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# Old Testament Literature Survey (1999–2001)

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*Philip H Eveson*

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The purpose of this survey is to draw people's attention to recent books which might be otherwise missed or where some guidance is needed. It makes no claim to be exhaustive. The previous OT survey in Spring 1999 should be consulted for a brief description of some of the evangelical commentary series.

## **Biblical Theology**

We begin with the latest addition to the IVP's series of 'New Dictionaries', the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* edited by **T.D. ALEXANDER** and **Brian S. ROSNER**, (IVP, 2000). It witnesses to the renewed interest in this branch of theology which has suffered considerably from the destructive criticism that dominated biblical scholarship during the 19th and 20th centuries. This substantial volume is divided into three sections. Part One provides an introduction to the whole subject of biblical theology. Among the items covered, is an article on the importance of biblical theology to preaching. The remainder of the work assumes the conservative evangelical position taken in this first section.

In Part Two the major sections of the biblical material are considered such as the Wisdom literature and the Prophetic Books. Instead of separate essays on the Pentateuch and the Former Prophets, there is one article dealing with Genesis to Kings. These introductory items are followed by a discussion of the theology of each book of the Bible. Over half the dictionary is contained in Part Three. It focuses on topics that 'are of central importance for an understanding of the unity of the biblical corpus'. The articles take us alphabetically from 'Abraham' to 'Worship'. There are cross-references to other topics of interest. For some subjects not individually covered, the reader is referred to articles in which the topic is discussed. Certainly this will remain an extremely useful tool for many years to come.

The most recent addition to the series, 'New Studies in Biblical Theology' is **Barry WEBB's** *Five Festal Garments* (Apollos, 2000). Its subtitle reads, *Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther*. All preachers and students of God's word should possess a copy of this book. In the series preface, the editor, D.A. Carson writes, 'This volume will not only help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better, and therefore the God of the Bible, but (I cheerfully predict) it will form the substance of not a few sermons delivered by preachers who for the first time dare expound the Five Scrolls.'

## **Preaching**

There are two books on preaching to be commended. They are included in this survey because they deal in some detail with a subject that is of considerable interest and concern to every evangelical preacher and teacher who wishes to be faithful to the word of God. **Graeme GOLDSWORTHY**, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian*

*Scripture* (IVP, 2000), seeks to apply biblical theology to expository preaching. While there are many books on preaching there are few which see the significance and role of biblical theology in the task of moving from the exegesis of Scripture to the preached message. In chapter one the author reminds us that evangelical preachers have an agenda. 'We want to see people converted and established in the Christian life on the surest foundation. – the word of God.' He is concerned to rectify a situation where people are encouraged to read and apply the Old Testament without any explicit Christian content. Old Testament characters are used by the preacher and teacher primarily, and sometimes exclusively, as examples of faith and behaviour for us to follow or, conversely, to avoid, and the gospel content is missing. Having moved away from the old methods of finding Christ in all the Scriptures which owed more to an over-productive imagination than to sound biblical principles, many no longer preach 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' from the whole Bible. This book presents a more satisfying approach to finding Christ in all the Scriptures. In the first part, Dr Goldworthy answers some basic questions about the Bible, biblical theology and preaching with a view to proclaiming Christ-centred sermons. The second part tackles in a practical way the application of biblical theology to preaching, by examining the various types of literature that make up the Bible. For instance, in dealing with the wisdom literature such as Proverbs, he warns against taking up an ethical or behavioural issue and divorcing it from the wider redemptive-historical context. We must 'not use the opportunity to put our hearers under the law with no gospel. Proverbs is as much about how one goes about gaining wisdom as it is about particular topics of wisdom.'

**Sidney GREIDANUS**, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1999), is an informative and practical textbook on this subject. He takes nothing for granted. Before considering the various methods, he emphasises the importance of preaching Christ and the necessity of preaching Christ from the OT. In doing so he covers the whole issue of what it means to preach Christ, the reasons for the lack of preaching from the OT as well as presenting the reasons for and the benefits of preaching Christ from the first part of the biblical canon. After surveying the history of the subject, he identifies seven acceptable ways of preaching Christ from the OT. He takes the reader step by step from the text to the 'Christocentric sermon'.

Although not a book about preaching, *The Ancient Love Song, Finding Christ in the Old Testament* by **Charles D. DREW** (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2000) is an example of how to preach Christ from the Old Testament using the benefits of the biblical theology approach. There are questions for discussion and reflection at the end of each chapter.

