

BOOK REVIEWS

The Bible Code. By Michael Drosnin. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997, 267 pp., \$25.00.

Three weeks before the Gulf War began, Eliyahu Rips, an Israeli mathematician, decoded from Genesis the date on which Iraq would launch its first Scud missile against Israel. More than a year before Rabin's assassination, his method found the event predicted in Deuteronomy. Journalist Michael Drosnin describes Rips' method and some of its yet-unfulfilled prophecies informally and nonmathematically and relates his own struggle as an agnostic with the implications of 20th-century details embedded in a book more than three millennia old.

If Rips' method is sound, evangelicals should exploit it for exegesis. In fact, several books by Christian authors use the method to find hidden messianic prophecies. While Rips' credentials and technical claims and the predictions themselves are impressive, his approach is lacking philologically, mathematically and theologically.

The "*Bible Code* method" is built on two principles: skipping letters, and proximity.

The first principle is that letters separated by equal numbers of intervening letters may be read consecutively to yield a word or phrase. The computer searches the consonantal MT for a given word by first skipping no letters, then one, then two, and on up to several thousand if necessary. The successive characters of "Yitzhak Rabin" in Deut 2:33–24:16 are separated by 4,771 letters.

Most of the expressions discovered by skipping are single words or short phrases. Forming a coherent prediction requires combining several encoded expressions (perhaps using different skips) that are close to one another. The prophecy of Rabin's assassination consists of three such expressions: "Yitzhak Rabin" with a skip of 4,771 letters, "assassin will assassinate" with zero letters skipped (the plain text of Deut 4:42), and the name of the assassin (discovered after the event), "Amir," in reverse order with a skip of 8 letters (Num 33:14–15).

The tradition of patterns among nonconsecutive letters in the OT includes acknowledged acrostics in Psalms and Lamentations, the hidden Tetragrammaton in Esther, and the cabala. In spite of its long pedigree, however, Drosnin's treatment is not persuasive.

Concerning philological issues, Drosnin reveals only a superficial knowledge of the nature and history of the Biblical text. Most of his errors do not directly affect the book's argument, but one is fatal. He claims: "All Bibles in the original Hebrew language that now exist are the same letter for letter" (p. 194). A glance at the apparatus of *BHS* shows numerous MS variations in the consonantal text. Adding or removing a single character in the midst of a skip sequence will throw off the sequence and destroy the encoding. Given this sensitivity to textual variation, even if someone did encode messages 3,000 years ago it is unlikely that they would be recoverable from the MSS that exist today.

Concerning mathematical issues, Biblicists may be intimidated by the scholarly article by Rips and his colleagues in the book's appendix. However, a more careful

look at the article, a simple example and some unexpected messages provide some perspective.

Rips and his colleagues give a rigorous definition of the method in *Statistical Science* 9 (1994) 429–438, a refereed journal for professional statisticians. The study searches Genesis for the names and birth or death dates of famous rabbis as recorded in Margalioth's *Encyclopedia of Great Men in Israel* (1961). It finds collocations of a rabbi's name and date more frequently in Genesis than in other texts, including Isaiah and the Hebrew translation of *War and Peace*, and it argues that this difference cannot be explained by chance. Drosnin repeatedly emphasizes the lack of any refereed challenge to this scholarly study.

Two cautions are appropriate here. First, as any active researcher knows, peer review is no guarantee that a study is correct, and much valuable work circulates informally for many years before reviewed publication. Brendan McKay, an Australian mathematician, has attempted without success to replicate Rips' effect (<http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim>). The selection of a test sample (such as the names and dates used by Rips) is extremely sensitive to researcher bias, and such an effect may be responsible for Rips' results.

Second, even if Rips' paper were substantiated, it does not validate Drosnin's more popular predictions. These predictions have not been subjected to the elaborate statistical tests defined in the paper. Furthermore the paper shows not only the presence of coded material in Genesis but also the absence of such material in Isaiah, invalidating Drosnin's search of the entire Biblical text for hidden prophecies.

Drosnin's prophecies seem too striking to result from chance. This intuition is not valid, because the analyst controls many options (statistically, "degrees of freedom") in searching for messages. (1) A sequence of unpointed consonants generated by a skip can often be read in multiple ways. (2) Words can be spelled either forward or backwards. (3) When using a zero skip, word boundaries are ignored. (4) The searcher chooses the skip length and where to begin skipping. (5) Dates can be written in several different ways. (6) The words sought are not specified in advance but chosen as analysis proceeds. These variables create a rich palette from which a diligent analyst can construct almost any message.

Michael Weitzman, reader in Hebrew at University College, London, published a helpful review of *The Bible Code* in *The Jewish Chronicle*, July 25, 1997. He offers the helpful example of searching for a given six-character phrase (longer than many of Drosnin's items) in the Pentateuch. Assuming equal frequencies, the chance of randomly picking a specified Hebrew letter is one out of 22 (1/22). The chance of randomly picking two specified letters in a given order is (1/22)*(1/22). Thus the chance that a specified six-letter phrase would randomly occur is $1/(22*22*22*22*22*22)$, or about 1/110,000,000. These odds seem incredible, but the analyst gets to choose the letter at which to begin (300,000 options), the interval to skip (on average 30,000 options), and whether to spell the phrase forward or backwards (two options). Thus the Pentateuch yields about $300,000*30,000*2$, or about 18,000,000,000 six-letter phrases. The probability that one of these will be the desired one is thus 180/1.1, or about 163—that is, the required phrase should occur by chance not just once but more than 160 times. The occurrence of multiple words near each other seems less likely, but the large number of potentially relevant words and the fact that only one letter in each of two "nearby" words actually has to be nearby once again make interesting patterns inevitable.

To show that the method can yield any desired message, McKay presents a detailed argument from the book of Revelation that Bill Gates is the antichrist, ten arrays predicting six different 20th-century assassinations from *Moby Dick*, and a single

region of the Hebrew translation of *War and Peace* (Rips' control text) that contains at least 59 words about Hanukkah as well as the names of the analysts. Weitzman offers another instance from Jer 8:8, whose last two words are "deceit" and "scribes." The root of "scribes" means "to count," so "scribes" are really "counters," people who tally Biblical letters to find hidden messages, and the first three letters of the Hebrew word spell Rips' name backwards. Unfortunately, the immediately previous word declares all this effort to be "deceit."

In addition to the philological and mathematical shortcomings of the method, it presents at least two theological problems to those who accept the Bible as the Word of God.

First, its predictions sometimes fail. Drosnin reports an elaborate prophecy of a world war to have started on July 25, 1996, an event that did not transpire, and much of the book speculates about the deeper philosophical meaning of failed prophecies. For the believer, speculation is unnecessary. Failure means that the prophet is not from the Lord (Deut 18:21–22) and therefore not to be trusted.

Second, the book exemplifies the human lust to seek out and believe a hidden meaning in the Scriptures while rejecting their open teaching. The Bible itself claims to be clear and patent to the believer. We do not need computers or statistical analysis to understand its message. It is God's communication to an unsophisticated people, a plain and simple message to confound the wise and mighty (1 Cor 1:26–29), hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes (Matt 11:25). There are indeed "secret things" that "belong unto the Lord our God," but we are to be preoccupied with "those things which are revealed," and that not for abstract theological speculation but "that we may do" all that God commands us (Deut 29:29). One who believes these testimonies will realize that even if the Bible contained hidden messages they would be less important than understanding and obeying the plain teaching of the text. Drosnin's attitude is just the opposite. He enthusiastically promotes the importance of hidden messages while rejecting the most explicit teachings of the Scriptures concerning the existence of God and the nature of his revelation.

This inconsistency between the "*Bible Code* method" and the plain sense of Scripture holds a warning for Biblical studies in general. Some scholars feel that their particular specialty, arduously cultivated through years of graduate study and professional research, is essential to understanding the true message of the Bible and that those who ignore those arcane investigations will forever be ignorant. Biblical scholarship sounder than *The Bible Code* can indeed illuminate, clarify and illustrate the plain teaching of the Bible, and it is a blessed privilege to have the time and training for formal exegesis. But such research is the icing on the cake, not the main course. It is not the key without which the Scriptures remain closed. Rather, it is supplementary to the personal reading and meditation that are the privilege of every believer.

