

## REVIEWS

Douglas D. Webster. *The Parables: Jesus's Friendly Subversive Speech*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021. Pp. 347. ISBN 978-0-8254-4690-0. \$22.99 (USD) paper.

The Parables of Jesus remain some of the most influential religious short stories in the world. They intrigue, baffle, inspire, anger, provoke, and encourage, and yet remain highly mysterious in their original meaning as much as in their contemporary significance. “On the surface,” writes Douglas Webster in *The Parables*, “parables may appear to be quaint moral stories designed to make people nicer, but Jesus worked their obvious hiddenness to open up the secrets of the gospel. He used the common stuff of daily life to teach the extraordinary truths and subversive message of the gospel. He challenged his hearers to interpret the metaphors, to look beyond the surface meaning” (20).

Strangely, then, Webster’s work terminates in a summary of theological readings that look far more like the Sunday-school stereotypes he initially seems to avoid. The theological lens the author brings to the text of the Gospels is incredibly thick, simplistic and reductionistic. Readers are told, for example, that “Parables rescue us from the chaos of social media by providing a simple and compelling picture of Christian discipleship” (24). Many, of course, have not interpreted the parables to be primarily about discipleship. Elsewhere, we learn that “The gospel of Jesus Christ ends all religions” (232), the meaning of which is not entirely clear. One must also apparently assume there is a “Christ figure” in each of the parables to unlock their meaning. For example, “The Christ figure in the parable [of Luke 21] is Lazarus” (221), and “If there is a Christ figure in this parable [of Luke 18], it is the widow” (238), etc. Contrary to what others contend about Jewish apocalyptic literature versus the literal end of the space time continuum, readers are presented with a category of stories entitled “The Sermon on the End of the World” (311), which again, answers fundamental questions before they are even asked. In short, the entire framework of interpretation for the parables is uncritical—unaware of its own theological assumptions and expectations.

While the words of Jesus may be a bit coy and hidden, Webster’s certainly aren’t. One regularly comes across such statements as, “We can assent to a few ideas about Jesus and then go on about our life as if nothing has changed, but

there's literal hell to pay" (330). Similarly, one reads that "We [are] ... admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ ... Unlike the silly bridesmaids" (330-31). Nevertheless, for those who haven't been raised on a steady diet of Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and C. S. Lewis (the latter is cited much throughout, alongside other popular authors), much of what is meant to clarify in *The Parables* may actually confuse. God is presented as a demanding landlord and coercive king (a traditional interpretation), requiring total self-sacrifice (chapter 18-19; "Like a disgruntled employee, it is possible to quit but not leave ... in the body of Christ" (280); William Herzog II, Dorothy Soelle, and other liberation scholars on Jesus are rolling in their graves by framing God as an employer this way!), while the same God presents a pure "gospel of grace" and concern for "others." At one point, readers are encouraged to embrace the contradiction not as a matter of the author's own opinion, but as a constituent part of one's personal relationship to God:

We accept God's unconditional, sovereign control and election of all people *and* we affirm the freedom and responsibility of each individual to respond to God. We believe in God's salvation for the elect through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross *and* we believe in the universal invitation of the gospel, that whosoever may come. We believe in the irresistible grace of God *and* in the freedom of choice to reject as well as to accept the gospel. We believe in the perseverance of the saints *and* we strive to remain faithful to the end. We hold these truths in tension because of our commitment to Christ and his word (276).

The trouble with this common framework of theologizing is numerous. First is failing to identify the "we"; it is obviously a very select subgroup of those who identify as "Christian," and it might be helpful if the author either said who this is or didn't use the second person plural at all. Second, as already mentioned, it swaps the author's opinion on specific theological debates with "commitment to Christ," with no concession on the part of the author that this is what is happening. This puts needless pressure on readers to adopt the author's opinionated views. Third, this type of framework never identifies when the theologian or student of scripture is permitted to capitulate to total mystery and when to break down into theological dogmatisms—which the book is noticeably saturated in. How can we trust that Webster is right when trying to harmonize seemingly contradictory assertions and also right when legitimizing the impossibility of harmonizing? Finally, it also treats the Bible like a systematic theology, which the Bible is not. It ignores the interpretative element in the Gospel authors' writing and experience, and also

ignores the possibility that the parables may not be about timeless, infallible “eternal truths” or “spiritual ideas,” as much as, well, “subversive speech.”

Speaking of subversive speech, while there is much talk about the “world’s values” (259) and the parables’ counter-cultural approach, it is painfully unclear what that really means today. For example, Thieleke is quoted, “Here is the root of all of Israel’s hostility to the prophets and here too is the root of all the fanaticism and radicalism of modern anti-Christians . . .” (303), and then provides an example of the Third Reich. Webster responds, “The great paradox confronting the church is that this gospel of peace in Christ, which is designed to destroy the walls of hostility actually provokes hostility. The old paganisms and the new messianisms fight against the church with everything they have” (303, cf. p. 327). Those faithful to the teachings of Jesus today might immediately think of the Christian Nationalist insurrection of January 6, 2021, where evangelicals, delusional about a “stolen election,” broke in the Capitol while citing Bible verses, carrying Bibles, wielding Christian symbols, and consecrating each area with prayer. Or they might think of President Trump’s misogynist and racist tirades, platformed from the pulpit of First Baptist Church in Dallas. Or, one might think of the Southern Baptist Convention and other religious institutions that have habitually, systematically, and secretly covered up the sexual assault of hundreds (officially, but likely tens of thousands) of members and clergy within their congregations—all of which the leadership sought to protect in the name of prioritizing the “preaching of the gospel.” Webster is quick to interpret Jesus’ words as threats of eternal hellfire and the need for religious obedience (towards the right gospel and God)—but dangerously does not identify what might be the “Pharisees” of today, or what it might look like. What if Webster and his audience aren’t actually on the right side of Jesus’ parables and condemnatory speech? Isn’t the possibility precisely the point of many of the parables to begin with—that our religious, and socio-economic security is not actually what we thought it was?

Thus, far from being “subversive,” *The Parables* come across as quite ordinary and self-affirming. It does not address Herzog’s fundamental question about how they would ever lead Jesus to be killed by the civic/Roman authorities. Similarly, the book is not (as I expected) a work accurately published under an “Academic” imprint. The writing is 8<sup>th</sup> grade level (which in itself is not a criticism) and written under the first person. *The Parables*, in short, is a high-school Bible Study. Readers are directly asked to ponder questions like, “Have you ever bought bookshelves or a cabinet from IKEA?” (22), etc.

In conclusion, *The Parables* is a popular synthesis of previous evangelical reflections about the parables. It may be helpful for youth groups and college

undergraduates attending conservative schools.<sup>1</sup> But it desperately needed critical engagement from contemporary scholars outside of the theological bubble in which it is situated—both from biblical studies and theological studies; less theologizing, and more cultural situating. While this won't make it less unoriginal, it would at least provide readers with an awareness that there are far more interpretive options than presented.

Jamin Andreas Hübner  
LCC International University

Matthew H. Patton and Frederic Clarke Putnam. *Basics of Hebrew Discourse: A Guide to Working with Hebrew Prose and Poetry*. Zondervan Languages Basics. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019. Pp. 288. ISBN 978-0-3105-3576-8. \$26.57 (CDN) \$18.69 (USD) paper.

While mastering the fundamentals of phonology/morphology and ensuring one is intentionally and proactively involved in sustained vocabulary acquisition, retention, and the like are all vitally necessary components (among other things) to effective biblical interpretation, exegesis, exegesis, and (still more) exegesis is the only way of truly wresting the full meaning of Scripture. That being said, however, without the right tools (and reliable guides) one can sometimes be at a loss as to how to move ahead effectively. Enter Matthew H. Patton and Frederic Clarke Putnam, authors of *Basics of Hebrew Discourse: A Guide to Working with Hebrew Prose and Poetry*.

*Basics of Hebrew Discourse* (BHD) introduces intermediate Hebrew students to the “principles and exegetical benefits of discourse analysis (text linguistics) when applied to biblical Hebrew prose and poetry” (back cover). Specifically, Patton and Putnam claim:

Where standard Hebrew reference grammars have traditionally worked to describe the relationships between words and phrases within discrete clauses (micro-syntax), discourse analysis works to describe the relationships that exists between clauses and texts (macro-syntax) ... making clear the relationships between clauses, paragraphs, and larger units of text in [biblical] Hebrew prose and poetry (back cover).

To put things differently, “*Basics of Hebrew Discourse* has been constructed and designed in order to provide students of the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament] with a functional introduction to the use and application of discourse analysis as a necessary component to textual analysis and the exegetical process” (11).

1 I believe the word “perquisites” (p. 243) should be “prerequisites.”

Aside from a one-page table of grammatical terms, two highly detailed table of contents, and a fine introduction (written by Miles V. Van Pelt), *Basics of Hebrew Discourse* is comprised of two main parts: (1) Working with Biblical Hebrew Prose (Patton) and (2) Working with Biblical Hebrew Poetry (Putnam). Three indices (Scripture/Subject/Author) and two brief appendices (*The Question of Meter* and *Gloss, Meaning, and Translation*) round out the volume.

For prose narrative, BHD does not treat *waw* as a discourse marker unto itself. To be clear, Patton contends: “the seemingly endless functions of *waw* are actually not so much functions of *waw* alone but of the larger clausal and supra-clausal structures of which *waw* is a part” (60). In a related way, Patton clarifies that biblical Hebrew also uses sequences of verbs in certain forms and in a certain order in order to communicate discourse relationships. For instance, a *waw* + *yiqtol* after an imperative usually communicates purposes (“so that”) despite the absence of any particular discourse marker (see p. 61). Patton further explicates that there are two levels of meaning for verbal forms (see below). NB: Patton maintains each verbal form (*qatal*, *yiqtol*, etc.) has its own “‘default’ meaning in terms of tense, aspect, and mood, but . . . these defaults can be overridden based on discourse considerations” (64). The two levels are:

Level 1: Tense, Aspect, and Mood: the first level is what people often mean when they speak of ‘verbal semantics.’ Every verbal form (*way-yitol*, *weqatal*, etc.) communicates something about how the verbal action or state relates to time (tense and aspect) and reality (mood). This level focuses on the action or state that the verb represents *a single unit*.

Level 2: Discourse relationships: in addition to the verbal semantics in level 1, verbal forms can also communicate something about how a clause relates to the others around it (62 — all emphases original).

The process for discourse analysis (Hebrew prose) is comprised of three main steps: (1) separate the text by clauses (giving each clause its own box in a table while also indenting subordinate phrases/clauses showing how they relate to the main clause), (2) analyse each clause (noting both its key factors and how the clause relates to the previous clauses), (3) reassess your analysis (ensuring one has accounted for *all* elements comprised therein and that one did not contravene the typical uses of discourse markers, verbal sequences, word order, etc. in order for it to fit comprehensibly with the context). Part One concludes with four examples of discourse analysis: (1) Jonah 1:4A–6B (narrative), (2) 1 Kings 20:23–25 (narrative containing direct speech), (3) Exodus 12:21C–23F (non-narrative), (4) 1 Samuel 9:26–10:13 (a larger pericope of narrative).

With respect to biblical Hebrew poetry, Putnam argues “a poetic line consists of a single clause: one clause per line and one line per clause” and (most distinctly) line *length* (as opposed to rhyme or meter, for example) is a “discourse-level device that the biblical poets used to organize their poems” (164). Uniquely, Putnam also opines that parallelism is “neither unique nor necessary to biblical poetry. It is a cohesive feature of biblical poems, a linguistic resource that helps to make biblical poems examples of *patterned language*” (155 — emphases original). The process for discourse analysis (Hebrew poetry) is comprised of several steps (see p. 262): (1) list all nouns/verbs, (2) parse verbs, (3) gloss the text, (4) determine the length (number of words) and structure (syntax) of each line, (5) analyze the morphology of predicates, (6) describe the type of each clause and its syntax, (7) look for semantic cohesion (semantic analysis, chiasm, ellipses, participant tracking) and logical cohesion (kinds of information/inter-linear relationships).

Part Two concludes with two examples: (1) Psalm 13 and (2) Proverbs 15:31–33.

Concerning Appendix 1, the author’s (rightly) note that attempts to discover and/or define meter in biblical poetry through, for instance, syllable counting (irrespective of the specific method employed) is ill-founded and that emending the text for metrical reasons is also equally illegitimate (pp. 271–72). Appendix 2 clarifies that while the glosses listed in lexicons do reflect how words are often translated, they do not constitute the word’s “‘basic’ or ‘central’ or ‘real’ meaning. Words have ranges of meaning and . . . may have more than one gloss” (273).

Despite the (relatively speaking) complex nature of the information being presented, Patton and Putnam admirably match their writing style with their intended audience. They consistently pitch things just right while also ensuring academic responsibility by means of sustained engagement with the academy at large and, as necessary, some rather content-heavy footnotes.

