision making. The reality is that there are no free decisions but there is accountability for every decision or human society could not function.

Sir Isaac Newton, principally in *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (*Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, 1687) revolutionized the world. Standing on the work of Galileo, Kepler, and the philosopher Descartes, Newton’s three laws of motion could precisely describe and predict planetary motion and the phenomena of gravity. It was assumed that observation and rational thinking were now the master predicting causation. The divine should be eliminated from understanding “natural” order, even to the point of its very

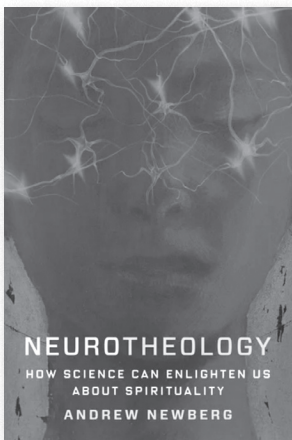
origins. What was deemed to be enlightenment became modernism which morphed into post-modernism. The pillars of epistemological certainty and determinism have proven to be both pathetically anaemic and horrifically destructive, but hubris has kept the spirit of enlightenment and modernism dominant in all areas of science and life. Sadly, Christians have shared in certainty of explanations, sometimes as ruthlessly as the Dawkins delusion.

The lucidity of this presentation of the most profound issues of science and theology masks the depth of research in this volume, which can be seen in copious footnotes and a diverse bibliography of 18 pages. The breadth of work in philosophy, science, and theology, along with many integrated examples from the practice of a medical doctor, psychotherapist, and theologian make every page both informative and interesting. Scholars will learn a lot from this book, including a lot about themselves, which will make them better people and scholars, but anyone literate will understand it and think about life a lot more clearly.

Life and the world are not determined in the way that the world presumes. God does determine the events and destiny of creation, but not in a way that theologians can explain because of human inability to understand causation, beginning at the sub-atomic level. It is good to rejoice in the mystery, but prudent to be less oblivious to the cavalier and often misguided way that decisions are made, even when they are made with great deliberation.

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Neurotheology: How Science Can Enlighten Spirituality. Andrew Newberg. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020. ISBN 978-0231179041. Pp. 321. Hardcover. \$26.00 (USD).



Exactly ten years ago (in Fall of 2011), I was contemplating the subject of my seminary thesis. My first choice was “neurotheology,” a burgeoning new field that studies the intersection between brain science and theology. But before I could begin writing (and before enrolling in graduate courses in neurology at a local university), life interrupted those plans and altered the course of my research towards other things. In this review, I revisit this subject in what will likely become the standard introduction to the subject, *Neurotheology* by Andrew Newberg.

In Newberg’s analysis the “four foundational goals of neurotheology are as follows:

1. To improve our understanding of the human mind and brain.
2. To improve our understanding of religion and theology.
3. To improve the human condition, particularly in the context of health and well-being.
4. To improve the human condition, particularly in the context of religion and spirituality.” (41)

These are rather broad, but appropriately modest given the complicated nature of each field. This particular intersection has already become cramped with misrepresentation and over-belief (to borrow a phrase from William James) of the scientific kind. In any case, some of the questions to be explored in this field are, “Can we determine why some people are devoutly religious whereas others are complete atheists? What research can explain both the beneficial and detrimental effects of religion on the health and well-being of individuals, societies, and all of humanity? How can we explain the tenacity of religion in virtually every culture and age? . . . What perspective can we take to understand the profound impact of spiritual and mystical experiences on a person’s life?” (1). Some of these questions are undoubtedly loaded, but Newberg’s tone and approach remains noticeably open towards possibilities and criticism in a way that isn’t characteristic of those entrapped in scientism/scientific reductionism. In his perspective, neurotheology expands—not limits—our understanding of spirituality (97), as well as religion and its evolution in general.