In sum, the prophecies of *The Bible Code* result from the interplay between coincidental distributions of letters and investigative creativity. There is no scientific reason to believe them to be intentional messages encoded millennia ago. The method is fundamentally flawed philologically, mathematically and theologically, and it is useless for serious exegesis. The book's popularity warns of the human weakness to prefer the hidden and sophisticated over the plain and simple. It exhorts us as believing scholars to pursue and package our work in a way that encourages lay people to diligence in their own interaction with the text rather than persuading them to surrender their individual theological discretion either to Biblical scholars or to Bible decoders.

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Accordance 3.0. By Oaktree Software Specialists, Altamonte Springs, FL, 1997.

I was an original user of Gramcord, the concurring software pioneered by the non-profit Gramcord Institute by porting a mainframe/minicomputer application to DOS. The software was complex, handicapped by an obtuse command-line interface and a steep learning curve. I got results but hated every minute of it. The Institute later contracted with Oaktree Software Specialists to develop a Macintosh search engine for their databases. That effort became *Accordance*, and the rest is history. *Accordance* went on to become the Cadillac of grammatical Bible software. I would own a Mac if for no other reason than to access this tour de force of software programming. *Accordance* is for the serious scholar, yet invites even the beginner to access its powerful search domain.

What's new in this version? One element that is becoming increasingly noticeable in *Accordance* is the powerful hypertexting. Select any text in any module, and one can jump instantly to any other text or tool that has the same language. This is extraordinary power. From lexicons to commentaries to translations to texts—that is, put simply, to any installed module—hypertext coding takes you there instantly. This is very useful, if admittedly a bit addictive. New diagram and syntax windows facilitate grammatical analysis with premade graphics; the user simply drags objects around. Font size for any text in any window can be changed without dialog boxes. *Accordance* even does background searches. Set the program on its way to a complicated grammatical search routine, and you can be on your way to another application while *Accordance* quietly works its magic in the background. The amplifying function is more powerful. Now, even abbreviations, bibliography and section headings are included. The browser pane can collapse or expand from section headings to individual paragraphs to full paragraphs in context.

I still maintain a wish list for *Accordance*. For one, the Bible student ought not to have to create certain grammatical categories. For example, would you like to study μ -verbs on their own as a group? This cannot be done conveniently in *Accordance*. A wild-card search on the ending does not catch them all. To create an exhaustive index of μ -verbs for my Greek grammar book, I had to depend on printed morphologies and tediously type each verb into the construct window to make *sure* I had them all so that the numbers tallied against *omega* verb statistics and totals indicated in global search routines in each grammatical category. For another example, what about deponents? Why could we not already have a subset list of deponents, at least as they are identified in the BAGD lexicon to which *Accordance* has been standardized? Another item is the setback on the development of three-dimensional maps and terrains coordinated with Biblical texts. Copyright issues and other impediments have been frustrating the *Accordance* team, but this is an area in which the Mac platform clearly shines and would be a wonderful enhancement. While this is moving beyond concurring, *Accordance* already has added a bevy of other study features, and I think maps and other graphics would represent a natural and desirable development, a clear Bible-study aid. I would encourage the *Accordance* team to continue in its efforts in this direction.

In short, *Accordance* is almost infinitely customizable, yet the user interface is clean, thoroughly Mac-compliant and elegant. The application installs effortlessly, loads quickly and is extremely stable. Many of its most powerful functions are only a click away. The grammatical construct features are sophisticated, yet accessed intuitively, graphically, easily. One can analyze search results statistically, plot the frequency or build frequency tables. One even can have the Greek, Hebrew, English or Spanish text read aloud. (This is a superb pedagogical tool for students.) A host of texts and resources are available, and the list continues to grow. I have used many Bible software

products on both Windows and Mac platforms, but I invariably find *Accordance* the most empowering software for serious Bible study.

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The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts. The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology. By Mark L. Strauss. JSNTSup 110. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995, 413 pp., \$70.00.

The present work is a revised edition of the author's Ph.D. dissertation, completed under the supervision of Max Turner and accepted by the University of Aberdeen in 1992. Strauss endeavors to establish within Luke's Christological purpose the importance of the theme of Jesus as the coming king from the line of David. Although he does not minimize the significance for Luke of Christological motifs such as Savior, Lord, prophet, servant and Son of God, the author maintains that Jesus' status as Davidic Messiah is at the heart of Luke's larger promise-fulfillment motif. A synthesis is sought in which Luke's Christological presentation is seen as consistent and unified.

In part 1, Strauss sets the study in the context of numerous previous works that consider the Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts. His approach stands in contrast to C. Burger's concentration solely on explicitly Davidic passages. Over against D. Bock, who emphasizes the centrality in Lukan Christology of lordship rather than messiahship, Strauss questions the claim that there is a decisive shift in Luke's Christology from messiahship to lordship. Strauss goes on to explore the Davidic promise traditions that were available to Luke in first-century Judaism and early Christianity.

In part 2, the author concentrates on those sections of Luke-Acts that are most strongly royal-Davidic—namely, the birth narrative and certain speeches in Acts. It is suggested that the early chapters of Luke's gospel introduce and define Jesus programmatically as the one who will fulfill the OT promises made to David. Nevertheless, readers are not quickly shown just *how* the divine promises will be realized in a Messiah who would not fulfill the expectation of bringing about political sovereignty for the nation. Three of the most theologically important characters in Acts—Peter (2:14–40), Paul (13:16–41, 46–47) and James (15:13–21)—deliver pivotal speeches that draw attention to the Davidic Messiah motif. These sections thus bracket the Lukan account of Jesus' life and ministry in a royal-messianic framework.

It is left to part 3 to probe Lukan redactional activity and show how the exodus image (Luke 9:31) of Jesus as a "prophet like Moses" (Acts 3:22; 7:37) may be seen as a reflection of Isaiah's portrait of eschatological salvation, a portrait in which the savior is at one and the same time Davidic king, suffering servant and an eschatological Mosaic prophet. This is in contrast to the stance of D. Moessner, for whom "Christ" in Luke means essentially the Mosaic prophet. Strauss calls for a synthesis between Mosaic and Davidic features of Lukan Christology and argues that the Isaianic eschatological deliverer is to be understood as the focal point of such a synthesis (here the author draws significantly on the work of R. Watts).

Strauss' study is well researched and clearly presented. He succeeds in showing that a synthesis of Christological strands in Lukan thought and theology must be sought, and he offers a well-placed challenge to studies that have concentrated on prophetic elements and minimized royal-messianic ones. In the end, however, it is not quite clear whether the author's achievement is all one might hope for. Strauss speaks

much of synthesizing or associating the various roles of Jesus in the Lukan portrayal, and he ably demonstrates that the category of Davidic Messiah is crucial to the total picture. But it may yet remain to be shown that the royal-messianic motif is necessarily deserving of center stage in the rich, complex Lukan Christological purpose.

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The Goddess Revival. By Aída Besançon Spencer, with Donna F. G. Hailson, Catherine Clark Kroeger and William David Spencer. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, 304 pp., \$14.99 paper. *Reimagining God: The Case for Scriptural Diversity*. By Johanna W. H. van Wijk-Bos. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995, 119 pp., \$12.99 paper.

With the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference as their backdrop, Aída Besançon Spencer, professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (with assistance from friends), and Johanna van Wijk-Bos, professor of Old Testament at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, have produced provocative works that attempt to chart the direction for a self-labeled moderate theological course between what is viewed as a traditional male-dominated conception of God on the one hand and a radical post-Christian female-dominated conception of the goddess on the other. Spencer's volume is clearly more conservative than van Wijk-Bos', as is evident from the outset and throughout each book. Spencer, for example, while sympathetic with the concerns of the November 1993 Re-Imagining Conference held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, does not hesitate to call her readers back to the God revealed authoritatively in the Scriptures and in Jesus Christ; van Wijk-Bos, to the contrary, gives only glowing endorsement of the Re-Imagining Conference, seeing that event as altogether positive in charting the course she here endeavors to advance. What both books have in common is their claim to offer a middle position between traditionalism and radical feminism in our conceiving and naming of God.

