Exegetical Tools Quarterly 2.2 (April 2016)
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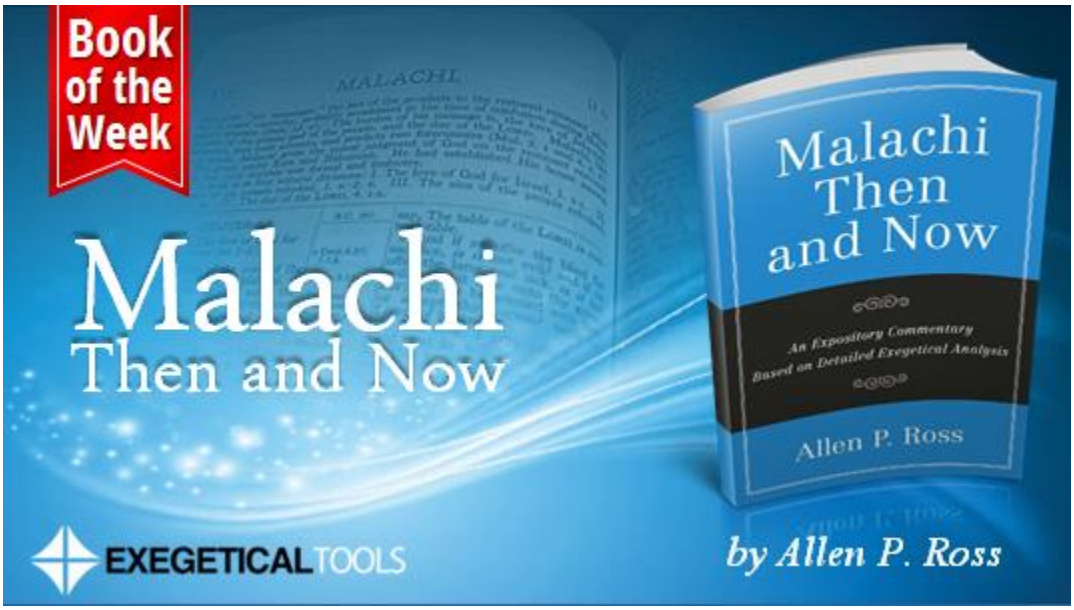
Books of the Week

A Comprehensive Guide to the Language, Meaning, Theology, and Homiletics of Malachi



Want to refresh and improve your Hebrew while studying an OT prophet closely?

I'm always on the lookout for resources that help you naturally improve your biblical language skills. I love some of the NT Greek guides that are being published, and the Baylor Handbooks on the Hebrew Old Testament are helpful as well. However, they are not intended to be commentaries on the meaning of the text, nor do they deal with theology.

Malachi Then and Now

Allen P. Ross has tackled an ambitious project: to explain the difficult grammar and morphology throughout the entire book of Malachi while also commenting on the structure, meaning, and theology of every paragraph in the book. Additionally, he gives sermon ideas such as the main expository idea of each passage and suggested applications to the modern day. I'm really, really excited about this book and I'm hoping more like it come out soon.

How it Works

As always happens, while focusing on Greek for the past couple years my Hebrew has lagged behind. Fortunately, then, I'm a great audience for this book.

Ross has an extensive introduction on exegetical method (~20 pages) which would be useful to a pastor who never received formal training or a formal method. It's basically a mini version of Stuart's *Old Testament Exegesis*. This includes 10 pages of categorized bibliography with suggested resources.

Each passage is then explored: first the language, then the meaning and theology, and then homiletical suggestions. Ross provides his own translation with textual footnotes explaining detailed issues. Next is an explanation of the literary context, followed by exegetical comments. These comments explain select difficulties in the Hebrew such as irregular morphology and the use of different tenses. Sparse footnotes keeps the explanations from getting bogged down.

Since the analysis of the Hebrew is not comprehensive as with Hebrew handbooks, the reader is expected to read from the Hebrew text oneself and use Ross as a guide. Positively, the reader must get into the text oneself, which forces immersion in the text and critical thinking. Negatively, those who are *really* rusty with morphology and syntax may need more help than Ross provides. However, there are no guides that I know of that help readers with the morphology of Greek or Hebrew texts throughout an entire book, so that's not much of a knock against Ross.

In the next sections, Ross moves toward the sermon with an exegetical outline, exegetical summary, a lengthy commentary in expository form, and finally the expository idea and application. If I could make one suggestion, it would be to shorten the commentary in expository form since it is a *little* redundant after the exegetical comments, and I would prefer those extra pages to be replaced with a little more help with morphology for pastors who haven't had time to keep up with theirs.

The end of the book synthesizes the biblical and theological emphases of Malachi that have been brought out in each passage of the book.

Why You Should Buy It

First, it gets you in the Hebrew text. I recommend any resource that motivates you and helps you to work through Greek or Hebrew texts of the Bible. The best way to practice any language is to make sure you're immersed in it for any amount of time each day.

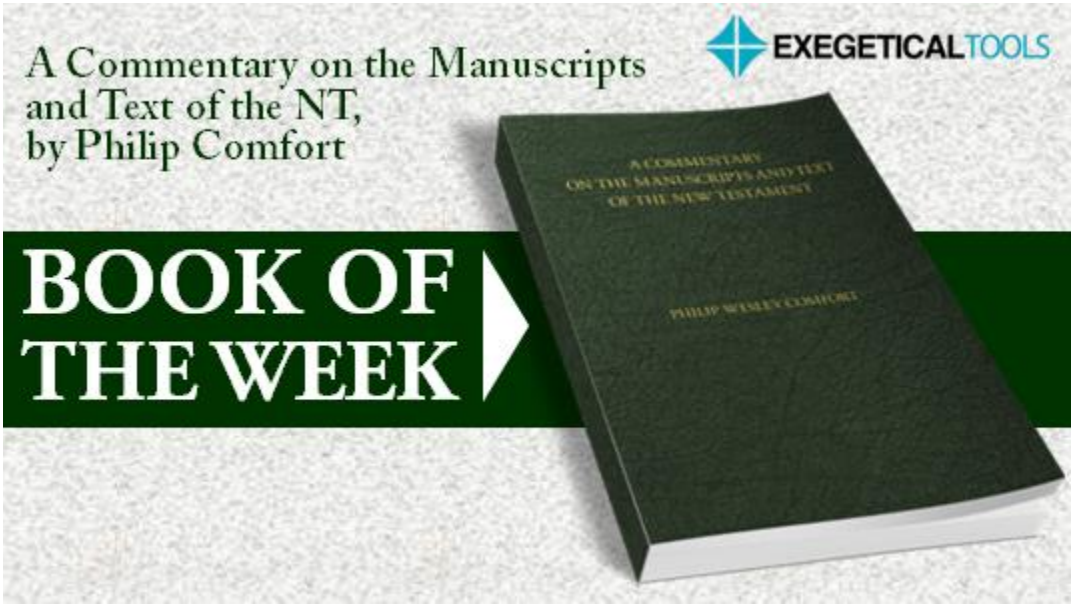
Second, this book is truly a one-stop-shop for pastors to prepare a sermon on Malachi. I'm happy that this book may encourage more pastors to tackle preaching an entire prophetic book, something that I have rarely heard. The pastor can (and probably should) supplement Ross's

work with another commentary or two, but my point is that if a pastor only had the time for bare bones study, this book could do the job.

Third, if you're like me, you need motivation to get into a language that is not one you're forced to work with consistently. A book like this, sitting on the side of your desk begging to be cracked open each day, will do just that. If you're feeling quite rusty, this is the book for you.

Preview or buy it here on Amazon.

A Concise Guide to Every New Testament Manuscript, Their Variants, and Uses of Nomina Sacra



Textual criticism is a specialized practice with lots of symbols, methodologies, and esoteric knowledge. Moreover, in order to be extremely skilled at textual criticism, one must have access to manuscripts to study or at least see them physically, which some scholars have the opportunity to do. But the best most of us can do is use the critical apparatus of our Greek New Testaments to see the variants and try to discern the original reading.

Enter Philip Comfort's new *Commentary on the Manuscripts and Text of the New Testament*. This little reference book will assist pastors, students, and even scholars in their pursuit for the

original text of the New Testament, and also for the significance of variants throughout the early manuscripts of the New Testament. Comfort has written extensively on New Testament manuscripts, his *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* being a superb volume.

Personally, I think the name of the book does not properly reflect its contents, or the *value* of its contents. This book is valuable in some respects, but should not be expected to do certain things.

1. Concise Guide to the Early Manuscripts

Comfort's first chapter is a concise introduction to the types of early manuscripts and their general classifications, as well as brief coverage of the typical canons of textual criticism. The second chapter is an annotated list of every New Testament manuscript, including papyri, uncials, miniscules, ancient versions, and the church fathers. This chapter provides much value. When evaluating variants in a critical apparatus, one can quickly flip to Comfort's description of that manuscript. He lists the principal edition of the manuscript and then discusses its dating, issues of correctors, and other pertinent information.

2. Commentary on Significant Variants

After the long third chapter describing each of the manuscripts, nearly the rest of the book consists of brief discussions of all the significant variants in the early New Testament manuscripts. Of course "significant" is subjective, so these are significant to Comfort, but nothing is wrong with that.

One should beware, however, that these discussions are more like brief comments and are not of the same kind as those in Metzger's renowned *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Metzger is concerned to defend the proposed reading that the UBS committee determined is most likely original. While Comfort also seeks the original reading, his commentary on the variants are less concerned with this. He does in many cases explain which manuscripts contain which reading and suggests which reading is original, but there is little argumentation in many cases. Usually, the early manuscripts win out, especially if they are in the majority.

A large percentage of this section is filled with comments on which manuscripts write out *Nomina Sacra.* While such information is useful, it probably could have been compiled in its own section to make this book much smaller. In short, Comfort's discussion of variants is complementary to Metzger's, but the latter's is still more useful for assessing the original reading of variants.

3. Discussion of Nomina Sacra.

The most stimulating aspect of Comfort's book is his attention to *Nomina Sacra*, or "sacred names." In a 25-page appendix, he discusses all of the *Nomina Sacra* used in the early manuscripts. These are divine names that are abbreviated with an overbar to denote the abbreviation. Κύριος was among the earliest, followed by Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, and θεός. Other titles that are not completely consistent are πνεῦμα, πατήρ, υἱός, υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, υἱὸς Δαυίδ, and even σταυρός and σταυρόω (419-443).

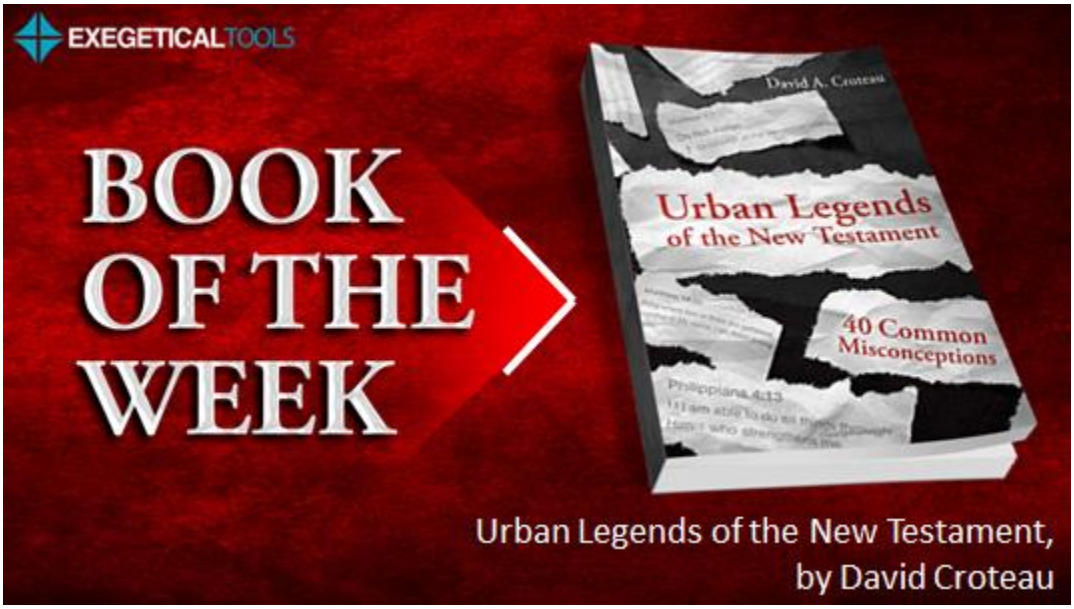
Comfort gives a summary explanation of the significance of each name in its ancient Jewish context. But perhaps the most useful idea from Comfort is that, since abbreviations were common in literary papyri from the same time period, some of these abbreviations (such as κυριός, Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, and θεός) may have been original from the hands of Paul, Luke, etc. While this is impossible to prove, it is a provocative idea.

Should You Own It?

The ultimate worth of this book lies first in its discussion of the *Nomina Sacra* and secondly in its character as a *concise* handbook on all the New Testament manuscripts and some significant variants. If you come across a variant and forget the dating of Sinaiticus or of P46, you can quickly turn to Comfort's volume for a one page summary of these important manuscripts. Other less important manuscripts receive less attention, but enough to give the user some acquaintance with the manuscripts under scrutiny. For this use, I commend Comfort's work as worthy of a place on your shelf next to your NA28 or UBS5, but not without your copy of Metzger on the other side to make a beautiful Greek sandwich.

Preview or buy it here.

Five Myths about the New Testament You Should Re-Examine



David Croteau has written a unique book with a sneaky purpose: to teach good hermeneutics. Many hermeneutics textbooks spend hundreds of pages on theory with some examples here and there. But not many books have been written with only examples of good exegesis for the purpose of teaching good exegesis.

This book looks at 40 of what Croteau calls “urban legends” of the NT. From browsing through the table of contents, you will see many urban legends you’ve heard taught or preached in your churches (at least here in America): Hell is (just) the absence of God; money is evil; Christians are commanded to tithe; the Gospel is dynamite; repent means “to change your mind”; the “eye of a needle” was a gate in Jerusalem; *agapao*-love is a superior love to *phileo*-love.

These sorts of legends have a way of perpetuating themselves, especially since many of them are passed along as “golden nuggets” that make the Bible more interesting and seem to make people more enlightened when they discover them. Unfortunately, while many of them preach well and seem to enlighten, many of them are less than true, and some are completely false.

So to introduce Croteau’s book, here are five urban legends (or, myths) about the NT you should re-examine, as explained by Croteau.

1. **The “eye of a needle” was a gate in Jerusalem with a very low opening.** This myth says that in order for a camel to get through, it must bow down to its knees, remove its

burden, and bow its head. Likewise, the rich must do so to be saved. However, there were no such gates in Jerusalem. Rather, Jesus is speaking of a little needle and using hyperbole, which he frequently does throughout his teachings.

2. **1 John 1:9 is a formula for salvation**. According to this myth, one must confess one's sins to be forgiven and saved; if any sins are not confessed, they are not forgiven and one is held in guilt until they are confessed. But this ignores that John's criterion for salvation is *belief*, not confession. It also misses the fact that the conditional statements in 1 John 1:5-10 work better as evidence-to-inference conditionals rather than cause-to-effect conditionals.
3. **John's Gospel has no concept of repentance**. Supposedly, because John's Gospel has no words for "repentance" or "to repent" in his Gospel, he does not include the concept in the process of salvation. But this is a simple confusion of word and concept. Just because a word does not occur does not mean a related concept is missing. In fact, just after John 3:16, we see that the unbelieving are called such because they have not turned from their wicked ways. In other words, they have not repented.
4. **Jesus spoke the most famous Bible verse in John 3:16**. This myth holds that the red letters in modern Bibles indicate that Jesus spoke John 3:16. The fact that they are Jesus' words make the verse even more significant. First, it is unlikely Jesus spoke these words. The language is more typical of John, 3:16 would be redundant for Jesus to speak just after he spoke 3:15, and 3:16 speaks of Jesus dying in the past, which makes it more likely for John to have spoken it. In the end, it doesn't matter who spoke the words, though, they are equally inspired.
5. **Nobody should judge anybody, ever.** Jesus said "you shall not judge" (Matt 7:1), so we can't judge anyone for their behavior, right? That's how many people use it, and that's why many people think Christians are hypocrites. But the word judge used here means to condemn or be severely critical. We are still called to be discerning (wise as serpents), and Matt 18:15-20 even tells us to rebuke fellow Christians when they sin. So Matt 7:1 is only telling us not to have an overly condemning attitude, which is God's role.

These five urban legends are only a sample of the forty that Croteau discusses. His typical means of argumentation is close attention to literary context, much more than historical context (e.g., citation of second temple Jewish sources). For that reason, this work would be accessible, fun, and effective for beginning Bible students who need to learn how to interpret passages in

(their literary) context. I would possibly use this as one of my textbooks in a hermeneutics class, or at least assign part of it.

If you don't teach, this would also be a fun book to read through. Find some urban legends you're familiar with, read about them, and have a good source to share with people next time they come up. Hear more about the book in this interview with Croteau below, and find the book on Amazon here.

A Guide to Every Greek Phrase in Philippians: A Huge Time-Saver for Students and Pastors

Preparing a sermon on difficult texts can be extremely time-consuming. In Philippians 1, what does Paul mean when he says "I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my **salvation**" (1:19)? How should the difficult Greek phrase τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν **ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** (2:5) be understood? What does the word **ἁρπαγμὸν** mean in 2:6? To give one more example, what about everyone's favorite word in Philippians, **σκύβαλα** – just exactly how strong is that word?

