BOOK REVIEWS


Lloyd Bailey retired from his professorship in Hebrew Bible at the Divinity School, Duke University, and became a Professor of Religion at Mount Olive College and an Adjunct Professor at Methodist College. He has authored fifteen books and was one of the editors for The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume (Abingdon, 1976).

The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary aims at being “a visually stimulating and user-friendly series that is as close to multimedia in print as possible” (xv). Much of the visual in this particular volume consists of various samples of art through the ages that reflect Leviticus and Numbers in some fashion. The accompanying CD includes a full-text PDF document of the volume that is fully searchable and allows copying of both text and illustrations for use in classroom instruction. Formatting for the volume accomplishes the visual and user-friendly aspects that present detailed information palatably.

Valuable discussions pepper the volume. One such is Bailey’s presentation of interpreting the food laws. He rightly concludes that the issue is actually “one of simple obedience to the Creator’s directives” (19). In addition, he exposes Western modernity’s focus “upon the autonomy of the self”—identifying this as “a rejection by creatures of their accountability to their Creator” (20). Yet another topic involves the repetitive nature of the sacrificial instructions in Leviticus 1–7 (57) and of the narrative in Numbers 7 (430). Such repetition “serves to drive the lesson home in a forceful and memorable way” (57). Readers will also find Bailey’s extended evaluation of various interpretive categories regarding food laws in Leviticus 11 clarifying and refreshing (129–39). This reviewer was pleasantly surprised by the author’s clear interpretive analysis of the ban on homosexuality in Lev 20:13, responding to seven erroneous popular claims about that text (245–56).

As good as some sections might be, a reader must use this volume with extreme caution. Bailey takes stances that are consistent with the Documentary Hypothesis (14–16) and antithetical to Mosaic authorship. Such an approach fragments the text of Leviticus into at least six different documents in six different time periods. One of his supports for this fragmentation of the text is the use of “the past tense and the third person” (24), as though it is unreasonable or illogical for an author to speak of himself or of an event in the past tense. Another erroneous basis for dividing the text into different productions involves the mention of cattle as a reflection of “a time when Israel had already settled in the ‘promised land,’ since
cattle will scarcely survive the rigors of nomadic life (in the Sinai Desert) at the time when the narrative is set” (46; see also 430). The biblical text, however, clearly reports that Israel took cattle into the desert (Exod 9:4-7; 10:9, 24-26; 12:32, 38).

Occasional comments denigrate the integrity of the text. For example, Bailey claims that textual differences “are to be found at tens of thousands of places” (8), without explaining whether such differences really impact meaning. Are these differences true material variants, or are they minor variations such as two different spellings for exactly the same word with the same meaning? Again, Bailey speaks of “a certain roughness of syntax” (68)—a judgment that a non-native, chronologically distant reader of Hebrew cannot make with any degree of certainty. When he writes that “the New Testament writers used (or misused) Leviticus” (96), he questions the integrity and accuracy of the NT. He proposes that final compilers of the text “were not bothered by . . . conflicting details, . . . apparently because the specifics did not matter” (111). It appears that Bailey has a low view of inspiration and inerrancy. Such examples of theological antipathy to divine authorship conflict with his declaration that “God has defined holiness” (203). Other than Walter Kaiser on Leviticus (in The New Interpreter’s Bible [Abingdon, 1994]) and Gordon Wenham on Numbers (Old Testament Guides [Sheffield, 1979] and Tyndale OT Commentaries [Inter-Varsity, 1981]), commentaries from an evangelical perspective are notably absent in the bibliography (615-22).

Bailey employs the human analogy of a family gathering a genealogical history in an attempt to explain the gradual development of the text (17). Such analogies, however, do injustice to the divinely superintended inscription of the Word of God (a concept whose presence is noticeably missing in this volume, unless one might read something into his sidebar comment about “the spirit of the LORD” coming upon the literary prophets, 114). In the same vein, even though Bailey criticizes one author for basing an interpretation “upon modern anthropological models, a rather precarious methodology” (121 n. 5; cf. also his criticism of “a hermeneutic of suspicion,” 183), he himself uses such models for explaining the concept of God’s “glory” (109-10), the practice of corner tassels with blue thread (153 n. 35), and the belief in demons (168; over and over again Bailey denies the existence of demons, even at the expense of the NT record, 33-34, 126, 185).

In the sidebars, Bailey occasionally fails to clarify information for the reader or to discuss obvious associations. In the discussion of the Dead Sea scroll notation 4QSam³, the author provides no explanation for the meaning of "b (10). Treatment of the topic of demons lurking on thresholds and divine guardians (72) provoke questions regarding the cherub decorations in Tabernacle and Temple as well as the presence of cherubim to guard the entrance into the Garden of Eden. However, Bailey does not address any of those associations. Within the text itself the reader is left wondering how being “cut off” would be accomplished, if it consists of “termination of the offender’s genealogical line” (88). Was Israel to execute all of a violator’s children, or did they castrate him?

Unfortunately, Bailey reveals a lack of accurate knowledge about the church in both Russia and China by claiming that, unlike persecuted Judaism, the persecuted church is “driven to the verge of extinction” (147). It is but one example, however, of providing undependable information.
Rekha M. Chennattu. *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship.* Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006. xxiv + 256. $29.95 (paper). Reviewed by Paul R. Thorsell, Associate Professor of Theology at The Master’s College.

Rekha Chennattu’s *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* illustrates just how far contemporary Johannine scholarship has turned from Rudolf Bultmann’s Gnostic interpretation of the Fourth Gospel, which dominated so much of the twentieth century. Despite John’s omission of the Synoptic and Pauline words of Jesus inaugurating the new covenant, Chennattu paints the portrait of Johannine discipleship with the vivid colors of covenantal language and motifs drawn from the OT and second temple Judaism. Chennattu’s volume, originally written as a dissertation under Francis Moloney at the Catholic University of America, is a masterful defense of the thesis that Johannine discipleship must be read as Christian faithfulness to the new covenant relationship created by Jesus.

Chapter one begins with a survey of the scope of recent scholarship on Johannine discipleship from Moreno to Köstenberger before focusing on discipleship motifs in the three call-stories of John 1:35-51. Chennattu detects elements within these stories related to OT covenantal motifs. The invitation to “abide,” knowledge of Jesus, the call to witness, and the acts of renaming and promising are all viewed against an OT covenantal background.

In chapters two and three, Chennattu examines significant motifs within the OT depiction of covenant (election, divine presence, knowledge of God, witness, peace, promises) before proceeding to read John 13–17 (1–12 is examined cursorily) against these motifs. She concludes that the farewell meal (John 13) is depicted as an OT covenant meal; the injunction to love functions as the new covenant commandment. John 14 expounds the presence and knowledge of Jesus/the Father through the Paraclete. “Abiding” in Jesus (15) is the equivalent of the OT demand for covenantal faithfulness. Jesus’ prayer (17) operates as the equivalent of a covenantal inauguration ritual. Chennattu instructively concludes, “The evangelist takes the OT covenant metaphor, redefines and broadens its prospect, and applies it to the relationship between God and the new covenant community of Jesus’ disciples” (139). Chennattu’s exposition of John 20–21 in chapter four provides a argument comparable to the previous chapters. Jesus’ actions reconstitute and empower the new-covenant community of His disciples. For instance, as Moses returned from the mountain with the tables of the Law, Jesus returns to His disciples with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter five is tangential to her argument, and probably the most problematic. Chennattu suggests that the Fourth Gospel reflects the *Sitz im Leben* of the Johannine community responding to its exclusion from post-destruction Judaism. In the aftermath of A.D. 70, according to Chennattu, Judaism utilizes the covenant metaphor to restore its self-identity (194) and excludes the Johannine community as covenant breakers. In reply, the community presents Christianity as the establishment of the new covenant relationship with God (as reflected by the Fourth Gospel). Chennattu’s scenario is plausible and certainly consistent with prevailing notions (following E. P. Sanders, et. al.) that first-century Judaism was a covenantal nomism. But the evidence she presents is hardly persuasive. The
Qumran literature and Pseudo-Philo certainly cannot substantiate her thesis since they antedate the destruction. Fourth Ezra (as Sanders argued) is not representative of second temple Judaism and 2 Baruch’s close relationship to or dependence on 4 Ezra vitiates it as an independent witness. In the end, Chennattu fails to substantiate her hypothesis about the Johannine community.