Aída Besançon Spencer, along with her collaborators, has written what may best be described as an apologetic defense of the true God of the Bible (which is not the same as the God proposed through the history of the institutional Church) in the face of the blatant rejection of the God of the Christian Church by radical feminism. In *The Goddess Revival*, Spencer writes: "The God of the Bible is not described by Goddess worshippers as creative, personal, and good, a God who allows freedom in creation. Rather, they say the God of the Bible is patriarchal, a male, warlike, intolerant, a dominating male repulsed by female bodies" (p. 104). It is tragic, then, that feminists leave the Christian God due to misconceptions of the true God of the Bible. But equally tragic, argues Spencer, is their turn to goddess spirituality, in which the repressive and binding features of pagan religions are affirmed anew in the name of a newfound freedom.

Spencer's book has nine chapters. The first three attempt to disclose some of the harsh reality behind the mask of the contemporary worship of pagan deities. Portrayed as a step toward true human liberation, goddess religion in fact leads to greater gender division and possible oppression. For example, Spencer presents what Joseph Campbell and others take as a given: that gods, goddesses and religious mythology generally represent metaphors of the human. Gods and goddesses are made in our image, says contemporary pagan spirituality. To this, Spencer responds: "If our God is really simply a reflection of each of us, *no male* can escape worshipping a masculine deity, and *no female* can escape worshipping a feminine one. God is limited here by our genders. And if God reflects us, rather than we reflecting God, then one would read

the biblical accounts as stories reflecting human frailty and all these interpretations would make perfect sense. However, if one considers Scripture as the divine revelation of the one true all-good God in whom is no shadow of turning, these interpretations are all far afield!" (p. 48, italics hers). In sometimes graphic detail (see e.g. "Terrifying Aspects of Ancient Deities" and "The Violent Behavior of Religious Devotees" in chap. 3), Spencer presents her case against the ancient gods and goddesses whose worship is revived in contemporary pagan spirituality.

The positive case for the true God of the Bible occupies the remaining six chapters of the book. Contrary to the evaluation of radical feminists, the true God of Scripture is a God of immanent care and love for his creation, while he transcends it in splendor and glory. This God is not the oppressive villain feminism has supposed. But while God is love, he is also holy. Goddess religion knows nothing of divine holiness, righteousness and justice. Spencer writes: "Most Goddess worshipers affirm compassion, and generosity, but they do not affirm the concept of sin, guilt, or punishment. God may be a healer (Exod. 15:26), a deliverer (Exod. 20:2; Isa. 43:3), a comforter (Isa. 51:12-16), but God should not be a jealous, holy, and just God" (p. 106). Above all, these chapters stress that God is not male. The longest chapter of the book (chap. 6, "God Is Not Male"), along with several other sections, stresses this point. Clearly, one of the main burdens of this volume stems from the authors' conviction that the traditional Christian view of God—as dominantly masculine in his self-revelation and as reflected, then, in male authority in the home and Church—is wrong and has unnecessarily driven feminists away from the Christian faith. Citing Donald Bloesch's support for a traditionalist understanding in his *The Battle for the Trinity*, Spencer comments: "Some Goddess worshipers because they have essentially agreed with his analysis about God therefore have rejected Christianity" (p. 111). Through a variety of means, Spencer endeavors to convince readers that (1) the "maleness" of God is less than it appears (e.g. Jesus' incarnation as male is incidental to his incarnation as human, God as Father metaphorically expresses God's generic parental qualities, God as Lord and King has to do not with maleness but with rightful Creator rulership), and (2) feminine qualities attributed to God abound in the Bible (e.g. God portrayed as a mother who bears, nurses, cares for her children), though they often go unnoticed and undeveloped. Language about God must likewise reflect masculine and feminine qualities while avoiding both (1) the error of attributing sexuality, male or female, to God who is Spirit and asexual, and (2) the error of radical feminism in which the nature of the divine is viewed in dualistic or polytheistic ways.

Interestingly, Johanna van Wijk-Bos' *Reimagining God* seeks to call the same community of radical feminists back to Christian faith, but her message to them is strikingly different from Spencer's. Where Spencer argued that the true God of the Bible is not masculine and patriarchal, van Wijk-Bos concedes: "Ancient Israel was indeed a patriarchal society, just as the Church later became a patriarchal organization. This patriarchy and its attendant attitudes are reflected everywhere in the biblical text" (p. 10). On what basis, then, can feminists be called back to Christian faith? For van Wijk-Bos, "the Bible as source and inspiration is also more than a text that reflects human experience; it is more than the sum of its parts. We hope to find there God's words for our time" (p. 10). The need, then, is for a reimagining of God reflecting the spirit of the Biblical revelation of God appropriate to the concerns of feminism.

This is not to say that every part of the portrayal of God in the Bible is masculine and patriarchal. Indeed, van Wijk-Bos goes to great lengths to expose the many female conceptions linked with God. Among her discussions of various feminine Biblical expressions (most of which parallel discussions in Spencer's volume) is her proposal

that *Ēl Šadday* best be understood as “God of the breasts” or “breasted God” due to the derivation of *Šadday* from *šad*, meaning “breast” (p. 27).

Yet while many Biblical references connect God to feminine qualities, van Wijk-Bos acknowledges that masculine expressions are predominant. “The choice by the biblical writers to refer to God for the most part as male was determined culturally rather than theologically,” she informs her readers (p. 99). What shall we do in our contemporary setting in light of this reality? Hear a sampling of van Wijk-Bos’ response: “Both ‘king’ and ‘lord’ are problematic God-titles today. They refer clearly to males without opening up the equivalent possibilities of ‘queen’ and ‘lady,’ and thus they create a skewed male picture of God. . . . In view of the long tradition of God as king and lord, an attachment to the terms is understandable; in view of the problems that are attached to them, they need to be reconsidered” (pp. 40–41). The feminizing of God, then, seems to be the way to reimagine the God of the Bible and Christian faith for contemporary life. There is no other viable way to interpret van Wijk-Bos’ rejection of God as “father” as “inadequate” due to its male-directedness while God as “mother” is viewed as “appropriate”—evidently escaping what would appear to be the alternate problem of a female-directed view of God. Although the God of the Bible is portrayed in predominantly masculine terms, the reimagined god of the contemporary faith community must be predominantly (exclusively?) feminine. In this, van Wijk-Bos believes, the spirit both of the Bible (“the Bible is not a static text”) and of the God of the Bible (“the God of the Bible is not a God who is locked into one mode of being”) is maintained (p. 101).

Spencer and van Wijk-Bos both present a largely feminized view of God, although they differ on whether such a view reflects the Bible’s own predominant depiction. Spencer says it does; van Wijk-Bos declines. On this issue, I believe van Wijk-Bos treats the intentions of Biblical writers more fairly. While Spencer is correct that there are more feminine images and metaphors of God present in Scripture than traditional Christian theology has often recognized, any cursory “count,” as it were, of the preponderance of masculine versus feminine usages would reveal a hands-down win for the former. For her part, van Wijk-Bos dismisses this fact as a reflection of the patriarchal culture of Biblical writers, but she realizes that to deny it is to deny the obvious. Furthermore, it is doubtful that radical feminism would ever agree that the Bible is anything other than inherently patriarchal.

In light of this, evangelical egalitarianism, as represented by Spencer, is likely to have a hard time successfully winning back the radical feminists it seeks to woo. One place where evangelical complementarians (those evangelicals holding to the normative nature of male leadership in the home and Church as reflective of God’s created design), Biblical revisionist egalitarians of the van Wijk-Bos type, and post-Christian radical feminists all agree is this: Biblical writers intended to present their view of God in predominantly masculine terms, and they did so recognizing, in part, the consistency of this view of God with their commitment to male leadership in the believing communities of Israel and the Church and in the home. The one group proposing an alternate reading of the Biblical text is evangelical egalitarianism. It is commendable that Spencer is not inclined toward the kind of Biblical and theological revisionism evident in the approach van Wijk-Bos has taken. To say “This is the Bible’s own position and teaching” and to follow this with “but we must seek alternate understandings for our day” is a clear and overt rejection of Biblical authority. For her part, Spencer’s stated commitment to the full authority of the Biblical text rings throughout her work. But the fact remains that her position on the Bible’s inherent patriarchalism is rejected by parties on her right and left.

