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Book Reviews

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Akopian, Arman. *Classical Syriac*. Gorgias Handbooks. Piscataway: Gorgias, 2019. xiv + 384 pp. \$98, paperback.

Arman Akopian has 24 years of experience on the faculty of Yerevan State University in Armenia, teaching Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic and Syriac. He obtained a PhD from Yerevan in Oriental Studies, focusing on Semitic Philology and also has decades of experience in international affairs, including service to the United Nations and NATO. Akopian is also the author of the 2017 Gorgias Handbook *Introduction to Aramean and Syriac Students*, which discusses the language, culture and religion of Syriac-speaking peoples, including their literary work and tradition, missionary work, and communal identity.

The goal of Akopian’s grammar is to provide a comprehensive course in Syriac, and he employs a unique system to accomplish this. A differentiating element in Akopian’s approach is that he focuses on teaching Syriac primarily from the Serto script, moving into and incorporating Estrangela script. Typically other Syriac grammars do the opposite; beginning with Estrangela script (assuming it to be the standard) and then later incorporate or employ Serto to varying degrees. Akopian’s purpose in this is to help students develop a full facility with both scripts while emphasizing that Serto was, historically, the more popular script. In many Biblical manuscripts and early Christian works, scribes used both scripts, but other grammars usually focus on teaching Estrangela. The rationale in teaching both scripts is that a student would be able to have a more complete grasp of the forms of the language going beyond a simple or limited translation ability.

Within the last two decades or so, several major Syriac grammars have been published of which Akopian’s is the most recent. In 1999, Thackston’s *Introduction to Syriac* was published, and has been the most commonly used grammar since. Thackston moves at a breakneck pace, with the entire substance of the grammar being twenty sections and coming in at just over one hundred pages, preceded by a rather overwhelming ten-part introductory section. In 2001, Eisenbrauns produced an English translation of Nöldeke’s German-language *Compendious Syriac Grammar*, which can also be difficult starting place for a student and may be better used as a reference text. In 2005, Muraoka’s *Classical Syriac* was published, and although it is labeled as “basic,” it more accurately lends itself to the intermediate student. In 2016, Stephen Hallam produced *Basics of Classical Syriac* which follows a similar outline to the other popular-level “Basics” grammars that Zondervan has produced. Hallam’s grammar is a good start, but has numerous typographical errors and is useful as a first step and perhaps a supplement to other grammars. Arman Akopian’s grammar, in my view, excels in the areas where these other grammars fall short.

There are several aspects that distinguish Akopian's grammar. First, the pace of the grammar strikes a balance that its predecessors were not able to find. It is designed to be learned over the course of one year, but it lends itself to different paces depending on the ability of the student. Like many other Syriac grammars (excepting Hallam's), it has an extensive introductory section which is comprised of eight short and simple lessons on the phonological basics of the language such as the vowels and alphabet. Following this incipient section, the grammar is divided into forty main lessons, each of which is never more than ten pages, and concludes with exercises and vocabulary which progressively increase in difficulty. From a pedagogical standpoint, it would be ideal for a student to learn the introductory portion of the grammar on their own, and then to complete one or two lessons weekly over the course of two semesters. For a language that is so foreign to modern systems of grammar, it is inadvisable to use a grammar like this in a condensed format for an intensive course. Additionally, unlike some other Syriac grammars, Akopian teaches the language with vowels. In my view, including and teaching the vowel system is the right decision, being more helpful for beginning students. Just as Classical Hebrew is taught with vowels even though these were unoriginal, teaching Syriac in this way is helpful not only for pronunciation but also for memorization and retention.

The design of the grammar is simple and the font is easy to read. This may seem very basic, but when one is using a grammar (which is read and referred to repeatedly) this is imperative. In some other available grammars (such as Thackston's *Introduction*), the font is small, the lines are very close together and the Syriac font can be difficult to read. Akopian's grammar is a physically larger book and has more pages than other grammars, but this is likely due to the fact that the font, paradigms, examples and descriptions are spaced out more widely and helpfully on each page, which works against a feeling of being overwhelmed at the page of a grammar (a feeling that students of ancient languages know well).

In terms of the drawbacks of Akopian's grammar, its primary areas for improvement are related to the sections at the end of each lesson. First, as is common among grammars, there is a final section of vocabulary and Syriac-to-English translations in each chapter, but Akopian also includes a section of English sentences for a student to translate in Syriac, which seems unnecessary. Students trying to learn Syriac are going to be interested in translating from Syriac to English and not the other way around. This inclusion seems to lengthen chapters that otherwise could have been shorter or included more relevant information. Second, it would have been helpful for the ending sections to have more space or wider margins for a student to mark in the textbook itself or to practice writing scripts. Hallam's grammar is one of the few that includes such sections and spaces, and Akopian's grammar could have been improved with such an addition.

Syriac was one of the major languages of the early church, and is especially important for biblical and theological studies. Various important early Christian

documents were written in Syriac, such as Tatian's second-century gospel harmony (dubbed the Diatessaron) and the many fourth-century hymns and theological works of eminent writers like Ephraem the Syrian. Such documents, in varying measure, aid in illuminating the practices and beliefs of a sizable group of early Christians for whom Syriac was their language, and prove invaluable in determining how biblical texts were translated. Beyond these orthodox Christian texts, several apocryphal documents that were originally written in Syriac have been discovered, including a third-century text which has been called the Acts of Thomas.

Because of its prevalence as a language utilized significantly in early Christianity, translators of the New Testament and translators of the Old Testament, learning Syriac has great benefit for the theology student or aspiring biblical scholar. Akopian's grammar is an excellent tool in that pursuit, whether as a course textbook or as a guide for self-teaching. One could use half of the grammar to gain a basic understanding of the language or complete all forty lessons to gain a broad competency which would put a student in a good position to begin reading ancient Syriac texts or translations. However one utilizes it, it serves as a helpful resource for developing competency in this neglected language.

William B. Bowes

Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary

Muraoka, Takamitsu. *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar*. Leuven: Peeters, 2015. 82 pp., \$25.00.

A Biblical Aramaic Reader by T. Muraoka is a concise Aramaic outline grammar that also contains notes on the Aramaic texts of the Hebrew Bible (Dan 2:4b–7; Ezra 4:8–24; 5–6; 7:12–26; Gen 31:47; Jer 10:11). Takamitsu Muraoka is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew Language and Literature, Israelite Antiquities and Ugaritic at Universiteit Leiden. Since 1982, Muraoka has been publishing technical works in the field of ancient languages and Semitics including, Syriac, Hebrew, Egyptian and Qumran Aramaic, Biblical Aramaic, and Greek (LXX). The work for which T. Muraoka is probably best known is *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, a translation and revision of Paul Joüon's original work. *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* showcases T. Muraoka's decades of language expertise.

This work seeks to be a "chrestomathy" to "help students consolidate the acquired knowledge of the grammar" (p. ix). Muraoka seeks to fill a gap in Aramaic resources by providing a systematic presentation of content on the Aramaic texts of the Hebrew Bible specifically for didactic purposes. To that end, *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* is far more than just a reader, even though it is quite short (only 82 pages).

In the formal Reader portion of this work (pp. 41–76), Muraoka comments on specific words and clause structures in the Aramaic text. He does not, however, provide the Aramaic portions of the Hebrew Bible in full. One would be expected

to have a Hebrew Bible side-by-side with this work. Even without the full Aramaic texts alongside the reader, the grammatical discussions are helpful for understanding and reinforcing the concepts from the outline grammar. Ranging from text critical comments to parsing verbs, Muraoka provides enough information to be helpful, but not so much that the textual notes are overwhelming. When Muraoka comments on items that are also discussed in the outline grammar, he references that section so that students can follow up with a summary discussion of that particular element of Aramaic phonology, morphology, syntax, or grammar. Since most students who pursue Aramaic studies have already had Biblical Hebrew, Muraoka regularly points students to a comparison of the same grammatical or morphological phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew (marked as BH in the reader). While not exhaustive, Muraoka comments on every verse of the Aramaic portions in the Hebrew Bible.

Because the Aramaic Reader is so succinct one should consider having other aids on hand while reading. Muraoka simply does not have the space to explain complex syntactical constructions or morphological phenomena. He simply states what the construction is and moves on. Perhaps Todd Murphy's *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew* (IVP, 2003) or Miles Van Pelt's *Biblical Hebrew: A Compact Guide*, 2nd ed. (Zondervan, 2019) would be helpful for understanding Muraoka's grammatical terminology when it is not readily defined in the outline grammar. I realize that both of these suggested resources are Hebrew resources, but the help needed to supplement Muraoka is not Aramaic grammatical terms; rather, students may need to look up definitions of the various linguistic terms.

One should be aware of Muraoka's nomenclature for grammatical and morphological discussions throughout the book. Muraoka uses verb terminology associated with the פֿעֿל system. Therefore, so-called "weak verbs" are labeled according to their פֿעֿל designation (Lamed-Yod; Pe-Guttural; etc.). Additionally, Muraoka uses the abbreviation system of Comparative Semitists for parsing verbs (G, D, tD, H, etc.) rather than the system used in most Arabic and Hebrew grammars (Qal, Piel, Hithpael, Hiphil, etc.). This system is quite efficient and makes for consistent transition between Semitic languages, but for those used to working with a first-year Hebrew grammar, it may take some time to get used to this system for parsing.

The best way to use this resource is to begin by reading through the outline grammar. This will provide the student with enough basics of Aramaic morphology and grammar to make use of the reader portion of the work. One should not expect the outline grammar to be a full Aramaic primer. With the formal outline grammar at only thirty-one pages, this work proves to be much shorter than Franz Rosenthal (Harrassowitz, 2006) or Alger Johns (Andrews University Press, 1972). The brevity of this work is commendable in its simplicity, but one will likely need to rely on other resources for a full comprehension of Aramaic grammar.

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After reading the outline grammar, Muraoka suggests the student work through the book of Daniel followed by Ezra. The “Grammatical and philological notes are written and presented” on the assumption that the student will work in this order (p. ix). Because of this trajectory of the work, Muraoka says, “Notes on the later chapters of Daniel and on the chapters of Ezra are pitched on a slightly higher level” (p. ix).

Two additional features of this work are worth mentioning. First, between the outline grammar and the Aramaic Reader, Muraoka includes two full paradigms for Aramaic verbs (pp. 35–37). One is the “regular verb” and the other is the “Lamed-Yod verb.” While these paradigms will prove helpful references, they both seem to leave out the so-called *shaphel* stem even though the comparative Semitics nomenclature labels the causative stem as “Š.” I would assume Muraoka left out the *shaphel* due to the fact that the *haphel/aphel* are far more common in Biblical Aramaic as the causative stem than *shaphel*. For consistency, Muraoka labels the paradigm causative stem with “H/A” (*haphel/aphel*).

The second additional feature worth mentioning is what Muraoka labels as “Simple Exercises” (pp. 37–38). These exercises come with an answer key (pp. 77–82), and so one would theoretically be able to practice the morphological concepts and paradigms necessary to learn and reinforce Biblical Aramaic.

Muraoka’s outline grammar and reader would be most valuable for someone who has had at least one year of Biblical Hebrew and perhaps even a semester of Biblical Aramaic. The grammar claims to be “An Outline Grammar of Biblical Aramaic for Beginners,” but remembering the state of my Hebrew after one year, I’m not sure that I would have comprehended all of the concepts and terminology in Muraoka’s grammar and reader. Reading it now, I can appreciate the simplicity and concision of the grammar, but as the first Aramaic grammar one encounters, it could perhaps lead to frustration.

On the other hand, the notes in the formal Reader portion of the book will prove helpful to anyone seeking to read the Aramaic texts of the Hebrew Bible. Muraoka explains forms, grammar, and morphological changes in a way that is helpful and succinct. This book would be best suited in an Aramaic classroom where additional instruction or guidance would come from a professor. It is possible that highly motivated language students could make excellent use of this resource in the pastoral study after having a year of Biblical Hebrew. However, it is likely best that this volume remains in the academic classroom.

Muraoka’s work in this volume was born out of several semesters of teaching Asian students the Aramaic language. It was intended to be a succinct grammar and Reader and Muraoka accomplished that goal. Even though it is succinct, Muraoka has piled mountains of information into this work. For those wanting to revisit or refresh their Biblical Aramaic, this volume is worth the investment.

Adam J. Howell
Boyce College, Louisville, KY

Van Pelt, Miles V. *Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar, Lexicon, and Annotated Text*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011, xiii + 235 pp, \$59.99, paperback.

The sun was blazing on the open plain of sand. I could hear the crashing waves of the lake, but it remained elusive. Certain it had to be over the next sandy hill, I hoisted two of my children onto my back and began a determined charge to the top. Cresting the crumbly mountain, my eyes met another vast tract of the Sleeping Bear Dunes. Would we ever get there? Many divinity students know this feeling. After years of study they finally feel ready to advance beyond the Greek of the Apostle John. Having conquered their fears with Jonah and Ruth, they start over “in the beginning,” reading Hebrew with Moses. And just when they think they have arrived at the lakeshore, the rolling dunes of Aramaic meet their gaze.

In the past decade it has become increasingly easier for students and pastors with a working knowledge of biblical Hebrew to gain access to the Aramaic texts of the Bible. In 2011 Miles Van Pelt added a biblical Aramaic textbook to Zondervan’s popular “Basics of Biblical Language” collection. Van Pelt, co-author of *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, is the Alan Hayes Belcher, Jr. Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at Reformed Theological Seminary—Jackson. He also leads the Summer Institute of Biblical Languages, an 8-week intensive study program. In addition to authoring numerous volumes in Zondervan’s biblical language series, he has edited *A Biblical Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016) and serves as associate editor for the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament. His experience and authorship in this arena provide those stuck on the sand dunes ample encouragement to complete their journey.

Basics of Biblical Aramaic (BBA) shares a very similar format to its Hebrew predecessor. It covers phonology/orthography, the nominal system, the verbal system (basic), and the verbal system (derived stem). It provides charts with paradigms, a lexicon, and video lectures. BBA differs in that each chapter includes workbook style exercises at the end, and the book includes the entire annotated Aramaic text found in the Bible. Most importantly, BBA presents Aramaic via comparison to biblical Hebrew in order to (1) reinforce Hebrew grammar, and (2) to minimize extra effort needed to retain concepts. Every chapter encourages memorizing vocabulary glosses such that diligent students will recognize over 90% of the Aramaic text. Van Pelt encourages Aramaic study in a four-step process: (1) study the grammar and exercises, (2) work through annotated text, (3) translate unannotated text, and (4) never stop reading (p. xii).

Van Pelt’s BBA has a very focused audience: those who have already learned biblical Hebrew and have an interest in reading the roughly ten chapters of the Bible composed in Aramaic. Such an audience will greatly appreciate the refresh of

Hebrew grammar through the comparative approach. Van Pelt does an admirable job offering succinct summaries of Hebrew grammar without going into an exhaustive review. For those who have used other volumes in this Zondervan series, the style will be familiar. For those who have not used the series (like myself), it is quite accessible. BBA provides relevant and efficient access to translation knowledge of biblical Aramaic. This is truly a textbook written with the focus audience in mind.

Such a sharp focus also cuts two ways. The restricted focus on biblical Aramaic reduces the comprehensive value of this text. For example, some grammar paradigms leave out various feminine forms not extant in the Bible (p. 46). Or, for those who want to develop basic communicative ability in the language, they cannot even learn to count to ten because of numeral omissions (p. 66; cf. Rosenthal §63). Such omissions could easily have been screened in grey or marked as “not occurring” in the biblical text. Further, even the target audience may eventually wish they had such materials when they learn about the Aramaic Targums, an ancient translation and interpretation covering most of the Old Testament. I would list them as the fifth step in Van Pelt’s learning progression. Knowledge of such a historic resource and how it connects to learning biblical Aramaic could significantly boost motivation to learn the language well. Granted, a few adjustments are needed to read Targumic and/or Imperial Aramaic. Assuming most readers of Van Pelt will only ever access Targums via electronic resources (e.g., via Logos or Accordance Bible Software), complete paradigms and a simple appendix would potentially make BBA the only resource such readers would ever need. Ability to translate the whole Bible from the original languages is a good motivation to take the Aramaic trek; access to a wealth of ancient Bible translation and commentary puts a pleasant wind at your back!

Van Pelt offers a streamlined pedagogical resource. Each of the 22 chapters, averaging 6–7 pages, can function as an independent lesson complete with vocabulary and exercises. The annotated text provides immediate follow up to traditional grammar lessons as students begin contextual translation exercises. Rosenthal’s *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (Weisbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2006) serves as a more complete reference resource, but it offers little help as a pedagogical tool. Schuele’s *An Introduction to Biblical Aramaic* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2012) finds a middle road between Rosenthal and Van Pelt: requiring classroom prep but offering more complex linguistic discussions. For those who desire a brief foray into non-biblical Aramaic, certain chapters of Greenspahn’s *An Introduction to Aramaic* (Atlanta: SBL, 2003) offer a broader survey of the language. But for those who simply want translation preparation for the Aramaic of the Bible, Van Pelt’s well focused presentation will likely win the day in classroom and self-study.

Marcus A. Leman
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Quick, Laura. *Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 240, \$93, hardcover.