The volume has a few oddities that editing could have remedied. In the tables on pages 42-43 and 150-51, some items have English only, some contain only the Greek text, some include English translation with the Greek text; consistency would have been helpful. W. R. G. Loader’s article on Johannine “Christology” is mistitled in the footnotes and bibliography. In my opinion, the chapter divisions are not helpful. Yet *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* is well worth the read. The observations and comparisons by which the author argues her thesis separately are interesting but unpersuasive. Cumulatively, however, they constitute a compelling argument that John (like Paul, Hebrews, and the Synoptic Gospels) presents Jesus as the inaugurator of the new covenant and Christians as those called to new covenant faithfulness.


Roland Chia’s book, *Hope for the World*, is one in a series entitled Christian Doctrine in Global Perspective, in which non-Western writers discuss Christian doctrine with an international audience in mind. Chia is dean of the school of postgraduate studies and director of the Centre for the Development of Christian Ministry at Trinity Theological College, Singapore. *Hope for the World* is about the nature of Christian hope (11) and was written primarily for pastors and lay leaders. It is an introduction or guide to eschatology that examines the major doctrines and issues related to last things. Chapter 1, “Hope in Asia,” focuses on the spiritual and cultural situation in Asia. Chapters 2–7 discuss various topics related to eschatology such as the kingdom of God, the day of the Lord, the coming of Christ, and the eternal state. Chapter 8, “Living in Hope,” discusses how a biblical eschatology should apply to people today.

Chia writes from an evangelical amillennial perspective and thus affirms the major tenets of orthodox eschatology such as the personal visible return of Christ, the restoration of the creation, and non-ending punishment for the wicked. On issues like the kingdom of God, the timing of the millennium, and the relationship between Israel and the church, most non-amillennialists are certain to find points of disagreement.

The book has helpful aspects. First, Chia’s methodology is to be commended and even modeled. He not only expounds the basics of Christian orthodoxy, he also contrasts the truth of the Christian view with erroneous beliefs, in this case the views of the Asian religions including Buddhism and Hinduism. For instance, he shows how the Eastern concept of suffering (*dukkha*) as an illusion is refuted by the
Christian view that suffering is real and will someday be completely defeated as a result of the cross of Christ.

Second, Chia offers a helpful and needed discussion about the hope of the Christian. Too often the Christian hope is presented as an ethereal, immaterial heaven that resembles the non-material afterlife of the ancient Greek philosophers. This approach, though, does not do justice to the holistic restoration discussed in Scripture. According to Chia, though a disembodied state of existence exists for all who physically die before the return of Christ, each person will receive a resurrected body suitable for the eternal dwelling place. For the Christian this dwelling place is a restored creation. Chia also rightly shows that a personal God is the object of and basis for this hope. Such contrasts sharply with the impersonal Brahman of Hinduism and the nirvana (extinction) concept of Buddhism.

Third, and perhaps most helpful, is Chia’s presentation of a Christian theodicy. Avoiding much of the philosophical jargon usually associated with discussions about the problem of evil, Chia correctly asserts that the answer to the problem of evil in the world cannot be solved philosophically. Instead, it must be answered theologically and eschatologically. The issue can be resolved only in light of what God has done in Christ and what God will bring about in the fullness of time (143). Thus, attempts to answer the problem of evil from a non-Christological standpoint are doomed to frustration.

The book has disappointing aspects, however. In agreeing with the big picture analysis that Chia offers in regard to the Christian’s hope, this reviewer disagrees with several of his amillennial interpretations, particularly his views concerning the millennium and his supersessionist approach to Israel and the church.

For instance, Chia states that “premillennialism actually contradicts the NT, which makes no mention of a ‘third age’ in which Christ will reign upon the earth” (122). In contrast, premillennialists are correct in affirming that both the Old and New Testaments teach a “third age” that is different from the present age and the future eternal state. Zechariah 14 speaks of a time when “the LORD will be king over all the earth” (v. 9) but sin and punishment will still exist (vv. 16-20). Thus, Zechariah appears to describe a “third age” that is different from the present age and different from the future sinless eternal state. Also, Revelation 19–21 sets out a chronology that explicitly teaches a “third age.” After the present age, Christ returns to reign for a thousand years and then the eternal state with the new heavens and earth begin. Thus, one can be confident that both the Old and New Testaments affirm a third age in which Christ reigns upon the earth.

Chia also assumes a supersessionist view of Israel and the church that is not convincing. For him, the church is the new Israel and all nationalistic promises to God are fulfilled in the church. His conclusion, however, falters in light of the fact that no NT passage identifies the church as Israel, nor is there any text that says that the church alone has become the possessor of Israel’s promises and covenants.

Chia’s conclusions on these matters stem from the amillennial position that the NT interprets the OT (124). However, though this reviewer acknowledges that the NT is a more complete revelation that at times interprets (but not reinterprets) the OT, he cannot simply dismiss the many detailed promises concerning Israel’s restoration found in the OT. Not only does the NT not revoke those promises, it reaffirms the OT expectations for the nation Israel (see Matt 19:28; 23:37-39; Luke
Also disappointing was Chia’s singling out of dispensationalism for criticism. One does not expect an amillennial scholar to speak favorably of dispensationalism, especially in a book on eschatology. But unlike other works of recent years that have expressed a more irenic spirit toward dispensationalism and dispensationalists, Chia takes a less gracious approach. After claiming that dispensationalism “tries to fit the biblical data into the procrustean bed it has created” (129), he uses a quote from Bruce Milne to assert that one may have to wonder about the “effect” dispensationalism may have on “personal religion and personal attitudes” (129). Thus, Chia seems to claim that dispensationalism may lead to defects in one’s personal walk with God—a claim that this reviewer finds unnecessary and hard to defend.

In sum, this reviewer has mixed opinions about this book. It certainly has good information. However, the amillennial approach to eschatology and negative portrayal of dispensationalism disqualify it from being a must-have reference for students of Christian doctrine or eschatology.


In 1988, Baker Book House published No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua by Dale Ralph Davis as the introductory volume in the series Expositor’s Guide to the [OT] Historical Books. The stated purpose of Davis, a Presbyterian pastor and former OT professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, was “to provide a model of what a pastor can do in biblical study if he will sweat over the Hebrew text and assume the text as we have it was meant to be bread from God for his people” (7). Davis fulfilled this purpose superbly in his volume on Joshua. Volumes on Judges (1990) and 1 Samuel (1994) by Davis followed under the Baker imprint. However, after the publication of one more volume on Ruth and Esther by other authors (1995), Baker discontinued the series. Fortunately for biblical expositors, Christian Focus republished the three volumes by Davis discontinued by Baker and have allowed him to complete the three additional volumes on 2 Samuel (1999), 1 Kings (2002), and now 2 Kings (2005). Appreciative readers echo the words of the author of this work on 2 Kings, “I am especially thankful to the kind folks at Christian Focus, who picked up an ‘orphaned series’ halfway through” (9).

Readers of the previous five volumes by Davis will not be disappointed as they read 2 Kings. All of the strengths of the proceeding expositions reappear in this work. First and foremost, the author concentrates on explaining and applying the biblical text; significant manuscript, lexical, syntactical, historical, and geographical issues are dealt with in footnotes. The footnotes themselves cite good sources and expose the reader to the richness of traditional and contemporary scholarship on 2 Kings. The main text reproduces the exposition to be communicated to the audience. The exposition consistently blends sound exegesis, theological substance, and sound
application. Second, the writer anchors the expositional outline to the structure of the biblical text and clearly demonstrates the connection to his readers. Third, the biblical text is explained with vividness and crispness. Fourth, the theological principles observed in a text are precisely articulated. Fifth, apt illustrations from church history, military history, and the writer’s own experiences in particular are sprinkled throughout the expositions. Sixth, the author’s wit surfaces continually in the writing. For example, one chapter is entitled “The Peril of Church Suppers” (71) and another “When God Gave a Preacher the Axe” (101).

Davis is also a master of variety. There is no dull monotony in the thirty expositions found in this work. The outlining at times is descriptive and at other times interpretive. There is also variety in the use of third person and second person in the outlines. Some chapters begin with a lengthy introduction before the exposition, while others delve right into an exposition of the text. In each chapter, Davis is concerned to communicate what the text of 2 Kings is revealing about the character of God and the necessary response of His people. Many times there will be an explicit or implicit connection between the OT text and the NT revelation concerning Jesus, but some of the expositions are content to remain in the OT and give a Yahweh-centered application to the readers.

