

CREDO

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By

HOW WELL DO YOU

the

KNOW THE BIBLE?

Book



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matthewbarrett@credomag.com*

FROM THE EDITOR

How well do you know your Bible? Now that is a scary question, even if you have been a Christian for a long time. Between church events, little league games, and a full-time job, finding time to read and study Scripture is a herculean task. To make matters worse, when you finally do escape to read the Bible you struggle to understand what it means. At times you can relate with the Ethiopian eunuch who said to Philip when asked if he understood what he was reading, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

In this issue of *Credo Magazine* we are here to help! If you feel tired and frustrated, this issue will give you that shot of adrenaline you need to keep going. And if you feel like you just don’t have the tools in your belt to interpret the Bible properly, then you are in good hands. Consider this an exercise in going to the hardware store to find those tools you need to comprehend the Bible. Obviously this issue of the magazine won’t give you all the tools you need, but we hope to get you started, even provide you with the motivation you need to study the Bible on your own. Sure, it’s hard work. But hard work pays off. And maybe one day you will be able to say, “Hey, I do know the Bible, and I think I can help someone else understand it too.” 

Matthew Barrett

Executive Editor



10 QUESTIONS WITH AUGUSTUS NICODEMUS LOPES

Augustus Nicodemus Lopes is vice-president of his denomination, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB). He is the pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Goyania. Holding a Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary, he also teaches courses in New Testament at various schools.

In this interview Augustus speaks with *Credo Magazine* in order to shed light on what Christianity looks like in Brazil, why there has been recent excitement over Reformed theology, and what challenges the church in Brazil will face going forward. He also

has something to say about McDonald's, Pentecostalism, and *feijoada*!

How did you become a follower of Christ and what led you to become a pastor and professor?

I was born and raised as a Christian. After a time away from church when I was a teenager and a young man, the Lord called me. This happened when I was 22 years old. I was studying at a state university to become an industrial designer. I quit my studies and dedicated myself to the preaching of the Word.

Later I engaged in theological studies in the local Presbyterian seminary, where I also noticed I had some skills for teaching.

What does Christianity look like in Brazil?

Christianity is relatively young in Brazil. Not more than 150 years old. At the moment the strongest influence is that of the Neo-Pentecostal churches. There are many Reformed churches, but we are small compared to the great number of Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostal churches. Nevertheless, we have been able to translate and publish a great number of books by the Reformers and Puritans. Also, there is an increasing number of Reformed Brazilian authors. Many Reformed conferences are held in Brazil every year. And the Reformed faith has been increasingly spreading among evangelicals in Brazil.

Pentecostalism has a major presence in Brazil. What impact is Pentecostalism having on the church in Brazil, good and bad?

Pentecostals are bringing the gospel to the big cities and reaching many people. At the same time, their emphasis on experiences, the lack of a solid doctrinal basis, and their belief in present-day revelations have opened the movement to the infiltration of false teachers. In spite of all this, and maybe because of this, many Pentecostals are leaving their churches as they get acquainted with the Reformed faith through the Internet, YouTube, Facebook and all other social media. Just last Sunday we

received about 60 new members in our church that came from Pentecostal churches.

What are the top two challenges a pastor faces in Brazil today?

Assuming that you are referring to Reformed pastors, I would say the challenge of church growth and the challenge of keeping one's integrity as a minister of the Word.

What advice would you give to Americans who become missionaries in Brazil?

Learn the language. Choose areas where Brazilians have not been able to reach people. Be able to work as a medical doctor, engineer, or any other kind of work that would put you in touch with people. Remember that large Neo-Pentecostal churches invite a lot of American prosperity preachers every year, so that many Brazilian evangelicals have grown suspicious of any American preacher.

Most Americans have never heard of a Brazilian Calvinist. How did Calvinism come to Brazil in the first place and why are the doctrines of grace so appealing?

There are a lot of us! Still, in a nation of 30 million evangelicals or so, we are vastly outnumbered by Pentecostals, Neo-Pentecostals, Adventists, and so on. Calvinism came to Brazil with American Presbyterian missionaries 150 years ago. But Calvinism had little impact then. In the last 20 years,

due to the great number of books published, the presence of Reformed leaders in social media and the increasing number of Reformed conferences being offered, Calvinism has become a significant influence in Brazilian evangelicalism.

What Reformed authors (dead or alive) are Calvinists in Brazil reading the most?

John Calvin, R. C. Sproul, John MacArthur, John Piper, Tim Keller, Charles H. Spurgeon, Kevin DeYoung, and Albert Mohler.

Besides churches, are there any schools (colleges and seminaries) in Brazil where students of theology can study, and if so, what impact are they having in the church and in society?

Oh, yes. The Presbyterian Church of Brazil alone has eight seminaries in major and strategically situated cities, more than a hundred schools, and one of the best Universities of Brazil. Other denominations like Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Episcopalians also have seminaries. The Lutherans and Methodists also have universities. As for the impact they

are having in church and society, I would say that Mackenzie Presbyterian University is the largest and most well known Christian school in Brazil with 40,000 students. The Methodists, Lutherans and Baptists unfortunately have succumbed to liberal theology in most of their theological schools.


What American food do Brazilians love to eat?

McDonald's, sorry to say...

What food should every American try out when he arrives in Brazil?

Our traditional *feijoada* made of black beans and pieces of pork, white rice, sausage and *farinha*.

In your opinion, what is the weirdest thing about Americans?

That's hard. Having lived in America for several years in different periods, I have grown used to the American way of life. Anyway, I never really got used to your way of drinking that dark water in large mugs all day long and still calling it coffee! 

THE BIBLE TEST

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW YOUR BIBLE, DO YA?

So you think you know your Bible, do ya? Well, let's find out. Take this basic Bible test and see for yourself. Don't be embarrassed, no one is watching... we think.

1. In Genesis 15 God made a covenant with:

- a. Abraham
- b. David
- c. Isaiah
- d. Give me a break. This is a trick question.

2. Which king of Israel wrote Psalm 23?

- a. Josiah
- b. Saul
- c. David
- d. Samuel

3. Can you identify who said this famous line? "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- a. Peter
- b. Jesus
- c. Paul
- d. Luke

4. Whose missionary journeys make up the book of Acts?

- a. Paul
- b. Peter
- c. John
- d. Seriously, there were missionary journeys?

5. What is the proper order of the Gospels in your English Bible?


- a. Matthew, Luke, Mark, John
- b. Luke, Matthew, Mark, John
- c. John, Luke, Mark, Matthew
- d. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

How to score your test:

Missed 0 - Congrats! You're not biblically illiterate.

Missed 1 - You have some brushing up to do.

Missed 2 - Ouch, when was the last time you did your devotions?

Missed 3 - Seriously, you need to read your Bible. 

Answers: 1. A. 2. C. 3. B. 4. A. 5. D.

TOUGH QUESTIONS

SHOULD A NEW CHRISTIAN START WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT OR THE NEW TESTAMENT?

START WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT

Mark F. Rooker, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

First, the Old Testament provides the proper background for understanding the New Testament. When we begin to read the New Testament we find that the understanding of many of the customs mentioned in the New Testament such as the institution of marriage and family, the various festivals Israel was to celebrate, the laws, the annual pilgrimages of Jews to Jerusalem, the institution of the priesthood, the animal sacrifices and sacrifices for forgiveness of sin, and numerous prophecies of the coming Messiah are assumed by the New Testament writers. Truly, Merrill Unger was correct when he stated: “Without the Old Testament there could have been no New Testament, and apart from it the New Testament would have been meaningless.”

The opening verse of the New Testament clearly supports the Old Testament priority and immediately throws us back to the content of the Old Testament: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). Notice that Abraham, considered the father of the Jewish people, is placed second in

the introduction of Jesus Christ although he was born one thousand years before King David. There is thus at the beginning of the New Testament a clear stress on Jesus as David’s descendant which qualifies Him to be the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. The rest of the New Testament is a clear and emphatic witness to this truth. This understanding would not be clearly appreciated unless a person had first studied the contents of the Old Testament.

START WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT

Tony Payne, Publishing Director of Matthias Media

The Bible is a promise-and-fulfilment story, culminating in Jesus Christ as the Yes to all God’s promises. So, to really understand the Bible and the nature of the Christian life, a new believer will need to understand both sides of it—the promises (largely in the Old Testament) and the fulfilment (mostly in the New). But you can start that exploration at either end, and (very handily) many parts of the New Testament provide enough of the Old Testament background to get you started. Therefore, I usually recommend that new believers begin by studying one of the Gospels (probably Mark or Luke), followed by one of Paul’s shorter letters (Colossians or 1 Thessalonians). ■



A VIEW FROM THE PEW

DOES YOUR BIBLE BEEP?

by Jeremy Kimble

Recently I attended a chapel service where the preacher, instead of asking the audience to open their Bibles, told them to turn to a certain passage of Scripture in their mobile devices. Inherent in this statement is the assumption that people today are more prone to leave behind leather-bound versions of Scripture and instead opt for YouVersion or a Bible app on their phone or tablet. While this assumption may become increasingly prevalent, pastors and church members alike should be asking themselves whether or not they lose anything by only reading the Bible on their mobile devices. My contention is that Scripture, bound in a book

on actual pages, may be of benefit to us for long-term retention, helping us effectively concentrate and meditate on God's promises and fight sin.

Certainly people today will cite the benefits of reading their Bibles on a mobile device. They will not have to carry a bulky study Bible to their church service. They also will be able to quickly tweet key verses and quotes from their pastor on the spot. It is argued that people can also highlight and underline just as effectively as if there were a bound Bible in front of them, and all of this with the convenience of being able to carry this device in one's pocket. So why be so backwards and

insist that there is benefit to be had in bringing an actual Bible with you to church services? There are several reasons.

First, the use of a mobile device could cause us to become apathetic and casual in our treatment of Scripture. While it is convenient, it can also prove challenging to hold a device wherein we do our banking, gaming, news updates, and Bible reading. If we are not careful, the functionality of such a device can become rather neutral and mundane. And yet, we are told that God esteems those who are humble and who tremble at his Word (Isa. 66:1-2). It could be that the casualness with which we treat our phones could bleed into our treatment of Scripture as well. Certainly one could do this with a normal book, but having that item in your hands reminds you that this is a unique and holy book. It serves one purpose in your life, namely to remind you of the radiant splendor and glory of our God.

Second, there is the distinct possibility of distraction for you and those around you. The temptation to check email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the like will be palpable as you seek to listen to the sermon (at the Christian university

where I teach at, I see students losing this battle in chapel almost every day). It seems wise to eliminate this factor by using the book-version of the Bible where we can most readily concentrate on the words contained there, which give us life (Matt. 4:4).

Finally, there is something to be said for using your hands to turn pages, navigate the Bible, and underline and highlight actual pages. This offers a permanence that is missing in the digital medium. Also, people are forced to know their way around the Bible as they locate the sermon text, and this is very healthy.

My hope is that we do not lose sight of the benefits of a paper-bound version of the Bible, which we use for private study at home, as well as public worship.

Jeremy Kimble is Assistant Professor of Theological Studies at Cedarville University. 



UNDER DEBATE

WHICH BIBLE TRANSLATION SHOULD I USE?

Thomas Schreiner: HCSB

There are many good Bible translations out there. Still, I would commend the Holman Christian Standard Bible for two reasons. First, it accurately conveys the meaning of the text. Readers can rely on it both for study and for spiritual nurture. Second, the HCSB is fresh and contemporary. More and more people in our culture are non-readers or they read very little. It is important to have a translation that connects with where readers are and where they live. I believe the HCSB fulfills that requirement superbly. It has a spontaneity and liveliness that makes reading it a joy.

Thomas Schreiner is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Douglas Moo: NIV

I recommend the New International Version of the Bible (updated 2011) as the translation that best combines accuracy to the original text with clear contemporary English. This approach has made the NIV the most popular English Bible for over thirty years. Its translators come from many different evangelical denominations, insuring that the translation has no sectarian bias. The fifteen translators are independent of any publisher or denomination. The NIV also comes in many different formats, so it meets the need of almost any reader. Children and those who struggle with English can use the New International Reader's Version, which puts the NIV text into simple English.

Douglas J. Moo is the Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College.



James White: NASB

The New American Standard Bible was translated before the translation and marketing wars began. Hence, its focus was more upon accuracy and consistency than is often the case today. In 1995 the NASB underwent a thorough updating review, increasing its readability across both the Old and New Testaments, and making sure it remained faithful to the latest advances in both the underlying Hebrew and Greek texts. A favorite of Bible teachers, ministers, and theologians for decades, it stands today as one of the most consistent and reliable translations in the English language.

James White is the director of Alpha and Omega Ministries, a Christian apologetics organization based in Phoenix, Arizona.



Kevin DeYoung: ESV

The ESV’s “essentially literal” translation philosophy manages “word-for-word” faithfulness (as much as possible) without sounding clumsy and wooden. As a pastor, I love that the ESV is a more transparent and consistent translation that requires less correcting in preaching. I also appreciate that unlike many dynamic equivalent translations the ESV works hard to retain the artistry, meter, subtlety, and concreteness found in the literature of the Bible, especially in poetry. The great accomplishment of the ESV is getting the reader closer to the world of the Bible and closer to the original

languages, yet without sacrificing literary excellence and readability.

Kevin DeYoung is the Senior Pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan.



Joel Beeke: KJV

Reading and consulting reputable word-for-word Bible translations, rather than dynamic translations, is always profitable, but you should have one translation to which you turn every day. My choice is the Authorized Version of 1611, the so-called “King James Version” of the Holy Scriptures. Based on the historic original text, translated word for word into beautiful and memorable English, and tested by the faith and scholarship of countless generations, the KJV can be trusted as a faithful rendering of God’s Word, setting the standards by which every other translation is judged.

