

REVIEWS

Andrew David Naselli. *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017, 123 pp. \$19.99.

Reviewed by Paul Shirley, Pastor of Grace Community Church at Wilmington, DE.

The vast majority of contemporary evangelicals have had their view of sanctification affected by the Keswick movement in one way or another. This is a somewhat ironic reality since most people are not even sure how to pronounce “Keswick” (the “w” is silent). Sadly, the confusion about how to pronounce “Keswick” could serve as a metaphor for the confusion about the Christian life that has arisen from this movement, because many of God’s people have been unwittingly caught up in its teaching. For instance, if you have ever heard the phrase “let go and let God,” you have been exposed to Keswick teaching. If your view of the Christian life was shaped by the study notes in the *Scofield Reference Bible*, you have sat under Keswick teaching. If you have ever been taught or tempted to think there is an attainable higher level of the Christian life that will make the battle with sin easier, you have received a form of Keswick teaching. If you have ever “rededicated” your life to Christ, you have practiced a form of Keswick theology.

The subtle but prevalent influence of Keswick teaching on the modern evangelical world is what makes *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful* by Andrew David Naselli such a relevant work for the church today. Naselli (Ph.D. Bob Jones University; Ph.D. Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) serves on the faculty of Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis and as an elder at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Having come to the Lord and growing up under Keswick teaching, Naselli is no stranger to “higher life” theology, and therefore his treatment of the subject derives from firsthand knowledge. His description of the formative years of his Christian life will sound familiar to many readers:

Young people in my youth groups or at summer camp commonly told their stories the same way: “I accepted Christ as my *Savior* when I was eight years old, and I accepted Christ as my *Lord* when I was thirteen.” That was the standard God-talk lingo (1).

There were always two steps: first you get *saved*, then you get *serious*. Too many of us Christians were saved but not serious. We were living a lower life rather than a higher life, a shallow life rather than a deeper life, a defeated life rather than a victorious life, a fruitless life rather than a more abundant life. We were “carnal” not “spiritual.” We experienced the first blessing but still needed the second blessing. Jesus was our Savior, but he still wasn’t our Master. So preachers urged us to make Jesus our master. How? Through surrender and faith: “Let go and let God” (2).

Eventually, Naselli became frustrated with this form of teaching when it didn’t work in his own life and, more important, when he realized it wasn’t consistent with what the Bible teaches. This exasperation led him to further study and research on the subject, which resulted in him writing his Ph.D. dissertation on the issue.¹ *No Quick Fix* is a condensed version of his dissertation research that was repackaged “to make it more inviting for thoughtful lay people” (3).

One might wonder why this view, despite the biblical and practical problems, remains so influential in the church. Naselli sheds light on part of the reason for the popularity of Keswick theology:

It is pervasive because countless people have propagated it in so many ways, especially in sermons and devotional writings. It is appealing because Christians struggle with sin and want to be victorious in that struggle—now. Higher life theology offers a quick fix to this struggle, and its shortcut to instant victory appeals to people who genuinely desire to be holy (4).

The body of the book is divided into four chapters, which are intended to explain where “higher life theology” came from (1), what it is (2), and why it is harmful (3–4). Before the reader arrives at the body of the book, the title of this volume alone goes a long way in diagnosing the core problem with Keswick theology: It seeks to replace a life-long battle for sanctification with a one-time experience and active submission to the means of grace with mystical passivity. In the words of the author:

The “let go and let God” approach to Christian living is a quick fix. A *quick fix*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “a quick and easy remedy or solution”—or negatively, “an expedient but temporary solution which fails to address underlying problems.” That’s what I think higher life theology is.... And that is why the title of this book is *No Quick Fix* (3).

The history and meaning of higher life theology and the Keswick movement detailed in the first two chapters is a fascinating account of modern church history that traces its way back to two main influences: Wesleyan perfectionism and the holiness movement (8). Wesley taught a form of Christian perfectionism that includes a second work of grace after initial conversion, allowing a believer to live without any *intentional* sins in his life. Thus, even though absolute perfection was impossible,

¹ A revised version of this dissertation is available in digital format under the title “*Let Go and Let God?*” *A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Hexham Press, 2010).

Wesley espoused a view of the Christian life that made “entire sanctification” (9) an attainable goal in this life. “When Wesleyan perfectionism blended with American revivalism, the holiness movement emerged” (10). The holiness movement took Wesley’s two-stage view of sanctification and infused it with Pentecostal language. Thus, the second work of grace taught by Wesley was referred to as “Spirit Baptism” or “Spirit Filling.” These extra works of grace were said to be received passively by “entire surrender (‘let go’) and absolute faith (‘let God’)” (12). As a consequence of this view of sanctification, two different classes of Christians emerged, those merely forgiven and those who were also sanctified. Thus, a “higher life” was created.

