

# Biblical Studies Bulletin

Edited by Richard S Briggs—Published Quarterly—Read Religiously—Disposed of Reluctantly—Free to Grove Biblical Subscribers

## Contents ————— Issue 56: June 2010

- 1 *THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR EVERYONE* John Goldingay takes up Tom Wright's mantle
- 1 *NEWS AND NOTES* The slowest blog in the biblical studies world
- 2 *HUMOUR* Hold the front page for wit and wisdom (but without the wisdom)
- 3 *BOOK REVIEWS* A range of recent studies, including several textbooks

## The Old Testament 'For Everyone'

BSB readers will doubtless be familiar with Tom Wright's 'For Everyone' series of New Testament guides, which currently runs to 16 books covering everything from Matthew–Hebrews, with just the general epistles and Revelation remaining. SPCK have also been putting out study guides to many of the NT books as a further study resource. (See also 'News' below.)

The format has now been applied to the Old Testament, in the creative and capable hands of John Goldingay, Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, and well known to Grove readers through the years. The first two volumes cover Genesis: *Genesis For Everyone Part 1: Chapters 1–16* and *Genesis For Everyone Part 2: Chapters 17–50*. The series is planned to cover the whole Old Testament eventually, in 17 volumes released at approximately four books per year. A review of the Genesis volumes is offered below. The third and fourth instalments (on Exodus–Leviticus and Numbers–Deuteronomy respectively) are due later this year.

## News and Notes —————

Most readers of BSB will have heard the news that Bishop Tom Wright has recently been appointed to a Chair at the University of St Andrews and will leave his post as Bishop of Durham this summer. As of September 2010 he will be the Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at St Andrews. In addition to completing the 'For Everyone' series of NT guides (see above), he is hopeful that this will also allow him to make long-awaited progress on his series of major NT volumes on 'Christian Origins and the Question of God' (1992–). Volume 4, engaging with recent scholarship on Paul, is well underway in what is now scheduled to be a 7-volume series.

Although it will probably price itself out of range of all but University libraries, we might note a new journal from Mohr Siebeck entitled *Early Christianity*. The publishers announce ‘The journal is concerned with early Christianity as a historical phenomenon. Thereby, *Early Christianity* aims to overcome certain limitations which have hindered the development of the discipline, including the concept of the “New Testament” itself. The journal, then, is taken to cover not only the first Christian century but also the second.’ We mention it here if only because the first issue is available free on line, at the Mohr Siebeck website: [www.mohr.de/en](http://www.mohr.de/en) (the ‘en’ allows you to read the German website in English). Search for it under ‘journals’. (And, to be fair, it does start with an individual subscriber’s price which is affordable.)

Of particular interest in the first issue is Francis Watson’s thorough book review of the excessively lengthy new volume from Douglas A Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009; pp xxx + 1218, ISBN 978 0 8028 3126 2, \$60.00). Watson offers a six-page summary (along with a brief verdict: not convinced), which will save most of us a couple of hundred hours or so.

My Mac friends are excited about what some bloggers have been calling a ‘Cunieform iPad’ ... (see, for example, <http://www.dailyhebrew.com/2010/01/27/ipad-itablet/>). Apparently the iPad looks suspiciously like a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the shape of ancient clay tablets, three millennia on. As someone more likely to curl up with a good book than an iPad, I was for some reason put in mind of the delightfully whimsical scenario of Jeanette Winterson’s *Boating for Beginners* (London: Minerva, 1985) where Noah headed up a consumer-goods society which got washed away by the flood...

I don’t know how many BSB readers are aware of the annual publication of *Ex Auditu*, a journal dedicated to the theological interpretation of Scripture which has just published its 25th annual collection of essays. Each year the papers are presented at a symposium at North Park in Chicago, and the resulting publication is addressed to a particular theological topic, typically bringing together OT and NT scholars as well as theologians and preachers. This year’s volume is on the topic of ‘Conversion’. It includes Scot McKnight addressing the topic of ‘Was Paul a Convert?’ by way of a series of stories about whether the tomato is a fruit or a vegetable, which turns out to depend on whether you are in the US tax office or a science class elsewhere in the world. I fear I may be remembering more about tomatoes than Paul—but hereby recommend the rest of the article (and the volume) too. *Ex Auditu* is (since 2004) published by Pickwick publications run by Wipf and Stock press in Oregon. Details at [www.wipfandstock.com](http://www.wipfandstock.com).