Joel R. Beeke is President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, and a pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, MI. ■

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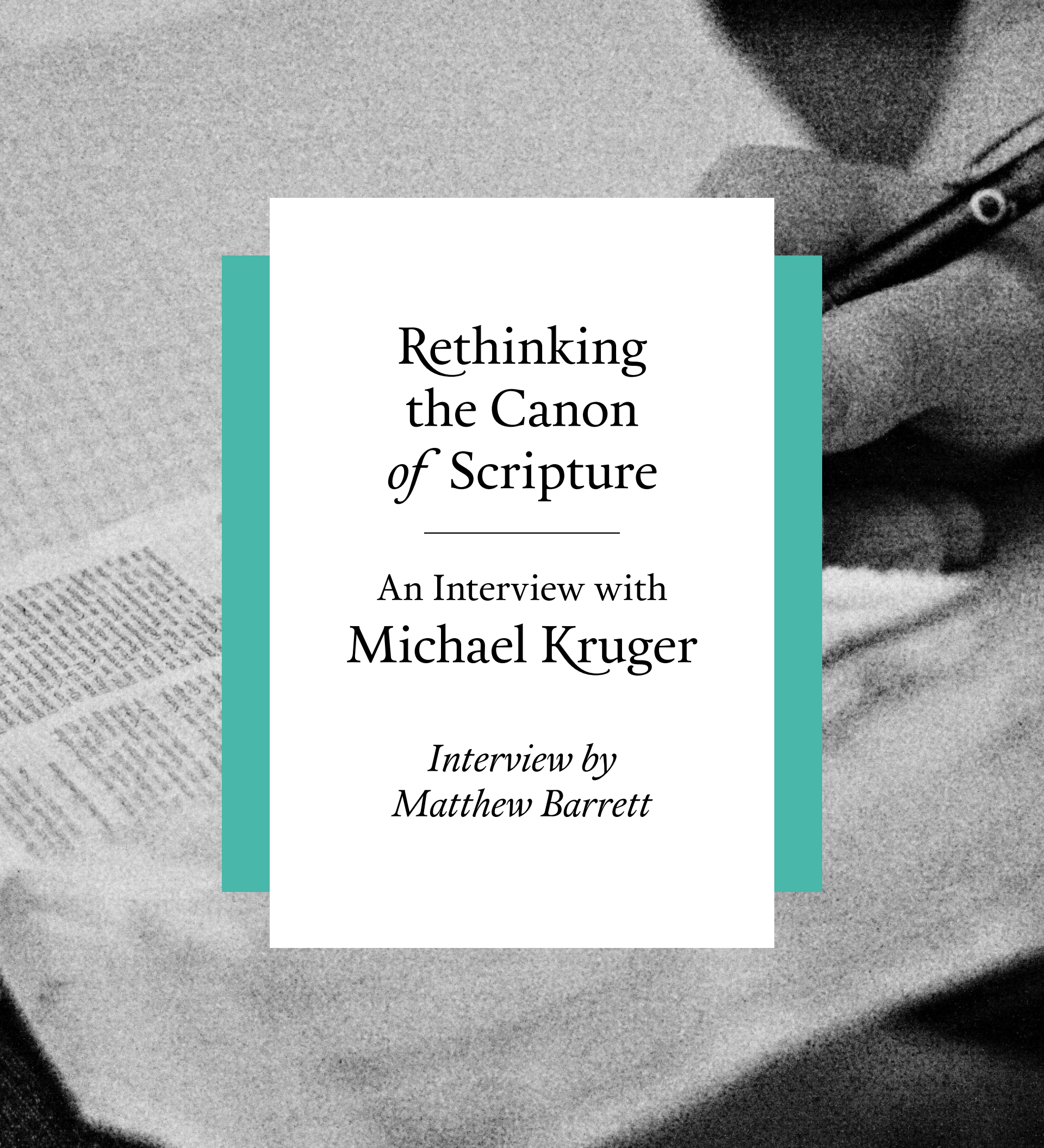
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Rethinking
the Canon
of Scripture

An Interview with
Michael Kruger

*Interview by
Matthew Barrett*

Michael J. Kruger is President and the Samuel C. Patterson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC. He is one of the leading scholars today in the study of the origins of the New Testament, particularly the development of the New Testament canon and the transmission of the New Testament text. He is the author of numerous books including *Canon Revisited* and *The Question of Canon*. In this interview *Credo Magazine* executive editor, Matthew Barrett, asks Kruger some probing questions to help us come to a more accurate understanding of the canon of Scripture.

Many scholars have approached the canon of Scripture thinking that they must find that special date in the early centuries of the church when the canon was finally closed and the church officially declared the books of the New Testament canonical. But you completely reorient our approach to the canon when you say in your book *Canon Revisited*, “From the perspective of God’s revelational activity, a canon exists as soon as the New Testament books are written—the canon is always the books God has given to the corporate church, no more, no less.” This sentence seems to get to the very thesis of your book. So tell us, what do you mean and why is this so different from how others have approached the canon?

Most modern approaches to canon are done on only a historical level, with no serious attention to the theology of the canon. Thus, when scholars want to in-

vestigate the “date” of the canon, what they are really investigating is the date of the *reception* of the canon by the early church. Investigating the date of the reception of the canon is entirely legitimate—but it’s not the whole story. In addition to the date of the canon’s reception, there is also the question of the date of the canon’s *existence*. And this latter issue can only be discussed when theological considerations are allowed into the discussion (e.g., canonical books are given by the inspiration of the Spirit). One might say this is looking at the canon from a “divine” perspective, rather than just a human one.

Some Roman Catholics have argued that the canon of Scripture is derivative from the church or caused by the church. For example, Hans Küng said, “Without the Church there would be no New Testament.” What are some fundamental problems with such an approach to Scripture?

Fundamentally, the Roman Catholic approach ends up confusing the *instrument* God uses to produce

INVESTIGATING THE DATE OF THE RECEPTION OF THE CANON IS ENTIRELY LEGITIMATE—BUT IT’S NOT THE WHOLE STORY. IN ADDITION TO THE DATE OF THE CANON’S RECEPTION, THERE IS ALSO THE QUESTION OF THE DATE OF THE CANON’S EXISTENCE. AND THIS LATTER ISSUE CAN ONLY BE DISCUSSED WHEN THEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS ARE ALLOWED INTO THE DISCUSSION (E.G., CANONICAL BOOKS ARE GIVEN BY THE INSPIRATION OF THE SPIRIT). ONE MIGHT SAY THIS IS LOOKING AT THE CANON FROM A “DIVINE” PERSPECTIVE, RATHER THAN JUST A HUMAN ONE.

IT IS ENTIRELY APPROPRIATE TO SAY THAT THE CHURCH IS SUBJECT TO THE SCRIPTURES AND THAT THE SCRIPTURES ARE OVER THE CHURCH [RATHER THAN VICE VERSA]. LIKE ANYTHING ELSE IN CREATION, THE CHURCH IS ALSO A *CREATURA VERBI*—A “CREATION OF THE WORD.”

the Bible (human beings who are part of the community of faith) with the *ultimate cause* of the Bible (namely God himself). Thus, it is misleading to say that the church “caused” the Bible. Sure, they were the means God used, but it is ultimately God who is producing the Bible through human authors. Therefore it is entirely appropriate to say that the church is subject to the Scriptures and that the Scriptures are over the church (rather than vice versa). Like anything else in creation, the church is also a *creatura verbi*—a “creation of the Word.”

What will no doubt surprise many readers is the discovery that many evangelicals today use an approach to determining what books are canonical that is similar to how many liberals have approached the canon. You call this approach the “criteria-of-canonicity model” because it believes the authority of the canon is established by historical investigation into the New Testament books in order to show that they meet these historical criteria. While evangelicals and liberals meet totally different conclusions, they both share a similar methodology by appealing to the “historical origins” of the books. But you argue that this approach is misguided because it makes criteria and data that is external to Scripture the very judge over Scripture, even validating whether Scripture is God’s Word or not. Tell us, what are some of the reasons this

approach is problematic?

First, we should be clear that there is nothing wrong with historical investigations into the origins of New Testament books. The problem is not with the use of historical evidence, but *how* that evidence is used. The criteria-of-canonicity model tends to use historical evidence as an *independent* and *external* test for what constitutes a divinely-given book. The problems with this are twofold. First, it functionally allows historical investigations to bear a higher authority of Scripture—something that should concern any Christian. Second, it never offers a cogent explanation for how it knows what criteria show a book to be divine. How does this model know what attributes it should be looking for in divinely-given books? Such information could only be provided by God himself. And where would he provide it? Paradoxically in the very book under discussion.

You argue that we should view the canon as “self-authenticating.” You write, “What is needed, then, is a canonical model that does not ground the New Testament canon in an external authority, but seeks to ground the canon in the only place it could be grounded, its own authority.” Why is it perfectly legitimate to look to, even appeal to, the very authority of God and the content of the canon itself?

People are typically confused by the self-authenticating model because it strikes them as circular reasoning. But, this is really a misunderstanding of what is happening. Whenever one justifies an *ultimate* authority, it is impossible to do so without using that authority. Otherwise, that authority

wouldn't actually be ultimate! Analogously, imagine if someone wanted to validate whether their sense experience was reliable. How could they go about investigating such a thing without actually using their sense experience? In such a situation, a person would have to use their sense experience

WE CAN TRUST THE TESTIMONY OF THE CHURCH BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THE BOOKS OF THE CANON HAVE SUCH SELF-EVIDENT AUTHORITY THAT THE CHURCH, THROUGH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WAS ABLE TO RELIABLY RECOGNIZE THEM. IN THIS WAY, THE CHURCH FUNCTIONS MORE LIKE A THERMOMETER THAN A THERMOSTAT. THE LATTER CONTROLS TEMPERATURE, WHEREAS THE FORMER MERELY RESPONDS TO THE TEMPERATURE THAT IS ALREADY THERE.

even while seeking to validate it.

If we adopt a “self-authenticating” approach to the canon of Scripture, does this mean that historical investigation is irrelevant?

Not at all. As I noted above, there is nothing wrong with historical investigation. Indeed, I devote much of my book, *Canon Revisited*, to a discussion of the historical origins of the canon. But, those who read my book carefully will see that the historical evidences are not presented as an independent authority that stands over Scripture. Rather, the historical investigation is itself guided by Scripture. The only reason we want to validate the apostolic authorship of a book (using historical evidences) is because the Bible has already told us that apostolic authorship

matters because the apostles bear the authority of Christ.

If the canon is self-authenticating, is there any role left for the community of believers, that is, the church itself?

Absolutely. The testimony of the church is a fundamental reason for believing that we have the right books in the New Testament. But, this is not because the church is infallible, nor is it because the church “created” the Bible (as claimed by Roman Catholics). It is because the church, which is filled with the Holy Spirit, properly *responds* to the voice of Christ in these books. In other words, we can trust the testimony of the church because we believe the books of the canon have such self-evident authority that the church, through the help of the Holy Spirit, was able to reliably recognize

them. In this way, the church functions more like a thermometer than a thermostat. The latter controls temperature, whereas the former merely responds to the temperature *that is already there*.

For those in the church that are unfamiliar with the academic debate over the canon, is there a book or two for a lay audience that is similar to your approach that you would recommend?

I am not aware of a lay-level book that adopts the approach I offer in *Canon Revisited* (though at some point, I may write such a lay-level book myself). In the meantime, I point folks to my website Canon Fodder (www.michaeljkruger.com) where I offer much discussion of the canon at a more basic level. ■

*How Did
We Get
the Old
Testament?*

Paul D. Wegner



Around the third millennium B.C., people began to write historical records in Hieroglyphic (Egypt) and Sumerian (Mesopotamia) of such things as land deeds, lists of sacrifices to the gods, conquests of empires, etc. Sometime later the Israelites preserved the writings of their prophets whose messages they believed came directly from God. These latter works were considered authoritative and served as the standard by which faith and practice were regulated and the history of the nation retained.

Old Testament Scripture is almost silent regarding how or when the books were assembled and the process or stages of its growth. However, it is almost certain that the earliest of biblical materials were transmitted orally. Moses commanded the people of Israel to teach God's laws and statutes to their sons and grandsons (Deut. 4:9). How long these traditions were transmitted orally is not known, but at some point they were committed to writing to better ensure their accuracy.

HOW DID THE OLD TESTAMENT COME INTO BEING?

Several biblical books suggest that early on some biblical books or parts of books were treated with great reverence and were thought to be authoritative (Exod. 17:14-16; 24:3-4, 7). The stone tablets upon which God inscribed the Ten Commandments were stored in the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 25:16, 21; Deut. 10:2-5; 1 Kgs 8:9; Heb. 9:4), a sacred place. The Law of Moses was taught to the priests and commanded to be publically read aloud every seven years so that the Israelites would not forget God's

laws (Deut. 31:9-11); nothing was to be added to or subtracted from its words (Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

We know that biblical authors make reference to earlier biblical writings (2 Kgs 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 8:1, 3, 5, 8; etc.) and the prophets often rebuked Israel for not obeying the words of their predecessors (2 Chron. 24:19; 36:15-16; Ezra 9:11; Neh. 9:26, 30; Jer. 7:25-26; etc.). Written forms of prophetic oracles (2 Chron. 21:12; Isa. 30:8; Jer. 25:13; 29:1; etc.) are mentioned, as well as histories recorded by prophets (1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29; 12:15; 13:22; etc.). But the first reference to a collection of biblical books (i.e., scrolls, *bassēpārîm*) is in Daniel 9:2, which states: "in the first year of his reign [Darius], I, Daniel understood from the scrolls, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years." Thus by Daniel's time the book of Jeremiah was part of a larger collection of books/scrolls that he considered authoritative.

Following the destruction of the temple there was a renewed emphasis on the collection and study of Scripture. It is difficult to know exactly when the Old Testament canon (i.e., list of books in the Old Testament) was closed, but the evidence suggests that it was completed before about 200 B.C. The Prologue to Ecclesiasticus, written about middle second century B.C., mentions a Greek translation of "the Law itself, the Prophecies, and the rest of the books" (NRSV). The implication is that there exists a collection of books that was then translated into Greek.

The concept of a canon containing authoritative information comes directly from Scripture itself (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Jer. 26:2; 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Rev. 22:6-8, 18-19). There were three specific occasions

in Israel’s history when certain writings were recognized as having divine authority. The first was when Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the book of the covenant and read it to the Israelites, who responded, “We will do everything that the LORD has said” (Exod. 24:7). The second was when King Josiah read the book of the covenant found in the temple by Hilkiah (622 B.C.; 2 Kgs 23:3; cf. 2 Chron. 34:32). The people accepted the words of the covenant and were willing to put themselves under its authority. The last occasion was when Ezra read the law to the Babylonian exiles who had returned to Israel. The people wept as they listened and renewed their obedience to the law, implying that they believed the words to be authoritative (Neh. 8:9).