For each of these exegetical problems, and the many more you would find in almost every paragraph of Philippians, you might need to consult a few commentaries and a couple lexicons, assuming you're working from the Greek. Perhaps your Greek skills aren't up to par and you

avoid translating the passage yourself. This new series from B&H Academic is designed to solve both problems–to save you loads of time while studying the text and to enable you to work through the Greek phrase by phrase.

Joseph Hellerman's handbook on the Greek text of Philippians is one of the latest volumes in the Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. We love these volumes so much that we recently featured Murray Harris' volume on John as the Book of the Week. Hellerman's is of the same quality as Harris' and would be useful and appreciated by all who use it.


Joseph Hellerman

Throughout this guide, Hellerman gives a stellar analysis of each exegetical problem with various positions taken by commentators and supporting reasons for each position. Some good examples are the following:

- For the meaning of σωτηρίαν, he gives three positions, with six reasons for the first, four for the second, and three for the third, and a final paragraph with his reasons for choosing the third (58-59).
- When analyzing σώματί in Phil 1:20, he cites BDAG, NIDNTT, TDNT, H-M, Fee, Gundry, and Silva. This brief word study (only one paragraph) is deceptively packed with research (64).
- On the difficult phrase "have this mind among you, ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Phil 2:5), he cites the two main positions, whether the ἐν expresses union with Christ that is the grounds for the Philippians having Christ's mindset, or the location of the mindset as residing also in Christ (108-109). He provides five reasons for the first and two for the second, choosing the second in a small summarizing paragraph.

This sort of analysis is extremely helpful for pastors who need quick syntheses of arguments from the commentators and trustworthy judgment on these arguments. Indeed, as Hellerman told us in our interview with him, his guide is meant to be a one-stop shop for users so they have no need to consult lexicons or commentaries for dealing with the Greek text (of course you will still want commentaries for theology and history). Students may also use Hellerman's analysis as a model of careful attention to the Greek text.

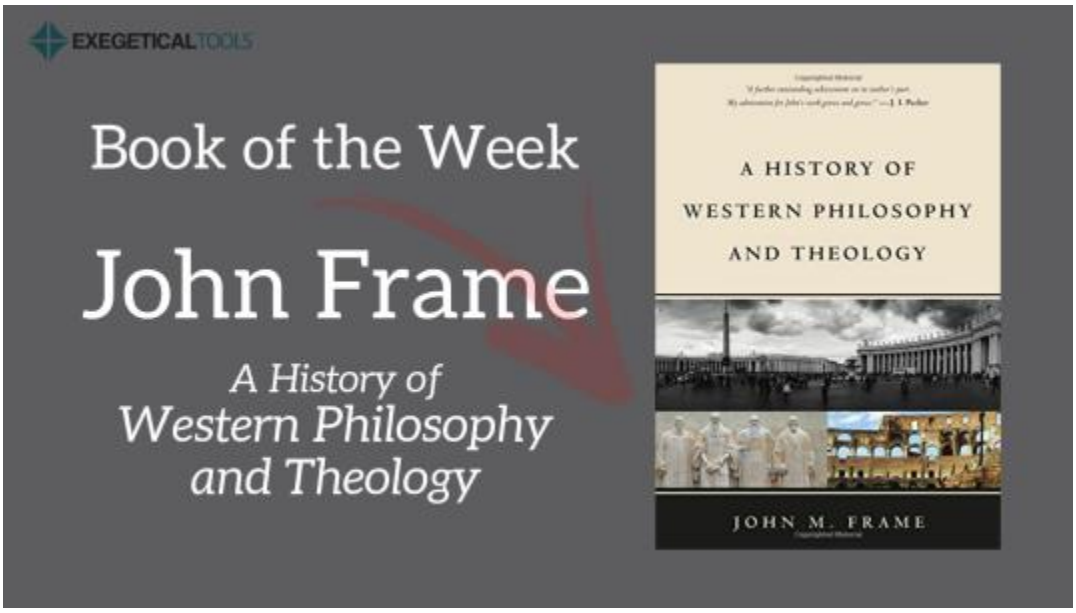
Hellerman's volume shares many of the other features that the EGGNT volumes have, including flow diagrams for each passage, suggestions for further reading by organized by topics that arise in each section, and brief comments about the literary makeup of each section

after the flow. I still lament the inattention to wider discourse features of the NT books, which is not intended to be covered in these volumes, so one must supplement this lack with other works on discourse analysis, which you can find in our Annotated Bibliography, but especially the Philippians volume in the Semantic Structural Analysis from SIL.

As with the other EGGNT volumes, I commend this as an incredibly helpful resource for anyone preparing to preach or teach on Philippians.

Preview or buy it here in paperback or for Kindle. (Compare the prices, the Kindle edition is currently much cheaper.)

How Useful is John Frame's History of Western Philosophy and Theology?



John Frame has written on a variety of topics related to philosophy, theology, apologetics, and other related matters. He has taught a course on the history of western philosophy and theology (many times, I'm sure), which you can find on iTunesU. He has now solidified the full material of this course into a nearly 1,000 page volume.

But don't let the size fool you. Positively, it's more manageable than you might imagine because the history only spans 500 pages. The rest of the ~450 pages are composed of 20 appendices (!), some published before and some not, as well as a glossary, some indices, and an annotated bibliography of philosophical resources. While the appendices might be helpful on various topics of interest (lots of them are book reviews), it's the 500 pages of history I'm concerned to evaluate here.

The Fame of Frame

Frame majored in philosophy at Princeton, studied philosophical apologetics under Cornelius Van Til at Westminster, and then studied in Yale's graduate program for philosophical theology. As you read through his chapters on various philosophers, it is obvious he understands the authors under scrutiny. However, as even Frame will acknowledge (e.g., with the Greeks), his analysis is the traditional one. Recent scholarship on figures such as Thales, Heraclitus, and others in the Greek world is not often worked into Frame's analysis. In this sense, his history is safe (sticking to what has been accepted as true for a long time), but lacking in the further detail a more focused book could give on recent scholarship.

Having said this, I can attest that his expositions are skillful. For example, his handling of Kant and Wittgenstein organize clearly their systems of thought. The former is difficult because of its complexity and Kant's obscurity, while the latter is difficult because of his shift in positions from 'early Wittgenstein' to 'late Wittgenstein.' For those starting out in philosophy, Frame's work is helpful.

However, there are many limitations.

First, this is a history of Western philosophy *and* theology. Two of the standard histories of Western philosophy are W. T. Jones' 5 volume set and Bertrand Russel's one volume work. Jones does figure the important theological figures such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Luther, but beyond the Reformation theologians do not feature in his history because they cease to be philosophers. Similarly for Russel, he has a section on the Reformation, but then theologians disappear. So one limitation of Frame's book is that he includes so many theologians, such as Calvin, Schleiermacher, Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, and many others. The result is that both the philosophical and theological history is too concise. I would rather have seen the appendices omitted and Frame's history extended to the full 1,000 pages, which would still be rather short in comparison with other histories of philosophy.

Second, while selectivity is a problem every historian has to navigate, I found the final chapter on recent Christian philosophy very imbalanced. He covers Kuyper, who was more of a political philosopher and theologian than a philosopher, and then Dooyeweerd, Gordon Clark, Esther Meek, and Vern Poythress, among others. If this is really the breadth of Christian philosophy today, the New Atheists wouldn't have much to worry about because philosophers such as William Lane Craig wouldn't be following them around the globe to destroy them in debates. (Craig gets mentioned on one page among a list of "other" analytic philosophers, about 2 of 25 of whom were worth mentioning in a history of philosophy and who deserved sections far more than other figures mentioned.) Of course, this *is* a history from a Reformed perspective (unashamedly), and I suppose Frame might only respond that he is writing for his tribe and giving attention to figures that are significant within *his* stream of philosophical thinking in the Reformed tradition. That is fine if that's his intent, but one should be aware of the limitation it places on this volume as a history of *Western (and not just Reformed) philosophy.*

The Many Strengths

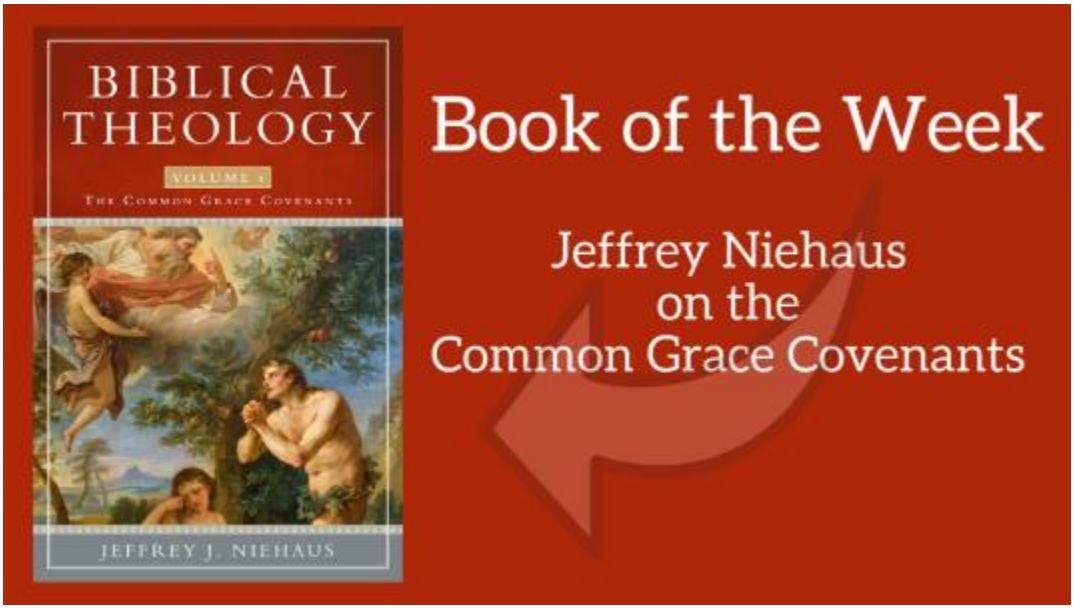
Of course one could continue with quibbles until the sun goes down, but let me extol some strengths of this volume:

- The inclusion of theologians is helpful for seeing how philosophy has influenced theology.
- The brevity allows those who are just beginning in philosophy to get a broad sweep in a manageable amount of pages.
- The Reformed perspective is useful for a large percentage of Christians who identify with that tradition.
- The writing format is–as usual–casual and easy to read, but academically informed.

Frame's work is a monument to his scholarship and a labor of love for the church. While it does have its limitations, I would be happy to recommend it to those starting out in philosophy and want a Christian perspective. For a complementary book that argues for Christian approaches to each topic of philosophy, use DeWeese's *Doing Philosophy as a Christian*. And finally, I would suggest buying W. T. Jones' 5 volume set (vol. 1 here) along with Frame's work so you can have a more in-depth analysis of each philosopher from a perspective that is not Christian but also understand Christianity well and is charitable to all.

Preview or buy Frame's work on Amazon.

It's Time to Rethink Traditional Covenantal Theology



Ever since Johannes Cocceius in the seventeenth century, the dominant model for federal or covenantal theology has been the Covenant of Works — Covenant of Grace dichotomy. This bi-covenantal scheme holds that Adam was under the Covenant of Works, potentially with the reward for obedience of eternal life, while all covenants after the fall were covenants of grace. This scheme underlies Reformed ecclesiology and is therefore vital to the theological system.

One problem with this scheme (at least in the view of some theologians, and in my own view), is that it theologizes the idea of covenant rather than understanding it as an ancient Near Eastern phenomenon. This isn't too surprising, though, since Cocceius and his followers lived before the major ancient Near Eastern textual excavations in the 19th century. But now that we have so much knowledge about Israel's ancient neighbors, and particularly about what covenants actually were, we now are responsible for ensuring that our understanding of covenant takes that data into account.

One scholar who has done this magisterially is Meredith Kline, particularly in his *Kingdom Prologue* and *Treaty of the Great King.* He understood covenants as contractual agreements between suzerains and vassals and attempted to integrate this understanding into the existing

bi-covenantal structure. But the problem remained whether this bi-covenantal structure accurately reflects how the OT presents the various covenants.

We should all now take note of Jeffrey Niehaus' work on covenant, who stands clearly in Kline's tradition. He has previously published a small monograph on *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* and his major and oft-cited monograph *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East*. He has therefore situated himself well to write his new *Biblical Theology*, beginning with volume 1, *The Common Grace Covenants*, which studies the two covenants of Genesis 1-9. This volume makes the major contribution to covenant theology of understanding the concept in his historical milieu and with close attention to the details of the biblical text.

Covenant in the ancient Near East is a "power relationship," a relationship that originates from God's power relationship with creation and its inhabitants when he created it and them" (36). God provides good things for his vassals, imparts standards for their way of life, blesses them for obedience and curses them for disobedience, and is the eternal witness to these facts (37).

Rather than a Works-Grace bi-covenantal structure, Niehaus sees one overarching program administered in two *kinds* of covenants: Common Grace Covenants and Special Grace/Revelation Covenants. His distinction is made based on two main claims: (1) multiple covenants in the ancient Near East were never consolidated into one (as would be the "Covenant of Grace"); (2) the Adamic and Noahic covenants are made with all of mankind and endure until the eschaton, while the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants only apply to God's elect people and remain eternally.

One of the most significant points of this book is his take on the Noahic covenant. Since all covenants are discrete covenants (yet organically connected), the Noahic covenant is also a discrete covenant. It is not part of one theologically constructed "Covenant of Grace." To construct such a single covenant is to gloss over the various differences between each of the covenants from Noah to Christ (223-224). Rather, the Noahic covenant is part of "one legal package" with the Adamic covenant under which all humans life, both of which are Common Grace Covenants.

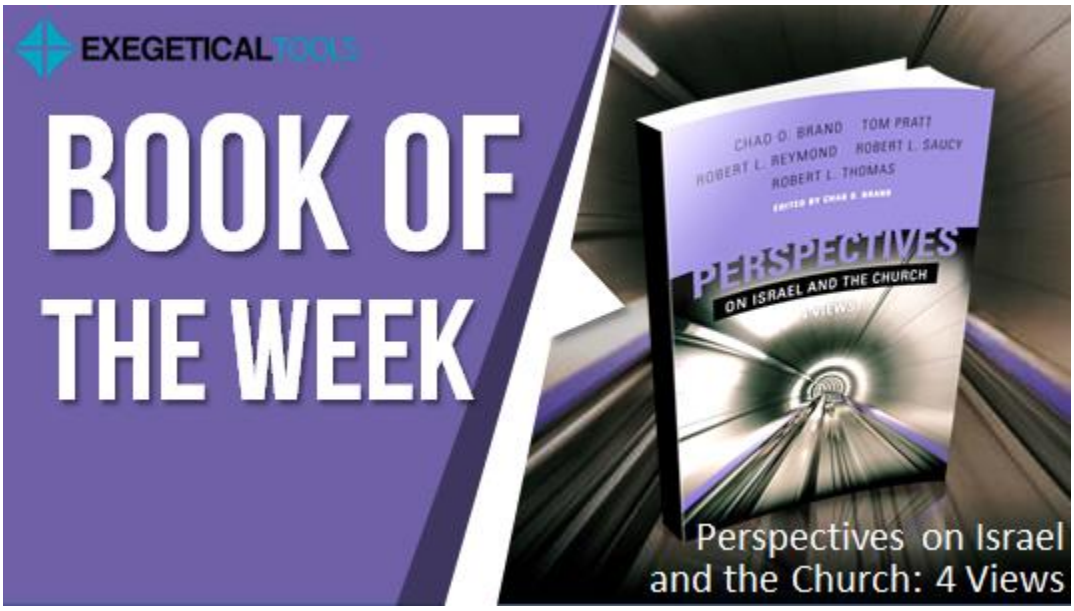
The entire book falls into seven chapters and four appendices. The first three chapters look at the Adamic covenant, the fourth chapter examines Cain's place in the scheme, the next two chapters expound the Noahic covenant, while the final chapter presents life under two covenants. The prose is clear, charts are abundant, and excurses everywhere promise exciting

adventures into theological and (even) philosophical issues (is God in or out of time?) as well as strange texts (yep, Gen 6:1-4). The one issue to wrestle with throughout is Niehaus' methodology for applying ancient Near Eastern themes, concepts, and literary forms to the Bible, but his approach is one of many that will challenge and enrich your own method.

Jeffrey Niehaus is to be commended for contributing this volume. I dare say that all those who hold to some form of covenantal theology *need* to read this volume and grapple with its arguments and implications.

Find it here on Amazon.

The Most Important Modern Theological Discussion



Feel free to push back, but I dare say that the most important modern theological discussion is the relationship between Israel and the Church.

It all started in the early church: who were these "Christians?" Of course they were Jews, but by the end of the first century we had the famous "parting of the ways." Christianity went the way of Ignatius while Judaism went the way of the rabbis. The Middle Ages bore rocky relations between the two, while modern times are stamped by the question of how Christians should

relate to the renewed state of Israel. Aside from the political issue, there is the issue of Messianic Judaism and its relation to Christianity. And above all, there is the age-old question that Paul wrestled with in Romans 9-11: what of God's special elect people, who have rejected the Messiah *en masse*?

Before we can settle any of these questions, the first and necessary step is to answer *what is the relationship between Israel and the Church?* How we answer this question will largely determine how we answer all the related questions. It largely drives our hermeneutic, our political stance toward Israel, and our approach to non-Messianic Jews today. That is why any book on Israel and the Church is so important.

When I learned about *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, I was happy to see an entry-level book to the problem because I would have loved to have read this during my M.Div. years. It would have saved me the problem of being confused by the various hermeneutical approaches of my professors–some dispensational, some progressive dispensational, some progressive covenantal, and some classical covenantal. I had all four of these approaches taught to me during my M.Div., and I would have been spared much confusion had I understood that these professors were all just teaching me out of four different theological systems.