Laura Quick (D.Phil., University of Oxford) is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible and Tutorial Fellow of Theology and Religion at Worcester College, University of Oxford. She returned to her alma mater in 2019 after a two-year Assistant Professorship in Religion and Judaic Studies at Princeton University. Dr. Quick co-edited the *Philology and Gender* issue for *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* (Mohr Siebeck, 2019) with Drs. Jacqueline Vayntrub and Ingrid E. Lilly, and her second monograph *Dress, Adornment and the Body in the Hebrew Bible* is in production with Oxford University Press.

According to Quick, *Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition* was written with three main goals. The first was to reorient the contemporary reader's view of the ancient world by presenting the literary importance of Northwest Semitic inscriptions in a field that often privileges biblical and Mesopotamian texts. When their value has been shown, the specific trope of the futility curse found in the Old Aramaic inscriptions are viewed considering the Hebrew Bible, especially Deuteronomy 28. Finally, by seeing a fuller picture of the futility curses in the ancient world the reader will be able to better understand the function of the curses in Deuteronomy 28.

Quick's summary on the past and present scholarly debate on the background of Deuteronomy 28 is a helpful key to understanding the need for a new approach to the topic. The scholarly consensus is that Deuteronomy 28 was written as a direct subversion to Esarhaddon's Succession Treaties (EST) during Josiah's reign. Scholars such as Bernard Levinson and Jeffrey Stackert have seen the EST as a conceptual template for Deuteronomy 28. However, recently Carly Crouch has pushed back on this theory by stating that subversive literary features (e.g. Akkadian loanwords, linguistic interference, and citations) are not present in the parallels between Deuteronomy and EST. If Deuteronomy 28 is not directly subverting the EST, then a new framework is needed to understand the function of the text and what other traditions are influencing Deuteronomy 28.

Such a framework comes from combining the work of Meir Malul and David Carr. The comparative method of Malul begins with the point of a plausible, historical connection between two texts. If the nature and type of connections (e.g. direction connection, mediated connection, common source, or common tradition) are not met with a test of literary uniqueness and possible corroboration, then comparative work should not begin. Malul's work provides a correction to older methodologies of finding second millennium Hittite parallels in Deuteronomy, which was the work of George Mendenhall and more recently of Joshua Berman, and newer methodologies like the lack of material needed to accept the Akkadian EST hypothesis. In Carr's intertextual approach, the scholar must assume that there could be broader cultural

records that provide the closest analogy to the work found in the biblical text. This leads to Quick's investigation of the first millennium Aramaic epigraphs, which contain a tradition of futility curses, and her definition of intertextuality as "the complex network of associations which exist between our sources, and which the author was largely unaware of as he drew from traditional discourse in the construction of his text, be this found in the levels of literature or reality." (p. 67).

Following the work of Delbert Hiller, Quick describes the futility curse motif as "[a curse] consisting of a protasis describing an activity; and an apodosis, describing the frustration of that activity, and often introduced by 'but not' (Aramaic *w'l*; Hebrew *wl'*, *w'yn*)". (p. 69). Three Old Aramaic epigraphs display such a motif: the Tell Fakhariyah Bilingual Inscription, the Sefire Treaties, and the Bukān Stele. All three contain lexical, conceptual, and syntactical overlap. Lexically, the curses contain words like "calf", "cows", "bread", "oven", and "bake"; conceptually, these lexemes are being frustrated with infertility; syntactically, they favor a "*subject–future-verb–object-conjunction–future-verb* syntax" (p. 92). These contrast with the lexemes, concepts, and syntax of Mesopotamian and Hittite treatises and curses.

Quick uses the patterns found in the Old Aramaic epigraphs to compare forty-four examples of the futility curse from the biblical corpus (the full list is found on p. 107). Although the biblical texts are more diverse in topic and syntax, there is, nonetheless, an ideological focus on frustration that pervades almost every curse. For example, there are seeds that cannot be harvested (Deut. 28:38; Hos. 8:7; Mic. 6:15a, etc), olive groves that do not produce oil (Deut. 28:40; Mic. 6:15b), and people who are barren (Deut. 28:30a, 41; Hos. 4:10b; 9:12, 16b) (a full list is found on p. 130). Syntactically, the pre-exilic prophets contain the simplest forms, mainly "*future-verb–conjunction–future-verb*" (p. 131), while the post-exilic prophets are more keen to break away from the traditional syntax found in the earlier biblical and Old Aramaic material. Although, Quick notes some variety, such as inverted protasis and apodosis (Deut. 28:30a, 30b, 30c), additional prepositional clauses (Deut. 28:40), and *ky* clauses which provide more complexity to the ideology of some curses (Deut. 28:38, 39, 41), the futility curses of Deuteronomy 28 are closer to the early material in syntax and concepts than the post-exilic biblical texts. The proximity to the Old Aramaic material and pre-exilic prophets bolsters the claim made by most redaction-critical scholars that the temporal context of Deuteronomy 28 is best placed in the mid-eighth and seventh century.

The final two chapters seem to be Quick's way of answering Malul's propositions on plausible historical connections between Deuteronomy 28 and the larger literary world of the mid-eighth and seventh century Levant. Of the three Old Aramaic epigraphs the Tell Fakhariyah Bilingual Inscription is the most important for the discussion of placing Deuteronomy 28 in contact with Mesopotamian texts. The inscription contains the same text, but written in two different languages, Akkadian and Aramaic, and exhibiting two different styles of writing, West Semitic

(especially as it relates to the earlier discussion on the uniqueness of the futility curse) and East Semitic. Quick's observations on the inscription find parallel results in Deuteronomy 28, namely, where scholars once saw direct interplay with the EST, Deuteronomy 28 was more likely interacting with the tropes of the Neo-Assyrian world while returning back to the literary style of Northwest Semitic. The function of the text finds a comparable companion in the Tell Fakhariyah Bilingual Inscription. Therefore, Deuteronomy 28 was not written to directly subvert the EST, but rather it was influenced by many intertexts, including the encroaching Mesopotamian threat, its local Levantine futility curses, and the ritual world of Northwest Semitic covenant cutting.

Deuteronomy 28 and the Aramaic Curse Tradition is an example of a comprehensive and well-reasoned work on a topic that had seemed to be well worn. The camps had been set and divided; however, Quick's approach has brought fresh insight to handling the biblical material. Those working in futility curses in the Hebrew Bible are without excuse and must consult the evidence found in the Old Aramaic epigraphs.

David M. Smiley
University of Notre Dame

Williamson, Paul R. *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018, pp. 226, \$20, paperback.

Paul R. Williamson serves as professor of Old Testament, Hebrew, and Aramaic at Moore College in Sydney, Australia. Among his many published works, Williamson made a previous contribution to the NSBT series in his work, *Seal with an Oath* (InterVarsity, 2007), where he examined the nature of the biblical covenants as central to God's advancement of universal blessing. He is a contributor to the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (InterVarsity, 2000) and the co-editor of *Exploring Exodus: Literary, Theological and Contemporary Approaches* (InterVarsity, 2008).

In his most recent publication, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions*, Williamson explores the metaphysical reality of death and the afterlife from the vantage point of the Bible's storyline. After a brief examination of the literature in ancient religious cultures, chapter one outlines the trajectory of the book. Williamson's chief aim is to evaluate the biblical data related to death, resurrection, judgment, hell, and heaven.

Williamson contends (chapter 2) that death, apart from being a ubiquitous reality across the ages and cultures, is diversely variegated. In the Old Testament (OT), death has little by way of positive connotation, though the continued existence of spirits is quite evident. The period between the testaments, notes Williamson, brought about more nuanced ideas related to death, being influenced largely by dualistic Greek

anthropology (49). Matters in the New Testament (NT) are brought into sharper focus: death becomes a temporary separation between the physical and non-physical.

Chapters three and four examine resurrection and judgment, respectively. In general, ancient Near Eastern religions rejected any notion of a person being resurrected, let alone judged. Even in Greek philosophy, observes Williamson, resurrection was not a welcomed idea. The notion of bodily resurrection in Second Temple Literature clearly embraced such a concept (69). While future resurrection moved from more to less amorphous in the OT, the NT is robustly clear, forcefully defending a future (as opposed to immediate) resurrection of the dead.

The book closes with a chapter on hell and a chapter on heaven. Williamson surveys some passages related to the general idea of hell, noting that the concept becomes less vague as one transitions from the OT to the NT. With respect to the biblical concept of heaven, the author presents an exegetical defense of eternal existence in a re-created earth, taking the visions in Revelation as symbol-laden presentations of heaven.

Death and the Afterlife exemplifies true scholarship, being written for the academic and the layperson alike. The work exudes many strengths—four being particularly worthy of comment. First, Williamson’s prose makes the book a delight to read and easy to follow. The faithful churchgoer with little to no academic training will find himself engaged with the contents of this work, undoubtedly finding its flow and arguments rather accessible. The layout of the book presented in the table of contents allows readers to quickly take stock of what to expect from the author.

Second, the book is an exegetical tour de force. Readers would fare well to follow Williamson’s methodological approach. His arguments are steeped in biblical reasoning, being presented as the careful conclusions of a meticulous exegete. He engages well with divergent conclusions, never going on a theological limb. Rather, Williamson presents opposing arguments and analyzes their conclusions against the backdrop of the biblical data. He makes thorough use of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

Third, this work represents a rigorous undertaking in biblical theology. Williamson takes the theme of personal eschatology and judiciously presents a case based on how the biblical authors understood it. Thus, for example, the concept of death is first considered by the OT authors and then evaluated in the NT. What is more, Williamson observes the way the NT authors use and develop the OT authors’ understanding of a particular idea. While not inspired, the author includes copious references to Jewish intertestamental literature, serving to inform how the NT authors thought about certain topics. This is very helpful, particularly when seeking to do justice to the historical context within which the NT was composed.

Finally, the book deals fairly and honestly with opposing views. When presenting a conflicting perspective, Williamson is careful to articulate another’s position as

originally put forward before engaging with it. Readers will be hard-pressed to find unsubstantiated or hasty generalizations by the author.

The five themes explored in this book (death, resurrection, judgment, hell, and heaven) are all proportionately presented—each theme is covered in roughly thirty pages. One wonders, however, assuming the total page limitation, whether some themes should have been discussed in more detail. Death, on the one hand, is a theological idea that seems to occupy a fairly large landscape of agreement among evangelicals and non-evangelicals. Hell, on the other hand, is hotly debated, even among evangelicals. Williamson’s dialogue with Edward Fudge helpfully highlights the reality of a non-traditional view of hell within confessional evangelical circles—a view gaining in popularity in the last few decades. Accordingly, then, the book could have dedicated some more time to a discussion of hell. As readers work through Williamson’s response to Fudge, they may be left wanting more, feeling as though the treatment was not sufficient.

Overall, students of biblical and theological studies will find this work beneficial as a model of how arguments in their field should be crafted. The main contents of the work should also be of valuable service to students. Williamson’s engagement with anthropological realities (most notably the idea of hell’s eternity vis-à-vis the human experience) fits with contemporary narratives that are at odds with the biblical data. In this way, the book helps students to be informed of competing arguments and how best to interact with them.

Tom Musetti

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Abernethy, Andrew T. and Gregory Goswell. *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020, pp. xii + 292, \$29.99, paperback.

Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment but the fulfillment of what? Over the years people have made him into their own image, as the fulfillment to their own self-determined needs and ideals. Think of all the images constructed: Jesus the fulfillment of Plato and Aristotle, a teacher of liberal morals, a Hindu Sage, a Nazi, a Marxist revolutionary, a hippie, the greatest salesman, the greatest therapist, a Hollywood superstar. Jesus of Nazareth came to fulfill what?

The real Jesus of Nazareth came to fulfill the BC Scriptures. That was and is his “job description.” He is “the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26), God’s Messiah. The words “Christ” in Greek (*christos*) and “Messiah” in Hebrew (*mashiach*) mean “Anointed One” (cf. John 1:41). While Jesus fulfills the BC Scriptures in many ways, one crucial dimension is the royal Messianic King from the line of David, anointed with the Holy Spirit.

To understand Jesus of Nazareth as the anointed Davidic King requires study of the BC Scriptures. For that study I recommend this volume. Andrew T. Abernethy is associate professor of Old Testament and degree coordinator of the MA in Biblical Exegesis at Wheaton College, and Gregory Goswell is academic dean and lecturer in Old Testament at Christ College in Sydney, Australia.

The volume discusses messianism and the expectations of a coming Davidic king in the Old Testament. The authors take a balanced approach that avoids two ditches evident in the secondary literature. Some studies limit the scope to passages explicitly using the word “anointed one” in reference to a future figure. Those who follow that approach end up devoting more space to intertestamental literature than to the Hebrew Scriptures. Some other studies try to shoehorn into the topic almost every future-tense passage, including texts about priests and prophets. Abernethy and Goswell focus on the texts that explicitly deal with kingship, in which “this royal figure is prefigured, anticipated, predicted, or described” (p. 1).

Except for Ruth, the authors follow the tripartite order of books in the Hebrew canon: Torah (Pentateuch), Former and Latter Prophets, and Writings. They deal with texts in the following biblical books: Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Zechariah, Malachi, Psalms, Daniel, and 1-2 Chronicles. They treat the texts in a holistic way and avoid extracting verses from their written and historical context. They conclude the volume with a survey of Jesus as the Christ in the New Testament.

The volume is well-written and displays thorough research. The authors attend to the Hebrew in a commendable way. For example, they point out that the noun often translated “branch” denotes vegetative growth or a “sprout” that springs up from the ground, not a branch on a tree (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12): “Just as vegetation grows from an unseen seed beneath the surface of the ground, so God’s promise to David will spring to life when all seems lost” (p. 108).

Various kinds of biblical material set forth expectations for the coming Davidic King such as explicit promises, royal narratives, and prayers. The biblical texts most commonly characterize the Messianic King as promoting the centrality of God as King and his temple and reigning with justice and righteousness. The king can be spoken of with various metaphors, such as lion, scepter, shepherd, and sprout. By including many biblical texts in their discussion the authors reveal a complex and multifaceted picture, what they liken to an abstract mosaic.

Here are some highlights. The authors begin with the Pentateuch as laying the foundation, concentrating on Genesis 3:15 and 49:8-10, Numbers 24:17-19, and Deuteronomy 17:14-20. They offer a nuanced view of the book of Judges, showing that it invites the readers not to give up on kingship but to hope for a human king who “would rule in a way that guides Israel to live under the rule of God” (p. 34). They give an insightful discussion of the book of Ruth as giving hope for the future of the Davidic house. The books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings set forth the ideal

for the future Davidic King. King David himself was the basic paradigm, a king after Yahweh's own heart who prioritized true worship of Yahweh, implemented justice, and was victorious in battle over Israel's enemies. Central to the entire topic is God's covenant with David. The ideal of the early Solomon includes the king's extensive dominion, ruling with justice and wisdom, commitment to the temple, and exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh. The subsequent Davidic king who receives the highest marks is King Josiah. (The authors should have given more attention also to King Hezekiah.) The book of Kings helps to establish Messianic expectations. The book of Chronicles encouraged the postexilic community in their current situation by highlighting the centrality of temple worship, which was fostered by King David and other Davidic kings. At the same time the Chronicler stressed God's enduring commitment to the Davidic promise. The prophets spoke of a future Davidic king who will be an agent of God's kingly rule. In Zechariah the royal Davidic "sprout" is portrayed as rejected, pierced, and slain in accord with God's plan. The authors rightly emphasize the fulfillment as both the "now" and the "not yet."

By way of critique I thought that the authors' treatment of the Psalms was too beholden to a sequential reading strategy. The prayers for the Davidic King in Psalms 72, 89, and 132 were to remain the prayers of postexilic Israel. The authors should have given more attention to the portrait of a suffering Davidic King, which is evident both from the Davidic Psalms and from the history of King David. They neglected Psalm 22. According to the four Gospels, Jesus' reign on David's throne began on the throne of a cross.

I also found some of their interpretations unconvincing. With a rather convoluted argument they propose that "the booth of David" in Amos 9:11 refers to Jerusalem and her temple. On the contrary, it is simply a sarcastic play on the idiom "the house of David." Instead of a strong "house" it was a flimsy "booth/hut" about to fall. But God promised to raise it up. According to James as understood within the context of Acts, God restored the Davidic dynasty by raising Jesus the Davidic Messiah from the dead (Acts 15:16; cf. Acts 2:24-32; 13:22-37). Goswell suggests that the figure riding on a donkey in Zechariah 9:9 is Yahweh, but that seems highly unlikely given the text's focus on the animal and the parallel in 1 Kings 1:33-40. Moreover, the authors ignore some things that call for attention, such as the significance of calling the future royal figure simply "David" (Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:5; cf. Isaiah 11:1) and the importance of Isaiah 11:10, the promise that Gentiles will come to the future Davidic King (cf. Romans 15:12). They ascribe the promise of worldwide "greatness" in Micah 5:4 to Yahweh instead of the future Davidic King, but that is grammatically less likely.

Nevertheless, I found their work overall to be an outstanding treatment of one important trajectory in the BC Scriptures. We Christians confess that Jesus of Nazareth is "the Anointed One/Messiah/Christ." He was and remains the Messianic King from the line of David, as the crucified, risen, and exalted Jesus himself states

at the end of the Bible: “I am the shoot and the descendant of David” (Revelation 22:16; cf. 5:5). The fine volume by Abernethy and Goswell greatly aids us in making that confession with understanding and clarity.

Paul R. Raabe
Grand Canyon University

Provan, Iain. *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014, pp. 502, \$49.99.