Typographically speaking, there are sufficient margins, effective bold face type, a good use of white space, and (for the most part) clear headings/subheadings. Almost all Hebrew characters are pointed and (usually) the accents are also included. Students are sure to appreciate the copious examples provided in the text itself while instructors will note that the book itself is not too unwieldy with respect to its overall length, thus enabling them to easily assign additional texts/supplementary reading. Educators are also sure to welcome the different ‘notes to teachers’ sections (see, for example, p. 157). Would, however, that the authors had published a separate work-book-style volume for students to sharpen their new-found skills!

To critique, as a basic introduction to the subject from within a confessional, evangelical perspective, one would be hard-pressed to find a more accessible,

up-to-date, and linguistically informed and sophisticated guide to discourse analysis of Hebrew prose and poetry. While many experts will (most likely) quibble at the author's terminology and/or labeling in certain places (see, for instance, pp. 38–39, 52, 62, 77–78, 81, 88, 90, 95, 98) and though there are also not a few matters concerning Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) that could (should?) have been leveraged by the authors in an introductory work such as this, Miles V. Van Pelt rightly states:

The authors of this book understand that there are a number of different models and methods for engaging discourse analysis and they do not claim to have provided the final or definite word on the matter. On the contrary, it is hoped that the construction and use of a practical introduction for the beginning student will advance, refine, and strengthen the field of study, especially as it is applied to our understanding of the biblical text (13).

In sum, modern linguistic theories, as a whole, can be ignored only to one's peril. Veritably, "discourse analysis provides the stimulus and foundation for further literary, historical, and theological study" (31). Students and educators alike, however, must discern for themselves whether or not appropriating Patton's and Putnam's specific methodologies as laid out in *Basics of Hebrew Discourse: A Guide to Working with Hebrew Prose and Poetry* truly pay the dividends that they claim. The text's primary users will likely be biblical studies students.

Dustin Burlet

Millar College of the Bible (Winnipeg, MB)

Rodney A. Whitacre. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. 508. ISBN 978-0-8028-7927-1. \$67.95 (CDN) \$49.99 (USD) hardcover.

Amidst the many New Testament Greek Grammars currently available, Rodney A. Whitacre's *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* uniquely and concisely combines the fundamentals of Koine Greek alongside key intermediate material. Whitacre desires not only to prepare students for exegesis, but to enable them to read the Scriptures, delighting in the beauty of the text (x). His own joy in reading the (Greek) New Testament comes across clearly (and is contagious!).

Before offering a critique of the volume, it is prudent to offer a brief overview of the text. *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* is five chapters in total length with eight additional appendices (more on these later). The first two chapters provide an overview of Ancient Greek (ch. 1: Introduction to Greek Writing, Pronunciation, and Punctuation; ch. 2: Basic Features of Ancient Greek). These are



followed by two chapters focusing on morphology, aptly named “Morphology of Nominal Forms” and “Morphology of Verbal Forms” respectively. The fifth chapter (which is longer than the first four combined), “Greek Syntax” deals extensively with syntax, providing examples from the New Testament (hereafter NT) to clearly illustrate each point.

The eight appendices concisely deal with much information of interest and include: (1) rules for accenting, (2) words distinguished by their accents and breathing marks, (3) common suffixes, (4) paradigms for reference, (5) summary of selected syntax topics, (6) simple overview of English grammar essentials, (7) suggestions for approaching a sentence in Greek, and (8) principal parts of common Greek verbs. These appendices showcase one of Whitacre’s strengths, clearly communicating the essential information while presenting it pragmatically. I found the appendix dealing with rules for accenting to be a particularly helpful summary and something I will point students to in the future.

In terms of pedagogical sensitivity and typography, the material Whitacre covers is both comprehensive and accessible. Headings and subheadings clearly indicate transitions and bold type is used to highlight definitions and key words. The format of the volume, including many lists and charts, lends itself to much white space which, combined with well-chosen fonts, make its pages both attractive and user-friendly.

Whitacre writes as an experienced teacher, anticipating the questions of the student and specifically offering direction as to priorities in memorization; for example, commenting on stems ending in a vowel, labial, velar, or a dental, he states, “If you have a general understanding of these changes, you will probably be able to recognize the forms while reading without learning these changes in detail” (109).

This volume functions as an excellent reference grammar and by including an Index of Subjects, an Index of Scripture, and an Index of Greek Words, one can quickly and easily find pertinent information. The Glossary of Grammatical Terms provides concise definitions to the grammatical terminology employed throughout the volume. The footnotes not only engage with and direct the reader to numerous other resources, but they also make clear Whitacre’s position in the field, specifically noting areas of agreement and of departure. For example, Whitacre states, “Aspect does not signal time. The main morphological signal of past time is the augment on the indicative of secondary tense-forms—the imperfect, aorist, and pluperfect” (228–29) adding in the footnote,

The temporal reference of the augment is a point of dispute. The view that verb forms do not signal temporal reference is especially associated with Stanley Porter; see *Verbal Aspect*, 76–83; or, more briefly



and accessibly, Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament* .... For the view taken here, which is the most common view, see Fresch, “Typology, Polysemy, and Prototypes” in *Revisited*, 379–415; and AGG §193a.

These comments are of great benefit to the reader and quickly situate Whitacre relative to recent developments in the field, while simultaneously providing clear direction to related works and different perspectives.

Whitacre engages with current scholarship throughout, but this is particularly evident in his discussions of verbs. His comments on voice as a spectrum (following Rutger Allan) are insightful. He states,

to understand the various uses of the middle it is helpful to think of a spectrum representing the ways a subject is related to the action of the verb. On the one end of the spectrum the subject is purely the agent of the action, while at the other end the subject is not an agent at all, but purely acted upon by someone or something else, referred to as the patient .... Other forms of voice then represent views both of the subject and of the verb in relation to transitivity that differ from those of the prototypical form (237).

In addition to the agent-patient spectrum, Whitacre highlights nine other types of subject-affectedness in the middle, which ably served to stretch my own thinking regarding this ongoing discussion. Interestingly, Whitacre holds that “the passive in Greek is not a separate voice, but one of the uses of the middle (§2.6)” (241). As a result, Whitacre regards the verbs employing  $\theta\eta/\eta$  as second middle/passives rather than exclusively passives, which does help make sense of how they function in the NT.

Whitacre emphasizes that the decision to use one tense-form rather than another may reflect an idiom — it is chosen because that is simply how something is said (232). Whitacre is himself cautious and careful not to overstate the impact of any particular grammatical element while clearly articulating what the text is communicating. Paying attention to what is present can be challenging enough, paying attention to what is absent requires another level of familiarity with the text and this is also something Whitacre models well.

One minor shortcoming is the absence of a discussion of the function of adverbs in chapter 5 (Greek Syntax). Another critique is that though Whitacre capably deals with participles, identifying their uses and possible nuances (with an extremely helpful section on determining the nuance of a circumstantial participle), I did not find his discussion as helpful exegetically as Mathewson and

Emig's, specifically regarding how a participle functions relative to the main verb.<sup>1</sup>

It is of interest to note that Whitacre works from Funk's definition of the genitive: "*genitive is the limiting [or] specifying case and is used to circumscribe the meaning of noun/substantive, adjectives, adverbs, and less often verbs.*"<sup>2</sup> Whitacre discusses twenty-four ways the genitive functions (pp. 201–10). Whitacre concisely and effectively communicates the varied uses of the genitive along with clear examples without introducing needless categories.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the volume, Whitacre often includes the ideal examples from the NT. For example, regarding distinguishing the second aorist subjunctive (which always uses a circumflex) from the second aorist second middle/passive (144), Whitacre uses an example from Luke 12:5 where the subjunctive of φοβέω (be afraid) is immediately followed by the imperative of φοβέω, distinguished only by their accents. Whitacre's examples are taken from throughout the New Testament (with numerous examples from every book other than 2 John!).

This volume serves as an excellent resource for the second-year Greek student or for the teacher who is looking for a textbook to use alongside an inductive book study. There are no student exercises or aids for reading specific NT passages included in this volume as it is intended to be used as one part of an inductive study; Whitacre has plans to publish *Learning Koine Greek Passage by Passage*, referencing pertinent sections of this work to help the student understand what they encounter in the NT (ix). *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* would also be highly recommended to anyone who has studied Greek in the past and wants to pick it up again or continue to develop the ability to read and interpret the Greek New Testament. Its primary users will most likely be second year/advanced language students of the Greek NT in Bible College, Christian University College, and Theological Seminaries alongside, one hopes, the industrious pastor and conscientious believer.

Overall, I especially appreciated Whitacre's attention to detail, his clear, concise communication, the care he took to find the ideal examples to illustrate each point, and the richness of the material in his footnotes. Whitacre has done a great service to both the student and the professor with his meticulous research, interacting with recent developments in the field. The inclusion of the fundamentals of

1 See David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 210–15.

2 Robert W. A. Funk, *A Beginning-Intermediate Grammar of Hellenistic Greek*, 3d ed. (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2013), §0888.

3 By comparison, Wallace (Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)) has 33 categories for the genitive and Köstenberger/Merkle/Plummer (Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2020)) have 16 categories for the genitive.

NT Greek alongside more advanced material makes this volume one I will continue to return to and highly recommend.

Amy Hancock

Millar College of the Bible (Pambrun, SK)

Kwok Pui-Lan. *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021. Pp. xii + 261. ISBN 978-0-6642-6749-0. \$30.00 (USD) paper.

The vast majority of Christian theology throughout the last two-thousand years has been dominated by white cis-hetero men. Most of Christianity as it exists institutionally today is also the result of colonialism—whether the forceful spread of Catholicism against Islam from the Crusades to the missions of Jesuits on the American west coast, or to Dutch Reformed colonies in South Africa, Indonesia, Brazil, and Sri Lanka, or to the vast expanse of British imperialism in the 1800s which involved nearly the whole planet. Whatever “gospel” this was, it certainly didn’t spread primarily by witness or persuasion.

Postcolonial theologies remain young, but Kwok Pui-Lan is an exceptional theologian and Christian activist who has spent an entire career undoing the damage of Christian colonialism. Her Asian, feminist, and liberationist perspectives—combined with experiences from Hong Kong to her career as a professor at leading world universities—offers unique insight, correctives, and contributions in a world that is now thoroughly globalized. *Postcolonial Politics and Theology* is a curated and revised collection of articles from her massive trove of scholarly publications. Her contention is straightforward:

Eurocentric political theology, based largely on the experiences of liberal democracy, cannot address the kinds of issues arising in the postcolonial world.... Asia, with more than half of the world’s population, is multicultural, multilingual, multi-racial, and multireligious. In the past several decades, the religious landscape in the U.S. has become increasingly more diverse and pluralistic as well. Political theology in both the Asia Pacific and U.S. context cannot privilege Christianity and must adopt a comparative approach and include discussion of religious plurality and diversity (2).

Contemporary theology simply cannot be coherent without engaging in postcolonial discourse precisely because it is the “default” way of theologizing. “The theological enterprise has been laden with imperial assumptions and motives ever since Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire” (11), she writes. “As globalization has built on the colonial legacy and enables rapid movements of

capital, labor, and resources, the former binary conceptualizations of the world, such as colonizer/colonized, First World/Third World, and ‘the West and the rest’ are no longer adequate to describe the new global relations.”

What then, does a postcolonial theology—an intentionally *constructive* theology, look like?

... it must be embodied in new religious and social practices in our heterogenous and richly textured social worlds, in which the local intersects with the global. These practices are counter-hegemonic, creative, and subversive, poised to produce new forms of beings and institutions in our church, community, and society... This book argues that postcolonial theology functions as a training of the imagination and an attempt to construct a religious worldview that promotes justice, radical plurality, democratic practices, and planetary solidarity (15).

This is a tall order—a kind of “adapt or die” approach similar to other constructive theologians like Sallie McFague and Gordon Kaufman.<sup>1</sup> (“New religious and social practices” is enough to disturb the majority of church deacon/elder boards!) But readers familiar with the movements of our contemporary world will find this necessary direction difficult to deny.

The book contains eleven articles (chapters) in three sections: (1) Contesting Empire; (2) Political Theologies from Asia Pacific; (3) Practices. The book moves logically from principles to practices. The first section examines the basic ideas of postcolonial theology, the relationship of religion to empire, the relationship of race and sexuality to colonialism, and the American Empire and Christianity. The second section looks specifically at the theological developments of the Asian Pacific, including articles on perspectives, transnationalism and feminism (and labor), and the Hong Kong protests and civil disobedience. The final section addresses pedagogy of postcolonial theology, preaching, interreligious solidarity, and “Christian Mission and Planetary Politics” (ch 11).

*Postcolonial Politics and Theology* will be immediately challenging to readers who come from a conservative, western, colonial perspective of theology—where God is conceived as the divine monarch who dispenses timeless abstract truth to a special people (usually white men with theology degrees in the priesthood or pastoral office), and the gospel is conceived primarily as escape from otherworldly hell (as opposed to the earthly hell of colonialism, slavery—or today’s fascist regimes and global warming). Pui-Lan is absolutely insistent that we must

1 Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987); *idem.*, *A New Theology of Climate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Gordon Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

evolve in our understanding of Christian mission as the circumstances of our world change:

The disruption and breaking down of planetary cycles, global warming rising sea levels, and the loss of biodiversity demonstrate that we cannot continue to appeal to human rights, property rights, and social justice in the usual sense, without considering the environment. Eco-justice demands that we include the natural environment in our ethical and moral reflections of justice and consider the inherent value of other living things, whenever human actions impact them.... Earth care and planetary habitability must be an integral part of God's mission in the twenty-first century (195).

