

# Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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## *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*

John W. Rogerson, Judith Lieu (eds.)

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### SUMMARY

This substantial collection of essays provides a good survey to current Biblical Studies. The forty-five essays of varying length cover the recent history of Biblical Studies, the impact of other historical disciplines, the languages, translation and textual transmission of the Bible, historical background of the Bible and the institutions as well as the genres of both Testaments, the composition of the Bible, methods in Biblical Studies as well as the theology and authority of the Bible. The arrangement of the articles as well as the focus of the volume raises a number of interesting issues for evangelical readers.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese substanzielle Artikelsammlung bietet einen guten Überblick über die gegenwärtige biblische Forschung. Die 45 Artikel von unterschiedlicher Länge decken die neuere Geschichte der Bibelwissenschaften, den Einfluss anderer historischer Disziplinen, die Sprachen, Übersetzungen und Textüberlieferung der Bibel, den historischen Hintergrund der Bibel und der Institutionen ebenso ab wie die Gattungen beider Testamente, die Komposition der Bibel, Methoden in der Erforschung der Bibel sowie die Theologie und Autorität der Bibel. Die Anordnung der Artikel wie auch der Fokus des Bandes werfen für evangelikale Leser eine Reihe von interessanten Fragen auf.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cette collection d'articles substantielle constitue un bon manuel présentant l'état actuel de la recherche sur la Bible. Au nombre de quarante-cinq, de longueur variable, ils traitent de l'histoire récente de l'étude de la Bible, de la portée d'autres disciplines historiques, des langues bibliques, de la traduction et de la transmission des textes, de l'arrière-plan historique, des institutions, ainsi que des genres littéraires des deux Testaments, de la rédaction de la Bible, des méthodes dans les sciences bibliques, ou encore de la théologie et de l'autorité de la Bible. L'agencement des articles et le centre d'intérêt de l'ouvrage soulèvent diverses questions intéressantes pour les lecteurs évangéliques.

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The present exhaustive volume offers an up-to-date comprehensive survey of Biblical studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Each of the articles is written by a specialist in the area and includes a selected bibliography. Most of the authors come from Great Britain; there are some North Americans and four Germans. Accord-

ing to the editors of this volume, biblical studies

is a collection of various and in some cases independent, disciplines clustering around a collection of texts known as the Bible whose precise limits... are still a matter of disagreement among various branches of the Christian churches.... No comparable collection of texts has been subjected to such sustained critical examination and elucidation over such a long period of time. The present *Handbook* aims to indicate to readers the current state of scholarship associated with the Bible (preface).

Part one, entitled *On the Discipline* starts with a survey of the history of the discipline of Biblical Studies in the last seventy years. J. W. Rogerson writes on the Old Testament (5-26), R. Morgan on New Testament research (27-49, continuity, transition, innovation). Section two of this part is devoted to the impact of other historical disciplines upon biblical scholarship (contributions from other disciplines appear in the part on methods in biblical studies): J. R. Bartlett writes on archaeology (53-73, including a brief section on archaeology and the Herodian period; New Testament sites outside of Palestine and their exploration is not treated), the Assyriologist W. G. Lambert on "Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Mesopotamia" (74-88), the Egyptologist K. Kitchen on "Ancient Near Eastern Studies: Egypt" (89-98) and P. Davies on "Qumran Studies" (99-107), P. Richardson on the study of the Greco-Roman world (108-19) and C. Hezser on "Diaspora and Rabbinic Judaism" (120-32, the significance of the Torah in ancient Judaism, the Greco-Roman cultural context, literary analogies, institutions and offices, prayer and liturgy, the question of contacts and influence).

Part two covers *Languages, Translation, and Textual Transmission of the Bible*. It includes J. Elwode on "Language and Translation of the Old Testament" (135-58), M. A. Knibb on "Language, Translation, Versions, and Text of the Apocrypha" (159-83), S. E. Porter on "Language and Translation of the New Testament" (184-210), G. J. Norton on "Ancient Versions and Textual Transmission of the Old Testament" (211-236) and J. N. Birdsall on "Textual Transmission and Versions of the New Testament" (237-49).

Part three, *Historical and Social Study of the Bible*, has three sub-sections. "Background and context" includes "Introduction: General Problems of Studying the Text of the Bible in order to Reconstruct History and Social Background" by K. W. Whitelam (255-67), "Israel to the End of the Persian Period: History, Social, Political, and Economic Background" by J. W. Rogerson (268-84), "Israel from the Rise of Hellenism to 70 CE" by L. L. Grabbe (285-300) and "The Life and Teaching of Jesus and the Rise of Christianity" by C. A. Evans (301-16).