Finally, this observation: It is striking that neither Spencer nor van Wijk-Bos ever considered seriously the possibility that the predominant use of masculine terms for God reflects God's perspective on who he is in relation to his creation. Spencer rejects this proposal in order to advance her thesis that feminine images counterbalance if not outweigh their masculine counterparts; van Wijk-Bos rejects this notion by arguing that the Bible's patriarchalism is culturally, not theologically, determined. But neither entertained seriously the possibility most of the Church has held over its history: that while God is not sexual, and hence not male, he intentionally revealed himself in predominantly masculine terms and metaphors to communicate his position of rightful responsibility and authority, and he intended this to be set as parallel to the special responsibility and authority he invested in men, particularly in their relationships in the home and community of faith.

The fundamental questions that flow from these works set side by side, then, are these: First, is the Bible's intended portrayal of God predominantly masculine, as van Wijk-Bos, radical feminism, and evangelical complementarianism would argue, or is God's portrayal gender-neutral or weighted toward the feminine, as Spencer suggests? Could Spencer be right and the others wrong? Are evangelical complementarians willing to consider seriously her arguments? But if Spencer is wrong on the first question and the other three parties right, what, then, will be our response to this Bible and to the God of this Bible? Is the Bible really our authority, or is a commitment to feminism so basic (as with van Wijk-Bos) that the Bible's own view may be left behind, all in the name of faithfulness to the "spirit" of the very Bible so abandoned? Ultimate loyalties are at issue. May God grant his people grace, strength and wisdom to do what is right, to the glory of his name.

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The Task of Old Testament Theology. Substance, Method, and Cases. By Rolf P. Knierim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, xvi + 603 pp., \$40.00.

This is a most welcome volume on an important topic by a noted OT scholar known for his rigor and his penchant for asking substantive questions and offering answers. Knierim here offers a sampling of his work spanning 25 years. The book is a collection of 21 essays and presentations ranging in length from ten to 40 pages, some of which were earlier published in English, German and Portuguese. Seven essays are here published for the first time.

The first-time published pieces include essays on hamartiology, spirituality, Gabler, and "A Posteriori Explorations." The "explorations" represent Knierim's proposals for the discipline of OT theology. These are important not only because they come from one most intensely involved for a lifetime with the subject but because they set a new agenda for the discipline. In brief the agenda is not so much to attempt a comprehensive conceptualization of the OT, although that is granted as desirable, but to develop a method by which individual texts are treated in the context of a pan-Biblical theology. This essay of "explorations" along with the analysis of Gabler's program, an analysis that differs considerably from the traditional views, forms an inclusio with the much-discussed lead essay on "The Task of Old Testament Theology" and the responses (reprinted from *HBT*). With the two blocks of essays, Knierim urges a re-direction for the discipline.

That redirection of the discipline is driven by his insistence throughout on the plurality and the diversities of theologies within the OT. Knierim advocates that the task of the discipline be the adjudication and prioritization of these theologies. His proposal in the lead essay is that the Bible's own criteria, that of justice and also its cosmic orientation, become decisive in the stratification and evaluation of the various theologies.

The themes of justice and creation/nature are both themes that resurface in several of the essays. A first-time published essay on "Food, Land and Justice" is an example. But other essays too, such as the one about Israel and the nations in the land, grapple with how justice is a factor in the interpretation. Rather decisive for his essay on hamartiology is the concept of justice. His excursus in that essay takes Borman to task for his truncated view when expounding NT contributions to the notion of economic justice in a society. The essay on sin, also the subject of his doctoral work in Germany, is certainly one of the more valuable essays in the book. On this subject and on others Knierim keeps theology and hermeneutics separate. In his view, to set out the theology does not yet answer how that theology is to be encountered by readers in the present day—the task of hermeneutics.

The theme of cosmos, creation, nature—categories usually differentiated from history—is another strand interwoven throughout the essays. Though earlier as a student of von Rad he tilted toward von Rad's emphasis on history, tradition history and the like, Knierim has in recent years moved away from such an emphasis. He is now urging the importance of the creation motif (cf. his essay "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," as well as the lead essay on "Task"). As to format, it is most unfortunate that the place and date of publication of these essays, even if now revised, is not given.

Knierim is one who tackles the foundations. He worries himself with the task of the discipline, rather than assuming a traditional stance and constructing a Biblical theology. He fusses about "God," "Yahweh" and how these designations are to be understood and related. His observations are astute and well documented, but not necessarily aligned with commonly held views. But scholars, including readers of this *Journal*, should take seriously some of this turning of the sod and grapple with the questions Knierim raises, despite the discomfort this will bring. His solutions are open to challenge, but that he raises significant questions and expounds these questions is beyond doubt. One of the longest essays, "Revelation in the Old Testament," which analyzes the positions of R. Rendtorff and W. Zimmerli as to whether word or event is constitutive of that revelation, is just one of the many essays that wrestles with what is entailed in affirming that Yahweh is God.

In addition to the above themes—theological diversity, justice, "nature/creation" and Yahweh—there are bonus pieces. I mention the essays on "Spirituality of the Old Testament." Several other essays fall into this bonus category in that they illumine Knierim's theological approach to the text. Here the exposition of Psalm 19 (part of it previously published) is exceptionally rich. His theological approach to an entire book (cf. "The Book of Numbers") or even his attention to corpora (cf. "The Composition of the Pentateuch") are models in Biblical scholarship.

The four essays on "The Interpretation of the Old Testament" represent well Knierim's agenda and posture. Readers of this *Journal* will be uneasy with the claim about multiple theologies illustrated on the topic of justice (e.g. justice as punishment, justice as pardon), with the discussion about establishing the truth and validity of a theology in a given Biblical text, and with comments that Christ's return is all but irrelevant today (this in a discussion of how the two Testaments relate). These essays are concerned with "Biblical thinking," but they are heavy reading, both for their sub-

stance and their style. Nevertheless the agenda that surfaces cannot be dismissed with glib shibboleths.

This is not a book for amateurs. The questions posed are complicated ones, the proposed solutions intricate and convoluted. But the aggressive confrontational style, and the passion and intensity for which Knierim is known, make this volume one that will stretch and greatly enrich those who take the time and have the courage to sample the writings of a profound thinker.

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In Search of Text Syntax: Towards a Syntactic Text-Segmentation Model for Biblical Hebrew. By A. F. den Exter Blokland. Amsterdam: Free University, 1995, 318 pp., \$23.00 paper.

This book is the published form of Blokland's 1995 dissertation and represents a significant new study in the field of Biblical Hebrew text grammar. In this work Blokland confronts the problem of how text segmentation should be carried out. While segmentation systems have long existed (e.g. versification, Masoretic accentuation), Blokland's goal is to create a procedure for calculating text segmentation by examining syntactic features alone. The text-syntactical approach of W. Schneider and E. Talstra forms the foundation for his model.

Blokland begins by examining the text segmentation models of Longacre, Andersen, and Gülich and Raible. Not only is each model given a comprehensive explanation and critique, but Blokland actually employs each model on 1 Kings 1–2 (his sample text) to demonstrate their segmentation capabilities. He then explains his own procedure and gives a full demonstration of his model. Also included are five case studies on the "directionality" of various clause types, and four appendices showing other proposals for segmenting the sample text.

While Blokland values some aspects of the models he examines, most of their procedures receive strong criticism. Blokland's argument with the tagmemic approach of Longacre and Andersen lies primarily in the fact that their models prioritize function over form and claim to analyze surface structure when in fact they are based upon semantic and literary considerations (pp. 54–55, 86–88, 98–99). Likewise, Blokland criticizes Gülich and Raible's model for basing its operations upon universal literary features rather than upon the syntax of Biblical Hebrew (p. 133).

