BOOK REVIEWS


John Collins is the Holmes Professor of OT Criticism and Interpretation at Yale University. He wrote this book after teaching introductory OT courses at various universities, some with religious commitments and others with none. He wrote this volume for those not well-versed in the OT and without any particular theological perspective. He takes a historical-critical approach and affirms that the OT tells an “ostensibly” historical story. He provides no footnotes but gives suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter. The front matter includes a table of contents, abbreviation key, and 13 clear, helpful maps of different parts of the Bible world as well as different periods of Bible history. He divides his treatment into four major sections: Torah/Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic History, Prophecy, and Writings. He includes the apocryphal (deutero-canonical) books in his treatment, not addressing the canon issue. The book ends with a glossary, but has no indexes.

One of the unique features of this volume (though becoming more common) is the provision of a CD-Rom with an electronic version of the book (in Libronix format) as well as a study guide that includes analytical questions for each chapter and numerous internet links for websites that contain relevant articles and numerous images, maps, and explanations of various features.

Collins takes the expected liberal positions with regard to the dating and composition of the OT books. The books he suggests for further reading only rarely include any kind of evangelical writers. That is not surprising in light of his approach to the OT.

Generally, this reviewer would not recommend this volume for readers of *TMSJ*. It would be better to have a few solid introductions to the OT that will help the student of God’s Word better understand the OT from a faith perspective (affirming the inspiration and authority of God’s Word). However, if someone owns some good OTI texts and desires an up-to-date, clearly written overview of how critics view the OT, Collins does a great job of doing that in the volume. In the end, the reviewer has a hard time recommending a book that potentially would have a narrow impact on one’s understanding of the OT, especially when that book is a
paperback that costs almost $50.00.


The book begins with different life illustrations that beg for prayer but that also end with different results. Consequently, such deep misery and life perplexities raise many questions regarding the very nature of prayer, in both its purpose and results. Can prayer actually change God’s mind? Does God always answer prayer (16)? The author proposes that attempts to answer such questions have resulted in two differing solutions. One position is that if one is faithful and persistent in prayer, God can be influenced so that any request can be granted. The other side is that prayer never influences heaven; only the one who prays is affected as God uses prayer as a tool to shape and mold believers into His already determined will. Crump’s challenge is to unravel this “Gordian knot” with a NT theology of prayer. He seeks to do so by examining different passages within the Synoptic Gospels (chapters 1–4), what is called by many “The Lord’s Prayer” (5–7), and Pauline Prayer (8–12). He has one chapter on petitionary prayer in the General Letters and the Book of Revelation (13), and a final chapter on “Petition, the Hiddenness of God, and the Theology of the Cross” (14). Crump holds that both the Old and New Testaments are “the divinely inspired word through which God speaks today” (17). However, he likewise holds to “the current scholarly consensus regarding Markian priority . . . and the Two-Source Hypothesis . . . of the now-lost source called Q” (22 n. 1).

The arrangement of the book is intriguing. The first chapter deals with Jesus cursing the fig tree (Matt 21:21-22; Mark 11:23-25), which while a pertinent study on prayer, begins with the last week of the life of Jesus. Obviously much of what Jesus stated in regard to prayer in the earlier part of His ministry would be an extremely helpful foundation. The context of this statement in Matthew 21 after His entry into Jerusalem, especially how this relates to national Israel, could be explored. Beginning a study of prayer in the last few days of Jesus’ life leaves out much discourse on what Jesus previously taught on prayer. Simply put, it begins toward the end of His teaching, not the beginning.

Crump’s book contains numerous footnotes. For those who want to do scholarly work, these may prove helpful. For “the average church member,” it may interrupt the flow of the book. The conclusions at the end of each chapter do have a sense of reverence to them, repeatedly emphasizing the relationship of prayer to the heavenly Father.

Crum obviously writes from a Reformed theological perspective, which, consequently, affects the theology of his study on prayer. For instance, as part of the
answer of Jesus cursing the fig tree, he writes, “The unbelieving temple establishment of Jesus’s day was replaced by (and finds fulfillment in) the tenacious community of believing disciples—you and me; members in the Christian church—who will never surrender true faith in Jesus Christ . . .” (38). It ignores or diminishes the immediate context of Jesus being the promised Messiah of the Jews, as the King promises to return in Matthew 24–25. The same will be true for what is called “The Lord’s Prayer.” The church exists “as the Messiah’s new temple” (157). Thus Crum sees “Thy Kingdom Come” as already finding its fulfillment in the NT church rather than a prayer that still has unfulfilled eschatological hopes and promises.

Some may find *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* helpful in their studies or in their prayer life; it contains sections of warm devotion and reflection. However, for those who understand Scripture in accordance with the doctrinal statement of The Master’s Seminary, it will be a much more challenging read.


R. Kent Hughes, former pastor at the College Church of Wheaton, is the editor for this series and has tasked each author with writing a commentary that focuses on the preaching of that biblical book. As one endorser wrote, “No academic aloofness here, but down-to-earth, preacher-to-preacher meat for God’s people” (back cover). The series is driven by unqualified commitment to biblical authority, clear exposition of Scripture, readability, and practical application.

The author of this volume, Iain Duguid, was a Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, but now teaches at Grove City College in Pennsylvania. In this volume Duguid seeks to aid both pastors and lay people on this journey by explaining the profundities of the biblical text, especially its less transparent portions, and communicating the lasting message of God’s devotion to those who follow Him in faith.

After a brief (9-page) thematic introduction to the book, Duguid provides 36 chapters or messages that cover the 36 chapters of the biblical book. In some cases two chapters in Numbers are treated in one message and other times a message treats only half a chapter from Numbers. He begins each chapter/message with a catchy title and an illustration to lead the reader into the primary idea of the message. After presenting the message with varying numbers of points, a message ends with probing questions and pointed exhortations. The volume concludes with endnotes for each message (as few as one and as many as thirteen for a message), a Scripture index, a general index, and an index of sermon illustrations arranged topically.

The volume has several strengths and weaknesses. To have a commentary
that works through a biblical book, let alone an OT book, with a primary purpose of preaching the passage is almost unheard of. Modeling the use of an introduction with an illustration that draws the listener into the message and concluding the message with clear probing questions and pointed exhortations serves as a good reminder for any preacher of the Word. Even indexing those illustrations is a nice feature of the book. Each message seeks to explain, with clarity and relevance, the most fundamental truths a reader would encounter in a given biblical passage.

Nevertheless, this volume’s treatment of Numbers has some drawbacks. This reviewer’s reservations, doubtless, arise from his own preferred preaching style, especially when preaching from an OT passage. The commentary assumes that a preacher would draw on other important information on the Book of Numbers from another commentary. Understanding key parts of the book would be enhanced if more attention were given to the place Numbers has in the salvation history of God’s chosen people. Duguid makes no attempt to give his readers the big picture of the Book of Numbers. What are the major sections and how does that contribute to one’s understanding of the larger context of the book? None of the outline points has any verse parameters provided. That is because some sections may closely follow a given section out of a chapter in Numbers, while other outline points are only loosely connected to a set of verses.

Though clear and relevant sermonizing of a biblical book is often done poorly, Duguid’s commentary seems to neglect another part of the process. To the present reviewer, preaching a biblical book should help the listeners have a better understanding of what that book says in addition to how it is relevant to their lives. Preaching should enhance Bible literacy as well as model the manner in which one takes a message given to an ancient audience and makes it understandable and, when appropriate, livable by a modern audience.