She also debunks "myths against peace-building," which include the myth of a "clash of civilizations," which has fueled needless war and violence (170), the myth that "equates secularism as progress and regards religion as irrational, absolutist, divisive, and incompatible with modernity" (170-71), and Islamophobia (171). We must reconceive the habitual tendency of Christians to think of themselves as the only ones with something good to share. As she puts it in one of the most memorable quotes of the book:

A postcolonial approach emphasizes that the aim of interreligious dialogue and engagement is to build relations and avoid drawing a hard and fast line between "us" and "them," or "between "Christians" and "non-Christians." The issue at hand is not whether people profess belief in God or not: the question is what kind of ultimate reality and what kind of power people affirm. Those who affirm power as a top-down process and those who see God or ultimate reality upholding that power are closer to each other, regardless of whether they are Christian or not, than those who affirm alternative forms of power (181).

Furthermore, the concept of "religion" itself must be reconceived (see p. 172).

Even for readers who are aware of these contexts, it will still be challenging to recognize just how important and influential Asian theologies have been in the world over the past several centuries—but especially in the last century. I learned much about Christian history, activism and struggle in Korea, China, Hong Kong, and elsewhere that jarred my typical framework of a "Christian West."

Pui-Lan's writing is clear, well-read, and always relevant to what's happening in the world. It is clear in every page that she loves God and our world, cares for those inside and outside the Christian church, and takes seriously the responsibility of those who construct new discourses, images, and models for human

religious imagination. Radically progressive and academically engaged, *Postcolonial Theology and Politics* is essential for all those engaged in the work of Christian theology and ministry.

Jamin Andreas Hübner  
LCC International University

Ashley E. Lyon. *Reassessing Selah*. Athens, GA: College & Clayton, 2021. Pp. xiii + 357. ISBN: 978-1-7341-9156-1. \$36.42 (CDN) \$29.99 (USD) paper.

*Selah*, an obscure term in the Hebrew Psalter and Habakkuk, has been “the puzzle of ordinary readers and the despair of scholars.”<sup>1</sup> Numerous 19th century scholars have devoted countless hours and many pages in an attempt to clarify this much-disputed word. Veteran commentator, John Goldingay, once quipped (jesting?): “It may be a liturgical or musical direction (‘raise the voice’?), but we do not know . . . David Alan Hubbard advocated . . . it was what David said when he broke a string, which is the most illuminating theory because there is no logic about when you break a string, and there is no logic about the occurrence of *sela*” (Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1: Psalms 1–41*, 599). Mid-20th century archeological finds, however, reveal certain clues and some stimulating new insights about *Selah*’s use during the Second Temple period.

Ashley E. Lyon, Professor of Hebrew for the Israel Institute of Biblical Studies, Professor of Hebrew Bible for the Israel Bible Center, and author of *Reassessing Selah*, states it is her prayer that through this volume “you’ll consider *Selah* in a different light; stripping away all preconceived notions and reading the term in its literary context” (xiii).

Lyon succeeds! *Reassessing Selah* has twelve chapters of different lengths. Chapter one (introduction) offers a select history of research and explicates some of Lyon’s methodology (more on this later). Chapter two explores the backgrounds necessary for understanding *selah* in each of the sources that are used in the book. The next four chapters cover the Hebrew Psalter. To be clear, chapter three analyzes Book I (Pss 3, 4, 7, 9, 20, 21, 24, 32, 39), chapter four Book II (Pss 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 66, 67, 68), and chapter five Book III (Pss 75, 76, 77, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 89). Chapter six engages Books IV and IV (Pss 140, 143) along with concluding remarks about the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Psalter. Chapter seven explores the role of *selah* in Habakkuk (MT). Chapter eight focuses on διάψαλμα (“apart from psalm”) and Pss 2, 33, 49, 79, and 93 in the Old Greek/Septuagint (LXX) version of the Psalter. Chapter

1 Ashley E. Lyon, “What Does ‘Selah’ Mean?” Blog. June 2, 2021. <https://weekly.israelbiblecenter.com/what-does-selah-mean/>

nine engages the Dead Sea Scrolls (both biblical and non-biblical). Chapter ten deals with Pseudepigrapha, i.e., The Psalms of Solomon and The Prayer of Habakkuk (Odes). Chapter eleven goes through several medieval finds, such as Aramaic incantation bowls, the Temple Mount inscription, the inscription at Ein-Gedi, the *Hammath Gader* synagogue, Ein Nashot, the *Gerasa* synagogue, the synagogue of *Horvat 'Ammudim*, and the *Kfar Alma* synagogue. Chapter twelve (conclusion) offers final thoughts concerning the thematic interpretation of *selah* and its place in the Psalter. The book rounds off with a fairly extensive 29-page bibliography, two appendices, 'Selah Occurrences,' 'Dead Sea Scrolls,' and a thorough subject index. Regrettably, there are no other indices (author, ancient sources/Scripture index, Hebrew words, etc.).

Methodologically, texts are evaluated through the lens of compositional and delimitation criticism. Delimitation criticism seeks out "ancient unit delimiters" such as *paragraphos* (a horizontal line between verses) and *petuhot* and *setumot* (major and minor section divisions) by means of *vacats* (empty spaces) within ancient manuscripts (see pp. 17 and 233). Lyon contends: "spacing in manuscripts will be of primary focus in this work along with other textual indicators such as stichographic arrangement of the psalms containing *Selah*" (17). Lyon also states:

Material philology will also be used as a means to look at the relationships in light of the previous texts and manuscripts surveyed . . . The goal of material philology is to look at the relationships between the text and such features as form, layout, para-textual markers, and surrounding context—the ultimate goal to be anchored in the reality of the subject matter, not reliant on historical background. Using ancient delimiters set out in the text, one can combine the lexical and thematic links found through compositional criticism and its compliments to determine a stronger intentionality throughout the biblical psalter. This is one way I will demonstrate *Selah*'s use throughout the MT psalter (18).

There is much to commend in this fairly lengthy yet not unwieldy volume. To begin, Lyon's work is comprehensive with respect to its scope. No other treatment of *selah* provides as much detail in one place. To this end, Lyon will become the standard academic reference work on the subject for years to come. Specifically, because so many of the scholars who wrote on the topic of *selah* published their work(s) before the discoveries in the Judean desert, i.e., the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), Lyon's book stands out from its contemporaries in its ability to analyse more precisely how "*Selah* was being used during the time of the Scrolls' composition" (213).

Thesis-wise, Lyon argues: "*Selah* is more than pause in the text" (213). *Selah*



serves as a rich “transition marker for changes in speaker, changes in topic, or changes in theme” (213). To bolster this assertion, Lyon points to how the scribe who penned QHēvXIIgr did not use διάψαλμα to replace *Selah* but “simply transliterated the term as σελε. This is important because either the scribe did not know what *Selah* meant, or he knew what *Selah* meant and chose to keep the Hebrew term by transliterating it into Greek. Whatever his knowledge, the term was preserved differently here than in any other Greek manuscript” (239–40). Alongside this, “11Q11 employed *Selah* verbally in a communal setting. This spoken word goes against the notion of *Selah* being a silent remark or liturgical direction” but rather “a spoken sentiment of faith” (252; cf. 290). In addition, with respect to 11Q13, one can see how the author “indirectly employed a biblical passage [Ps 82:2], which includes *Selah* as part of the biblical MT Psalter. Thus, since one must ascertain the literary context carefully, and it is clear that the text was read eschatologically, *Selah* . . . fits an eschatological/prophetic/future-oriented context as the author of the *peshar* used its biblical MT citation” (252).

Lastly, concerning the study of Aramaic bowl spells and inscriptions, while it is true that each of the inscriptions and incantations are different, Lyon (rightly) maintains:

They all reveal the multi-faceted nature of *Selah*. Familiar themes . . . blessings, judgment, and salvation . . . are formed in their own contexts, in their own time. Each context contains an element of future oriented hope that benefits the person who either constructed a synagogue or ancient mosaic floor, or for those who desired protection from demons and evil spirits. Familiar placement at the end of sentiments also mirrors *Selah*’s use in the MT, LXX, and DSS as theme and structure intertwine. And, as incantations were written and then performed aloud over the families to invoke protection, we again find *Selah* in its oral element as it correlates once again with familiar themes found in the MT. Thus, through its diversity in use, we are able to see a progression in the use of the term that reveals its tradition history in the context of not only liturgy, but in spiritual protection association with divine blessing through the ages (277–78).

Despite its strengths, however, *Reassessing Selah* is not above reproach. For example, while Lyon is to be commended in her impressive engagement with primary sources and other works (the ample usage of non-English secondary works is especially notable) the conspicuous absence of some ‘standard’ commentators and other contemporary scholars is somewhat odd.

For instance, Lyon does not cite the fine excursus “Selah” by Peter C. Craigie in *Psalms 1–50* (Word, 1983) nor the new excursus “Selah” (see pp. 410–11) by

Marvin E. Tate in the commentary's second edition (Thomas Nelson, 2004). Pointedly, Tate engages with Klaus Seybold's impressive work in this second excursus, another scholar whom Lyon fails to note. It is also strange how Richard D. Patterson's article "The Psalm of Habakkuk" is referenced by Lyon (188) yet his extensively researched Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Moody, 1993) is not. Likewise, though Lyon does list some of deClaisse-Walford and Rolf A. Jacobson's works (see pp. 306 and 313) their combined contribution to *Psalms* (Eerdmans, 2014) is not in her bibliography. In addition, given Lyon's emphasis on strophic structure, should not Samuel Terrien's *Psalms* (Eerdmans, 2003) have been cited? Readers will likely spot other omissions.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, some book references (see, for instance, p. 314) do not cite the most up-to-date editions. In a related way, since lexicography plays a key role in a work such as this, I was fairly surprised I could not find any reference to Muraoka's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Peeters, 2009) in Lyon's definitions of certain key terms (see pp. 35 and 205). It should also be known that readers should look elsewhere for exemplar lexical, text-critical, and grammatical aids to assist them in their translation work of the Psalms. Also, as noted above, given Lyon's emphasis on stichographic arrangement, some readers may be disappointed how Lyon fails to break the lines down into semantic phrases (both in Hebrew and English) so as to help assist the reader in strophic understanding. Lastly, while the author's translations of each psalm is more than adequate one may quibble that Lyon consistently uses the term 'Lord' in place of the traditional LORD for the *tetragrammaton* (or, even better, the more personal, covenantal name Yahweh). On an editorial level, having complete bibliographical details and references in the footnotes alongside a separate, full bibliography seems unnecessarily redundant. Typographical errata (minor) also appear in some places of the volume (see, for example, pp. 303, 309, 322).

These infelicities aside, Lyon's contribution to the academy through *Reassessing Selah* helps to elevate the position of the Hebrew Psalter beyond 'mere' music. As Lyon states: "the value of interacting on a literary level with this term [*Selah*] can address past and present questions with solid evidence from the texts that we now know contain it. As more discoveries are made, other uses of *Selah* are brought to light. This inter-textual study will, hopefully, provide a new perspective for modern readers of this all-too-important book" (17). Its users will most likely be invested laypeople, certain Christian educators and leaders, Bible

---

2 Some other (older) scholars whom Lyon also fails to note in her bibliography include R. Gyllenberg, "Die Bedeutung des Wortes Selah" *ZAW* LVIII (1940–41), 153–56, and Z. Malachi, "Zur Erklärung des Wortes 'Selah' in der Bible," *Bet Miqra* XI (1965–66), 104–10.

College/Christian University College and seminary students, and, quite possibly, studious pastors, preachers, and ministers of God's Word. *Sui generis!*

Dustin Burlet

Millar College of the Bible (Winnipeg, MB)

Mark D. Janzen, ed. *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2021. 304 pp. ISBN 978-0-3101-0874-0. \$30.69 (CDN) \$24.99 (USD) paper.

Despite almost a century and a half of archaeological work in Egypt and the Middle East, one of the most highly debated issues within biblical history continues to be the Exodus event. The seeming lack of evidence directly tied to Israel's sojourn in Egypt and the account of the Exodus has led to innumerable attempts to reconcile the biblical narrative and the archaeological record. *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications*, edited by Mark D. Janzen, brings together five scholars with different approaches to this issue: Scott Stripling lays out the case for a 15th century BC Exodus (commonly called the Early Date), James K. Hoffmeier and Peter Feinman each give distinct interpretations of why a 13th century BC date should be preferred (the Late Date), Gary A. Rendsburg dates the Exodus to the 12th century BC, and, finally, Ronald Hendel treats the Exodus as (mere) cultural memory.

Each of the contributors are given one chapter to lay out their view of the Exodus, after which each other author is given the opportunity to respond. Every chapter concludes with a rejoinder by the original contributor. As general editor, Janzen also provides an introduction and conclusion to the book. Unlike some other Counterpoints books, there are no 'pastoral reflections' or the like.