Blokland himself proposes an ascendant segmentation procedure based upon two syntactic features: the continuity and distribution of clause types, and "reference tracking" (i.e. how subject and object are expressed and maintained). Segmentation of the text is effected by the continuity and discontinuity of actant markers and by the tendency of clause types to form homogeneous groups, thus creating a "foreground/background" distinction in the narrative (pp. 138–160).

Since the text is a cohesive unit progressing in a linear fashion, this means that its clause components must be connected to each other; these linkages between clauses are expressed in certain directions (p. 141). Since the connections between clauses operate on different levels, a hierarchy of text-segmentation markers is created (p. 144).

Because his procedure is apparently based on purely surface-structure phenomena, the question that naturally occurs is: Does Blokland's segmentation procedure give meaningful results? A glance at his evaluation (pp. 196–200) and appendix 4 shows that his procedure results in a coherent reading of the text, at least on the first few

levels of segmentation. The divisions he finds are almost identical to those proposed by six major commentaries on Kings. Blokland is cautious about his results, however, and admits that his higher-level operations—even though they obtain good results in the sample text—are “largely ad hoc” (pp. 169, 197–198). He also cautions the reader that his model may not account for syntactical constructions not found in 1 Kings 1–2.

If Blokland’s work fails at any point, it is largely in the area of demonstration. It is not made sufficiently clear that the “connections” effecting “directionality” between clauses (pp. 140–141) are actually a function of whether the clause types and/or actants are homogeneous. While he claims that directionality is “not related to how the linkage is actually effected” (p. 141), it would be helpful in a work such as this to find a detailed discussion of precisely this topic. One would also expect his four “tendencies” regarding clause grouping (pp. 162–164) to be based upon more evidence than case studies 1–3 alone, which deal with only two out of the nine possible narrative-clause constructions.

Another area of concern is Blokland’s use of the term “actant” to refer to the subject or object of a clause. While he maintains that he does not use this term in a literary sense (p. 149), there are instances (e.g. 1 Kgs 2:26a1–27a1) where he seems to be going beyond a “purely syntactic” approach.

Despite these problems, this is an original and creative work that raises a number of intriguing questions about Hebrew syntax. Blokland’s case studies have contributed valuable data concerning the text-syntactic function of certain clause types and the nature of reference tracking in Biblical Hebrew. It is to be hoped that this book will be widely read and used to stimulate further discussion in the area of Hebrew text syntax.

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Numbers. By Eryl W. Davies. NCB. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, lxxiv + 378 pp., \$22.99 paper.

Eryl Davies’ new commentary on the book of Numbers fits into the critical tradition of Gray and Noth, both of whom he cites frequently. One of the strengths of this new work is Davies’ ability to summarize views, options, and background on pertinent subjects, such as the relationship of the Deir ‘Alla texts to Numbers, on which he offers a succinct excursus (pp. 281–284).

The commentary is clearly written and quite readable, although Davies gives documentation, sometimes extensive, in the text rather than in footnotes. Davies often has a way of summarizing a thought in a strikingly pointed manner. Describing Balaam’s encounter with the ass, he suggests that “Balaam, the renowned seer, is depicted as less perceptive than his ass, and more recalcitrant than an animal renowned for its sheer obstinacy” (p. 249).

Despite these advantages, conservative scholars will find that Davies’ critical approach to the book of Numbers limits the commentary’s usefulness. The book, he believes, was written primarily by tendentious priestly writers (the “P” of source criticism) late in Israel’s history: “Yet the Priestly writers were not primarily interested in historiographical questions; rather, their concern was to legitimate the religious practices and institutions of their own day by projecting them back to the time of Moses” (p. lxix).

Consequently, Davies concludes that "it would be impossible, on the basis of the information provided by Numbers, to reconstruct a coherent picture of Israel's history in the presettlement period" (p. lxix). While some material in the book might indeed be very early, such as the description of the defeats of Sihon and Og in chap. 21 that "may well reflect at least a nucleus of historical truth" (p. 228), for Davies the book as a whole is to be regarded as late and biased.

The redactor was not, in fact, terribly good at his job: The "inconsistency" in Num 7:1 between assuming that the events of chaps. 1–4 had taken place and giving a date earlier than that given in Num 1:1 is seen as the result of "a later editor who had simply failed to notice the inconsistency" (p. 72). Since the dates are duly noted in the text, a more conservative scholar might assume that some rhetorical purpose drives the displacement of the chronology, even if he is unable to pinpoint that purpose.

Pastors and laymen will find little or no use for this commentary because of its critical perspective and would be better off obtaining the conservative commentary by Gordon J. Wenham (*Numbers* [InterVarsity, 1981]) and the critical but insightful commentary by Jacob Milgrom (*Numbers, The JPS Torah Commentary* [Jewish Publication Society, 1990]). Serious scholars working in the book of Numbers will find Davies' interaction with the critical tradition helpful and will need, in turn, to interact with Davies' own critical approach.

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Numbers. By Dennis T. Olson. Interpretation. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996, 196 pp., \$23.00.

The Interpretation series seeks to provide a synthesis of each Biblical book while stressing the use of that book in the theology and liturgy of the Church. As a result of these aims, this new commentary is perhaps one of the clearest and most readable commentaries available on the book of Numbers. At the same time, the book contains very little documentation; instead the reader is referred to the standard commentaries. In effect, this editorial decision makes the book a luxury to buy after one has purchased several standard commentaries.

Generations of commentators have despaired of finding any unity within the book of Numbers. Olson's work to synthesize Numbers is a real step in the right direction, though there is not a great deal of development over his previous work, *The Death of the Old and the Birth of the New: The Framework of the Book of Numbers and the Pentateuch* (Scholars, 1985).

While Olson's outline is based on the two major rhetorical markers in the book—the two censuses in chaps. 1–3 and chap. 26—he seems inconsistent in his division of the book. At times he insists on two "halves" to the book (pp. 4, 5, 157, 159), and at other times he seems to see three major sections to the book: the positive chaps. 1–10, the negative chaps. 11–25, and the positive chaps. 26–36. At times he overemphasizes the two censuses. In his table on p. 5, for example, he misses the fact that the issue of contact with death arises in chaps. 5, 19, and 31, which fits a three-part structure to the book. On the one hand, Olson recognizes the inclusio formed by the daughter-of-Zelophehad passages in chaps. 27 and 36, but on the other hand, he misses the inclusio formed by the order of the camp/march in chaps. 2 and 10. This would, in fact, fit a three-part structure for the book quite nicely. The first and third sections would each begin with a census and be enclosed with an inclusio.

Olson's critical approach and several careless errors mar the usefulness of the book. Olson is clearly critical, assuming that the final form of the book took shape after the exile (p. 3) and often attributing differences or difficulties within Numbers or between Numbers and other OT books to different traditions (pp. 52, 124–125, 155). Concerning his factual accuracy, I would question that the Temple menorah and the Hanukkah menorahs are to be directly equated (p. 48), or that the *šišit* (fringes) are today blue (p. 96), or that God was being unjust to women (pp. 74, 129).

While many will find Olson's book helpful, particularly if they do not have access to his earlier work, readers would be well advised to use caution in relying on this commentary.

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Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity. By E. Theodore Mullen. SBLSS. Atlanta: Scholars, 1993, ix + 334 pp., n.p. paper.

Sensing an impasse in the study of the deuteronomistic history (DH), Mullen offers a new approach that is intended as a complement to those already in use (p. 3). Thus the book does not contain a polemical tone.

Mullen's approach is first of all concerned with establishing a firm *Sitz im Leben* for the DH (pp. 3–12). While Mullen does not deny that there may have been possible earlier editions of the DH, he is primarily concerned with the exilic edition. As he puts it, "the major portions of the deuteronomistic history in substantially the form in which we possess them were written in a period immediately following 561 BCE" (p. 7 n. 19). "What can be reasonably argued as a starting point is that by 550 BCE, the deuteronomistic history probably *did* exist and, given the historical exigencies of that time, was probably employed within a specific context" (p. 9). It was during this period that a distinctive form of ethnic identity was developed in response to the threat of a loss of the previous identifying factors that had defined "Judahite" on the basis of land, leader, and locus.