In this book, Provan has set out to argue that, among the many worldview stories that are active in the world today—most of which are anti-Christian—the “Old Story” (Old Testament) is genuinely dangerous. “*Biblical monotheism is seriously dangerous*” (10, italics original). By dangerous, Provan does not mean that the Old Story intends to harm society in any way. Rather, he argues that when understood properly, in light of the narrative that the Old Story itself tells, it poses a threat to all other worldview stories, *and* it poses a threat to those who take its own message seriously. The ideologies of the Old Story “threaten” to answer the most important questions humans ask. According to Provan, the Old Story answers those questions satisfactorily for those who are willing to be shaped by its message.

Provan begins the Introductory chapter, “Of Mice, and Men, and Hobbits” by outlining the common stories we encounter in our world today with two example novels. The first is like *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, in which “Absurdity rules” (1–2). The second is from Tolkein’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo and Sam find themselves in a story, but it is a story that is part of a much longer and much older Story. This older Story helps them find meaning, purpose, and hope in their current story. Since each human inhabits his or her own personal story, we must admit that we are in a story. The question is whether we will admit that this story is part of a larger one that gives meaning to the present one, and if we admit that, of what Story are we a part?

In the modern age, Provan identifies three stories, one of the “Axial Age” (5–6), one of the “Dark Green Golden Age” (6–7) and one of the “Scientific New Age” (7–8). I’ll leave it to the reader to discover what Provan has in mind with these stories, but the common thread among them according to Provan is, “Each of the new stories is, indeed, consciously told in an attempt to displace, above all other stories [the] dominant Old Story of Western culture” (9). They view the Old Story of the Old Testament as either “ineffective” or “dangerous” to a culture that has evolved beyond ancient narratives. “It is in the light of this thoroughgoing modern assault on the Old Story from all sides that I have written this book” (10). In one sense, this book is intended for the critics of the Old Testament to reconsider what the Old Testament itself claims, perhaps even to read it for the first time rather than assuming

they know its content from critical reports about the Old Testament. In another sense, Provan “has written this book,..., for the *readers* of critics” (10, italics original). In such a post-Christian world, Provan desires that those who read the critics of the Old Testament will also engage afresh with the content of the Old Testament as presented in this volume.

Since Provan argues that the Old Testament answers some of the most profound questions that humans can ask, he spends the bulk of the book asking and answering those questions. From the chapter subtitles, Provan seeks to answer: “What is the World?” “Who is God?” “Who are Man and Woman?” “Why Do Evil and Suffering Mark the World?” “What am I to Do about Evil and Suffering?” “How Am I to Relate to God?” “How Am I to Relate to My Neighbor?” “How Am I to Relate to the Rest of Creation?” “Which Society Should I Be Helping to Build?” “What Am I to Hope For?” In fitting Provan fashion, each chapter answers these questions thoroughly and with an eye toward unveiling the philosophical and ideological presuppositions of even the most seasoned critic.

In the final chapters of the book (Chpts 12-13), Provan summarizes the findings with an eye toward the New Testament and asking whether this Old Story is really dangerous.

In this volume, Provan has limited himself to the Old Testament primarily. Other than the summary chapter, “Further Up and Further In: New Dimensions in the Old Story” (Chpt 12), the primary content of this book focuses on the Old Testament. Provan decided to do this because many critics do not understand the Old Testament rightly. Even those who do know the Old Testament haven’t always read it rightly. Whether layering on the Old Testament a New Testament lens or just flat misunderstanding the historical and cultural context, even many Christians do not read the Old Testament well. Therefore, he approaches these questions from the Old Testament alone.

In each chapter, Provan also employs a strategy to begin with evidence in Genesis. He says, “The book of Genesis is where the biblical story begins, and no story can be read well if the beginning is not properly understood” (14). Therefore, a proper understanding of the beginning will lead to greater understanding across the entire Old Story as Provan seeks to answer these questions. After beginning each chapter with an understanding of the question in Genesis, Provan moves to the rest of the Old Testament in a somewhat topical fashion centered on the question at hand.

Toward the end of the first chapter, Provan gives a list of ideal readers of this book. His assessment is accurate, at least from the perspective of his intentions when writing. He mentions there “students who have often heard in the course of their education, ... , about the problematic or dangerous character of the biblical tradition, yet have read enough of the Bible, ... , that they have come to question what they have been taught” (19). I would also add that this book could be helpful for students who thoroughly believe the Old Testament, but only read it through the

lens of the New Testament. Provan addresses these questions using the Old Story on its own terms, and that can be helpful for long-time Christian readers to see the Old Testament afresh.

In typical Provan fashion, he does not disappoint with this volume. The overall goal and audience of the book make it applicable and accessible to a large audience. His insight and philosophical orientation make this more than just a “re-telling” of the Old Story. He has shown how the Old Story *should* fit into the modern stories being told and why the Old Story should be taken seriously even among committed Christians. In the end, this Old Story will be “seriously dangerous” to the critics if followers of Christ would take its message seriously and live as if this Old Story informs our present story. Likewise, a commitment to the Old Testament on its own terms may prove “dangerous” for Christianity in the sense that they become radically committed to the grand narrative God has written and its fulfillment in Christ. Like Frodo and Sam, committed Christians may find themselves in part of a much grander story than they imagined, informing their understanding of the world and heightening their hope that these Scriptures still matter.

Adam J. Howell

Boyce College & Southern Seminary

McDermott, Gerald R. ed. *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity and Judaism* (Studies in Scripture and Biblical Theology). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021, pp. 264, \$29.99.

After the introduction by the editor the volume consists of twelve essays. Here I will briefly summarize the main point of each essay. Mark S. Gignilliat shows how thoroughly the New Testament relied on the Torah, Prophets, and Writings (Old Testament) as its own theological grammar and argues that it would not even exist on its own apart from its connection with the Old Testament. Matthew Thiessen argues that the Synoptic Gospels depict Jesus as Jewish-law observant and using standard legal argumentation to defend his actions. The Jesus of the Gospels did not plan to start a new religion by dishonoring the temple and discounting concerns over ritual impurity and sacred time. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 7:17-20, Acts 15 and 21:17-26, David Rudolph contends that the apostle “Paul lived as a Torah-observant Jew and taught fellow Jews to remain faithful to Jewish law and custom” (p. 40). David M. Moffitt shows how Hebrews correlates Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension with the sequence and logic displayed in Exodus-Leviticus. In that way Hebrews does not mark a decisive break from Jewish roots.

Matthew S. C. Olver argues that sacrifice was one of the most important Jewish influences on early Christian worship, especially with respect to the Eucharist as the central act of worship. Malachi 1:11 was cited frequently by the early church

fathers. Isaac W. Oliver asks when and how the gatherings of Jesus-followers and the synagogues split. No single date can be specified. Various factors fueled the split, including the claims about Jesus of Nazareth, the desire of non-Christian Jewish communities to maintain their status as a minority in the Roman Empire, the growing Gentile character of the church, and the increasing dominance of Rabbinic Judaism in the synagogue. Jewish believers in Jesus became isolated from both church and synagogue. Eugene Korn gives an honest survey of the history of the church and the Jews from Constantine to the Holocaust. He describes how each side has viewed the other in the past and sees promising signs for a more positive relationship in the future. Jennifer M. Rosner focuses on post-Holocaust thinkers: Karl Barth and Thomas Torrance on the Christian side; Franz Rosenzweig, Elliot Wolfson, and Michael Wyschogrod on the Jewish side. She also discusses Mark S. Kinzer's Messianic Jewish theology. They all argue for seeing the two traditions as intertwined and inseparable. Sarah Lebar Hall tells the fascinating history of how Anglicans helped pave the way for the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel.

Mark S. Kinzer discusses how the growing movement of Jewish believers in Jesus functions both to critique the church's past history and to raise fresh possibilities for the church in the present and future to recover her Jewish character. Archbishop Foley Beach emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus and its implications for Christians: exhibiting no anti-Semitism, understanding the Hebrew roots of the faith, valuing the Old Testament, understanding the teachings of Jesus in his first-century Jewish background, desiring to share Jesus with our Jewish friends, and appreciating the great debt we owe to the Jewish people. Finally, Gerald R. McDermott offers perceptive comments on the essays' implications for Christians. He notes that four biblical words need proper definition: "Christ, Jews, Law, and Kingdom."

The essays are impressive, well-written, and well-researched with current secondary literature. Overall I found the volume quite strong and pushing in the right direction. Christianity should not be thought of as a western, Gentile faith even though much of her history looks that way. Our mother church was the Jewish church in Jerusalem. Romans 11 pictures the one people of God as consisting of both "natural and alien branches," and Revelation 7 portrays sons of Israel and Gentiles together praising "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (verse 10). The biblical perspective needs to receive the spotlight.

During the past 70 years there has been much fruitful dialog between thinkers of synagogue and church, and this volume does a good job of bringing the reader up to date. The reader should note two important recent documents from the perspective of the synagogue: "*Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*" and "Orthodox Rabbinic Statement on Christianity."

By way of critique I found the terminology in the essays blurring necessary distinctions. According to the entire New Testament, Jesus fulfills the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. But the claim is not that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Mishna and the

Talmuds or of every Qumran text for that matter. Not all Jewish texts can be placed into the same basket. The essays should have devoted more sustained attention to the definition of “Judaism,” which cannot simply be equated with the tenets of the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.

The essayists did not deal with Jesus’ predictions about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and his mission mandates, both of which meant that Jerusalem’s temple would not remain the central worship site and that followers of Israel’s Messiah would include Gentiles worldwide. This worldwide mission is in keeping with Israel’s prophets and Psalms (e.g. Isaiah 11:10/Romans 15:12). More attention should have been given to the episodes recorded in Acts of synagogues opposing the Jewish apostles. One key debate concerned “the hope of Israel,” the bodily resurrection (Acts 28:20; cf. 23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:6-8).

The volume raises some important questions in my mind. One issue pertains to Jewish believers in Jesus, who have in fact always existed and whose numbers are growing. On the one hand, have churches in the west become so predominantly Gentile as to make it difficult for Jewish followers of Jesus to participate? On the other hand, according to Jesus and his Jewish apostles, must Jewish believers in Jesus obey the Sabbath laws and food laws of the Pentateuch? Another issue focuses on location. Today where do discussions and debates between church and synagogue actually take place that deal with the Torah, Prophets, and Writings? For example, churches today have many scholars of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Jewish apostle Paul expressed his deep love for his kinsmen according to the flesh (Romans 9:2-3). His former teacher Gamaliel expressed openness to what was happening via the Jewish apostles (Acts 5:34-39; cf. 22:3). May the Jewish-Christian conversation grow ever stronger. To further that mutual conversation, I heartily recommend this volume of stimulating essays.

Paul R. Raabe
Grand Canyon University

Feldman, Liane M. *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, pp. 245. 104€, hardback.

Liane Feldman is Assistant Professor at New York University in the Skirball department of Hebrew and Judaic studies. Feldman earned her PhD from the University of Chicago Divinity School in Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East.

In *The Story of Sacrifice* Professor Liane Feldman explores the “literary function” of the priestly ritual materials. Feldman is clear in the introduction that she intends to read and explain these ritual materials “as part of the story”, in conjunction with, not separated from their narrative setting (11-18). Her inquiry is simple: what happens when one assumes that the ritual and narrative texts in the Priestly source were intentionally placed together, and one chooses to read them as literature?

Feldman divides the book into six chapters: Introduction, Moses's Private Audience: The Construction of Space in the Story World (Exod 40–Lev 7), Yahweh's Public Performance: The Creation of a Cult (Lev 8:1–10:7), Inside and Outside: Yahweh's Delineation of Boundaries (Lev 10:8–15:33; Num 7:1–8:4), The Possibility of Decontamination (Lev 16–17), and Conclusion. This review will summarize the book's contents, follow with a critique, and end with recommendations for the reader.

In chapter two Feldman reasonably asserts that the broad narrative concerning the tabernacle is conceptually split into physical labor and ritual labor (35–37). Moses arranges "Yahweh's home" in Exodus 40:17–33 allowing His presence to reside within it (Exodus 40:34). Finally in Leviticus 1:1 Moses begins learning the ritual labor (Lev 1–7) which he applies during the tabernacle's inauguration (Lev 8–10). Feldman rightly claims that the ritual instruction contained in Leviticus 1–7 logically precedes Moses's ritual labor in Leviticus 8–10 because how else could Moses anoint the tabernacle without knowledge of the needed sacrifices (46)?

Her third chapter hones-in specifically on Moses's ritual labor and its importance in maintaining God's presence. Feldman convincingly reasons for her principle of ritual innovation: a principle contrary to what typical (especially confessional) readers of Leviticus (and other priestly materials) might expect. She, along with many others, have observed that the priesthood's installation (Lev 8:1–10:7) strays from the order outlined in Exodus 25–31, 35–40, and Lev 1–7 (68, 79). She clearly maintains that Moses's deep grasp of the sacrificial system described by God up to this point, gives him the tools to innovate when necessary, which in this case, is caused by the priesthood's incomplete anointing. Here Feldman's trustful posture towards the text's author(s) generates immense insight.

Chapters four and five represent a slight change in emphasis. Chapter four is Feldman's most ambitious, arguing that various scenes in Leviticus *and* Numbers occur simultaneously within the story world. She does offer a very attractive reading for Moses and Aaron's disagreement in Leviticus 10:16–20. Again, she appeals to ritual innovation, noting that Aaron, now a fully-fledged priest, can make logical and situational adjustments to the ritual system, whereas Moses cannot because his term as interim priest is over (116–120). Her argumentation for the simultaneity of Numbers 7:1–88 with Leviticus 10:8–20 and Numbers 7:89–8:4 with Leviticus 11:1 is well-received but may not pack the same punch as do her previous insights (123–133). In the fifth chapter Feldman argues for the Day of Atonement's non-performance, instead arguing that Leviticus 16 depicts God *describing* the ritual procedure to Aaron via Moses (155–158). This is comparable to her analysis of Leviticus 1–7, where Moses is simply learning how to administer the sacrifices(s) rather than performing them.

Feldman's work deserves very high praise for many reasons. First, her desire to depict the ritual texts as *legitimate* literature yields immense results (3, 5). She contends that modern assumptions of what constitutes literature incidentally

exchanges the original “implied reader” for the modern one, leading the modern one potentially to misjudge the literary conventions of other cultures and eras (3). Feldman upholds the logic of the text until she is forced to concede that it is garbled, and this work is full of examples of how this presumption of the text’s coherence clarifies otherwise difficult texts. For instance, Feldman makes sense of the odd sacrifice offered by Moses in Exodus 40:29 arguing that through the current plot development, Yahweh’s location in the heavens, Moses’s default status as Yahweh’s intermediary, and the previous uses of this type of offering in the Pentateuch, one can make sense out of this strange sacrifice (36-38). The current author cannot champion this element of Feldman’s work enough.

This leads to a second praise: throughout, Feldman offers a masterclass in close reading. Perhaps the most outstanding display is found in Feldman’s notion of ritual innovation (35–38, 87–94). In chapter three Feldman explains while Aaron’s mixed-form purification ritual is indeed divergent from instructions in Leviticus 4, it is logical and internally coherent per Aaron’s liminal priestly status. Using this principle of ritual innovation, Feldman also makes sense of Nadab and Abihu’s error. The two brothers’ failure originates in rushing to meet God without God’s invitation (41) whereby they innovate beyond the logical boundaries of the ritual system. Feldman’s belief that the ritual system itself demands innovation (35–37) provides a rich springboard for further research.

Third, Feldman, at times working against the history of scholarship, argues convincingly for the Priestly source’s democratization of the cult (48-49, 56–59, 105, 133). Rather than reading Leviticus 1–5 as an instruction manual for priests, Feldman uses the principles of narratology to argue that the implied reader, presumably a lay Israelite, is brought into the private conversation of God and Moses and learns the cultic procedures before the priests themselves (48). Moreover, the Israelite-*laity* become central to the cult itself not only as imaginative implied readers but as the offerors who slaughter their own sacrifices before handing the animals off to the priest (56).

A fourth commendation concerns Feldman’s inclusion of ritual background information to the benefit of those unfamiliar with the Bible’s ritual material. This is most obvious in pages 49–65 where she walks the reader through a typical sacrificial procedure, using the careful explanation itself to argue for the intentional and obvious democratization of the cult.

The current author does have a few very minor critiques. First, with her focus on the narratology of ritual procedures, a test case showing the difference between ancient written ritual and its real-world performance would have greatly benefited the persuasiveness of her argument (5–15). Second, while the author is favorable to Feldman’s translation of אֶכְבֵּד – “I will be present” – they were left desiring a more thorough explanation (104).

For those who are mistrustful of a source-critical-first approach which assumes the unreadability of the Bible, Feldman offers a way forward. Because of her attempt to combine both historical-critical methods and literary approaches, often disconnected in Biblical scholarship, the field will benefit greatly from this book. Her model of ritual innovation alone providing a way to make sense of seeming inconsistencies in the text is worth the purchase alone (5). In a similar vein, her reasonable methodological assumptions do justice to both the academy and faith communities trying to understand the text (25)

With that said, the book, printed by one of the field's most prestigious publishers, is intended primarily for the scholar. However, Feldman's lucid writing and consistently clear explanations makes her work accessible to the diligent student. The careful undergraduate will begin to see just how fragmented Pentateuchal scholarship is, which only underscores Feldman's successful attempt at bridging the gap previously mentioned. The reader will obtain the highest yield from this work if they gain a familiarity with both Leviticus and perhaps Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus published by Fortress Press.