Finally, the writer’s broader theological position will clearly impact his preaching of an OT text and limit or enhance the usefulness of a given commentary. Duguid approaches the text from a thoroughly Reformed perspective. As an example of this issue, in the latter part of his message on Num 15:22-41, when commenting on the faithfulness God expected of His people and their tendency toward unfaithfulness (196-98), Duguid exhorts his readers to have their Sabbaths spill over into other days besides Sunday. He then has a section on baptism and refers to it as a sign of God’s covenant faithfulness. He exhorts his readers to “improve your baptism” and to talk with their children regularly about their baptism. This baptism to which he refers is effusion (water poured on a person) as an infant. What do the Sabbath and infant baptism have to do with this passage in Numbers?

To be honest, the reviewer is still not sure how he would use the volume in preparing messages from Numbers. I think that I would turn to this volume after I have worked through the meaning of the passage and am considering how to introduce and apply that message to a modern audience. Am I glad I own this volume? Yes, but to be perfectly honest, I did not purchase the volume (it was a perk for writing this review!). Would I buy every volume of this series? Probably
not. I would want to look at how it treats key passages before I added a given volume to my library. Knowing the author might help my decision. Having said that, many of the things that Duguid explains the Book of Numbers are things most preachers need to think about in presenting a relevant message to their audiences.


Temporarily digressing from expanding his Theology of Lordship writings, John Frame, well-known author and scholar, accepted an invitation from the Institute of Theological Studies to tape a systematic theology survey course for them. This book is an enhanced version of that course. The same threefold approach taken in the lordship series, the reader is informed, will be adopted for this survey, namely, exegetical, Reformed, and focused on the lordship of Christ (ix-x). Although wondering whether the term “exegetical” is not perhaps an overstatement, it is the second term “Reformed” that signals disagreements which will most probably arise in certain areas, especially for readers who are not oriented to or accepting of covenant theology’s faults and foibles. Still, a well-written survey can prove to be valuable in providing students with an overarching perspective, the big picture, which Frame acknowledges may help the student learn important things which might get passed over when concentrating on the details. Commendably, the goal is to show that the Bible is not a miscellaneous conglomerate of ideas but a coherent, consistent system of truth “in which the major doctrines depend on one another” (ix-x). The intended audience is beginners in theology, which the comments below have kept in mind.

The nature of the book allows the author to decide which issues are to be simply bypassed, minimally introduced, or acknowledged as being inconclusive, or as bringing no clarity to a certain subject or term, e.g., the nature of the days in Genesis (20), the debates over creationism and traducianism, trichotomy and dichotomy (93), the order of the divine decrees and the ordo salutis (182-83) or the use of the phrase “eternal generation” not helping out with interpreting monogenes (Frame prefers “only begotten” of the Nicene Creed rather than the meaning “unique, one and only,” 37), or the mode of baptism (37).

Scattered throughout the book are statements which cause eyebrows to rise or a quizzical look to linger momentarily on the reader’s face, e.g., inter alia on Spirit baptism’s being the initial regeneration (163), on the church’s being the people of God in all ages since Eden (233-34, 36), on the highly symbolic numbers in Revelation ruling out the reality of a literal millennium (301), on the return of Christ, the final judgment, one general resurrection occurring all at once (306), on believers’ children being members of the covenant of grace who ought to be baptized, and that
Christians really should not break fellowship over this issue (281-82), which is somewhat naïve since behind the mode of baptism stands a doctrine of the church.

Were this book to be assigned as required reading for a survey course, or as part of a theology course, several rewritings would have to be done to make the book profitable, namely, (1) rewrite Chapter 9, “God’s Covenants,” taking pains to present properly the Abrahamic covenant, not taking away from his descendants their right to occupation of the Promised Land as per repeated prophetic promise with its careful geographical descriptions, definitely not allowing the biblical covenants to be subsumed under a supposed covenant of grace, (2) rewrite Chapters 18 and 21, “The Nature of the Church” and “The Sacraments,” in order to present clearly the believers’ church, not giving replacement theology free reign to do disservice both to the identity of that church and its ordinances, (3) rewrite Chapter 23, “The Events of the Last Days,” particularly so that the reader will come to understand that the differences between amillennialism, postmillennialism, and premillennialism are not just little differences of opinion, but are significant hermeneutical issues, and then finally, (4) insert exegetical notes to correct that reasoning which automatically equates an unlimited, broad, or remote extent of the atonement with universal salvation—not all who disagree with Frame are Arminians or are so inclined. Far from it.

The constant citing of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is somewhat distracting for those readers who are not oriented to the creeds, but given Frame’s theological background, its choice is understandable and thus tolerable.

Now the big question: Is this a good book, one to be recommended for private and/or classroom use? Since John Frame’s reputation as a worthy scholar of Scripture is well established, this reviewer hesitantly and uncomfortably advises that no real commendation is being voiced, neither is an outright rejection being expressed. Instead, the label on the cover would be “Use With Caution.”


Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., is one of the premier evangelical OT scholars of the present generation. For over forty years, he has taught at three major theological institutions, most recently serving also as President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has written over thirty books, the majority of them dealing with OT issues. Scott M. Gibson, Haddon W. Robinson Professor of Preaching and Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has enlisted ten former students and/or faculty associates of Kaiser to join him in writing Preaching the Old Testament in honor of their mentor, colleague, and friend.

Both Robinson in his foreword and Gibson in his introduction to this
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... volume affirm that Kaiser is well known for his insistence that the contemporary church desperately needs more preaching from the OT (15, 17-19). Thus, the theme of OT preaching has been chosen for this book as a tribute to Kaiser’s passion. Robinson writes, “If the truth of the Old Testament is to sound again in churches, it must be from the pulpits. Perhaps this collection of essays will ignite a spark that causes to blaze again the warm, strong, relevant preaching of the entire Word of God. . . . [N]othing would please Walter Kaiser more” (15). Gibson clearly articulates and reaffirms that the purpose of the present book is to give preachers the tools they need to prepare sermons from the OT. The emphasis is on preparation (17, 27, 198).

The first chapter, “Challenges to Preaching the Old Testament” by Gibson, sets the agenda for this volume. He states the reasons he believes that contemporary pastors do not preach the OT. Five barriers to preaching from the OT that he has discovered in interactions with pastors are the difficulty of using Hebrew, the foreignness of the OT culture, the irrelevance of the OT, the greater familiarity with the NT, and the difficulty of preaching Christ from the OT (22-26). As the years of ministry take a pastor from his foundational biblical training, his neglect of preaching the OT leads to a lack of fervor for and basic knowledge of the OT. Thus, “the purpose of this book is to help preachers cultivate a desire and skill to preach the Old Testament” (26). The target audience of this work is the struggling preacher and the following chapters of the book are designed to help “his or her” (26) preparation of OT sermons. The essays, therefore, are in essence a “refresher” and updating of the expositor’s foundational OT seminary courses as the above barriers to preaching the OT are addressed.