In this helpful book, editor Chad Brand provides a concise history of the church's belief on this topic, from the early days of Ignatius through to Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*, which is the most recent major work in this area. This little introductory chapter is at least worth the Kindle price of the book, in my opinion (currently $9.99).

The four views are as follows:

- The Traditional Covenantal View by Robert Reymond
- The Traditional Dispensational View by Robert Thomas
- The Progressive Dispensational View by Robert Saucy
- The Progressive Covenantal View by Chad Brand and Tom Pratt, Jr.

Brand orders the chapters by the historical appearance of the view. The traditional covenantal view was spawned initially by Johannes Cocceius in the 17th century, but was not solidified until slightly later in the Reformed tradition. The traditional dispensational view arose in the 19th century and was given its classical exposition by Charles Ryrie in his *Dispensationalism Today*, while the progressive dispensational view arose in the twentieth century with its foundational treatment by Blaising and Bock. The order of these four chapters therefore takes you on a

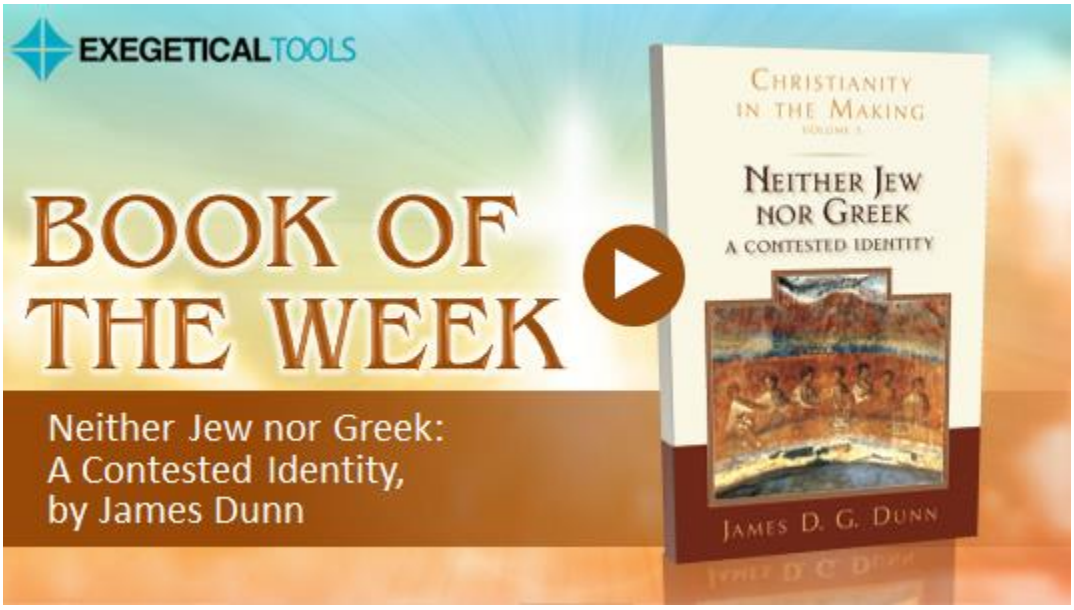
historical journey so you can see the way these positions have unfolded in response to the weaknesses of former positions.

The format of the book is typical of these sorts of works. Each author has about 50 pages to lay out their view, then the authors of the other positions make a brief response. The original author does *not* get a final response to the three critiques, which I probably prefer. Other books that allow a final rebuttal end up being too bogged down with details and repetition.

If you want to start thinking about the most important modern theological question, this is a great place to start. But even if you've thought about this question a lot, there's still plenty to learn from these scholars who will bring the strongest of arguments for their positions. I'd recommend any seminary student and any pastor read this work, and even scholars could benefit from these concise treatments of each position.

Preview or buy it here.

Neither Jew Nor Greek: James Dunn's Capstone to His History of Early Christianity



The history of early Christianity has taken one of the prime spots in recent NT research. Revisionist histories abound, and new perspectives on old data are welcome. But the attempts to canvas in detail the first 150 years of Christianity are few and far between.

James Dunn doesn't shy away from a challenge. Once one gets beyond the NT documents, the nearest history is Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* in the fourth century. So how would one go about studying this early period, and how would one tell the history? Dunn has undertaken this task in his third and final volume of his Christianity in the Making series, *Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity*.

The first and second volume were not lacking in detail and analysis, each spanning over 1,000 pages. The first volume focused on Jesus in memory, analyzing the Gospels, while the second volume focused on the period before 70 AD, using Acts and Paul's letters as sources. This third volume is challenged with the task of discerning which sources give reliable information of the years 70-180 AD and creating a history from scratch.

Here are some unique features to Dunn's approach:

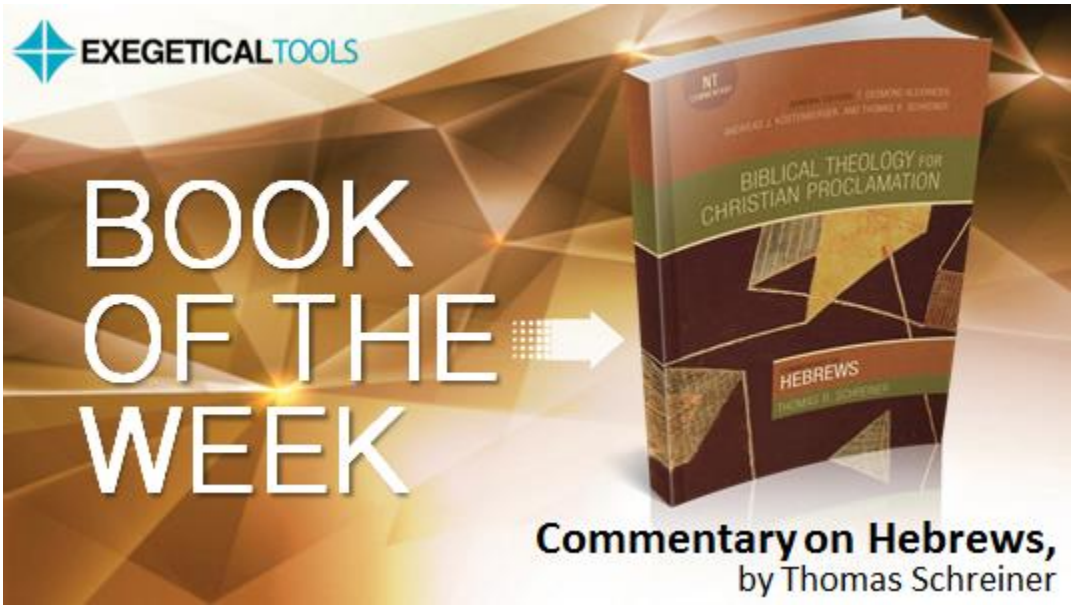
1. Rather than tell history from the perspective of the "winners" (i.e., the orthodox) as Eusebius did, Dunn wants to tell the story from a more neutral perspective, ensuring that even the heretics get their say. This approach falls in line with those who have been influenced by Walter Bauer's approach to early Christianity. Positively, it does allow us to focus on the parts of Christianity that are often glossed over because of their heretical status.
2. Dunn analyzes the reception of Paul especially in the second century. Many of the early heresies centered over the exegesis of Paul's letters, so chapter 47 of this volume (the chapter count continues from vols. 1 and 2) is especially helpful for studying these controversies (675-723).
3. The Gospel of John provides a unique testimony to the history of Jesus by its own unique developments of the tradition, but also because the sources come from eyewitness testimony (757-760). Although he does not identify a specific John as the author, he clearly gives this Gospel historical value that it is not often attributed.
4. The book as a whole provides an analysis of the role of each of the major early church leaders: James, Paul, Peter, John (and Thomas as well). While no one will agree with Dunn's analysis on every detail (e.g., I've argued elsewhere that his take on Gal 2:11-21 is mistaken), as a holistic project this volume and the entire series is incredibly significant and useful.

5. Dunn writes like a lecturer. That is, he not only gives you his analysis, but he shows you how he gets there. He begins the volume by discussing which sources he will use and what issues are involved in using them. As he introduces a subject, he explains carefully his approach and the critical issues involved. Because of this format, even one who disagrees with much of Dunn's analysis can still gain a framework for studying early Christianity.

Much more could be said about this 825 page book (plus appendices). But let me just say what is most important. This series involves many assumptions and arguments that have been made elsewhere by professor Dunn. While one might disagree with him on some issues, one cannot deny that he is among the foremost of NT scholars alive today. He has given us around 3,000 pages analyzing the history of Christianity from the death of Christ to 180 AD. His work deserves to be appreciated and studied, and one can certainly learn many things from Dunn, especially how to go about doing the work of studying the early church. May this work be found useful in the hands of many students, pastors, and scholars.

Find it here on Amazon.

Tom Schreiner Helps You Bring Biblical Theology to the Pulpit



This new series focuses on a distinction made since J. P. Gabler in 1787: the distinction between biblical and systematic theology.

The major contribution of each volume … is a thorough discussion of the most important themes of the biblical book in relation to the canon as a whole. This format allows each contributor to ground biblical theology, as is proper, in an appropriate appraisal of the relevant historical and literary features of a particular book in Scripture while at the same time focusing on its major theological contribution to the entire Christian canon in the context of the larger salvation-historical metanarrative of Scripture. (xi)

Schreiner is well-suited to write a commentary focusing on biblical theology, having published his whole-Bible biblical theology in 2013. He has published numerous other works, including top-notch commentaries on Pauline texts such as Romans and Galatians as well as a Pauline theology and a New Testament theology.

Now he has tried his hand at Hebrews, a different sort of text, and perhaps the best volume to write in this series that focuses on biblical theology. The letter is filled with allusions to and citations of the OT and there are important biblical-theological themes such as land, kingship, priesthood, sacrifice, and more.

Each section begins with an outline, including sections before or after within the same division of the letter so the reader maintains an idea of where the present section lies in the letter.

Schreiner then provides a translation of the text, followed by a section on context. These sections are all brief.

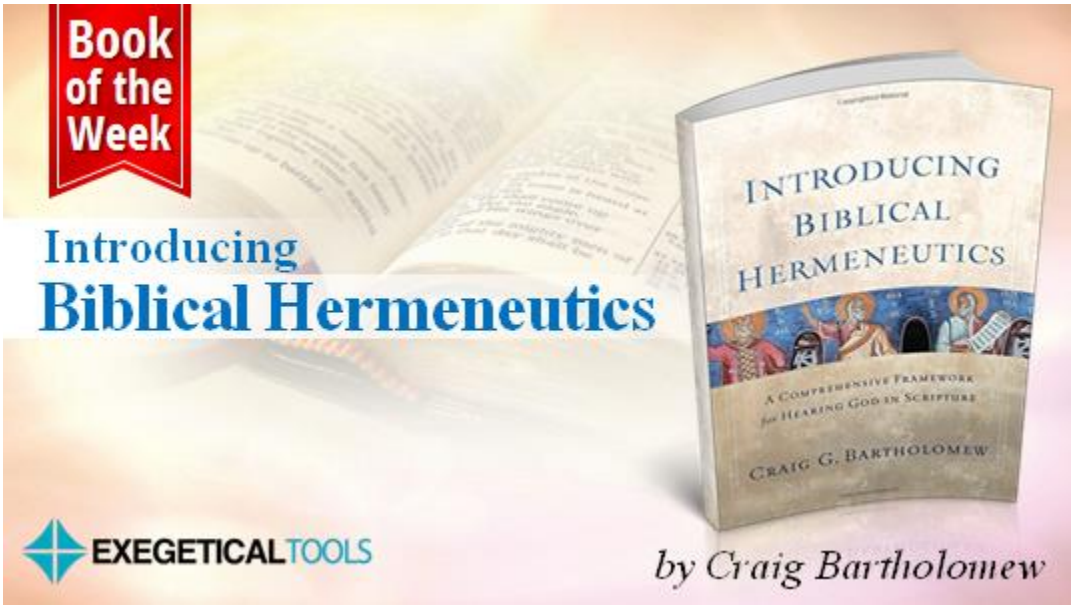
Then comes an exegesis of each verse. In that sense, the commentary is much like any other. It makes one wonder whether there is really a way to execute a series of biblical-theological commentaries, since commentaries are based on exegesis. So it is a strange mix between Zondervan's Biblical Theology of the NT series and regular commentaries.

Thankfully the text prints Greek fonts rather than transliterations. The book itself is smaller than normal commentaries and so the page count makes it seem longer than it really is (539 pages). One could actually read through this entire commentary in a week in order to get an overview of the exegesis and theological themes throughout Hebrews before starting to preach it.

The brevity of the commentary means three things. First, it is nowhere as near in-depth as other commentaries, such as those by Attridge and Lane. Second, however, there is a smooth exposition that will benefit beginning students working on research and pastors who need a brief and clear exposition from a scholar who understands the academic issues involved. Lastly, the price of the commentary is a bit lower than the other major commentaries, coming in at around $28 right now on Amazon. This would definitely be a good addition to anyone's library–student and pastor especially, but scholars will also likely be consulting this volume.

Find it here on Amazon.

A Truly Inspiring Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics from Craig Bartholomew



There many introductions to biblical hermeneutics, but none have truly inspired me in the many ways Craig Bartholomew's has. His *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* is truly a *tour de force* of the many methodologies, historical precedents, and disciplines that are wrapped up in the process of interpreting the Bible.

This book has inspired me in at least two ways. First, I've never seen another hermeneutics textbook that includes a chapter on *lectio divina* and the necessity of *listening* to Scripture, as Bartholomew does in ch. 2. I was inspired to slow down and put this ancient tradition into practice more often.

Second, Bartholomew agrees with the likes of Wright's *New Testament and the People of God* and Köstenberger's *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* to push forcefully the idea that biblical scholars *must* engage with philosophy, historiography, and literary theories. Having studied much from these three areas, I wholeheartedly agree with all three scholars that we must engage this triad of disciplines. But Bartholomew has an uncanny ability to cut to the heart of these disciplines, to summarize their movements, and to extract what is useful for our hermeneutical methods (see chs. 9-11).

Aside from being inspired, Bartholomew has also provided a one-stop-shop for an entry into hermeneutical theory. But he does so from a unique perspective that biblical theologians will be much please with! Chapters 4, for example, summarizes the old Biblical Theology Movement,

the responses by Barr and Childs, and the subsequent biblical theology movement that is currently ongoing.

Additionally, chapter 6 covers early and medieval Jewish biblical interpretation. This chapter alone would be useful in NT introductory courses, but he also explains *how* to integrate the study of Jewish traditions into our hermeneutical method. Bartholomew summarizes the important Jewish texts, explains the rise of Jewish sects, discusses the rabbis, and explains various Jewish exegetical methods. Such a chapter is unique among hermeneutics textbooks.

While on the topic of unique features, note also that Bartholomew includes a chapter on Scripture and the University. He uses the image (with a literal image on p. 475) of a tree to represent an "ecology of Christian scholarship." Faith stands at the root, which uses Scripture to build everything on top of it. This starts with biblical theology, which then generates a Christian worldview, upon which come the branches of Christian philosophy and theology. From these two disciplines flower the rest of the tree, which includes chemistry, economics, history, psychology, political science, and all the rest. I sincerely appreciate the attempt in a hermeneutics textbook to show how proper biblical interpretation can bloom into a fully biblical and Christian approach to every field of knowledge.

A final impressive aspect of this work is that the last section, chs. 14-15, includes the following: (1) a 35 page interpretation of Hebrews, displaying the full arsenal of tools given throughout the textbook, including practical instructions on *lectio divina*; (2) homiletical discussion, including a history of preaching, help on application, and the centrality of Jesus. The chapter on Hebrews is a laudable example of exegesis, theology, and integration of disciplines, while the homiletical chapter is a delightful dialogue with the likes of Barth, Bonhoeffer, Hodge, Broadus, Lloyd-Jones, and Stott.

What is this book useful for?

This book is not for everyone, and it would not work for just any hermeneutics class. I cannot praise this book enough, but here are my recommendations for use:

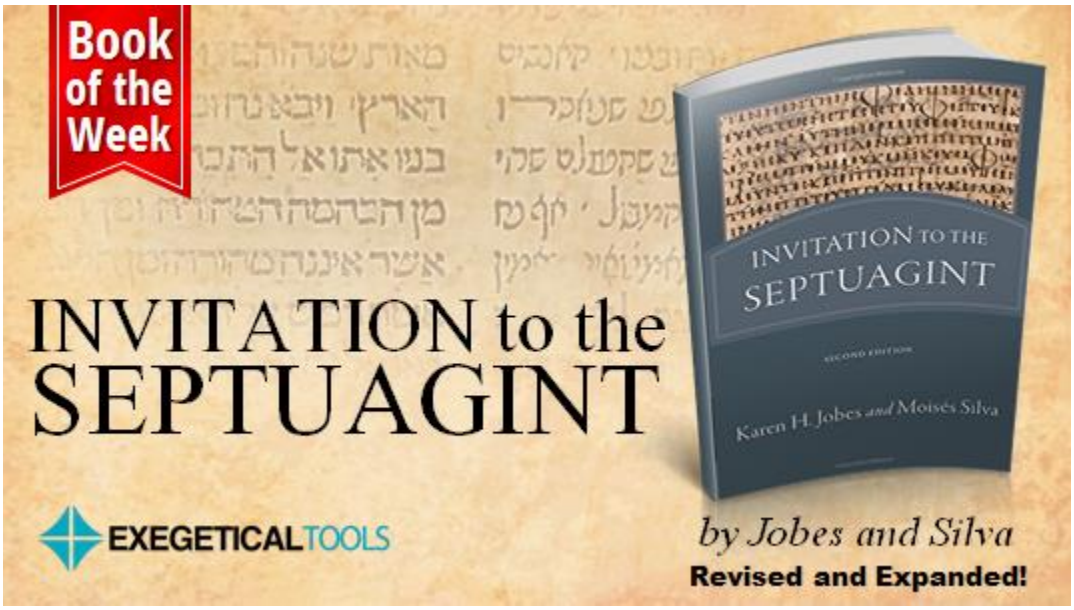
- Intermediate textbook for personal use to gain a solid grasp of tools needed to interpret the Bible today.
- Textbook in a ThM or PhD level seminar on hermenetuics. Chapters could be selected to generate profitable discussion. I believe this textbook could be used successfully in a masters program if it is an academically rigorous program (I would have *loved* for this to have been my textbook in my MDiv).