*Five Views on the Exodus* is consistent in its layout (for instance, each scholar is allotted the same number of pages) but also in the ability of each presenter to fully interact with the thoughts, comments, and perspectives of their peers. Interestingly, the five views seem to have been intentionally presented in the "most conservative" to "most liberal" order. One wonders, however, how the authors themselves might have felt about such an arrangement!

Stripling's chapter, "The Fifteenth-Century (Early-Date) Exodus View," heavily emphasizes a so-called 'literal' reading of 1 Kings 6:1. Stripling claims that the relative chronology of the Bible indicates a specific date for the Exodus (1446 BC) that can be connected with other events in world history (29–30). Stripling's strongest evidence for the 'Early Date' comes from his discussion of various sites mentioned in the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan (Hazor, Jericho, etc.), the Amarna Letters, and especially in his explanation of Tell ed-Daba

as the location of Israel's sojourn and departure. Egyptologists have discovered evidence of a distinctly Asiatic/Semitic city at the site of Tell ed-Daba (ancient Avaris/biblical Rameses) which was inhabited from circa 1900 BC until approximately 1440 BC, when it was abandoned during the reign of Amenhotep II. The last century of its habitation included the construction of a palatial Egyptian royal quarter; a fact easily correlated to the enslavement of the local population for state-sponsored construction projects.

Stripling's greatest weakness is that some of his evidence is not widely accepted by other archaeologists. His attempts to use, for example, the Berlin Pedestal, the structure/altar on Mt. Ebal, and Douglas Petrovich's recent theory that proto-Sinaitic inscriptions are early Hebrew (mentioning individual Israelites) tend to fall on deaf ears (see pp. 35–40, 46–48). While other contributors condemn Stripling for taking biblical numbers too literally, particularly Rendsburg (see pp. 67, 123), one must also ask if such a critique is justified. How else might one record an actual passage of 480 years if (as certain authors more than intimate) biblical numbers can only be (by and large) either 'symbolic' or 'exaggerated' (198–200)?

Hoffmeier's essential premise in his chapter, "The Thirteenth-Century (Late-Date) Exodus View," is that "real events stand behind the sojourn and exodus traditions" (82) and that the Bible should be treated as any other ancient source (85). Hoffmeier uses five types of evidence to support his conclusion that the Late Bronze Age Egyptian context of the Exodus account is secure: (1) Semitic-speaking people lived there, (2) foreigners were enslaved, (3) the Hebrew account in the Torah preserves many Egyptian words, (4) geographical details are impressively accurate, and (5) the toponyms recorded reflect the correct time period (86–103). Since Hoffmeier also acknowledges the appearance of the name Israel on the Merenptah Stela (which is dated to c. 1208 BC) and that Israel was already in Canaan previous to that, this date becomes his *terminus ante quem* for the Exodus/Conquest (105). Hoffmeier speaks with great expertise on these topics and establishes his belief that the Exodus happened between 1270 and 1240 BC.

The problem for Hoffmeier is that while he shows strong evidence that the Exodus truly happened, three of the contributors (Stripling, Feinman, and Rendsburg) all noticed that he does not actually establish 'when' it happened very well. To put the matter differently, Hoffmeier leans heavily on the occurrence of the city named Rameses in the Bible (Exod 12:37). That is, he places the story of the Exodus after the reconstruction of the city of Avaris into the 19th dynasty delta capital called Pi-Ramesses (98). Stripling sees this as an intentional anachronism, thereby removing the problem (112). Hendel feels that because he believes the biblical text was only written 500 years or more later, the name was only a memory of a great Egyptian city and bears no significance to an actual event (127).

One surprising thing is that Hoffmeier does not try to link the destructions of Canaanite sites during the Late Bronze Age to a 13th century Israelite conquest, as many other scholars (such as Albright, Bright, Ben-Tor, etc.) have done.

The third chapter, by Feinman, is titled, “The Thirteenth-Century Hyksos/Levite-Led Exodus View.” While both this chapter and the previous one actually deal with the same time period, Feinman’s approach is completely different than Hoffmeier’s. Specifically, Feinman focuses on the relationship between politics and literature and sees evidence of the Exodus not so much from the Bible itself but as an event that can be reconstructed from Egyptian history. In particular, Feinman uses three texts from the 13th century BC: (1) the Story of Seqenenre and Apophis, (2) Leiden Hymn 30, and (3) the 400-Year Stela (148-160). In his reconstruction, Asiatics in Egypt defied Rameses II and chose to leave Egypt for Canaan (135). Feinman claims (136–46) that among those Asiatics were an elite class called Hyksos (even though that name had long disappeared from the historical record) and soldiers from a division of Rameses’ army (whom the author rashly identifies as the eventual Levites).

Feinman places great stress on the Story of Seqenenre and Apophis, a tale which purportedly occurred in the 16th century BC, but only survives in an incomplete 13th century BC copy. To be clear, he believes that it was created in the time of Merenptah (late 13th century BC) as a commentary of his father Rameses II’s military failures. Feinman states, “he was declaring that his father Rameses II had been a humiliated, defeated failure in a Hyksos confrontation led by Apophis” (155). Due to the incomplete nature of the text, however, any reconstruction of the events behind the story (much less the purpose of the story) is essentially pure speculation (something that was also recognized by each respondent).

Rendsburg’s chapter, “The Twelfth-Century Exodus View,” returns to an ‘evidential’ approach. Rendsburg uses three lines of evidence to argue that the Exodus happened during the reign of Rameses III (1187–1156 BC): (1) the plethora of new Israelite houses and villages being built in the highlands of Canaan during the Early Iron Age I (1200–1100 BC), (2) the arrival of the ‘Sea Peoples’ and subsequent end of Egypt’s power in the region, and (3) the length of biblical genealogies such as that of King David (186, 195-197, 205-206; Ruth 4:18-22; 1 Chr 2:5-15).

One major obstacle facing Rendsburg, however, is that virtually all archaeologists recognize that Merenptah’s stela mentions a people named Israel being defeated in Canaan. As mentioned above, this monument dates to approximately 1208 BC. As such, Israel plainly could not ‘emerge’ in Canaan if it was already there—a dire problem for Rendsburg. Given such, according to Rendsburg, either the reference to Israel relates to Merenptah’s mastery over the Israelite slaves still

in Egypt, or it could reference Israelite tribes in Canaan that were never part of the Exodus (192–93). This assertion, however, by and large, actually destroys his own thesis that Israel was not yet in the land. Indeed, since the mention of a people group named Israel is included in an account which emphasizes geographical place names in Canaan, this theory (to put it mildly) strains credibility.

Finally, Hendel presents his thoughts within “The Exodus as Cultural Memory View.” Regrettably, one of the consequences of a multiple-view book such as *Five Views on the Exodus* is that by this time the last author has already had the opportunity to respond to four other contributors, so much of their own position has already been revealed. In summary, Hendel does not see the need to seek ‘real events’ behind the Exodus story; it was the effect that the story has had on later generations that gives it value. As Hendel states, “This means that (the Exodus) is not plain history, nor is it pure fiction. It is a mixture of reminiscences of historical events and circumstances, traditional motifs, and narrative imagination. It recalls and revises the past, forgetting some aspects while foregrounding others, with the aim to make the past usable in the present, to anchor ancient Israel’s identity and ideals” (252). As a result of this overly skeptical approach to the text and because of his own biases, Hendel condemns the traditional evangelical doctrine of inerrancy for not allowing scholars to have the freedom to ask certain questions (238). Hendel even accuses some evangelical scholars of hypocrisy (238–42).

Unfortunately, the debate degenerates at this stage of the book as mudslinging and emotional outbursts begin to overtake well-presented arguments. Janzen himself acknowledges this struggle within the book’s conclusion but can only point out the common disagreements the contributors had on evidential issues, not the foundational differences of their viewpoints (283). One wishes that the editor had taken a more firm stance on the matter and required increased tolerance, humility, and patience between each of the various ‘combatants’ prior to the publication’s final release.

The real issue behind the variety and diversity of opinion, though, is not, in itself, the evidence that the contributors present; it is (rather) the presuppositions and biases that each author carries into the debate. Their wide-ranging views on biblical authority, the perspicuity of Scripture, what distinguishes ‘fact’ from ‘fiction,’ and a host of other issues are what actually underlie their reconstructions of the past (including in some cases, I would say, an obvious post-modernistic skepticism towards the grand narrative of the Bible). In this way, it may be said that the true evidence, whether archaeological, biblical, or otherwise, is secondary to the main argument: do biblical stories relate to real events transpiring within space and time (historical referentiality)? Said otherwise, most of the evidence (and non-evidence!) mentioned above can (in many ways) be interpreted however one wants to interpret it; it is completely dependent on a person’s preunderstanding, theological

bias/constraints, and presuppositions. Even something as widely agreed upon as the Merenptah Stela can (somewhat shockingly, perhaps) be dismissed as evidence if it does not fit one's paradigm. At its heart, this reflects a worldview issue.

Stripling stands alone in this volume as one who interprets the archaeological evidence in light of an authoritative reading of the biblical account. He places far more value on the biblical text itself to describe the Exodus event than the individual items of evidence that he uses. His reconstruction of the Exodus event therefore reflects his belief that the story happened as described in the Bible. That said, Stripling is also very honest about this bias and how this conviction impacts his understanding of the Exodus event (see pg. 52). Unsurprisingly, this approach puts him at odds with many of the other scholars who do not share that viewpoint but are themselves unwilling to admit their bias to others as explicitly as Stripling. Why is it that if one makes clear their conservative convictions from the outset that they are somehow labeled as 'biased,' but if one holds to a so-called 'liberal' position but does not make that explicit, it is often considered 'good scholarship'?

What I mean by this is that while Hoffmeier, Rendsburg, Feinman, and Hendel each do use the Bible as a source for their theories they seem to allow 'scholarship' (not Scripture) a much greater voice—and 'scholarship' will always provide a vast range of opinions to choose from. Hoffmeier (the closest to Stripling) and Rendsburg are very adamant about the accuracy of some biblical data yet are willing to devalue other information when it does not seem to conform to their theory. Rendsburg, for instance, spends almost ten pages (200–09) discussing chronological and genealogical data from the Bible that points to the time between the Exodus and King David as being much shorter than the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1. As a result, he must dismiss information that contradicts his view (205, 207–08). That is to say, it seems far too convenient for Rendsburg to throw out the numbers and lists that he disagrees with rather than be held accountable to Scripture as the authoritative voice by which to measure things. While some might see this as 'good scholarship,' it comes across as arbitrary and careless. In a similar manner, while one recognizes both the rhetorical and literary intent of Scripture, it is quite difficult to understand how Feinman's and Hendel's positions would uphold the authority of the Bible.

As a whole, *Five Views on the Exodus* is a well-organized book, but it does have flaws and inconsistencies. Although it includes a few charts and illustrations, this is by no means consistent among the authors. In particular, Hoffmeier's chapter would greatly benefit by having a detailed map of the eastern Egyptian Delta (94–102). Even for someone familiar with the region, more clarity could be achieved if one could directly follow his arguments visually. Also, one critical error escaped the eye of the editor. On page 130, Hoffmeier says, "Pi-Ramesses



did not exist during Israel's monarchy, but twelve miles north stood its replacement, *Avaris*" (emphasis added). The city being referred to here in the context of the passage is Tanis, not Avaris. Unfortunately, this mistake confuses an important point that Hoffmeier is trying to make.

To conclude, *Five Views on the Exodus: Historicity, Chronology, and Theological Implications* does an excellent job of delineating the challenges and benefits of holding to each of the various positions of the Exodus. That being said, the breakdown of civility that occurs within the final few chapters is off-putting and runs the risk of alienating the audience. Alongside this, while the uninitiated reader may look at this book as an opportunity to formulate their own opinion on the subject (and will therefore have to decide which of the five scholars they trust to handle the weight of evidence) it is unlikely that an informed reader will actually be swayed by any argument that stands in competition to their own view of Scripture. Such is the world of cognitive bias. This book's most likely audience is Bible college and Christian university/seminary students, along with other Christian leaders and certain invested laypeople. Definitely recommended, as long as one approaches the book with a healthy dose of discernment!

Murray D. Hiebert

Millar College of the Bible (Pambrun, SK)

Pete Myers and Jonathan G. Kline, eds. *A Hebrew Reader for the Psalms: 40 Beloved Texts*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2021. Pp. xxiv + 230. ISBN 978-1-6830-7272-0. \$53.49 (CDN) \$35.99 (USD) hardcover.

The biblical Psalms are some of the world's most familiar and most beloved poems ever written. Regrettably, however, many students of the Hebrew language barely read them in the original.