WHAT BOOKS MADE UP THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON?

It is sometimes difficult for us to realize that our Bible did not come to us as one book but rather as a collection of books written over about fifteen hundred years. These books are called the TaNaK, referring to *Torah* (Law), *Nebi'im* (Prophets), and *Kethubim* (Writings), and are divided as follows:

LAW (Torah)	PROPHETS (Nebi'im)	WRITINGS (Kethubim)
Genesis	The Former Prophets	Poetic Books
Exodus	Joshua	Psalms
Leviticus	Judges	Job
Numbers	Samuel	Proverbs
Deuteronomy	Kings	
	The Latter Prophets	Five Scrolls (Megilloth)
	Isaiah	Ruth
	Jeremiah	Song of Solomon
	Ezekiel	Ecclesiastes
	The Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets)	Lamentations
		Esther
		Historical Books
		Daniel
		Ezra-Nehemiah
		Chronicles

This three-fold division of the Old Testament can be traced as far back as the Prologue to Ecclesiasticus dated to about 132 B.C. When addressing his disciples, Jesus used similar terminology for the Old Testament: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). The designation “Psalms” here most likely refers to the entire third section of the Old Testament since it is the first and largest book of that part.

The evidence suggests that the Jewish nation considered only thirty-nine books to be canonical (the Protestant canon reflects this as well):

SOURCE	DATE	EVIDENCE
1. Septuagint (LXX)	c. 150 B.C.	Contains at least the entire Old Testament plus Psalm 151, which was known to be extracanonical
2. Prologue to Ecclesiasticus	c. 132 B.C.	Tripartite division of the Old Testament (Law, Prophets, and others)
3. Jesus	c. 4 B.C.-A.D. 30	Matthew 23:34-35; Luke 11:50-51 “Genesis to Chronicles”; Luke 24:44 “Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms”
4. Philo of Alexandria	c. 20 B.C.-A.D. 50	“Laws and oracles delivered through the mouth of the prophets and psalms”
5. 2 Esdras 14:45	1 st century A.D.	Old Testament contains 24 books (same as Protestant 39 books only designated differently)
6. Josephus (Contra Apion I.37-39)	c. 37-100 A.D.	Old Testament contains 22 books (same as Protestant 39 books only designated differently)
7. Melito, Bishop of Sardis	c. 170	List of all Old Testament books (except possibly Esther)
8. Jerusalem list	c. 170	All 39 Old Testament books
9. Origen	c. 185-253	Old Testament contains 22 books (same as our 39)
10. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria	c. 367	22 books (no mention of Esther; inclusion of Baruch and Epistle of Jeremiah)
11. Jerome	c. 345-420	22, 24, 27 books but still referring to Protestant 39 Old Testament books
12. Rufinus	c. late 4 th -early 5 th centuries	24 books (same as Protestant 39, but in a different order)
13. Jewish Tradition	c. 2 nd -6 th centuries	24 books (same as Protestant 39, but different order)

The early Christian church, whose roots were in the Jewish nation, initially used the same canon (cf. Rom. 1:2) and read it in light of Christ’s coming. Indeed, New Testament writers quote from almost every Old Testament book. Jesus seemed clear about what constituted the Old Testament canon, stating in Luke 11:49-51:

For this reason also the wisdom of God said, “I will send unto them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that this generation may be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation” (cf. Matt. 23:34-36).

The Jewish nation will be held responsible for killing God’s prophets and rejecting their message. But

Jesus puts a limit on the revelation for which they will be held responsible, namely from the blood of righteous Abel (Gen. 4) to the blood of Zechariah (2 Chron. 24). Notice that means he does not hold them responsible for revelation past 2 Chronicles which is the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament. Thus Jesus appears to hold to the same canon, even in the same order, as the Jewish nation.

Later the New Testament books were added to the Old Testament to constitute the Christian canon. Jesus recognized the authority of the Hebrew Old Testament and taught his disciples to reverence it. Jesus often condemned the teachings of the Jewish scribes and Pharisees, and used the Old Testament to point out errors in their teaching.

THE CONCEPT OF A CANON CONTAINING AUTHORITATIVE INFORMATION COMES DIRECTLY FROM SCRIPTURE ITSELF.

to have developed among the church fathers two traditions concerning the Old Testament canon. One canon tradition was broad, encompassing many of the Jewish works that were read in the church for purposes of edification, including apocryphal books and a few apocalyptic Pseudepigrapha. Likely through the influence of Augustine who favored this broader canon, copies of the Septuagint from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. include some books of the Apocrypha. Several local synods in the Western church (e.g., Hippo, A.D. 393; Carthage, A.D. 397 and 419) authorized the use of apocryphal works as Scripture. The other canon tradition deemed only those books in the Jewish Bible to be canonical; scholars such as Melito (died c. A.D. 180), Origen (A.D. 184/85-253/54), Athanasius (c. A.D. 296-373), Epiphanius (c. A.D. 310-403), and Jerome (c. A.D. 347-420) favored this position.

WHY DO SOME PARTS OF THE CHURCH HAVE DIFFERENT CANONS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT?

The Jewish nation did not accept New Testament teachings, creating a split between Jews and Christians. Jews (and Romans) often persecuted the early church, causing it to spread widely across the Roman Empire. As time went on Christians had less and less contact with Jews, resulting in uncertainty about which Old Testament books they considered canonical. This problem was compounded by the presence of heretics in the Christian church who claimed that certain Old Testament books were not canonical (e.g., Marcion in the mid-second century A.D.). Thus by the fourth century there appears

This debate came to a head during the Reformation, when the Reformers (e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin) countered corruption in the church with the need to return to the ancient doctrines of the supremacy and sufficiency of Scriptures. But this required knowing which books were and were not Scripture. The Reformers aligned themselves with the canon identified by Jerome and others following him, whereas the Roman Catholic Church argued for the broader view of the canon, especially since their teachings included prayers for the dead and purgatory (found only in 2 Macc. 12:40-45). At the Council of Trent in 1546 the Roman Catholic Church determined that both the Apocrypha and the Jewish Bible were authoritative Scriptures and firmly rejected anyone who disagreed. These debates continue today. The Protestant canon includes the

thirty-nine Old Testament books. The canon of the Roman Catholic Church includes the thirty-nine Old Testament books plus the Apocrypha (1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus [Sirach], Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah, Song of the Three Children, Susanna, Bell and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, 1 and 2 Maccabees). The Eastern Orthodox Church includes all of the earlier works plus three more

70-200 A.D.), a second group of scribes arose called the Tannaim (*tānna'im* “repeaters,” i.e., teachers), and began copying their traditions. The Mishnah (a collection of Jewish oral traditions expounding Old Testament laws), some of which may have originated in the early first century B.C., also began to take shape under the Tannaim. During this period or shortly thereafter, Talmudic evidence suggests that the temple hired professional “correctors” or “revisers” (*maggihim*) to conduct some type of textual criticism on the temple scrolls.

CURRENTLY WE HAVE ABOUT 300 HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS, AS WELL AS MANY ANCIENT VERSIONS THAT WE CAN COMPARE TO DETERMINE THE ACCURACY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

works (Psalm 151, 3 and 4 Maccabees).

HOW ACCURATE ARE THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS?

Before the advent of the printing press, scribes would hand-copy a biblical book when it began to show signs of wear or if another copy was desired. The process of hand-copying meant that changes could unintentionally be introduced into the original text due to human error. Scriptures that were handed down as revelation from God were treated much more carefully and reverently in the copying process than most other literary documents. In fact, the Scriptures were so important to the nation of Israel that an entire class of scholars called *sopherim* “scribes” developed from about 500 B.C. to A.D. 100. Their primary job was to preserve Israel’s sacred traditions, the foundation of the nation.

Shortly after the beginning of the Christian era (ca.

A third group of scribes called the Amoraim (*‘amôrā'im* “expositors”) arose about 200-500 A.D. and worked to preserve the Hebrew text. During this period, the Talmud (a record of the rabbinic discussions concerning the interpretation of Jewish law, customs, etc.) began to be formed. The Amoraim were centered in both Babylonia and Palestine, giving rise to two Talmuds, the Babylonian and Palestinian. Sometime during this period, meticulous rules were developed to preserve the Old Testament text in the synagogue scrolls; for example: the page was first to be lined, from which the letters were to be suspended; no word or letter was to be written from memory; the scribe could not write the name *Yahweh* with a newly dipped brush, nor take notice of anyone, even a king, while writing this sacred name. Later an entire tractate was devoted to the proper procedures for preparing a sacred scroll and many more requirements were added.¹

Finally, about 500-1000 A.D. a fourth group of scribes called the Masoretes inherited the scribal traditions. Their diligent labors helped to preserve the Hebrew text we have today, called the Masoretic Text. These scribes made meticulous notes regarding

the text, from recording the number of letters used in a book to indicating the middle letter of a book. They also made careful notations along the sides of the Hebrew text and in multiple other volumes concerning the reading and pointing of these texts.

Currently we have about 300 Hebrew manuscripts, as well as many ancient versions that we can compare to determine the accuracy of the Old Testament. Bruce K. Waltke notes that in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (the most recent critical edition of the Hebrew Bible) approximately one textual note appears for every ten words; thus 90 percent of the text is without significant variation.² According to Shemaryahu Talmon, even the errors and textual variations that exist “affect the intrinsic message only in relatively few instances.”³


CONCLUSION

We can rest assured that we have a very good idea of what books form the canon of the Old Testament. Jesus himself confirmed this canon. These books were meticulously copied and checked by ancient scribes assuring their accuracy. In addition, since the twentieth century many manuscripts have been discovered so that we are in a better position today

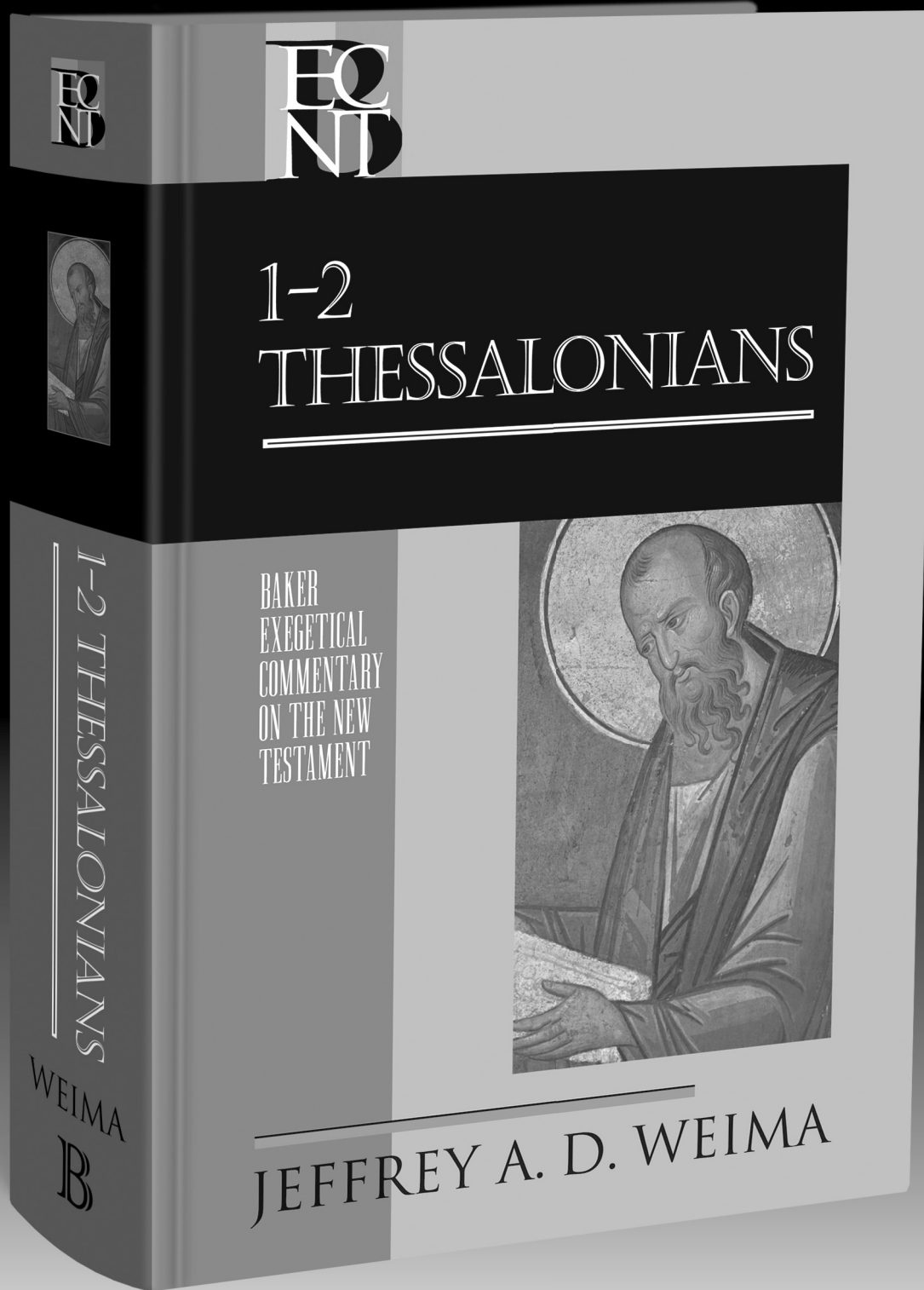
than ever before to know that we have an accurate text of the Old Testament.

END NOTES

1. See T.B. *Masseketoth Sopherim*.
2. Bruce K. Waltke, *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. D. S. Dockery, et al. (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), 157.
3. *Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd, et al., 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963-70) 1.161.

Paul D. Wegner (Ph.D. Kings College, University of London) is Professor of Old Testament Studies at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* and *A Student's Guide to Textual Criticism: Its History, Methods, and Results*. 

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HOW DO
I READ
the
OLD
TESTAMENT?