- Researchers should take Bartholomew as an example of the modern day Renaissance Man. He has set a high bar for interdisciplinary work and the integration of multiple tools into his hermeneutical arsenal.
- Anyone who wants profitable discussions on the following topics: *lectio divina* (40-42); rule of faith (57-61); the use of "story" (63-82); biblical theology movement (90-97); the most recent Germany biblical theology (106-110); Patristic exegetical methods (126-157); Jewish sources and interpretation (ch. 6); interpretation of Hebrews (ch. 14); preaching (ch. 15); and I could go on.

You can find more information about Bartholomew's philosophy of history that he utilizes in this volume at our post here, which summarizes his 2015 IBR address.

You can preview or buy *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* here.

You're Invited to Septuagint Studies: Refuse at Your Peril!



You're invited to Septuagint studies…again! Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva have revised and expanded their fantastic introduction to the blooming field of Septuagint studies. And we mean

it: refuse at your peril. If you haven't yet read a good introduction to this field, there are several reasons why you should, and many reasons why Jobes and Silva is the best place to start.

Why Septuagint Studies?

In decades and centuries past, the LXX has been used often as evidence of early Jewish interpretations of the MT. But recent studies have found far more use for the LXX. This includes its use for textual criticism, for ancient Jewish sociological and historical investigation, for the study of Greek, for better understanding the NT authors' use of the OT, and for the study of second-temple Jewish theology.

In short, if you're not at least acquainted with the basic issues of the formation of the Septuagint, its text, and how to approach it for use in biblical studies, you need to ASAP.

Jobes and Silva as Accessible and Reliable Guides

Jobes and Silva's first edition of *Invitation to the Septuagint* has been popular and frequently used. This second edition gives it new life by expanding every chapter with updated sources and discussions of developments over the last 15 years.

The book falls into four parts. The first explains the history of the LXX including its relation to other Greek versions, its transmission, modern editions, and issues related to its translation. Part two discusses its use in biblical studies, including the quality of its Greek (especially Semitic influence), attempts to establish its text, its use for OT textual criticism, and how it helps with Qumran and NT studies. Part three is somewhat unique to this book. It dedicates a chapter to the founders of LXX studies and influential modern scholars, current linguistic issues, attempts to reconstruct the text's history, and what the LXX tells us about Jewish theology in the Hellenistic era.

Throughout the book are useful case studies. To demonstrate the LXX's value for OT textual criticism, they discuss instances where the LXX may contain an earlier reading, such as "David" instead of "circle" in Isa 29:3 (possible), "Moses finished speaking" rather than "and Moses went and spoke" in Deut 31:1 (supported by the Hebrew of 1QDeut^a 13 II, 4), and an entire sentence in 2 Sam 14:30 missing from the MT, but found in 4QSam, thus *virtually* confirming the LXX as the better reading.

To demonstrate the problems of interpreting the LXX, Jobes and Silva provide a chapter that interprets the LXX of Gen 4:1-8 almost word for word, Isa 52:13-53:12 selectively, and Esther

5:1-2 with Addition D to show the difficulties of sections with competing Greek translations and with material not paralleled in the MT. The reader therefore sees theory in action.

In addition to the many other case studies are a plethora of tables, diagrams, and graphics. Diagrams help the reader see how the LXX relates to the MT and other Greek versions (pp. 35, 39, 49); tables compare the book order of the MT, LXX, and Protestant English Bibles, they they MT and LXX texts side by side for comparison, and more; the best graphics are those that show a page of a critical LXX edition (e.g., Göttingen or Larger Cambridge) with an explanation of the apparatus on the adjacent page.

There are several other helpful sections. I enjoyed the biographical sections on Septuagint scholars as well as the discussion of the use of the LXX in NT use of the OT studies. Throughout, Jobes and Silva explain methodological considerations but also often give specific steps to walk through when studying an issue. For all these reasons, this book is one of the best places to start for most issues related to LXX studies.

Jobes and Silva in Comparison

There are several other introductions to the LXX, such as McLay's *Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*, Law's When God Spoke Greek, and Dines's *The Septuagint*. Each volume has its own strengths and focuses on different areas within LXX studies. However, for the beginning student or the pastor who wants to learn how to use the LXX sensitively when studying the text while preparing for sermons, I suggest Jobes and Silva's new second edition is the best place to start.

You're invited to preview or buy it here.

What about Free Will? The Age-Old Question, Newly Explored

When I first read the introduction to *What about Free Will?*, I couldn't help but think of myself 10 years ago. I had recently discovered the "doctrines of grace" and was exploring them and studying Scripture to sort things out. I could recall my own experiences as I read through the backstory to this book given by the author, Scott Christensen. We've all had the chance to wrestle with the issue of God's sovereignty, how it relates to salvation, and where free will comes into play.

If you're still sorting through the issue (I think that means *all* of us), you might enjoy this work. Christensen's goal is not to deal with the philosophical issues that attend this discussion (e.g., the precise definition of "free will" as it relates to, say, quantum mechanics). Rather, he wants to take a fresh glance at Scripture and compare the arguments made on both sides to what the Bible says. In some ways, I'm nostalgic–reading through this work is like reading through the Reformers as they simply dove into Scripture.

Contents

Here's how the book is laid out. Chapters 1-2 examines libertarian free will. Since the dual tasks of this book are to critique libertarian free will and to argue for compatibilism, these two chapters carry a lot of weight. Chapter 3 surveys God's sovereignty in Scripture, which sets up his explanation of compatibilism in ch. 4. Chapters 5 and 6 then explain how we are able to obey God's commands and how he can ordain evil (no small task!). The rest of the book explains how compatibilism works out in areas such as the human will, freedom, and responsibility.

There are a thousand books out there on sovereignty, election, predestination, and the 5-points. Why might you want this one on free will? Here are a few reasons…

Praise

Christensen writes in a very relaxed manner. While I do enjoy a good papal rant from Calvin's writings, it's also nice to read a smooth script that talks you through an issue. He also throws in some fun illustrations to pull you back into the book–for example, his nice use of *Twelve Angry Men* at the beginning of ch. 5. Again, when discussion the difference between coercion and reluctant action under duress, he relates a fascinating account of a bank robbery by a man who was forced to do so or be blown up by a bomb placed on him.

I recall reading Loraine Boettner's classic *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* long ago. It read in a similar manner insofar as he dealt with Scripture throughout and omitted discussion of much philosophical jargon. However, I also found it quite dry, with illustrations generally relegated to hypotheticals that did not have much relevance. Christensen, though, enjoys a good cultural reference here and there (unfortunately, there were no Seinfeld references or I would recommend this book even more highly…).

One last point is that his interaction with sources spans the spectrum from academic (e.g., D. A. Carson's *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*) to pastoral (e.g., Sam Storms, Randy Alcorn), to those who write for both audiences well (e.g., John Frame's *Doctrine of God*).

What about 'What about Free Will?'

So if you want to enjoy a nice walk through the issues related to free will and sovereignty on a Sunday afternoon while enjoying a cup of coffee in your armchair, grab this book. New perspectives, new stories, and new takes on old arguments await you, and not many issues stand to perplex you as much as this one (which is fun for those of us who enjoy that sort of thing!).

Find it here on Amazon.

Greek Resources

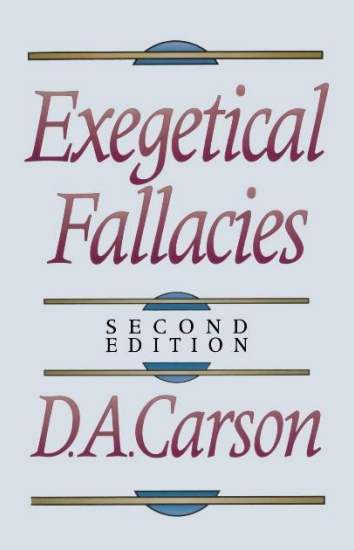
Exegetical Fallacies: Word Studies, Part 2

We hope since our last post you've been avoiding the five word study fallacies we explained.

Now we want to give you five more to avoid. Make sure to avoid these mistakes in your preaching, teaching, research, and individual study.

For more detailed reading, buy Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies*, which this series is summarizing.

1. **Verbal Parallelomania**



   - *Definition*: "The listing of verbal parallels in some body of literature as if those bare phenomena demonstrate conceptual links or even dependency." See the classic article from Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13 (online here). Since Sandmel's article, scholars have been more judicious in their attempt to find dependency when there is only similarity, but this fallacy does still occur.
   - *Example*: Bultmann and Dodd's studies in John 1:1-18 aimed at finding parallels in other literature, however, they only overlapped in 7% of their studies which suggests that any significant weight on either findings is dubious at best.

2. **Linkage of Language and Mentality**

   - *Definition*: "The assumption that any language so constrains the thinking processes of the people who use it that they are forced into certain patterns of thought and shielded from others."
   - *Example*: "The Hebrew thought in pictures, and consequently his nouns are concrete and vivid. There are no such thing as neuter gender, for the Semite everything is alive" (45). But if something were considered dead simply because it were neuter in gender, τό παιδίον could not be a living being for any Greek thinker, which is absurd.

3. **False Assumptions about Technical Meaning**
    - *Definition*: Fallacy in which the "interpreter falsely assumes that a word always or nearly always has a certain technical meaning — a meaning usually derived either from a subset of the evidence or from the interpreter's personal systematic theology."
    - *Example*: The Greek word *apokalupto*, meaning "to reveal," can be fallaciously interpreted as always applying to special revelation which was previously unknown. However, such an interpretation of the meaning of this word creates difficulty in interpreting passages such as Phil. 3:15b, where "make clear" is a better translation of ***apokalupto***.
    - Example: **ἡγιασμενοις** (1 Cor 1:2) refers to a completed action that happened at the moment of conversion for the Corinthian church. Therefore it is fallacious to assume the word "sanctification" always carries the technical sense from systematic theology of "progressive sanctification."
4. **Problems Surrounding Synonyms and Componential Analysis**
    - *Definition*: Fallacy involving the misinterpretation of two similar but not wholly synonymous words wherein two different words may be mistaken to mean two different things when, in fact, they are meant to be synonymous or, conversely, wherein two different words are mistakenly taken to have synonymous meanings when, in fact, they have different meanings in context.
    - *Example*: In John 21:15-17, the words ἀγαπάω and φιλέω both generally meaning "to love," are both used. It is fallacious to view these words as having separated meanings simply because they are different words. Context here seems to show that the words are used as synonyms in this context, just as the words "lamb/sheep" and "feed/shepherd" are used in parallel in this same passage and are synonymous. In other contexts, however, the same two words may have separate meanings since their semantic range, while overlapping significantly, is not identical.
5. **Selective and Prejudicial Use of Evidence**
    - *Definition*: Appealing to only that evidence which supports the point a particular commentator would like to make.

- *Example*: Roman Catholic theologian Thomas Groome makes the claim that the NT is far less concerned with doctrine and more concerned with obedience. He cites 1 John 2:3-5, 3:6 as his evidence for such a claim. However, he overlooks the scores of biblical witnesses, even in John, where he refers to the importance of the content of belief (John 4:50, 5:47, 11:26, 13:19, 17:21)

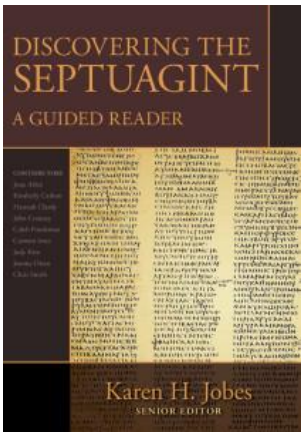
Subscribe to our blog (and/or follow us on Twitter and Facebook) to catch the final six word study fallacies in our series.

Check out Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies here*.

Two Forthcoming Works to Strengthen Your Greek

The New Year is getting off to a great start for those looking to strengthen their Greek. Kregel Academic is set to publish two volumes that the student of the Greek New Testament will want to add to their shelves. The following descriptions are from the publisher.

Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader

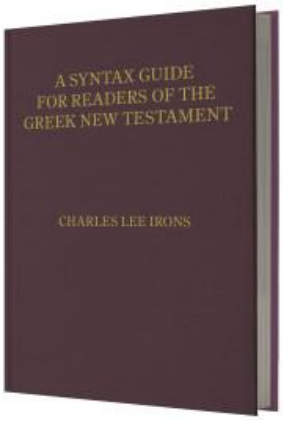


Interest in the Septuagint today continues to grow stronger. Despite that interest, students have lacked a guidebook to the text similar to the readers and handbooks that exist for the Greek New Testament. Discovering the Septuagint: A Guided Reader fills that need. Created by an expert on the Septuagint, this groundbreaking resource draws on Jobes's experience as an educator in order to help upper–level college, seminary, and graduate students cultivate skill in reading the Greek Old Testament.

This reader presents, in Septuagint canonical order, ten Greek texts from the Rahlfs—Hanhart Septuaginta critical edition. It explains the syntax, grammar, and vocabulary of more than 700 verses from select Old Testament texts representing a variety of genres, including the Psalms, the Prophets, and more.

The texts selected for this volume were chosen to fit into a typical semester. Each text (1) is an example of distinctive Septuagint syntax or word usage; (2) exemplifies the amplification of certain theological themes or motifs by the Septuagint translators within their Jewish Hellenistic culture; and/or (3) is used significantly by New Testament writers.

A Syntax Guide for Readers of the Greek New Testament



Only by immersing oneself consistently in the Greek New Testament can students, pastors, and other readers gain facility with the language. This invaluable guide from Charles Lee Irons streamlines and enhances the process, allowing readers to interact with the Greek text with minimal interruption and maximum understanding. By focusing specifically on syntax, this guide takes its place among other resources as a time-saving new tool that builds on, rather than replaces, what already exists. In the author's words, it "picks up where these other tools leave off, presupposes their use, and moves on to more complex issues of syntax, translation, some textual criticism, and limited exegesis."

Eminently useful, A Syntax Guide for Readers of the Greek New Testament

- Provides brief explanations of intermediate and advanced syntactical features of the Greek text
- Suggests translations to help the reader make sense of unusual phrases and difficult sentences
- Eliminates the need for the reader to stop and look up intermediate, advanced, or unusual grammatical features of the Greek text
- Recognizes Hebraic constructions, Semitic inferences,and Septuagintisms
- Closely follows the Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th and 28th editions

Find *Discovering the Septuagint* here and *Syntax Guide* here.

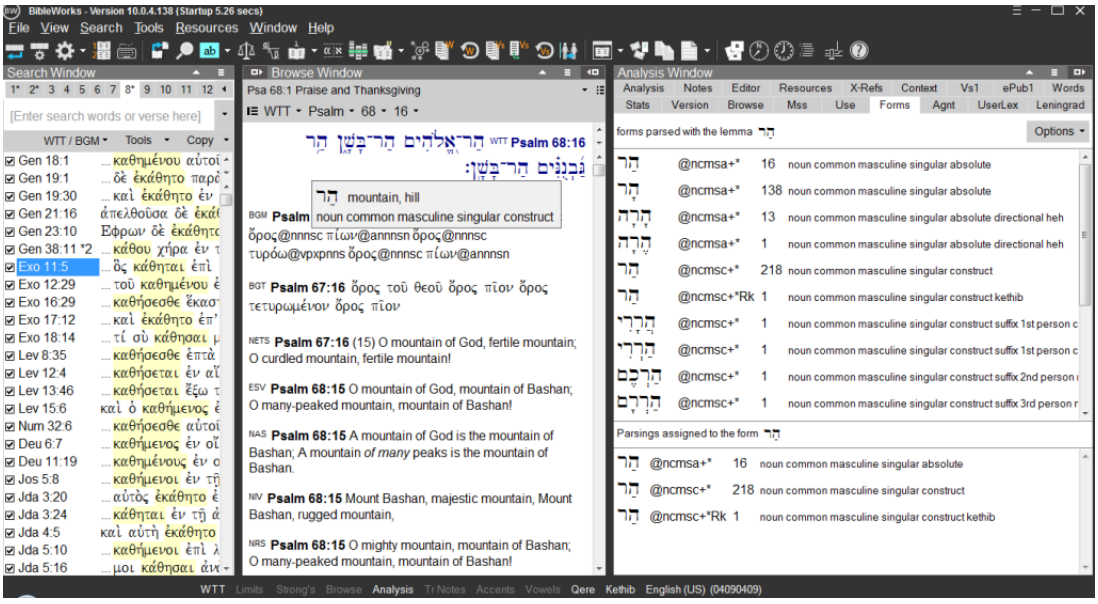
Using the BibleWorks 10 Forms Tab to Streamline Study and Lecture Preparation

This is the fourth installment of our BibleWorks 10 review series.

One of the most time-consuming aspects of studying Greek or doing exegesis is looking up difficult or irregular forms. One might see the perfect form of a verb in a passage and decide to write a note about how the author could have used the aorist tense here but chose not to…but what is the aorist form you need to write in your notes?