C.J. Gossage

Hebrew-Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion

Bekins, Peter. *Inscriptions from the World of the Bible: A Reader and Introduction to Old Northwest Semitic*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2020, pp 300, \$79.95, hardback.

If you know Biblical Hebrew, then you essentially know ancient Edomite, Moabite, Ammonite, and Phoenician. You can add those to your résumé. They are all basically the same language. The differences among them are rather minor. For example, the direct object marker in Hebrew and Moabite is 't (*aleph-tau*), whereas in Phoenician (and Aramaic) it is 'yt (*aleph-yodh-tau*). A modern analogy might be English spoken in London, New York, Minnesota, and Georgia. Moreover, if you know Biblical Hebrew, then you are well on your way to a knowledge of Aramaic.

We should not think of Biblical Hebrew as a completely unique language all alone, as if it were *per se* a holy language. It was part of the common language spoken throughout the area of ancient Syria and Palestine. It was, you might say, part of the *lingua franca* of that area, much like the Koine Greek of the New Testament in the Greco-Roman world. There is a theological message here. The Creator chose to communicate with his human creatures in an everyday language, the kind of language spoken by everyday people at that time and place. He is not some secretive god with a mysterious code accessible to only a few cognoscenti. He is the transparent God who communicates in human language that is readily understandable.

The linguistic label for this language-group is Old Northwest Semitic. It consists of four major sub-languages: Phoenician, Hebrew, Moabite, and Aramaic.

Book Reviews

Peter Bekins has taught advanced Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitics at Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion. With this textbook he provides a reliable, accessible, and well-organized introduction to old Northwest Semitic. Part I of the volume introduces students to old Northwest Semitic languages and their grammar, including phonology, morphology, and syntax. Part II then offers readings selected from Northwest Semitic inscriptions that date to the time of ancient Israel's monarchy, basically from the time of King David (about the year 1000) to the Babylonian exile (the year 587). For each language Bekins provides the student with the text, explanatory notes on the words, a translation, and a glossary. The languages are: Old Phoenician, Old Hebrew, Moabite, and Old Aramaic. He treats separately texts from Deir Alla (east of the Jordan River north of Ammon and Moab) and the ancient kingdom of Samal (northern Syria) because of their distinctive linguistic features. At the end of the volume he includes a helpful bibliography.

Bekins made good choices with his selection of inscriptions. Each inscription has enough lines that the student can get the feel for the language. Several of the inscriptions have biblical connections. For example, a Hebrew inscription dated about the year 600 found at Ketef Hinnom near Jerusalem repeats the first two lines of the Aaronic benediction. Hebrew inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud in northern Sinai offer a blessing “by Yahweh and by his Asherah” (a goddess), giving evidence of the kind of syncretism condemned by the biblical authors. The Mesha inscription (Moabite Stone) correlates with 2 Kings 3. The Deir Alla inscriptions dated about 800-750 give a prophetic vision by Balaam son of Beor (compare Numbers 22-24). And there are other connections.

I highly recommend this book for students who have had beginning Hebrew. Knowledge of Biblical Aramaic is also helpful. Bekins does a great job of leading students into the fascinating world of inscriptions. The book will enable them to understand Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic in their linguistic context of old Northwest Semitic. As a side benefit, they can then impress their family and friends that they know Moabite.

Paul R. Raabe
Grand Canyon University

Andrew S. Malone. *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017, pp. 230, \$25.00, paperback.

Andrew S. Malone serves as Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Dean of Ridley Online at Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia.

In *God's Mediators*, Malone develops an expositional and synthetic biblical theology of the theme of priesthood, studying both individual and corporate priestly identities and work across the canon so as to “augment and refine our existing knowledge, reinforce or reshape our theological framework, and make us better

expositors of the texts and their consequences for God's holy people" (p. 10). He contends, specifically, that Christians struggle to define priests and priesthood in a manner following the patterns of the biblical witness (pp. 8–9; 186–187). Malone descriptively surveys, therefore, the biblical landscape for individual priests, starting with Aaron's and his sons' mediation at Sinai with an important focus on "the kingdom of priests" found in Exodus 19:5–6 as a royal priesthood (pp. 16–17, 126). His survey of the Aaronic priesthood, ultimately, establishes a baseline to consider implications for 1) Israel's corporate priesthood, 2) Jesus' priesthood, and 3) the nature of the church's corporate priesthood. He labels the Aaronic priesthood by its status of (unearned) holiness (pp. 130–133) that allows for a safe approach to God and mediation to draw others closer to God (pp. 20, 35, 45–46). Thus, Israel's corporate priesthood sets the whole nation as a mediator for those beyond itself (pp. 126–136): a graded and missiological holiness (pp. 20, 45–46, 134–137). Ultimately, the failures of individual priests and the corporate priesthood pave the way for a greater priest (pp. 125–126, 137–144). For Malone, the NT, and especially Hebrews, transforms the OT categories of the Aaronic priesthood to teach "Jesus as our great high priest who facilitates everything foreshadowed in the earthly [OT] cultic system" (p. 114). He posits that both "Jesus' individual priesthood and Christians' corporate priesthood are derived from closely related Old Testament antecedents, *but they are not derived in the same fashion* (p. 184)." Malone argues that the NT transforms the graded holiness of the OT because Jesus' priestly ministry provides an access to God that needs no other priest "to facilitate [further] access" (p. 186), mark[ing] believers as beneficiaries of the altar and sacrifice rather than as contributors to them" (p. 170) Christians' corporate priesthood, therefore, depends on and "respond[s] to God's grace with 'sacrificial' praise and acts of service (p. 172)," not with sacerdotal contributions that forge access to God, leaving the church with a spiritual priesthood that allows the church "to *be* and to *behave* in such a holy – God-worthy manner – fashion that the wider nations are brought to join the worship of the universe's creator (emphasis original) (p. 178)."

In chapter 1, Malone lays out his problem and methodology. His approach to priests and priesthood "invoke[s] the English concept of 'mediator' and/or 'mediation' (p. 9)" in a rather broad sense because the primary thrust of his thesis and analysis is descriptive.

In Part 1, Malone focuses on individual priesthood, beginning with chapter 2's look at the mediation of Aaron and his sons. Malone argues for an Aaronic priesthood whose ministry emphasizes a "[s]afe approach to God in response to the terrifying theophany at the mountain and the Tabernacle's "concentration of God's presence in creation" (p. 18) Even Aaron's clothes mark his status and those of his sons' as closer to God, reflecting a priestly royalty (pp. 24–25) that facilitates holiness (pp. 28–34) and communicates such (p. 38) to forge "successful *reconciliation* of humanity to God (emphasis original)" (p. 38).

Malone, then, in chapter 3 draws the reader to a discussion of the garden of Eden and priests before Sinai. Adam's depiction corresponds to priestly work, even a regal priesthood that anticipates the Aaronic priesthood. He, also, focuses on Melchizedek as a priestly king, showing how these two roles work together (p. 63) before depicting Moses himself as a priest (pp. 65–66).

In chapter 4, Malone tackles individual priesthood in the rest of the Old Testament, beginning with the failures of the golden calf. His broad definition of "priest" ultimately highlights the prophets condemning the Israelite priesthood and promising a restored priesthood of Israelites and foreigners (86–96).

In chapter 5, Malone finishes Part 1 of his study of individual priests by examining new covenant transformation. He asserts that the failed Israelite priesthood continues in NT narrative (97–102). Finding little support for Jesus' depiction as a priest in the gospels, he leans upon Hebrews' confession of Jesus as high priest that uses a combination of comparisons and contrasts, a "*synkrisis* [that] inherently relies upon the unfolding developments found in salvation history and progressive revelation (115)." He further supports Jesus' perfect priesthood in Revelation and in 1 Peter (116–120).

In Part 2, beginning with chapter 6, Malone considers Israel's corporate priesthood as a kingdom of priests so as to draw closer to understanding how the Aaronic priesthood relates to corporate Israel, Jesus, and corporate Christians (125–126). In particular, he focuses on Exodus 19:5–6's "kingdom of priests" to reinforce Israel's holy status for the benefit of the world. Israel's priestly mediation is missiological (134–137). Unfortunately, Israel does not live consistently with its holy status (137–144).

In chapter 7, Malone pivots to the church's priestly commission as a spiritual house with spiritual sacrifices, a principle that he again tethers to Exodus 19:5–6 via 1 Peter 2:9–10. He develops this corporate priesthood as a chosen people from all the nations with a holy and special status before God that grants their role as priests with behaviors consistent with this status (137–153). Turning to Revelation, Malone identifies the church's corporate priesthood as both inaugurated and regal, ministering so that the nations may worship God (161–163). Hebrews regards the church as beneficiaries of Jesus' priesthood (164–170), approaching God to walk in spiritual sacrifices of "praise and acts of service (172)."

Malone concludes his work in chapter 8 with final reflections that draw out biblical implications for how individual and corporate priesthoods work "under the old covenant and after new-covenant transformation (182)." He extends these insights into ecclesiological and missiological components that challenge churches to walk in its assigned priesthood.

Malone succeeds in defending his descriptive-focused thesis. His examination of priesthood connects categories across the two canons and provides consistent and sufficient evidence for the patterns described. Pastors and scholars will strengthen

their understanding of the church's dependence on Jesus' priesthood and the corresponding call to walk in a missiological mediation through this book. Also, this volume prepares for more detailed and more prescriptive examinations of its data. It offers clearly aligned relationships of priesthoods, but its study proves a mere starting point, being embedded with unanswered questions beyond this volume's scope. Thus, its greatest weakness in the limiting of its scope that made the study useful on so many levels also leaves readers with a desire to resolve these same questions. Such answers will hopefully stem from other works that will draw from this resource that will enable churches and denominations to examine their own understandings of priesthood in light of the whole biblical corpus.

Peter Link, Jr.
Charleston Southern University

Muraoka, Takamitsu. *Why Read the Bible in the Original Languages?* Leuven: Peeters, 2020, pp 106, \$24.00, paperback.

Takamitsu Muraoka received a PhD from Hebrew University in 1970 and has served as a lecturer on Semitic languages at Manchester University, professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Melbourne University, and chair of Hebrew, Israelite Antiquities, and Ugaritic at Leiden University. Since his retirement in 2003 he has continued to publish in Semitic and Septuagint studies as well as teach biblical languages and the Septuagint in Asian countries. In 2017 he received the Burkitt Medal for Hebrew Bible studies from the British Academy.

In *Why Read the Bible in the Original Languages*, Dr. Muraoka seeks to convince readers that when the Bible is read in its original languages "it can be interpreted and analyzed better or differently than when it is read in this or that modern translation" (7). He introduces the work by sharing his passion for the languages through a brief autobiography. He then outlines two general principles concerning the value of the biblical languages: (a) there are certain aspects of language (such as poetic devices) that can only be seen in the original language, (b) and reading the original language makes one aware of possible alternate interpretations (16). In the rest of the book Muraoka shares insights from Hebrew (chapter 1), Greek (chapter 2), and Aramaic (chapter 3). He concludes with a final chapter on the Septuagint (chapter 4), advocating for its value as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments.

Through many examples Muraoka succeeds in demonstrating a key way the original languages aid biblical interpretation: one can see the biblical author's emphasis. He notes that since all three biblical languages have the subject of a verb built into its ending, explicit pronouns and repeated references to the subject are unnecessary and therefore indicate focus. One example he gives is the repeated use of *David* with multiple verbs in 2 Samuel 12:19 to slow down the narrative and highlight David's response to the death of his child (30). Muraoka also notes that

Greek and Hebrew word order, being more flexible than English, often highlights certain ideas or characters. For example, Genesis 22:1 states: “After these things, God tested Abraham,” but the placement of “God” before “tested” is not the expected word order for Hebrew narrative and Muraoka explains that the author is zooming in on God and the surprising event of Him testing a human (25-26). Other aspects of emphasis Muraoka highlights include the use of repetition and the significance of the definite article.

Muraoka also explains important ways the verbal systems of the biblical languages differ from common languages today. He explains that Hebrew verbs have specific endings to indicate the gender of the subject of the verb. This gender correspondence often helps identify the subject of the verb when it could otherwise be ambiguous, such as the various speakers in Song of Solomon (35-36). Most of the chapter on Greek is devoted to the issue of verbal aspect (kind of action). Holding to a tri-aspectual system, he explains the present aspect as portraying continuous action, perfect aspect as portraying an action that has already been completed, and aorist aspect as referring to the action in general without reference to its ongoing or completed nature (72). To demonstrate insights available from aspect he notes that the woman in Luke 7:38 was continually kissing and wiping Jesus’s feet since the verbs are in the present aspect. But when Jesus confronts Simon in verse 45, He highlights the action of kissing in the present aspect while describing the other actions with the aorist aspect. Muraoka also shows how Jesus is not teaching that the woman is forgiven because of what she is doing, but that her sins had already been forgiven (perfect aspect) and her present actions were a demonstration of gratitude for that forgiveness (73-75).

Acknowledging that Aramaic and the Septuagint are likely unfamiliar to the average reader, Muraoka begins chapters three and four with their respective histories to demonstrate the value of studying each discipline. These introductions highlight the complex linguistic milieu behind the Bible and encourage readers to consider the impact of this milieu on our understanding of scripture. He makes a great case for the importance of these two subjects, but the examples used in these chapters do not measure up to the breadth of examples provided for Hebrew.

While this work is primarily for beginning readers, Muraoka expresses his hope that more advanced readers will also benefit from the insights he offers (7). One such insight concerns Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38. Muraoka notes that many translations state Tamar became pregnant ‘from him’ in 38:18 (23). However, he argues that the Hebrew preposition used here (*lamed*) never means ‘from’ and that Genesis 38:18 should be translated: “she became pregnant for his best interests.” This alternate interpretation, Muraoka argues, paints Tamar as faithfully trying to preserve the promise of offspring given by God to Abraham, an interpretation possibly strengthened by the positive description of Tamar later in scripture (Ruth 4:12, Matthew 1:3). While this interpretation may or may not be correct (Muraoka

does not comment on the same preposition in 38:24 where it indicates that Tamar became pregnant *by* prostitution), it certainly highlights Muraoka's thesis of various possible interpretations made possible by the original language.

One weakness of this work is its inconsistent organization. There are several sections and paragraphs that appear out of place. One section in the chapter on Aramaic relates more to translation issues in general and not to insights drawn from Aramaic. Muraoka also includes an insightful section on the Greek words for love and a Japanese politician-soldier who adopted the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40) as his life motto. This section, however, seems out of place in the chapter on the Septuagint and might fit better in the chapter on general Greek. There are also several sections where the flow of an example is interrupted by a different idea making it hard to follow Muraoka's point. These sections would benefit from rearranging and updating so that the insights could be more fully appreciated.

This is a great book for anyone considering investing the time to learn the original languages of scripture. Through this book the reader will become well acquainted with the kinds of insights reading the Bible in its original language can offer. Since Muraoka wrote this book for readers who have no knowledge of the biblical languages (7), he does not use any Hebrew or Greek letters and only rarely refers to specific words in the original languages. Instead, he communicates his points through English translations and explanation. He also avoids many technical grammatical terms unfamiliar to the average reader, and thoroughly explains terms he does include. While this book certainly contains many valuable insights into scripture, readers who have some familiarity with the biblical languages will find more a more thorough overview of potential insights in *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek*, and *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew*.

Daniel Graham
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Naselli, Andrew David. *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020, pp. 160, \$15.99, paperback.

Andrew David Naselli (PhD theology, Bob Jones University and PhD New Testament exegesis and theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of systematic theology and New Testament for Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, MN, administrator for the evangelical theological journal *Themelios*, and one of the pastors of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis. Naselli's *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer* is an entry in the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series (SSBT) from Crossway Publishers (edited by Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt). The studies are short because of the series purpose "to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers" (11).

Naselli's preface begins with a statement of presuppositions consonant with the SSBT purpose and the evangelical confessional stance of the publisher: (1) the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture; (2) the necessity of a "whole-Bible canonical approach" to biblical interpretation; and (3) the conviction that "the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ" (13-14). Naselli's "biblical theology of snakes and dragons" (13) aims to contribute to the goal of the series by demonstrating that his colleague Joe Rigney's "pithy way to summarize the Bible's storyline" is accurate: "Kill the dragon, get the girl!" (15, 17). Though the "serpent theme" might be relatively unfamiliar to the average believer, Naselli argues that it "is a prominent theme at the Bible's bookends . . . *and in between*" (33, emphasis added). The serpent of Genesis 3 and the dragon of Revelation 12 are not coincidental, as most readers will recognize, but neither are they marginal, as some may suspect. In other words, the Scriptures, studied canonically, present a unified dragon-slaying story.

After a brief preface, Naselli's introduction provides several paradigms for understanding Scripture as a dragon-slaying story. Satan is the "serpent" (villain), God's people are the "damsel in distress," and Jesus is the "serpent slayer" (hero) (18). Naselli includes both "snakes" and "dragons" under the "umbrella term" of "serpents." However, these are not mere synonyms; Naselli argues that the two categories of "snakes" and "dragons" represent "two major strategies" of Satan, *the Serpent*: "Snakes deceive [tempt, lie, backstab]; dragons devour [attack, murder, assault]" (18).