The second chapter, “Keeping Your Hebrew Healthy” by Dennis Magary, tackles the first barrier of retaining the Hebrew language skills necessary for effective OT preaching. Magary writes, “Learning Hebrew is a challenge. But learning the language is not the greatest challenge. . . . A challenge far greater than learning Hebrew is keeping it vital and healthy for use in lifelong ministry” (29-30). Therefore, a program for reclaiming (or retaining) biblical Hebrew is the gist of the chapter. Based upon a preacher’s learning style (32), the writer gives hints as to how an expositor can use the resources now available to resurrect and keep his Hebrew skills sharp as the foundation for effective OT preaching. This chapter (29-55) is a “healthy” read for all who wish to preach the OT, from the seminarian now learning Hebrew to the seasoned preacher.

The next five chapters address the issue of what preachers need to know in order to preach from the different genres of the OT. These essays describe the characteristics of the genres and how they were used in the OT. Very little practical information is given in how to use this information in one’s preaching. Chapter seven, “Preaching the Old Testament in Light of Its Culture” by Timothy Laniak, explores the barrier of cultural distance. Though it gives a good survey of contemporary tools available, very little practical direction is given for sermon use.

Chapter eight, “Toward the Effective Preaching of NT Texts that Cite the
Old Testament” by Roy Ciama, shows that even a preacher who concentrates on the NT must use the OT in his sermons. The author presents how he believes the NT uses the OT, because, “In order to effectively use a NT text that quotes the Old Testament, a preacher will want to help the embedded Old Testament text play the same role with the audience that it played with the original audience” (152). However, the essay concludes, admitting, “The issues related to understanding the use of the Old Testament in the New are many and complex. It requires wisdom to discern how much a congregation needs to know about these issues in order to reach a maximal understanding of NT text without getting lost in the trees” (167). The final two chapters seek to demonstrate the relevance of preaching the OT. “Preaching the Old Testament Today” by David Larson (171-83) is a good summary of why the OT needs to be preached whatever the perceived contemporary barriers might be.

Preaching the Old Testament Today is a good reminder of the need for OT preaching today. It also provides a healthy review of OT studies that is the foundation upon which an OT preacher builds. However, it fails to show the OT expositor “how” to prepare sound biblical sermons. For that, the preacher will need to consult two excellent volumes written by the honoree of this book, Walter Kaiser’s Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching (Baker, 1981) and Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church (Baker, 2003).


This cleverly titled volume follows on the heels of the author’s first work, This Little Church Went to Market. In it, Gilley passionately urges the church to be biblically discerning in an era of dangerous deception.

The book consists of 15 chapters unfolded in four sections:

1. A Postmodern World
2. The Church’s Mandate
3. The Scriptures
4. Pressing Challenges

As one might expect, the author espouses a high view of God, a high view of Scripture, and a high view of the church. He seeks to expose those who attempt to impose upon the church a low view, i.e., less than fully biblical, of any one or all of the three afore-mentioned non-negotiables.

For those who wonder about George Barna, Brian McLaren, Rick Warren,
the Emerging Church movement, the purpose-driven life fad, and/or postmodernism’s impact on the church, this well-written alert should be a must read.


Volume 41 of the SBL Resources for Biblical Study is a brand new edition of Landes’s A Student’s Vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961) that went out of print in 1997. His approach is based upon the observation that students of biblical Hebrew find it easier to acquire vocabulary when they can see words grouped by their etymological relationships (ix). This new edition retains the same basic format as the original publication. List I contains “Verbal Roots Occurring Ten or More Times, and Their Most Frequently Attested Nominal and Other Cognates” (47-126). List II contains “Nominal and Other Cognates Occurring Ten or More Times, with Their Less Frequently Attested Verbal Roots” (129-56). List III consists of “Nouns and Other Words without Extant Verbal Roots in the Hebrew Bible” (159-86).

Changes in this new edition include a larger font size for improved readability, division of the three lists into 91 sub-lists or “discrete vocabulary groups” (x) for more manageable study lists, and expansion of the number of glosses for providing a more complete overview of semantic nuances. Whereas the former edition drew upon definitions in Koehler and Baumgartner’s Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros, rev. ed. (Brill, 1953-57), the new edition looks to the English translation of their third edition, The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Brill, 1994-2000).

Landes’ work, like those of John D. W. Watts, Lists of Words Occurring Frequently in the Hebrew Bible (2nd ed., Eerdmans, 1978) and Larry A. Mitchell, A Student’s Vocabulary for Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic (Zondervan, 1984), lists Hebrew words alphabetically within each frequency range rather than in order of individual word frequency. Watts did not list any verb occurring fewer than 25 times or any noun occurring less than 50 times in the Hebrew Bible, and he included a separate list for prepositions and prepositional phrases (28-31). Mitchell employs a combined list of all verbs, nouns, and particles (including prepositions) occurring ten or more times in the Hebrew Bible (1-51). In addition, he includes frequency lists for all 648 words employed in biblical Aramaic (52-65)—something neither Landes nor Watts provide. Only Watts uses a format that places the Hebrew on one page and the English glosses on the opposite page, enabling self-testing.

Landes, like Mitchell, lists only those words occurring ten or more times, although cognate words might occur as seldom as once within a grouping that has
more than ten representative occurrences. Landes does not give exact statistics for words occurring more than 70 times. Instead, he provides the general range (e.g., the verb נָאָר, swḥ, “command,” is listed among verbs occurring more than 500 times; its cognate noun, נָאָר, miswā, “commandment,” is assigned a frequency in the 100-199 range) (51).

Only Mitchel (66-88) and Landes (191-218) provide the user with an alphabetical index to make it easier to locate words in their lists. Mitchel gives exact statistics for each and every vocabulary word except for those twelve words occurring in excess of 5,000 times. Mitchel provides transliteration for each word, while Landes does not. Landes’ introduction to his vocabulary lists is far more extensive than either Watts or Mitchel. A large portion of his introduction instructs the reader in “How Hebrew Words Are Formed” (7-39). That section is a basic review of the formations of verbs and nouns, together with the various possible affixes (including prepositional, article, and interrogative prefixes and pronominal and adverbial suffixes).

Landes follows up his three major vocabulary lists with two appendixes: “Proper and Place Names Occurring 70 or More Times in the Old Testament Arranged in Decreasing Order of Frequency” (187-88) and “The Forms and Meanings of the Hebrew Pronominal Suffixes” (188-89).

As long as people study biblical Hebrew, vocabulary building will be a necessary component of learning the language. As Landes points out, rote memorization and word associations are of limited aid (2-3). Repetition is the primary key for learning biblical Hebrew vocabulary (4-6), a repetition that may take the form of flash cards (either physically or electronically). Vocabulary lists provide handy access to the most frequently occurring words in a systematic fashion. Landes’ new edition is the only one arranged by cognates. That factor helps to propel his volume to the top of recommended vocabularies for biblical Hebrew.


Tony Lane, Professor of Historical Rheology and Director of Research at the London School of Theology, has done a great service by offering his revised and expanded edition of *A Concise History of Christian Thought*. This work is a concise, readable survey of key Christian leaders, creeds, councils, and documents from the time of the church fathers to the present.

The number of books devoted to church history is vast, but Lane’s work distinguishes itself from many by its excellent format. His 336-page work has 150 entries that offer succinct but thorough explanations of the person or topic at hand. Thus, the average entry receives a little over two pages of fact-filled, relevant
information that gets to the point and shows why the discussed person, creed, council, document, etc., was important in the development of Christian thought. This helpful format avoids the brevity of dictionary-like definitions while escaping overly long explanations that can lose the reader who is looking only for the most essential information on a person or topic.