To begin, one almost always starts one's study of the language with (narrative) prose texts. In addition, precious few people manage to gain sufficient competency in the fundamentals of the Hebrew language (grammar, syntax, morphology, phonology, vocabulary, etc.) to effectively tackle Hebrew poetry. Beyond sound, rhythm, textual uncertainties/alternative text-critical possibilities, unfamiliar idioms, and semantics (the psalms contain a fair number of rare words or words that in context appear to have rare meanings that have largely eluded translators and scholars throughout the millennia), the Hebrew psalms are also challenging since they contain "a surfeit of morphologically difficult forms and rare variations. These forms include many verb and non-verbs that, with the addition of pronominal suffixes, do not closely resemble their lexical forms" (xx–xxi). In brief, "the Hebrew psalms present us with many challenges, a situation that can be frustrating since — perhaps more than any other part of the Bible — we long

to experience in a profound and immediate way the literary beauty and spiritual power of these texts in their original forms (xvii). Enter *A Hebrew Reader for the Psalms: 40 Beloved Texts* compiled and edited by Pete Myers and Jonathan G. Kline.

*A Hebrew Reader for the Psalms* constitutes “a carefully curated collection of forty psalms from the Hebrew Bible” (xix). Myers and Kline state:

Our purpose in creating the book has been to remove as many impediments as possible that might stand between you and an intimate experience with the Hebrew text of these psalms. Our goal is to guide you through each of the various kinds of linguistic and literary challenges . . . listed above so that — whether you have studied Hebrew for a year or have a PhD in biblical studies — you will be able to access the riches of these texts and read them with enjoyment and confidence for years to come” (xix).

Aside from the preface, a guide to the Hebrew numerals which appear in the book (more on this later), and two appendices (A Description of the Main Features of *A Hebrew Reader to the Psalms* and The System of Masoretic Accents/Cantillation), Myers’ and Kline’s volume is comprised of seven main sections: (I) Hymnic/Faith Psalms (Pss 100, 67, 146, 23, 62, 95, 91), (II) Lament/Supplication Psalms: Part One (Pss 43, 27, 14, 56, 41, 22), (III) Liturgy Psalms: Part One (Pss 24, 15, 46, 48, 132), (IV) Lament/Supplication Psalms: Part Two (Pss 32, 51, 88, 90, 69), (V) Liturgy Psalms: Part Two (Pss 93, 98, 2, 110), (VI) Wisdom/Torah Psalms (Pss 1, 19, 82, 112, 127, 36), (VII) Thanksgiving Psalms (Pss 138, 118, 124, 107, 8, 103, 135). Myers and Kline admit, however, quoting Robert Alter, that “genre in Psalms is very often not a locked frame but a point of departure for poetic innovation” (see p. xix).

The authors are to be commended on their inclusion of such a broad swath of literary texts that, arguably, represent some of the most important psalms from the perspective of biblical history, theology, and exegesis. Quite strangely, though, while one of the many notable things about the Psalms is the frequency of citations to the crossing of the Reed Sea (*Yam Suph*) when Israel came out of Egypt (Exod 14), there are, unfortunately, few, if any, references to this event in Myers’ and Kline’s selection (Cf. Pss 66, 74, 77, 78, 106, 114, and 136). While this seems to be unintentional, it is unfortunate that this momentous occasion is overlooked in this book.<sup>1</sup>

The authors maintain the texts themselves are intentionally presented “roughly in order of what we have judged easiest to hardest” with respect to their length

1 Cf. M. Ferris “The Red Sea Crossing in the Psalms: Returning to Redemption.” Blog. August 8, 2019.<http://gentlemantheologian.com/2019/08/08/red-sea-crossing-psalms-returning-redemption/>

(shortest to longest), vocabulary, morphology, and syntax (xx). The actual presentation of each psalm comprises four major elements: (1) The Hebrew text (consonants, vowels, and accents), (2) the verse numbers, (3) an apparatus that faces the psalm text and provides glosses and lexical forms, and, lastly, (4) another apparatus which follows the psalm and provides text-critical data and morphological analysis (see pp. xx–xxi alongside 191–208). It is of interest to note (see p. 205) that roughly 60% of the words found in the Psalms in this book (on average three out of every five words) are analyzed in the morphology section of the apparatus — a commendable accomplishment!

Myers and Kline note that for each psalm:

The apparatus of glosses and lexical forms can serve as a hand-curated ‘vocabulary guide’ to the psalm (allowing you to study the left-hand side of the page before reading the psalm) or as a vocabulary refresher (which you can review after reading through the psalm once or twice), not simply as a reference guide to be consulted during your reading of the Hebrew text (203).

The Hebrew text for most of the psalms presented in this book represents “a fresh transcription of these poems as they are attested in the Aleppo Code (“A”), which many consider to be the finest exemplar of the Tiberian Masoretic tradition” (191). Psalms 15–24 are missing from “A.” As such, the four psalms in *Hebrew Reader for the Psalms* which fall in this range (Pss 19, 22, 23, and 24) were taken from photographs of the Leningrad Codex “L” with exhaustive cross referencing between them and the Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC) electronic text (see pp. 191–92). One notes Myers and Kline have “listed all differences between A and L, and between WLC and L, in the apparatus” and that “differences in the use of *rāfē* are . . . noted occasionally [only] where such variation may have particular significance” (192).

Since “A” and “L” differ in terms of Hebrew pointing, Myers and Kline include clear guidance with respect to these matters, much of which will, most likely, be new to almost all readers, especially matters concerning *rāfē* (see pp. 192–96). As something of an aside, one would be hard pressed to find a guide to the ‘System of Masoretic Accents/Cantillation’ (see appendix two, pp. 209–30) that is as pedagogically informative, concise, and accurate as that found within *A Hebrew Reader for the Psalms*. It alone (truly) is worth the price of the book.

The decision to use “A” itself over “L” is of immense help for many readers since “A” contains more pronunciation helps than “L.” Two examples will suffice: (1) concerning the *shewa*, while the pointing of “L” requires a reliance on one’s memory of morphology the pointing of “A” always reminds one that the *shewa* is vocal, (2) the pointer of “A” used *dāgēš* slightly more than the pointer of

“L” thus helping the reader with pronunciation and pausing at times (see, for example, Ps 98:7).

Concerning numbering, Myers and Kline identify each psalm in terms of its position in the Psalter by both an Arabic numeral and a Hebrew numeral. Likewise, every verse in every psalm is marked with both an Arabic numeral and a Hebrew numeral (English on the left-hand side of the page, Hebrew on the right). The author’s state:

We have used both Arabic and Hebrew numerals for two reasons. First, this is meant to encourage you to become familiar with the system of Hebrew numerals. Aside from the intrinsic worth of learning this native method of enumeration, knowing these numbers is helpful if you wish to use most Israeli editions of the Bible, to consult or read publications written in Modern Hebrew, or to understand certain text-critical notes written by the Masoretes themselves (e.g., some of the marginal notes in BHS). Second, as is well known, in many psalms the English and Hebrew verse numbers do not correspond exactly. This is typically because a superscription . . . is not counted as a verse in English Bibles, whereas in the Hebrew texts superscriptions are included in the system of verse numbering (196).

Matters concerning the unique division of the text into lines, clauses, and phrases according to the Masoretic cantillation marks may be summarized as follows:

The way we have formatted the text means that, as a general rule, there is only one clause on each line. Within a given line, the presence of ‘large spaces’ and medium-sized’ spaces between words allows to easily see how — from the perspective of the ancient Jewish singing tradition — the line breaks down into semantic phrases. Paragraph breaks are based on our subjective judgment and are meant to aid your reading and understanding (199).

Myers and Kline helpfully include both “the *lexical forms* of Hebrew words (to help you see how a word’s contextual form differs from its lexical form and to aid your use of a dictionary)” and also “*contextual glosses* (to help you understand how a word is being used in context)” (200 — italics original). The authors ably distinguish between each of the different Hebrew stems with respect to their sense and meaning (Qal, Niphal, Piel, Hiphil, Hophal, etc.) In this way, their analysis is free from many of the all-too-common exegetical and “word-study” fallacies (such as the ‘root fallacy’ or ‘basic meaning fallacy,’ for instance) which often plague language studies.

Most uniquely (but also most welcome!), in each of their glosses, Myers and

Kline have sometimes used “an uncommon English word to reflect the rarity of a Hebrew word” (xv). In addition to this, given the oft “ambiguous or polyvalent” nature of a given Hebrew word, the authors have also (quite judiciously) provided a choice of two or even three glosses at times (201). Furthermore, since even “competent readers of Biblical Hebrew can be stymied by commonly occurring words when they appear in poetry,” Myers and Kline have also chosen to gloss many words that occur commonly in the Hebrew Bible (202). That being said, the authors “endeavored to limit the glosses for each line of Hebrew to one line whenever possible. For this reason ... occasionally a word that we gloss in one place is not glossed in another” (202).

To critique, I found the authors’ choice of lexicons to be somewhat odd in light of the embarrassment of riches now available. To be clear, Myers and Kline maintain that while they occasionally made use of HALOT and BDB the primary lexicons they consulted (see p. 199, cf. 201) were Holladay’s *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1971) and Clines’s *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield, 2009). Alongside this, while Myers and Kline are to be commended in their fine bibliographical selection of ‘helpful commentaries’ and recommended texts concerning biblical Hebrew poetry and the Psalms in general (see pp. xviii and 202), the conspicuous absence of many notable evangelical authors who have written similar (superior?) works on one and the same subjects is odd; one will search in vain for Hassell C. Bullock, David Firth and Philip S. Johnston, Mark D. Futato, Derek Kidner, John Goldingay, Tremper Longan III, James L. Mays, Allen P. Ross, Leland Ryken, Willem A. VanGemeren, Bruce K. Waltke, Gerald H. Wilson, and others. Lastly, though the authors (see pg. xv) rightly contend the meaning of *selah* is disputed, citing the excursus by Peter C. Craigie in *Psalms 1–50* (Word, 1983), they fail to note the new excursus “Selah” (see pp. 410–11) by Marvin E. Tate in the book’s second edition (Thomas Nelson, 2004). One also notes how Ashely E. Lyon’s stimulating new volume, *Reassessing Selah* (College & Clayton, 2021) has opened up many new horizons for scholars.

These quibbles aside, there is much to commend in this slim (highly) attractive volume. The book itself is beautifully formatted, printed, and bound. This was intentional. Ornate and intricate designs neatly divide the text and draw the eye. The unique size and shape of the book is pleasing to hold and lays flat well. The opaqueness of the pages prevents most bleed through and the inclusion of two ‘ribbon markers’ is a nice touch. The type-face for the Hebrew font is superb and the effective use of white space, special shading, bold face type, and the like make for easy tracking at a glance. To quote the endorsement by Gary A. Rendsburg, Pete Myers’ and Jonathan G. Kline’s “self-stated objective ‘is to make the poetry of the Psalter accessible to as wide a range of readers as possible’—a goal which

they attain in the most effective manner. The beginning student will make major strides in reading ancient Hebrew poetry, while the advanced student will discover nuggets on every page. The user-friendly presentation only enhances the most pleasurable learning experience.”

I heartily concur with Rendsburg’s assessment of *A Hebrew Reader for the Psalms: 40 Beloved Texts*. It is a welcome addition to the ever-growing Hendrickson library of primary source materials. Its users will most likely be invested laypeople, Christian educators and leaders, Bible College/Christian university and seminary students, and, one hopes, studious pastors, preachers, and ministers of God’s Word. Highly recommended.

Dustin Burlet,  
Millar College of the Bible (Winnipeg, MB)

Christopher A. Beetham, ed. *The Concise New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021. Pp. cxiv + 1086. ISBN 978-0-3105-9847-3. \$79.99 (USD) hardback.

At its core, effective biblical interpretation hinges on effective exegesis. Relatedly, effective exegesis turns on an effective analysis of words as they appear in their respective contexts (clauses/phrases, sentences, and discourse units). *The Concise New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (formally abbreviated *CNIDNTE* but hereafter *CNID* edited by Christopher A. Beetham, is a significant resource for those looking for a quick-reference guide to aid in exegesis and interpretation (back cover). To be clear, *CNID* is an abridgment of the acclaimed five volume *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2014, hereafter *NID*), edited by Moisés Silva.<sup>1</sup>

Beetham states, “The goal of this present volume is to make the riches of *NID* accessible to a wider audience. The current volume retains approximately 55 to 60% of *NID*. It differs only in the size of the articles—all the articles and features of *NID* have otherwise been fully retained” (vii). The key question is what has been cut to condense the material from five (!) volumes to one not oversized book? Beetham makes clear (vii): (1) except for noting the most relevant material

1 One notes, of course, that *NIDNTE* was actually a thorough revision of the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (*NIDNTT*), edited by Colin Brown, which was originally published in three volumes by Zondervan in 1975–78 (a reissue in 1986 included a fourth volume consisting of indexes and errata). Lastly, *NIDNTT* was, itself, a translation, revision and expansion of *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament* (“Theological Concept Lexicon to the New Testament,” 2nd ed., 2 vols. [1970–71; rev. ed. in one vol., 2010]). As something of an aside, the *NIDNTT*, much like the *NIDNTE* has now, also received its own superb, one-volume edition, namely the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Abridged Edition* (formerly titled the *NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*), abbreviated as *NIDNTTA*, which was edited by the late Verlyn D. Verbrugge (Zondervan, 2000).

from other standard lexical reference works, such as *TDNT*, *EDNT*, *TDNT/TDOT*, and *NIDOTTE*, for example, the bibliographies have all been deleted, (2) besides a substantial trimming of the Greco-Roman sections, most etymological discussions have also largely been removed, (3) discussions of rabbinic Judaism, which, despite having their origin(s) in earlier times, were all written after the New Testament (NT) period, have generally been cut, (4) extended discussions of scholarly interpretations for so-called difficult and/or significant passages have typically been excised, (5) since NT apocryphal and gnostic literature, as well as the writings of the church fathers, date later than the NT documents (much like the bulk of rabbinic Judaism noted above) they are of much less value in determining the meaning of a word in the first-century context than, say, the writings of Philo and Josephus—for this reason, they have mostly all been deleted, (6) discussions concerning putative sources (e.g., JEDP), authorship, and the authenticity/inauthenticity of a specific logion or pericope have, by and large, been entirely eliminated except when deemed to be necessary by the editor for the argument, similarly, text-critical discussions have only been retained when it was thought to be absolutely necessary in order to substantiate a significant exegetical/theological point, lastly, (7) while *NID* often (and liberally) provided the biblical reading (NIV 2011) for the convenience of its users, these have all been deleted for economy of space. One notes, though, that the Scripture references themselves have (wisely) been retained so inclined readers are able to look them up. Indisputably, Beetham is to be commended for his judicious editorial decisions in these regards.