Depending on the anthropological suppositions of A. D. Smith (*The Ethnic Origins of Nations* [1986]), Mullen assumes that this deuteronomistic narrator organized his stories as a series of "social dramas" of ritual creation/reenactment that produced or reinforced certain ethnic boundaries that defined the people "Israel." From the fabric of traditional stories, some ancient and some invented, this author "imagined" the form and content of a community and then gave it a "history" designed to define and preserve selected aspects that might be understood as unique and meaningful to the community being addressed.

Mullen proceeds to demonstrate how this anthropological understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* of the DH informs the interpretation of a particular sample text: the reign of Athaliah (pp. 21–54). Here the deuteronomistic writer projected a history of Athaliah that reinforced his concept of what the ethnic boundaries between true "Israelites" and "non-Israelites" should have looked like, with the intention of motivating the exilic community to these ethnic (and/or religious) standards.

In chap. 3, Mullen proposes that the deuteronomistic historian created the book of Deuteronomy as a "kind of social manifesto of 'Israelite' ethnic identity" (i.e. it laid out clearly for the exilic community the distinctiveness of Israelite vs. non-Israelite). It defined "Israel" for the deuteronomistic historian's community (pp. 55–85).

While the book of Deuteronomy might be seen as a social, ritual manifesto of "Israelite ethnic identity," the book of Joshua, through a process of "recreation and reconfiguration of group identity," modifies the particular ethnic boundaries formed in the book of Deuteronomy through the social world created and projected by the author of Joshua (pp. 87–119). Thus, to Mullen, the fictive way of presenting reality provides a basis for the creation of a new community out of the remnants of the people scattered and dislocated by the exile (p. 97).

The remainder of the deuteronomistic history (whether Judges, Samuel or Kings) plays a role in the projection of the historian's present *Sitz im Leben* (pp. 121–281). So, for example, the office of judge is the clear invention (according to Mullen) of the deuteronomistic historian, who also created the framework that "invents" the period of the judges (p. 133).

Although Mullen's attempt to combine a *Sitz im Leben* for the deuteronomistic history—which, in fact, may be very reasonable—with a synchronic-type reading is laudable, I am not especially convinced by his approach.

First, even if the DH came out of the context that Mullen envisions, this does not require the level of fabrication that he sees, especially in Joshua and Judges. The motives of the prophetic, scribal group responsible for the DH's creation are highly suspect. The problem seems to lie in the tendency to equate literariness with fabrication and fiction, and the lack thereof with history. Second, could not the earlier sources (that Mullen admits probably existed) have created earlier, social ethnic identities that the later editions of the history simply transmitted? Finally, it seems that the deuteronomistic scribal group could have considerably streamlined the history's presentation in order to communicate more effectively their ideology of "Israel's ethnic boundaries."

Even though one may disagree with Mullen's approach, he makes many excellent observations about the rhetoric of the DH. And this is, undoubtedly, one of the great strengths of the book. Though his reading of the book of Joshua is the weakest in this regard, his section on Judges is especially strong. Moreover, Mullen's reading is quite helpful in highlighting many of the communal aspects of the DH. For example, his observations concerning Judges 4–5 (pp. 142–143) explicate a particular aspect of the supplementary nature of the prose and poetic accounts. Thus he aptly concludes: "The failure to participate could bring a curse, as was exemplified by the sudden reappearance of the *mal'ak yhwh* to deliver a curse on Meroz for 'failing to come to the aid of Yahweh' (5:23). This curse stands in direct contrast to the blessing on Jael that follows (5:24), and further defines the community: those who belong to Israel are those who fight on Yahweh's behalf. Failure to do so can bring a curse and possible expulsion from the community" (p. 143). Thus my disagreement with the book's thesis does not diminish the book's value to those interested in the study of the DH. Mullen has given us much insight into this important portion of the Hebrew Bible.

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The Alpha-Text of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text. By Karen H. Jobes. SBLDS 153. Atlanta: Scholars, 1996, 256 pp. + appendices, \$29.95.

In this publication of her Westminster Theological Seminary Ph.D. thesis (1995), Jobes seeks to understand the relationship of the MT to the variant Greek text of Esther known as the Alpha Text (AT).

The author's starting point is a detailed syntactical study of the nature of the AT Greek, using criteria developed by Raymond A. Martin. Foundational to her thesis is

the conclusion that the AT is a translation of a Hebrew *Vorlage* rather than a recension. That *Vorlage*, she finds, is similar to the MT, and the major plus and minus differences between the two texts are explicable in terms of the *Tendenz* of the AT. Responsibility for this *Tendenz* is placed by Jobes at the feet of a subsequent Greek editing in which "Mordecai's stature overshadowed Esther's" (p. 220). A comparison of the AT with the LXX in the six major additions finds no consistent affinity between the versions. Throughout, Jobes shows an awareness of recent scholarly interest in the AT and responds explicitly to the work done by Moore, Tov, Clines and Fox.

Perhaps the most helpful feature of this volume is the methodological interaction with Martin's syntactical criteria for distinguishing translation Greek and compositional Greek. The thoroughness of Jobes' work at this point results in a mass of syntactical data hitherto not achieved by recent studies on the Esther texts and a real advancement of the methodological discussion. On the basis of her data the author questions Fox's assessment of the LXX with respect to the AT and comes to a different conclusion from him as to the relationship of the AT to the MT. On that latter point, she falls short of convincing me, however, that the bias evident in the A Text is not part of its *Vorlage*. Perhaps more attention to literary aspects of the comparison, as so well exemplified by Clines, would have paid dividends in the advancement of that part of her argument.

There is also an excursus in which Jobes suggests an affinity between the AT of Esther and the OG of Daniel. Although this is tangential to the main purpose of the book, enough connections are made to raise some intriguing possibilities for further research.

This careful and intentional piece of scholarship deserves a place in the critical discussion of the Greek traditions of the OT. Although the author's thesis on the AT does not quite carry the day, Jobes has made an important contribution to ongoing research and provided data that cannot be ignored.

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The Book of Psalms: An Annotated Bibliography. By Thorne Wittstruck. 2 vols. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 1413. New York: Garland, 1994, xii + 984 pp., \$157.00.

This is the fifth volume in Garland's new Books of the Bible series, which will cover the entire Bible, including the Apocryphal (deuterocanonical) books. My reaction when I first learned of this series was somewhat negative; after all, books like this are immediately dated and researchers with access to good bibliographic databases do not need someone else to point them into the literature. However, as I have perused this volume my mind has changed. This is a very valuable reference tool indeed, one that belongs at least in every academic library, if not also in individual scholars' personal collections. The work includes a very impressive 4,971 entries. However, they are not all annotated; my (very unscientific) estimate is that ca. 70 percent of the entries actually are annotated.

The work is divided into 11 categories: (1) General Surveys and Studies; (2) Commentaries (helpfully categorized by era: pre-500 AD, 501–1800, 1801–1900, post-1900); (3) Texts and Translations; (4) Poetry; (5) Literary Criticism and Historical Issues; (6) Form-Criticism and Tradition History; (7) Worship in Ancient Israel; (8) Ancient Near Eastern Parallels/Comparative Studies; (9) Theology and Themes; (10) Public

Worship and Devotion (helpfully divided into "Worship and Devotion," "Preaching and Sermons," and "Music and Songs"); and (11) Individual Psalms (each psalm's categories include "Scholarly Inquiries," "Musical Settings," and "Homiletical Applications"). Volume 1 is devoted to the first 10 categories and vol. 2 to treatments of the individual psalms. There is only one index in the work, an author index.