In the past, one would need to do one of two things: look up the form in a lexicon or a work like Mounce's morphology, or do the grueling task of memorizing thousands of irregular forms to know them by heart. No longer!

One of my favorite new features in BibleWorks 10 is the forms tab. This is the quickest way to find all the forms of a lexeme that occur in BibleWorks' morphologically tagged Greek and Hebrew texts. Simply open the forms tab and place your mouse over any Greek or Hebrew word in the browse window, and all the forms for that word that occur in any of the morphologically tagged texts will appear in the analysis window on the right.

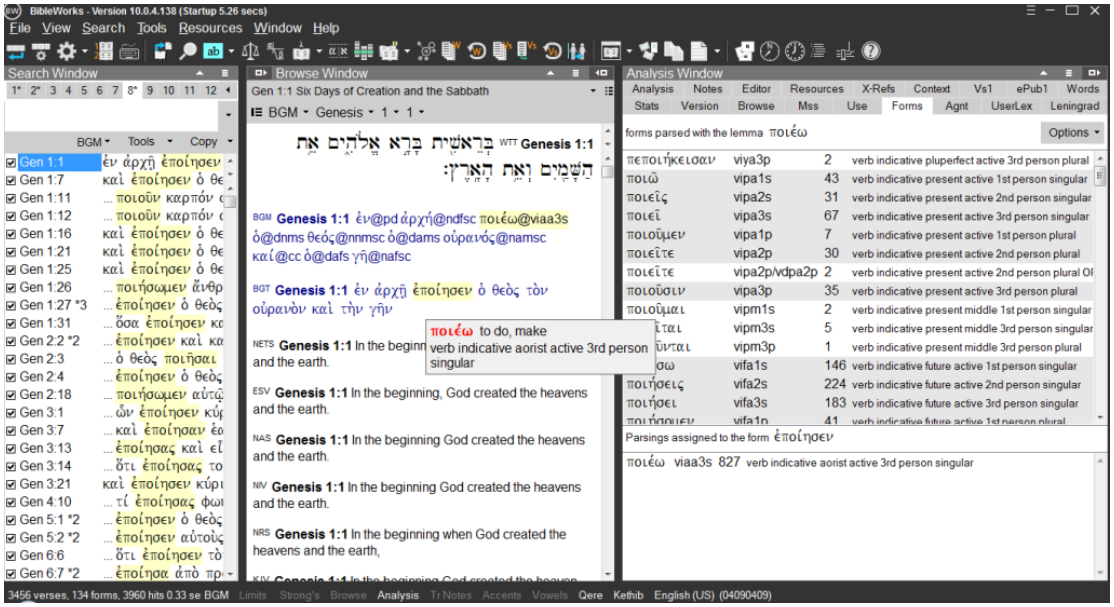


All the forms of הַר that occur in the MT.

One of the other reasons I appreciate this feature is that I'm right now creating a lecture on contract verbs in Greek. I want to create a Power Point with random contract forms to show my class and help them try to parse them. Without BibleWorks, I would have to type out forms that I

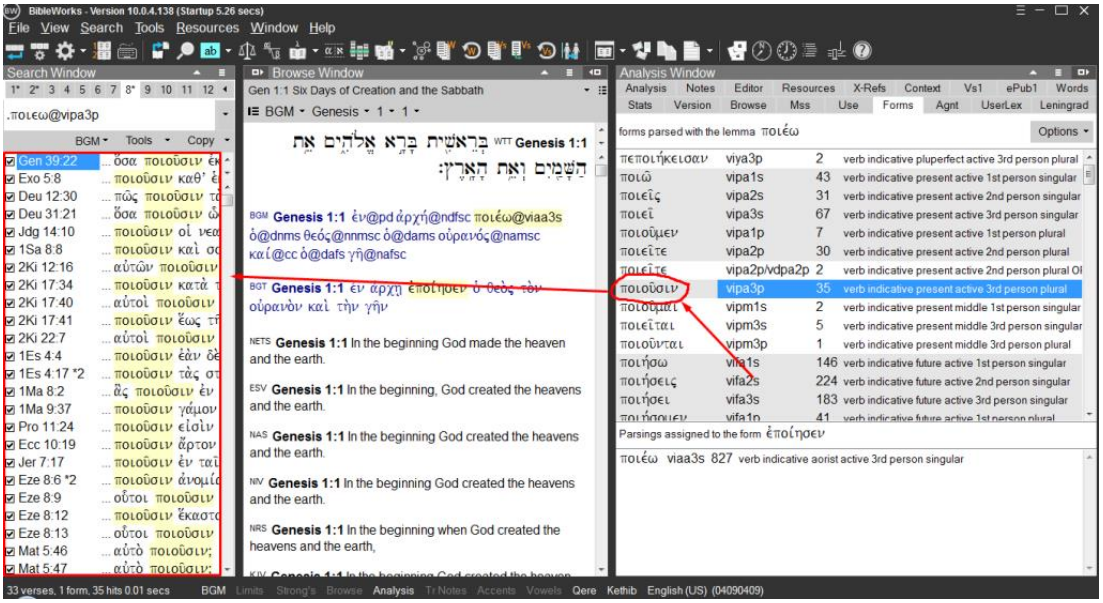
have memorized, look up other forms in verses where I know they occur (e.g., εὐχαριστοῦμεν in Paul's greetings), and use a lexicon or Mounce's book to look up other words.

But thanks to BibleWorks' forms tab, I can streamline this process. Step 1: Pick out lexemes of contract verbs, search for them, then scroll your mouse over the word in the browse window.



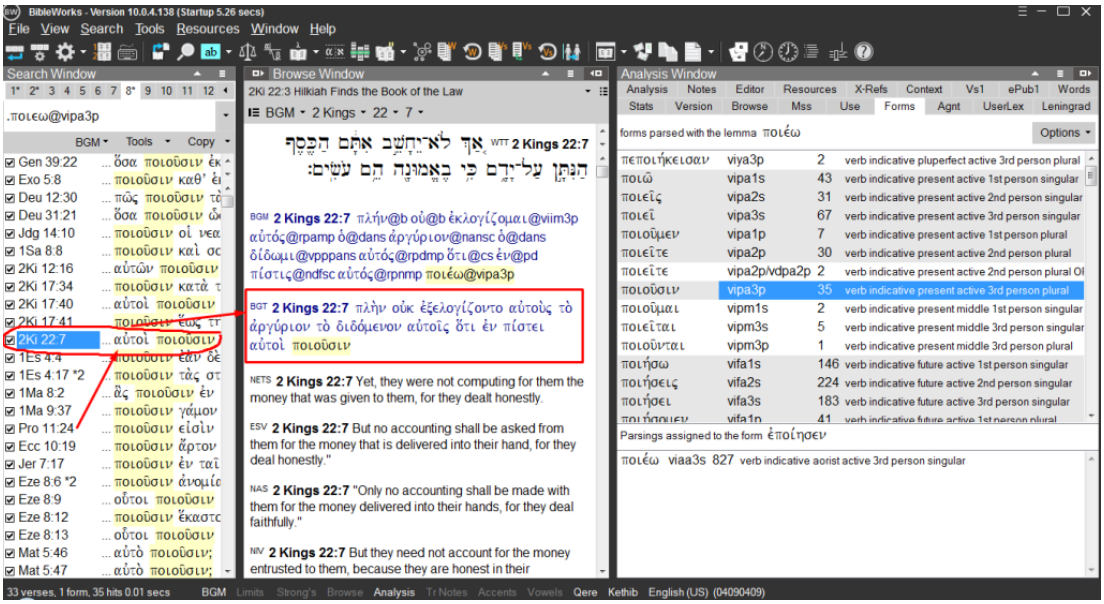
Step 1: Generate the forms.

Step 2: Double click any form to generate a list in the search window of every verse in which that form occurs.



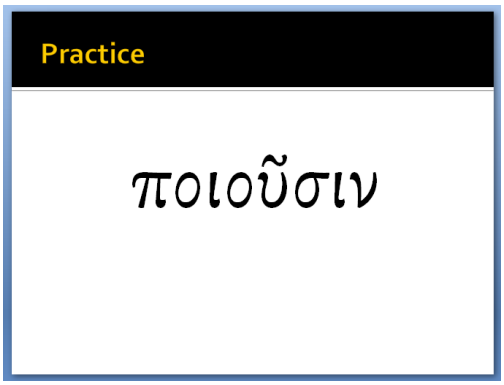
Step 2: Load uses of forms into the search window.

Step 3: Click any verse from the search window to make it show up in the browse window.



Step 3: Load an instance of that form into the browse window.

Step 4: Copy the form of the word and paste it into PowerPoint.



Step 4: Paste the form into PowerPoint.

The entire process for each word only takes around 10 seconds at most. That means I can generate an entire PowerPoint with 25 forms from various lexemes in just a couple minutes, with *no resources required* except for BibleWorks! Additionally, you could create forms yourself and use the forms tab to make sure you have the spelling and accents correct.

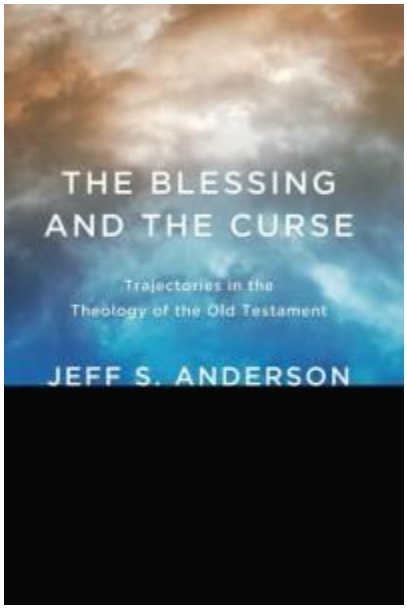
There are other uses for the forms tab: you could check to see if a form has an alternate spelling or if an aorist has both a first and second aorist form; you could use it to learn principal parts; you could use it while teaching a Greek text to show different forms of words for some morphology review.

In short, I love BibleWorks 10's Forms tab. It's helping me streamline my Greek lectures and my personal Greek study.

Find BibleWorks 10 here on Amazon.

Book Reviews

The Blessing and the Curse: Trajectories in the Theology of the Old Testament, by Jeff S. Anderson



***The Blessing and the Curse: Trajectories in the Theology of the Old Testament*, by Jeff S. Anderson (Wipf & Stock, 2014), 416 pages.**

Reviewed by David Barry

Anderson's purpose is to analyze the dual biblical theological theme of blessing and cursing across the OT. Whereas previous scholarship has been interested in the supposed magic of the words, Anderson chooses instead to apply speech-act theory to the various instances of blessing and cursing (261).

Anderson neatly sums up this study saying, "In addition to traditional insights from historical-critical research, new understandings from speech-act theory allow the interpreter a fresh methodology to reflect on ways that God enhances or opposes a life of fullness without viewing blessing and curses as some primitive, magical notion that has no place in a twenty-first-century reflection about God" (326). The reader who takes this sentence as a guide will find few surprises within.

Summary

He begins in Chapter 1, introducing OT theology with the suggestion that it should be viewed as the fusion of normative and descriptive study. In other words, there should be a balance between the two. In Chapter 2, Anderson defines his terms with reference to previous descriptions of blessing and cursing (e.g. Mowinckel, Westermann). Specifically, Anderson sees blessing and curses as speech acts functioning within a society that recognizes them as such. They are illocutions intended to lead to a life of fullness or emptiness. That is, they have a function within society contingent upon its recognition of it.

At this point, Anderson launches into his normative and descriptive analysis of the dual theme across the OT. Chapter 3 analyzes the whole Pentateuch both from a source critical perspective

and from a literary approach. Chapters 3-7 take smaller sections of the Pentateuch in turn: Genesis 1-11, the ancestral narratives, Exodus, and Deuteronomy (with reference to the Deuteronomistic history).

Chapters 6 and 7 in particular highlight the correlation between a life of obedience to Yahweh and covenant blessing. Anderson then proceeds to highlight the conditionality of blessing in the Deuteronomistic history. For example, 'land' is a blessing contingent upon covenant faithfulness. Thus, idolatry can lead to its loss and consequent exile. The curse of exile is the opposite of the land blessing.

In Chapter 8, Anderson discusses the united monarchy: Saul, David, and Solomon. Each experienced an initial phase of blessing and a subsequent curse. Each sinned and brought about curse, after a Deuteronomistic fashion. One helpful insight is Anderson's comparison of the Deuteronomistic history's surprisingly balanced emphasis upon the Davidic blessing as well as upon the curse. Anderson explains, "the Deuteronomist appears to be as interested in cursing David's dynasty as in blessing it" (202).

Chapters 9-12 survey significant texts in the prophets, cultic texts (e.g. Psalms), Job and other wisdom literature, and apocalyptic writings. Anderson concludes noting that OT theology results in the union of curse and exile, but these give way to restoration and renewal (320). Finally, he concludes noting the benefits of applying speech-act theory to blessing and cursing as a better modern explanation for the phenomena than previous magical suggestions.

Evaluation

Like most books, Anderson's *The Blessing and the Curse* has a number of elements worthy of commending and some that are not. Perhaps most helpful of all is his careful discussion of the nature of cursing and blessing. His rejection of the magical power of the word, but emphasis upon the perlocutionary effect of curse or blessing in society is illuminating. His discussion of the *arur* formula as a communal shunning illustrates this (31-37). Moreover, Anderson's observation that superiors curse inferiors, and typically in a corporate or ritual setting, is intriguing evidence to the point (32-33).

Some may take issue with Anderson's treatment of the text. On more than one occasion, Anderson insinuates that the biblical writer is writing historical fiction rather then real history (e.g. Samuel's overly negative portrayal of Saul [cf. 192]) or that a certain part of scripture is inferior to another (e.g. imprecatory psalms "do not measure up" to the ethics of the rest of the Bible [264]).

As a general comment on the whole, although there is much to commend Anderson's work, there is too much of it. A good editor could reduce the book without losing much content. Related to this, Anderson's word-choice is sometimes careless. For instance, in his discussion of the golden calf episode of Exodus he calls the executions "murder" (143). Perhaps he is tipping his hand or perhaps Anderson ought to be less reckless with his word choice. This slip of the finger implies wrongdoing in divine judgment. For another example, he calls Moses the "ultimate" mediator (147).

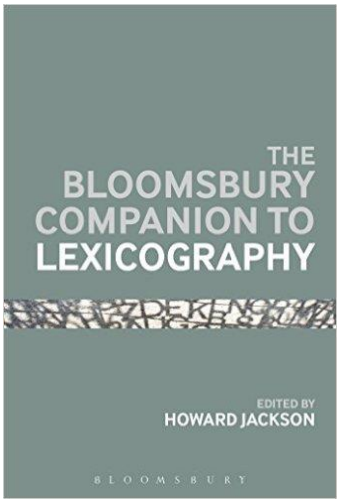
The substance of the book is Anderson's application of speech-act theory as a methodology (cf. 40-50). At times this is very helpful. For example, a curse of shunning someone from the camp is effective as a performative act recognized by the community doing the shunning. At other times, however, speech-act theory merely provides more jargon and labels without explaining anything further. For example, Anderson's attempt to explain the irreversibility of Isaac's misplaced blessing upon Jacob is explained away in terms of illocution (115-16). It was (irreversibly) done by the speaking. Frankly, this explains nothing, but merely throws some labels at it.

Overall, the weakness of Anderson's *The Blessing and the Curse* is his failure to provide consistent explanation or even connection between the various instances of blessing or cursing studied. He retells the significant portions of OT history regarding these things, but fails to explain the significance of the pattern.

David Barry is a PhD student in Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Preview or buy *The Blessing and the Curse* here on Amazon.

The Bloomsbury Companion to Lexicography, edited by Howard Jackson



***The Bloomsbury Companion to Lexicography*, edited by Howard Jackson (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 420 pages.**

Lexicography can have two different meanings: (1) the compilation of dictionaries, and (2) the study of dictionaries. This volume is primarily addressed to the latter group, who are sometimes called metalexicographers. There are various issues involved in the compilation of dictionaries, and metalexicographers study those issues to clarify the practice for us. It is therefore directly relevant for those who do lexical work themselves, and more indirectly relevant for those of us who use lexicons every day (BDAG, HALOT, LSJ, etc.).

This Bloomsbury companion is unique from other companions in the series. Most companions are a hodgepodge of essays on various issues, with, at best, essays grouped by section. But this companion has a more discernible structure that is sure to be most helpful for students entering the field.

Howard Jackson introduces the book with a brief look at lexicography and metalexicography and then summarizes the contributions to the book. Paul Bogaards follows up with a useful essay on the history of research in lexicography. For anyone who wants to get caught up to speed on lexicography, Bogaards' essay is the place to start. One will see that lexicography has only been a modern discipline for around 50 years, and there is no comprehensive system of study. Rather, only a variety of studies with various methodologies have been undertaken.

Section three focuses on research methods and problems. Essays are included on researching lexicographical practice, methods in dictionary criticism, and researching users and uses of dictionaries. Each of these essays contributes to our knowledge of how dictionaries work and how users of dictionaries work. In order to be completely self-aware of our use of lexicons such as BDAG and HALOT, we must understand how we approach them and whether we are correct in the way we approach them. There is much similarity here between our approach to lexicons and our approach to hermeneutics in general: self-awareness is key.