Another boon is the inclusion of Moisés Silva's full introduction to the *NID*, which includes a fine exposé of theological lexicography with ample references to his esteemed *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. ed. (Zondervan, 1994). Aside from two exhaustive lists (Greek Words/Concepts) there is also a very thorough Scripture index which is of inestimable value for the serious student. The decision, however, to retain a 'Strong to Goodrick-Kohlenberger Number Conversion Chart' seems odd.<sup>2</sup>

*Typographically*, *CNID* is very readable and user-friendly. The two-column-per-page format with ample headings/subheadings throughout makes for easy argument tracking. In addition, ample margins, effective use of white space, (mostly) pointed Hebrew, special shading at times (concept lists), and superb handling of bold face type thoroughly enhance its usability.

One notes, of course, that this volume is not exhaustive. Specifically, *CNID* provides nearly 800 articles covering over 3000 of the approximately 5400

2 Despite not a few notable lexical works being 'keyed' to Strong's, how many users will actually benefit from its inclusion? For a fairly extensive list of resources coded to Strong's number system (which include BDB, *TLOT*, and *TWOT* for the Old Testament alongside *TDNT*, *TLNT*, and Thayer's Greek English lexicon, for the NT), see below: <http://www.bibletexts.com/strongs.htm>



different words that occur in the Greek New Testament (viii). While one may quibble at what, precisely, constitutes an exegetically and/or theologically significant word, given that this work was never designed to supplant and/or replace any of the standard Greek lexicons, like BDAG or Louw and Nida, for instance, one would be hard-pressed to fault the editor for the exclusion of any specific word(s).

In much the same way, while Louw and Nida's concept list(s) may vary somewhat from *CNID*, the differences between the two are rather negligible in terms of the actual method, practice, and execution of discerning the semantic range, field, or domain of a word. The unique layout of *CNID* is also of great benefit in avoiding a so-called "atomistic approach" to language wherein one discusses "an individual Greek word in isolation from semantically associated terms and therefore ignoring important passages that are relevant for the theological topic under purview but . . . do not happen to include the word chosen for study" (xii). Alongside this, the presentation of *CNID* also helps the less astute user evade many of the egregious and highly irksome trappings which (regrettably) plague far-too-many original language studies. These include, for example, the basic meaning fallacy, illegitimate totality transfer, and such.<sup>3</sup>

While space forbids any sort of analysis of the articles contained within this work, suffice it to say that treasures and tidbits abound within a linguistically informed structure. Beyond question, whatever issues one may have with *CNID* are unlikely to arise due to quality.

If only the unabridged volumes of *NID* by Silva had contained some introductory articles, much like its counterpart, i.e., the *NIDOTTE*. We have needed an update to Gaebelein's *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 1—Introductory Articles* (Zondervan, 1979) for so long.<sup>4</sup>

Though some may quibble, the decision to not include any indices for the Greek and/or Hebrew/Aramaic words is understandable given economics. It may also be argued that the thoroughness of the Scripture index and the superb arrangement of *CNID*, in general, may have made such an index redundant anyway. Perhaps the biggest challenge facing this work, however, is one that most users of *NID* have already faced; namely, proper citation format and source material traceability. To be clear, unlike almost every other so-called 'theological dictionary,' no article/entry closes with the name of a specific author. This makes accurate

- 3 For more details on these matters, one should primarily consult Benjamin J. Baxter, *"In the Original Text It Says": Word-Study Fallacies and How to Avoid Them* (Energion, 2012) alongside D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*. 2nd ed. (Baker, 1996). For more details on the interplay of James Barr and some of these things, see, above all, Douglas J. Moo, *We Still Don't Get It: Evangelicals and Bible Translation Fifty Years after James Barr* (Zondervan, 2014) and Stanley E. Porter ed., *James Barr Assessed: Evaluating His Legacy over the Last Sixty Years* (Brill, 2021).
- 4 Interestingly, the introductory articles to the *NIDOTTE* were of such value for exegetes they were made available separately. See Willem A. VanGemeren's *A Guide to Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Zondervan, 1997).

documentation extremely difficult if one seeks to align (see p. vii) with the *SBL Handbook of Style* 2nd ed. (SBL, 2014). While a clear answer to these things is not simple, compounding this problem is the question of origins. As noted above, *CNID* is based off of Silva's 5-volume set. What's more, the original articles from Colin Brown's work, which, by and large, remain the essential source of both *CNID/NID*, are themselves indebted to a team of over 70 German academic and pastors under the editorship of Lothar Coenen and others (xi).

Pointedly, despite Silva's exceptional editorial prowess (who is equal to such a task?) he fails to explicate the precise nature of the not insignificant changes implemented. Silva contends:

The original German work and the first English edition were produced during a period when the figure of Rudolf Bultmann loomed large over NT scholarship. Thus the contributors interacted extensively with him, as well as with other prominent writers of the mid-twentieth century. Some of these discussions are less relevant today and have therefore been shorted or even omitted in the present edition[*NID*], but it seemed wise to maintain a measure of continuity with the original *NIDNTT* [*NID*] by retaining material that still contributes to our understanding of Greek usage and NT concepts. On a selective basis, these discussions have received brief updating. (Although the revising editor assumes responsibility for the final form of this edition, readers should not infer that the views expressed throughout the work necessarily reflects his own opinions). The revision has involved not only numerous omissions, additions . . . and alterations of various sorts, but also extensive rewriting — so much so that it seemed inappropriate to retain the names of the original authors after each article (xi).

These things aside, Beetham's abridgment should be considered a marked success. This does not mean, however, that one should abandon either the *NIDNT* or *NIDNTTA*. They both retain much that is of great value for serious study. The same (of course) can be said of Silva's *NID*. Even so, Christopher A. Beetham's *The Concise New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (*CNID*) deserves a prominent place on the shelf for all budget conscious individuals. Its primary users will most likely (one hopes) include the studious pastor, invested laypeople, certain Christian educators, and a variety of researchers including Bible college, Christian university, and seminary students. Highly recommended.

Dustin Burlet  
Millar College of the Bible (Winnipeg, MB)

Chloe T. Sun. *Conspicuous in His Absence: Studies in the Song of Songs and Esther*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. Pp. x + 326. ISBN 978-0-8308-5488-2. \$45.99 (CDN) \$34.00 (USD) paper.

How can God be omnipresent (Ps 139:7) yet absent (Ps 22:1)? Why does the Bible include Song of Songs and Esther, in which God's absence, at least by name, is palpable? What does God's absence teach about him? Chloe T. Sun, the author of *Conspicuous in His Absence*, argues:

God's presence and absence are not mutually exclusive. The way in which God works in the Writings and Megilloth differs from that in the Torah and the Prophets. Since Song of Songs and Esther are rooted in creation theology, where divine presence is not overt but covert, these two books complement and supplement what the rest of the biblical canon lacks. Consequently, they offer insight into the larger question of the nature of God and how believers should respond in times of his absence (11).

Sun presents a thorough, scholarly study of divine absence in both the Song of Songs and Esther while fulfilling her promise to provide a practical theology. Prior to offering a full critique of the volume, an overview of the book is in order.

Aside from the introduction/conclusion and three thorough indices (subject, author, Scripture, etc.) Sun's work is comprised of six, roughly equal-sized chapters. The first two chapters discuss theology, while the latter four apply and reflect on aspects of "the theology of absence . . . and how it contributes to a fuller picture of God" (86).

Sun posits that teaching about God's absence is (relatively speaking) acutely lacking as compared to his presence. In her introduction, she cuts to the heart with a common human experience, feeling forsaken. She asserts, "God is there but he refuses to act. . . . When suffering abounds, questions of divine absence arise" (1). To answer this problem, Sun uses Theological Interpretation as her methodology (3).

In chapter one, "Theology: Divine Presence and Absence," Sun analyzes the three positions regarding God's presence and absence: (1) diachronic "from divine presence to divine absence" (17), dialectic "divine presence in absence and absence in presence" (26), and canonical (39). Sun argues that when considering theology and our present sufferings, "the absence of God in these two biblical books is a theological necessity" (14).

In the second chapter, "Absence: Wisdom and Countertexts," Sun clarifies that absence is not nonexistence, but "[r]ather, absence refers to an aspect of God that escapes human comprehension" (50). She opines these biblical books are

countertexts which “complement and supplement what is lacking . . . in regard to the transcendent and mysterious nature of God” (77).

Chapter three, “Time: Song and Narrative,” delineates how Esther and Song of Songs “contributes to the understanding of the theology of absence” (87). Key here is Sun’s delineation between the dimension of human existence and God’s regarding the felt absence of God from the human perspective (123). In “Temple: Garden and Palace,” chapter four, Sun discusses the suggestion of God’s presence by way of two temple images. These are the reminiscence of the Garden of Eden in Song of Songs and in the palace in Esther (138–40).

Chapter five, “Feast: Passover and Purim,” discusses the significance of these biblical feasts with respect to divine absence in a markedly post-exilic context. Lastly, “Canon: Resonances and Dissonances,” traces the distinct echoes, that is, the “motifs of both books [which] resonate with other biblical texts” (228) and their counterechoes. In other words, Esther and Song of Songs “challenge, critique, and evaluate the normative motifs manifested in the rest of the canon” (228). To be clear, Sun posits the echoes confirm the canonicity of these books but “the counterechoes provide an alternative voice, creating a disharmonic symphony” (287).

Incontrovertibly, Sun demonstrates keen scholarship by interacting with the *crème de la crème* of contemporary resources (providing equal treatment of both Song of Songs and Esther) and superb engagement with the Hebrew text (not transliterated) as needed. Typographically speaking, there is a beautiful use of white space with clear headings throughout. The pictures at the beginning of each chapter are also a nice touch! One should also note Sun’s effective use of illustrations, summations, and applications. Her conclusion, for example, is an excellent demonstration of the application of theology to reality. Along with a list of several tragedies and hardships, Sun explains:

The realization and the acknowledgment of divine absence in human history . . . and in the lived experience of human beings . . . helps believers align Scripture with reality. Therefore, divine absence is a theological necessity. The experience of the absence of God creates doubt and despair, but it also elicits faith and prayer (293).

Sun’s argument that these books function as countertexts in Israel’s salvation history alongside the development of a more robust, practical theology of divine absence, highlighting that human suffering and forsakenness demand complements and supplements to divine presence theology, is a true gift to scholarship and this work will surely become the new standard on the subject.

To critique, while Sun does dive into the Jewish figural interpretations of the Song of Songs in the Rabbah and Targums (187–210), she does not offer more

than a passing reference to the church's allegorical interpretations. This oversight is regrettable. Also unfortunate is the fact that Sun discusses the connections between the Passover and the Lord's Supper within chapter six (210–12). While one cannot, of course, include every topic, it is unclear why the discussions on God's presence in the Christian figural readings are nearly absent. She does admit that a Christian figural reading is dismissed "due to its incongruence with historical-critical methods" (184), but are Christian ones less valuable than the Jewish ones? Is it wise scholarship to dismiss "the dominant mode of interpretation since the Song's inclusion into the canon" (184)? What is missed from these interpretations regarding a theology of God's absence?

These infelicities aside, Chloe T. Sun's *Conspicuous in His Absence: Studies in the Song of Songs and Esther* remains an excellent resource that ought to be of top consideration for all those seeking the reason and significance of the absence of God's name in Esther and the Song of Songs. Sun effectively meets her goal of answering this question as well as providing practical answers to what we should think and do when God is absent (6, cf. 290–95). Its primary users are likely theology students in Bible colleges, seminaries, and Christian university programs alongside, one hopes, the studious pastor and invested layperson. Highly recommended!

Travis Johnston

Millar College of the Bible (Pambrun, SK)

Christopher A. Rollston, ed. *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context*. University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018. Pp. 613. ISBN 978-1-5750-6764-3. \$99.95 (USD) hardcover.