Today, there is a renewed emphasis on the preaching of OT narrative in evangelical circles (see the review of Steven D. Mathewson’s The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative below). The six volumes of Ralph Dale Davis, of which 2 Kings: The Power and the Fury is the culmination, are excellent guides for the contemporary expositor as he preaches from the “Former Prophets.” Davis has laid an excellent foundation; may many biblical expositors build upon his work as they preach OT narrative.


In recent years a number of biblical Hebrew grammars have appeared on the market, each attempting to outdo the other grammars in either being user friendly or in being more scholarly in approach. This grammar’s claim is that students learn to read verses in the Hebrew text after just two hours of instruction and longer passages after eight hours (i). Like Page H. Kelley (*Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*; Eerdmans, 1992), Dobson has a missions background and experience in a language other than English. He was trained as a classical scholar at Merton, Oxford, and spent time in Uganda in the Lugbara language (ix). His grammar is the product of ten years of teaching in Africa and Europe. He died early in 2006. Employing tried methods for spoken language acquisition, Dobson produces a methodology featuring memory techniques like miming and movement (24), usage (49), sounds (72), visualization (88), interaction (127), and singing (16, 33, 118). An audio CD accompanies the volume to give the student the sounds of the Hebrew for the exercises. Its recordings are clear and definitely helpful. However, since Dobson does not break the accompanying texts into identical segments, students might have
difficulty coordinating the reading segments with the text segments.

Introductions to each section of the grammar provide a clear view of lesson content and goals (1, 35-39). Vocabulary lists utilize three dots (…) to indicate a wider range of meanings than those he provides (15). At times, however, Dobson fails to indicate such a range for words like the beth preposition (29; cp. 135, 302-6). From the start he rightly informs the student that the waw conjunction has a variety of uses and translations (27). He also introduces the student to wayyiqtol early as the verb that marks the next step forward in normal Hebrew narrative (36).

One of the strengths of this grammar is the focus on narrative and its characteristics. Insightfully, Dobson employs “main line” and “off line” to identify the distinction between two types of narrative verbs (38; also discussed by Duane A. Garrett, A Modern Grammar for Classical Hebrew [Broadman & Holman, 2002] 318-19). Throughout the grammar he preserves a focus on context as the ultimate determining factor for translation and meaning (39, 67, 75). Listing helpful translation guidelines (56), he gives the student clear direction for translating biblical Hebrew.

Dobson does not ignore the intricacies and difficulties inherent in biblical Hebrew. To introduce students to the potential ambiguity of the Hebrew text, he presents a brief discussion of Gen 2:18 (145). In addition, he informs them that emphasis is not always a simple matter of word order (248). His summaries of sections on wishes, oaths, conditions, and wayyiqtol are simple and memorable (223, 239). He leaves the treatment of Hebrew poetry to the end (279-94). It is not as thorough as his treatment of narrative, but is quite understandable and practical.

In spite of the many helpful and insightful features of Dobson’s grammar, it has many unfortunate errors and inaccuracies that might confuse or hinder the student. Christ’s cry in Matthew 27:46 does employ the Hebrew Ėli (“my God”), but the full statement is Aramaic, not Hebrew (1). Describing the pronunciation of ‘ayin as “a slightly raspy sound in the back of the throat, like the start of a gargle” (9) is too close to the guttural heth and ignores the fact that it is often silent. “יָהָּה or יָּהָּה may also be used before a name. In the examples note נַעַר ‘not’, כּוֹנֶה ‘and not’. …” (19) is a confusing non sequitur. By translating the Tetragrammaton (יהוה) as “Lord” instead of “LORD” or “Yahweh” or “YHWH” (28, 45), Dobson leads students to ignore the significant difference between the divine titles ‘Adonai and Yahweh. His treatment of the Hebrew perfect as “completed” action (37, 96), rather than complete (or, whole), runs contrary to the latest grammatical opinions (cf. Gary A. Long, Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew: Learning Biblical Hebrew Grammatical Concepts through English Grammar [Hendrickson, 2002] 92 and Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax [Eisenbrauns, 1990] §30.1d). Dobson’s discussion of the correlative perfect (94-95) is basically the old-fashioned waw-conversive view, which ignores the role of context and genre.

On the basis of the statement that Hebrew writers “do not use long complicated sentences with many subordinate clauses” (97), students might think that subordinate clauses are rare in biblical Hebrew and fail to comprehend the complex of subordinate clauses in Ruth 1:1. Discussion of the weak verb forms (103-7) lacks adequate organization, preventing the student from understanding them more readily. Dobson misrepresents the Piel conjugation as primarily “a strong form
of action” (107) and omits the iterative (or, repetitive) from his summary list of usages (159). He ignores the immediate future (futurum instans) usage of the Hebrew participle (152, 244). Students and teachers alike will be puzzled by the absence of any discussion of vowel lengthening (349-50 refer to only to vowel shortening and reduction).

Lastly, the dictionary exercise (160-62) requires Langenscheidt’s Hebrew dictionary. Dobson fails to introduce the student to an inadequate lexicon for biblical Hebrew. His exercise would have been more effective with William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1988).


According to Justin Taylor, who writes “An Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of This Book,” advocates of a postconservative evangelical theology have surfaced under various names: postconservatives, reformists, the emerging church, younger evangelicals, postfundamentalists, postfoundationalists, postpropositionalists, and postevangelicals (17-18). Such people are self-professed evangelicals whose purpose is to revise the theology, renew the center, and transform the worshiping community of evangelicalism because of the postmodern global context of the present day (18). Taylor suggests Stanley Grenz as postconservatism’s Professor, Brian McLaren as its Pastor, and Roger Olson and Robert Webber as its Publicists (18).

The book’s contributors include Chad Owen Brand, A. B. Caneday, D. A. Carson, Garrett DeWeese, Kwabena Donkor, Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, Douglas R. Groothuis, J. P. Moreland, James Parker III, R. Scott Smith, Justin Taylor, William G. Travis, and Stephen J. Wellum. This group defends foundationalism-type teaching of Christian doctrine against the postconservatives who advocate more of a community-determined use of Scripture in the present postmodern culture. The postconservatives contend that the Carl Henry-type doctrinal position is out of date in the today’s world. They prefer a “generous orthodoxy” that is somewhere between conservative traditionalism and liberal-progressivism.

In his chapter, “Is Theological Truth Functional or Propositional? Postconservativism’s Use of Language Games,” Caneday notes that a favorite device of Grenz and his fellow postconservative John R. Franke goes by the name of speech-act theory. They see the primary purpose of Scripture as functional as the Spirit speaks to the church in a postmodern, postfoundationalist context. They criticize the Princeton theologians such as Charles Hodge for viewing the doctrine of Scripture as foundational to all Christian theology. They point to the Spirit’s subjective speech-acts as He uses Scripture within the community of believers. “Their appropriation of speech-act theory, then, is to move beyond what the Scripture says and means (textually accessible) to God’s acts and speech today
(textually inaccessible)” (155). For them, many and varied applications of the text replace the time-honored hermeneutical principle that the text has one and only one meaning. That use of speech-act theory opens wide the door to using the text to support various mutually exclusive meanings, a great concession to postmodernism.

Erickson in his chapter, “On Flying in Theological Fog,” critiques postconservatism’s effort to adjust to a postmodern culture. He writes, “One of the criticisms of postconservative evangelicalism in this volume is that it is too focused on the present, or in some cases, on the past, which it thinks to be the present. It also sometimes looks at the present and describes it as the future.” His point is that trying to adjust Christian theology to a changing secular culture is a hopeless task because no one knows what direction that culture will take in the future.

As seen by Taylor, postconservatives have acknowledged their own set of debilitating dichotomies: “focus on the center versus preoccupation with boundaries; convertive piety versus correct doctrine; appropriation of postmodernism versus stagnant traditionalism” (32).

This reviewer certainly agrees with the tone of the essays in this book. Postconservatism is a current danger to evangelicalism. The essays are a timely warning to all evangelicals. Yet he is disappointed at the dominant philosophical treatment of the dangers that contributors have authored. A scanty one and one-half page “Scripture Index” at the end of a book of this length reflects how rarely contributors have referred to the Bible in support of this warning. Those desiring a more biblical response to postconservatism must look elsewhere to find it.