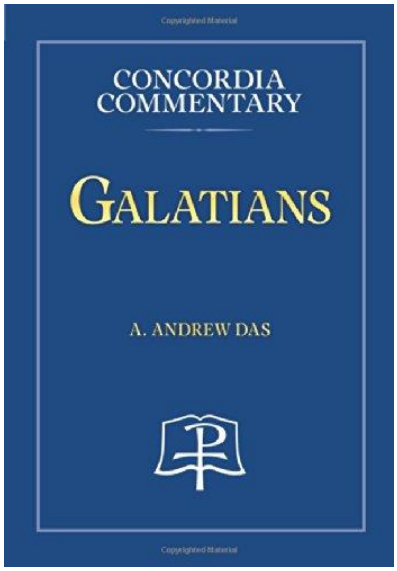
Section four is the largest and contains 10 essays on current research and issues. Some of these essays are quite important. Adam Kilgarriff discusses using corpora as data sources for dictionaries. One can immediately sense the relevance of Kalgarriff's discussion, since we students of the Bible are so often pulling from Philo, Josephus, and other relevant corpora for word studies. Arleta Adamska-Salaciak discusses issues related to compiling bilingual dictionaries, while Robert Lew writes on identifying, ordering, and defining senses. At this point there is some bleed-over into lexical semantics, which is a welcome bridge to find in this volume. Lastly, Tadeusz Piotrowski asks whether there is a theory of lexicography, answering in the affirmative because our current place in lexicography is so revolutionary that past practice is not a guide for the future.

The last three sections are brilliantly included for students: a section on resources, a glossary of lexicographic terms, and an annotated bibliography by the editor Jackson. If every companion or guide contained such resources (even an annotated bibliography), we should be so lucky. My one complaint about the annotated bibliography is that not all entries are annotated, and many simply have a one sentence annotation about what the resource contains; more evaluation would have been helpful.

In sum, this volume is useful for students who know little about lexicography, or for professors who use lexicons consistently and want to become more aware of the issues involved in approaching them. I certainly learned that there are more issues involved in creating and using lexicons than knew before, and among the quality essays, I am left with a guide to resources and an annotated bibliography to further my study of the field. I would recommend this companion to anyone interested in being more conscientious about using lexicons.

Find it here on Amazon.

Galatians (Concordia Commentary), by A. Andrew Das



***Galatians* (Concordia Commentary), by A. Andrew Das (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2014), 808 pages.**

The purpose of the Concordia Commentary series is to serve "pastors, missionaries, and teachers of the Scriptures to convey God's Word with greater clarity, understanding, and faithfulness to the divine intent of the text" (x). To that end, the convictions of the series are that Scripture is Trinitarian, Christ-centered, and Christological. The series focuses on expositions that are ecclesiological and sacramental. In short, these commentaries are confessionally Lutheran.

When I hear "confesionally Lutheran," I think much of Lenski, who seemed often in his commentaries to interpret through his systematic theology rather than doing the rigorous historical work to interpret each text in its own terms. Whether that is a fair representation of Lenski or not, Das certainly falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. This commentary is full of references to extra-biblical Greek and Jewish literature throughout, as well as a thorough understanding and inclusion of the secondary literature available.

The introduction covers the standard issues of Galatians with delightful organization. These issues include mirror reading, the opponents, apocalypticism, North vs. South Galatia, Pauline chronology and the letter's date, and Greco-Roman rhetoric and Galatian's structure. Pastors and students will benefit tremendously from Das's organization of the arguments, both for and against, in numbered lists, as in his discussion of the North vs. South Galatian issue.

In the commentary, Greek and Hebrew fonts are used, but transliterations are also given. While expanding the word count, this does provide a bit of relief to those such as myself who prefer seeing actual Greek and Hebrew fonts, while also accommodating the beginning student and pastors whose languages are not proficient enough to use regularly.

One other unique feature of this commentary series is that it uses images as codes for marking theological themes in the text, such as the Trinity, Passion, Atonement, Baptism, Lord's Supper, etc. (xxxii-xxxiii). These images show up in the margins of the commentary. These may be helpful to a minister attuned to the necessity of highlighting these theological themes throughout, although I'm unclear of how helpful these images will be if the reader is already reading the commentary text.

Each passage includes a translation with textual notes following, which is then followed by a verse-by-verse commentary. These textual notes make the commentary more valuable because they discuss every textual variant in Galatians at some length. Also valuable are the excurses. For example, after a brief exegesis of 2:11-14 (the Antioch incident), Das includes an excursus on the issue at Antioch that deals especially with the New Perspective takes on the incident, to which Dunn initially brought so much attention and built his NPP on.

Those who receive the most attention in Das's commentary are the usual suspects, including Dunn, Martyn, and de Boer. Das shows his clear understanding of these scholars' positions on the NPP and apocalypticism, which is commendable. While treading through the murky waters of the various schools of thought, Das is able to emerge with his own unique Lutheran perspective on Paul and justification, which includes forensic justification (244-245) and freedom from the whole law, not just the boundary markers of Judaism.

The most difficult passages in Galatians, e.g. 2:11-22; 3:6-14; 4:21-32 are made to seem much simpler by Das. He writes lucidly with masterful organization of arguments and positions and clear conclusions. His skill is evident on both a macro level of the larger argument of Galatians as well as the detailed textual level of particles and conjunctions.

If you chose only one commentary on Galatians, choose this one. It is grounded in a Christological and ecclesiological view of Scripture, comprehensive in its coverage of historical backgrounds and secondary scholarship, clear in its conclusions, and fair in its treatment of alternative viewpoints. The result is a masterful and balanced commentary of most use to students and pastors, but also for scholars.

Find it here on Amazon.

The Handbook of Discourse Analysis, eds. Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin

***The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, edited by Deborah Tannen, Heidi Hamilton, and Deborah Schiffrin, 2 vols. (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 952 pages.**

Several handbooks on discourse analysis have been published recently. To gain a little perspective, Brown and Yule's Cambridge Textbook on discourse analysis was published in 1983. In this short 30 years, the field of discourse analysis is now increasingly specialized such that handbooks are being published left and right.

The first edition to this handbook was published in 2001. It is been used widely, so much so that this second edition was issued only 14 years later. It follows shortly after the Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis (2012) and the Bloomsbury Companion to Discourse Analysis (2013). Textbooks also arise rapidly from all different kinds of perspectives, ranging as wide as the topics addressed in this handbook.

Content

The editors believe this diversity within the field is a strength rather than a weakness, and they intend this handbook to foster "the cooperative use – by linguists and others interested in empirically grounded studies of language – of the many theoretical and analytical resources currently proliferating in the study of discourse" (5). As I said in my review of the Routledge volume, I found it to be the most helpful for non-specialists or beginning linguists, while this Blackwell volume is the best volume for specialists because of its breadth and clear aim to write for professional linguists.

There are four parts to the set, 2 parts in each volume: (Linguistic Analysis of Discourse; (2) Approaches and Methodologies; (3) The Individual, Society, and Culture; (4) Discourse in Real-World Contexts. Biblical studies students will find the first two parts most helpful, since it focuses on method different applications of discourse analysis to various fields. Much can be learned in these essays that can be applied to one's own method. However, not all the articles are useful, since many of them analyze oral speech (e.g., "Voice Registers," ch. 5; "Humor and Laughter," ch. 8; etc.). This volume is certain to help many, but not many of the articles are certain to help all readers.

The second volume should not be ignored, however. The application of discourse analysis to cultural issues and real-world contexts is still useful to those of us who remain buried in ancient texts. We still live in a world swirling with political discourse (ch. 36); we participate in

institutional discourse (ch. 35); we have a workplace (ch. 41); we are constantly interacting with the media (ch. 37). And then there are chapters such as "Queer Linguistics as Critical Discourse Analysis" and the chapter on Critical Discourse Analysis by world-renowned Teun A. van Dijk that can be helpful for interacting with certain segments of the biblical academy that focuses on similar issues.

Problems

There are two main downfalls to these volumes. First, there is no methodology laid out by any of the practitioners. Consistently, the only times I see any method somewhat laid out is in chapters on Systemic Functional Linguistics, when the author analyzes a text using Halliday's categories. Even then, the author is not teaching the method, but only exemplifying it. This is a consistent problem with works on discourse analysis: everyone is left to do what is right in their own eyes.

Second, the price is simply not affordable for individuals. While these volumes will make it into many institutional libraries across the world, I doubt anyone reading this will be willing to spend the cash required to purchase it. However, a significantly cheaper paperback version of the first version was published two years after the hardback version. So perhaps Blackwell has a paperback version in the works. If so, then as soon as it comes out, I would recommend purchasing it, even the first edition still runs around $70 for the paperback volume.

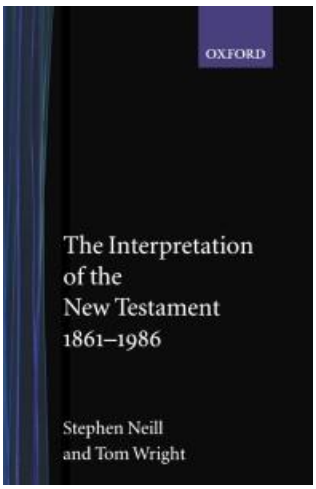
Finally, for more resources on discourse analysis, see our annotated bibliography.

Find it here on Amazon and preview the table of contents.

The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1968 – Stephen Neill & Tom Wright

***The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986*, by Stephen Neill and Tom Wright (Oxford, 1988), 480 pages.**

If you are a student of the New Testament, then you should be familiar with the history of interpretation (the helpfulness of which could comprise a post in and of itself). Although we have featured Baird's volume on the history of research, there are a number of other great resources that may be of interest to you.



One volume I have recently read and enjoyed is Stephen Neill's '*The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986'* (nothing like a delayed flight to SBL to get some good reading in!). Neill wrote all but the last chapter, which Wright added. While this volume does, to some extent, presuppose familiarity with the figures and movements in question, it is still accessible to a wide readership.

For those who feel *overly* familiarly with the common figures in a 'history' of interpretation, this volume will give you a number of interesting details. The fact that the author records personal conversations with C. H. Dodd, the legendary study habits of F. C. Baur, and how scholars of the 19th century studied Greek and Hebrew, makes this volume an entertaining read (entertaining for a particular crowd of course). Here is a brief outline of the contents of the book:

I. Challenge to Orthodoxy: traces the rise of 19th c. German theology in the vein of Schleiermacher, Harnack, Strauss, Schweitzer, and F. C. Baur (and with him, the rise of the Tübingen School)

II. The New Testament and History: addresses the 19th c. Cambridge School (Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort), noting their commentaries, contributions and debates. The organization of this chapter is commendable, creating a harmonious narrative for the readership. One particularly interesting point here is the debate surrounding the Clementine writings and letters of Ignatius. Why was this issue such a pivotal dividing line between the Cambridge and Tübingen School? You'll have to read!

III. What The New Testament Says, And What It Means: This chapter provides a history of, textual criticism (Griesbach, Lachmann, Tregelles, Tischendorf, Westcott, Hort are the focus), philology (Bengal, the Cambridge methodology, Kittle's 'Theologisches Wörterbuch zum neuen Testament', etc), and commentary writing in the 19th c. (the Meyer series of 1832-1852, the work of the Cambridge school, Godet, the Cambridge students [Moule, Caird, McNeile). Due to the targeted nature of study (i.e. specifically 19th c. scholarship) this overview provides greater depth than some of the more expansive histories.

IV. Jesus And The Gospels: is really a chapter about the Synoptic Problem. This chapter is helpful for a number of reasons; chiefly, it provides students/scholars with a resource for the

primary texts which have been formative for the modern debate (Lachmann and Weisse on Markan priority, Holtzmann and Harnack on 'Q', Streeter's 'Four-document Theory' [M & L]).

V. Greeks and Christians: is a consideration of the influence of all things Greek for the study of the New Testament (Hatch 'The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity', Grant 'The Influence of Greek Ideas', the Oxyrhynchus papyri, mystery religions, magic in the ancient world, Bousset's theory of historical development, and the 'History of Religions' approach).

VI. Re-Enter Theology: surveys the contribution of Albert Schweizter (1875-1965), Karl Barth (1886-1968), Edwin Hoskyns (1884-1937), and Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). The remarks regarding Bultmann's Greek study habits (both Koine and Classical) will rebuke most students of the NT.

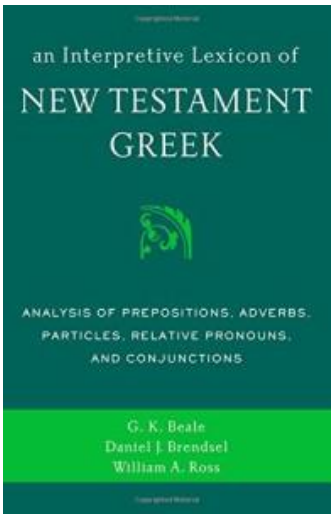
VII. The Gospel Behind The Gospels: surveys the rise and main tenants of 'form criticism' (focusing on Dibelius). The overarching skepticism among the form critics towards the historical validity and reliability of the various 'forms' found in the New Testament, serves as the transition point to discuss the work of Bultmann and Wrede. The distinctiveness of British scholarship (among others) on this point is also noted, namely, Vincent Taylor and C. H. Dodd.

VIII. Salvation Is Of The Jews: introduces the discovery and influence of the Dead Sea Scrolls for the study of the New Testament. Particularly notable is the discussion of the relationship between Qumran and John especially as it relates to the study of the historical Jesus (a field largely neglectful of John's Gospel), and the work of Bultmann. The section dedicated to the study of the Fourth Gospel is also very helpful. The contributions of Lightfoot ('Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations upon the Gospel of St Matthew and St. Mark), Strack-Billerbeck ('Commentary on the NT from the Talmud'), Edersheim ('Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah'), Davies ('Paul and Rabbinic Judaism'), Montefiore ('Judaism and St. Paul') are all sufficiently noted and discussed.

IX. History And Theology: this last chapter, written by Wright, highlights a number of key areas of advancement in the 20th c. (understanding religions in antiquity, historical Jesus studies, Pauline theology, the question of Israel, Johannine scholarship). If you don't buy the book, find it in a university/seminary library and read this final chapter. *Reviewed by Warren Campbell.*

Preview or buy it here.

An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek, by G. K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel, and William A. Ross



***An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek: Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions*, by G.K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel, and William A. Ross (Zondervan, 2014).**

Based on *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Second and Third Editions with references to Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and Harris' *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament*, Beale, Brendsel, and Ross's *Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions) provides an indispensable resource for those interested in thorough and diligent exegesis.

In its most basic form this book can be described as the brilliant work of scholars who through painstaking work provide: a list of the key linking words (prepositions, adverbs, particles, etc.) in New Testament Greek, their English glosses, the various ways they can function in a discourse, and where they occur in some of the most notable Greek resources, all in one 96-paged book.

The authors have put together an invaluable resource that focuses on the small words encountered in the NT and their often grand implications in Greek exegesis. Though much of this work is focused on smaller details, the overall purpose and function of this book is to provide a tool for a reader of the NT to better detect a writer's flow of thought and thus the main point of a given discourse.

Steps toward this goal are achieved by the two-fold function of this book: (1) its use as a lexicon for the key words in the NT used to indicate relationships between clauses, and (2) its use as an interpretive handbook, providing categories for how these key words may be functioning in a given discourse and how they construct or support the main point (or points) in the author's communication.

Layout of the Book

The book begins by describing its usefulness for the task of discourse analysis, that is, analyzing the meaningful and logical relationships between statements and propositions in meaningful and extended communication. By highlighting the relevance of understanding linking words such as “since” and “therefore” in every day communication, the book anticipates the necessity to understand these types of words in the communication of the NT.

On the next few pages a table is provided categorizing the various relationships between statements and breaking them down into more specific categories. Next to these categories, symbols are provided to identify how propositions within the category are logically related to its surrounding propositions. These symbols indicate the discourse function of a word and are found next to the entries provided in the *Lexicon* (discussed below). The remaining pages in the introduction describe how the book is to be used in conjunction with the external Greek resources referenced within each entry.

The remainder and bulk of the book is dedicated to the Interpretive Lexicon. Each page contains a Greek word, its syntactical function, a list of its semantic range with the symbols indicating its possible discourse function, its location in BDAG and BAGD, and its references in the works of Wallace and Harris.

Critiques

For those who do not have a baseline knowledge of discourse analysis, I wonder if the curious exegete who picked up this book would understand how to move from the step of categorizing isolated propositions to understanding how they relate to the propositions that construct and support the author’s main point (or points) in the surrounding context. Though symbols are provided to indicate a word’s logical function, their visual role in connecting propositions on a larger discourse is left untouched. For this reason, I believe that the potential usefulness of this book may be truncated for those unfamiliar with Beale’s incorporation of the tools provided for his method of discourse analysis.

My last critique is less of a critique of the book and perhaps more a critique on the people reading the book. The introductory discussion on the stylistic features used to indicate references to BDAG and BAGD is quite cumbersome. Aside from this, I think it is a very real possibility that students will solely rely on the options provided in the book without considering the work of the resources provided. Nevertheless, the fact that the authors repeatedly refer to the importance of cross-referencing these resources unfortunately makes it necessary that the

reader pay special attention to this area in the introduction in order to track the insights of the *Lexicon* with the information provided in BDAG and BAGD.

Praise:

This book will save you a tremendous amount of time as it gives you the page and section numbers of a word's occurrence in BDAG and BAGD as well as their appearance in the work of Wallace and Harris. When a word's function seems to be particularly ambiguous, referencing these resources will allow one to better formulate a conclusion for a more precise translation or interpretation.