The book has five major divisions. Part I (26 entries) covers the church fathers up until A.D. 500. Part II (11 entries) addresses the Eastern tradition until A.D. 500. Part III (26 entries) covers the medieval West from 500–1500 and Part IV (41 entries) summarizes the Reformation period and reaction to it (1500–1800). In Part V (46 entries), Lane addresses Christian thought in the modern world from 1800. This last section of Lane’s expanded edition includes discussion of more recent theologians such as George Lindbeck and John Hick.

In any book in which the history of Christian thought is distilled to 150 entries, some will have differences of opinion concerning who should be included or excluded. This reviewer, though, found the selections to be well chosen. Evangelicals will probably be disappointed that Lane does not give more attention to evangelical theologians. For instance, G. C. Berkouwer and John Stott are the only two evangelicals of the last one hundred years whom Lane discusses.

For the most part, A Concise History of Christian Thought operates as a reference book that dispenses concise, helpful information to the reader. One could read this book from beginning to end, but its primary benefit is more as a reference tool, much like a dictionary or encyclopedia. The reader should be aware that at times Lane offers his personal evaluations of the topic at hand, especially in regard to more recent theological developments. For example, in his discussion on Process Theology, Lane points out that the movement has a philosophical starting point that leads to a distortion of the biblical concept of God (295). Lane also expresses optimism about the ecumenical movement (333) and recent Catholic-Protestant discussions concerning the doctrine of justification (335-36).

Though the reader must be discerning when he comes to Lane’s opinions, this book delivers what it offers—a concise history of Christian thought. Thus, it is a helpful resource for church leaders, students, and all who are interested in church history and the development of Christian theology. For this reviewer, A Concise History of Christian Thought continues to be a much-used reference work.


The Holman Old Testament Commentary is a projected 20-volume set designed as a counterpart to the 12-volume Holman NT Commentary that is already
complete. All 32 volumes are under the general editorship of Max Anders, Senior Pastor of Castleview Baptist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. This commentary series was created with the pastor or Bible teacher/student in mind. The editorial preface states, “Today’s church hunger for Bible teaching, and Bible teachers hunger for resources to guide them in teaching God’s Word. The Holman [Bible] Commentary provides the church with food to feed the spiritually hungry in an easily digestible format” (ix). Each volume is based on the NIV and follows the same eight-point outline for each chapter in the commentary.

In the commentary by Larson and Dahlen, volume 9 in the OT series, most chapters represent a corresponding chapter in the biblical text. Every chapter begins with an introductory quote and a summary description of the chapter. This is followed by (1) an introduction to the sermon/lesson to be delivered from the biblical text, (2) an outlined verse-by-verse commentary including the “main idea” for the whole as well as the “supporting idea” for each individual point, (3) a conclusion that includes both a narrative and bullet-pointed principles and applications from the chapter, (4) a life application designed to bridge biblical truth to life, (5) a suggested prayer tying the chapter to life with God, (6) “deeper discoveries” that seek to enrich the biblical exposition with historical, geographical, and grammatical facts, (7) a teaching/preaching outline that summarizes the material presented in steps 1-3, and (8) issues for discussion that zero in on the points of the chapter on daily life.

Knute Larson, Senior Pastor of The Chapel in Akron, Ohio, wrote the commentary sections dealing with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in this volume. He is particularly effective in providing the “main ideas” for each chapter, sometimes giving a descriptive statement and at other times providing a principled one, outlining the biblical chapters, and stating application points arising from the commentary on the biblical texts. Particularly noteworthy are his discussions of biblical interpretation and application (121-23), OT historicity (138), pain and trouble (200), and justice and judgment (275-76).

However, Larson’s interpretation of the chronology of the biblical text departs at a number of points from that espoused by the majority of commentators in the evangelical tradition. First, he dates the events in Ezra 3 to 522-520 B.C. (32, 44, 62) after “several waves of exiles returned to Palestine” (39), even though Ezra 3:8 states they occurred “in the second year of their [the returnees listed in Ezra 2] coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month,” about 536 B.C. Second, Larson also dates the reading/explaining of the law by Ezra to the people and leaders recorded in Nehemiah 8 as occurring in 458 B.C. between the events described in Ezra 7–8 and 9–10 (104, 215-16); the preferred date is 445 B.C. after the building of the wall by Nehemiah. Third, the author wavers on whether the events recorded in Neh 9:1-37 took place between Ezra 10:15-16 (which would be 457 B.C.) or after Nehemiah 8 (which would be 458 B.C. on his reckoning) (228). The preferred interpretation is the latter, but with a 445 B.C. date. Finally, Larson thinks it probable that Neh 9:38–10:39 actually occurred after Nehemiah 13, when Nehemiah returned for his second governorship and confronted the abuses of the law
that he found (242). The majority interpretation is that these events took place in Nehemiah’s first governorship in 445 B.C. Two excellent commentaries on Ezra and Nehemiah, those by F. Charles Fensham (NICOT) and Derek Kidner (TOTC), are missing from this volume’s bibliography. Larson should have consulted them on these issues.

Kathy Dahlen, former Director of Communications at The Chapel and present free-lance writer, penned the commentary on Esther. Her perspective on the providence of God seen in the book is in keeping with the majority interpretation. She views Esther as a woman who trusted in her God and was respectful and submissive to the men in her life. In the end, the Lord rewarded her faithfulness to Him. In the bibliography, commentaries by Barry Davis (Christian Focus, 1995) and John Whitcomb (Moody, 1979) that would question Dahlen’s viewpoint concerning Esther as a godly model are not listed.

Bible expositors and teachers would be better served beginning with another Broadman & Holman volume, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther (NAC) by Marvin Breneman, as a primary resource as they prepare to preach and teach these biblical books. With the firmer interpretive foundation laid by Breneman, the applicational insights provided by Larson and Dahlen can be incorporated. Bible expositors should be aware of a number of especially valuable volumes in The Holman Old Testament Commentary. Judges, Ruth (vol. 5) by W. Gary Phillips, Job (vol. 10), Psalms 1–72 (vol. 11), Psalms 73–150 (vol. 12) by Steven J. Lawson, and Ezekiel (vol. 17) by Mark F. Rooker are good additions to the expositor’s library.


Kenneth Mathews is Professor of OT at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University and is also an adjunct faculty member at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Other commentaries in this series have been reviewed in TMSJ. In fact, the first volume on Genesis was reviewed by William D. Barrick in issue 8/2 (see his comments there). Each author of the New American Commentary (NAC) series affirms a commitment to inspiration and inerrancy and the series seeks to enable pastors, teachers, and students to read the Bible with clarity and proclaim it with power. In light of this focus, most issues relating to scholarly discussions and technical points of grammar and syntax appear in footnotes rather than in the text of the commentary. The first volume (1996) dealt with the primeval or early history of Genesis 1–11, and this volume begins with the call of Abram and follows the building of the nation of Israel through the death of Joseph in Egypt. Mathews argues that Genesis in its present form is a cohesive unit that shows thoughtful order
and a self-consistent theology. “Essentially, there is one mind that has shaped the book, whom we believe to have been Moses.” The goals of this commentary are to describe the literary and theological contours of Genesis in light of the book’s overall structure. At the same time Mathews keeps an eye on the place of Genesis within the five books of Moses and within the OT canon.