With the stage set to view Scripture as a dragon-slaying story, Naselli offers four chapters and a conclusion, followed by an appendix. True to his purpose (33), Naselli's chapters examine the serpent theme "at the Bible's bookends" (chs. 1 and 4) "and in between" (chs. 2 and 3). The first chapter focuses on the first "bookend" in Gen 3. Satan, through the talking snake (46-47), deceives Eve, Adam follows, the couple is banished from the garden, and the battle is on: "The rest of the Bible's storyline traces the ongoing battle between the snake's offspring and the woman's offspring" (40).

The middle chapters survey this battle "between the Bible's bookends." In the second chapter, Naselli explains that, though serpents and serpent symbolism occasionally represent the "positive quality" of shrewdness (50-51), they are "overwhelmingly negative in the Bible" (51). They primarily symbolize God's enemies, ultimately Satan, "*the serpent that energizes other serpents [i.e., enemies of God and His people] to craftily deceive and devour people*" (54, emphasis original). The third chapter is a diachronic survey of six "categories of the serpent's offspring" in the Bible's symbolism (69). The exodus was a victory over Egypt's serpent-worshipping Pharaoh (69-82). The "wicked leaders" of Canaan and Moab (like scale-wearing Goliath) were "serpent heads to crush" (82-91) Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians were "sea monsters" and "serpents" (92-93). Though there is no

explicit ‘serpentine’ language applied to Herod by Scripture, “Satan the murderous dragon energizes” him as he follows Pharaoh’s path of killing children (93-95). The Pharisees are a “brood of vipers” who “first *tempt* Jesus [like snakes]... and finally resort to *murdering* Jesus [like dragons]” (95-97), followed by other “deceitful” false teachers compared to Satan in the NT (97-103).

The fourth chapter examines Satan’s work as “the devouring dragon” at the Bible’s latter “bookend,” Revelation. The dragon is a “deceiver” (Rev 12:9) and a devourer (Rev 12:4), but he is defeated by Christ, “the ultimate serpent crusher” who “decisively crushed the dragon by being ‘*crushed* for our iniquities” (111, emphasis original). Because of the “*already but not yet*” nature of God’s Kingdom, Naselli argues, the dragon-slaying story will nevertheless continue until Christ’s return (115).

Naselli concludes with six ways to apply Scripture’s dragon-slaying story in the Christian life. Naselli exhorts believers not to imitate the serpent by “killing unborn babies” (like Pharaoh and Herod killed newborns), “embracing the prosperity gospel,” or “slandering people” (123-24). They ought not believe Satan’s lying temptations to sin (125-26), but rather they ought to fight him by “feel[ing] disgust at his poison” (129). They ought to “exult in the serpent slayer” (129-30), “enjoy good serpent slaying stories ... that make [them] love what God loves and hate what God hates” (130), and “trust the serpent slayer ... when the serpent is persecuting [them]” (131). Besides substantive indices, Naselli includes an appendix of 11 Hebrew and 5 Greek words naming serpents, their definitions in HALOT and BDAG, respectively, and their occurrences broken down by book and chapter.

Naselli’s work is short without being shallow and full without being dense, serving its purpose and its target audience. Any thoughtful Christian reader should find Naselli’s illustrations and applications meaningful (like the six applications in the conclusion) and his more technical explanations (like the brief discussion of millennial views on p. 120) sufficiently understandable. Some readers may wish for elaboration at points (e.g., the relationship between commendable ‘shrewdness’ and damnable ‘deception’) or question the value of some sections (e.g., an overview of “six of the most popular dragon-slaying stories in English literature” [19]). In a work of this size and scope, however, Naselli has set a high standard of excellence for an introductory ‘theme-tracing’ biblical theology book, a prolific category at present.

Those with an academic interest in the book’s topic or the broader field of biblical theology may be pleasantly surprised at the value of Naselli’s short work as a useful starting point for research (especially through footnotes, the appendix, and the indices). In contrast to James Charlesworth, whose “744-page tome” takes Scripture’s serpent symbolism as “primarily *positive*” (14, emphasis original), Naselli sees serpent symbolism as primarily *negative* in Scripture, including in John 3:14 (14). Following John Currid, Naselli takes the “pole” on which Moses’ bronze serpent was placed as a “military standard,” signifying Yahweh’s victory over Egypt (76). Along these lines, Naselli suggests that “it is possible that Moses depicted [the

serpent] as *impaled* on a military standard,” corresponding to Christ’s death on the cross as a representative of sin (77, emphasis original). This negative view of serpent imagery aids Naselli’s take on Scripture as a unified dragon-*slaying* story with a primary antagonist. Though brief, broad works of biblical theology must by necessity take some points for granted and assume some arguments, Naselli effectively demonstrates the potential of these works to undergird more narrow arguments and make valuable suggestions for further scholarship.

Travis Montgomery
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Merkle, Benjamin L. *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019, pp. 163, \$14.19, paperback.

Benjamin Merkle currently serves as professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, a position he has held since 2008. He also serves as the editor of the *Southeastern Theological Review* and series editor of the *40 Questions* series. In the area of biblical Greek, Merkle has co-authored *Beginning with New Testament Greek* (B&H, 2020), an elementary Greek grammar, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek, Revised Edition* (B&H, 2020), an intermediate Greek grammar, and *Greek for Life* (Baker, 2017), a guide for refreshing Greek.

In *Exegetical Gems*, Merkle offers motivation for students learning or re-learning biblical Greek. Covering various debated passages in scripture, he provides thirty-five ‘exegetical gems,’ which are “substantial insights from NT passages gained by a proper knowledge and use of Greek” (vii). This volume also provides a brief review of Greek syntax normally covered in a second semester/year Greek course. Each chapter covers a different area of Greek syntax and is broken into three sections: (1) an introduction which presents a verse or passage to be interpreted; (2) an overview of the point of Greek syntax, framed towards interpreting the passage, and (3) an interpretation of the given passage utilizing the relevant syntactical concept and offering a solution to the exegetical question.

Merkle presents the areas of Greek syntax in the same order as his intermediate grammar *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*. The first two chapters cover changes in Greek during the Koine period and textual criticism. Chapters three through eleven cover nouns, adjectives, and the article (as well as Colwell’s Canon and the Granville Sharp rule). Verbs, participles, and infinitives are then covered in chapters twelve through twenty-four. Pronouns, prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions, and particles are covered in chapters twenty-five through twenty-eight. The book concludes by covering an assortment of topics, including conditional sentences (chapter 29), figures of speech (chapter 30), context (chapter 31), word studies

(chapter 32), exegetical fallacies (chapter 33), discourse analysis (chapter 34), and diagramming (chapter 35).

The purpose of *Exegetical Gems* is to help “students of New Testament Greek prosper and ultimately succeed in using Greek” (vii). Merkle recognizes that students do not persevere in the study of Greek because they do not see it as valuable. Although he acknowledges that “knowledge of NT Greek does not answer every exegetical or theological question” (vii), Merkle does assert that a proper understanding of Greek makes a significant difference in the interpretation of debated passages. His goal in this book, then, is to provide an accessible demonstration of the value knowing Greek adds to the student of scripture.

One of the strengths of this volume that best aids its purpose is its brevity. The student unsure of the value of a subject will not invest too much time into learning it, so Merkle kept this volume short to overcome the inertia inherent in starting a massive book. Each chapter is only three to five pages long, and syntactical concepts are helpfully bulleted for clarity. A drawback to this brevity, however, is that helpful explanation must be cut from the chapters, potentially confusing the unfamiliar reader. Merkle seeks to combat this drawback by thoroughly footnoting the chapters to provide resources for further study. However, the brevity required by the purpose of *Exegetical Gems* precludes it from being a stand-alone introduction, and Merkle rightly notes that it should be read by someone already familiar with Greek syntax or alongside a more thorough textbook (ix).

Throughout the book, Merkle promotes understanding Greek as one would any language and combats common abuses of interpretation. He consistently affirms the important role context plays in understanding language, noting that the interpretation of a passage does not hang on one syntactical factor but is informed by the broader syntactical and theological context. He also asserts that each syntactical category does not represent what that part of speech means but represents one way a speaker/writer can use that part of speech given the lexical, grammatical, and contextual factors (cf. pages 63, 72, and 94). In addition, Merkle notes incorrect interpretations people have made when they do not pay attention to the influence of a word’s meaning (54-56), the specific genre (85-87), or the stylistic preference of an author (153-155). The reader of *Exegetical Gems*, then, should come away understanding Greek as an interconnected system of language and not as a special code to reveal hidden meaning.

Another way Merkle helps students learn to apply Greek is through the inclusion of multiple viewpoints in the interpretation sections. As he interprets the passages, Merkle does not simply present his own position as if it were the only possibility, but he lists other positions on any given issues and includes evidence for the viability of the various positions. This inclusion gives the student practice thinking through the various ways the language can be interpreted and allows the student to weigh various options and come to their own opinion.

While it is a thorough review of Greek syntax, there are aspects missing from *Exegetical Gems*. One grammatical topic missing is a discussion of verbal voice. In his intermediate grammar, Merkle devotes a half chapter to a discussion of the voice system of Greek verbs. However, this is not a topic that he chose to cover in *Exegetical Gems*. The nuance of the middle voice makes it ideal to be included among the topics covered in this book, especially since the middle voice is not used in English. Merkle also does not address current issues of debate in Greek study. He will sometimes include footnote references to different views on a topic but does not inform the reader that this issue, such as aspect, is currently being debated by scholars. It is possible that Merkle did not want to bog a student down with these issues, but he could have strengthened this volume by noting current debates.

Its brief nature and exegetical depth make *Exegetical Gems* an ideal volume for a student struggling with motivation to learn Greek or a former Greek student wanting to dive back into Greek. However, once the student is properly motivated and situated in the Greek language, the benefit of the volume is limited. Merkle does helpfully summarize the syntactical categories, but standard reference grammars do the same thing in more detail. Ultimately *Exegetical Gems* accomplishes the goal Merkle set for it, and it is a helpful tool that fills a pedagogical role not filled by other books. Any person wanting to learn or re-learn Greek would do well to read through this book.

Daniel Graham
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Armstrong, Karl L. *Dating Acts in its Jewish and Greco-Roman Contexts*. LNTS 637. London: T&T Clark, 2021, pp. 229, \$115.00, hardback.

The emergent consensus that Acts was written post-70 CE but pre-90 CE is not much more than “political compromise” says Karl L. Armstrong in *Dating Acts* (p. 3): fraught with methodological and interpretive problems; Armstrong received his PhD (Christian Theology) from McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario Canada, and *Dating Acts* is a revised form of his PhD dissertation there under Dr. Stanley E. Porter. According to Armstrong, the re-asserters of a late (post-100 CE) date for Acts—a growing minority—fare no better than the current consensus, given as they seem to be to ideological literary theories which, while commendably creative, have not come to grips with the powerful traditional arguments for an early date of Acts made in days gone by. In *Dating Acts*, Armstrong demonstrates these assertions and completely re-founds a case for the early date of Acts (à la Rackham) in light of contemporary historiography and linguistics.

Summary: Following his introduction (summarized above), Armstrong offers a chapter on historiographical method (chapter 2) and advances a series of principles which define the procedure of the study: for selecting and interpreting sources,

defining facts and events, and for drawing relevant textual conclusions (pp. 29–33). The proposition to be defended: in light of the relevant evidence, it can be plausibly shown that Acts was written before 64 CE (~ 62–63 CE).

Asking the question as to how one's theory of sources impacts one's view of the date of Acts (chapter three), Armstrong eschews notions that Acts is a pastiche reducible to literary sources and invention, and defends the notion that the author relied on personal memory and eyewitness and written sources; common areas of discussion (the prologue; the "we" passages) are treated here. Armstrong also employs linguistic and text-critical examination of the relevant texts in support of two major source theories which would seem push the date of Acts later: that the author of Acts depended on the Pauline corpus (mentioned below), and/or on the works of Josephus, and finds both wanting (chapter four).

The treatment of the end of Acts is the capital contribution of the monograph and spans much of its content (chapters five through eight). The traditional hypothesis—that the author narrated only what he knew, and thus that key omissions demonstrate that Acts was likely written before the omitted events occurred—is defended with new rigor. In addition to offering a history of interpretation (chapter 5), Armstrong appeals to papyrological and historiographical data to set Acts 28:17–28 in its Jewish historical context (hopefulness is projected with respect to a Jewish response to Paul, consistent with a pre-70 AD date; chapter six), Acts 28:11–31 in its papyrological context (the Western text helps to demonstrate the earliness of the text; chapter seven), and the end of Acts ultimately in its Greco-Roman context (the omission of key socio-political events of Roman history move the date back even more concretely before 64 CE; chapter eight).

Evaluation: A critical point of framing in the methodology of the monograph is that Armstrong demonstrates that any treatment of Acts as ancient historiography demands a treatment of its date—there are too many relevant and important reliably datable events to be ignored (the reign of Nero, the fire in Rome, the death of Paul, the Jewish war, the destruction of the temple). At the same time Armstrong also demonstrates that those looking to examine the date of Acts must do so informed not only by ancient history, but also by contemporary historiography (pp. 23–9). This is commendable, yet those familiar with the field might wish that there was more explicit interaction with particular historiographical methods or models: for example, are there particular historical methods, or considerations of historical epistemology, which would further aid the case? It is implied throughout but not made explicit here.

With respect to source-critical issues, it is commendable that Armstrong interacts primarily with the classic work of Jacques Dupont (but also especially Cadbury) and in so doing shows that some important insights of Dupont have not been properly emphasized (pp. 69–73). It builds confidence in the reader that the author is not merely relying upon secondary literature (in this case, *of* secondary literature) but is dealing with his sources themselves. In an over-saturated field, the

solution is perhaps not to rely on this or that summative work, but to identify key and classic works and to be well-familiar with them.

As regards the specific source-critical issues of the author's dependency on the Pauline corpus and/or Josephus, while it is noted that the latter view is more determinative for dating Acts, the options available on the Pauline-dependency thesis could have been spelled out in greater detail since in theory there could have been dependence on an *early* letter collection (thus not demanding a late-date). Admittedly, however, this would have meant an *excursus* on the whole topic of Paul as a letter-writer and of the Pauline letter collection.

As regards the monograph's major contribution, it is praiseworthy that Armstrong devotes a chapter to a history of interpretation. This is in keeping with good historiography (and is a tacit consensus amongst pre-modern, modern, and post-modern historians/philosophers of history), as one cannot situate oneself properly with respect to a historical interpretation of a matter if one does not consider how that matter has come down to the present in the published literature of historians. This sets the stage for the major contribution, and if this historiographical point was spelled out explicitly (even touched upon in the methodology chapter) there would have been a sense of even greater coherence when arriving at this chapter.

Also as regards the major undercurrent of argumentation in chapters six through eight, the reasoning throughout could have been made stronger by appeal to the philosophical/historiographical literature as to just how strong certain formulations of *argumentum ex silentio* can be. For example, it could be asserted (as some have) that other ancient authors (like Thucydides) do not conclude events ostensibly important to them (like the Peloponnesian war) even while they know the outcome. Armstrong considers such points made by middle-position scholars (i.e., those who date Acts post-70 but pre-90 CE), and he does mention the argument from silence (p. 114 and n. 17), but as it is the main counter-argument to his primary contribution there could have been more *explicit* appeal to philosophical and logical reasoning here (see for example Timothy McGrew, "The Argument from Silence" *Acta Analytica* 29 [2014] 215–28). However, this is clearly implicit and the data marshalled is compelling.

Considerations: Armstrong's chapter two will be a particular benefit to read because of its treatment of contemporary historiography. A course is (briefly) charted through the conflicting seas of hard-empiricist historiography and poststructuralist historiography, and the benefit here concerns how these theoretical considerations in the philosophy of history can aid in the outline of an approach and model for defining, selecting, and interpreting evidence. In this light, those who want to see how a project informed by historiography (and especially attentive to issues of language and text) can be undertaken for New Testament studies will benefit.

Those interested in examining the evidence for an early date of Acts (or defending this position) will be greatly helped by the volume. Armstrong is invariably fair to his sources and demonstrates the claims he makes with the kind of varied evidence

one expects of a New Testament scholar. In one sense, a sub-highlight of the book is something of the exposé it offers of consensus position.

Ultimately, *Dating Acts* is a learned shot-across-the-bow with respect to the middling consensus and the more radical emerging minority of late-daters; none dare ignore it.

Nathan Nadeau
McMaster Divinity College

Allen, Michael, and R. David Nelson, eds. *A Companion to the Theology of John Webster*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021, 366 pages, \$50.00, hardcover.

John Webster (d. 2016) is celebrated as one of the greatest English-speaking systematic theologians of his generation. This *Companion*, introduced by the publisher as “[a]n overview and analysis of John Webster’s seminal contributions to Christian theology” (dust jacket) is both a handbook for readers of Webster himself, and a set of gently critical interactions with Webster’s theology which lay down paths for potential future theological work in Webster’s wake. The editors (who, between them, also contribute a preface, four chapters, and an epilogue) have assembled a highly qualified group of contributors made up largely of Webster’s former academic colleagues and students.