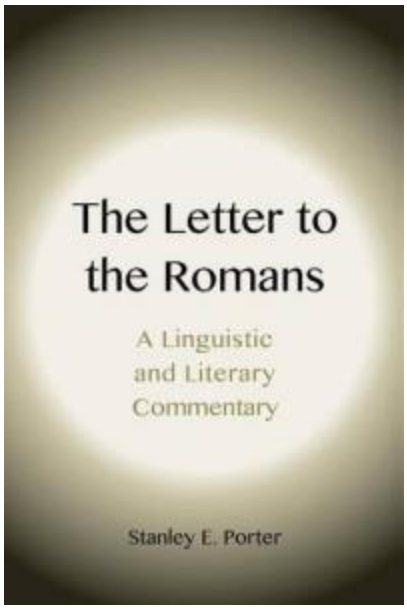
Secondly, it provides you with tools for a slower, and closer reading of the text in order to identify how Greek words are contributing to the whole of an author's communication. Often times courses in Greek syntax focus on the smaller levels of the reciprocal relation of words and clauses through sentence flows or diagramming. There is usually little attention given to how sentences are related to the larger context of the paragraph and how paragraphs are related to connect to its broader context. Therefore, with the knowledge of the discourse function of these linking words, the exegete is better equipped to determine how these words are used to connect propositions and how propositions are connected to larger sections of discourse that eventually form an entire epistle or narrative. This results in a closer look at what an author is trying to communicate using the clues from the text itself.

Reviewed by Laura Guzman.

Find it here on Amazon, Kindle, or WTS Bookstore.

The Letter to the Romans: A Linguistic and Literary Commentary, by Stanley Porter

I have worked through enough of Stanley Porter's *The Letter to the Romans* to offer a positive recommendation. Porter has complained that most commentaries are composed of comments on other commentaries. This is an observation that I echo as well. He has succeeded, in my opinion, in avoiding that pitfall. As would be expected, Porter is very familiar with the literature



on Romans and mentions a large number of secondary articles and books often overlooked by commentators. But he still manages to comment on the text before him.

Porter has complained that commentaries focus too much on individual words and neglect the macro features of sentence and paragraph. And true to his word, he focuses on paragraphs, another characteristic that echoes with me. He does this because of his sensitivity to the linguistic features of the text, although his emphasis on the Systemic Functional Linguistic school will not be off putting to a reader new to linguistics. His method, clearly explained in the Introduction, is implicit in his comments and does not demand of the reader a mastery of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL).

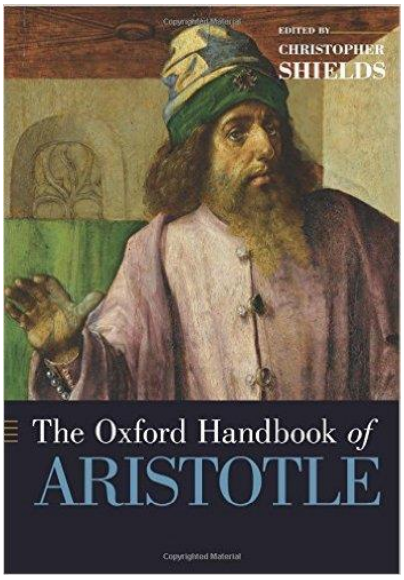
He is fully aware of all the theological issues crowding around Romans, but still keeps his focus on the text. He is also bold enough to offer unpopular views when he thinks the evidence leads there, as seen in his defense and explanation of the ἔχωμεν reading in Rom 5:1. His insight that 5:1-11 serves as the "peak" of the discourse also deserves some serious consideration.

I must end this brief review, but let me encourage you to get this commentary. It is an example of what can and should be done in commenting.

Reviewed by William Varner.

Preview or buy it here on Amazon.

The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle, edited by Christopher Shields



***The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, edited by Christopher Shields (Oxford University Press, 2015), 732 pages.**

Among the philosophers, only Plato has made as large an impact as Aristotle. The latter a student of the former, Aristotle moved in slightly different directions and was not awarded the ownership of Plato's academy. These two therefore made their own unique contributions, but they are inextricably tied together.

In the Christian tradition, the two ancient giants, Augustine and Aquinas, borrowed heavily from Plato and Aristotle, respectively. In fact, Aquinas utilizes Aristotle so heavily he calls him "The Philosopher," and it is nearly impossible to understand his writings without a prior understanding of Aristotle. This handbook is therefore a useful asset of any theologian's or biblical scholar's library.

As do most handbooks, this one begins with Aristotle's historical and social milieu. The editor, Shields, gives an overview of Aristotle's philosophical life and writings. Hussey surveys Aristotle's study of earlier natural science (and of course, Aristotle was a top-rate scientist of his day), and Bolton covers science and scientific inquiry in Aristotle, including his Platonic provenance.

The chapters are written accessibly for students or those beginning study in Aristotle. However, the abundance of footnotes do showcase the authors' familiarity with the critical issues and secondary sources, so even advanced students can gain from these essays. Some are brief, around 15 (large) pages, while others span up to 40 pages on more complex issues such as Aristotle's ontology. One unfortunate feature is that the footnotes are included as endnotes to conclude each chapter, which only exacerbates the reader as he or she must keep a finger or a marker in the page with the notes and constantly flip back and forth.

Continuing on from the introduction are six more parts. The first examines Aristotle's framework for doing philosophy, topics such as his categories, his logic, his philosophical method, etc. Part three covers explanation and nature, which includes important topics for Aristotle's system such as teleological causation and form and matter in the *Physics* and *De Generatione et Corruptione*. I highly commend David Charles's essay on teleological causation as one of the

most important in the book, given the importance of the idea for Aristotle's system and for contemporary philosophy (which, by the time of Hume, had rejected all causation; some may now see one of Aristotle's four causes).

Part four covers first philosophy, metaphysics and ontology. Shields takes the foundational topic of being *qua* being in 30 pages, which is necessary for understanding Aristotle's ontology. Part five examines Aristotle's ethics and politics, which includes the typical topics of *eudaimonia* (happiness) in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, becoming good by habituation, reflection, and perception, and Aristotle's *Politics*. Parts 6 and 7 are briefer, covering rhetoric and the arts and Aristotle's legacy.

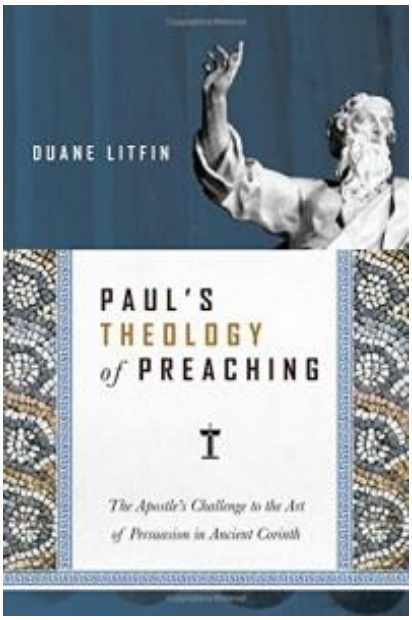
Overall, this work stands as a monument to Aristotle's legacy and makes the study of his philosophy much more accessible. Many handbooks contain essays that are on the fringe of being relevant, but every essay in this handbook deserves its place. That is in part because Aristotle wrote so much and his works have been so influential, that even in 700 pages there are more foundational topics that could have been examined. But Shields has succeeded in pulling together an extremely helpful volume for students of classical philosophy. Of course those in biblical studies will benefit from the introductory nature of these essays. If there is one book on Aristotle you would have on you shelf in addition to the primary texts, I would currently suggest this one.

As one last note, I would commend Robert Pasnau's essay "The Latin Aristotle" to all Christian theologians. This essay details the loss and recovery of Aristotle's works in the Latin world and the dominance of Aristotle's philosophy through the middle ages. This knowledge is a prerequisite for understanding much about Aquinas, who has been so influential throughout the centuries in Christian thought.

Find the handbook here on Amazon.

Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth, by Duane Litfin

***Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth*, by Duane Litfin (IVP Academic, 2015), 400 pages.**



Reviewed by Peter Moore

Duane Litfin's *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* updates and expands *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation* (1994), a revision of his dissertation. This latest version, which Litfin calls the "final" one, the one "envisioned from the outset" (12), represents decades of contemplation on this crucial subject through doctoral programs in rhetorical theory and New Testament and years of pastoral ministry.

While leaving out some of the documentation of the earlier version, this revision offers the reader interaction with more recent scholarship and further analysis and application of Paul's theology for preaching today (26, 30). The text is reformatted so that the central argument is distinguished by larger font from thirty-three more technical excurses.

Summary

Litfin begins by contending that "every theory of discourse is anchored in the soil of its author's presuppositions" and on this basis, that 1 Corinthians 1-4 is paramount for understanding Paul's theology of preaching: nowhere else in his writings does he engage in such sustained reflection on the theological presuppositions underlying his preaching (41). Litfin's estimation of these chapters rests on his view that in them Paul is primarily engaged in defending the *form* of his gospel proclamation against the Corinthians' criticisms and that these criticisms spring from the Corinthians' devotion to Greco-Roman rhetoric (137-160). In its three parts, Litfin's book defends and expounds this interpretation.

Part one lays the foundation with a crisp overview of the art of rhetoric in the ancient world: its "beginnings," "goal," "power," "reach," "genius," "appraisal," "hazards," "rewards," and "grand equation" (chapters 1-9). Litfin uncovers the essential features of the art of persuasion, avoiding common reductions of rhetoric to unscrupulous manipulation, mere ornamentation, or endless

classification of figures of speech; and he shows its prominent role in Greco-Roman society. This overview serves to commend the rhetorical tradition as the appropriate source of the criticism of Paul addressed 1 Corinthians 1-4 (a view common in the history of interpretation and now much revived, but out of favor at the time that Litfin wrote his dissertation) and to equip the reader to conceive properly Paul's contrasts between his preaching and the wisdom of the world.

Part two turns to the text itself, focusing on 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5. Litfin notes that "the verbs Paul uses to describe his public speaking…are decidedly non-rhetorical" (184), and he finds especially telling Paul's use of terms associated with the ancient herald. "Unlike the orator, the herald's task was not to create a powerful message custom designed to generate belief (πίστις) or persuasion (πεισομονὴ) in the recipients. The herald's task was to convey as faithfully as possible the already constituted message of another" (185).

What is critical to grasp is that Paul views this heraldic *form* of the message to be an outworking of its *content.* The straightforward proclamation of the gospel accords with God's nullifying human pride in the cross of Christ and the calling of the Corinthians, because it grounds the hearer's faith in the Spirit's work rather than human wisdom and eloquence. The form of gospel proclamation and the content of the gospel thus stand together, and, in fact, Litfin argues, the two are encapsulated in Paul's use of κήρυγμα in 1:21 (195-213).

Part three summarizes and analyzes the "ministry model" that emerges from these chapters, setting in greater relief the contrasting "stances" of the orator and the preacher. The orator is tasked and, given the proper training and gifts, empowered to move the audience to yield to his message. The preacher is called to make known faithfully the message, leaving the hearer's response to the Spirit. For the orator, the results are determined and the message is variable. For the preacher, the message is determined and the results are variable. The orator is judged by whether he has been persuasive; the preacher is judged by whether he has been obedient (270-271, 280).

In chapters 17 and 18, Litfin addresses most fully an issue raised repeatedly in the book: the relationship between Paul's disavowals of rhetoric and the apparent presence of rhetoric in his letters and in the account of his sermons in Acts. Litfin's engagement with this complicated question reveals the subtlety and boldness of his thesis. While allowing that Paul has rhetorical intention, broadly conceived, (that is, he aims to influence, 286-287, 293), employs communicative features discussed by rhetoricians (293), and adapts his message to facilitate the audience's comprehension (276-277, 283-284), Litfin rejects the solution that Paul, in 1

Corinthians 1-4, merely opposes the "bad" rhetoric of the sophists, leaving untouched the good rhetoric of the philosophers (150-153, 260, 274, 294-297). He insists on the more radical position that Paul's critique cuts to the heart of ancient rhetoric, even in its best forms, and he seeks to exonerate Paul from knowingly or unknowingly violating his theory in his practice.

In the final chapters (19 and 20) Litfin applies Paul's ministry model to contemporary preaching and ministry. While more in depth discussion would be welcome here, his comments orient the reader to the appropriate aims and posture of the preacher in light of his study. Five short appendices discuss his interpretation with relation to Apollos, the book of Acts, and Paul's epistemology and further draw out implications for preaching and ministry.

Evaluation

Though Litfin's study is in many ways thorough, a few areas would benefit from further analysis, especially with regard to the relationship between Paul's theory and practice. For instance, how does Paul's emotive language relate to a disavowal of the human dynamics of persuasion? Likewise, how does the necessity of the simple heralding of the message square with the discursive nature of Paul's communication to unbelievers in Acts (e.g., Acts 17:22-31; 19:8)? Litfin's survey of these speeches (288, 308-309, 327-333) and his discussions of epistemology (179-181, 208-209, 334-338) are suggestive, but more detailed treatment would help clarify Paul's theology and inform contemporary questions over the legitimacy of apologetic argumentation in evangelism.

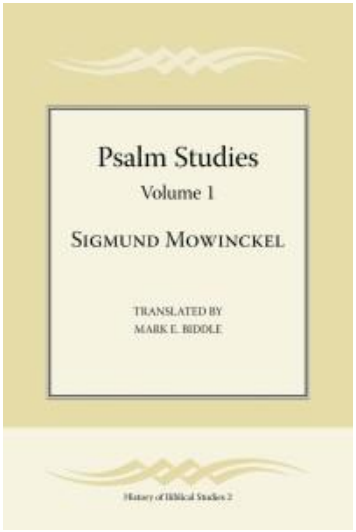
While Litfin's study of Paul's theology of preaching emphasizes Paul's role as a *herald*, a complete account of that theology would require more consideration of other passages and descriptions of his preaching and of his ministry in general. "Herald" sets in the foreground stewardship and accountability to God; other characterizations, for instance, better capture Paul's earnest desire for his hearers to be saved and made holy, a desire which also plays a role in shaping the form of his communication to believers and unbelievers.

This final point is more a clarification than criticism of Litfin's work: it is not foremost a survey of the relevant passages of Paul's preaching and ministry throughout his letters or even in the Corinthian correspondence (though it touches on many of these), but rather a detailed examination of Paul's most sustained reflection on his proclamation at the beginning of 1 Corinthians. As such, it powerfully confronts the reader with Paul's understanding of the counterintuitive and countercultural form of his gospel proclamation, which alone accords with his gospel message. This is an outstanding book, worthy to be wrestled with and applied.

Peter Moore is a PhD student in Hermeneutics and Biblical Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary.

Preview or buy it here on Amazon.

Finally, Mowinckel's groundbreaking Psalm Studies has been translated into English



***Psalm Studies*, by Sigmund Mowinckel. Translated by Mark E. Biddle (SBL, 2014), 2 vols.**

It's surprising it took this long for Sigmund Mowinckel's *Psalm Studies* to venture their way into the English language. These six studies were published in two volumes in 1921-1924. They were foundational to Mowinckel's approach to the psalms, which then dominated psalms studies for the next 70 years. His *Psalms in Israel's Worship* was published in 1962 and summarized all his previous work on the psalms. It was translated into English in 2004 by James Crenshaw. But much of that work assumed or referred to lengthier discussions in *Psalm Studies*. For that reason, it's surprising it hadn't been translated yet. While one could always consult the original German, we can now thank Mark Biddle for saving us a lot of time trying to read Mowinckel's German.

Until the 1920s, the psalms were generally ignored by critical scholars and considered a random assortment of hymns from the second temple period (they were generally dated very late). Gunkel's form-criticism brought life to academic study of the Psalter, although he still dated most of the psalms as post-exilic.

Sigmund Mowinckel was Gunkel's student and absorbed his passion for the psalms. While Gunkel dated the psalms late and focused on their use as individual portraits of piety, Mowinckel dated most of them as pre-exilic and argued that the *Sitz im Leben* of most of

the psalms was Israel's cult. His second distinct contribution was his theory of the New Year's "Enthronement of Yahweh" festival. The six studies in these two volumes are foundational for Mowinckel's argumentation to support these two contributions.

The Contents

The first study examines the *awen* and the psalms of individual lament. The second study is the full study on the Enthronement of Yahweh festival. If there is one study to read by Mowinckel, it is this one, as it's foundational for much of what he did with the psalms, and because some even today still defend his thesis.

Volume two contains the last four studies: (3) cultic prophecy and prophetic psalms; (4) the technical terms in the psalm superscriptions; (5) blessing and curse in Israel's cult and psalmody; (6) the psalmists. As you can tell from the titles of the studies, Mowinckel sought to explicate many of the historical questions we have about the psalms: who wrote them? For what did they write them? What do the superscriptions mean? How were they used in worship?

While Mowinckel makes many questionable assumptions and depends much on historical conjecture (sometimes with little evidence), his approach it laudable. He desires to understand the psalter as a collection of songs and rituals used in ancient Israel's worship. So the studies are still valuable today, even a century after he wrote them.

The Translation

Mowinckel has short book on Psalm 68 in which I first encountered his German (it has not been translated into English, to my chagrin, as I write my dissertation on Psalm 68). German was not his first language, being a Norwegian who, according to Biddle, "professed discomfort with the German language and German culture in general" (xi). In his work on Psalm 68, he includes many references to Norwegian folklore, as he does also in *Psalm Studies*. Needless to say, trying to translate rough German with foreign cultural references makes a tiresome task.

I was more than pleased to read Mowinckel through Biddel's pen. The text flows well with a somewhat informal academic style that approaches conversational at points. Part of that is to be attributed to Mowinckel, and part of it to Biddle. He had a difficult task of translating some rough German and he has produced a magnificent translation that will serve scholars for years to come.

Its Value

Some might wonder if such an old work is worth buying and reading. Much of scholarship has moved beyond reading the psalms in isolation to read them as part of a narrative, guided by the Psalter's editors as they arranged the psalms and smaller collections.