The volume begins with a helpful introduction to issues related to this part of Genesis: history and historicity, religion of the patriarchs, themes and motifs, as well as a thorough outline for the book. Interspersed throughout the text of the commentary, Mathews provides two maps (Israel and Ancient Near East) as well as seven appendices: Abraham’s career and legacy, the patriarchs’ wealth, Melchizedek, faith and obedience, the sacrifice of Isaac, Edom and the Edomites, and Levirate marriage.

He begins every major section of the text by addressing key issues related to questions of composition and structure, in the first section providing brief responses to critical scholars. He consistently argues for a single author for Genesis (Moses) and critiques the various approaches that deny Mosaic authorship. The volume ends with a selected bibliography, selected subject index, person index, and selected Scripture index.

Although this commentary is not as technical as some, it represents a superb addition to commentaries available on the Book of Genesis. Mathews writes with clarity and depth and deals with most of the major exegetical issues in each passage he considers. There is no doubt that Mathews’ two volumes would be one of the first commentaries for which this reviewer will reach when working in Genesis.

Keith Miller, ed. Perspectives on an Evolving Creation. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. 528 pp. $36.00 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor P. Craigien, Associate Professor of Theology.

All twenty-one chapters of this book support an evolving creation and oppose a young earth/recent creationist understanding of Genesis and origins. The first of three sections, “Providing a Context,” furnishes the needed biblical, historical, and scientific context for what follows. The second section, “Scientific Evidence and Theory,” puts forward the scientific evidence for this evolving creation, or theistic evolution. Then the third part, “Theological Implications and Insights,” deals with the philosophical and theological issues usually associated with evolution. The book’s stated objective is “to provide a wide-ranging and authoritative evaluation of evolutionary theory from those with an orthodox Christian perspective” (xi). “The need is for a Christian worldview which integrates, seriously, both scriptural revelation and the testimony of the created universe” (xii). So, to this end, contributors were drawn from a variety of disciplines, namely astronomy, geology, paleontology, anthropology, biochemistry, genetics, philosophy,
theology, and the history of science.

The editor’s preface advises that he, as geologist and paleoecologist, wishes to share the excitement and challenge of contemporary evolutionary research (xi). More than sharing the news of new discoveries, he wishes to advance the debate on creation and evolution in the evangelical Christian community beyond its “often fruitless and divisive nature” (xi). An admirable intention, to be sure, but one wonders if the debate can be advanced at all beyond the current stalemate. The reason is that with the Word of God as the inspired, infallible, inerrant, and authoritative revelation, any treatment overlooking sound exegesis and seeking an interpretive context to justify the view being proposed, is not tolerable. The elasticity and fluidity with which passages are subsequently handled so as to ensure that the biblical text and its facts conform with the current understanding of science is also quite troubling. It is easier, apparently, to relate the Bible to the fossil record if one considers that the Bible was written before the modern age, before the rise of modern science, and thus is not a science textbook. That the Bible is not a textbook of modern science is correct, but this does not imply that errors of fact and loss of objective accuracy occur in passages about natural phenomena and historical events.

“Evolution and Original Sin” is the title of a chapter which obviously attracts attention. The Historical/Ideal View is considered the best understanding of evolution and original sin. It might be “the best” from Miller’s perspective, but its denial that Adam and Eve were ever actually in the Garden of Eden in a paradisal state is beyond most worrisome, to say the least. Further, the denial that the Fall deeply affected human nature is equally very troublesome, especially when the assertion is made that neither of these two topics is found in Scripture (472). The Garden is said to represent what an ideal relation with God would be, and Adam and Eve represent both “every person” as well as the first hominids with self-consciousness and a growing awareness of God—a clear awareness uncluttered by the spiritual darkness that clouded the minds of the human race when later it turned away from God. The Historical/Ideal View, is described as theistically guided evolution, which means that all on earth is the result of the evolutionary process with God in different places and times guiding or influencing this process. God works in and through the natural processes, e.g., reproduction, and so the offspring are both the product of the operation of the world and a creation of God (497).

The problem is that other unsettling statements are quickly noticeable as one reads through the book, such as a clear acceptance of (1) the reality of common descent, (2) hominids before Adam and Eve, with the fossil record suggesting continuity between pre-human and human physical forms (208-30), (3) dual revelation theory (15-16), (4) two separate and contradictory creation accounts in Genesis 1–2, which defy harmonization if they are taken as natural history (21), (5) two traditions—agricultural/urban and the pastoral/nomadic—in the vocabulary of Genesis 1 and 2, which allows for harmonization, which a literal historical hermeneutic could not accomplish (22-23), (6) the primeval darkness and sea and the formless earth as the forces of chaos to be overcome, but without considering that
this need not depict chaos at all (26-27), (7) the Big Bang as the beginning point, but without commenting upon “the nothing” before that (104-7), (8) the seven-day week as having no chronological or historical significance—it just religiously affirms the totality of the universe having its origins in God (25-26), (9) a definition of original sin as covering the sinful choices all the way from hominids up to the current generation and the resulting bondage to sin and darkness inherited from ancestors (470-71), and (10) the early chapters of Genesis as a theological commentary and symbolic reconstruction of primal history, fitting in with the concepts and stories of that time—it is decidedly not historical narrative but cosmogonic narrative, and thus not to be taken literally (32-33).

One writer in closing his chapter, “Biochemistry and Evolution,” acknowledges that the biblical account of the origin of man reveals a unique origin, both physically and spiritually, that puts it outside the evolutionary process. Yet, nothing in *homo sapiens* biology or biochemistry would suggest that his origin is not part of evolution. Eloquently, he opts for no conclusion by saying, “I am content to remain in a state of cognitive dissonance on this issue until further clarity comes my way” (287). Commendable stance? No! Why is it so difficult to accept the biblical account? Does man being made in the image of God have no significance here? Not a single chapter, it may be said, is entirely free of such troubling and disturbing conclusions, evaluations, and statements as those noted above.

Perhaps it would be too much to ask the contributors to read thoughtfully David Tsumura’s “The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation,” (JSOTSup 83, 1989) and Roberto Ouro’s two-part article, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2, Abiotic or Chaotic?” (*AUS* 35/2, 1998, and 37/1, 1999), for conclusions that the darkness and the “without form and void” are not indicative of chaos but of a world which could not sustain life, i.e., abiotic. The Hebrew conception of the world rejects the mythological concoctions of the surrounding nations. Were not these stories of creation and origins from the other nations nothing but sin-distorted versions of what really took place, which finally Moses under inspiration put down in writing so that the Hebrews would not embrace falsehood with regard to the beginning of all things? One more question: Is it really possible to ignore the Flood when studying the fossil record?

The footnotes, however, are most informative and introduce the reader to a considerable body of literature treating the subject matters under discussion. The content of the chapters is no easy reading, requiring concentration. The absence of an index makes for thumbing through the pages of a chapter or two whose contents might cover the information being sought.

This book has value in that it will provide the reader with an extensive look at the conclusions and thinking of theistic evolutionists and will reveal their interpretive approach to the biblical account of creation. It is an eye-opener!