Who would benefit from this work? Certainly scholars and serious students would. The work includes the most important articles in each area through about 1992. No article or book on the Psalms that I checked for was missing; Wittstruck clearly knows the field of Psalms studies. The entries for Sigmund Mowinckel illustrate how this work can help scholars and students. The author index at the end of vol. 2 contains 31 entries for Mowinckel. Many of these entries merely list the article title. Others include a one- or two-sentence summary of the article. However, for Mowinckel's monumental *Psalmstudien*, Wittstruck devotes 15 full pages to summarizing the six volumes in this important work. Since it has never been translated into English, here we have a very helpful summary of a work that has influenced Psalms studies ever since it appeared in the 1920s. (The author states in the preface that his original summary of Mowinckel was 100 pages long. The book's space limitations forced him to cut things significantly.)

Pastors and others will also benefit from this work. In the summaries, they can quickly grasp the state of the field in any given area of study. Also, the entries on the individual psalms are usually helpful. The "Musical Settings" section refers to actual musical compositions inspired by the individual psalms. Unfortunately, this section and the "Homiletical Applications" section, even for the most popular psalms, is rather meager.

This is not necessarily a "must-buy" book. However, it certainly belongs in the "must-consult" category for any serious study of the Psalms.

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Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples. By Claus Westermann. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995, 178 pp., \$19.95 paper.

When one hears the name Claus Westermann, one should automatically associate it with the methodology of form criticism. Westermann, professor emeritus at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, has been one of the foremost practitioners of form-critical methodology in this century. This book on Proverbs is only his second publishing attempt in the field of wisdom studies, the first being *The Structure of the Book of Job: A Form-Critical Analysis*.

Westermann's work on Proverbs is a diligent effort to apply the principles of form criticism to the various collections and individual proverbs in the book. In terms of the development of the collections within Proverbs, Westermann argues that the short sayings of Prov 10:1-22:16; 25-29 represent the earliest collection within the book because of the presupposition that one-line and two-line sayings represent a frozen oral stage that has since found its way into writing. After the collection of short sayings, the longer and more didactic texts such as Proverbs 1-9 were added. However, Proverbs 1-9 represents the work of sages in a formal setting, not an original oral stage. Therefore, Proverbs 1-9 is reflective of a later wisdom. The second element in Westermann's approach is that since the earliest collection was originally oral, one can presuppose that preliterate societies today and their proverbial collections can provide

insight into the function of proverbs, whether in Israel or among tribes in Africa. This conclusion is certainly in keeping with the comparative-religions approach of form criticism. Finally, Westermann will take an inductive approach in the study of various proverbs and will group them into categories that reflect a certain *Sitz im Leben*. Once more the reader is aware of two essential elements in form criticism: literary categories and the function of the text in the community.

Certainly, Westermann does an outstanding job of analyzing the individual proverbs and then placing them in various categories. Furthermore, his proposals for the function of proverbs in Israelite life are excellent. However, one should keep three questions in mind when reading Westermann's approach. First, is it correct to assume that early wisdom is built upon the universal understanding of good and evil, as well as a view of God that is rather generic? Here, it is interesting that Westermann compares early wisdom's view of God to Genesis 1–11. I have a difficult time conceiving that the conception of God in Genesis 1–11 is more generic and adaptable to all religions of humankind. Second, how do discoveries of various forms internally relate to the overall canonical structure of the book of Proverbs? In other words, when the book begins and ends with an emphasis upon the "fear of Yahweh," does that not change the reading of early wisdom in Prov 10:1–22:16; 25–29? Finally, one should ask whether the form-critical methodology always handles the evidence fairly. For example, Westermann will argue that the writers of Onchsheshonqy composed the material to have an archaic look, but in reality it was late (p. 160). If one were to argue that Onchsheshonqy was late, though it has one-line sayings, then the fundamental premise of form criticism is questionable. When one reads Westermann with these caveats in mind, one can still gain a great deal of insight from his writings on Proverbs.

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Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon. By Ronald E. Clements. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996, x + 278 pp., \$29.00.

The fifteen chapters of this book are a collection of previously published essays dealing with the nature of OT prophecy. As the subtitle indicates, Clements' main concern in these essays is to provide an explanation of how an oral prophetic message delivered long ago in a narrow historical context could be transformed into a literary work regarded as authoritative Scripture for later generations of Jews and Christians.

While there are obviously some parallels between these essays and the works of Brevard Childs (to whom this volume is dedicated), it is clear (pp. 79–80, 245–246) that Clements' investigations should not be called "canon criticism." Rather, his goal is to examine the entire history of composition, first identifying the material belonging to the original prophet, then isolating and examining the successive layers of redactional reworking that functioned as interpretations of the earlier tradition for new historical situations. His first two chapters, dealing with Amos 7 and Isa 36:1–39:8 respectively, give clear examples of his method.

Chapter 3 surveys the treatment of messianic hope in the OT from the 1600s to the present. While Clements believes that the critical view of messianic prophecy—i.e. that the oracles were not in their original sense "messianic"—is correct, he argues that the dominant model in the past century, the history-of-religions approach, is flawed by its inability to account for the present shape of the text. Insisting on the necessity of redaction-critical study to trace the growth of the prophetic literature,

Clements demonstrates that the NT use of the OT is merely a continuation of the "inner-Biblical exegesis" observable in the OT text itself. In chap. 4, he traces this development of messianic hope by investigating the redaction history of the Immanuel prophecy in Isa 7:14.

The next six chapters—dealing with Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—are broader in scope, examining the compositional structuring, intertextuality and thematic development present in the larger sections of these books. Clements finds fault with the pre-critical view of composition that ascribes each book in its entirety to a single prophet, noting that unity of theme and structure does not necessarily imply unity of authorship. He also argues strongly against the two classical critical models: the first, which views the prophetic books as collections of unrelated material attributable to prophets in different eras, and the second, which explains the prophetic books as the work of a prophet and his "school of disciples" who preserved and added to his work. Clements proposes that the prophetic books can be best explained as the work of redactors who recognized the relevance and authority of the original prophetic message for their time, reworking and adding to the tradition in order to interpret it for and apply it to a later and broader historical setting.

The next five chapters deal with the nature of prophetic literature and its relationship to apocalyptic. Clements makes a strong distinction between oral and written prophecy and sets forth what he sees as the characteristics of prophetic literature: historical departicularization, intertextuality, and the creation of literary patterns that could be adapted to fit events widely separated in time.

In contrast to those who investigate the origins of apocalyptic using purely socio-historical factors, Clements argues that "the rise of apocalyptic . . . was only possible because prophecy had come to take on a written form" (p. 177). By viewing apocalyptic as a self-consciously literary phenomenon, he thus concurs with L. Hartman's description of apocalyptic as "prophecy among the scribes" (pp. 178–179).

In the final three essays, Clements explores the characteristics of prophetic literature as they relate to the idea of a "canonical form." Noting that critical scholarship has stressed both the message of judgment and the lack of literary unity in these books, he asks: Why did the NT regard the prophetic literature as a cohesive body of literature proclaiming a unified message of salvation? He concludes that the literary structuring and patterning present in the final form have made such a view possible: "It is this canonical form of prophecy which brings together the various sayings and messages of individual prophets and coordinates them into a unified 'message.' Likewise it is this same canonical form and structure which makes prophecy as a whole a message of coming salvation" (p. 192). This "process of connecting separate prophecies together and of viewing them collectively" (p. 195), far from being a NT development, was present in the OT itself as the motivation behind the formation of the text's final form. In contrast to the early critical goal of theology as "hearing the voice" of the original prophet, Clements argues that theology was made "possible and necessary" (p. 206) by the transformation of spoken oracles into a written prophetic corpus.

In the last of the three chapters on prophecy and canon, Clements discusses the relationship of the prophet to his subsequent editors and the role of those editors in the composition of the prophetic books. Drawing on Max Weber's concept of "routinization," Clements sees the prophetic editors primarily as interpreters. It is clear that he is taking a mediating position between two views: the first, that the editors were mere disciples or preservationists; the second, that the editors were proponents of completely new ideas that had no real relation to those of the original prophet. Clements' view thus allows the editors to be creative theologians, while it also takes into consideration the unique role and message of the prophet himself.

Clements' essays are marked by clarity, careful argument and penetrating logic. The material on compositional models and on the characteristics of written prophecy is particularly valuable, and Clements is extremely perceptive when he discusses the history of interpretation. Not only is this volume a pleasure to read, but it could be very profitably used by teachers in a seminar on prophetic literature or critical method. These articles should encourage every first-time reader of Clements to investigate his full-length treatments of the prophets.