But Mowinckel is still relevant for two reasons. First, his work was a step toward the canonical approach. The canonical approach (e.g., Childs) still builds on critical scholarship, including Mowinckel's in the psalms. Second, the canonical approach is not necessarily a better approach. For reasons I cannot elaborate on here, I much prefer Mowinckel's approach to the psalms as individual compositions to be used in Israel's worship, with their meaning and use connected to their original purpose. The canonical approach to the Psalter can tell us some things about second-temple Jewish Psalter redactors and their beliefs, but I'm hesitant to elevate these beliefs to the same level of importance (or even relevance) as the original composers and users of the psalms.

And so, Mowinckel is still relevant, because he shared in that quest for the historical circumstances of the psalms' composition and use, even if he may have used different assumptions than we ourselves might hold. In sum, many thanks to Mark Biddle for this laborious project from which we may all now benefit!

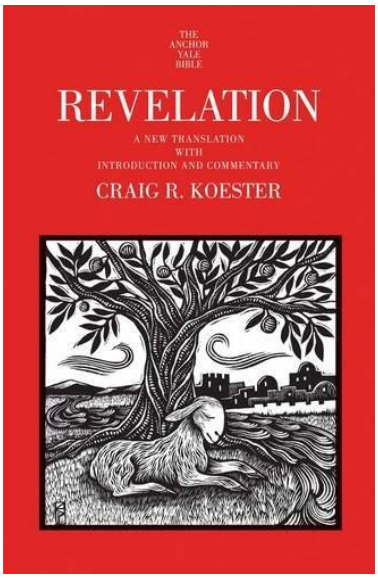
Preview or buy it here.

Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, by Craig R. Koester

***Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, by Craig R. Koester (Anchor Yale Bible, Yale University Press, 2014), 928 pages.**

Reviewer Paul Hoskins (bio here) specializes in Johannine literature and currently in Revelation specifically. He is also the creator of a Greek parsing app called Master Greek. It is a fantastic

app to quiz yourself on any combination of parts of speech to enable you to better read your Greek New Testament.



Craig Koester is a professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a familiar name for anyone who has an eye on contributors to Johannine studies. Several years ago (2001), he published a short overview of the book of Revelation entitled *Revelation and the End of All Things*. That work is a helpful preview to the commentary that I am reviewing here, but the two works do not always agree. This is as one would expect, because Koester undoubtedly learned a great deal from the detailed work that has produced a significant commentary on the book of Revelation.

A major strength of Koester's work is its attempt to give a close reading of Revelation that imposes relatively few historical or theological presuppositions upon it. It is true that his commentary fits primarily within the camp of preterism, which means that he ties Revelation closely to the first century and relates the work of the Beast to Rome. Even so, his preference for preterism does not keep him from seeing the "seven kings" of Revelation 17:10 as a symbolic number of kings rather than a reference to seven identifiable Roman emperors (73, 690-1).

Another instance of the same strength occurs with reference to his treatment of the Millennium. Koester notes various positions that interpreters have held with respect to the Millennium (741-50), but his main focus is upon trying to see what Revelation 20:1-10 plainly says. He then critiques those views that appear to be in conflict with his reading of the text. His reading of the text leads him to question whether amillennialists are right about the Millennium (784-5). He appears to approve of premillennial reading (785), but he is clearly reluctant to align himself with any one theological position (see also 787-8). This is where Koester's strength turns into a weakness. His desire to avoid theological presuppositions and categories leads him to provide a fairly weak and unhelpful presentation of his view of the Millennium and where his view fits with the work of prior interpreters.

Koester's desire to avoid historical and theological presuppositions also leads him to try to find neutral ground with respect to the authorship of Revelation. The book clearly tells us that its author is a prophet (22:9), but nowhere in the book does he claim to be an apostle. Therefore, that is the position that Koester takes with respect to authorship. John was a prophet in Asia

Minor, but not an apostle of Jesus, and little else needs to be said about him (66-69). Such an approach to the authorship of Revelation has the appearance of neutrality and a textual warrant, but it is not a very satisfying solution to the authorship question.

One surprising weakness of Koester's work is his tendency to gloss over difficult Greek constructions with little or no comment. On the other hand, a surprising and refreshing strength is found in his treatment of the seven letters to the seven churches. He repeatedly questions whether the details of each letter can be accurately correlated to historical data related to each of the seven cities. He is trying to correct a trend that has been given too little scrutiny and rests heavily upon Colin Hemer's *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (1986).

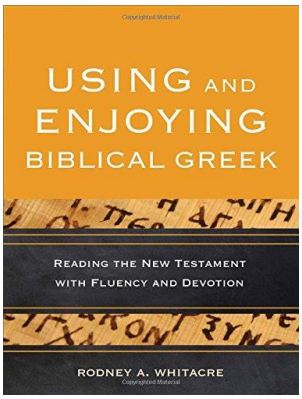
Overall, I have found Koester's commentary to be helpful and worthy of consulting. He will provide aid to anyone who is trying to study the book of Revelation. His preteristic leanings are clear, but his desire to provide a close reading of the text is equally clear.

Reviewed by Paul Hoskins.

Preview or buy Koester's commentary here.

Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek: Reading the New Testament with Fluency and Devotion, by Rodney A. Whitacre

***Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek: Reading the New Testament with Fluency and Devotion*, by Rodney A. Whitacre (Baker Academic, 2015), 272pp.**



In chapter one, Whitacre lays out his method and rationale for the work. He begins by encouraging readers of the GNT to do just that: read the GNT. Even if you read only a few passages of the NT at a time, it is vitally important that you start to become familiar and somewhat fluent in your understanding of the GNT. As you become

more fluent, you will also start to understand and begin to think as the NT authors. Alongside fluency comes an aspect that is rarely mentioned when learning Greek, it is the art and practice of meditation on what you are reading. As one who spent seven years learning Greek in undergraduate and graduate studies, the thought of meditating on the GNT never crossed my mind.

Chapters two and three serve as a good review on the basics of learning vocabulary and essential parsings. Whitacre provides some excellent steps in building vocabulary as you consistently read through the GNT. He reminds readers to pay close attention to things like suffixes, prefixes, semantic domains, and other lexical elements of the Greek. Chapter three provides the reader with a number of important charts on parsing that serve as a helpful reminder for the rusty student or helpful guide for the new student as he or she continues on the journey of learning Greek.

Chapter four is an excellent guide on how to break down sentences and identify key elements that the author uses. Beginning with the core elements of a sentence, Whitacre builds on them and guides the students through how sentences were constructed and the various elements that make up not only a sentence but also a discourse as well. At the close of the chapter he offers three methods that can be helpful when disambiguating a more complex passage of scripture: chunking, sentence scanning, and sentence mapping.

Moving on to chapter five, Whitacre provides some steps for the student of the GNT to use to gain a familiarity with the GNT. The first step, what he calls puzzling, is to skim through a given portion of scripture to see what is familiar. This will give the reader an idea of what is needed in order to understand what the text says. Whitacre calls the next step scanning. As one's knowledge of Greek increases, so too does his familiarity with certain aspects of the language. Scanning allows the reader to move more quickly through a text, moving beyond just basic parsing and vocabulary to looking for types or clauses, the use of infinitives and participles, prepositional phrases and other discourse features that are being utilized by the author in his text.

Finally, after scanning the passage comes re-reading the text. Nothing builds fluency like reading and re-reading a text until the reader begins to think in Greek. Quite simply, the goal is not to be able to translate Greek into English but to be able to think in Greek. Whitacre concludes the chapter with a section on helpful aids in building fluency in Greek.

Chapter six is what I consider to be the best chapter of the book. Learning Greek is fun, and there is nothing more exciting than to be able to open up the GNT and begin to work through a passage of sacred Scripture, noticing the unique style of a given author. But the end goal for Christians is not to be able to solve syntactic problems, it is to have the sacred scripture saturate our minds and transform our lives. Whitacre lays out some practical methods for transforming your study of Greek into a time of worship and meditation. He discusses a few methods of meditation to use while reading through the GNT. Helpful is the brief history of meditation in the early church and how the ancient church defined the practice.

At the conclusion of the chapter Whitacre provides some examples of how to utilize meditation in exegesis. I cannot say enough about how useful and needed this chapter is in learning Greek. It is all too easy to get lost in the details of exegesis and syntax and neglect the message and author of sacred Scripture.

The closing chapter offer some practice passages that the reader can work through and apply what he has been taught in the first six chapters. Following this chapter are five appendices: sentence mapping, labels for sentence maps, reader's notes for John 3:16-18, core patterns for Greek morphology, and Greek verbs—two current topics. Each of the appendices are worth reading through, as they highlight certain aspects earlier discussions.

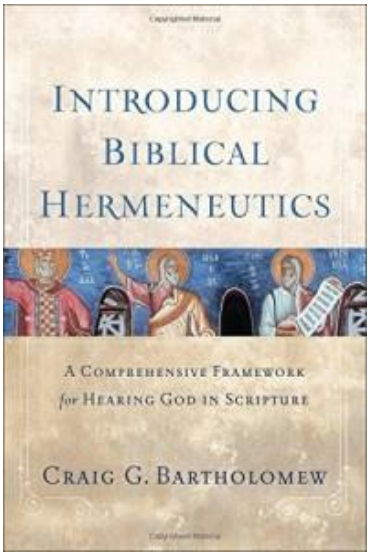
All in all, Whitacre's UEBG is a valuable tool for anyone who has taken one year of Greek or one who is a little rusty and wants to return to one's first love. The format is easy to follow and the examples are good at illustrating points discussed in the book. For someone who has kept their Greek and uses it on a daily basis, I find chapter six alone is worth the price of the book; in fact, this is what initially attracted me UEBG. If you are learning Greek or use Greek daily, this is a book worth having on your shelf and working through.

Reviewed by Cliff Kvidahl.

Preview or buy it here.

Current Issues

Eight Guidelines for a Trinitarian Hermeneutic



In Craig Bartholomew's recent *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics*, he gives eight guidelines for how the doctrine of the Trinity shapes biblical hermeneutics (8-15). If we want to interpret the Bible in a trinitarian manner, we should approach the Bible in this way:

1. **A trinitarian hermeneutic approaches the Bible as authoritative Scripture.** This is a simple corollary of the doctrine of the Trinity.
2. **A trinitarian hermeneutic approaches the Bible as a whole as Scripture.** The NT and OT are not either on their own Christian Scripture, but only the totality of the witness together. This commits us to biblical theology and typology, which lead toward a unity of Scripture.
3. **A trinitarian hermeneutic views ecclesial reception of Scripture as primary.** Scripture is primarily God's Word to God's people, so reception of his word through the ecclesia is primary.
4. **A trinitarian hermeneutic exalts and humbles academic interpretation**. Academic is a partner to ecclesial reception of the Bible, which operates at the front line of its reception.
5. **A trinitarian hermeneutic will attend to the discrete witness of the Testaments**. Each testament must be heard on its own terms (*a la* Seitz and Childs). Critical tools must be brought to bear on both testaments, especially the historical dimension of Israel's life and Jesus' life. But these tools are not neutral and we should allow for a plurality of approaches, while recognizing that only some are truly Christian. Each testament must be interpreted in dialogue with the other so that they shed light on one another. Understanding each section of Scripture in its relation to the canon as a whole is necessary.
6. **A trinitarian hermeneutic rightly discerns the goal of reading the Bible**. The end goal is "obedient attention to God's address through his Word" (12), and the facilitation of communion with God.

7. **A trinitarian hermeneutic does not close down but opens up interpretation of the Bible**. This approach is only one of many, but it is the "right and truthful way to read Scripture, the way that will yield a truthful understanding of the Bible" (13).
8. **A trinitarian hermeneutic takes God's address for all of life seriously**. Scripture has something to say about all of life, from politics in the Old Testament to cultural engagement in the New Testament. We must keep one ear to the Bible and one ear to our culture.

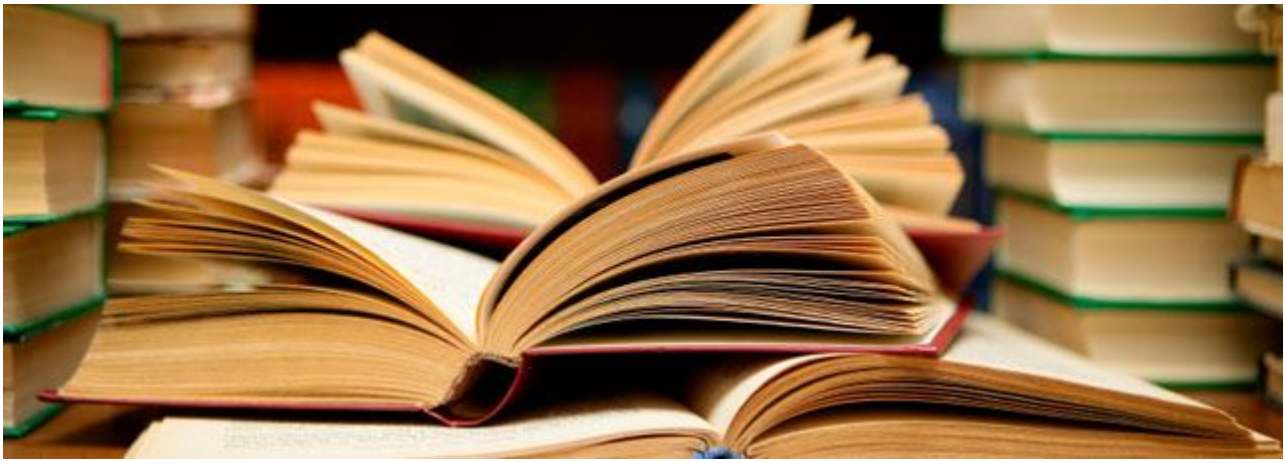
At least two issues arise for debate for me. First, how one handles the dialogue between the two testaments is a significant and touchy issue. The canonical approach in the vein of Childs is a noble attempt to fuse critical scholarship with traditional hermeneutics, but raises problems of how Scripture is revelation, or authoritative, or why it is, or when it is (is each redaction equally authoritative? can redactors contradict one another? what happens to authorial intent after all the editorial stitching and canonical placements?). For anyone thinking through this issue, I highly recommend *Understanding Biblical Theology*, which lays out 5 approaches to biblical theology and gives a chapter on a major practitioner of each type.

Second, what does it mean for Scripture to be received within the ecclesia? "Interpretation in community" is becoming more trendy, but what does that really mean? Is it more effective to sit in a room with other Christians and discuss passages and theology than to sit alone in one's study reading published works on the same issues? Does it mean one must simply dialogue with other Christians, past and present? If so, I suppose it would be hard to argue with that, but I'm not sure it means much more than that we do scholarship.

What about you? What quibbles do you have, or what guidelines might you add?

You can check out more of Bartholomew's book here, or read about his philosophy of history he advocates for doing biblical theology.

Three Tips for Reading Faster to Improve Your Productivity



New books are being published left and right, but you're crazy busy. How can you read faster and improve your productivity?

In my first reading seminar as a ThM student, my professor assigned 700 pages in the first week and a 10-page reading report. The average reading per week was around 450 pages, and I was taking a full load. I had no idea where to start or how I would finish half of it.

If you're a pastor, you have another challenge. Every day new books stream off the presses, books you're expected to keep up with. But you already work 50 hours a week doing administration, sermon prep, required finance, counseling, visitation, prayer, personal Bible study, and who knows what else. There's no way you can keep up.

Among the never-ending stream of new books and huge reading assignments, here are **three ways to read more faster.**

1. Map the terrain.

Get the big picture: what is this book about? Who are the author's conversation partners (i.e., other books interacted with)? How is it organized? The first thing to do should be to simply study the table of contents. Don't start reading chapter one without knowing what it's about and where the book as a whole is going.

If you can fit each chapter into the wider picture, you can read it faster and comprehend the author's direction better. Sometimes, you'll find you don't need to read a chapter and can simply skim it.

In my reading seminar, my first book was Rainer Riesner's magisterial *Paul's Early Period*. I started on page 1 without even bothering to map the terrain. I was absolutely lost, and was only beginning to figure things out on p. 200, when I ran out of time to read for the week. Had I even looked at the table of contents, I would have understood why I was reading about numismatic evidence from Judea and why it mattered for Pauline chronology…and then I probably would have skimmed it quickly to get to the second part of the book.

2. Look for authorial helps.

As you begin reading each chapter, flip through the entire chapter first. Look for headings and sub-headings: what topics are discussed and in what order? Does the author include an introduction and conclusion? If so, read both first. Often the author is kind enough to summarize the contents of the chapter in the conclusion.

Of course, don't use this tip to skip reading altogether, but use it to read *smarter*. Sometimes you do not need to read an entire chapter thoroughly; it might be familiar terrain, covering the same evidence you've seen discussed fifteen times before. If so, look for his conclusions and his main arguments, with which you're probably familiar. Don't waste your time reading something that will be of minimal value to you.

3. Read book reviews.

Often, books aren't worth reading. So many books published today cover the same ground with only slightly different twists on their interpretation of the available evidence. The law of diminishing returns looms large here.

Reading book reviews from journals and blogs are a good way to keep up with new books without having to read them all. And many more reputable PhD students and scholars are blogging nowadays, which makes finding reliable online book reviews even easier.

We publish 1-2 book reviews a week, so to keep up, follow us on Twitter, like us on Facebook, and subscribe to our newsletter. But don't stop with us, sign up for the other good blogs too. You can also try services such as Books At a Glance, which for a small subscription fee gives you access to lengthy book summaries (~3,000-6,000 words) of new books that come out, which helps you read the substance of new books to decide if you want to purchase and read the entire book.