Bill Mounce continues his many good and profitable books on Greek studies with this newest edition. For years *Vines’ Expository Dictionary* has been somewhat of the standard for pastors and lay people who want to do word studies from the Bible. Mounce’s dictionary is presented as “*Vines* for the 21st century,” and lives up to what it claims. Not only does it have more up-to-date definitions that benefit from over sixty years of collective studies; the format is much easier to use than *Vines*’.

For instance, if one looked up “Prayer” in *Vines*, the Greek transliterations would be given (e.g., EUCHOMAI), followed by very brief definitions and numerous Scripture references. This served its purpose, but the format of Mounce’s book is more user-friendly. As with *Vines*, the dictionary headings are all in English. However, instead of a Greek transliteration, each word begins with OT usage (if any), followed by NT usage. Mounce gives both his own numbering system used in his other Greek works as well as the often-cited Strong’s numbering system. Mounce presents his information in paragraph style, which is not only easier to follow than *Vines*, but also it gives much more information to the reader and does so in a format that is easy to follow and understand.

*Mounce’s Expository Dictionary* is purposefully presented to those in the church who want to do their own word studies. Those who have no background in either Hebrew or Greek can do this. One can merely skip over the Greek and Hebrew words and the numbering system and still gain a great deal of insight into certain words. For those who do have some understanding of the languages, the numbering system linked with other works may prove useful. For those who want to do deeper studies in the languages, this will be a good beginning point. Often the scholarly works from which the information is derived are cited so that the advanced student can pursue additional sources, if desired.

Mounce’s book has many helpful features. Of extreme importance is the “How To Do Word Studies” (xiii-xxvi). For those who have never attempted such, this is a very useful “walk through” to getting started. The book also has a Scripture index in the back (819-84), as well as both Hebrew and Greek dictionaries (885-1316). Special attention should be paid to page 885, where explanations of the different components of each word entry are given.

This dictionary will be warmly received by many pastors in their studies. It will likewise be a good tool when asked by a lay student of the Bible, “Is there a good tool or dictionary that I can use to do my own word studies?” Yes, there is. Many Bible and language dictionaries sound good to the church member, and yet will sit on the shelves or else usually be given away to someone later (such as Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*). Robertson’s information is too advanced for the average church member. Mounce’s is not. It presents information
that can be understood easily, and should leave the reader with a greater desire to mine gold out of the Word, with the encouragement that “I can do this!” This most likely will not be one of those books that sits on the shelf, looks good, but serves no real purpose. Hopefully, it will be a very useful—and used—tool.


Four years after the original hardback edition (2001), Blackwell has published a paperback edition of *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*. Its driving force is to “demonstrate the principal areas of biblical study that are under major investigation” (xxx). A constellation of major contributors from seven countries wrote the 26 essays. Theologically the contributors represent a wide range and the general stance of those essays is nonevangelical. For example, Carol Meyers declares that the biblical sources are a combination of historical memory and fiction (xiii, 67) and, in part, unreliable (63). Leslie Hoppe concludes that biblical narratives are largely legendary and comprise a questionable historical source (xiv, 88) that tends at times to be imprecise (91). Robert Carroll states that the Bible presents “the myth of the empty land” following the Babylonian conquest (xv, 105). Indeed, the exile and return are both myths as well (112). William Dever continues to insist that the Book of Joshua presents an incorrect view of the conquest (xviii, 123). Ronald Clements adheres to a documentarian view of the “D texts” (xxiv; cf. 287-88). Bruce Birch argues that the Hebrew Bible says nothing about private ethics—only community ethics (xxv, 298). Klaus Koch accepts the three-Isaiah composition of that major prophetic book (xxvii, 353). James Crenshaw attributes the final form of the twelve minor prophets to a redaction much later than the historical prophets themselves (xxvii, 369). John Collins identifies some of Daniel’s prophecies as “unreliable and often in need of reformulation” (xxx, cf. 438-39).

This volume is similar in scope to two previous works, identifying current developments in research and writing on the Hebrew Bible. From a nonevangelical perspective, the earlier one (*The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker [Fortress, 1985]) provides a look at the state of OT studies nearly 25 years ago. A later collection of essays (*The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold [Baker, 1999]) provides an evangelical perspective on the field within the past decade (see the review in *TMSJ* 11/2 [Fall 2000]:239-42). The Blackwell volume is contemporary with the latter, but has the perspective of the former.

Antony F. Campbell (Jesuit Theological College, Melbourne, Australia) deals with “Preparatory Issues in Approaching Biblical Texts” (3-18). David Jobling (St. Andrew’s College, Saskatoon, Canada) surveys “Methods of Modern Literary
Criticism” (19-35). Charles E. Carter (Seton Hall University, South Orange, N. J.), who wrote on the same topic for The Face of Old Testament Studies (421-51), analyzes “Social Scientific Approaches” (36-57). Three essays cover the area of OT historical materials: “Early Israel and the Rise of the Israelite Monarchy” (61-86) by Carol Meyers (Duke University, Durham, N. C.), “The History of Israel in the Monarchic Period” (87-101) by Leslie J. Hoppe (Catholic Theological Union, Chicago), and “Exile, Restoration, and Colony: Judah in the Persian Empire” (102-16) by Robert P. Carroll (deceased; University of Glasgow, Scotland).

William G. Dever (University of Arizona, Tucson) contributes three essays on archaeology: “Archaeology and the History of Israel” (119-26), “Biblical and Syro-Palestinian Archaeology” (127-47), and “Archaeology, the Israelite Monarchy, and the Solomonic Temple” (186-206). Dever’s second essay is the same topic as one he wrote for The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters (31-74). Dennis Pardee (University of Chicago) in “Canaan” (151-68) describes the developments in studies of Canaanite religion and culture. Joseph Blenkinsopp (University of Notre Dame) writes on “The Household in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism” (169-85).

André Lemaire (The Sorbonne, Paris) deals with “Schools and Literacy in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism” (207-17). Five essays cover the area of OT theology: “Modern Approaches to Old Testament Theology” (221-40) by Henning Graf Reventlow (retired; University of the Ruhr, Bochum, Germany), “Symmetry and Extremity in the Images of YHWH” (241-57) by Walter Brueggemann (Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga.), “Theological Anthropology in the Hebrew Bible” (258-75) by Phyllis A. Bird (retired; Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.), “The Community of God in the Hebrew Bible” (276-92) by Ronald E. Clements (King’s College, University of London, England), and “Old Testament Ethics” (293-307) by Bruce C. Birch (Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.).

Rolf Rendtorff (University of Heidelberg, Germany) and Calum Carmichael (Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y.) present “Creation and Redemption in the Torah” (311-20) and “Law and Narrative in the Pentateuch” (321-36), respectively, in the area of Torah. For the Prophets, Herman Spieckermann (Georg-August-Universität, Göttingen, Germany) covers “Former Prophets: The Deuteronomistic History” (337-52), Klaus Koch (University of Hamburg, Germany) handles “Latter Prophets: The Major Prophets” (353-68), and James L. Crenshaw (Duke University, Durham, N. C.) deals with “Latter Prophets: The Minor Prophets” (369-81). Crenshaw also contributed an essay on wisdom literature to The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters (369-407).

In the Writings, Ralph W. Klein (Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago) contributes “Narrative Texts: Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah” (385-401). Erhard S. Gerstenberger (Philips University, Marburg, Germany), who wrote the essay on lyrical literature for The Hebrew Bible and Its Modern Interpreters (409-44), presents “The Psalter” (402-17). Katharine J. Dell (Cambridge University, England) surveys studies in “Wisdom Literature” (418-31) and John J. Collins (Yale Divinity
School, New Haven, Conn.) closes the work with “Apocalyptic Literature” (432-47).