Not every reader will agree with the historical reconstructions offered by Clements. He goes too far, for instance, when he asserts that the references to exile in Amos 7:11–17 are necessarily editorial insertions written after 722 BC (pp. 26, 32). Certainly others, such as Wolff and Mays, have found a plausible *Sitz im Leben* for the proclamations of exile as authentic prophetic material.

Those who are unfamiliar with critical methods of Biblical study will no doubt find Clements' view of prophecy—i.e. that if prophets spoke of the future they did so only in the most general of terms—rather unsettling. Yet it is to be hoped that these landmark essays—which have exercised a major influence on other scholars in the field—will be read profitably by all students of the Bible. The publishers are to be highly commended for collecting and reprinting these valuable works in a single volume.

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Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature. By Marvin A. Sweeney. The Forms of the Old Testament Literature 16. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, xx + 547 pp., \$45.00 paper.

This volume, the ninth to appear in this series, is one of the best so far. It contains the usual features: extensive bibliographies, a glossary of genres and formulas, and a discussion of the structure, genre, setting and intention of each unit. Also included is a 21-page introduction that discusses form-critical methodology and the genres of prophetic literature.

The introduction is very well written and shows a keen grasp of the issues in form criticism, both past and present. Sweeney argues that the forms of prophetic literature must be examined as well as the forms of prophetic speech, since “the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible does not distinguish between the ‘original’ words of the prophets and the later redactors and tradents. . . . The final form of the prophetic book in its entirety must therefore stand as the basis for form-critical exegesis” (p. 11). Sweeney carefully preserves this distinction between oral forms and written forms in the introduction, where each is treated separately.

It must be pointed out that Sweeney is not performing a naïve “literary reading” of the final form. He is fully committed to discussing the history of the compositional process. Moreover, he insists that the sociohistorical setting of each unit must be understood. While the first step—a study of the oral forms and their *Sitze im Leben*—is necessary, Sweeney believes that it is essential to continue the process by identifying how each layer of composition (including the text as a whole) functioned in its own historical setting.

The study of compositional history is thus very important for Sweeney, for only by distinguishing between earlier and later material can he explain why the later community treasured the original prophetic message as relevant to their situation: “Only by investigating the process by which such later tradents understood, reformulated, and

reapplied the earlier words of the prophets can the form critic identify the impetus for the preservation, growth and continued vitality of the prophetic tradition" (p. 12).

Sweeney next includes a large section (pp. 31–62) on the book of Isaiah as a whole. While he believes that chaps. 1–39 contain the earliest material, he does not believe that the book of Isaiah ever existed as three separate "books." Sweeney not only rejects Duhm's divisions of Isaiah as a theory of composition but also states that the classic tripartite division does not even correspond to the internal literary structure (pp. 41–42). From a top-down perspective, Sweeney notes that the book is thematically structured into two sections, with a division between chaps. 33 and 34; the first half of the book contains announcements of judgment, whereas the second half proclaims that the judgment has ended. These two sections, which are held together by intertextual links between chaps. 1 and 65–66, can be further subdivided into other sections. This narrative shape can only be discerned at the end of an ascendant form-critical process, since Sweeney's procedure is to begin with the smallest literary units and work upwards.

Sweeney identifies four compositional stages based on larger groupings of these units: The first goes back to the prophet Isaiah ben Amoz; the second is a Josianic redaction dating to the late 7th century; the third is a late 6th-century exilic redaction; and the fourth stage, resulting in the final form of the book, dates to the late 5th century during the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. Sweeney is fairly confident regarding his ability to date these stages, and he depends heavily on references to international politics for reconstructing the *Sitz im Leben* of each unit. His arguments for dating the layers of tradition are well reasoned, though not all readers will be convinced by his tendency to see the widespread agricultural metaphors in the book as evidence of cultic liturgical activity (pp. 54, 57, 129).

Highlights of the book include frequent demonstrations of how the later community appropriated earlier traditions (pp. 67–69, 357–358, 457–459, 485–487), a brilliant discussion of the form-critical problems in 7:1–25, and an explanation of 9:7–10:14 that shows Sweeney's remarkable ability to understand the flow of the argument and the function of a unit in its context. Another noteworthy section is his treatment of chap. 38 (pp. 488–505), where he interacts extensively with C. Seitz. One disappointing feature is Sweeney's tendency to downplay the possibility of eschatological references (e.g. pp. 99, 196–211, 394–396), especially noticeable when he examines chap. 11 only in the context of 7th-century national and religious aspirations (pp. 210–211).

Even for those who may disagree with Sweeney's views on compositional history, this is an invaluable tool for understanding the compositional strategy of the book of Isaiah. Sweeney's meticulous work is to be highly commended and will stand the test of time as a first-class exegetical tool.

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Interpreting the Parables: A Hermeneutical Guide to Their Meaning. By John W. Sider. Studies in Contemporary Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, 283 pp., \$14.99 paper.

Sider, professor of English at Westmont College, divides his book into three parts. The first examines the concept of "analogy (the two things parables compare)" (p. 10); the second explores literary features within parables (diction, rhetorical structures, irony, plot, character, speeches, setting, point of view and tone); and the third addresses

the cultural milieu and literary genre of the parables. Parts 2 and 3 aim at determining “the limits of allegorical symbolism” (*contra* Jülicher’s denial of the same; cf. pp. 247–250) via an examination of internal and external features respectively (p. 89).

Sider addresses two very different audiences in his endeavor to approach Biblical studies and literary analysis from an interdisciplinary perspective. He takes an important initial step toward understanding the parables as literature and shows that there is more to be done in this area. Noting how limited Biblical scholars can be at evaluating critical literary theories, he calls attention to the need for interdisciplinary studies like his (p. 16). A citation of C. S. Lewis (apparently reacting to Bultmann) takes the British scholar out of context to strain this point (p. 211). The author is content not to address many historical-critical issues and focuses instead on “a sufficiently thorough literary analysis” of the parables (p. 25).

With *Interpreting the Parables*, Sider purposes to offer “a hermeneutical guide to the parables for college and seminary students” and also to challenge “conventional wisdom about the parables” by employing “methods more familiar in English literature classes than in courses on biblical hermeneutics” (p. 10). Without this statement one would think that Sider writes for more introductory students: He assumes little or no knowledge of literary theory in part 2 and does not really challenge or advance “conventional wisdom about the parables.” He at least begins with his purpose: The introduction, with the dropping of names like Frye and Derrida (pp. 15–16), seems to be aimed at professors rather than the students who might profit from the remainder of the book. He does draw attention to an important literary and hermeneutical observation meriting further study: The genre distinction between parable and allegory is not one that can be maintained consistently. But intending to be read by scholars and advanced students, he is significantly undermined by trying to do two very different things for his different audiences. There is not much wrong with what he writes: It is just too simple on the literary side and too heavily based on the observations of other Biblical scholars. The author’s contribution to the subject is probably better reflected in five earlier articles published from 1981 to 1985.

This book, however, has much to offer beginning students, especially with the (albeit too) frequent citations from other scholars (e.g. Jülicher, Jeremias, Gundry). Summaries are included after each part, including a glossary of literary terms and bibliography listing secondary literature (not including Pheme Perkins’ *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* or J. Dominic Crossan’s *Anchor Bible Dictionary* article) written in or translated into English. Despite its introductory level, Sider’s book should not be a fast read since the author wisely instructs students to take time to interact with the literary features of Scripture and the interpretations of others. While we would probably first order other texts for a seminar on Jesus’ parables, Sider’s book belongs in most college and seminary libraries. *Interpreting the Parables* can serve as a starting point for students having little background in literary theory and analysis, aid others writing papers on the parables in NT introduction classes, and perhaps complement other readings in English classes concerning the Bible as literature. All in all the book is a helpful reminder that a significant part of Jesus’ message belongs not to the rational west but to the contemplative east: The parables call us to reflection to search out the depths of his teaching.

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