The higher life view of sanctification that emerged through the various figures of Wesleyan theology and the holiness movement was propelled forward through the Keswick Convention, a week-long conference held each year since 1875 in the town of Keswick located in northwest England. During these conferences, attendees were encouraged to enter into the higher life through a “crisis moment” of total passivity and dependence upon God. Like walking the aisle in American revivalism, this “crisis moment of faith” provided a definite point of entrance into the higher life. This “crisis” event was taught to be an instantaneous event whereby a believer consecrated his life to the Lord. Early Keswick teachers associated this event with a “Spirit-filling” or a “Spirit-baptism” (42), although later proponents dropped this association. No matter the nomenclature, the crisis moment is when a believer enters the higher life, and thus when the actual process of sanctification begins (37–43).

As Naselli points out, the view of sanctification promulgated by these conferences influenced to various degrees countless Christian leaders, including H. C. G. Moule, Andrew Murray, Robert C. McQuilken, D. L. Moody, R. A. Torrey, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie. These views spread especially within dispensational circles where the “Scofield Reference Bible more or less canonized Keswick teachings” (21).

Higher life theology spawned four institutions or movements that have greatly influenced American evangelicalism: the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Moody Bible Institute, Pentecostalism, and Dallas Theological Seminary. Those four successors to higher life theology each began as influential variations on higher life theology (emphasis on *began as*—today the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Moody Bible Institute, and Dallas Theological Seminary do not promote higher life theology like they used to) (18).

One of the most notable remaining influences of the higher life movement was its impact on the various debates concentrated on the relationship between justification and sanctification. For those influenced by higher life teaching, sanctification was an additional work for some believers instead of a necessary consequence of justification. This controversy, known by most as “the Lordship salvation debate” was heavily influenced by the two-stage view of the Christian life exported through the Keswick Convention (24–27).

Naselli’s description of the higher life movement is engaging, and his evaluation of it in chapters three and four is exceptional. After explaining that not everything about every member of the movement is completely bad, he provides ten reasons why the higher life movement is harmful:

1. It creates two categories of Christians (49–76).
2. It portrays a shallow and incomplete view of sin in the Christian life (77–81).
3. It emphasizes passivity, not activity (81–83).
4. It portrays the Christian’s free will as autonomously starting and stopping sanctification (84–86).
5. It does not interpret the Bible accurately (86–88).
6. It assures spurious “Christians” they are saved (88–91).
7. It uses superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification (91).
8. It fosters dependency on experiences at special holiness meetings (91–92).
9. It frustrates and disillusiones the have-nots (92–94).
10. It misinterprets personal experiences (95–97).

In his criticism of the higher life movement, Naselli demonstrates a faithful understanding of how sanctification works and how the Keswick view falls short of Scripture’s teaching. Furthermore, he demonstrates a pastor’s heart in warning susceptible sheep of inaccurate teaching:

Bad theology dishonors God and hurts people. That’s why I wrote this book evaluating higher life theology. I love God, and I don’t want higher life theology to hurt people. Higher life theology hurt me, and it has hurt many others. Don’t let that happen to you (99).

Naselli’s evaluation crystallizes the key issues that the average Christian needs to understand, and it deals with many of the relevant passages that need to be addressed. His interaction is not thorough, but readers can consult his doctoral work for more information.

The one difficulty readers will have is discerning his many charts and graphs, especially when he attempts to work exegetically through Romans 6. His phrase diagram on this chapter is difficult to follow unless the reader happens to understand the exact process he employs. That being said, his overall point from Romans 6 is thought-provoking and challenging for any who would hold onto a higher life view of sanctification. It is refreshing to read a work on polemical theology that is both pastoral and exegetical.

In addition to Naselli’s work on this issue, readers of this book will be treated to a fascinating afterword by John MacArthur. In his brief biographical contribution, MacArthur traces his spiritual development from his early influences of Keswick teaching to his robust affirmation of Reformed soteriology. These four pages provide a window into MacArthur’s life and ministry development that readers have never had access to before. In fact, for some readers, the whole book might be worth buying just for this brief excerpt of MacArthur’s life.

Even if the afterword does not compel an individual to pay almost twenty dollars for a hundred and twenty-three page book, the totality of this work is worthwhile for every believer who wants to know more about how to grow closer to Christ. The church would benefit if the number of individuals who read this book matched the number of individuals affected by higher life theology and Keswick teaching.