The relationship of preachers to the political authorities has always been a complicated one. But it has also been an *old one*, as the thematic volume *Enemies and Friends of the State* demonstrates. As early as 1,000 BCE, God's prophetic voice can be found making friends and making enemies with the state.

The first chapter of the book is an enlightening discussion about the meaning of "the state" and the history of perception regarding political authority and bringing to bear this sociological and historical discussion on ancient prophecy. The second chapter is equally brilliant and enlightening, "The Politics of Voice," which offers various models, including one that illustrates the distance of prophetic voice from centers of power:

1. Prophet Voice: speaking with moral courage (this is at the center and addresses competing worldviews head-on)
2. Proximal Power: Courage as Standpoint (the second circle around Prophetic Voice)

3. Intermediate Power: Courage as Strategic Interaction
4. Peripheral Power: Courage as Co-cultural Resistance (most distant circle)

Miriam Perkins (the author) then goes on to look at how Isaiah 7 is an example of proximal power (congruence), Amos 7 of intermediate power (assertive opposition), and Jeremiah 28 of peripheral power (aggressive resistance). Combined with interpretive questions about the nature of prophetic communication, her model is markedly sophisticated. She concludes that

Naming the complexities of speaking truthfully, persuasively, and passionately against more dominant worldviews and in the presence of more powerful individuals exemplifies the prophetic voice many of us need to become people of good will in the contemporary world. The voices of moral courage in Isa 7, Amos 7, and Jer 28 are therefore an important legacy both for communities that honor these texts and those beyond who struggle to give voice to moral conviction from places of social marginality. (55)

The next chapter looks at whether prophecy existed in ancient Egypt (Thomas Schneider concludes that it cannot be ruled out), and the following is a survey on the role of prophets in the Ancient Near East in general, which is “deeply involved in the establishment and maintenance of just kingship by the ‘correct’ king, with the promise of a good outcome if this just kingship is established and maintained correctly” (107). The next chapter, “Prophecy in Transjordan” focuses on the multi-attested and multi-faced figure of Balaam in and outside the Bible. Balaam was an “international ‘seer of the gods,’ privy to the higher, international level of the pantheon headed by El. As a spokesman for the whole ‘the gods,’ who oversee the larger cosmic framework within which kings receive their power to rule their own realms, Balaam stands as a potential friend of the state but, for the same reason, as a latent threat” (198). Two chapters then cover prophecy in Deuteronomistic history, followed by a chapter on Huldah and then prophecy by the Chronicler. The next section looks at prophets and prophetic books “of the First Temple and Exilic Periods” (311), concluding with an eight-chapter section on the second-temple period.

*Enemies and Friends of the State* is a superb work of biblical studies. It is a well-rounded, scholarly, and yet readable compilation of everything relevant to ancient prophecy and the various bureaucratic, political, and theological roles that it played. The authors are all top of their fields—and I particularly enjoyed the chapters not only by those I had already been familiar with (John Collins on

Daniel, Richard Horsley on Jesus as revolutionary prophet and covenant-renewer, William Schneidewind on early monarchy), but by others as well.

For example, Jennifer Knust poses an interesting question about the book of Revelation: if the book is so anti-state, how can it be so easily used as an inspiration “for those who seek to advance what might be considered a statist agenda” (546)—like in dispensational Zionism and the whole *Left Behind* enterprise? Her sense is that:

...any attempt to turn Revelation’s all-seeing eye of God against current states and contemporary enemies fails to deal adequately both with the book’s ambiguous legacy and John’s own rhetorical strategies. To invoke John’s divine sovereign in order to overturn an objectionable human one repeats the terms of Revelation’s arguments, but without calling John’s “necro-politics” into question. When John envisions a divinely sanctioned and ruled state apparatus (“New Jerusalem”) as the answer to the state he derides, his fantasized state retains the privileges of citizenship for his sovereign’s son, this man’s allies, and all the obedient members of his heavenly community. Rhetorically, John’s persistent defense of the sovereignty of his God—God’s armies will ultimately triumph, the citizens of God’s city will one day receive all the rewards due to them, and God’s law rules supreme—pursues a story that repeats familiar terms of sovereign power and reinstitutes relations of domination. Thus, John’s theory of sovereignty actually mirrors that of his archenemy, Rome: he too invests his sovereign with the absolute power to kill or let live, his citizens with the privileges due exclusively to them, and God’s laws with the status of absolute truth. Perhaps John’s double message—adversarial toward one imagined state but ready to demand absolute loyalty to another—can help explain why Revelation’s authority has been so effective at serving the needs of both biblical scholars with liberationist sympathies and the inventors of *Left Behind*’s Tribulation Force. (560)

In other words, the author of the Apocalypse took a risk—similar to how the earliest Christians took a risk appropriating political, emperor titles like “Lord” and “Savior” to Jesus—in appropriating the empire’s statism to God’s kingdom. (Indeed, the “Kingdom of God” is itself a political metaphor.) While I stumbled on this realization a few years ago reading Matthew Bates’ *Salvation by Allegiance*



*Alone*,<sup>1</sup> it struck me as all the more profound to find this argument being made with regard to Revelation. Why? Because this disjunction was partly the source for the great contradiction, or at least tension, in Christology and the church's work: gentle Jesus, friend of sinners, suffering servant (inspiring Christians to care for the poor, love enemies, live radically, and endure suffering) vs. the Return of the King in Revelation, riding on a war horse slaughtering beasts (inspiring the church to engage in Crusades and religious wars). As I learned in a similar book (*Israel and Empire*, also reviewed in this volume), colonized peoples sometimes unfortunately "imitate" the colonizer and empire. That seems to be happening here in Revelation, as happens elsewhere.

*Enemies and Friends of the State* is the best collection of essays on the subject I'm aware of and provides penetrating analysis regarding these political and social dimensions to the world of the Hebrew Bible and the Israelites.

Jamin Andreas Hübner  
LCC International University

Adam J. Howell, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer. *Hebrew for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining, and Reviving Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. Pp. xiv + 224. ISBN 978-1-5409-6146-4. \$22.99 (USD) paper.

The immense pleasure and tangible benefits (both temporal and eternal) of gaining rock-solid proficiency in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic (the original languages of the Bible) should not be underestimated. Veritably, "true theology and precise exegesis are ... systematically dependent on one another" (7). Even so, many individuals find it an arduous task to maintain the necessary discipline(s) to cultivate such skill(s). Enter *Hebrew for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining, and Reviving Biblical Hebrew* by Adam J. Howell, Benjamin L. Merkle, and Robert L. Plummer. To be clear, *Hebrew for Life* addresses conclusively the most important questions that most people have about learning biblical Hebrew and provides important resources, methodical approaches, and concrete study habits so as to enable students of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament (hereafter HB/OT) to be "faithful stewards of the unique privilege of reading the Hebrew text" (back cover).

1 Jamin Andreas Hübner, review of Matthew Bates, *Salvation By Allegiance Alone* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016) for *The Canadian American Theological Review* 6:1 (2017):121–27, at 122: "A more significant concern is overstress on the allegiance concept in soteriology, at least to the point of hegemonic reductionism. It is important that Jesus Christ is not only King, but the Prince of Peace, the Lamb of God, the true Vine, the Light of the World, Temple, and so forth. Kingship was stressed in the NT because of the contemporary context of the Roman emperor and Jewish Messiah (a perfect backdrop, by the way, to show Jesus's divinity). This should not overpower Christ as the *logos* or other, non-Jewish and non-nationalist titles, images, and metaphors. The Western world in particular needs this diversity of images, as it continues to recover from oppressive regimes and tyrants, colonialism, racism, sexism, charismatic cult leaders, etc."

Prior to offering a full-scale review, though, it is prudent to offer a synopsis of the volume as a whole. Aside from a brief foreword (written by Miles V. Van Pelt), *Hebrew for Life* is comprised of nine chapters of roughly the same length (NB: the following chapter summaries are derived from pp. x and xi). Chapter One, “The Goal of the Harvest,” shows why knowing Hebrew matters in the life and ministry of all Christian leaders in the Church; Chapter Two, “Weighed in the Balances and Found Wanting,” helps to ground the student in the proper study habits in order to start learning Hebrew on a firm fitting; Chapter Three, “Review the Fundamentals Often,” stresses the value and importance of reviewing vocabulary and paradigms and offers different strategies as to how to most effectively build vocabulary and retain memory paradigms; Chapter Four, “Develop a Next-Level Memory,” emphasizes the need to use as many senses as possible to learn Hebrew, including reading, writing, listening to, and singing/chanting Hebrew, not to mention using mnemonics as well as visual aids and the like; Chapter Five, “Strategically Leverage Your Breaks,” provides specific texts that people can read over an extended time (such as spring, summer, or winter vacations), along with specific exercises that one may work through in order to maintain their proficiency in Hebrew; Chapter Six, “Read, Read, Read,” highlights the value (and necessity) of reading Hebrew daily; Chapter Seven, “The Wisdom of Resources,” provides an overview of various tools/aids that are available to assist one’s use of the Hebrew language as well as specific strategies as to how best to utilize and leverage them; Chapter Eight, “Hebrew’s Close Cousin—Aramaic,” offers practical advice on learning biblical Aramaic; Chapter Nine, “Getting Back in Shape,” provides practical ways to re-enter the “arena of Hebrew if it has been neglected for some time” (xi).

Aside from the “chapter reflections,” i.e., five well-crafted, open-ended questions that are meant to facilitate further engagement with the specific content of each particular chapter, there are also nine brief “devotional reflections” from a wide variety of authors including Tom Blanchard, William Fullilove, Peter Gentry, Steven Hallam, Dominick Hernández, Adam J. Howell, William R. (Rusty) Osborne, and William Ross. These reflections vary quite widely in length from (roughly) two pages to upwards of four and almost even five (!) pages in total page length. Despite this unevenness, the material itself is often quite thought-provoking and even if one does not readily agree with some of the specific writer’s assertions or conclusions, they remain ‘on-target’ with the primary overarching hope that “these brief meditations whet your appetite for a devotional life spent in the Hebrew text” (xi). Perhaps the most stimulating message (written by William Ross) involves ‘Reading the Septuagint alongside the Hebrew Bible’—a practice that ought to continue to be heartily recommended for any serious student of the HB/OT.

Various motivational quotes and the like are generously provided in special, gray shaded boxes that are usually found alongside the edges and outer margins of the text. Not a few testimonials also appear which often run a full-page in length or more. These ‘asides’ are all quite well-written, poignant, and helpful. Three indices (name, scripture, and subject) round out the volume. Regrettably, there is no bibliography.

To critique, I have very few quibbles with this volume. The book itself is quite visually appealing with ample charts, diagrams, and the like. Specially illustrated graphics are also used as a ‘type’ for how one might perhaps better facilitate vocabulary acquisition. These unique and memorable examples are a special treat! Other ‘bonuses’ include numerous high-quality reproductions of different resources, such as certain ‘Hebrew Reader’ editions, interlinears, and even various ‘handbooks.’ The personal examples and anecdotes that are used throughout the volume are both relatable and inspiring. Though the astute reader will likely find numerous ‘favorite’ volumes that were ‘conspicuously absent’ from this work (my own list included Milton Eng and Lee M. Fields’s *Devotions on the Hebrew Bible: 54 Reflections to Inspire and Instruct* - Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), as a whole, the sensitivity and astuteness of the ‘recommended reading’ lists of *Hebrew for Life* are all quite in-depth and commendable.

As something of an aside, one might wish that a more concerted focus was devoted in this volume towards preaching and teaching using biblical Hebrew. That being said, however, since not a few works do make this their primary emphasis, it is possible that Howell, Merkle, and Plummer believe it to be redundant to duplicate such resources.

There remains, though, one primary criticism that must be raised against this otherwise superb volume. While the words lamentable and inexcusable may seem harsh, it remains reasonable to argue that any text that explicitly states (via the title itself) that its overarching goal is to facilitate one’s acquisition in the Hebrew language *for life*, the lack of thorough engagement with the discipline of textual criticism is not insignificant. Though it might be tempting for the fledging student or harried pastor to ignore complex matters such as the transmission/copying process of the Scriptures or the procedures for evaluating different textual readings, learning this material effectively will better equip and prepare the exegete to understand God’s Word more circumspectly. Inconvertibly, anyone truly emphasizing learning Hebrew *for life* would concur with this assessment.

To conclude, *Hebrew for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining, and Reviving Biblical Hebrew* is an excellent text that will undoubtedly aid students in what Howell, Merkle, and Plummer consider to be “the ultimate goal of . . . Hebrew study: *to know and love the Triune God and to love people who are made in his image*” (xi, italics original). Its primary users will likely be any serious Hebrew

student alongside, one hopes, the studious pastor and the invested lay-person. Highly recommended!

*Dustin Burlet*  
*McMaster Divinity College*

Horatio Clare. *Heavy Light: A Journey Through Madness*. London, U.K.: Chatto & Windus, 2021. Pp. xii + 336. ISBN 978-1-7847-4352-9. \$38.24 (CDN) hardcover.