## **OT Introductions**

**David W. BAKER** and **Bill T. ARNOLD** have assembled a collection of essays by leading conservative evangelical authors which should prove very useful for those wishing to keep abreast of current thinking. *The Face of Old Testament Studies, A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, (Apollos/Baker, 1999) examines the state of OT scholarship over the last twenty years with judicious and fair comment. The essays cover all the main areas of OT study and the footnotes and author index will reveal the thorough nature of this survey. Professor VanGemeren of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School considers the work to be 'A magnificent contribution to the state of Old Testament scholarship'.

In *Re-thinking Genesis, the sources and authorship of the first book of the Pentateuch* by **Duane GARRETT** (Mentor, 2000), the author makes a fresh and interesting contribution to an old question, arguing that Moses made use of different source materials. Of this book Motyer writes, 'no reader will put it down unrewarded'. For an up-to date, clear and informative introduction to the making, transmission, and significance of the first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into any language, *Invitation To The Septuagint* by **Karen H. JOBES** and **Moises SILVA** (Paternoster, 2000) should prove helpful for beginners.

## OT Commentaries

Commentaries on Genesis continue unabated. The latest include **John E. HARTLEY**, *Genesis* in the **New International Biblical Commentary** series (Hendrickson/Paternoster, 2000). The series editor in his forward devalues commentaries which do not engage with recent scholarly works, applying the word *precritical* to them, a term demeaning to the scholarship of Calvin and those who followed him. It is a pity that Professor Hartley has not taken note of his editor and engaged with recent scholarship concerning the 'seed' theology in Genesis (see, for instance, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* by T.D. Alexander, Paternoster, 1995). According to Hartley neither the author nor readers of the OT period would have seen anything more in Genesis 3:15 than God giving 'humans the hope of mastering frightful serpents'. **Bill T. ARNOLD**, *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (Baker, 1998) is not a detailed commentary, but an introduction that interprets Genesis against the background of the Ancient Near Eastern world. It is full of diagrams and illustrations and is user-friendly.

After a period which has seen little in the way of books on Exodus, it is good to introduce four commentaries from evangelical authors. **John D. CURRID**'s *Exodus, Vol.1 Chapters 1-18* (Evangelical Press, 2000) is the first OT volume in the **EP Study Commentary** series. Currid's research in Egyptology is reflected in his comments and notes. Both this and the **Mentor Commentary** on *Exodus* by **John L. MACKAY**, (Christian Focus, 2001) explain and apply the text in a careful and God-honouring way. There is very little to choose between them, except that the second part of Currid's work is not yet available. Both are well-researched and readable productions that open up this second book of Moses. While Mackay adopts 'on balance' a 15th century date for the exodus, Currid considers it 'an open question', although his sympathies seem to lie with a 13th century date. **Peter ENNS** has produced a fine piece of work in the **NIV Application Commentary** series, (Zondervan, 2000). It follows the format of the series by dividing each section of material into three parts: the Original Meaning, Bridging Contexts, and Contemporary Significance. There are excellent comments on the text, the biblical theological significance of each section is brought out and the application is generally of a high standard. An annotated bibliography adds to the usefulness of this commentary. In the **Welwyn Commentary Series**, **Michael BENTLEY**'s *Travelling Homeward, Exodus simply explained* (Evangelical Press, 1999) expounds the text with plenty of illustrations and down-to-earth application, particularly of a moral nature. It is not so clear in coming to terms with the theological significance and purpose of the book.

New in the **Focus on the Bible** series is **Dale Ralph DAVIS**' *1 Samuel, Looking on the Heart*, (Christian Focus, 2000), which brings together two books previously

published by Baker in 1988 and 1996. Alec Motyer describes it as 'A great feast of biblical truth made so digestible, garnished with so many apt illustrations.' *2 Samuel, Out of every adversity*, was published in 1999. **Roger ELLSWORTH** has made a further contribution to the **Welwyn** series with his *From Glory to Ruin, 1 Kings simply explained* (Evangelical Press, 2000). The **Crossway Classic Commentaries** series has recently added two works by **John CALVIN**, *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Crossways, 2000). They are condensed and modernised to introduce more readers to this prince of commentators.

The wisdom literature of the OT is receiving more attention these days. It is good to see in print again **William Henry GREEN**, *Conflict and Triumph, The Argument of the Book of Job Unfolded* (Banner of Truth, 1999). It is not a word by word commentary on the text but an extremely valuable summary of the whole book by one of old Princeton's great biblical scholars.