William C. Watson. *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism*. Silverton, OR: Lampion Press, 2015. 373 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Michael J. Vlach, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary

One common charge against Dispensationalism is that its beliefs are a relatively new perspective with little to no support in church history. Allegedly Dispensationalism's views on a restoration of Israel, Israel's return to the land, and a pre-tribulational rapture of the church are mostly the creation of John Nelson Darby and the dispensational tradition viewed as stemming from him in the nineteenth century. William Watson's book, *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, however, shatters this perspective. Not only was Darby not the originator of these beliefs, these views on Israel and the rapture were held by others in the English tradition before Darby penned his works. As Watson, Professor of History at Colorado Christian University, claims, "Very little of what John Nelson Darby taught in the mid-nineteenth century was new" (177).

As one who specializes in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English history, Watson spent twenty years combing through mostly unnoticed or ignored English works that reveal both belief in a national restoration of Israel to the land of promise and a pre-tribulational rapture of the church. The result of this research is significant evidence showing that Darby was continuing a stream of theological thinking that already existed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writings. Watson notes that the idea of restorationism concerning Israel "existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries long before John Nelson Darby who is considered the father of modern dispensationalism" (2). In fact, Watson lists over 40 seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors who "were Philo-Semitic and Expected the Restoration of Israel" (280).

Watson also discusses more than just the restoration of Israel and the pre-tribulation rapture view. Broader issues concerning eschatology and apocalyptic expectations are examined. This reveals not only belief in a future restoration of Israel, but an affirmation of futurism—the belief that many significant prophetic events in the Bible concerning Israel and the nations still need to be fulfilled.

While Watson's focus is on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English writings, he also covers material in the early church and the nineteenth century. Those interested in the history of Reformed doctrine should take note that several Reformed theologians of the past held strongly to the restoration of Israel idea. This includes many of the Puritans along with Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle. Ryle in particular expressed very clearly belief in a restoration of the tribes of Israel to the land. In my reading of Watson's book, it made me curious as to why the Reformed tradition of previous centuries was more accurate on eschatology and the future of Israel than what is often seen in much of the Covenantal/Reformed camp today.

The research in this book is very deep and impressive. Watson's documentation is reliant on many sources. I personally think this is one of the more significant historical books on Christian doctrine in recent years. This is so because it explodes a myth in much of Christendom that certain eschatological beliefs were concocted by Darby and Dispensationalism. As this work shows, Darby was not a theological mad

scientist concocting strange new doctrines in a dark office somewhere. His ideas were consistent with a significant English tradition that preceded him. This is not to deny the historical significance of Darby, but it does lay to rest the idea that Darby was creating new things. Darby seems to be following and sharpening already established viewpoints rather than starting them. I highly recommend this book.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament*. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2015. 176 pp. \$12.99 (paper).

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary

Walter Kaiser is a well-known OT scholar. He spent most of his teaching ministry at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and then Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (and later served as president there). He has written many scholarly essays, articles, entries, and books. Although now retired from teaching, he still speaks and writes with regularity.

This volume is more practically-focused than many of his other writings, focusing on prayer in the OT. Kaiser interacts with eleven prayers by OT individuals: Abraham's Prayer for a Wicked City (Gen. 18:22–33), Moses' Prayer for Pardon for Israel (Num. 14:13–23), Hannah's Prayer in Thanksgiving for her Son (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11), David's Prayer in Thanks to God for his Dynasty (2 Sam. 7:18–29; 1 Chron. 17:16–27), Solomon's Prayer for a Listening Heart (1 Kgs. 3:5–15), Solomon's Prayer at the Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:22–53), Jonah's Prayer in Thanksgiving for his Rescue (Jonah 2:2–9), Hezekiah's Prayer for Dealing with an Arrogant Enemy (2 Kings 19:14–19; Isa. 37:14–20), Nehemiah's Prayer in a Time of Distress (Neh. 1:1–12), Ezra's Prayer of Confession for Corporate Sin (Ezra 9:6–15), and Daniel's Prayer in Confession of National Sin (Dan. 9:1–27).

This volume is very readable and each chapter is about ten pages long. The book's layout adds to its value and usability. A chapter provides the full text of the prayer under consideration, summarizes the literary and historical context, and then works through the prayer section-by-section. Pointed conclusions and discussion questions conclude each chapter. The volume ends with a brief bibliography and helpful indices (name, subject, and Scripture).