The *Companion* consists of seventeen chapters, plus a foreword by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and an epilogue by R. David Nelson. There is also a useful bibliography of published works by Webster, which brings up to date the list that previously appeared in Webster’s 2015 Festschrift, *Theological Theology*. (This list is still incomplete, lacking the important chapter by Webster, “The Service of the Word: Theological Reflections” in the 1997 co-authored booklet, *What Happened to Morning Prayer?*, although this work is mentioned on p. 260, n. 46.)

Three of the chapters are revisions or reprints of previous publications: Ivor Davidson’s biographical and personal tribute (chapter 1), and two of the three essays by Michael Allen, on “Theological Theology: Webster’s Theological Project” (chapter 2) and “Anthropology” (chapter 12): all the rest are original chapters for this volume. The *Companion* is in two parts. Part I is on “Webster’s Theological Development”, and contains the aforementioned chapter by Allen on “Webster’s Theological Project”, “Webster on Eberhard Jüngel” (R. David Nelson), “Webster on Karl Barth” (Kenneth Oakes), “Webster on the Theology of the University” (Martin Westerholm), and “Webster’s Theological Exegesis of Christian Scripture” (Matthew Levering). Part II, “John Webster on the Theological Topics”, includes chapters on “Scripture” (Darren Sarisky), “Reason” (Michael Allen), “The Triune God” (Fred Sanders), “The Perfection of God” (Christopher R. J. Holmes), “Creation” (Justin Stratis), “Anthropology” (Michael Allen), “Jesus Christ” (Katherine Sonderegger),

“Salvation” (Ivor Davidson), “The Church” (Joseph L. Mangina), “Metaphysics” (Tyler R. Wittman), and “Ethics” (Paul T. Nimmo). The book is helpfully structured so that many of the chapters in Part II reflect on diachronic developments, following the broad outlines of that development charted in Part I. For example, one of the finest short summaries of Webster’s well-documented turn from the influence of Barth towards Aquinas in his later work comes in Christopher Holmes’ chapter in Part II (p. 168).

This book will serve a variety of audiences well. For the reader who comes to the *Companion* with little or no previous experience of reading Webster himself, it should be both a useful orientation and a spur to read Webster’s own work. A number of the chapters reflect such heavy influence of Websterian turn of phrase that they begin at times to read like Webster himself rather than as commentary or critique. Readers new to Webster are thus primed to expect certain emphases and not to be caught off guard by Webster’s particular style and approach. While, on the one hand, new readers should anticipate the bracing experience of encountering “earnest and conspicuous notes of joy” (p. xix) in Webster’s theology, there may also be challenges since, for example, “[r]eading Webster is like going back in time” (p. 183), a nod to his Protestant-inflected *ressourcement*. Contributors are therefore at pains to help us read Webster *rightly*, so that we avoid “apprais[ing] his work in lopsided or eagerly schematic fashion” (p. 17). A further aim is that (as Webster himself desired) we might be led from reading Webster himself to reading his primary sources—Holy Scripture and the great texts of the Christian tradition. Above all, a repeated theme in the *Companion* is that reading Webster ought to lead us to the contemplation of God himself and to growth in our discipleship as creatures called into fellowship with God by his grace.

As indicated above, a particular practical help to new readers of Webster is Part I’s focus on theological development. This serves as an invaluable guide to “locating” Webster’s writings in the appropriate stage of his career. For example, the recently published *The Culture of Theology* (2019) is actually a re-publication of a lecture series that Webster gave in 1998. These lectures are significantly different, both formally and materially, from Webster’s later work, such as the essays in the two volumes of *God Without Measure* (2015). An appreciation of context and development is essential to correctly interpreting Webster in this case. At the same time, some contributors note that we should also focus on the “profound continuities” that might be eclipsed by an over-zealous periodization of Webster’s theology (p. 140). This is a helpful corrective.

Some of the chapters in the *Companion* are easier than others to approach without prior knowledge, whether of Webster himself or of particular doctrinal or philosophical areas of interest. For example, this reviewer found Wittman’s chapter on “Metaphysics” one of the most challenging in the book, doubtless partly due to a lack of specifically philosophical training. Along these lines, it might have been helpful

to offer a suggested order for reading Webster suited to new readers. That is because Webster's own *oeuvre* ranges from the relatively easy to access (such as his sermons or the monographs *Holy Scripture* and *Holiness*) to his comparatively complex interpretive work on Jüngel and Barth (which demands some familiarity with these theologians) and other pieces that require a more robust philosophical apparatus.

The student who is already basically conversant with Webster's theology will also find much of great interest and enjoyment in these chapters, not least repeated encouragement to go beyond a "basic" Webster canon of his collected essays collections and the monographs mentioned above to include his published sermons and other, less celebrated, essays or even audio recordings. While most of the chapters in the *Companion* follow what have already become well-worn lines in Webster interpretation, some are distinctly fresh. In this latter category are Matthew Levering's fascinating piece on "Webster's Theological Exegesis of Christian Scripture". This chapter is almost an apologetic directed towards the criticism often levelled at Webster that, despite his own exhortations to the contrary, he did not spend enough time on actual biblical exegesis. The chapter contains an analysis of Webster's use of Scripture in *Holiness*, and concludes that there is a significant "cumulative impact" of Webster's biblical citation which amounts to a more important exegetical contribution than that for which he is often given credit (p. 111). Doubtless debate in respect of this question will continue, but Levering has certainly offered us an intriguing case.

The other truly "fresh" chapter in this volume is the epilogue by R. David Nelson, entitled "Course Charted but Not Taken". This 18-page finalé is as significant as any of the others chapters in the book, not least because it makes available in published form for the first time sections of Webster's own proposal for his *Systematic Theology*, a projected 5-volume work which was never realized due to his untimely death. Nelson's own personal and professional investment in this project means he is clearly the best person to situate and explicate this proposal. It is regrettable that we will likely not see the multiple drafts of Webster's first volume, but Nelson's epilogue goes some way to helping us understand the contours of the entire project as it might have materialized.

Indeed, it is a common feature of many of the chapters in the *Companion* that they leave readers with a variety of "courses charted but not taken" by John Webster, and the encouragement to pursue some yet unresolved questions or to take up Websterian resources in our theological labors. For example, Michael Allen argues that we need to "move beyond Webster" even as we learn from him in our account of human creatureliness (p. 145). Not many of the chapters offer sustained criticism, but there are exceptions, even when the authors are broadly positive in their evaluation. For example, Darren Sarisky observes rightly that the "lingering challenge of dualism" remains in Webster's doctrine of Scripture (p. 130). In Webster's bibliography, "the description of Jesus in relation to the creaturely realm

makes it appear that the mundane features of the [biblical] text can be of no more than marginal pertinence to how it communicates”: as Sarisky concludes, “this is a real problem” (p. 129). Another significant example of criticism (albeit framed with the reticence of the subjunctive mood!) is found at the end of Paul T. Nimmo’s excellent chapter on “Ethics”. While most of the contributors to this book seem to stand with the later Webster in his commitments to beginning theological science with God *a se*, and rejecting a Christologically-defined doctrine of God, Nimmo is one Webster interpreter who has registered unease with the latter’s move from a Barthian to a more “scholastic mode of thinking” in the final phase of his career (p. 296). For Nimmo, the later Webster (at least possibly) “precludes allowing the person of Jesus Christ to be sufficiently determinative of the understanding of God and of human beings; [...] risks eliding a more dynamic and more historic perspective of what it means to be human; and [...] inclines towards an understanding of grace as reified and tenable in a way that fails to attend to the full depths of human sin” (p. 296). The irony for Nimmo is that these are precisely the sorts of concerns that Webster himself registered at an earlier stage of his career, but in respect of which his anxieties appear to have abated over time. These are central theological issues, and it is likely that the debates they inspire will continue to be a focus of Webster studies in the future.

It is to the future, then, that the *Companion* points us. How will study of John Webster’s theology develop, and what will be the potential fruits of such study? As Vanhoozer quips in his Foreword, “[t]his handbook, published so soon after [Webster’s] passing, is probably as close as Protestants come to canonization” (p. xiii)! There is a half-truth here. It is only five years since Webster’s death, and one senses that most secondary reflection on his legacy continues to be written in almost hushed tones by those who knew him personally. There is nothing wrong with that: Webster was a theological luminary and those who enjoyed his light are right to reflect well on a superlative teacher, mentor, and friend. But a future generation of Webster readers and students, perhaps one step removed from the man himself, may feel freer to interact with Webster’s theology from a more critical perspective, while still cultivating the humility and teachableness to learn from Webster’s example.

John Webster is perhaps not as well-known as he might have been. This may be a consequence of his personal humility (a feature of his character remarked upon by several contributors). But it is incumbent on students of theology to make Webster’s acquaintance, not least because of his widening influence through his many former students around the world. This *Companion* would be a great place to begin, in order to “situate” Webster and begin to interact with his theology. In addition, reading John Webster opens up a promising way to learn from and engage with the broader tradition of western, Reformed, evangelical theology. (Webster himself expressed his intention to write “evangelical” theology, and he is often known as an evangelical theologian. But as he pointed out in the proposal for his *Systematic Theology*, Webster intended “the German sense of *evangelisch* rather than the more restricted North

American sense of a particular blend of modern Protestant developments” [p. 300].) Finally, reading John Webster is a bracing experience because of his principal subject matter: the eternal and replete Triune God who, of his overflowing love, creates, restores, and perfects creatures for everlasting fellowship with himself.

Richard Brash
Christ Bible Seminary, Nagoya, Japan

Tipson, Baird. *Inward Baptism: The Theological Origins of Evangelicalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, hardcover, \$79.

It is safe to say that within the conservative Protestantism of the last hundred years, there has been no common understanding of the relation in which the modern movement stands to earlier Protestantism. In the Victorian era, conservative Protestants saw things differently. With a sense of urgency provided by a resurgent Papacy bent on re-exerting international influence and by movements within Protestantism, such as the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement – which aimed at the re-Romanization of Anglicanism, Protestant historians tended to maximize the continuity of Protestant movements from one era to the next. Born in the age of Reformation, Protestantism was understood to have been reinvigorated in the age of Puritans and Pietists and enlivened in the era of transatlantic awakenings, but still been a constant.

This broad-brush approach was in need of refinement and it has come about, beginning with the 1988 release of David W. Bebbington’s *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. While chiefly about developments within the United Kingdom, Bebbington’s work suggested elements of discontinuity between the transatlantic and trans-denominational evangelical movements arising in the 1730’s and what had gone before. Meanwhile, a modern resurgence of evangelical Calvinism has had the unforeseen effect of pitting various streams of that movement at odds with one another—some extolling the Reformation age, some the Puritan era, some the period of eighteenth-century awakening as definitive. By any of these analyses, we are very far from the Victorian view of an almost-seamless Protestant heritage. To add further to the mix, we now witness the over-association of the very term “evangelical” with right-wing religious and political causes so that the term has fallen into discredit.

It is the very great strength of Baird Tipson’s *Inward Baptism* that—while fully allowing that momentous developments occurred disrupting the flow of a common Protestant history (none more so than the English Civil Wars, followed by an Interregnum, Restoration of Monarchy and re-imposition of religious unity)—he maintains that there have also been constant themes and commonalities bridging the eras of upheaval. Tipson has adroitly demonstrated this commonality by tracing—across five hundred years—pastoral attempts to ensure that the balm of the gospel was both appropriated and suitably internalized by persons ready to confess their sins. Of course, the half-millennium he surveys (pre-Reformation Europe through

the eighteenth century) shows upheavals and discontinuities. But throughout, there was an unvarying pastoral quest to lead those hoping for forgiveness through Christ's passion into some confidence that what they sought had indeed become theirs.

The pre-Reformation penitential system, (chap. I) presupposed confession of sin to a priest, who—if satisfied as to the penitent's sincerity—would pronounce an absolution of guilt. But the absolution of guilt presupposed that the one confessing would be ready to carry out a prescribed penitential activity (a pilgrimage, a donation) which would demonstrate change of heart. To have done this, was to do "what was within one's power" (implying exertion). But all sins were not necessarily confessed and all prescribed penitential acts were not carried out. Purgatory loomed for those passing from this life with unfinished business. But indulgences, available for purchase, assured those who purchased them that through the application of the surplus merits of deceased saints, their own imperfect acts of penitence would be properly augmented. On this plan, the certainty of salvation applied to the individual was contingent on the gestures and imperfect aspirations of that person.

Martin Luther upended this apple cart (chap. II) through his preaching of salvation by faith in Christ alone. Not the aspirations of the sinner after holiness, not the auricular confession of the individual, certainly not the lent merits of departed saints, but faith in Christ was now determinative of who could be counted among the ranks of the redeemed. If those confessing their sin with a trust in Christ doubted their standing in grace, the Lutheran reformation directed such persons to the solace of baptism and the Lord's Supper as seals of Christ's provision for them. Lutheran sacraments while not directly communicating grace in the Roman Catholic sense, were still understood to be essential in the appropriation of salvation. The penitent who leaned on these had the assurance he needed.

Not quite so with the Reformed (chap. III). As articulated by Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, at the Colloquy of Montebeliard (1586), an acceptance of divine election qualified the ability of the two sacraments to certify the possession of salvation. The genuineness of a saving faith anchored in the eternal divine purpose could only be displayed by a subsequent pursuit of holiness. This development, carried forward in the Puritanism of William Perkins (chap. IV), emphasized that the reality of regeneration, the "inward baptism", could only be corroborated by subsequent conscientious obedience to the moral law. But an acceptance of this same divine election led others into antinomian reactions in both Old and New England; the Puritan emphasis on conscientious holy living as corroboration of rebirth was denigrated in light of claimed an immediate divine communication certifying acceptance.

A reaction to this excess in both Old and New England (chap V), i.e., moralism, maintained the older Puritan emphasis on the necessity of holy living while downplaying the necessity of spiritual rebirth. All of this leads Tipson to a fresh appraisal of the transatlantic awakening (chap.VI) in which appear both alarming emphases found in the antinomianism of the preceding century (against which

Jonathan Edwards warned) and that theologian's more careful exposition of what constitutes a saving work of the Spirit in a human life.

The reviewer has already typified this work as "adroit". Written at a scholarly distance from today's evangelical movements, its sensitive assessment is nevertheless full of implications for an evangelical Protestantism currently struggling to identify what is its own mainstream and what are its backwaters. It represents a masterful combination of the author's own researches and the best modern scholarship.

Kenneth J. Stewart

Emeritus Professor of Theological Studies, Covenant College

Carter, Craig A. *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021, pp. 352, \$32.99, paperback.

Craig A. Carter currently serves as research professor of theology at Tyndale University in Toronto, Ontario, and he serves also as theologian in residence at Westney Heights Baptist Church in Ajax, Ontario. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of St. Michael's College and has published multiple books within the discipline of theological studies. Carter is both Reformed and Baptist, confessing the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689). The book at hand is the second part of a trilogy that aims to recover important insights from the classical Christian tradition. The first installment was *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis*, which took up the subject of classical theological hermeneutics.

In *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition (CGGT)*, Carter argues that Christians today should be intentional with retrieving and confessing the doctrines of God and the Trinity that were developed by the pro-Nicene patristic fathers along with the hermeneutics and metaphysics they used in so doing. This retrieval is necessary if Christians are to confess the doctrines of God and the Trinity as articulated in the Nicene Creed (pp. 1–11). Carter names this model of God *Trinitarian classical theism* (TCT), and he juxtaposes it with what he terms *relational theism* (RT).

Carter begins with an autobiographical preface wherein he describes how he "changed his mind" over his career as a theologian. While initially intrigued by the theological projects of Stanley Grenz, John Howard Yoder, Colin Gunton, and others, Carter became convinced that these projects could not avoid the pitfalls of revisionist theology, and after much reflection and engagement with the patristic fathers he shifted to the TCT of the "Great Tradition" (GT). After discussing what he sees to be numerous problems with RT, he engages in a polemic for theologians to retrieve the TCT of the GT. He defines *classical theism* (CT) as "the historic orthodox doctrine of God, and it says that God is the simple, immutable, eternal [atemporal], self-existent First Cause of the cosmos. God creates the world and acts on it, but the world cannot

change God in any way” (p. 16). RT, on the other hand, “is a term that we can apply to a number of different doctrines of God, all of which affirm that God changes the world and the world changes God” (p. 16). Examples of RT include theistic personalism, theistic mutualism, open theism, panentheism, pantheism, process theism, polytheism, and social trinitarianism. The problem with RT, he claims, is that they diminish God’s transcendence and overemphasize his imminence.

Carter’s second chapter lays out all the content that he means to communicate with TCT in the form of 25 theses. He helpfully lists all 25 of these theses in summary form in the Appendix (pp. 307–308). In summary, TCT is a doctrine of God that affirms a classical, or Latin, view of the Trinity, as well as the assorted doctrines included in CT. Such is the doctrine of God that is affirmed by all the pro-Nicene fathers and is enshrined in the Nicene Creed. Not only this, but TCT is the result of the proper interpretation of Scripture concerning the doctrine of God. Chapters 3–6 develop the biblical basis for TCT by means of a theological exegesis of Isaiah 40–48. Carter’s three main emphases here are that God is “the transcendent creator,” “the sovereign lord of history,” and “the one who alone is to be worshipped.” The first of these focuses on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (CEN), which claims that God created the cosmos from nothing and requires a high theory of divine transcendence. The second of these focuses on how God acts upon creation and history, moving history towards its destiny in the Kingdom of God. The last emphasis re-focuses on God’s transcendence, claiming that God alone is the Creator and worthy of worship.