Robert Chisholm’s Handbook on the Prophets (2002; see TMSJ 16/2 [2005]:328-32) and Victor P. Hamilton’s two titles, Handbook on the Pentateuch, 2d ed. (2005) and Handbook on the Historical Books (2001) are companion volumes to Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms in Baker Academic’s handbook series. Estes intends the book for “advanced undergraduates, seminary students, pastors, and lay teachers of the Bible” (9). This reviewer required Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms for courses on OT wisdom literature that he taught to seminary students in Myanmar and Singapore and will continue to use it for all such courses in the foreseeable future. For students with limited resources and limited means to obtain books of value, this volume provides excellent verse by verse expositions of Job (11-139), Ecclesiastes (271-392), and Song of Songs (393-444).

Coverage of the Book of Proverbs (213-69) is thematic (twelve themes arranged alphabetically: cheerfulness [224-27], contentment [227-32], decisions [232-35], diligence [235-36], friendship [236-39], generosity [239-43], humility [243-45], kindness [245-48], parenting [248-52], purity [252-54], righteousness [254-57], and truthfulness [257-61]). The author selected these twelve themes as representative of “procedures and virtues that are constituent parts of a life characterized by wisdom” (224). Selected psalms with wisdom content (arranged
according to ten psalm types) comprise the treatment of Psalms: introduction (Psalm 1; 152-55), descriptive praise (Psalm 145; 155-58), nature ( Psalm 29; 159-62), declarative praise (Psalm 138; 162-65), lament (Psalm 13; 165-72), imprecation (Psalm 109; 172-77), messianic prophecy (Psalm 22; 178-85), enthronement (Psalm 98; 185-90), wisdom (Psalm 127; 190-96), and trust (Psalm 46; 196-99).

A fairly detailed introduction discusses such matters as authorship, date, unity, literature, structure, setting, purpose, theme, poetry, interpretation, and theology for each biblical book. For the Book of Job, Estes provides excellent argumentation for establishing the setting in patriarchal times (22-23).

Within the expositions, the author consistently refers to the Hebrew text for the discussion of key words and for the solving of interpretive problems and is not reluctant to tackle even textual critical issues (cf. 66-67 with reference to Job 13:15). Ecclesiastes receives the greatest amount of attention and detail. In fact, Estes' excellent commentary on that book could stand alone. The exposition of Eccl 3:11 provides one of the volume's most memorable and repeatable lines: “In other words, humans are bound by time, but they are wired for eternity” (313).

Although Estes’ volume is thoroughly evangelical, an occasional dubious statement occurs. For example, he refers to the parables of Jesus as “literary fictions” (18; see also, 325). He also lends too much credence to mythology and legend supposedly employed in Job. If Behemoth and Leviathan truly reveal God’s omniscience and omnipotence, they must be real rather than “fantastic or legendary creatures” (121; see Job 40:15). In Eccl 1:16 he resorts to claiming that the writer of the book probably made “a slip” (297), rather than supporting the inerrancy of the text. Estes does not hold to Solomonic authorship, describing Qoheleth’s “masquerade as Solomon” (304) and his construction of “a royal fiction” (286).

This volume utilizes the NIV as the textual base for exposition. In the bibliographies Estes does not list secondary literature (articles, essays, and monographs) of note prior to 1992, since recent commentaries cite the earlier items (10). Readers will find the bibliographies very helpful in the pursuit of significant resources. The brief topic index at the conclusion of the volume (445-48) is not extensive enough to make a valuable contribution—a Scripture index would have been far more useful.


Yizhar Hirschfeld, Professor of Classical Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Institute of Archaeology and author of *The Judean Desert Mountains in the Byzantine Period* (Yale, 1992) and *The Palestinian Dwelling in the Roman-Byzantine Period* (Franciscan Press, 1995), currently directs excavations at En Gedi, Ramat Hanadiv, and Tiberias. All of these projects focus on the Roman and Byzantine periods, the eras of his expertise. Joining a chorus of archaeologists questioning the traditional findings of Roland de Vaux at Qumran (cf. de Vaux’s *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls* [Oxford University, 1973]), Hirschfeld
proposes that the site was the prosperous rural estate of an influential member of Israelite metropolitan society. Although he is not the first to make such an identification, his major contribution to the debate relates to his employment of results from a regional survey of sites in order to place Qumran within its regional as well as chronological context.

Firstly, Hirschfeld discusses “The Study of Qumran” (1-27), describing the nature, setting, and significance of the find as well as a brief history of the archaeological field work and recent scholarly work. Secondly, he introduces the reader to the debate of the scrolls’ origins (29-48): Qumran or Jerusalem? He concludes that the heterogeneity of the scrolls is more characteristic of a setting in second temple Jerusalem than a sectarian community in Qumran (48).

“The Archaeology of Qumran” (49-182) comprises the third chapter and the volume’s core content. Excavations by de Vaux, though typical of his time, were inferior to today’s conventions and standards (52-53). Archaeological evidence depicts the Late Iron Age settlement at Qumran as a general settlement that might have functioned as a military post starting in the late seventh century B.C. (59). It is most likely that John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.) in the Hasmonean period reconstructed Qumran as a field fort and road-station (87). In the Herodian period (ca. 37 B.C.-A.D. 68) the site became a civilian rural estate (88) with a striking similarity to George Washington’s estate at Mt. Vernon in Virginia (90). De Vaux’s “scriptorium” might turn out to be a private dining room (93-96). Unfortunately, de Vaux appears to have ignored the lamps, juglets, lathe-turned stoneware, and glass vessels that help to demonstrate the economic wealth of Herodian Qumran (142). Architectural details, geometric tiles, stucco, columns, evidence of arches, and flagstone also indicate a wealthy settlement rather than a monastic sectarian settlement (142). A “far cry from Pliny’s description of the Essenes as living ‘without money’” (143; see also, 230), large quantities of coins at Qumran contradict the sectarian hypothesis.

Fourthly, after examining the available evidence at nearby ‘Ein Feshka (183-209), Hirschfeld proposes that the site played a role in the perfume industry (207). De Vaux, on the other hand, had concluded that ‘Ein Feshka housed a tannery that produced the parchment for Qumran’s scrolls (203). Lastly, the author leads a tour of the Dead Sea Valley in the second temple period (211-43). In geographical and historical context, Qumran fits the classification of fortified estates or manor houses (221, 229). Expelling the Essenes from Qumran, however, does not invalidate Pliny’s identification of an Essene site near the Dead Sea. In fact, Hirschfeld has excavated a potential Essene sectarian site situated above En-Gedi (233).

For the most recent archaeological study offering support to de Vaux’s viewpoint, this reviewer (and Hirschfeld) would refer the reader to Jodi Magness, The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls (Eerdmans, 2002). The newest contribution to the ongoing debate comes from Yizhak Magen and Yuval Peleg who believe that Qumran was nothing more than a pottery factory (“Back to Qumran: Ten Years of Excavation and Research, 1993-2004,” in The Site of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Archaeological Interpretations and Debates, eds. Katharina Galor et al., 55-113, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 57 [Brill, 2006]).

Compellingly written, richly illustrated (73 black and white plates, 16 color plates, and 47 drawings, plans, and maps), and systematically presented, Hirschfeld’s
Qumran in Context is must reading for anyone interested in the manuscript and/or archaeological finds at Qumran. Academic libraries should acquire this volume for their collections on the topic of the Dead Sea scrolls.


*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing* presents readers with a pleasantly readable expository commentary on the Book of Genesis. As the senior pastor of The College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, and a popular Bible conference speaker, Kent Hughes is a skillful biblical expositor. Comparing this volume with two sources Hughes frequently cites helps to classify this commentary. On the one hand, the two volumes by Kenneth A. Mathews in the New American Commentary series (*Genesis 1–11:26* and *Genesis 12–50*; Broadman & Holman, 1996, 2002; see review in *TMSJ* 8/2 [Fall 1997]:244-47) are more exegetical in nature. On the other hand, *Creation and Blessing* by Allen P. Ross (Baker, 1998; see review in *TMSJ* 11/2 [Fall 2000]:269-70), instructs preachers how to expound the text of Genesis. Hughes’ commentary is a great example of building upon the foundation Ross laid.

Endnotes (625-70) provide readers with pertinent quotations from a wide range of key resources for interpreting Genesis. Five excurses (perhaps representing individual topical sermons) summarize key theological topics: “Man and Sin in Genesis” (579-87), “Faith and Righteousness in Genesis” (589-97), “Grace in Genesis” (599-606), “Messiah in Genesis” (607-14), and “God in Genesis” (615-24). Indexes (Scripture, 671-85; General, 686-97; and Sermon Illustrations, 698-702) round out the volume of seventy-five sermons—approximately one and a half years of Sundays.