Deven K. MacDonald

The New Testament doesn't occur in a vacuum. Jesus and the Apostles understood the Gospel message as being the fulfillment of the Old Testament story of Israel. They understood it to be further building upon what was already revealed in the OT; not as a plan "B." The writers of the NT quote the OT 343 times and allude to it another 2,309 times! We can't understand the death and resurrection of Jesus in all its beauty and significance unless we understand the OT. If we want to "get" the gospel, we first need to get into the OT. But let's be honest, it can be a bit intimidating at times. Even so, the OT is God's Word and, as such, is "profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). So, here are a few thoughts to help us get our understanding of it right and to make it more accessible.

Let's start by getting a few basic facts straight: The OT is not one book; it's a library of books—39 to be exact. It was written over a period of around 1,000 years (1500-400 B.C.), and authored by a diverse group of people including kings, prophets, shepherds, and generals. It features a number of different genres including history, narrative, poetry, wisdom, lament, and apocalyptic literature. It was written on three different continents. It is almost entirely written in the Hebrew language (and some Aramaic).

GET THE BIG-STORY

First, it is crucial that you "get" the Big-Story. When you are studying a passage, it's important to place yourself in the original audience's shoes and

think about what God had revealed about himself at this point in their history. Abraham, likely, had less revealed to him about God's character than Isaiah did. Fit the story or passage that you are studying into the larger story of God's redemption plan. To do this, you may need to print off a timeline of significant events or write out chapter titles for the book(s) you're studying. So, let's take a moment and look at the big story of the OT.

In the opening scenes, God creates the world, and places man and woman in the Garden of Eden to tend and rule it. Through their disobedience, sin is introduced to the world. The effects of "the Fall" are devastating, and God casts man and woman out of the Garden. But hope remains because God also promises that one day evil will be defeated by a son, born to humanity (Gen. 3:15).

After a world wide Flood (Gen. 6) and the scattering of nations at the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), God comes and, in grace, chooses Abraham to be the man through whom he will continue his restoration process for the world. God promises Abraham a land of his own, a huge number of descendants, and that his people will bless the entire world (Gen. 12-15). Abraham's grandson, Jacob (whose name is changed to "Israel") has a bunch of sons and, eventually, these sons go to Egypt to avoid a famine that is sweeping through the land (Gen. 46).

After 400 years of living in Egypt, Abraham's descendants have grown to an enormous number, but have become slaves of the Egyptians. They are freed from bondage in Egypt by Moses (Exod. 3-14) and pass through the Red Sea (the Exodus story). After this, Israel is given the Law (Exod. 20) and taught about God's grace, holiness, and what it means to be "God's people." Israel takes

THE REASON THAT WE, AS CHRISTIANS, NEED TO STUDY, LEARN FROM, AND LOVE THE OT IS BECAUSE IT REVEALS WHO GOD IS, WHO WE ARE, AND HOW JESUS IS THE ONLY HOPE WE HAVE. YOU'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND THE DEPTHS OF THE GLORY OF THE GOSPEL WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THE OT!

the land of Canaan, which God had promised, and anoints a king. The first king, Saul, eventually turns his back on God. God then chooses David to be the start of the line of kings that will rule the people forever (2 Sam. 7). The nation continues to fall into sin and, although there are positive points in the story, it never seems like things are working out as they should. Israel is broken apart by political struggles and two nations form: Israel and Judah (1 Kings 12). They each have a number of kings that rule over them, but most fail to honor God and lead the people in righteousness. In judgment, God sends the Assyrians, a neighboring nation and super-power, to capture the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17).

Years later, the same thing occurs to the southern kingdom, this time by the nation of Babylon (2 Kings 24). The southern kingdom is eventually released from exile and is allowed to return to the land; but it's not "happily ever after" because there is a problem. When will God raise up a king to rule them in true righteousness and overthrow their enemies? When will God send a prophet who will finally both live and speak all of God's truth? When will he send a priest who will be holy enough to lead the people into God's direct presence? When will a lamb's sacrifice be enough to finally atone for the people's sin? In the last book of the OT, the prophet Malachi says something startling, something that gives the people hope: "Get ready!

God himself is coming" (Mal. 3:1-2).

We turn the page and open our NT and are introduced to Immanuel—God with us (Matt. 1:23). God himself came down in the person of Jesus Christ. He is God's Son—heir to the throne of David, the promised seed of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). Jesus is the true and final King who reigns in perfect righteousness, not only over Israel, but over the whole universe. When we read the NT we see Jesus, the final sacrifice for sin—the perfect spotless "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We turn page after page in the NT and understand that Jesus is the great and final high priest, who has given the people his own perfect righteousness (Heb. 7:23-28) and can, therefore, lead them directly into the presence of God. The tension and cry of the OT is finally and fully resolved only when we turn the page and continue reading in the NT, seeing Jesus. The reason that we, as Christians, need to study, learn from, and love the OT is because it reveals who God is, who we are, and how Jesus is the only hope we have. You'll never understand the depths of the glory of the gospel without understanding the OT! So, let's continue to talk through how we can grow in our understanding of the OT.

GET THE CHRONOLOGY

Second, you need to "get" the chronology. The OT is not in chronological order in most English Bibles. Accordingly, when you are reading a book like Haggai, you need to be aware of the historical context. Where on the time-line does

this book take place? What date was it written? What was happening at that time in history? What just happened in Israel's history? A proper understanding of context and timelines are essential if we are going to "get" it.

GET THE THEMES

Third, it's important that you "get" the themes. Part of "getting" the big story is taking time to think through some of the themes of the OT and trace their development (some may call this "biblical theology") throughout its pages. A helpful exercise could be taking time to trace specific themes like "light," "glory," "temple," "Grace and Law," or "God's presence." Start in Genesis and work through the OT (continue into the NT). For example, taking the theme of "God's presence," we can see this concept develop. Originally, man was created to dwell with God himself (Gen. 1-2). However, because of sin, God's presence was lost. While God continued to pursue his people, there was a distance or separation that now existed between God and man because of sin. In the tabernacle, God's presence was with his people again (2 Chron. 5:14) although a large curtain separated the people from God (Ex 26:33). Jesus came and was himself the tabernacle—or dwelling place of God (John 1:14). At his death, the temple curtain was torn—the way was once again open (Mark 15:28)! Now, through faith and repentance, we are placed in Christ and he in us (Gal. 3:20), and we can come again into the presence of God. Someday, God will dwell with people in total perfection (Rev. 21:3). What was lost in Eden will eventually be restored in the new creation!

GET SOME GOOD TOOLS AND HELPS

Fourth, "get" some good tools and helps. There are a number of great tools to help our interpretation of the OT. A Bible Dictionary is useful to look up terms like "temple," "Canaan," "Moses," "Babylon," or a specific book of the Bible, like "Jonah." When you are studying a passage of the OT, don't just overlook important places, actions, rituals, or people; take a minute or two and look up their details.

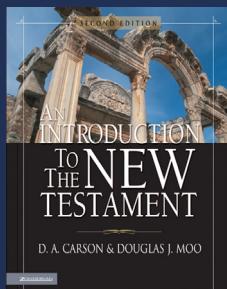
A commentary will usually take you verse by verse through a specific book. So a commentary on Micah will give you the background, literary features, significant linguistic issues, and offer an interpretation of the passage and book. It's also helpful to get an OT Introduction, which covers each book of the OT. It explains its main themes, offers an outline of the book and bibliography—basically everything you need to get started.

GET INTO THE TEXT AND GET THE TEXT INTO YOU

Fifth, "get" into the text and get the text into you. There is no substitute for getting into Scripture. It's great to read about it, study the history, culture, and linguistics of the Bible times, but this cannot and should not take the place of regular reading of the OT. It may also be useful to find a Bible reading plan to help guide you; and it's important to read and study large sections of the Bible, not just a few verses at a time. Don't neglect the act of memorizing verses from the Bible.

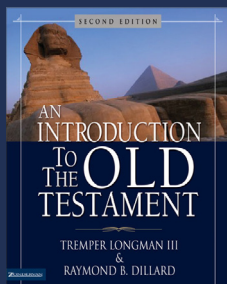
GET READING!

LOOKING TO IMPROVE YOUR BIBLE READING SKILLS? HERE ARE A HANDFUL OF BOOKS TO GET YOU STARTED.



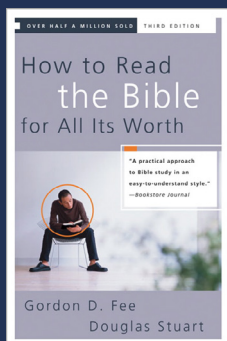
D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*

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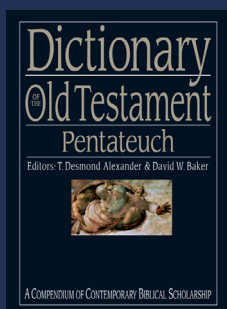
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Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*

For further explanation of how to read the Bible, and what exegesis looks like, Fee and Stuart's book is a great resource. It will explain methods and approaches in biblical studies and offer some practical exercises. So, it's a great resource to start working through to refine your skills in interpretation and exegesis.



The IVP Bible Dictionary Series.

These dictionaries are scholarly yet accessible. There are eight volumes covering topics like: Pentateuch; Gospels; Paul; NT Background. Read the passage or book you are studying a few times. Then, look up the people, places, events, and themes that you find. For example, on a passage from John about Jesus healing on the Sabbath in Jerusalem, you could look up: "John," "Healing," "Sabbath," "Jerusalem," and "Pharisees."

THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GETTING INTO SCRIPTURE. IT'S GREAT TO READ ABOUT IT, STUDY THE HISTORY, CULTURE, AND LINGUISTICS OF THE BIBLE TIMES, BUT THIS CANNOT AND SHOULD NOT TAKE THE PLACE OF REGULAR READING OF THE OT.

THE METHOD: THE TASK OF EXEGESIS AND INTERPRETATION

So, once you “get” it, how do you actually do it? Though this list is not at all exhaustive, it’s a start. Here are a few thoughts:

1. Read the text carefully a number of times in different translations.
2. Pray that God’s Spirit will give you understanding and use his Word to transform your heart. Don’t let it be simply an “academic” exercise. This is God’s Word—in it we encounter the *living* God.
3. Identify author and genre. (Narrative is obviously going to be interpreted differently than a Proverb or poetry.)
4. Identify context: both immediate (chapters before and after) and broad (the book), the section (Law/Prophets), and overall (redemption history). What is happening? What just happened in the story or is about to happen?
5. Research significant words, events, places, etc. in a Bible Dictionary. Where else do these words or places pop up? Read some commentaries while asking: Is the interpretation being offered here valid? Is it logical? Is it consistent with the text or does it bend and twist it?

6. Diagram the text: underline recurring words or themes. Take note of any comparisons or contrasts happening in the text. Take a minute or two and summarize or paraphrase the passage. What is the essence or heartbeat of the passage? Move from the words, to the sentences, to the paragraphs, and to the entire book.
7. Ask three questions: (1) What does the text say? (2) What did it mean to the original audience? (3) What does this text mean to us as NT Christians?

The reason that I love the OT so much is that it gives us a clearer picture of who our Savior is, why he came, and what he accomplished through his death and resurrection. Jesus himself said about the OT: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).

Hopefully, the next time that you are reading through the OT and feeling bogged down or confused, you’ll have a few more resources and ideas on how to get through and come out on the other side, seeing and loving our Savior, Jesus, in a new way.

Deven K. MacDonald is Associate Pastor of Summerside Community Church in London ON Canada. He holds a BA (Hons) from Crandall University, MA (New Testament) from Acadia University and is currently a PhD candidate at Pretoria University. He is passionate about helping people understand the centrality and supremacy of Jesus in all things. ◀

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BY ARDEL CANEDAY

Philip, the evangelist, came upon an official from the royal court of Ethiopia who had been in Jerusalem to worship but was returning home, riding in a chariot and reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah concerning the Servant of the Lord being led to slaughter as a sheep (Isaiah 53:7, 8). Philip inquired, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The royal official wondered, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” So Philip entered the chariot to interpret the prophet’s meaning, for the Ethiopian asked, “About whom does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Both he and Philip believed that understanding the meaning of an ancient text was truly possible, even if translated from the language in which it

was originally written. So, Philip explained how Isaiah was speaking of Jesus Christ.

Do we understand what we are reading when we open the Scriptures as the Ethiopian did? We face the same challenges that he did, though we have the New Testament to aid us. Let’s consider a few of the difficulties we encounter when we read the Bible.

INTERPRETATION IS INHERENT TO WRITTEN TEXTS

Every text worth reading conveys a message. Thus, at a basic level, to read a text is to interpret. Yet, because one can read words without

EVEN DEVOTED POSTMODERNISTS BECOME ANNOYED IF ANYONE INTERPRETS THEIR STATEMENTS THE WAY THEY DECONSTRUCT LITERARY MASTERPIECES, INCLUDING HOLY SCRIPTURE. THOUGH THEY MAY INSIST THAT AMBIGUITIES OF LANGUAGE, RESTRICTIONS ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, INDIVIDUAL UNIQUENESS, AND SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON HOW WE COME TO KNOW RENDERS TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT ANY GIVEN TEXT MEANS IMPOSSIBLE, DECONSTRUCTIONISTS READILY ACCUSE OTHERS OF TWISTING THEIR MEANINGS WHEN THEIR OWN STATEMENTS ARE SUBJECTED TO THE SAME PRINCIPLES OF DECONSTRUCTIONISM.

understanding, to interpret entails more than simply having ability to read combined words. If reading a text correctly requires us to read what the text's writer actually wrote, interpreting properly what a text means obligates us to know what the text's writer intends. This assumes that the writer of a text is sufficiently skilled to invest the written words with intended meaning. Even devoted postmodernists become annoyed if anyone interprets their statements the way they deconstruct literary masterpieces, including

Holy Scripture. Though they may insist that ambiguities of language, restrictions on human understanding, individual uniqueness, and social and cultural influences on how we come to know renders true knowledge of what any given text means impossible, deconstructionists readily accuse others of twisting their meanings when their own statements are subjected to the same principles of deconstructionism.¹

Despite numerous obstacles we encounter in communicating with one another, whether by spoken words or written texts, we properly expect people to write or to speak what they mean and we assume that we will understand them. So it is with the writers of the New Testament Scriptures. Though they wrote their texts in *Koiné* Greek long ago in the first century and within a culture vastly different from our own, they rightly expect us, their readers, to read their texts with understanding and thus with benefit. So, we have confidence that we can read the text of the New Testament with reasonable clarity, understanding, and spiritual profitability. The true meaning of the text of Scripture is not opaque but pellucid, nor is it fluid but formed, for Scripture itself encourages us to expect that we can understand what is written.