Just a selection of Kaiser's observations is offered in this short review. As any book of prayer does, the reader will sense strong conviction at various points. At the end of the book's introduction, after mentioning the prominent role that prayer occupied in OT believers' lives, Kaiser writes: "We often correctly say that nothing will be accomplished without prayer. And it is also true that if we do not pray we will accomplish precisely nothing—at least, nothing of any true or lasting value. Therefore, we ought to pray!" (p. 6). Abraham's prayer (Gen. 18:22–33) shows that prayer can include hard questions asked of God. Not doubting the pervasive wickedness of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah or questioning that God was indeed perfectly righteous, Abraham asked "Will not the judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25d).

Although many OT prayers show this, Moses' prayer that Yahweh not wipe out the Israelites in the wake of their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea involved both the recognition and celebration of God's surpassing character (Num. 14:17–19).

In Ezra's prayer, Kaiser engages the tension between corporate and individual responsibility. Under the governance of the Mosaic Covenant, the Lord was not just dealing with individual Israelites but a theocratic nation. Some rebellious conduct impacted the nation (corporate) along with God's demand for each Israelite to obey Him and maintain a faith relationship with Him. In that regard, I wonder about one of Kaiser's concluding statements at the end of the chapter on Ezra's prayer. He writes: "God holds us accountable not only for our personal sins but also for those of the group in which we live and participate." On the one hand, we have some responsibility, at times, for choices made by our church or our family, but is there a general divine accountability for group sins?

Kaiser's volume on OT prayers deserves a place on a believer's shelf. Readers might wonder about this or that detailed conclusion along the way, but Kaiser forces us to grasp the importance and key elements of prayers by significant individuals in OT times. Especially with its concluding statements and discussion questions, it would serve as a helpful guide for personal devotions or small group Bible studies.

John A. Beck. *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers: An Illustrated Guide to Israel*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017. 256 pp. \$16.99 (paper).

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

As someone who leads at least two trips to Israel each year, I am always looking for solid sources to help me learn more about the land of Israel as well as resources for people who travel with me to Israel. The author of this volume, John Beck, was an OT professor and now focuses on researching and writing material to help people understand the Bible. John shares our (TMS's) high view of Scripture as well as our chronology of the Old and New Testaments.

The first section of this book provides "big picture" information about the land of Israel. In addition to modern-day maps of Israel and Jerusalem, Beck provides an overview of Israel's history as well as the geography and climate of the Promised Land—geographical zones, agricultural year, seasons and culture, winds, water, and rainfall. Then he offers various suggested itineraries—for various numbers of days to visit all Israel as well as smaller itineraries for touring Jerusalem. He ends this "big picture" section with suggestions of things a traveler should know when travelling to Israel.

The central (main) section of the book provides an overview of sites in the Jerusalem area (sites you can walk to and sites you need to drive to around Jerusalem) and then discusses sites in four major regions—Coastal Plain, Central Mountains South, Central Mountains Center, and Central Mountains North.

For each of the chapters that focus on the sites in and around Jerusalem or in the three sections of Israel that Beck identifies, he begins by listing the sites he will explain. As he works through these sites, as needed, he expands his "commentary"

to consider that area in various historical periods. Throughout this explanation, he provides several photos of artifacts and artist reconstructions of various buildings or cities. For example, in his consideration of Jerusalem, Beck includes some helpful artist reconstructions of the appearance and extent of Jerusalem (in the times of David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Jesus—pp. 48, 52, 56, 65).

In his explanation of Christ's birth at Bethlehem (p. 90), he provides a great artist reconstruction of a home in that period which demonstrates that in Judea many homes were built on top of natural caves. This would provide the family a place for additional storage as well as a shelter for their animals (and where Jesus was likely born). In his explanation of sites in the Galilee region, Beck summarizes (and depicts with artistic reconstructions) three kinds of fishing that took place in that area (cast net, drag net, and trammel net—pp. 227–29). These and many other helpful features of the book do not simply provide some geographic tidbits but shed light on a biblical place or practice that enables a reader to better understand various biblical passages. Finally, every site treatment ends with a blue box with key information—directions to take to get to your desired location.

The last section involves numerous clear and helpful maps—OT and NT cities, the road system, tribal divisions, maps of the united and divided kingdoms, and maps of all Israel and then Galilee in the NT. This section ends with a Bible timeline and an index of locations explained throughout the volume. He provides a key to symbols that occur throughout his explanations that remind the reader whether there are fees or if modest dress is required.

For scholars or lay people who want to have a great resource to help guide their learning about important features of the land of promise, this relatively small volume by John Beck deserves a place in every backpack of people heading to Israel. While there are several good written guides for those travelling to Israel, Beck's volume is the top of this trip leader's list!