This volume is the companion to Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Hendrickson, 2005). Sparks is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University, St. Davids, Penn. He is also author of *The Pentateuch: An Annotated Bibliography*, IBR Bibliographies 1 (Baker, 2002) and *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Eisenbrauns, 1998).

In order to prepare the reader for the categorization of ancient texts in his volume, Sparks embarks upon a discussion of current concepts of genre (1-24). Contrary to the over-simplified generic realism of Gunkel and his followers, the author proposes generic nominalism, which recognizes that multiple legitimate genres can be assigned to any particular text.

For example, the book of Deuteronomy is no longer understood merely as a lawbook but also as an ancient treaty, a book of rituals, a history book, and a series of religious speeches. Nominalism does not force us to choose between all of these helpful alternatives (7).

Ultimately, Sparks takes an eclectic approach that realizes that there is no comprehensive theory of genre that adequately represents all facets of the texts under examination (21). He is in the process of preparing a second volume examining the Hebrew Bible within its comparative literary context, which will reveal his “unique generic judgments about the Hebrew Bible” (xiii).

Following his examination of generic theory, the author describes the nature and existence of “Near Eastern Archives and Libraries” (25-55). Descriptions of selected libraries and archives in the ANE include Syria-Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Anatolia (52-55). Individual chapter topics include wisdom literature (56-83), hymns, prayers, and laments (84-126), love poetry (127-43), rituals and incantations (144-215), intermediary texts (omens and prophecies, 216-39), apocalyptic (240-51), tales and novellas (252-70), epics and legends (271-304), myths (305-43), genealogies and king lists (344-60), historiography and royal inscriptions (361-416), law codes (417-34), treaty and covenant (435-48), and epigraphic sources from Syria-Palestine (449-76). Each chapter commences with an introduction followed by discussion moving from Mesopotamia, to Egypt, and then to Syria/Palestine, unless one of the civilizations is more important than others in
that particular genre. Within the sections (e.g., “Mesopotamian Prayers and Laments,” 90-102), a number of sub-sections appear (e.g., “Dumuzi Laments,” 90-91; “Laments for Deceased Kings,” 91-92; “Sumerian and Akkadian City/Temple Laments,” 92-94, etc.). Each sub-section is concluded with a list of resources divided into “Texts and translations,” “Translations,” and “Bibliography.” A general bibliography closes each chapter.

This reviewer benefited from the volume’s usefulness in locating ANE literature that contained the equivalents of the Psalter’s superscripts and subscripts. Sparks not only confirmed the presence of such superscripts and subscripts, but indicated that some corresponded to musical instrumentation and others to the format or purpose of the text (85). In addition, he listed the various types of Mesopotamian literature that contained those elements, making it possible to find his discussions of the types and to employ his list of sources to locate the literature in both text and translation formats. Others will find this work equally beneficial in such endeavors. Such research, however, uncovers the volume’s weaknesses: no subject index by which one might locate all references within the volume to “superscript,” “subscript,” “colophon,” “acrostic,” and similar topics.

At times Sparks exposes his personal biases. He apparently does not think that works produced by theological fundamentalists can be of any use for serious biblical research (xiii). He reflects a viewpoint that looks at some biblical texts as adaptations of pagan (usually Canaanite) texts, when he indicates the possibility that Psalm 20 “originated as a northern psalm at the bull cult in Bethel before it was transmitted to Jerusalem and underwent a process of ‘zionization’” (112). Falling in line with liberal scholarship, Sparks identifies the Joseph story, Ruth, Jonah, Esther, and parts of Daniel as pure fiction (267). This is just the tip of the iceberg, however. He believes that many other texts within the narratives of the Pentateuch and subsequent Deuteronomistic history are also fictitious (268).


Richard Taylor, author of the commentary on Haggai, is Professor of OT and Director of Ph.D. Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. His specialties involve Aramaic studies and Syriac literature. Ray Clendenen is the Executive
Editorial Director for Bibles, Academic, and Reference Books at Broadman & Holman Publishers. He has been a college and seminary professor, is the general editor for the NAC series, and served as the associate general editor for the Holman Christian Standard Translation. His specialty is Hebrew textlinguistics. As with each author in this series, Taylor and Clendenen write from an evangelical perspective with allegiance to the complete authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures. This volume represents a superb addition to an already strong commentary series (for more information on the series, see the above review of another NAC commentary). One of the factors that makes this volume so appealing is that the authors had 200-250 pages to devote to a few chapters, unlike some of the volumes that have to cover many more chapters with only a comparatively few more pages (Mathews in his Genesis commentary had an average of 25 pages per chapter, while Taylor and Clendenen had between 60–100 pages per chapter available for their comments). Besides that logistical detail, Taylor and Clendenen both treat the biblical text carefully and thoroughly.

In their brief but helpful introduction to each book (Haggai, 77 pages; Malachi, 37 pages), Taylor and Clendenen deal with the customary topics of authorship, date, provenance, genre, message, purpose, literary structure, unity, language, style, and textual history of the book. Both authors affirm that the books are unified compositions written by one author. Although Taylor does not provide any excurses in his commentary, Clendenen provides five of them: Priests and Levites in critical perspective, the Levitical Covenant, divine impassibility, immutability of the everlasting God, and tithing in the church. If comparisons can be made, it seems that Taylor gives more attention to text-critical issues in his footnotes, whereas Clendenen, in light of his training in textlinguistics, provides more focus on the structure found in the text of Malachi.

This volume represents a fine addition to OT commentaries that have already been published. For an evangelical in particular, this volume will provide great assistance in understanding and teaching or preaching the prophetic message in these small prophetic books.


Travers is an expert in poetry in addition to being a Bible scholar. He teaches English at Southeastern College at Wake Forest, North Carolina, a division of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this volume’s two sections, he introduces the poetry of Psalms (19-70) and then presents what Psalms teaches about God (71-285).

In the first section, three chapters deal with the nature of Hebrew poetry in
Psalms, psalm genres, and an approach to reading Psalms. Travers’ approach to reading a psalm involves asking four questions (58-61): What is the overall effect of the psalm? What is the structure of the psalm? What are the figures of speech and their effects? What are the themes and theology of the psalm? By means of Psalm 97, the author illustrates his approach (61-68), concluding with applications (69). According to Travers, the Psalter is God-centered. From it we can learn how to have a God-centered life. Therefore, the applications consist of devotional thoughts that guide the reader into a greater knowledge of divine character and actions and how they impact one’s faith and life.

After introducing readers to the poetry of Psalms and an approach to reading Psalms, Travers embarks upon a study of God in Psalms. Moses’ encounters with God become the analogy for understanding how God reveals Himself (73-86). In subsequent chapters the author applies his fourfold approach to individual psalms in order to uncover what each reveals about God. Psalms 19 and 104 elevate the picture of God as Creator (87-123). They reveal that God’s creation provides reason for worshiping God. God is Covenant Maker in Psalms 33 and 103 (124-50), which focus on His unfailing love (hesed, 126).