Therefore, we legitimately seek the meaning of Scripture and properly admonish Bible study participants who declare, “That’s just your interpretation,” or announce, “This is what the passage means to me.” Such notions are errant because a text’s meaning is assigned by its author, not by its readers. Thus, interpretation must always seek the meaning with which the author endows a text and be wary lest we impose a foreign meaning upon the passage due to our own biases. If we understand Scripture, we have the Holy Spirit to thank, for apart from the Spirit we would neither accept nor understand God’s Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-14).

That said, a few basic principles should be readily evident.

INTERPRETATION ADAPTS TO THE KIND OF LITERATURE BEING READ

A passage’s proper meaning resides within its context. For as the meaning of a word depends upon its usage, so the meaning of a statement or of a paragraph, simple or complex, depends upon its context. Crucial to identifying context is recognition of the kind of literature we are reading. Literary folks classify literature by *genre*, a French term that derived from Latin *genus*, familiar from biology’s classification system. The Bible includes at least five literary *genres*, each one theological in nature—biographical (four Gospels), historical (Acts),

A TEXT’S MEANING IS ASSIGNED BY ITS AUTHOR NOT BY ITS READERS. THUS, INTERPRETATION MUST ALWAYS SEEK THE MEANING WITH WHICH THE AUTHOR ENDOWS A TEXT AND BE WARY LEST WE IMPOSE A FOREIGN MEANING UPON THE PASSAGE DUE TO OUR OWN BIASES.

epistolary (e.g., Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, etc.), homiletic (e.g., Hebrews, 1 John), and apocalyptic. Consequently, as we read Mark’s Gospel, we must not read it as if it were a letter, a homily, or an apocalypse, though one may come upon aspects of each within the Gospel. Likewise, we read Paul’s letter to the Romans not as a Gospel nor as a homily, but also not as systematic theology. The five kinds of literature in the New Testament also include within themselves various sub-genres—legal codes, genealogies, proverbs, parables, riddles, poetry, household codes, church orders, hymns, prayers, discourses, monologues, sermons, quotations, etc.

Each Gospel must be read as a unit to itself without importing information from other Gospels as if one harmonized unitary Gospel were preferable to four individual Gospels testifying to the Christ. That John’s Gospel includes no account of Jesus’ birth, presents the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus as overlapping, recounts seven of Jesus’ miracles which he calls signs, and devotes half his Gospel to Jesus’ passion obligates us to read it as a unique witness to Christ. The Fourth Gospel is a portrayal of God’s incarnate Son with which we should not tamper as if we could improve it by harmonizing it with the

Synoptic Gospels.

Of course, the same is true of each of the three Synoptic Gospels. This can be illustrated by

A PASSAGE'S PROPER MEANING RESIDES WITHIN ITS CONTEXT. FOR AS THE MEANING OF A WORD DEPENDS UPON ITS USAGE, SO THE MEANING OF A STATEMENT OR OF A PARAGRAPH, SIMPLE OR COMPLEX, DEPENDS UPON ITS CONTEXT.

the fact that all four Gospels record Jesus' miraculous feeding of the multitude, but each portrays it differently, not contradictorily but complementarily. Mark's Gospel, the shortest, devotes the most words to his account of Jesus' miracles. Mark's penchant is to incite readers' imaginations concerning Jesus' identity, but especially his fulfillment of Scripture by alluding to the Old Testament, rarely actually quoting it. Thus, he infuses his portrayal of the miraculous meal with Jesus fulfilling Old Testament shepherd imagery by saying that "when he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were *like sheep without a shepherd*" (6:34). He alludes to Numbers 27:17 which

reverberates throughout the OT (1 Kgs. 22:17; Isa 40:11; Ezek. 34:5, 23) until it comes to rest upon Jesus, the singular shepherd whom the OT passages foreshadow. Even mention of "the green grass" on which Jesus' disciples directed the crowd to recline (Mark 6:39) teases readers to reflect more fully upon how the OT scriptures presage Jesus. The Bread of Life discourse, which later follows the narrative of the miracle in John's Gospel, features Jesus not as Israel's foreshadowed shepherd but as True Bread, fulfilling another wilderness motif, the giving of manna from heaven. Within John's Gospel the OT shepherd imagery comes to rest upon Jesus who by way of parable and subsequent discourse features himself as the Good Shepherd in contrast to the Pharisees who are false shepherds (John 10).

INTERPRETATION IS NEITHER LITERAL NOR SYMBOLIC

Unique within the New Testament is Revelation, which poses its own set of difficulties. Whether it portrays what has mostly come to pass already or what yet mainly lies in the future is one interpretive issue, too large to ponder now. More primary, however, is the dispute whether we should interpret Revelation *literally* or *symbolically*. This misguided and unfruitful debate, entrenching

advocates on both sides, has persisted since ancient days. Neither literal nor figurative are suitable descriptions of interpretation, for we do not interpret literally or symbolically. However, when we speak or write we do represent things either literally or figuratively.

Many who endorse *literal interpretation* of Revelation do so under the misguided notion that not to take their view is to regard things portrayed in the Apocalypse as not actual, unreal. For example, John portrays New Jerusalem as having twelve gates, each made from a singular large pearl, and a main street made of pure gold which is transparent as glass (Rev. 21:21). Even the angel's measuring rod used to measure the city is made of gold. The size of the pearls and the transparent gold signal figurative, not literal, representations of the city.

Yet, John's figurative portrayal hardly suggests that the city is not real. Rather, how could he represent the reality that he sees in his vision of the eternal city except by portraying it with the most exquisite, expensive, and extravagant elements known to humans? His objective is to assure believers that the celestial city that will be our habitation upon the new earth is far grander, far more lavish, and much more paradisiacal than human imagination can conjure. As precious as pearls and gold are in this present world, to regard these as the actual elements of New Jerusalem's gates and streets is to miss John's point, even to cheapen his vision. Why? For neither massive pearls nor transparent gold, neither of which are known to exist in this world, adequately

capture the glory and beauty of the eternal abode upon the new earth. John is assisting his readers to envision the most extraordinary city imaginable in terms of earth's costliest elements in astounding abundance. The dwelling place will be exponentially better than anything humanly imaginable.

INTERPRETATION & SCRIPTURE'S MULTIFACETED IMAGERIES FOR SALVATION

Among many issues that could be addressed with regard to interpreting New Testament letters and homilies, one common misstep looms large. Crucial though it is, systematic theology often inclines Bible readers to identify justification, sanctification, redemption, reconciliation, regeneration, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, adoption, etc. as doctrines to be segregated from one another, each to be arranged in their own categories and considered as individual doctrinal units. Scripture itself, however, resists such isolation, compartmentalization, and arrangement of these as doctrinal categories unto themselves. Rather, these are imageries that together sketch the multifaceted teaching of Scripture concerning salvation. They are earthly analogical imageries that portray heavenly realities of salvation which is ours in Christ Jesus. They are like numerous finely cut facets of a unitary gem. Thus, while each facet is discernible, even distinguishable from others, none are separable, for they are aspects of one integrated and indivisible whole.²

That Scripture represents salvation by way of analogical imageries which are figurative portrayals does not render them imaginary or fictional. Rather, given Scripture’s revelatory nature, rightly understood, all the aspects of divine salvation are originals and all earthly analogies are copies of those heavenly originals. For example, the heavenly courtroom, in which God who as judge justifies and condemns, is the original with all earthly courtrooms as copies of the heavenly, for however poorly, human justice reflects divine justice. Thus, to be acquitted or condemned in a human court is a microcosm, a copy, an image, or an earthly portrayal of the more enduring verdicts in the far greater heavenly courtroom where God’s declarative judgment, justified or condemned, will be issued on the Last Day but even now is announced ahead of time in the good news of Christ Jesus.



CONCLUSION

Many have offered brief introductions to reading the New Testament with understanding. Though others tend to focus upon methods of interpretation, I have chosen to feature less commonly addressed issues but ones that have considerable breadth and impact upon how we read the whole of the New Testament.

We can understand Scripture, contrary to disparaging voices in our pluralistic and postmodern culture. Meaning resides in Scripture’s texts, put there by those who wrote them and illumined by the Spirit given to us by Christ.

THAT SCRIPTURE REPRESENTS SALVATION BY WAY OF ANALOGICAL IMAGERIES WHICH ARE FIGURATIVE PORTRAYALS DOES NOT RENDER THEM IMAGINARY OR FICTIONAL. RATHER, GIVEN SCRIPTURE’S REVELATORY NATURE, RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD, ALL THE ASPECTS OF DIVINE SALVATION ARE ORIGINALS AND ALL EARTHLY ANALOGIES ARE COPIES OF THOSE HEAVENLY ORIGINALS.

Of course, recognizing the kind of literature we are reading is necessary lest we flatten all texts as if they were the same. This is intuitive to responsible readers whose understanding expands with experience, governed, of course, by God’s Spirit.

As skills in reading develop, one becomes increasingly attuned to the beauty, breadth, and exquisite texture of Scripture’s figurative and symbolic portrayals of heavenly and divine realities revealed to us throughout the written Word and disclosed wonderfully by God’s Incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ who says, “No one has ever gone into heaven

except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man” (John 3:13). Thus, he reveals the heavenly blessings that came with him and the powers of the age to come which he imparts to us, especially eternal life, birthed by the Spirit. Therefore, we can understand what we read in the Scriptures and expect that our insight will enlarge and mature.

Johann Albrecht Bengel, a seventeenth and eighteenth century German minister, expresses well our great need when he admonishes, “Apply yourself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to yourself.”³

END NOTES

1. For a delightful illustrative example of this, see D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 102-103.

2. For greater development of these Scriptures’ imageries of salvation, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday,

The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 46-86.

3. I first encountered this on a plaque in Douglas J. Moo’s office when he was my Ph.D. supervising professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

Ardel Caneday (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is Professor of New Testament Studies and Biblical Studies at University of Northwestern in St. Paul, Minnesota. He has served churches in various pastoral roles, including senior pastor. He has authored numerous journal articles, many essays in books, and has co-authored with Thomas Schreiner the book *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*. ▀

WHICH IS THE
BEST ENGLISH BIBLE
TRANSLATION?



ROBERT L. PLUMMER

When someone discovers that I am a New Testament professor, that person often has a “religious” question that he or she would like to ask. One of the most common is this: what English version of the Bible do you recommend? During the birth of my oldest daughter, the attending physician even asked me this question in the midst of my wife’s labor! Alas, I received no medical discount for my advice.

THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES OF THE BIBLE

The Bible was originally written in three different languages over a period of nearly fifteen hundred years (roughly 1400 B.C. – A.D. 90). The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, with a few Aramaic portions. The New Testament was written in Greek. While sections of the Old Testament had been translated into a few other languages (mainly Greek), as soon as the Christian gospel began to permeate other cultures, the entire Bible was quickly translated into many other languages—Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Latin, etc.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Any living language is constantly changing. “Modern English” (as classified by linguists) is a relatively recent phenomenon—just a few hun-

dred years old. The “grandfather language” of English is Old English, the Anglo-Saxon dialect that conquering Germanic tribes brought with them to England in the fifth-century, A.D. (The word “English” is derived from “Angles,” the name of one of these conquering tribes.) Later, when William the Conqueror defeated the Germanic tribes at the Battle of Hastings (1066), he and his Norman conquerors brought with them a French influence. Allegorically, we might say that the English language’s Anglo-Saxon grandfather married a French lady. The “inter-married” Germanic-French language that evolved from the eleventh to the fifteenth-centuries is known as “Middle English” (Modern English’s metaphorical “father”). Latin, the language of the church for centuries, also had some influence on the development of the English language.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE

While Latin was the official language of the church, a few portions of the Bible were translated into Old English (Anglo-Saxon) from the seventh to the eleventh-centuries. In 1382 the famous reforming church leader John Wycliffe (1330–1384) translated the entire Bible into the English of his day (Middle English). The translation was based on the Latin Vulgate and was copied by hand, as the printing press had not yet been introduced to Europe.¹ Followers of Wycliffe continued to call for reform of the church and monarchy based on biblical truth they were reading. Very quickly, church officials and the king judged the availability of the Bible in

English as a threat to the status quo. In 1414, reading the Bible in English became a capital offense (that is, punishable by death). In 1428, Wycliffe’s body was exhumed and symbolically burned at the stake.²

In 1526, William Tyndale (1494–1536) published the first printed (with a printing press) English New Testament, translated from the Greek original. Tyndale printed the New Testaments in continental Europe and smuggled them into England. The first complete printed English Bible appeared in 1535. It was called the “Cov-

erdale Bible” because it was published under the leadership of Miles Coverdale, Tyndale’s assistant. Tyndale was captured by followers of King Henry VIII, and in 1536, he was strangled and burned at the stake. As he was dying, Tyndale reportedly prayed, “Lord, open the eyes of the King of England.” Only one year later, Tyndale’s request was granted as the king officially licensed the distribution of an English translation of the Bible. During the next hundred years, a spate of English Bible translations were produced—most of them heavily dependent on Tyndale’s seminal work.

EARLY ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Date	Work	Description
1382	Wycliffe Bible	1 st complete translation (handwritten) of the Bible into English based on the Vulgate.
1526	Tyndale Bible	1 st printed NT in English based on Greek.
1535	Coverdale Bible	1 st complete printed English Bible. Relies heavily on Tyndale Bible, German versions, and Vulgate.
1537	Matthew’s Bible	Edited by John Rogers. Relies on Tyndale and Coverdale. 1 st licensed English Bible.
1539	The Great Bible	Revised version of Matthew’s Bible by Coverdale. Based on Tyndale, Hebrew, and Greek.
1560	Geneva Bible	NT is a revision of Tyndale, and OT is revised based upon the Hebrew. 1 st English Bible with verse divisions. Strongly Calvinistic footnotes.
1568	Bishops’ Bible	A revision of the Great Bible translated by a committee of Anglican bishops.
1610	Douay-Rheims Bible	Literal rendering of the Vulgate by Roman Catholics.
1611	King James Version	Translated by a committee of scholars.