Subsection two examines the "Institutions of the Old and New Testaments". R. Hayward examines "Priesthood, Temple(s), and Sacrifice" (319-50), G. Wenham "Law in the Old Testament" (351-61), L. L. Grabbe "Scribes and Synagogues" (362-71), J. M. Lieu, "Movements" (372-81, various early Jewish groups). Section three surveys "Genres of the Old and New Testaments". D. W. Rooke looks at prophecy (385-96), P. Davies at apocalyptic (397-408), K. J. Dell at wisdom (409-19), E. S. Gruen at novella (420-31), R. A. Burridge at gospels (432-44) and J. M. Lieu at letters (445-56).

Part four, *The Composition of the Bible*, consists of R. G. Kratz' essay on "The Growth of the Old Testament" (459-88), A. Salvesen on "The Growth of the Apocrypha" (489-517), J. M. Court on "The Growth of the New Testament" (518-43) and A. Millard on "Authors, Books, and Readers in the Ancient World" (544-64, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Levant, NT times). The origin and nature of the canon of the Bible is discussed in the part *The authority of the Bible*.

Part five covers *Methods in Biblical Scholarship*. J. R. Bartlett describes archaeology (567-78), A. van der Kooij textual criticism (579-90), J. P. Floss form, source, and redaction criticism (591-614), M. M. Mitchell rhetorical and new literary criticism (615-33), M.-T. Wacker feminist criticism and related aspects (634-54) and C. Rowland social, political, and ideological criticism (655-71). There are no separate essays on historical criticism, on theological readings of biblical texts or readings that are inspired by psychological insights.

The next part, *The Interpretation of the Bible*, is actually devoted to the theology of the Bible and its study (raising interesting questions on the relationship between interpretation and theology). Old Testament theology is treated in one article only (W. Brueggemann, 675-97; would the theology of the Law, the historical writings, the prophetic literature and wisdom literature not have deserved articles of their own?) as well as one article on all of New Testament theology (J. D. G. Dunn, 698-715, here one might ask the same question). Should there have been separate articles on the presuppositions and methods of biblical theology and on the unity and diversity in the theology of the Bible? B. Janowski covers "Biblical Theology" (716-31) and E. W. Davies "The Bible in Ethics" (732-53). Likewise attempts to describe the theology of the whole Bible such as B. Childs or C. Scobie may have called for a separate article. Also in this part appears J. Magonet's essay on "Jewish Interpretation of the Bible" (754-74, would an article on Christian interpretation of the Bible be superfluous?).

The final part deals with The Authority of the Bible. L. M. McDonald looks at the canon (777-809) and H. A. Harris at "Fundamentalism(s)" in biblical study and much beyond (810-40, there is relatively little on hermeneutical presuppositions and interpretation of Biblical texts). Is this one of the major problems in Christian biblical studies? Is a dogmatic mindset restricted to one side of the range of positions or rather a danger all bibli-

cal scholars are prone to fall prey to? J. W. Rogerson discusses the relationship between historical criticism and the authority of the Bible (841-59). Indexes of subjects and names (860-82) and of references (883-96) round off this well produced volume.

A review cannot assess each article, any selection would be subjective. In addition to the questions raised above, the outline of the volume and the selection of the authors invite some reflection. A number of the essays have been written by conservative or evangelical scholars (e. g. Evans, Millard, Wenham). This is indicative of the welcome fact that there are several highly qualified evangelical biblical scholars who made competent contributions over many years and are well recognised in their field. While many people from non-Western countries have made contributions to "Western Biblical Studies", one wonders whether a volume such as this should have also included authors from this context or at least an article surveying what is happening outside of Western biblical studies in scholarly discussions and how such approaches and insights can be mutually enriching. Obviously it is interesting to speculate what such a volume might look like at the end of the century.

With all its approaches and advances biblical scholarship as described here (a representative survey of the current state of *academic* biblical studies!), it has apparently little to offer for a *theological* interpretation of biblical texts in the context of faith and of the church. While it can warn us of the dangers of fundamentalism, it has little to offer itself. How do we reach sound applications from biblical texts? The editors ask in their preface whether Biblical Studies is "a watered-down version of theology with the doctrinal parts omitted". The volume seems to affirm this view. This is an area where evangelical scholars need to and can make a contribution that will be recognised beyond the confines of their own camp. For some suggestions see I. H. Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

I want to close with an observation of the editors:

... it will be noticeable that English-speaking contributors from North America seem to read a different set of books from those in Britain, while contributors from Germany concentrate primarily on German-speaking scholarship. These differences are representative of the state of scholarship, which has become so technical and specialized that even scholars working in a comparatively small area cannot hope to master the secondary literature produced by experts working in different countries and languages. However... the diversity that becomes apparent in the Handbook is a reliable guide to the present state of Biblical Studies (Preface).

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