Psalms 84 and 96 reveal God as King (151-78). Such psalms teach us to employ our prayers to glorify God (166). Messianic psalms (Pss 22 and 45) are the foundation for presenting the Son of God (179-205). Travers argues for a “binocular” view of the Messianic psalms: they refer both to David and to Jesus Christ (182). Psalm 22 has a more direct reference to Christ. Psalm 45, however, has its ultimate fulfillment in the future descendant of the Davidic line, while its immediate focus is on the contemporary Davidic king.

Psalms 27 and 79 direct the reader to God’s provision of protection and deliverance (206-30). Travers handles the problem of imprecatory psalms by examining Psalm 59 (231-48). His solution to the problem involves considering four purposes for imprecatory psalms: to remind us that some things are truly evil, to help us identify sin in our own lives, to warn unbelievers so that they might turn from their unbelief, and to teach us about the sovereignty of God (235-38). The next two chapters look at God’s forgiveness in Psalm 51, a penitential psalm (249-67), and God as the beginning of wisdom in Psalms 111 and 112 (268-85). A final summary chapter asks, “What Have We Learned?” (286-95). An appendix presents “Major Attributes of God in the Psalms” (296-309), listing the topic of each of the 150 psalms and the divine attributes to which each refers. A select bibliography of books, articles, hymns, poems, and plays closes the volume (310-13).

Encountering God in the Psalms is not intended as an exegetical commentary, but it provides basic exegetical guidance. It does not discuss fully major problems like imprecatory and messianic psalms, but it offers the reader some valuable insight with which to begin a more detailed study. The volume’s strength is in Travers’ purpose to create an attitude of worship in the reader. Preachers and lay people alike will benefit from this catalyst for a devotional study of Psalms.

Most books on textual criticism focus exclusively either on the OT or the NT. Wegner’s volume, however, examines the history, methods, and results of textual criticism with regard to both testaments. For the OT, *A Student’s Guide* is more comprehensive and analytical than Ellis Brotzman’s *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Baker, 1993), even though both are aimed at the beginning student or informed layperson. Brotzman’s volume is distinctive because he illustrates the methodology of textual criticism by discussing all of the material variants in the Book of Ruth. On the NT side of things, Wegner’s depth and breadth of coverage compares favorably with J. Harold Greenlee’s *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed. (Hendrickson, 1996). Wegner excels in his insightful categorization of the different philosophies of textual criticism, his bibliographies for each major topic, and the work sheets and instructions giving the student direction for initiating the process of textual criticism (OT: 120-34; NT: 227-49). “Further Reading” lists occur 40 times at the conclusion of each topical discussion. Some sources occur repeatedly in these lists, because they cover a wide range of topics.

Some of the book is standard fare for volumes dealing with textual criticism: definitions and examples of unintentional and intentional transmisssional errors (44-57), a history of the transmission of the text (58-86), and a history of key manuscripts, versions, and editions (OT: 89-119, 140-203; NT: 207-28, 256-65; both: 267-97). Wegner’s work stands out, however, in dealing with both testaments. An abundance of helpful tables, illustrations, and text samples make the material accessible for readers (like this reviewer) who are visual learners. The volume contains 77 figures, 22 tables, and 3 maps placed strategically within the text in close proximity to the corresponding discussions they illustrate. One of the most helpful tables covers “Perceived Goals of Old Testament Textual Criticism” (31, Table 1.1). Six separate goals have been set by various OT text critical scholars. Each goal is described and scholars who adhere to that goal are listed. For some readers it will come as a shock that so very few OT text critics seek to establish the author’s *ipsissima verba*.

One of the fascinating benefits of a volume covering textual criticism for both testaments is a discussion of the differences between OT and NT textual criticism (26-29). The two sciences differ due to the vast difference in the transmisssional histories, as well as different starting points for practitioners. Throughout, Wegner maintains a sanely conservative stance, as evidenced in his preference for the “Reasoned Eclectic method” in NT textual criticism (221).

Wegner concludes that, for the OT, a “high regard for Scripture, devotion to detail and providence have preserved over the millennia a text that is remarkably
In regard to the NT, the relatively small number of material variants “underscores how accurate our Bibles actually are” (231). He iterates these conclusions in the final chapter (298-301), then provides readers with a practical “Glossary” (302-10) and indexes for names, subjects, and Scripture references (314-34).

In spite of the overall excellence of this volume and its great value in providing students and laypersons with a user-friendly, understandable, and instrumental presentation of textual criticism for both testaments, it does have its flaws. Incompleteness, inconsistency, inaccuracy, and inequality crop up on occasion like unwanted weeds in the middle of a wonderful garden.

Incompleteness: Although the author provides sources in a footnote (75 n. 51) regarding the current debate over a potential new approach to the purpose of Kethib-Qere’ readings in the margin of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, he fails to reveal that the new approach understands the Qere’ as a warning not to be led away from the Kethib (see the review of John Barton, Holy Writings, Sacred Text [Westminster/John Knox, 1997] in TMSJ 14/1 [2003]:108-9). In the description of one Qumran Isaiah scroll (1QIsa; 91-92), the author does not inform the reader that lengthy (not just single-word) corrections appear written between lines and even down the margins (as at Isa 40:7-8). The table for major abbreviations in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) and Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ) correctly lists the meanings for pc Mss, nonn Mss, and mlt Mss, but fails to list the different quantities and the one additional abbreviation (permIt Mss) that applies to the Books of Samuel (117, Table E1.1, incorrectly labeled as Table 4.1 on this one page). The bibliography for the Masorah (118-19) omits the valuable work of Page H. Kelley, Daniel S. Mynatt, and Timothy G. Crawford, The Masorah of Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (Eerdmans, 1998). Commentary series especially helpful for identifying textual issues, gathering textual evidence, and offering a solution should include the International Critical Commentary (249).

Inconsistency: In the text (63, 143) Wegner cites Emanuel Tov’s second edition of Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (Fortress, 2001) stating that 35 percent of Qumran biblical manuscripts demonstrate affinity to the proto-Masoretic Text. However, in a chart (67, Table 3.1), he gives the figure as 60 percent (based upon an older unrevised work by Tov).

Inaccuracy: Discussing the textual variant at Gen 1:7 in the textual apparatus of BHS, Wegner asserts that the “editors of the BHS” suggest an addition (52, 114). Actually, “editors” should be “editor,” since Genesis was edited by Otto Eissfeldt in 1969, according to the reverse of the BHS title page. Another inaccuracy is due to a typo in references to “8HevXIIIgr” (200, 201) that should be “8HevXIIgr.”

Inequality: Wegner does not grant equal treatment to both testaments. This volume slightly favors OT textual criticism over NT criticism. True, the OT’s history and transmission are over a longer period of time and are often more complex. However, readers will be left wondering why an equivalent history of NT textual
history is not divided up into at least two major periods: AD 100-1500 and 1500-present. For the OT, the author provided nearly nine pages of transm issional history from AD 100 to the present (70-78), while only two full pages for the same period of NT transmiss ional history (80-82). On the other hand, Wegner presents two completed worksheets for a NT example (Eph 1:1; 250-51, 252-53; cp. 228), but he provides no completed worksheet for an OT example (134).

As far as this reviewer is concerned, this volume will become required reading for OT textual criticism courses that he teaches. Future revisions will iron out the first edition’s problems and keep the book in use for years to come. For that, teachers, students, pastors, and informed laypersons will be grateful.