THE BIBLE IN MODERN ENGLISH

During the last one hundred years (and especially the last fifty), many good, reliable, and readable translations have been produced in English. Modern English-speakers face a choice unlike any in the history of Bible translation. Rather than ask, “Which translation is best?” it is better to recognize that all translations have strengths and weaknesses. In fact, it is advisable for a Christian to own multiple Bible translations. The only Bible translations we can label as completely bad are those done by sectarian or cultic groups, such as the New World Translation (NWT), the Jehovah’s Witness translation that attempts to remove scriptural teaching on the deity of Christ.

APPROACHES TO TRANSLATION

There are two main approaches to Bible translation, and all translations fall somewhere along the spectrum between these two extremes. On one side is the “functionally-equivalent” translation (sometimes called “dynamically-equivalent”). This is a translation that seeks to accurately convey the same meaning in a new language but is not so concerned about preserving the same number of words or equivalent grammatical constructions. The New Living Translation (NLT) is a good example of a reliable

functionally-equivalent translation.³ On the other end of the spectrum is the “formally-equivalent” translation. This type of translation is very concerned to preserve, as best one can, the number of words and grammatical constructions from the original. Because languages are so different, a formally-equivalent translation almost inevitably results in a stilted English style. The New American Standard Bible (NASB) and English Standard Version (ESV) are examples of formally-equivalent translations. The New International Version (NIV) falls somewhere in the middle, being more functionally-equivalent than the ESV, but more formally-equivalent than the NLT. The chart on the next page includes the various translation approaches.

AS HE WAS DYING, TYNDALE REPORTEDLY PRAYED, “LORD, OPEN THE EYES OF THE KING OF ENGLAND.” ONLY ONE YEAR LATER, TYNDALE’S REQUEST WAS GRANTED AS THE KING OFFICIALLY LICENSED THE DISTRIBUTION OF AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE. DURING THE NEXT HUNDRED YEARS, A SPATE OF ENGLISH BIBLE TRANSLATIONS WERE PRODUCED—MOST OF THEM HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON TYNDALE’S SEMINAL WORK.

For reading larger portions of Scripture (reading through the Bible in one year, for example), a person might choose a functionally-equivalent translation. For careful verse-by-verse study, one might prefer a more formally-equivalent transla-

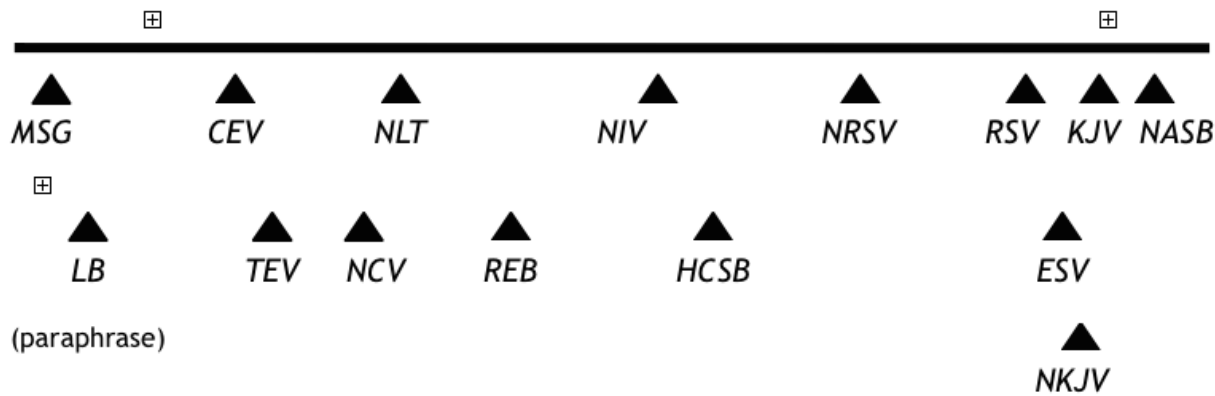
Translation Approaches of Major Bible Versions 4

Dynamic Equivalence

- clarity of English expression
- “thought-for-thought”

Formal Equivalence

- Correspondence to the form of the original language
- “word-for-word”



tion. In explaining a difficult passage to others in preaching or teaching, it is sometimes helpful to quote other Bible translations which clarify the meaning of the passage. Also, in personal study, reading a passage in multiple translations frequently results in increased comprehension. It is advisable to vary the Bible translation one reads to hear the text afresh.

lical narrative in the setting of a certain sub-culture. *The Word on the Street*, a paraphrase by Rob Lacey, casts the Bible as “urban performance art.” Clarence Jordan’s famous paraphrase, *The Cotton Patch Version*, sets Jesus’ ministry in the Southern United States of the 1950s, replacing Pharisees with white supremacist and Samaritans with African-Americans.

PARAPHRASES

A paraphrase is not really a Bible translation, but an attempt to freely word the meaning of the biblical text. A paraphrase is usually done by one person and allows for more interpretive comments than a functionally-equivalent translation. Sometimes a paraphrase seeks to recast the bib-

The original Living Bible was a paraphrase of the American Standard Version (a formally-equivalent translation completed in 1901) by Kenneth Taylor that he composed for his children during his daily train commute.⁵ (The New Living Translation, however, is not a paraphrase but a dynamically-equivalent translation.) In contrast to paraphrases, Bible translations are always based on Greek and Hebrew texts and are worked on by large committees of diverse scholars, preventing a narrowness of interpretation and guaranteeing that

the work remains a translation rather than veering into an idiosyncratic interpretation or paraphrase.

THE KING JAMES VERSION

The best Bible translations are based on the most reliable ancient manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments. The King James Version (KJV) is not highly recommended because it is not based on the best manuscripts and because seventeenth-century English is hard for most modern people to understand. Unfortunately, many hotel Bibles and other give-away Bibles are the KJV translation. While an excellent work for its day, the KJV has been surpassed by many modern translations in both readability and faithfulness to the original manuscripts. Some wrongly and often passionately claim the KJV is a superior translation of the Bible. The historical and linguistic facts do not support this claim.⁶ For those who continue to insist on their preference for the KJV, the New King James Version (NKJV) is possibly a better

ON THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM IS THE "FORMALLY-EQUIVALENT" TRANSLATION. THIS TYPE OF TRANSLATION IS VERY CONCERNED TO PRESERVE, AS BEST ONE CAN, THE NUMBER OF WORDS AND GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTIONS FROM THE ORIGINAL.

option—being based on the same manuscript tradition of the KJV, but updated somewhat in language.

RECENT TRANSLATION DEBATES

In recent years, conservative Bible translators have clashed over how to translate generic pronouns and similar constructions. For example, in older English, as well as ancient Greek, the pronoun “he” (or *autos*, in Greek) was frequently used to refer generically to both men and women. Fifty years ago, all English teachers would have said, “If a student wants to speak to me after class, he should stay in the room.” Recently, there has been a move in English towards an informal generic “they” or “their” (“If a student wants to speak to me after class, they should stay in the room.”) or the more cumbersome, “If a student wants to speak with me after class, he or she should stay in the room.” Bible translators debate as to whether translating *autos* (“he”) as “he or she” or *anthrōpos* (“man”) as “person” faithfully conveys the meaning of the original. While the debate can be quite impassioned, the sides are closer than they appear, both acknowledging that much gender-specific language in the Bible was understood by the original recipients as applying to women too.

For example, virtually all translators acknowledge that Paul’s letters addressed to *adelphoi*

SOME WRONGLY AND OFTEN PASSIONATELY CLAIM THE KJV IS A SUPERIOR TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE. THE HISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC FACTS DO NOT SUPPORT THIS CLAIM.

(“brothers”) in churches, were in reality for all Christians, both men and women. The question remains, however, whether a Bible translation should render the expression *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters” or “brothers.” Is “brothers and sisters” an interpretation or translation? As one can see, this debate involves the distinction between formally and

functionally-equivalent translation theory. Scholars favoring the more “gender neutral” translations are usually more inclined towards functionally-equivalent translation theory. Those favoring a more strict correspondence of expressions are usually more disposed towards formally-equivalent approaches to translation. Conservative Bible-believing scholars, however, are agreed that Greek and Hebrew masculine pronouns for God should be rendered as masculine English pronouns (“he,” “his” or “him”) because God has revealed himself as Father.

END NOTES

1. Europeans began using the printing press in 1454. The Chinese, however, were using printing presses long before Europeans.
2. Definitely the preferred way to be burned at the stake, as a friend once noted.

3. A new Bible translation, *The Voice* (New Testament released October, 2008), although billed as a dynamically-equivalent translation, appears to veer into paraphrase. Moreover, *The Voice* seems unduly influenced by the theology of the emergent church movement.

4. This chart is taken from Clinton Arnold, *It's All Greek to Me: Cleaning up the Confusion about Bible Translations*, Discipleship Journal 132 (November/December 2002): 35.

5. Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 372–73.

6. See James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1995).

Robert L. Plummer reads, studies, talks, and writes about the Bible. When he is not busy teaching Greek and New Testament classes at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, Plummer is serving as an elder at Sojourn Community Church. Plummer’s primary ministry role, however, is pastor of the little flock in his home. He and his wife, Chandi, have three delightful daughters – Sarah Beth, Chloe, and Anabelle. Plummer’s hobbies include long-distance running, enjoying international foods and cultures, and traveling. To read more from Plummer on the Bible, see his book *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, from which this article was adapted with permission. ▀

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ON SCRIPTURE

NEW TESTAMENT
III

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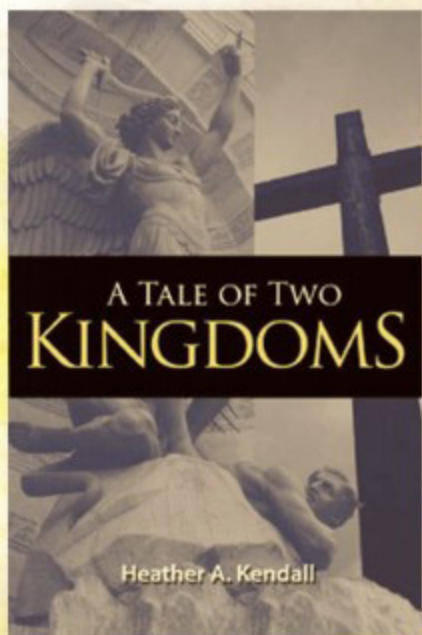
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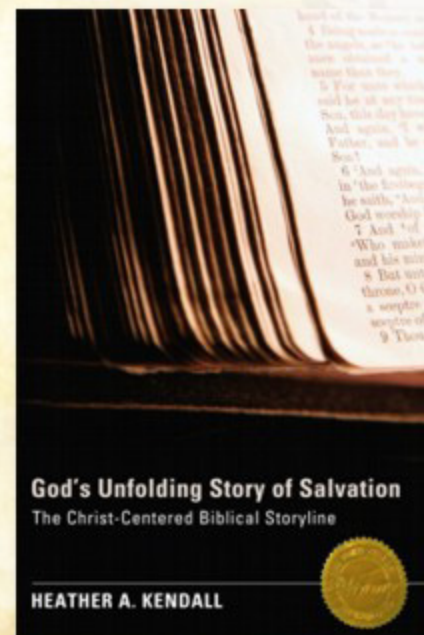
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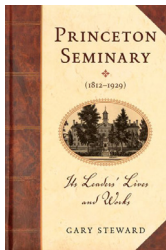
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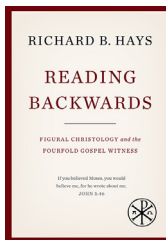
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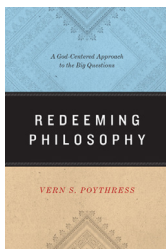
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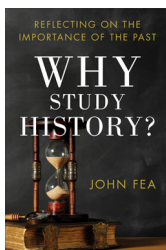
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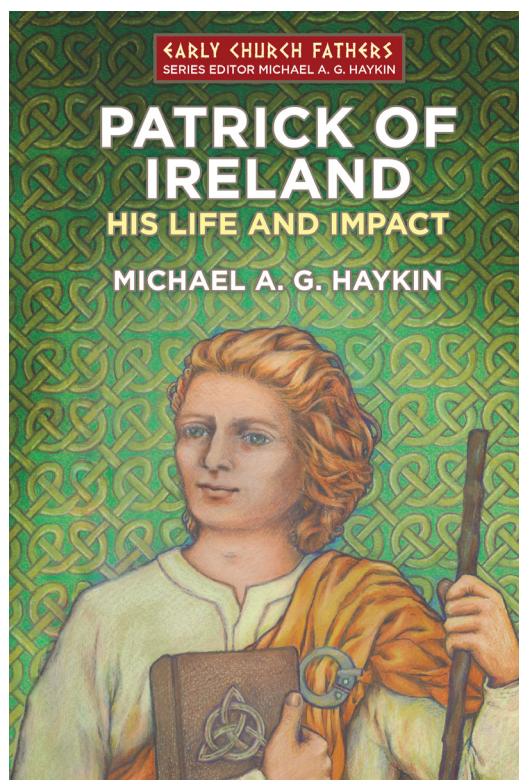
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**REDEEMING PHILOSOPHY: A
GOD-CENTERED APPROACH
TO THE BIG QUESTIONS**
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**WHY STUDY HISTORY: REFLECTIONS
ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST**
by John Fea



NO SHAMROCKS. NO POT OF GOLD. MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN INTRODUCES THE REAL ST. PATRICK

by *Dustin Bruce*

The names of few, if any, “saints” are as widely recognized as the name of Saint Patrick. Yet, while many know of the legendary propagator of Celtic Christianity, few know the facts surrounding Patrick or the legacy he left behind. In *Patrick of Ireland: His Life and Impact* (Christian Focus, 2014), Michael A. G. Haykin has cut through much of the mist surrounding the great missionary of the early church. Haykin, who serves as Professor of Church History at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, provides an account of the life, theology, and legacy of Patrick that is both responsible in its use of sources and readable for all who may find themselves interested.