The first half of the book looks at introductory ideas about neurology, religion, psychology of religion, and the role of myth-making and rituals. Chapters 9–10 get more specific in linking the connections between religion’s traditional roles and functions and their role as scaffolding meaning. “One important way in which myth becomes connected to the body is through the process of ritual,” we read, “Rituals typically involve rhythmic and patterned activities performed using specific body movements and functions . . . rituals bring myths to life and greatly reinforce their power” (180). Newberg also here discusses all of the various methods of observing the brain (e.g., fMRI, electroencephalograms, BOLD fMRI, MRS, etc.). Research can “form the basis of an applied neurotheology subfield that may lead to a deeper understanding of how religious and spiritual practices affect humans along multiple dimensions. We might even find out which practices yield the most spiritual experiences” (223).

Newberg’s approach is always qualified, cautious, and (despite its incredibly clear prose) sophisticated. For example, he is careful to delineate the varieties of atheism (225) and between the “spiritual” and “religious.” He has no interest in showing how religious or non-religious brains (whatever this may mean) are intellectually superior or inferior. For “neurotheology strives to find a less biased

perspective and would acknowledge that believers and nonbelievers alike have certain flaws in their neurological systems that depend heavily on the overall beliefs they hold” (231). There are, nevertheless, cognitive distinctions between people who are highly religious and those who aren’t—at least in *some* research. But even there, “one system may not be inherently better or worse than the other; they simply process information about the world in different ways” (231). In the end, “the information we have about religious and nonreligious individuals is incomplete”; there is no “God spot.” In fact, “a neurotheological approach might conclude that the entire brain is the ‘God Spot’” (238).

After looking at freewill, the book examines mystical experience. Such experiences are typically characterized by five things—a sense of intensity, clarity, unity, surrender, and a “transformational effect” (267). Interestingly, “[t]hese experiences, which last just seconds to minutes, seem to rewire the brain completely in this very short period of time. It is remarkable that all the different ways a person thinks about the world can radically shift from a singular moment of mystical enlightenment” (275). This chapter is a much-welcome follow-up to the work of William James over a century ago.

The book’s conclusion attends to the concerns of religious fundamentalism and mass exodus of out of traditional religious institutions and forms, the nihilistic proposal, and the stubborn persistence of spirituality in our species.

If our brain is always trying to understand the world, and if we are trapped within our brain, then we will always create stories to explain the world. And since we struggle with understanding the universe, our brain acts as a belief-making machine. We have no choice but to generate ideas about all aspects of our universe. In doing so, we never know for sure if our ideas are accurate. Our ideas about God and religion may very well reflect the true nature of the universe, or they might be completely delusional. Our brain will never know. But because our brain will never know, the beliefs we hold become part of our reality. For some, that reality includes God, and for others, it does not. (283)

Neurotheology “represents an intriguing possibility as a middle ground between science and religion” (284) and may even serve as a metatheology—an approach to theology that can be applied to all theological systems. If so, such a metatheology must: (a) account for how and why “the foundational myths of any given belief system are formed” (285); (b) “describe how and why the foundational myths are developed into the complex logical systems of a theology”; and (c) “describe how and why the foundational myths are ultimately transformed into religious and spiritual practices and rituals” (285–86).

Whatever the case, two practical imports of neurotheology for religious practitioners is its ability to: (a) identify which rituals and religious practices and patterns can be more effective (i.e., spiritual and meaningful), such as the type of rituals, or how effective are certain kinds of prayers, etc.; and (b) identify the pathways (e.g., psychedelic drugs) by which people can have intense spiritual experiences. With the rise of “spiritual but not religious” populations, I think Newberg is right that this kind of work will be quite useful and relevant in the next century.

Neurotheology won’t be satisfying for those who expect to find revolutionary discoveries about God, the meaning of the world, or religion by the study of the brain—nor will such readers find great apologetic material for either classical theism or atheism. Newberg is fully aware of how this field can be wielded by such ideologically-motivated enterprises. I was actually shocked by how anti-reductionistic and rigorously nuanced the book was. Even more so, it reads amazingly well and serves as an excellent introduction for those who have read little in either theology or neurology, which is quite a feat considering the subject matter.

I am thankful for the book, and all persons of faith should find it not only non-threatening, but as interesting and potentially useful as the field claims to be. Time, however, will tell how successful and useful neurology, as a field of study, will ultimately be.

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