In the final three chapters of the book, Carter looks at TCT throughout history by focusing on the biblical nature of TCT and RT’s abandonment of CT and the doctrine of CEN by reverting to “pagan mythology.” He criticizes modern theologians who have insisted that CEN is not a biblical doctrine and is a result of the primitive Christian message being subsumed into the Greek metaphysics assumed by the patristic theologians. He concludes with an Epilogue wherein he discusses why the church does not change its mind on the doctrine of God and why TCT is the orthodox doctrine of God. All versions of RT—explicitly or implicitly—are outside the boundaries of orthodox Christianity.

There are several positive aspects about *CGGT*. First, Carter takes seriously the task of historical theology. Taking his cue from the projects of Lewis Ayres¹, Khaled Anatolios², and Stephen Holmes³, he has serious reservations about the so-called revival of trinitarian theology in the 20th century. More times than not, the 20th century projects were more revised than retrieved with many of these revisions smuggling in foreign metaphysical assumptions. Carter is right to properly

1. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

2. Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

3. Stephen R. Holmes, *The Quest for the Trinity: The Doctrine of God in Scripture, History and Modernity* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012).

understand and locate the patristic fathers in their historical contexts and to consider their metaphysical assumptions. He is also right to demonstrate that TCT was not developed apart from the fathers' commitment to the biblical witness. Carter rightly demonstrates that the patristic fathers' use of Greek philosophy is more nuanced than the Hellenization thesis admits, and that careful study of the patristic sources reveals that the fathers frequently revised Greek philosophy in service to Scripture. He also rightly emphasizes the importance of Christian doctrine for Christian worship, and he rightly emphasizes the creator-creature distinction.

Despite these positive qualities, *CGGT* has numerous problems, the first of which concerns some definitions on which the project hinges. Carter frequently describes RT as denying "transcendence" of God. It is very unclear what he means by "transcendence." Not only this, but it is interesting that Carter insists on using these conceptual terms that were developed by enlightenment thinkers, especially since he spends so much of his book decrying the atrocities that modernism and the enlightenment created for Christian theology. More significant than this, however, is that Carter nowhere provides an actual definition of "transcendence." The following list of propositions *seem* to be included in what he means by the term.

1. God is distinct from and unlike the creation.
2. God cannot be affected by creation in any way.
3. God enjoys aseity.
4. Aseity hinges on the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS).

Carter claims that all versions of RT deny transcendence of God, implying that all variants of RT are guilty of denying some of these propositions. The first problem here is that Carter never defends his view of transcendence; he asserts it as though it were axiomatic. Second, many whom he designates as RTs explicitly affirm transcendence, such as William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, and Richard Swinburne, though they define it differently. Craig and Swinburne have written lengthy treatments on the doctrine of aseity, and all three of these philosophers affirm CEN, a doctrine that necessitates that God exists *a se* and is distinct from creation. Carter seems to think, however, that DDS is necessary to affirm CEN and aseity. This may be, but there are numerous arguments against such a claim in the philosophy-of-religion literature, none of which Carter engages. What Carter has done is setup definitions of the views that he disagrees with, definitions that many of the alleged adherents would deny, and critiques those definitions as though they represent said adherents, which is the straw man fallacy. Carter commits this fallacy numerous times throughout the book. If he is going to hinge as much of his polemic on this idea of "transcendence," then he needs to 1) provide clear and distinguishable definitions of the key terms and concepts,

and 2) faithfully engage the literature that argues explicitly against his position. Otherwise, he will continue to straw man his opponents and not convince his readers.

Another definition that Carter struggles with is “social trinitarianism” (ST). It is worth noting that he never provides an actual definition of ST in the book; rather, he mentions Swinburne’s and Moltmann’s varieties of ST and seems to presume that these are representative of all varieties of ST. For example, because Swinburne and Moltmann emphasize that God is temporal, Carter assumes that every version of ST affirms this, which is demonstrably false. Though he affirms that God is temporal with creation, William Lane Craig affirms that God is atemporal sans creation. Craig also affirms ST, though his is very distinct from Swinburne’s and Moltmann’s. Had God never created, on Craig’s model, then God would exist both as a social trinity and atemporally and would not constitute a variety of RT. This is but another instance of how problematic definitions lead Carter to build up straw men.

Another problem is that Carter never engages those with whom he disagrees. He cites Swinburne, Craig, Plantinga, Bruce Ware, and many others as RTs, but he never engages with their actual arguments. He cites them as examples of RT, reminds his readers of why he thinks RT is unacceptable, and then dismisses them as missing the bar of orthodoxy. To treat fellow scholars in such a manner is uncharitable and unscholarly. If one is going to write off other scholars, especially ones with the distinguished careers as those mentioned, then they owe those scholars the charity and dignity of engaging their arguments, demonstrating which of their premises are false, and demonstrating *why* those premises are false, and Carter does none of these. He insists repeatedly that we need to retrieve TCT, but he never engages with any of the arguments against CT in general. He never tells his readers what the arguments against DDS, immutability, impassability, and atemporality are, and he never explains which of the arguments’ premises are supposedly false. This is consistent with the overall polemic in the book.

There are more issues with *CGGT*, but space only allows for the discussion of one more. Though Carter aims to demonstrate that TCT has its roots in Scripture, much of his exegesis is theologically stretched and he ignores numerous important exegetical voices. For example, he argues that DDS finds its biblical roots in Exodus 3:14, where God reveals himself as “I am who I am.” While this is one plausible translation of the Hebrew, there are others as well, such as “I am who I will be,” which finds support in a lot of contemporary Old Testament scholarship. Carter never engages or mentions these other plausible translations, and he never argues for his preferred translation as a result. A similar negligence occurs in chapters 3–6, where he exegetes Isaiah 40–48. Though he mentions a few contemporary scholars in passing, Carter neglects major important interpreters of Isaiah in these chapters, such as John Goldingay and John Watts. He accuses most contemporary biblical scholars of being beholden to philosophical naturalism, which causes them to misinterpret Scripture. While some contemporary interpreters are guilty of this, it is extreme

to believe that this represents the majority. Goldingay and Watts, for example, are not philosophical naturalists, and they do provide interpretations of Isaiah in its canonical context—which Carter argues for. This canonical hermeneutic may not be their primary exegetical method, but it does play a part in their exegesis. Carter thus continues to straw man his opponents.

Though there are positive aspects of *CGGT*, they are far outweighed by the negative ones. Though Carter has good intentions, his poor definitions, lack of engagement with those with whom he disagrees, and his repeated use of the straw man fallacy make *CGGT* unsuitable for a work of scholarship. This is not to say that Carter is a bad scholar, but that *CGGT* falls short of scholarly standards. I neither would recommend it as an introduction to the doctrine of God or as an important work in the field. Overall, it makes too many errors in scholarship and most of its contents contribute nothing to the ongoing discussions and debates over the doctrine of God. The most original part of the book is its attempt to ground CT in a theological exegesis of Isaiah 40–48, but even here errors abound. For those interested in contemporary articulations of and arguments for CT, I recommend the works of Katherin Rogers, Brian Leftow, James Dolezal, Paul Helm, and John Webster. Carter's *CGGT* has potential, but it is never actualized.

Andrew Hollingsworth
Brewton-Parker College
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Pitkin, Barbara. *Calvin, the Bible, and History: Exegesis and Historical Reflection in the Era of Reform*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. xii + 250, £64.00, hardback.

Barbara Pitkin is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Stanford University, where she teaches on the history of Christian thought, including the sixteenth-century reformations and the history of biblical interpretation. She is the author of *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in its Exegetical Context* (OUP, 1999), editor of *Semper Reformanda: Calvin, Worship, and Reformed Traditions* (V&R, 2018), and co-editor with Wim Janse of *The Formation of Clerical and Confessional Identities in Early Modern Europe* (Brill, 2006). Pitkin also serves as an editor for the *Sixteenth Century Journal* and is a former president of the Calvin Studies Society.

In *Calvin, the Bible, and History*, Pitkin investigates Calvin's biblical exegesis through a series of case studies and seeks to show how he was consistently historically attuned. Though Pitkin argues that Calvin was not a historian *per se*, she demonstrates that Calvin was an astute exponent of the Bible as history. Chapter 1 functions as the book's introduction, which summarises, in broad terms, how Calvin's biblical interpretation was influenced by exegetical tradition, his legal and humanist studies, and the social and political context in Geneva and beyond; it outlines key features

of Calvin's interpretative approach, such as his commitment to 'lucid brevity' (p. 17) and the unity of scripture; and it sketches the trajectory for the book's remaining chapters. Chapter 2 examines Calvin's reception of Paul, including both his epistles and his appearances in the book of Acts. Pitkin shows that, for Calvin, Paul's theology (especially as articulated in Romans) was the key to understanding the rest of scripture. Chapter 3 then examines Calvin's treatment of John's Gospel. Calvin's historicizing approach meant that he rejected earlier commentators' assumption (informed by fourth-century Christological debates) that the primary purpose of the gospel was to communicate doctrine concerning Christ's divinity. Instead, Calvin emphasised its soteriological themes. From Chapter 4 onwards, Pitkin pivots her focus towards the Old Testament. Chapter 4 focuses on Calvin's treatment of David in the Psalms, who he saw as a model for Protestant faith. Chapter 5 convincingly argues that Calvin read Isaiah's prophetic message to Israel's exiles as a mirror for his own sixteenth-century context. This fascinating chapter — which, for this reader, was one of the highlights of the book — illuminates how sixteenth-century experiences of exile informed Calvin's readings of the prophets in profound ways. In Chapter 6, Pitkin discusses Calvin's exegesis of Daniel and shows that Calvin eschewed eschatological interpretations of Daniel's prophecies, preferring to see them as being historically fulfilled in Christ's first advent with their contemporary significance drawn out by way of analogy. Chapter 7 focuses on Calvin's harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, drawing attention to how trends in early modern historiography informed this work. Finally, Chapter 8 compares Calvin's expositions on 2 Samuel, delivered against the backdrop of the French Wars of Religion, with François Hotman's *Consolatio è sacris litteris*, emphasising their mutual commitment to 'sacred history'. The book closes with an epilogue, outlining the main contributions of this book and potential avenues for future research.

There is much to commend in *Calvin, the Bible, and History*. By focusing so intently on Calvin's historicizing approach, Pitkin illuminates an important and unifying theme of Calvin's exegesis. She convincingly shows that while he handled different biblical genres with distinct emphases, and was frequently conscious of his text's application to his contemporary context, he was nonetheless absolutely committed to upholding the importance of a historical reading of the Bible. Indeed, Pitkin rightly notes that even when Calvin engaged in typological exegesis (an approach widely used by early modern Reformed exegetes) he did so without relinquishing a clear sense of his passage's own historical context. In fact, she argues that this historicizing impulse is so pronounced that 'few if any were as consistent', as Calvin, 'in seeking to preserve the integrity and unity of that history — as Christian salvation history, to be sure, but history nonetheless' (p. 4). Pitkin also helpfully shows *how* Calvin applied the biblical text to his sixteenth-century context, consistently but in varying ways, while maintaining his determined commitment to a historical interpretation of the biblical text.

While Pitkin admirably draws out these distinctive aspects of Calvin's exegesis through her seven biblical case studies, one can still detect signs of the book's origins as separate chapters and articles, originally published between 1993 and 2014 (p. x). In chapter 8, for example, where Pitkin engages in comparative analysis between Calvin's sermons on 2 Samuel and Hotman's *Consolatio*, she breaks from the preceding chapters' more exclusive focus on Calvin's exegesis, suggesting that they had originally been developed in different contexts. This observation is not intended as a criticism of the quality of Pitkin's research — indeed, the comparison between Calvin and Hotman is illuminating in its own right — but it does serve to illustrate a slight unevenness of methodology, despite Pitkin's overall success in drawing a unified line of argument throughout the book.

Notwithstanding this minor quibble, *Calvin, the Bible, and History* is a valuable resource for scholars of John Calvin, Reformation history, and the history of biblical interpretation. Pitkin's careful and enlightening exploration of Calvin's commitment to the 'sacred histories' provides an important glimpse into how and why Calvin handled distinct biblical genres in the manner that he did. While this book will primarily benefit researchers, students may also benefit from this work, especially from Pitkin's discussion of Calvin's reception of Paul in Chapter 2, which so compellingly demonstrates how Romans functioned for Calvin as a hermeneutical key for understanding the rest of scripture. Students at all levels would be well served by the insights offered by this chapter, which could profitably be read in isolation. That being said, students who are dipping their toe into scholarship on the Bible in the Reformation era for the first time may find chapters in volume 3 of the *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* (CUP, 2016) a more accessible starting point.

In the years to follow, we can hope for further research that builds on *Calvin, the Bible, and History*, but in the meantime those of us with interests in early modern biblical interpretation should be grateful to Pitkin for her careful and thorough exposition of Calvin's commitment to history in his exegesis.

Russell Newton

The Faith Mission Bible College, Edinburgh

Hampton, Alexander J. B. and John Peter Kenney, eds. *Christian Platonism: A History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, 512, \$130.00, hardcover.

Christian Platonism: A History is edited by University of Toronto Assistant Professor Alexander J. B. Hampton and Saint Michael's College Professor Emeritus John Peter Kenney. The individual chapter authors range from various universities around the world from Cambridge to Notre Dame to Toronto to Oxford. It is hard to imagine that the editors could have assembled a more well-educated group for the topic. And at over 500 pages, it is a dense, well-researched, *tour de force* on the topic.

The book is divided into three parts: Concepts, history, and engagements. Before the main three sections the editors provide an overall introduction to Christianity and Platonism. The editors argue that the term “Christian Platonism,” for the purposes of this book, is elastic given the complex relationship between Christianity and Platonism and the significant variances across history (p. 3). However, they do suggest that there *is* one constant thread throughout history: transcendence, or a commitment to a higher level of reality beyond the material world (p. 4).

The first section on the major concepts of Christian Platonism begins with a chapter from Lloyd Gerson on the value of Platonism. He argues that, by the Council of Nicaea, philosophical contemplation by Christians was done “almost exclusively within a Platonic context” (p. 13). He then argues that Platonism, at its most basic, means “there is a distinct, hierarchically arrayed subject matter irreducible to the material or physical world” (p. 16). Such a definition is rather thin given that Platonism is committed to a vast array of further doctrines. Because of the elasticity in the definition, he can argue that those like Aristotle are Platonists too (p. 22). John Dillon and Daniel John, in their chapter “The Ideas as Thoughts of God,” then trace the development of the Platonic Forms as ideas of God. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz follows Dillon and John’s brief chapter by arguing that both Greek and Latin pro-Nicene theologians in the late fourth century drew primarily from Platonic resources in their Trinitarian theologies (p. 53). The chapter closely analyzes how similar alternative theologies such as Arianism (a theological movement that denied the divinity of Christ) mirrored Platonism. Of course, he also shows how Platonism could be employed with very different Trinitarian theologies, so it is not simply reducible to Platonism (p. 69). The following chapter from Kevin Corrigan seeks to show how Christianity developed and transformed thinking from those like Plotinus (p. 85). Corrigan thus provides his own definition of Christian Platonism as “a sophisticated, critical, but sympathetic dialogue, that thinks through the logic of language in relation to God, while freely acknowledging our inability to know anything about God’s nature” (p. 95). Next, Olivier Boulnois traces the development of theology as that of a rational science of faith. The final chapter in the section from Rudi A. te Velde considers the necessary conditions of a Christian doctrine of creation and whether a Neoplatonic understanding of participation can be transformed to meet its criteria.

The second section on history begins with Mark Edwards who seeks to show the continuities and discontinuities from early Christians and Platonism—sometimes finding an ally and other times a foe. Next, John Peter Kenney provides an overview of Platonism and Christianity in Late Antiquity. Kenney, like many of the authors in this work, suggests that the unifying principles of Platonism are not its actual doctrines but its “shared intellectual style, textual canon, forms of discourse, and modes of personal formation” (p. 163). However, Kenney suggests that “Christians were never really Platonists in antiquity” though sometimes they were “fellow travelers” (p. 166). Many early Christians such as Justin Martyr and Origen found

Platonism useful as a transcendent metaphysical basis but not a spiritual path (p. 171). Later Pro-Nicene Christians would take up the transcendental metaphysics of Plotinus alongside his modifications (p. 177). Next, Lydia Schumacher examines the medieval west. Her focus is to examine an indirect channel of Platonism that is largely ignored in the literature—Islamic readings of the tradition before Aquinas and Bonaventure (p. 185). Then, Torstein Theodor Tollefsen expounds the Byzantium tradition and Platonism. Tollefsen utilizes a distinction between formal and diffused Platonism, where formal Platonists are those who strictly adhere to Platonism *and* identify with Platonism as such, and diffused Platonists are those that do not so identify with Platonism but still borrow some ideas like transcendence and the Forms (p. 208). This section closes with chapters on the Renaissance, the Northern Renaissance, early modernity, Romanticism, and modernity.

The third and final section focuses on creative and critical engagements with Christian Platonism. Andrew Davison and Jacob Holsinger Sherman open with a wide-ranging chapter on Christian Platonism and natural science. They cover topics from participation to math to biology and psychology. The following chapter is from Alexander Hampton on nature and environmental crisis. Hampton attempts to argue that a Platonist participatory ontology provides a needed “radically non-anthropocentric answer” to the crisis of anthropocentric conceptualizations of nature that determine all sorts of economic, religious, and scientific perspectives (e.g. placing humans *above* nature in some sense that leads to environmental degradation) (p. 381). The remaining chapters cover art and meaning, value, dualism, and materialism, love and friendship, and multiplicity in earth and heaven. The first two are the most creative, while the final four cover more traditional loci within Platonist thinking.