Haykin begins in chapter 1 by placing Patrick within his historical context, providing readers with an

overview of his life and ministry. Born in the late fourth century A.D., likely south of Hadrian’s Wall on the western coast of Britain, Patrick experienced early life as a member of upper class Romano-British society. Taken from his life of luxury at the age of sixteen, Irish raiders sold Patrick into slavery in the country he would come to identify with so closely. It was while he was an Irish slave that Patrick would say, “the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart that I might at last remember my sins and be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God.” After six years of captivity, Patrick experienced a dream that revealed he would soon return to his home of Britain. The dream’s prediction was realized as Patrick traveled 200 miles to the coast and gained safe passage on a ship traveling to Britain. After returning home, Patrick experienced another vision.

This time, the highborn Brit was to return to the land of his captivity, not as a slave, but as a missionary. After gaining the necessary training for the ministry to which he had been called, Patrick set sail upon the Irish Sea, this time as Patrick, Bishop of Ireland.

Chapter 2 establishes the foundation of Patrick's theology as explicitly trinitarian. Haykin notes that Patrick offers merely one citation other than the Latin Bible in his combined writings, leading one scholar to label him "a man *unius libri*"—"a man of one book." With such limited use of sources, what Patrick does cite reveals what is clearly of importance to the missionary bishop. Near the beginning of the *Confessions*, Patrick includes a creedal statement focused on God's triune being. Haykin concludes, "the reason for Patrick's inclusion of the creed is not because his orthodoxy has been questioned... Rather, it has to do with Patrick's desire to praise his Triune Lord" (46). Haykin examines Patrick's creedal statement, highlighting its specifically trinitarian wording in light of fourth century attacks on orthodoxy from Arius and others. For Patrick, the Trinity was to be both confessed and adored. Furthermore, he knew the gospel he took to Ireland to be trinitarian in every respect.

Shifting from Patrick's theology to his missionary labors in chapter 3, Haykin begins by pointing to Patrick's legacy. As the modern missionary movement began to gain traction in the eighteenth century, men such as William Carey looked to Patrick as an example of one who possessed a praiseworthy missionary spirit. According to his own testimony, Patrick saw thousands converted, including family members of Irish kings. Commenting on his fruitfulness, Haykin states, "his missionary labours firmly planted the Christian faith in Irish soil, and left a deep imprint on the Celtic church that would grow up from this soil" (61). His efforts involved confronting Celtic paganism and local practices that he found antithetical to the

gospel. Also, the traveling bishop ordained other gospel ministers in order to extend his missionary reach. While Patrick's labors are applauded in retrospect, he faced a great deal of opposition from both pagans in Ireland and other Christians within the church. Yet, Patrick would not be stopped. Haykin comments on several of Patrick's motivations, but none proved as powerful as Patrick's own conversion, which "gave him a deep sense of gratitude to God, and out of thanks to God he felt bound to go back to Ireland and preach the good news of saving grace in Christ" (74). Like Paul in Acts 20:22, Patrick felt himself "bound by the Spirit" to preach the gospel to the Irish (76).

Chapter 4 moves from Patrick's missionary enterprise to his personal piety, which centered on the Scriptures. From Patrick's writings, one discerns a man who is intimately familiar with the Bible. "We cannot be sure of any other books that Patrick had read," Haykin emphasizes, "But one thing we do know, Patrick knew his Bible" (79). For the missionary, the Scriptures were unequivocally the very words of God. The Word did not stand alone as central to Patrick's piety. Haykin notes the Holy Spirit also played a central role in Patrick's understanding and practice of prayer, mission work, and leadership as bishop. He explains, "The Holy Spirit, then, plays an absolutely vital role in enabling Patrick to stay faithful to the call of missions. The Spirit enables him to persevere in prayer, to remain faithful despite his feelings of utter inadequacy, and to stay in Ireland no matter what cost" (91).

Haykin concludes in chapter 5 with a brief reflection on the life and ministry of Patrick as an evangelical. In this positive but sober assessment, Haykin recognizes evangelicals will not find themselves in wholesale agreement with the great missionary, but may still learn much from this giant of the faith.

Haykin's work is short (coming in under 100 pages), but has the potential to make a major impact on the way evangelicals think about Patrick of Ireland. For many, Patrick is associated with little more than four-leaf clovers and leprechauns. The vision of Patrick Haykin presents, however, is that of a missionary saint, an ancient exemplar of piety and zeal. In and of itself, this successful recasting of Patrick makes Haykin's work a worthy read. Yet there are a few strengths and weaknesses worthy of mention.

A major strength of *Patrick of Ireland* is its accessibility. Haykin provides contextual background of Patrick's world, as well as breakout boxes that inform the reader of related information. For example, in a discussion on Patrick's trinitarianism, the reader will find a breakout box filled with relevant information on the teaching of Arius. One needs no prior knowledge of the period to benefit from Haykin's work. Haykin also uses the breakout boxes to treat interesting tidbits associated with Patrick. A few pages later, Haykin includes an insert on the famous Breastplate of Patrick and how it shows the effect of Patrick's trinitarian piety within the Irish church.

The level of scholarship undergirding Haykin's work is yet another strength. While the book aims for the popular-level reader, Haykin interacts with leading scholars in the field. The result is a book that can be read by anyone, with footnotes and references that could prove helpful to a doctoral student. At times, however, this can prove a weakness. Haykin's familiarity with the historiography surrounding Patrick makes its way into the narrative at points, providing most readers with more historiographical discussion than desired.


Other than reforming common misconceptions surrounding Patrick, perhaps Haykin's most helpful contribution is his discussion of Patrick's ministerial practice and personal piety. Two examples will suffice. First, in regard to Patrick's ministry, Haykin points

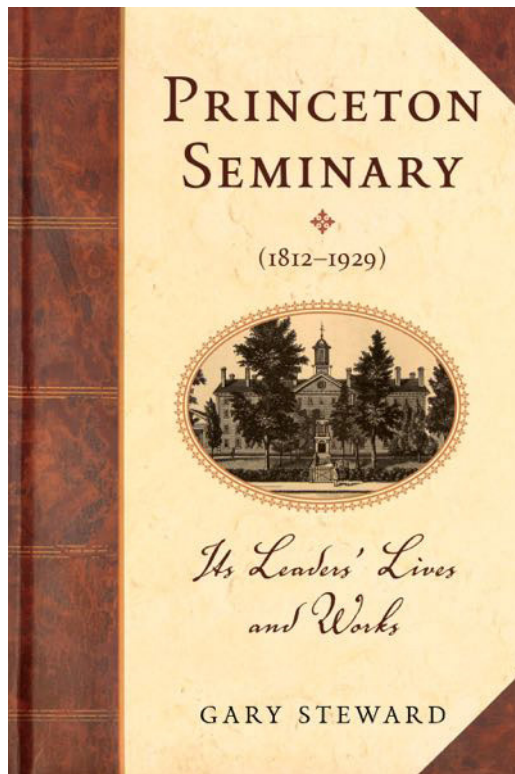
out that Patrick took the time to pursue ministerial preparation and theological training between receiving his call and traveling to Ireland. Patrick sensed his specific calling was not in and of itself sufficient; he would need to learn to handle God's Word accurately and effectively if his mission work was to prosper.

Second, in reference to Patrick's receiving direct instruction through the Holy Spirit via dreams, Haykin highlights Patrick's cautious appropriation. He states, "All of Patrick's dreams relate to either issues of personal guidance, such as his call to mission in Ireland, or personal encouragement; none of them are employed to determine or set forth doctrine" (87). In this respect, Patrick sets himself apart from other medieval Christians who allowed dreams and visions to supplant God's Word and proves instructive for evangelicals discerning the work of the Spirit today.

In *Patrick of Ireland*, Haykin has written an engaging and accessible work that recovers the missionary saint who bravely took the gospel to the land of his former captivity. Read this book and you will not find a shamrock or a pot of gold, but a forgiven Brit who effectively became Irish that he might follow the Lord's command to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Dustin Bruce,

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 



BACK FROM THE DEAD GARY STEWARD RETRIEVES OLD PRINCETON AND WE ARE BETTER FOR IT

by Fred Zaspel

Given our generation's renewed interest in a theology that is robust, deeply informed, and life-shaping, it was inevitable that we would also see a renewed interest in Old Princeton. New monographs on Charles Hodge, J. Gresham Machen, and B.B. Warfield highlight the life and work of these Princetonian luminaries, and those who have played a part in this Princetonian resurgence are always eager to see this interest continue. With the arrival of Gary Steward's *Princeton Seminary (1812-1929): Its Leaders' Lives and Works* (P&R, 2014), we have in a single volume a most enjoyable and well-informed introduction to the earlier giants that were Old Princeton

and that gave it the shape for which it was—and is—so famous.

The Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America at Princeton, New Jersey was founded with a very decided intent to be a place where aspiring Christian ministers would be deeply nourished in vital piety and thoroughly equipped in all things theological so as to minister the gospel faithfully to the people of God and defend the faith effectively against all who would oppose it.


The Alexanders, Hodges, and Samuel Miller were men who modeled this

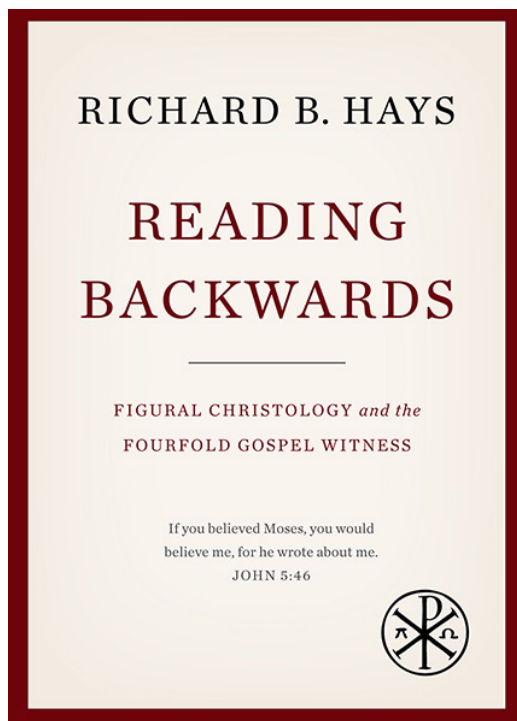
wonderful combination of “religion” and scholarship, and they and others with them were used of God as an enormous force for the gospel and given an influence that is virtually impossible to measure. The story of this remarkable chapter of American church history deserves to be told—for what it was and for its impact that continues and expands still today.

The first chapter of Steward’s *Princeton Seminary* surveys the history that led to the founding of Princeton Seminary, and in my judgment it alone is worth the price of admission. It is a wonderful story of faithful men with a heart to see the gospel of Christ advance, and I enjoyed it as if for the first time.

In succeeding chapters Steward recounts in turn the life and work of Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge, James Waddel Alexander, Joseph Addison Alexander, and A.A. Hodge. Each biographical chapter is followed by a survey-analysis of some representative work—Alexander on religious experience, Miller on pastoral ministry, Hodge on ecclesiology, J.W. Alexander on nineteenth century American culture, and A.A. Hodge on the atonement. The topics are well chosen and together provide a well-rounded portrait of Old Princeton. Steward wraps up with brief attention to Warfield and Machen, some short reflections on the seminary’s first century, and a very helpful annotated bibliography.

Steward knows his subjects well, and both his biographical and theological surveys provide a portrait of these men that all students of Old Princeton will find illuminating and enjoyable. Steward writes judiciously yet with an obvious appreciation for his subject that without doubt will rub off on the reader. And for those new to Old Princeton, certainly, this is the place to start.

Fred Zaspel,
*Reformed Baptist Church
of Franconia, PA* 



MOVING BACKWARDS IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD CAN RICHARD HAYS SHED LIGHT ON THE GOSPELS?

by Bobby Jamieson

The thesis of Richard Hays' latest book, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Baylor University Press, 2014), is as simple as it is compelling: “*The Gospels teach us how to read the OT, and—at the same time—the OT teaches us how to read the Gospels*” (4, emphasis original). But this simplicity is far from simplistic; Hays supports his thesis through sensitive and suggestive readings of each of the Gospels' use of Scripture. And the upshot of Hays' exposition is that the more attention we pay to how the Gospels use Scripture, the better we discern each of their portraits of Jesus as a man who is also, in the fullest sense, divine (107).

Hays, Dean and George Washington Ivey Professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, turned the six Hulsean Lectures he delivered at the University of Cambridge in 2013 into this illuminating and refreshingly brief book. He has been working for years

on a fuller treatment of scriptural citations, echoes, and allusions in the Gospels, of which this volume is a progress report or down payment (ix). Chapter one introduces both halves of Hays' thesis, working through two examples of the Gospels' “figural reading” of the Old Testament, the broad strategy which he sees each Gospel deploying in varied ways. Chapters two through five sketch how Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John narrate the identity of Jesus through the lens of the Old Testament, which itself has new light shed on it by Jesus' resurrection. Hays' soundings are selective, but they are detailed enough to give a sense of what's distinct in each Evangelist's use of Scripture.

Hays' final chapter balances this focus on the evangelists' distinctive approaches by summing up what they have in common. First, Hays reviews his findings and assesses each Evangelist's use of Scripture, on which more is offered below. Next Hays

suggests ten ways that the Evangelists, taken together, teach us to read Scripture:

1. “A Gospel-shaped hermeneutic necessarily entails *reading backwards*, reinterpreting Israel’s Scripture in light of the story of Jesus. Such reading is necessarily a *figural reading*, a reading that grasps patterns of correspondence between temporally distinct events, so that these events freshly illuminate each other” (104).
2. “More specifically, Scripture is to be reinterpreted in light of the cross and resurrection” (104-5).
3. “Similarly, the Evangelists’ diverse imaginative uses and transformations of the OT texts summon us also to a *conversion of the imagination*” (105).
4. “For the Evangelists, Israel’s Scripture told the true *story* of the world” (105-6).
5. The Evangelists’ interpretation of Israel’s story is “in no sense a negation or rejection of that story,” but rather its “transfiguration and continuation” (106).
6. “The Gospel writers approach Scripture as a unified whole, but their reading of it is not undifferentiated” (106).
7. On the whole, the Bible the Evangelists read was the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament (107–8).
8. The Evangelists’ allusions to the Old Testament are characteristically “metaleptic”: “that is, they nudge the discerning reader to recognize and recover the context from which the intertextual references are drawn” (107).
9. “*The more deeply we probe the Jewish and OT roots of the Gospel narratives, the more clearly we see that each of the four Evangelists, in their diverse portrayals, identifies Jesus as the embodiment of the God of Israel*” (107–8, emphasis original).
10. The Evangelists “consistently approach Scripture with the presupposition that the God found in the stories of the OT is living and active” (108–9).