## Humour

---

One OT scholar points out to us an OT limerick:

Goliath was known for ferocity  
An expert in every atrocity  
But was knocked in a heap  
By a youth who kept sheep  
A victim of teenage precocity

(For another take on David and Goliath, they point us to an enjoyable *a cappella* version performed by Take 6, and available on You Tube, eg <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-HkMfm3gRY>)

Time to dust off my old copy of the legendary book in honour of the theologian who never existed but who has haunted theological studies for decades: Martin E Marty and Jerald C Brauer's *The Unrelieved Paradox: Studies in the Theology of Franz Bibfeldt* (Eerdmans, 1994). The book exists but Bibfeldt didn't: he was invented by Chicago students unable to access the library late one Sunday night in 1947, and they inserted gratuitous footnotes into their essays under the name of this suitably obscure German. (My students have been doing the same ever since I mentioned this to them.) The 1994 Eerdmans book, a *festchrift* unlike any other ever published, contains many delightful gems, including a full Bibfeldt bibliography, which we may be drawing on in future issues to see if you are all awake. Here's a selection from his *Pragmatist's Paraphrase of Selected Sayings of Jesus*, with its self-declared hermeneutic of 'revisionism': 'Any saying that is too hard to understand or follow is to be understood to mean the opposite of what it literally says.' Here's the Sermon on the Mount:

- 5:3 Blessed are the rich in money, for they can build bigger and better churches. Who cares about the Kingdom of God?
- 5:4 Blessed are those who are always happy, having everything they need, for they don't need to be comforted.
- ... 5:8 Blessed are those whose external appearance and behaviour are impeccable, for they shall look nice when they see God.

## Book Reviews

---

J Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp xviii + 235, pb, ISBN 978 0 8028 6235 8; £11.99)

Another introduction to theological interpretation (see BSB 53). Here Billings aims to write for the interested non-specialist who wants to see Scripture living and active in Christian ministry. He writes well and leads such a reader through the by-now standard range of issues which such an introduction might cover: reading as part of a journey in the life of faith, an account of how far we read the Bible 'like any other book' (*ie* the role of general hermeneutics), a discussion of revelation which is robustly Trinitarian, a somewhat diffuse chapter looking at the way people receive Scripture in different cultures, a defence of the value of premodern biblical interpretation for today, and some reflections on the practices of scriptural interpretation in a missional church embodying the drama of salvation. This is hermeneutics from a systematist with a heart for preaching. It is really about the right frameworks for handling Scripture (thus: theological hermeneutics). The much-vaunted 'extended examples' seemed unduly vague to me, and this book will frustrate those wanting to know how they should actually go about the practices of interpretation. There is a place for such a warm orientating account as this, but a little more engagement with the need

to work hard at exegetical detail would not have gone amiss. The book is generous in spirit, but is, I think, aimed at a reader on the conservative end of the theological spectrum, inviting them to embrace tradition a little more and to recognize their own situatedness as a reader. Nevertheless I could imagine this being a helpful read for the interested churchgoer who wonders what 'theological interpretation' is all about, and it contains helpful annotated suggestions for further reading.

*Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham*

J W Rogerson, *A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication and Being Human* (London: SPCK, 2009; pp x + 214, pb, ISBN 978 0 281 05875 4; £16.99)

This book is one of the most idiosyncratic books I have read for a long time. John Rogerson is a retired Professor from the iconoclastic Sheffield department of Biblical Studies, where he held his own as an Anglican Christian scholar. His kindness and encouragement have touched many lives, and that lively interest in others is evident here, for it is written primarily for those uncertain about faith and probably hostile to the Old Testament. The title is, I think, rather misleading. There is no easy assumption of the authoritative nature of the text, nor any systematic attempt to set out what the Old Testament says about God. Rather, Rogerson develops various theses about the human character of the Old Testament, while keeping open the possibility that it says valuable things about God. The insights such an approach can glean are limited, but stimulating nonetheless, for (whatever else it is) the Bible is indubitably a human work. Along the way we are introduced to a number of sociological and anthropological perspectives with which few of us will be familiar. There are chapters on history and cultural memory, and the creation accounts as a critique of experience, but the majority of the book explores relationships (especially disrupted relationships), between people, and between people and God. A refreshing feature is how the ethical implications of the biblical text are applied forthrightly to contemporary issues. This is not a book I'd recommend to an unsophisticated or (despite the author's hopes) an unbelieving reader, but for those wishing a different approach to the Old Testament with plenty of provocative ideas, they need look no further.

*Philip Jenson, Ridley Hall, Cambridge*

John Goldingay, *Genesis for Everyone. Part I chapters 1–16* (London: SPCK, 2010; pp ix + 197, pb, ISBN 978 0 281 06124 2; £9.99) and *Genesis for Everyone. Part II chapters 17–50* (London: SPCK, 2010; pp ix + 186, pb, ISBN 978 0 281 06125 9; £9.99)

Recommend these to your congregations, and read them yourself. For those who would like a longer review: they are wonderfully fresh and engaging takes on the Genesis stories, formatted as per Tom Wright's NT series, with the author's own translation, a brief anecdote illustration first and then a discussion of the text. The style is Goldingay's typically relaxed but theologically incisive kind of 'table talk'. There are nuggets everywhere: re-setting Eden as a story involving watching too much TV (or the wrong kind); a powerful account of blessing (and cursing) (I: p 121), some understated reflections on where we might and might not follow the NT's handling of the OT text in view (where Goldingay suggests that the NT tends to focus on what they did on their good days, whereas we may have other questions too). Of course any reader might read differently here or there, but I was struck by, for instance, the way in which his ever-questioning

approach holds together theological depth with pastoral concern for how far these texts might spin the new reader out of their theological orbit. In comparison to, say, his reading of the same texts in his *Old Testament Theology vol 1*, here he wants to balance reframing suggestions with acknowledgement of why other ways of looking at it might be helpful too (eg on the familiar question of 'fall' language). And who else could let their account of Hagar drift effortlessly into a pastiche of Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive'? I looked forward each morning to getting up and reading these reflections, and that's not something I often think about devotionally orientated books.

*Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham*

Steven L McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books: Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp vii + 169, pb, ISBN 978 0 8028 2877 4, £11.99)

McKenzie's textbook is intended as part of an Eerdmans series (Paul Redditt's comparable but far longer volume on the prophets came out in 2008). A brisk introduction looks at questions of genre, locating a sub-section of the canon for inclusion, and a helpful brief account of history writing in the ancient world. Chapter two looks at the Deuteronomistic and Chronicler's histories. Chapter three rehearses a good range of methods of approach with brief examples included. The remaining six chapters then look at Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah. There is not a consistent set of subheadings but attention is given throughout to matters of how the text came to be compiled as we have it, questions of historical accuracy or apologetic purpose and general reviews of contents. Most helpful are brief conclusions on 'reading strategies,' or 'theological themes,' or, the best of these, 'Tips for Reading,' which concludes the coverage of Judges. Here one is invited to enjoy the book as great literature. This is probably a textbook which will be of most use in American classrooms for OT survey courses.

*Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham*

Anthony C Thiselton, *The Living Paul: An Introduction to the Apostle and his Thought* (London: SPCK, 2009, pp x + 190, pb, ISBN 978 0 281 06110 5).

After a distinguished career in New Testament studies, Thiselton has provided a fine introduction to Paul that encapsulates his years of study. The book begins by addressing two perennial questions: 1) the relationship between Paul and Jesus, and 2) the tensions within Paul's apocalyptic theology. He then devotes a couple of chapters to a biographical sketch of Paul's life and ministry. The majority of the book, however, covers Paul's theology with traditional categories of God, humanity, soteriology, ecclesiology, ethics, and eschatology. The twist comes in the concluding chapter where Thiselton presents an interesting dialogue between Paul and key figures within postmodernism. While not focused on a confessional audience, the book does address some of these concerns, for example, the congruity between Paul's theology and later credal affirmations. Importantly for students, Thiselton regularly presents the key opposing positions related to the topics addressed before providing arguments for his position. The strength of the work—the fact that it is the culmination of a career of study—is also its weakness, in that it doesn't integrate, as much as one might expect, scholarship from the past 10–15 years. His reading of Paul is in no way deficient because of this but it could make it harder for introductory students to know

the current proponents of different positions. This notwithstanding, Thiselton's book is an excellent introduction to Paul, not only in relation to his ancient context but also within our own postmodern context.

*Ben Blackwell, Durham University*

Joel B Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010; pp xii + 432, pb, ISBN 978 0 8028 6420 8; £18.99)

This is an update of the excellent 1995 textbook, long a recommendation of choice for those coming to reflect upon how we work with the NT text in our many and various ways. Updating textbooks is always tricky: much of the energy and enthusiasm of the original seems dated, and changing the articles completely makes for a mismatch of emphases. Green's volume is updated in a limited number of ways: two 'survey' chapters are dropped (a pity), the 'further reading recommendations' are overhauled, and a limited number of chapters are entirely replaced. The result is a book where 1994 is still 'recent,' eg on p 405, but with 4 chapters which operate from 2010: Holly Cary replaces Bruce Chilton on 'traditio-historical criticism,' F Scott Spencer replaces Sandra Schneiders on feminist criticism, and there are new chapters on African/American and latino/a hermeneutics. A strength of the book is that each chapter still works through a sample passage to show how the approach in view operates. I was startled that there was nothing on theological interpretation (except in a 1-page bibliographical update by Stephen Fowl). This remains a good textbook, but those with the first edition will not need to obtain this new one.

*Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham*

## Grove Biblical Series —————

This month's Grove booklet (B56) is by Stephen Wright, *Reading Gospel Stories in Today's World*. Stephen tackles the question of how we can receive and present the stories of Jesus in the gospels as good news for today. Particular attention is paid to the stories of his 'mighty works' and to imaginative ways of engaging with them.

Individual titles in the Biblical Series are available direct from Grove Books at **£3.95** each. Annual subscription (4 books) costs **£11.00, a saving of 30%**. Call, fax, email [sales@grovebooks.co.uk](mailto:sales@grovebooks.co.uk) or visit [www.grovebooks.co.uk](http://www.grovebooks.co.uk) to order.

---

Contributions to BSB should be sent to: Richard Briggs (Editor—*Biblical Studies Bulletin*) at Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham DH1 3RJ (or via email to: [richard.briggs@durham.ac.uk](mailto:richard.briggs@durham.ac.uk)). Unsolicited material is welcome, but it cannot be returned.

---

**GROVE BOOKS LIMITED**

RIDLEY HALL RD CAMBRIDGE CB3 9HU

Tel: 01223 46 47 48 Fax: 01223 46 48 49

ISSN: 1365-6090