While autobiographical discussions of mental breakdown (and tentative steps toward recovery) abound, there are few penned by someone with Horatio Clare's facility with the English language; and fewer still, thanks to his past employment with BBC, his current literary reputation and public visibility, by someone with access to the intricacies of Britain's health-care plan (National Health Services) and its labyrinthine subtleties of psychiatric assessment, intervention, and follow-up.

Following two earlier crises while on writing assignments, Clare had been diagnosed as cyclothymic; i.e., subject to mood swings that are more exaggerated than normal yet not so extreme as to merit a diagnosis of bi-polar mood disorder wherein the sufferer oscillates between psychotic mania and immobilizing depression. Subsequently, however, his increasing use of cannabis as a stimulant and alcohol as a tranquillizer found his mood swings expanding. During a ski-holiday in the Italian alps he moved into full-blown mania with its classic symptoms (e.g., irresponsible use of money and hypersexuality/promiscuity), together with raging paranoia (other hotel-guests belonged to military intelligence units of European nations) and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Soon Clare was apprehended by the police. Following interviews by a social worker and a psychotherapist he was moved along to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist's assessment rendered him 'involuntarily committed' for up to 28 days. He took the prescribed medicine, quetiapine (trade name: Seroquel), commonly used in cases of bipolar disorder, major depression, and schizophrenia. In 19 days, however, he was discharged, with an anti-psychotic drug in hand, even as he refused mood-stabilizing medication. The presupposition of the treatment he received during his institutionalization was that his mental illness was rooted in the brain's chemical imbalance, which imbalance, of course, the drugs were meant to redress. In only a few days, however, he gave up the anti-psychotic medication on account of its side-effects: confusion, numbness, and nausea. Thereafter his recovery proceeded without significant setback.

Part II (almost one-half) of the book moves from a personal delineation of the author's illness to an arm's-length discussion of medical assumptions concerning

the nature of mental illness (here he is at pains to expose and contradict the neuro-chemical model), followed by an exploration of the thicket-like services, offices, and personnel who deliver government services to the mentally ill. Relentlessly he documents the lack of scientific evidence for the ‘chemical imbalance’ thesis; and no less relentlessly he exposes the pharmaceutical companies’ commitment to this thesis for the sake of Big Pharmas’ profit maximization.

At no point, however, does he deny the ever-increasing emotional distress of our era: in 2018, 7.3 million Britons (out of a population of 66.65 million) were taking antidepressants—twice as many as ten years ago. In 1987 1.1 million Americans received disability payments for mental health reasons; by 2021, 5 million did. Neither does he ignore the rising tide of distress among children and adolescents, particularly with respect to anxiety, depression, self-harming, eating disorders, and assorted addictions. Astutely he points out what too many people overlook: the relation between social class and mental illness, wherein the more affluent are afforded privileges, access, and considerations the socially semi-submerged never see. Not least, Clare readily acknowledges the cruciality of early childhood experience: inadequate provision for children subjected to overwhelming stress, emotional deprivation, exposure to marital conflict amounting to warfare—these are factors precipitating mental illness in adults whose present circumstances occasion the crystallization of stresses long suppressed but now virulent.

Clare does not attempt to deny that psychotropic medication ‘works’ in the sense that it reduces symptoms (even as he repeats tirelessly that no one knows how it ‘works’). At the same time, considering the deleterious side-effects of too many drugs, he is undeterrable in his agenda of deprescribing. Why, for instance, should bipolar patients be prescribed lithium when short-term relief is followed by longer-term worsening of prospects for recovery?

Then what does Clare propose as an alternative? Here his anti-chemical agenda (both with respect to diagnosis and treatment) comes to the fore. Instead, he underlines the effectiveness of the sufferer’s insight gained through the psychotherapist and social worker, together with “social prescribing”: “exercise, hobbies...therapies involving art, literature, writing, music and creativity” (225). While he avoids the more strident pronouncements of the anti-psychiatry movement (whose major spokespersons were psychiatrists R. D. Laing and Thomas Szasz in Britain and USA respectively), the second half of his book advances a ‘softer’ but unmistakable opposition.

Many readers will dismiss him as naïve. After all, haven’t we all seen psychiatric sufferers whose agony was lessened through drugs? Still, the questions he raises remain.

No less frontal is his challenge to the church. While the book is written from a

consistently secular standpoint (“I was seeking to understand what we know about the causes and treatments of mental disorder... for a third way between pills and praying” (303)), the book everywhere invites theological comment. For instance, when Clare speaks of the erosion of selfhood, biblically informed people will immediately ask, ‘What is human selfhood? What is its origin? How is it maintained? How does the community of faith uphold human selfhood in a society that is fast succumbing to social scientific, Marxist, even empiricist perspectives that erode what Scripture attests concerning the indefeasibly human: we are made in the image of God, are addressed by God-in-person, are appointed to render ourselves neighbour, and are possessed of an agency unparalleled in the animal world?’

While Clare rightly deplores the depersonalization rampant in understaffed clinics and hospitals, and perceptively recognizes a major healing factor to be not the medical expertise of nurse or social worker but rather the humanity of these people, he proffers no explicit understanding of the human. Again, it must be noted, the community of faith could not be accorded a greater invitation to address the matter and, no less importantly, exemplify what the gospel alone gives and enjoins. While he was briefly institutionalized yet profoundly percipient Clare wrote, “In here, you cling so hard to hope that you create it” (148). The Christian can only rejoin, ‘Hope is a future certainty grounded in a present reality. The present reality is the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom he brings with him; the future certainty is that *shalom* in which suffering and sin are remedied in an eschatological appointment that renders us whole as creatures (no longer disfigured by pain) and holy as humans (no longer self-contradicted by sin).’ Plainly he speaks of healing from derangement as “a process of discovering a lost story” (178). Immediately the spiritually alert want to announce (and embody) the truth that everyone’s story is taken up into a bigger story, our Lord’s story, a story that honours ours yet transfigures it so as to defuse the threat derangement otherwise poses to our identity and integration and serenity.

Since the mental health crisis is not abating (in the last 30 years teenage suicide has increased threefold), and in view of the ministry to the mentally ill that Christian pastors and counsellors invariably exercise, Clare’s book should be probed by all who aspire to be witnesses to that Kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28).

*Victor A. Shepherd*  
*Wycliffe College, University of Toronto*

Leo G. Perdue and Warren Carter. *Israel and Empire: A Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*. Edited by Coleman Baker. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015. Pp. x + 328. ISBN 978-0-5672-4328-7. \$42.95 (USD) paper.

Post-colonialism and de-colonialism is quite popular in academia today. And it's no surprise why: much or most of the world we now live in is the result of colonizing empires. But the same was true for those in the ancient world—especially the people of Israel. Indeed, perhaps no collection of writings would benefit more from a post-colonial reading than the Bible. The Bible is, after all, a story about Israel and the Judeans, spanning over a thousand years, who have lived under Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman rule. And it is under such colonization that virtually all of the Bible was written.

But what exactly makes up a post-colonial reading? That's the subject of the introduction in *Israel and Empire*. The authors assemble various dimensions of a post-colonial reading stemming from various influential figures, such as nationalism and social power (Michael Mann), the discourse of power (Michel Foucault), and discourse of resistance (James Scott). The second chapter goes into more detail, focusing on post-colonial literary criticism, the "subaltern and economic exploitation," "racism in the ideology and practice of imperialism," "Orientalism: Subverting of Western Stereotypes of the East," "the location of culture," hybridity, mimicry,<sup>1</sup> various approaches to historiography, the imperial metanarrative, colonial resistance, and the "diaspora." "An important goal of the postcolonial," the authors underscore, "is to be a 'vernacular cosmopolitan' who is able to translate cultures and reinterpret traditions in ways that subvert the empire" (19). The "goal of the postcolonial is not simply to accomplish the return of the land and self-rule to the colonized; it seeks to replace the colonized mind with a new understanding of the world and to value its own traditions and cultures .... Opposing the powerful colonial world is difficult but necessary to create a new reality devoid of imperial oppression and racial and cultural stereotypes of the Other" (14).

This orientation is used as the lens for five major chapters that lucidly write the history of Israel under various colonial/empire rule: (a) The Assyrian Empire, the Conquest of Israel, and the Colonization of Judah; (b) Judah under the Neo-Babylonian Empire; (c) The Persian Empire and the Colony of Judah; (d) Judea/Israel under the Greek Empires; (e) Judea/Israel under the Roman Empire.

---

1 "...mimicry is not simply servile imitation of the empire's culture and customs, but rather an exaggerated imitation of their language, manners, and ideas. Indeed the colonials wear the clothes, use the language, and perform the courtesies of their masters, but in ways that ultimately taunt their masters" (18).



Despite its targeted analysis, the book's balanced treatment, readability, and lack of presuming previous historical knowledge makes *Israel and Empire* a remarkable fit for a fine textbook on Israel's history in general. Readers become not only keenly aware of how much the political and economic situation determines the framework for all of biblical study but are encouraged to become next-level interpreters of the text in a way that effectively connects literature, theology, and history together.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, despite the specialized language of post-colonial discourse, readers can appreciate the genuine applicability and meaningfulness of contemporary hermeneutics.

The authors are also skilled and competent to address the various facets and theory issues surrounding this entire enterprise. For example, they write:

Since postcolonialism embraces postmodernism's primary argument that there is no single meaning or reality or objective free interpretation, but rather there are multitudes of meanings or realities, usually based on the self-interests of texts and interpreters, interpretation becomes the function and outlook of a particular perspective, something that is both historically and culturally located and yet in constant flux. This does not mean that interpretation or reality is solipsistic, thus denying the concrete existence of data (temporal, physical, active, and spatial), but rather that meaning is construed in large measure by the imagination of the historiographers or other types of interpreters working within their own social locations and out of their own ideological framework. (29)

This becomes important given the big question: can the subaltern speak?

Spivak ... is skeptical that scholars can rediscover the voices that imperialism has silenced, since they are lost forever to human memory. Even if imagined by writers in the past or present, these voices are only the fictional expression of an individual writer. What this means for historiography is the fact that biblical texts, which speak of even the heroes of Israel, are produced by human imagination. The biblical voices of the marginalized are fictional and written by intellectuals who rarely can capture the thoughts, values, and views of the

---

2 On the latter (history), the authors write: "Historiography involves three major concerns. The first is to discover the material and cultural data of past civilizations and to reconstruct the human thought and behavior that produced them in particular times and places. The second is to examine the ways that the various pasts of these civilizations have been reconstructed and interpreted by later historians from antiquity to the present. And the third is the informed attempt of the modern historian to interpret the peoples and events of civilizations in order to comprehend their past experiences and preeminent understandings and events by using current theories that shape the histories of the contemporary period" (26).

marginalized. This does not mean she denies history can be written, but it does imply that much in the biblical recreation of human beings in the past is historically irretrievable. Without subaltern discourse, which is rare in Israelite and Judean texts, great care has to be taken by historians who are attempting to reconstruct their lives, ideas, and beliefs. (21)

The book unfortunately does not go further down this important rabbit trail, asking how (for example) the fact that much or most of the OT (especially historical writings) come from the hand of scribes in the 500s BCE under exile, who have perhaps an intentionally subversive goal while handling authentic oral and written traditions that, in some ways, are now irretrievable except through their eyes and literary goals. That the OT was written by not just the privileged (i.e., scribal class) but by the marginalized (exiles Israelites) would seem to be a significant dimension in this discussion.

In any case, one finds plenty of immediate attention given towards subversive literary analysis. For example, we read on the chapter on Assyria and section on Hosea, “It was especially the prophets of YHWH during this period that made use of their hidden discourse that sought to subvert the Assyrian metanarrative and its ideology of hegemony. This discourse, which was grounded in Israel’s and Judah’s own traditions and drew on the past conventions of salvation, burned within their memories” (49). The authors’ analysis also continually compares the “hidden transcript” from the “public transcript,” as well as how the economic situation came to frame imperialism and its resistance by Israel, its prophets, and biblical authors.

To stay within its basic goals, the last section on the Roman empire does not look at Christian resistance to the empire as much as the various events, drama, propaganda (another important topic that is continually revisited), surrounding Jewish resistance and the writings of Josephus. For that reason, readers will have to look to McKnight and Modica’s *Jesus Is Lord, Caesar Is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* and Herzog’s *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God* to fill-in the Christian and New Testament era on this subject (though, it should be said, “empire criticism” is not as full and complex as post-colonial analysis).<sup>3</sup> The section “Decolonizing the Mind” was particularly interesting, as it looks at the noncanonical writings of the Second-Temple period as a source of considerable Judean/Jewish resistance to the empire and its agendas.

---

3 The book also complements Christopher A. Rollston, ed., *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context* (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2018), also reviewed in this volume. I read both side-by-side in a couple months; *Israel and Empire* is more readable and less technical and focuses less on the prophets. Both, however, highlight the inescapable economic and political dimensions of the role of prophets and Hebrew literature in general.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading *Israel and Empire* and consider it a first recommendation for a solid and readable history of Israel, from Abraham to Caesar. It is also another firm reminder about how political and economic the biblical world—and Christian identity—really is.

*Jamin Andreas Hübner*  
*LCC International University*