This is a rich, rewarding, and challenging work. The main

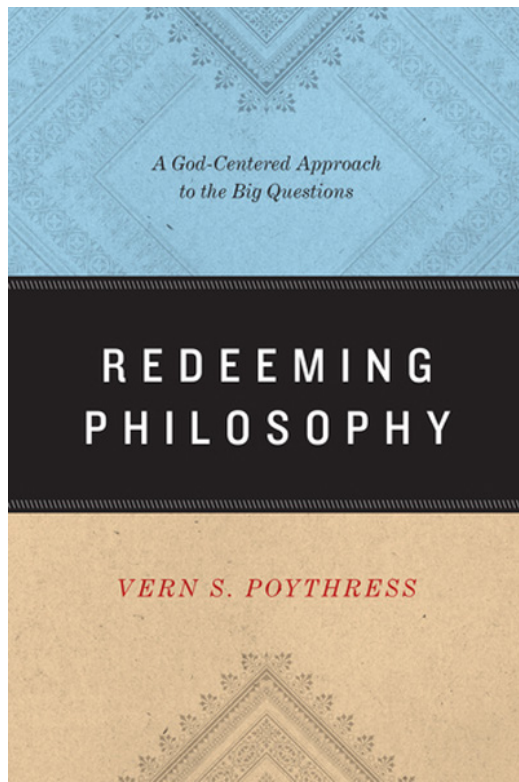
substance of Hays’ argument is not only convincing but nourishing to Christian faith: many of Hays’ readings undermine those of more skeptical scholars and align precisely with the instincts of faithful though not learned Christians. Hays is in one sense telling evangelical believers what we already know, but giving us even better reasons for it than we may have had before.

Not every detail of the book is equally convincing, or edifying. For instance, Hays’ assessment of the Evangelists’ use of Scripture identifies what he considers the weaknesses of each approach (94ff.). I’d suggest that the reverence Scripture claims for itself should confine this line of evaluation to identifying the particular challenges each Evangelist’s approach poses to modern readers, rather than pronouncing a verdict on where they fall short of our standards. Further, I think Hays’ legitimate insistence on the ways in which the Gospels perceive new significance in the Old Testament in light of the revelatory event of the cross and resurrection leads him to downplay the role that predictive prophecy does at times play in their portrayal of Jesus in light of Scripture (e.g., Matt. 2:4–6; John 19:24).

So I would gladly recommend the book, but to the right reader. If you’re in the early stages of stocking your biblical interpretation toolkit, there are other shops I’d send you to first. But if you’re a student or pastor who has laid solid theological and hermeneutical foundations, and you’ve already wrestled with some of the challenges involved in the New Testament’s use of the Old, then you stand to profit greatly from Hays’ lively, vivid exegesis. I certainly have.

And if the firstfruits fit so much insight into so few pages, what will the full harvest bring?

Bobby Jamieson,
University of Cambridge 



CAN PHILOSOPHY REALLY BE GOSPEL DRIVEN? VERN POYTHRESS THINKS SO

by Matt Manry

In his latest book, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Crossway, 2014), Vern S. Poythress tackles the subject of philosophy. His main objective is to redeem the study of philosophy by approaching the big questions from a God-centered approach. This seems like a noble task. However, does Poythress provide enough answers from a Christian perspective to truly “redeem” the study of philosophy?

From the outset, Poythress admits that he is heavily influenced by John Frame (J.D. Trimble Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy, Reformed Theological Seminary). Poythress and Frame have developed a system of thought that has come to be known as “perspectivalism” or

“multi-perspectivalism.” Poythress explains: “Multiple perspectives inevitably arise because God has created multiple human beings” (56). For those who have never been exposed to multi-perspectivalism, chapter 7 provides a thorough examination of the history, background, and current state of multi-perspectivalism.

In part 5 of *Redeeming Philosophy*, Poythress discusses some of the main subdivisions of philosophy, helpfully interacting with these subdivisions from a Christian perspective. For many Christian philosophers, this will come as a breath of fresh air. Much of philosophy within academia is usually depicted as being “objective” or “neutral.” However, Poythress is very clear that he is operating under a Christian presuppositional

framework. This enables him to discuss subdivisions of philosophy such as epistemology, the mind, and ethics from an explicitly Christian position. Poythress brilliantly demonstrates how to interact with these philosophical disciplines faithfully.

Surprisingly, one of the best sections in Poythress' book is in an appendix. In appendix A, Poythress explains some of the main emphases of Cosmonomic Philosophy. This philosophical tradition was mainly developed by neo-Kuyperians (Herman Dooyeweerd, Dirk H. Th. Vollenhoven, Hendrick G. Stoker). For readers who have never heard of Cosmonomic Philosophy, this appendix will provide a basic introduction, and readers will discover how the Cosmonomic approach can assist Christians in conducting philosophical thinking from a Christian mindset.

What is somewhat lacking throughout *Redeeming Philosophy* is hard to put your finger on. However, several shortcomings are noticeable. To begin with, having read *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* by Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, I was a bit underwhelmed by some of the book's omissions. For example, Poythress hardly discusses any of the history of Christian thought. There is also little to no discussion about Reformed epistemology or how Christian philosophy of religion can be engaged faithfully within the secular academia. Poythress' objective is to "redeem" the study of philosophy, but there are many areas that could have been explored in more detail and only aided Poythress in fulfilling the goal of the book.


In part 4, Poythress spends an extended amount

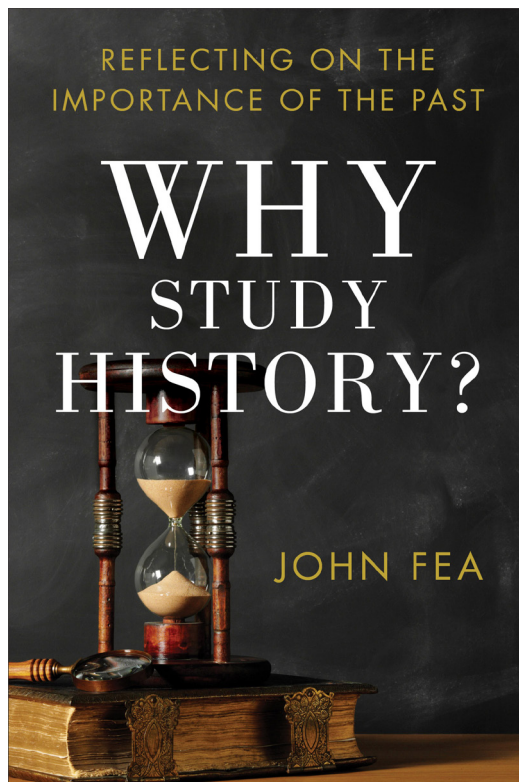
of time discussing the metaphysics of an apple, walking, and a bookmark. In this section, Poythress is trying to demonstrate how multi-perspectival metaphysics works, and how the ultimate metaphysics of the world can be found in God himself. While some readers might benefit from this section, it seemed unnecessary. Poythress could have spent more time elaborating on some of the ways that multi-perspectivalism applied to all areas of philosophy instead of primarily focusing on the metaphysics of specific actions and items.

Certainly Poythress is successful in *helping* Christians see that engaging the study of philosophy from a Christian presupposition is absolutely necessary. However, *Redeeming Philosophy* may not be the philosophy book to recommend to Christians who have little or no philosophical background. Some will even find this book to be a bit wordy and drawn-out. Also, readers who disagree with the use of Frame/Poythress multi-perspectivalism may struggle to finish the book since it is founded on this method.

That said, readers may want to look elsewhere if they are looking for a thorough introduction to Christian philosophy. Nevertheless, Poythress does provide Christians with the necessary tools in order to redeem philosophy.

Matt Manry

Editor, *Credo Magazine* 



THINK HISTORY IS BORING? THINK AGAIN JOHN FEA BRINGS HISTORY TO LIFE

by Jeff Straub

Why Study History: Reflections on the Importance of the Past (Baker, 2013), by John Fea, is a student’s introduction to the field of historical research. From its opening chapter to its concluding comments, it is chock full of sage counsel for budding historians, particularly Christian historians. Indeed the book contains a good deal of basic material for the novice student of history. Fea’s advice arises out of the considerable time spent teaching students at the collegiate level the intricacies of American history. Thus the final chapter, “So What Can I Do with a History Major?” may cause some would-be readers to pass over this title on a bookstore shelf if all they consider is the book’s table of contents. While the book should find a ready audience as

a student primer for the study of history, it also contains a good deal of general material useful for anyone who wishes to understand the work and legitimate goals of a historian. As such, a lover of the reading of history will find in this book some important ideas by which to evaluate the writers of history. Of particular importance is the way Fea integrates the idea of Christian history with its limitations and challenges.

The book, therefore, serves as a kind of apologetic for the study of history, particularly Christian history. In a relatively short space, Fea makes an impassioned appeal for the pursuit of history. He starts off with a discussion of the whys and wherefores of doing historical research. History is not merely about facts—names, dates, events.

It is “an exciting act of interpretation.” The author is quick to caution his readers that some issues are off-limits to the work of the Christian historian. Tempting though it may be, a Christian historian cannot really address matters of divine providence in history. Is God the active agent in certain events controlling the outcome for his divine end? It is not that this question is a matter of indifference. It is simply a matter for the theologian to ask and not the historian. One may hazard a guess as to why events of history happen in the natural order. But the historian has no means to evaluate the metaphysical issues behind the history. This is simply not in the historian’s purview. The past is a vast complexity, only a part of which may be discovered. At the end of the day, the historian will never be able “to provide a complete or thorough account of what happened in the past.” So by this book, Fea wishes to set out what a historian can and cannot do.

Fea is fully convinced that Christian historians have an important role to play in the Church. They can enrich the Church by the telling of stories of the past. But, these same stories also serve a cautionary purpose, warning against going down pathways which none should travel. As the historian does his or her work, the Church can better understand its place in the world in which it finds itself. However, the historian’s ultimate goal is understanding, not judgment. Historians must avoid “preaching through history.”

Fea warns of certain cautions incumbent upon the historian. Historicism, “the idea that historians should seek to understand the past on its own terms,” is a perennial challenge in recent historical

writing. This is a good practice when kept in balance. History must never degenerate into a form of propaganda. This means that the historian must attempt to empathize with the subject under scrutiny. It is only by entering the world of the past that a good historian will be able to adequately write about that past.

Pastors have demands on their time, and reading can sometimes be slotted to a minor priority. With a vast array of practical and systematic theological books, not to mention an ever-growing abundance of exegetical material, what does a busy pastor read? This may leave little or no room for reading topics like history, much less a book on the historian’s method. Yet the pastor who will take the time to peruse this book may come away with a greater appreciation for the value of historical reading. Fea includes a chapter that argues for the value of Christian history as a part of one’s spiritual formation. Good historical writing has the power to transform a believer’s life. However, Christian historians need certain virtues like prayer and dependence upon God when studying the past so that God may use the study to its fullest.

The past may indeed be a foreign country. The work of the historian, with all of the attending complexities, can pay big dividends for the Christian church when done in the spirit of humility and reverence for what God has done in human history, even if the historian may not be able to articulate exactly why he has done it.

Jeff Straub

Central Seminary 

FIRST PRINCIPLES

PREACH THE BIBLE

BY MATTHEW BARRETT

“Hey Pastor, do you preach the Bible?” Any pastor worth his salt is going to answer yes to that question. But how many pastors today actually preach the Bible? Certainly pastors quote Bible verses to back up whatever topic they have chosen to discuss that Sunday. Other pastors may even camp out on different themes or doctrines in the Bible. But these approaches don’t really preach the text of Bible. They may quote the Bible, piggy-back off of the Bible, or trampoline from biblical themes to contemporary issues, but the text of the Bible is not setting the agenda of the sermon. Instead, the sermon is setting the agenda of the text.

Methods like these are tricky. Since the Bible is being quoted and since themes or topics in the Bible are being mentioned, sermons sound

spiritual, even biblical. However, such sermons fail to get to the text itself. As a result, those in the pew know lots of random Bible verses and general Bible facts, but they cannot, for example, work through a chapter in Romans or explain the thrust of Galatians. We are left, sadly, with believers who look and sound very Christian, but would have struggled to follow Jesus’ train of thought on the road to Emmaus when he “opened...the Scriptures” (Luke 24:32).

So what is the solution? First, pastors need to preach through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, even verse by verse. This doesn’t mean pastors should be a mere running commentary on a text. That’s not preaching. But it does mean one is expositing the text itself. Sometimes pastors shy away from doing so because the text


is detailed, complicated, and assumes biblical knowledge. However, until you, as a pastor, show your people how to navigate the complexities of any particular chapter of the Bible, your people will never be able to do so either.

Second, pastors must show their people how one chapter in the Bible (even one verse!) relates to what comes before and after. For example, if you decide to preach through the Gospel of Matthew, your first sermon will (and should) address the genealogy of Jesus Christ who Matthew says is the “son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). Your temptation will be to skip over these minute, seemingly boring details of family lineage. Don’t do it. What appears mundane to your congregation is pregnant with meaning and significance. Explain who Abraham and David were, the covenants God made with each, and what all of that has to do with the coming of the Messiah who brings God’s promises to fulfillment. In doing so, the pastor preaches the whole Bible, teaching his people how the biblical pieces of this redemptive story fit together.

Third, the best way to double check whether or not one is actually preaching the Bible is to ask the question: “Is the main point of the text the main point of my sermon?” If not, start over. The preacher must capture the author’s original intent, and ultimately God’s intent as the divine author. In doing so the preacher guards himself from misusing and manipulating the text. Too often a pastor will preach the right doctrine from the wrong text. The primary way to avoid such a mistake is to meticulously examine whether the thrust of one’s message is birthed from the biblical text in focus. It’s not enough to sound spiritual or biblical. One must sound utterly dependent upon the verses being expounded, so that when the people hear your voice they hear echoes of the text itself.

Pastor, preach the Bible.

Matthew Barrett

Executive Editor 

CREDO

MAGAZINE