Hughes’ expositions deal forthrightly with the text of Genesis. He chooses his illustrations with care and employs them to heighten the focus of the text itself. Applications are judicious, contextual, and often tied to equivalent NT truths. Expositions through Genesis 12–50 provide rich character studies of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Judah. One of the most memorable of his expositions, “Guilt and Grace” (493-99; regarding Gen 42:1-38), hammers home the truth that “True guilt is a grace because it brings the guilty to seek forgiveness and to repent” (496). Hughes’ presentation of Judah’s transition to a godly leader superbly balances Judah’s spiritual development and Messianic prophecy about his ultimate descendant (451-57 and 549-54).

Normally, sermons dealing with the theological intricacies related to the fall of mankind propel the expositor headlong into matters many in the pew find difficult to understand. Hughes, however, succeeds in simplifying without sacrificing theological depth (57-99). His success is partly due to dividing Genesis 3 carefully into four sermons, enabling him to serve the information in digestible bites without losing continuity.

The series of nineteen sermons on Abraham (181-329) is especially masterful and provides passionate, sound expositions based on accurate exegesis.
However, the series of eighteen sermons on Joseph (435-577), though superbly presented, are uneven in their exegetical accuracy. To his credit, Hughes correctly reminds the reader that Joseph’s coat was most likely “a sleeved coat that reached to the wrists and ankles” (438), rather than a multi-colored garment. On the other side of the exegetical ledger, however, dating Joseph’s imprisonment to 1500 B.C. (465) is inaccurate. It is possible that the date might be a typo rather than an intentional late-dating since Hughes gives 1720-1570 B.C. as the dates for the Hyksos rulers (460).

At some points factuality appears to suffer from a lack of accurate information. For example, domesticated camels were not a “rarity” (193) in the time of Abraham (see John J. Davis, “The Camel in Biblical Narratives,” in A Tribute to Gleason Archer, ed. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Ronald F. Youngblood, 1412-52 [Moody, 1986]). Likewise, it is inconsistent with biblical usage to claim that “the superior always blesses the inferior” (219)—see 14:19-20, where Melchizedek employs the same word for the blessing of Abraham and God in the same statement (cp. Pss 16:7 and 72:15, too often translated “praise”; cf. Michael L. Brown, NIDOTTE, 1:764 [#9]). Whether Hughes adopts a late date for the exodus from Egypt is difficult to ascertain. He identifies Goshen with “the land of Rameses” (520) and his endnote cites Kidner favorably regarding a Ramesside context for Moses (666), and at 47:11 he ignores the problem the text presents regarding the early date (533).

In a few places Hughes implies that some textual details in the pre-patriarchal period are nothing more than Moses’ own inserted ideas or concepts. For example, he declares that “The designation ‘in Eden, in the east’ is from the perspective of Moses, in the Sinai” (53). In addition, with a touch of anachronistic reasoning, he proposes that Moses’ account of the building of the tower of Babel is colored by a Palestinian perspective (170).

This reviewer’s greatest disagreements with Hughes reside in his exposition of 1:1–2:17 (15-56). Reference to “the primeval chaos” (21) at the earth’s creation unnecessarily assumes a chaotic rather than orderly condition of the earth in 1:2. A chaos viewpoint leads to the depiction of the darkness as evil (cp. 30, “Christ the Creator, who brings order out of the dark chaos of our lives”), rather than as God’s good creation. Interestingly (amusingly?) disagreement over the length of the “days” of creation evokes an appeal “to employ good will and magnanimity” (24), but later Hughes implies that some interpreters exhibit “ignorant arrogance” (26) in their attempts to deal with this problem. Arguing that the seventh day had no end (26, 43, 45, 46) seems to go beyond the natural reading of the text and produces a conflict with the clear implications of the Fourth Commandment in Exod 20:10-11. Forcing this unending day interpretation on the preceding six days (27) seems equally precarious and unnatural.

At other times Hughes takes a certain degree of artistic license—such as his description of Abraham’s and the heavenly guests’ faces as “leathered” (262). Who among us, however, has not waxed eloquently in the same fashion without supporting evidence? Occasional lapses in archeological, cultural, or historical details might briefly distract those who know better, but no one can read these expositions without God impacting heart and mind with His Word. Every preacher of Genesis should read this volume.

“I write as an evangelical pastor to other evangelical pastors who have the amazing privilege and awesome responsibility of proclaiming the Word of God to their congregations week after week. You are my heroes” (15). So begins Steven Mathewson, the senior pastor of Dry Creek Bible Church, Belgrade, Montana, as he introduces this book, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*. Mathewson recounts his own frustrations as he began to preach through 1 & 2 Samuel in his second year of pastoral ministry:

I had preached a sermon chock-full of exegetical insights and laced with historical-cultural data. I even pressed it into a neat analytical outline. But my sermon did not do justice to the purpose of Old Testament stories: to lure people into real-life dramas where they run smack into God’s agenda and his assessment of their lives (13).

His frustration led him to raise the level of his own OT narrative sermons. His passion was to devour every book and article on interpreting and preaching OT narratives and become a preaching practitioner of what he was learning. He has preached through nine of the historical books of the English Bible and has also prepared sermons from individual texts in every other narrative book of the OT. A large part of his D.Min. studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary was devoted to preaching OT narrative literature. In 1997, Mathewson published a summary of his findings in the article, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming Old Testament Narratives” (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 [October-December 1997]: 410-35). Though he admits that he still has much to learn, Mathewson writes, “But I reached a point in my journey where I feel compelled to help other preachers who struggle with the proclamation of Old Testament narrative texts. I am attempting to write the book I needed when I first started” (14).

Mathewson begins the volume with an introductory chapter, “The Challenge of Preaching OT Narratives” (19-27). He notes that in a culture where people are programmed to think in stories, preachers need to take the narratives of the OT seriously. “As evangelicals, we’ve taken Old Testament stories seriously enough to defend their historicity. Now it’s time to learn to preach them effectively” (20). He avers that preachers who are committed to expository preaching, i.e., preaching that exposes the meaning of Scripture and applies that meaning to the lives of the hearers, need to realize that good storytellers do not convey their stories through analytical outlines. Yet the analytical outline is the approach usually used by contemporary evangelical expositors. Mathewson proposes in this volume to remodel a method of preaching OT narratives built on the stages of sermon preparation presented in Haddon Robinson’s textbook, *Biblical Preaching* (2d ed., Baker, 2001).

The author divides the core of his book into three parts. Part I is entitled
"From Text to Concept" (29-90), and it concentrates on the hermeneutical task of interpreting the OT narrative texts. Part 2, “From Concept to Sermon” (91-157), deals with the homiletical task of how to craft an accurate, clear, interesting, and relevant sermon from an OT narrative text. Part 3, “Sermon Manuscripts” (159-226), provides five examples of sermons based on OT narrative texts to show how to apply the concepts described in the first two parts of the book. Two appendices follow the main discussion. Appendix A details how to analyze narrative plot structure from the OT Hebrew text (227-55). Appendix B supplies resources for the study of the OT narrative books, Genesis through Esther (256-60). A bibliography (261-70), Scripture index (271-74), and subject index (275-79) complete the volume.

The most valuable section of the book is Part 1 where Mathewson displays pedagogical skill in summarizing the exegetical steps a preacher needs to follow in his study of OT narrative. These steps are listed in one of the helpful charts that the author has sprinkled throughout parts 1 and 2 of the book (77-78). In Appendix A (228-29), the writer also challenges the expositor to get his Hebrew up to speed and use it in his study of the OT text. He then proceeds to summarize and demonstrate how preachers can do discourse analysis from the Hebrew narrative texts (229-55). Further, building on Robinson’s concept of “the big idea,” i.e., the exegetical idea of the biblical passage that becomes foundational for the homiletical idea of the sermon, Mathewson proposes that the exegetical idea stage be divided into exegetical idea and theological idea. While the exegetical idea states the biblical writer’s intended meaning that reflects the time and culture of the original audience, “(the theological expression of the big idea states it in timeless language that applies to God’s people living in any stage of salvation history” (83). This insight is beneficial to the expositor of OT narrative, especially when he wrestles with the contemporary application of the biblical text (101-3).