It is hard to appraise such a work as this either negatively or positively given its breadth and varied authorship. Despite this, on the whole, it is a fine introduction into the Christian adaptation of various Platonist doctrines. Several of the chapters are quite stimulating and even fresh new ground is broken in chapters like Hampton’s work on the environmental crisis and Christian Platonism. Overall, the chapters are all well-argued, well documented, and well situated. There is hardly a chapter that lacks any of these virtues. Thus, it should be widely acclaimed as *the* resource on the topic given its breadth and depth.

However, I do have one main qualm with the book—though this does not detract from its overall value. The problem is this: I am continually confused over the proper definition of Christian *Platonism*. At times it seems the authors assume if thinkers use *any* Platonic themes, they are Christian Platonists. Other times they admit that Christian Platonism is a term lacking clear definition. Take several examples besides those listed in the summary above: Joshua Levi Ian Gentske says, “I treat Platonism as a historically and culturally contingent mesh of dynamic and diverse ideas, practices, and images, which can nevertheless be heuristically envisioned as a recognizable discourse” (p. 328). Elsewhere Lydia Schumacher: “there are as many

kinds of Platonism as there are Platonists” and “the meaning of the term ultimately breaks down” (p. 190). But I find this elastic understanding largely unhelpful given that such a flexible definition ends up reducing to nothing uniquely *Platonist*. When used in this way, I do not know what makes it different than other philosophical traditions that would be comfortable affirming something like divine transcendence. Such a definition of Platonism likely stems from a reliance on Lloyd Gerson’s “Ur-Platonism” that defines it negatively by five “anti’s”: anti-materialism, anti-mechanism, anti-nominalism, anti-relativism, and anti-skepticism. But while these may be *necessary* conditions of Platonism, they surely are not *sufficient* conditions. For example, traditionally, Platonism has been described as adhering to certain theories of Form and abstract objects. Yet one could reject such theories, affirm the five “anti’s” and be considered a Platonist. I do not find such a way of categorizing Platonism especially useful or persuasive. Moreover, the Christian tradition, as shown throughout, has a variegated way of utilizing certain Platonist concepts here. So, when Christian Platonism is defined in this elastic way, it is never clear why it should be called Christian Platonism rather than simply Christianity.

So, how should the biblical-theological student interact with this book? For the student desiring to understand much of the philosophical background to various thinkers throughout the history of the church, I think this resource presents a helpful guide. You will find background on thinkers from Thomas Aquinas to the Cappadocian Fathers. I also think it will prove beneficial for highlighting various shared metaphysical and epistemological assumptions throughout the Christian tradition. It should be noted that the book is not an undergraduate level text. It is best suited for graduate students and requires some level of prior philosophical-theological knowledge. In sum, I warmly commend *Christian Platonism: A History*. It is carefully argued, well written, and contains several new appropriations of special interest to theologians seeking to retrieve the past for renewal.

Jordan L. Steffaniak
Wake Forest, NC

Song, Felicia Wu. *Restless Devices: Recovering Personhood, Presence, and Place in the Digital Age*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. pp. 216.

How do we understand personal identity in a time where we do not simply go online, but we live online? Song’s work in *Restless Devices* examines the question of personal identity in a digital age through the lens of an unapologetic Christian theological anthropology. It takes a supple voice and keen mind to navigate the complexities of digital media to an overwhelmingly uninformed audience about the ethical issues behind technology used every day.

The expertise and tenure of Song's work here shine in the landscape of the contents of *Restless Devices*. Anyone studying the ethics of technology understands the complexity of the relationship between the device as a mere instrument and the device as an implement of power. For example, Part 1 ("Being at Altitude; The Terms of Agreement; and The Industrialization of You and Me") examines how "smart" technologies shape the user through the values laden by the producers of said technology (cf. Jürgen Habermas' economic thesis). Tech companies use and exploit behavioral psychology and insights from neuroscience to make addictive products without much concern for the ethical and moral outcomes of the user's relationship. In part 1 (pp. 17–96), Song exposes how Silicon Valley, through tech like social media, has rewired our perceptions of social networks to a series of analytics—will this post attract engagement?

How are users to reconcile personhood, presence, and theological identity in light of the commodification of our social/digital identity? In part 2 (pp. 97–214), Song further examines her thesis that digital technologies often leave us frustrated, exhausted, and isolated, but this disenchantment does not have to be the end of our relationship to technology. Rather than address and engage every issue related to digital technologies, Song goes to the root of the theological and psychological fundamentals of how devices shape us and our appetites for meaning, significance, and security. Instead of taking a Luddite approach to digital technology, Song advises applying a form of the spiritual disciplines and practices to the use of our devices, ones that are grounded in spiritual wisdom and community (p. 13).

Song proffers that through understanding the *imago Dei* as a reflection of humans' creation of communion with God, we can adequately situate our relation to one another (p. 111). According to Song, we are tempted to subcontract our fellowship with God for connection with people through the device as an implementation of presence. Imperative to Song's thesis is that we develop counter-liturgies that help us resist this temptation through the practice of spiritual disciplines like a sabbath from our phone or intentional times of disconnection to commune with God's word and His people. Moreover, Song's caution about spiritually disruptive devices links to call for ethical due care about the values laden within the technology be created (p. 27). Thus, the scope of her thesis goes beyond cultivating a digital etiquette but to understanding each device as a spiritually shaping instrument. In the words of Song, "we need to recognize that our souls have appetites" (p. 35), and her book is an introduction to the praxis of spiritual disciplines aimed at ensuring the ensouled body is spiritually cultivated and feed.

Restless Devices is a much-needed addition to the literature of theological reflection on media studies. The work is unique in that it proffers a complexity thesis between our devices and spiritual development. Song does not bemoan technology and its usage but rather cautions her readers to consider the theological shaping of the tools we allow into our lives and how they can shape us in both positive and

negative ways. I would have liked to have further addressed in Song's work within the discussion of personhood and fluidity amid embodied and disembodied spaces. This is not a criticism of her work, but I mention this in hopes that she and others will further explore this topic in later additions and publications. While Song addresses personhood and connects it to the *imago Dei* ("image of God"), a normative reading in Christian theological circles, much more could be said about this topic in our digital age. For example, the incarnation of Jesus is often cited as the model of what we should strive for regarding embodied presence within the local church and our communion with the saints, but this does not mean there is no room for the disembodied presence within digital communities and the powerful connections that can come through digital media. I mention this because there is a temptation to say digital media, and presence through such, is less than embodied physical presence.

Nevertheless, human persons are more than material, and we must be careful to account for the immaterial (i.e., soul) in the life of faith and cultivation of the soul, and there is hope for such because of the incarnation, which goes far beyond mere physical presence. I believe Song would agree with the assessment, and I do not see the absence of this topic as a weakness of her work; in fact, I see *Restless Devices* as a primer for these conversations as virtual reality and future digital media becomes more integrated into the life of faith and the local church. Song's work in *Restless Devices* deserves serious consideration by the academic and lay reader alike. Her work would make a great addition to any Christian ethics course on the undergraduate or graduate level because of its scholarly rigor and *telos* aimed toward praxis in the local church.

Joshua K. Smith, PhD
North Morton Baptist Church
Morton, MS

Kim, Matthew. *Preaching to People in Pain: How Suffering Can Shape Your Sermons and Connect with Your Congregation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021, xvi + pp. 223, \$21.66, paperback.

With the heart of a pastor, the mind of a theologian, and the skill of a soul-surgeon, Matthew Kim navigates the turbulent waters of pain. This insightful work will "encourage pastors to preach less pain-free sermons and to preach more pain-full sermons where preachers disclose their suffering and pain" (p. xi). Kim (Ph.D., University of Edinburgh) serves as the Professor of Preaching and Practical Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, MA, as well as past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. He is a seasoned pastor and prolific author of works such as *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence* and *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*.

Preaching to People in Pain is a balm for each preacher's soul as well as their weary flock. If after reading this book, you can see the value of preaching on pain, then Kim has fulfilled his goal (p. 201). He arranges his work into two units: *Naming the Pain* (three chapters) is an invitation to authentic dialog concerning how and why pastors and congregants suffer pain, with a clear process for the task of preaching on pain (p. xii). In *Preaching on Pain* (six chapters) Kim investigates six distinctive categories of pain that hearers frequently conceal (p. xiii). Each chapter concludes with a Kim sermon addressing that particular pain. There is a helpful Appendix with a *Worksheet for Understanding Pain* (pp. 205-211).

Chapter 1 alone is worth the price of this book, for it addresses the elephant in the room – the pain of the preacher. Kim admits what most pastors will not admit, “I can count on one hand the number of times that a church member asked me how I was doing and actually cared enough to listen to my pain and suffering” (p. 3). Should pastors preach on pain regularly, even revealing their own? He supplies some “*Pitfalls of Preaching on Pain*” and the danger of the preachers’ self-disclosure, for it will 1) damage listeners’ faith in God, 2) diminish pastoral authority, 3) focus the sermon excessively on the preacher, and 4) make for repetitive sermons (pp. 9-12). Conversely, there are “*Benefits of Sharing our Suffering*,” which will 1) humanize us, 2) connect us with people and their pain, 3) help us model how to overcome pain, and 4) help us become self-aware (pp. 12-15).

Listeners’ Pain comprises chapter 2. Weighty is the baggage that listeners live with and bring to worship every week (p. xii). Many pastors have lost their way and instead, “Pastors might like the stage on which to preach but no longer want to serve as a pastor to others and be involved in their painful, messy lives” (pp. 21-22). A way is offered to create an “inventory” of listener and church pain (pp. 24-25). While noble, one might wonder about the time-consuming process of this daunting task. Kim also provides a preaching strategy to address pain and reorder the hearers’ biblical and theological mindset, we should preach: 1) to expect to suffer, 2) to lower one’s expectations (people disappoint), 3) against entitlement and ingratitude, 4) to educate and reconcile the church, 5) a big God and small problems, 6) lament without an immediately happy ending, and 7) for spiritual maturity (pp. 27-34).

Chapter 3 “invites us to consider some of the key elements for preaching on pain and an initial pathway for how we can preach on pain intentionally and end effectively” (p. 35). Kim provides a template called *Preparatory Questions to Preach on Pain*: 1) Which passage will I preach on, 2) What type of pain/suffering is revealed in the text, 3) How does the Bible character or biblical author deal with the pain, 4) How does this pain in the text relate to our listeners’ pain, 5) What does this pain say about God and his allowance of pain, 6) How does God / Jesus / the Holy Spirit help us in our suffering, 7) How can their preaching show care and empathy, 8) How can we share this pain in a Christian community, and 9) How will God use our suffering to transform us and bring himself glory (pp. 36-41).

Part 2 (chapters 4-9) deals with six areas to consider when dealing *with* and preaching *on* pain: 1) decisions, 2) finances, 3) health issues, 4) losses, 5) relationships, and 6) sin. For each of these subjects, the *Nine Preparatory Questions for Preaching on Pain* are asked, followed by *Principles for Preaching* on that specific painful issue. Kim reminds us that “ministry requires pulpit time and people time. Imbalance will lead to ineffective preaching and ineffective discipleship” (p. 142).

This work has several strengths. *First*, the weight given to addressing pastoral pain is commendable. Kim asserts, “Pastors are not immune from encountering unspeakable tragedy and hardship. If we believe in the power of the local church, why, then, are we so reluctant to share struggles with our beloved Christian communities?” (p. 4). Of the few books that address this topic, his is most insightful for he offers a roadmap for wisely disclosing pain in the pastor’s life (p. xii). Sagaciously he states “we cannot allow ourselves to stand “above the congregation” as if we are better than they. We can admit and share our pain and suffering with judiciousness” (p. 5). *Second*, one may, by first impression believe Kim will try to hammer pains’ *square peg* into preachings’ *round hole*. Rest assured Kim always prioritizes the text, “I hope that after reading this book you will agree with me that speaking on suffering regularly, *and as you’re preaching pericope warrants*, will contribute to increased vulnerability and congregational change (p. xv). He states further, “I am not arguing that every single sermon must address pain and suffering. This would be unfair, unwise, and unfaithful to Scripture and its assortment of genres and passages . . . As a general rule of thumb, we can preach on pain and suffering when the sermon text addresses it” (pp. 35-36). *Finally*, his emphasis on compassion or *preach with your presence* is a much-needed word. This type of preaching occurs in “a hospital room, palliative care center, waiting room, home visitation, police station, courtroom, prison, and other physical locations where they are” (p. 46). He concludes, “Preaching on pain involves more than simple proclamation. It requires active participation and empathy” (p. 202).

This book is homiletical and pastoral gold. To be sure, “Scripture exposes suffering and pain because God provides solutions for us and *is* the solution for the Christian” (p. 9). It serves as a stark reminder that preaching and pastoral ministry can never be divided (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2; 2 Tim 4:2) and it also reminds us that we are to preach *to* pain, but sometimes we will preach *with* pain. This excellent work is for every vigilant shepherd of God’s flock and every professor who trains shepherds in preaching and pastoral ministry. For other helpful works see Timothy S. Laniak *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (IVP Academic, 2006) or Brent A. Strawn *Honest to God Preaching: Talking Sin, Suffering, and Violence* (Fortress Press, 2021). This is a must-read for every shepherd who takes their calling, their preaching, their *pain*, and *that of their flock* seriously.

Tony Alton Rogers
Southside Baptist Church, Bowie, TX

Jamieson, Bobby. *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021, 185, \$17.99, paperback.

Bobby Jamieson is an Associate Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Formerly, Jamieson was an assistant editor for 9Marks. He did his doctoral work at the University of Cambridge and his MDiv from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has written on all areas of pastoral ministry, including *Guarding One Another: Church Discipline, Leading One Another: Church Leadership, and Hearing God's Word: Expositional Preaching*.

The Path to Being a Pastor is a brief discussion about the necessary conversations that need to be had before one goes from participant to pastor. When one becomes a pastor, they join an elite group that God has used to do mighty works. Jamieson maintains that some have made this leap without realizing what they are getting involved in. As a result, the churches have suffered, and pastors have experienced burnout. Although Jamieson admits to not having been a pastor himself, he has helped many on the journey. This book is the fruit of that labor. The first third of the book sets up the dialogue about whether or not someone should enter pastoral ministry by discussing the move away from the common language of being “called” and finding certainty that one meets the necessary qualification. The second portion involves moving from saying you will be a pastor to implementing the groundwork used in the pastoral position. This section is the heart of the book. It includes but is not limited to the things that a would-be minister of the Gospel should already be doing. The final section acts as a summary and gives final advice on how to enter the ministry.

In the preface, Jamieson states that the book’s thesis is not a direct map for entering ministry but is to “provoke” his reader (p. 13). Instead, he says that his goal is to incite thought. The topics listed are what a would-be pastor should be discussing with the pastor or elder who is discipling them. Before getting into the book, it is essential to note the similarities between this book and another would be manual for those entering the pastorate: Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*. Both are relatively brief, but the similarities more so lie in the fact that both exclaim that the primary steps in preparation for the role of shepherd include shepherding oneself. One cannot lead others to a proper theology if they do not have one. One cannot catechize others if they have not catechized themselves. One cannot spread the Gospel to others if they have not (and do not daily) preach the Gospel to themselves.

While many books leave their most important themes until the end, Jamieson begins with his. Pastoral ministry has the sense of being set apart or called to this particular vocation. Rather than ask, “are you called?” Jamieson asks, “are you qualified?” While it is only explicit in the beginning chapters, most of the book is

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about being a pastor to oneself and discerning whether one is truly qualified for the position. For Jamieson, the question of being called leads to ego and focuses on the self rather than Jesus. Jamieson qualifies being called as a way of the “would-be preacher,” stating that he is qualified for ministry. This is different from being set apart by church leadership, observed, and then set apart for ministry work. Calling also necessitates that one meets specific qualifications. For that reason, the bulk of the book focuses on fleshing out those qualifications.

It is not easy to name all the tools in a pastor’s bag, especially in a book with less than two hundred pages. It is even more challenging to distinguish which ones are essential or merely beneficial to pastoral ministry. Nevertheless, that is Jamieson’s goal. It is a short list, not an extensive one. Pastor, there may be tools that Jamieson did not mention, but as he says in the early pages, his goal is to provoke. His chapters on seeking counsel are to help one seek out more mature believers and pastors more senior. He mentions safeguards to avoid falling into the traps that so often are attached to pastors’ names as news about them being removed for things like “moral failures.” Jamieson’s lessons are for pastors, but they are also helpful for lay leaders. For example, everyone in the church can benefit from the short section on memorizing Scripture (p. 80-81). Jamieson’s Calvinistic theology does shine through, especially in his selection of pastors and scholars to quote, like Carson, Vanhoozer, and Schreiner. Spurgeon features prominently like many books of pastoral ministry, but there is not so much reliance that one must subscribe to this theology to benefit.

Jamieson offers a brief and fantastic resource for those entering the pastorate and those interested in pastoral ministry. It raises thought-provoking questions dealing with pursuing the call to pastoral ministry.

Matt Crawford, ThM
Westview Baptist Church, Wichita, Kansas

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