Good commentaries on Proverbs are thin on the ground. All who are looking for a trusty guide in their study of this wisdom book will be much encouraged by **Eric LANE**'s book, *Proverbs, Everyday Wisdom for Everyone*, in the **Focus on the Bible** series (Christian Focus, 2000). Each verse is considered in a clear and user-friendly way and at the end of the commentary there is a comprehensive thematic index of the topics covered. There is application at the end of each chapter, often in the form of questions with biblical references. The author takes account of the personification of wisdom and folly in terms of the good and bad (or 'strange') woman respectively, but could have developed the theme in a more thorough-going way. Of the two more technical commentaries recently published, **Roland E. MURPHY**'s work on *Proverbs* in the **Word Biblical Commentary** series, No. 22 (Nelson, 1998) is much to be preferred to **Richard J. CLIFFORD**'s *Proverbs*, in the **Old Testament Library** series (Westminster/John Knox, 1999). There are detailed comments on each section of the text with an explanation which seeks to capture its theological import. **Roland MURPHY** is also responsible for the briefer comments on Proverbs in the **New International Biblical Commentary** series, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Hendrickson/Paternoster, 1999). **Elizabeth HUWILER** deals with the other two biblical books. In *Ecclesiastes* there is not enough comment on key texts, such as 12:9-14. *Song of Songs* is seen as a unified work about young lovers and their dreams. The reader will be left wondering whether the book encourages sex before marriage. Furthermore, at no time are we led to consider the love between the Lord and his people. Doubt is placed on Solomonic authorship while too much is made of what is described as the 'likely hypothesis' of female authorship.

**Michael V. FOX**, in *A Time to Tear Down & A Time to Build Up, A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*, (Eerdmans, 1999), is a work of great erudition and insight. It is a revision of his 1987 study *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. He gives more attention than he did previously to the Preacher's constructive thought and takes the opportunity to respond to recent scholarly literature. Unlike Longman in his commentary on *Ecclesiastes* in the NICOT series (see review in Spring 1999), Fox sees less of a contrast between the message of the Preacher and the message of the author of *Ecclesiastes*. He dismisses too readily *Fredericks*' understanding of 'vanity' as 'ephemerality' and in its place argues for the meaning 'absurd' or 'senseless'.

**Tremper LONGMAN III**'s contribution to **The NIV Application Commentary** series, (1999, Zondervan) on *Daniel*, brings out the meaning and contemporary significance of the book but one will need to go to Young and Baldwin for a more detailed treatment of the text. As he considers wisdom in Daniel he does not hesitate to present his own interpretation of Ecclesiastes.

## **OT sermons**

*Just Grace* is a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments by **R.T. KENDALL** (SPCK, 2000), with a helpful forward by Terry Virgo. Kendall introduces the sermons by telling us of his experience at Oxford as he began studying the Puritans. One gets the feeling that the author is embarrassed to mention the Commandments in Christian circles, whereas the New Testament is not diffident in referring to them. We close this survey by referring to two books published by Bryntirion Press in 1999. The first brings together sermons preached by **D. Martyn LLOYD-JONES** which have been given the title, *Let everybody praise the Lord, An exposition of Psalm 107*. These evangelistic sermons show the profound difference between false and true religion and how true Christianity inevitably leads to praising God from a sincere and grateful heart. Another gripping and challenging series of evangelistic sermons this time by **Graham HARRISON**, entitled *Beginning at the Beginning, Sermons from the Book of Genesis*, is also warmly recommended.

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*Philip Eveson is the Principal of the London Theological Seminary and Director of Studies of the John Owen Centre.*

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To his eternal glory, God does not deal with his covenant people strictly on the basis of what they deserve. He figures into his moral equation the merit of his crucified Son and he gives us good things we do not deserve. And that means one thing for us who bear his name. Discipline may be necessary but it is never final. We may ruin our lives; we may bungle the stewardship of God's cause in our generation. But God is the greatest junk dealer in the universe. He deals in secondhand merchandise. In his wisdom and mercy, he takes the damaged goods of our lives and he restores us. No one else can do this. No one else cares enough to try. All our hope lies in God. And this vision of God our Restorer fills the people of God with hope, even as they remain for new under discipline. God will restore our fortunes. But there is still more.

Raymond Orland in *Revival Sent From God*, commenting on Psalm 126

So what is the proof that the Spirit is being poured out on us? The voice of the church rings with prophetic clarity. The people of God are no longer passive, intimidated, unresponsive, uncertain. They are no longer preoccupied with self-convenience, comfort. They are no longer complaining, whining, griping. Instead, they become outspoken in God's praises and gospel truth, 'declaring the wonders of God' (Acts 2:11). The Spirit-drenched people of God 'speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. [They] sing and make music in [their] heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Eph. 5:19-20). And the unbeliever, observing a church eloquent with prophetic power, 'Will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare, So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is ready among you"' (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

Raymond Orland in *Revival Sent From God*, commenting on Joel 2:28-29

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