Part 2, which deals with the construction of the sermon from the interpretation of the narrative, is recognized by the author to be the more difficult process. He writes, “Arriving at the exegetical summit with the author’s intended meaning is the easy part. It’s getting back down to deliver the goods to the congregation that’s hard” (94). Because there is more subjectivity in sermon preparation, Mathewson is more tentative in his suggestions in Part 2 that he was in Part 1. He does a good job of reminding the expositor of the basics of sermon preparation, i.e., determining the homiletical big idea, deciding the purpose of the sermon, specifying the introduction, body, and conclusion of the sermon. The expositor will find this discussion stimulating and challenging. The most difficult part of the sermon preparation process is outlining, especially in preaching biblical narrative (122-30). The writer opts for an inductive approach, because “while stories work inductively, outlines work deductively” (124). Therefore, the expositor of narrative should think in terms of “moves” instead of points, following the suggestion of David Buttrick in his book, Homiletic: Moves and Structures (Fortress, 1987). The five sermon examples given in Part 3 of the present work (by Mathewson, Donald Sunukjian, Paul Borden, Haddon Robinson, and Alice Mathews) all follow the inductive, “moves’ approach. It is at this point that some readers, including the present reviewer, have their greatest tension with Mathewson’s suggestions. Although induction is the best approach to the study of the OT narratives, is it the best means of exposition? The biblical text is an objective revelation from God whose meaning
needs to be explained to a contemporary audience. For example, Ezra and the Levites “read from the book, from the law of God [which included narrative], explaining to give the sense so that they understood the reading” (Neh 8:8). The inductive, “moves” approach implies that the hearer will discover the sense from a sermon, whereas a deductive, “point” approach implies that the expositor gives the sense to the hearer. It seems that the latter approach is more consistent with the biblical mandate. Therefore, this reviewer sees the approach of Dale Ralph Davis (see the review of 2 Kings: The Power and the Fury above) as a better model of OT narrative preaching than the models found in the present volume.

Matthewson is to be commended for introducing the biblical expositor to the challenge of preaching OT narrative. He has issued a challenge that no evangelical pastor can ignore. This is a book that all expositors should read. There is much that is of value in its pages, although some of its suggestions need to be refined.


The author is Dean of the School of Theology, Senior Vice President for Academic Administration, and Associate Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also was the first Executive Director of the Carl F. H. Henry Institute for Evangelical Engagement. In this work Moore presents a strong case in favor of Kingdom theology.

Moore blames evangelical failure in the sociopolitical arena on an inadequate evangelical theology of the Kingdom. He heavily emphasizes the work of Carl F. H. Henry, particularly in his _The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism_. Right after World War II, Henry was a leader in the new evangelical movement that sought to cure evangelicalism of its fundamentalistic isolation from the activity of contemporary society and politics. Henry pushed strongly the theological case for evangelicalism in terms of a vigorous engagement with nonevangelical thought. According to Moore, Henry’s work and the new evangelical movement it helped to start forced evangelicals into a middle ground between fundamentalist social detachment and the liberal social gospel.

Moore continues in noting that evangelicalism was divided into two camps, the covenantalists and the dispensationalists with their differing view of the Kingdom, a division that hindered evangelicalism from having a united impact on the secular world. Debates between premillennialists and amillennialists were secondary matters to Henry (and apparently to Moore too). He lamented the absence of a united evangelical front with which to confront the secular society.

In Moore’s estimation, that united front has begun to emerge. His book refers repeatedly to an emerging consensus (e.g., 60, 69, 74, 96, 116, 153, 149, 152, 153, 157, 160, 167) that results from changes in both Dispensationalism and Covenant theology. The emerging consensus was facilitated by the exegetical and biblical theological syntheses of George Eldon Ladd, whose view of the Kingdom differed from the two dominant evangelical systems. Moore sees movements toward

Moore laments the fact that both dispensationalists and covenantalists miss the major point in identifying the seed of Abraham as Jesus of Nazareth. On this account dispensationalists err in giving the nation Israel a major role in the future millennium, and Covenant theologians err in their theories of “replacement theology.”

Moore offers a quite interesting theory regarding developments in evangelicalism since World War II, but his work is quite deficient in its practice of proof-texting without regard to the historical and contextual meanings of the Scriptures he cites. Such exegetical carelessness is devastating. His case for a unified, evangelical Kingdom theology does not appear to have a bright future.


Steven Sizer is vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, Surrey, England, and Chairman of the International Bible Society (UK). His goal in the book is to demonstrate that “the convictions of Christian Zionists have made a significant contribution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (17). Sizer defines “Christian Zionism” as follows: “At its simplest, Christian Zionism is a political form of philo-Semitism, and can be defined as ‘Christian support for Zionism’” (19).

In discussing the history of the movement, the author notes that “proto-Christian Zionism predated and nurtured Jewish Zionism” and that “the contemporary Christian Zionist movement emerged only after 1967, alongside Messianic Zionism, in part in reaction to the widespread criticism Israel has endured over the last thirty-five years” (19). He sees dispensational Christian Zionism as the dominant form of Christian Zionism in America (23). Sizer traces the origin of Christian Zionism all the way back to the Reformation and shows how various individuals and organizations have been instrumental in promoting that cause. He sees Hal Lindsey as the most influential of all twentieth-century Christian Zionists (93).

Sizer is critical of what he calls the ultra-literal hermeneutic of Christian Zionism. He writes, “Therefore, the question is not whether the promises of the covenant are to be understood literally or spiritually; it is instead a question of whether they should be understood in terms of old covenant shadow or new covenant reality. The failure to recognize this principle is the basic hermeneutic error which Christian Zionists make and from which flow the other distinctive doctrines that characterize the movement” (135). By reading the NT back into the OT, the author asserts that the Jews are no longer God’s chosen people: “The idea that the Jewish people continue to enjoy a special status by virtue of the covenants made with the Patriarchs is in conflict with the clear and unambiguous statements of the New Testament” (149). Sizer presents the usual perspective of Covenant theology and
ami llenn ialism in see king t o comba t Ch ristian Zio nism. 
He notes, “The Christi an right came to influence US foreign policy largely through the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. His victory over Jimmy Carter gave a considerable boost to the Christian Zionist cause” (214). About 95% of the Christian tour groups that go to Israel never see or hear about the indigenous Christian church in Israel, he says. “The biblical literalism of Christian Zionism leads many to demonize Arabs and Palestinians as Satanic enemies of the Jewish people” (250). Sizer’s great regret is over injustices that have been inflicted on the Palestinian people, even those who are Christians. He sums up with the words, “In its apocalyptic and political forms especially, Christian Zionism distorts the Bible and marginalizes the universal imperative of the Christian message of equal grace and common justice” (259).

Sizer’s work is commendable in the amount of information it contains. Even though it is anti-dispensational, it contains a huge amount of information on dispensationalism about which most dispensationalists are unaware. The research has been thorough. Its major weakness lies in its hermeneutical approach. Sizer’s use of Scripture is superficial and beset with covenantal and amillennial preunderstandings. It is a book that seeks to discredit the role of Israel as seen through dispensationalist eyes. For those without deep roots in sound biblical hermeneutics, it may have an unfortunate impact. But for others who can withstand the storm of harsh accusations against Christian Zionism as a political force in today’s world, it will be instructive regarding present-day international policies, especially those of the United States.


Tertullian’s famous question, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” is given a new twist by James K. A. Smith in his book, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? For Smith, Professor of Philosophy at Calvin College, the question before the Christian church now is, “What has Paris to do with Jerusalem?” (10).

The aim of Smith’s book, which is part of the The Church and Postmodern Culture series, is to offer a non-technical introduction to postmodernism and to show how postmodernism should be a catalyst for the church to recover its authentic mission. He also attempts to show how the unholy trinity of French postmodern scholars—Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Michel Foucault, when correctly understood, offers insights that “have a deep affinity with central Christian claims” (22).

Smith’s work has five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the concept of postmodernism and why Christians should be aware of the cultural shift from modernism to postmodernism. Chapters 2–4 are the heart of the book. Here Smith discusses how the primary postmodern thinkers Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault “can push us to recapture some truths about the nature of the church that have been overshadowed by modernity and especially by Christian appropriations
of modernism” (23). Chapter 5 is Smith’s attempt to show how postmodernism can actually be a stimulus for authentic Christianity. Here Smith chastises the evangelical church for being too modern and relying on outdated concepts of objectivity, absolute truth, and Cartesian certainty. The postmodern church, on the other hand, is in a position to recapture important elements such as tradition, catholicity, the sacraments, community, liturgy, and aesthetics (136–143).

While trying to position himself between those who see postmodernism either as savior or devil, Smith clearly aligns himself with those who view postmodernism as a mostly positive development. In doing so, he also finds himself in agreement with much that is going on with the Emerging Church Movement, which has openly embraced postmodern concepts.

The most helpful part of this book for this reviewer was Smith’s analysis of certain “bumper sticker” slogans that are most associated with postmodernism. For instance, Smith shows that Derrida’s oft quoted statement, “There is nothing outside the text” is not a claim that only language exists and that everything else such as cups or tables do not. As Smith points out, Derrida is no linguistic idealist. Instead, what Derrida meant by “There is nothing outside the text” is that everything is subject to interpretation (39). Thus, even the most basic objects taken for granted, such as cups or forks, must be interpreted.

Smith also does a similar analysis of Lyotard’s claim that postmodernity is “incredulity toward metanarratives.” Smith argues that Lyotard is not arguing against big stories or epics that tell an overarching tale about the world. Instead, what Lyotard is against are claims that metanarratives can be proven with certainty by appeals to universal reason. Smith also attempts to show the proper understanding of Foucault’s statement, “Power is knowledge.” Since even postmodern thinkers deserve to be understood in context (although some may not offer the same courtesy to us), Smith has done a good service by clearing up confusion on what these popular philosophers believed.

This reviewer did find fundamental points of disagreement with the book. First, while profiting from a clear explanation of what Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault meant by what they said, a convincing case was not made as to why the church should be interested in applying the ideas of these non-Christian philosophers. The church at various times in history has been influenced by non-Christian philosophers (Augustine–Plotinus, Aquinas–Aristotle). Plus, there is no denying that non-Christian philosophers at times make statements compatible with Christianity (even stopped clocks are right twice a day). However, the Scriptures do not call on God’s people to incorporate non-Christian philosophy into the church. In fact, the church is instructed to guard itself against the infiltration of worldly philosophies (see Col 2:8–10).

A second concern is that Smith promotes the common belief among postmodern scholars that no objective truth exists. Apparently, Smith has concluded that since all things are subject to interpretation and that all people have biases and presuppositions, then objective truth must not exist. However, the fact that certain factors make epistemic certainty difficult at times does not mean that absolute, objective truth does not exist.

In this reviewer’s opinion, Smith’s denial of objective truth has dangerous consequences such as holding that Christianity is not more objectively true than other
religions. For example, Smith claims the Christian understanding of reality is an interpretation and is no more objectively true than the Buddhist understanding: “Both are interpretations; neither is objectively true” (50).

Giving a readable summary of Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault is no small task. For this Smith should be commended. Yet this reviewer remains unconvinced that Paris has much to do with Jerusalem or that Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault are wells from which the church should drink.


The purpose of the book is to “assist you in being able to think through your context, apply universal principles in your mission setting, and then identify and apply strategies that will make you more effective in your context” (2). Ed Stetzer is Research Team Director at the North American Mission Board (SBC), and David Putnam is Executive Pastor of Mountain Lake Church in Northern Forsythe County, Georgia. Both are seasoned church planters. This is the fourth book dealing with church planting and Emerging Church issues to which Stetzer has contributed. It accompanied the recent release of *Planting Missional Churches*, which is an updated version of *Planting Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Broadman and Holman, 2003).

This book assumes a shift in American culture to a “glocal community.” The term describes the “convergence of the global reality with our local reality,” which requires “new strategies for effective ministry” (5). The authors are not theorists, but practitioners. Their approach takes values developed from church planting and applies them to the context of established local churches which seek to reach their communities with the gospel.

The writers are theologically conservative. They emphasize the gospel of repentance and assert that when the church’s message becomes something other than “repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . the gospel itself is lost in the process” (39). They believe in a regenerated, active church membership (150). And they push for radical cultural awareness. They urge readers to act like a missionary would in a foreign culture, who usually learns local culture and people with the goal of introducing the gospel therein (217).

“Exegeting the culture” is not a new concept. It means that certain practices the missionary/planter/pastor is familiar with and embraces as his own “personal preferences” may not adapt to the culture he hopes to bring the gospel into. Accordingly, this book urges readers to lay aside personal preferences in order to embrace trans-cultural biblical principles in making disciples of all nations. As the book suggests, the best way to contextualize the gospel within a culture is to plant new churches.

Though this book has much to commend it, cautions are necessary. Being “missional” tends not to focus on one particular method over another, but certain methods may be more or less useful in a culture. What about employing methods in
a culture where conflicting views exist about what is moral or immoral? The "missiological" emphasis in the book is welcomed with caution. It seems to be too sociological. The authors state, "Missiology impacts how these things are done, but the Bible requires that certain things should be done" (53). Whereas this is a true statement, the dichotomy is not necessary. Does the Bible merely give overarching mandates with no propositional paradigms to employ? This statement is also contradictory since the writers are seeking to follow a "missional" approach whose paradigm they maintain has derived from Scripture.

Unfortunately, the book also sets forth ideas from contemporary missiology like "redemptive analogy" (96-97), the "man of peace" (218), and the mystical idea seeking to determine where God is working before knowing how to join Him (220-21). The book offers such "methods" as time-tested ways of doing ministry.

No perfect methodological approach to ministry exists, but wise evangelical pastors should pay attention to certain principles in this book. Yet that does not guarantee gospel success in a culture. Some lack of success may be due to a poor "missional" strategy or inability to faithfully contextualize the gospel. But in some cultures, churches will not be planted and communities will not be reached, even though one has done all of the work of loving people and contextualizing the gospel. The Bible suggests (cf. Luke 9:5; Acts 13:51; 16:7) that in some instances churches will not be planted and people will not be reached. Nevertheless, any missionary, planter, or pastor should be aware of cultural issues as this book urges.

The presentation of discipleship is also problematic. The authors say that people are "converted" to the community before they are "converted" to Christ, and present this as the proper discipleship process (105-6). Though this may work with church plants that often desperately need people, established churches should be more cautious when involving non-Christians in the community. The authors suggest that "code-breaking churches . . . create all kinds of opportunities for the unreached/unchurched to participate in service." But like what? Where should unbelievers serve within a church? They do not give examples. And how should a pastor shepherd non-Christians once they are participating in the life of the community? Again, no examples are given.

The book calls it "sin" for evangelicals to be unwilling to depart from their personal preferences when seeking to reach a people. But should one always be so quick to divest himself of all personal preferences? This reviewer comes from a certain theological heritage, was trained at certain evangelical schools, and has come to embody certain practices often equated with the evangelical experience. The reviewer is currently a church planter, seeking to understand people within a certain culture to contextualize the gospel and plant a church among a certain people group, but to abandon a particular evangelical heritage and certain preferences does not seem wise. Should one leave his denomination because it is not largely welcome in a certain town? Humans do not live in a vacuum. The gospel is lived out in a diversity of contexts where evangelical churches are planted. It seems that the "glocal" church is most blessed by the interrelationship that faithful churches have with one another, while simultaneously knowing that every preferential cultural oddity is not culturally transcendent.

The major premise of Breaking the Missional Code is that the culture in North America is increasingly non-Christian, and that the church no longer enjoys
This reviewer agrees. Therefore what is needed is a heart change toward the Great Commission and a mentality shift to love people within any and every context. To this end, Stetzer and Putnam have produced a work that serves North American pastors, church planters, and leaders very well. Missionaries will also see this book as long overdue. Therefore, the reviewer cannot recommended it highly enough.


For over a decade, David Wells, Professor of Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has provided the evangelical church (especially) with an informed theological critique of contemporary culture. The previous books in this series, *No Place for Truth* (1993), *God in the Wasteland* (1994), and *Losing our Virtue* (1998), mourned the loss of theological depth in contemporary culture by investigating its cultural, philosophical, and theological sources. One could sum up his critique by saying that the reality of God’s truth, holiness, and power has been eclipsed by the tools and methods of the contemporary world. In other words, the evangelical church has been guilty of “worldliness” in ways far deeper than the practices of what we wear and what we enjoy in entertainment. There is “something rotten in the Denmark,” and it has penetrated the so-called “Bible-believing” churches. The sad thing is that Christians oftentimes cannot see it until someone like Wells points it out.

Wells is a theologian of Reformed convictions, and he reaches deep into history, sociology, philosophy, literature, and other disciplines to develop his perspectives carefully. Also permeating his critique, similar to Francis Schaeffer, is a deep pastoral concern that manifests itself in constructive criticisms of church practice.

This work claims a Christological orientation, hence the subtitle: “Christ in a Postmodern World.” To those who have read fairly deeply on the subject of postmodernity, much of what Wells articulates may not be new. He documents his claims so well, however, that even those experienced in that area will benefit from his analysis. In many cases, the first books to treat new topics are not typically the best. It is easy to see that Wells has been thinking about the subject for many years. Though this book builds on the foundation he laid in the previous three books in the series, not too much unnecessary repetition appears.

In his introduction he laments that the evangelical church lacks “a spiritual gravitas, one which could match the depth of horrendous evil and address issues of such seriousness. Evangelicalism, now much absorbed by the arts and tricks of marketing, is simply not very serious anymore” (4). *Above All Earthly Pow’rs* derives its title from Luther’s famous line in “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” and attempts to inject Christological seriousness back into the evangelical mind and heart. The hymn presents the transcendence of God and the necessity for the church to depend on a transcendent God for its faithfulness. That is precisely what Wells
believes is becoming lost in evangelicalism today. To make his point, Wells elucidates the defining features of the postmodern world: how it emerged, what it is, and how Christians should respond to it.

To understand post-modernism, one must understand modernism. Wells devotes one chapter to this task, “Miracles of Modern Splendor,” in which he explains the arrogant optimism and rampant materialism in the West. The following chapter then addresses “Postmodern Rebellion,” in which the optimism of the modern period gives way to despairing of having a unified worldview at all.

Wells devotes three chapters bringing a biblical Christology to bear on postmodern manifestations in philosophy, theology, and practical ecclesiology. He repeatedly makes clear that the church’s response to postmodernism must be rooted in objective truth, rooted in the Triune God who stands over all who are His creatures. He carefully explains how the gospel shatters human pride and proclaims that through Jesus Christ spiritual restoration is possible (see John 1:1-3, 14; 2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5-11). The cosmic impact of the gospel, not just the inner spiritual changes, are brought to bear on life and thought in a most engaging manner.

In his past works, Wells has not hesitated to name names, and in this book he is no different. His critique of individuals, however, is not slanderous, for he always grounds his criticisms in a rigorous theological evaluation of their views. His comments about influential writers like Grenz (73, 126, 228-29) and Pinnock (242-51) illustrate his theological acumen.

The final chapter, “Megachurches, Paradigm Shifts, and The New Spirituality,” is one that fans of Wells will expect from his previous writings. He indicates how the megachurch and seeker-sensitive approaches to ministry actually appropriate the tools of postmodernity—principally marketing to consumer preferences—to the degree that theology becomes largely irrelevant. This is a theme he has stressed before, and he does not back off in this work. He illustrates how liberal churches have used megachurch growth models to increase their membership considerably, indicating that in all such instances people are most likely being drawn more by methodology than by theology. Wells lays the blame for much of this thinking on the “homogeneous unit principle” of missiologist Donald McGavran, who claimed that evangelism is most successful when people are not forced to cross any racial or economic barriers in order to come to Christ. The megachurch methodology has extended the principle to apply to generational barriers as well. Thus, churches target specific groups and tailor their services to fit specific preferences. The underlying assumption is that “the chief barrier to conversion is sociological and not theological” (289). By catering to certain preferences, and avoiding dislikes, so says the approach, people will more naturally come to Christ.

True to his theological calling, Wells points out the essentially Pelagian thinking that underlies that approach; it assumes that people do not stumble at the gospel, but how it is presented and because it does not fit their cultural preferences. He searingly analyzes, “Seeker methodology rests upon the Pelagian view that human beings are not inherently sinful, despite creedal affirmations to the contrary, that in their disposition to God and His Word, postmoderns are neutral, that they can be seduced into making the purchase of faith even as they can into making any other kind of purchase” (299). The answer to this theological defection, Wells declares, is a return to revealed, objective truth: “What distinguishes the Church from this
industry is truth. It is truth about God and about ourselves that displaces the consumer from his or her current perch of sovereignty in the Church and places God in the place where he should be” (303).

Occasionally this reviewer stops underlining important statements in a book, because he finds himself underlining nearly a whole page! Such is the case with this book. Wells has hit another home run. Whether or not his critique will overthrow the postmodern evangelical juggernaut depends, however, on how many recognize his worth and join his team! On the back cover, D. A. Carson writes, “Those who are serious about the gospel and about thoughtful cultural engagement will not want to miss this book.” To that the reviewer can only add a hearty “Amen.”


The author of this volume is the International Ministry Director of the Langham Partnership and has taught OT at All Nations Christian College in Ware, England. His many published writings include The Message of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative (IVP, 2006), Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament (IVP, 2006), Old Testament Ethics for the People of God (IVP, 2004), Deuteronomy (NIBC, Hendrickson, 1996), and Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament (IVP, 1995).

As a series, The Bible Speaks Today purposes to present readable and accurate expositions of the biblical text in order to relate it to contemporary life. Therefore, Wright “felt free to organize the material with some degree of selection and with a division of the book into groups of related chapters” (12). Therefore, following a fairly complete introduction (17-42), the first chapter of the volume deals with Ezekiel’s vision in 1:1–3:15 (43-63), the second chapter expounds Ezekiel’s first year in ministry as presented in 3:16–5:17 (64-93), and an appendix provides brief notes on Ezekiel 6, 7, and 12 (94-96). The commentary’s third chapter treats the exit of Yahweh’s glory in 8:1–11:25 (97-126) and the fourth chapter is entitled “History with attitude (16:1-63; 23:1-49; 20:1-49)” (127-68), followed by an appendix of notes on Ezekiel 15, 17, and 19 (169-71). Chapter five asks “Who then can be saved? (14:12-23; 18:1-32; 33:10-20)” (172-210). The remaining chapters include “The turning point (24:1-27; 33:1-33)” (211-28), “Then the nations will know that I am the Lord” (25:1–32:32)” (229-72), “The gospel according to Ezekiel (34:1–37:28)” (273-314), and “The glory of God revealed to the world and restored to his people (38:1–48:35)” (315-68).

This volume has much to commend. In his introduction, Wright argues for the unity of the Book of Ezekiel (40). Among the theological focuses that he identifies is the evangelistic nature of Ezekiel’s prophetic ministry (32-35, 42). Discussing the idolatrous condition of Israel as depicted in 8:5-18, he connects Lev 26:40-42 with their need for confession and repentance (104). In fact, he repeatedly emphasizes the significance of Leviticus 26 to Ezekiel (151, 281, 298). Throughout his exposition of Ezekiel 18, he upholds the biblical doctrine of the natural
consequences of sin (181-90).

Although the author claims to perceive an eschatological fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecies (35), he does not interpret such prophecies literally (152 n. 77). Instead, fulfillment is tied to the ministry of Jesus Christ, the establishment of the NT church, and the mission of the church to the Gentiles. Wright’s anti-literalist stance reaches a crescendo in his treatment of Gog and Magog (324-25). In the same vein, he claims that Ezekiel’s description of the temple in chapters 40–48 is purely metaphorical (335). He assigns Ezekiel’s temple vision to messianic fulfillment in Christ (341).

Discussing Ezekiel’s vision of the divine chariot (Ezekiel 1), Wright claims that the prophet “hijacks the Babylonian juggernaut and turns it into a vehicle for conveying the sovereign glory of Yahweh” and that the cherubim were familiar to Mesopotamian inhabitants (28-29). He fails to observe that Moses had written about such guardian cherubs existing at the very beginning of the history of fallen mankind (Gen 3:24). His identification of Daniel in Ezek 14:14 with the Dan’el of Ugaritic texts, rather than with the Daniel of Scripture (176), is debatable. Elsewhere, he denies any reference to Satan in 28:11-19, deflecting literal interpretation by an appeal to poetic language (244-46).

Wright’s prose, in the highest traditions of the British, is pleasant to read for its cadence, color, and clarity. Expositors looking for commentaries that will improve their understanding and their presentation of the text need to read this volume. Sometimes exegetical detail is absent, but, like Wright (12), the reader can refer to Daniel Block’s two-volume commentary in NICOT (Eerdmans, 1997) for such detail.