

Oswaldo Padilla. *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022. 284pp. + 29pp. (front matter).

One of the first offerings of the fledgling Tyndale Commentary series was the 1957 volume on the Pastorals, written by Donald Guthrie, who revised his work in 1990.¹ Through his commentary work, his popular *New Testament Introduction*, and other writings, Guthrie became well known for defending the authenticity of the letters against their detractors.² Now, after sixty-five years of Guthrie's name gracing the TNTC Pastorals volume, Oswaldo Padilla, professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, has provided a new edition, his first foray into commentary writing.³ His volume is evangelical and egalitarian in its stance, robust for the series in which it appears, and lucid in its style.

Padilla aims to contribute to the understanding of the Pastorals through significant interaction with primary source material and serious theologizing in conversation with Christian dogmatics (x). Given the brevity of the commentary, he largely accomplishes his goals with a work that is well researched and often insightful in its own right, not merely the mediation of larger commentaries for a popular audience. The bibliography is impressive, including French and German works that inform the commentary throughout. Padilla engages scholarship on the letters well overall, including newer contributions by Gerald Bray, Jens Herzer, Chris Hoklotubbe, Lyn Kidson, Jermo van Nes, and Robert Yarbrough, though his complete omission of William Mounce's WBC volume is surprising. He speaks of well-known Pastorals scholars Spicq, Marshall, Towner, Johnson, Oberlinner, and (especially) Malherbe as influential for his work (ix).

Padilla believes the Pastorals are Pauline and does so fundamentally because of the testimony of Scripture itself (2, 10). He expands this understanding with five standard reasons supporting authenticity (1–16): (1) Scripture sees Paul as author. (2) The early church rejected false writings. (3) The early church accepted the Pastorals as Pauline. (4) Arguments for pseudonymity are flawed. (5) The consensus for pseudonymity seems unduly influenced by academic and social pressures (a point elevated by Luke Timothy Johnson, and one still well worth pressing). Padilla's comments on 1 Timothy are refreshing: "The words of Paul in this letter are the written word of God and must be taken as possessing the authority of God himself. To read the letter otherwise is to read against the grain of the document, thereby compromising the reader's potential understanding of it" (47). In the commentary, he points out instances of such potential interpretative compromise, as when Paul's self-portrait in 1 Timothy 1:12–17 is read as pseudonymous (65). He dates 2 Timothy to the mid-60s but leaves open the time of composition for 1 Timothy and Titus.

¹ Steve Motyer, "Donald Guthrie," in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 287–98.

² Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles and the Mind of Paul* (London: Tyndale, 1955); *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 607–59; "Timothy and Titus, Epistles to," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, 3rd ed. (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1996), 1189–92.

³ Padilla has published *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography*, SNTSMS 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016). He has commentaries on James (BECNT) and Matthew (Proclamation) in preparation.

Interestingly, Padilla confronts the growing trend of discarding the title “Pastoral Epistles.”⁴ While recognizing benefits of considering each writing separately, Padilla argues that setting aside this collective designation focuses too narrowly on the letters’ historical circumstances and not enough on their theological unity. Padilla’s corrective offers helpful nuance, but he may *overcorrect* at times in his corpus reading. For instance, his introduction seems to conflate the three letters’ data on their opponents. While acknowledging that the particulars of the false teaching in view are “difficult to know with exactness” and “unclear,” and with only one citation from Titus in the discussion, Padilla proposes that the “false teaching was broadly similar in the situations presented in all three letters” (24–25) and proceeds accordingly, suggesting that the opponents were Jewish Christians with ascetic tendencies.⁵ And while the discussion of theological themes in the letters collectively (God, salvation, the Christian life, the church) is salutary, more attention to the thematic profile of each letter would have been welcome.

Padilla’s labors in the commentary proper are ambitious and assiduous. Most remarkable is its interaction with Greco-Roman moral philosophers, whether their general practices and vocabulary, or matters connected with a specific school (Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans) or figure (e.g., Seneca, Epictetus). Taking his cue from the work of Abraham Malherbe, Padilla does not intend merely to provide points of comparison and contrast to Paul. Instead, he understands Paul to be purposefully adopting and adapting certain language and ideas which would have resonated with his hearers (63). Padilla’s work here is helpful both for better understanding the worldview common in Paul’s day and for considering some of the letters’ atypical vocabulary, though the commentary’s unrelenting attention to Greco-Roman philosophical connections seems at times overzealous.

The commentary work helpfully advances earlier editions by dividing the analysis of each textual unit into discussion of context, content, and theology. Padilla offers not only exegesis of the text but also some degree of interaction with theologians ranging from Calvin to Bavinck to Barth. His exegesis is grounded firmly in the Greek text, though the commentary is accessible for those without knowledge of the language. Padilla addresses text-critical matters, a *desideratum* in some commentaries twice the size, and provides occasional forays into pastoral and liturgical application. In what follows, to provide a sense of Padilla’s approach to the letters, I will note some of his interpretive choices in passages typically of interest.

A new commentary on the Pastorals is doubtless often first opened to 1 Timothy 2:11–14, and it is instructive to observe the movement in the Tyndale series’ treatment of this *crux interpretum*. Guthrie in 1957 asserted that “the teaching of Christian doctrine . . . is confined by Paul to the male sex” and spoke of “the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray,” though noting that “there may have been local reasons for this prohibition of which we know nothing.”⁶ Guthrie’s 1990 revision shifted his language: “The teaching of Christian doctrine *seems to be* confined by Paul to the male sex,”

⁴ This trend was given impetus in Philip Towner’s 2006 NICNT commentary, accordingly titled *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*.

⁵ For a preferable methodological approach, consult Dillon Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy*, BBRSup 15 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

⁶ *Pastoral Epistles*, 1st ed., 76.

but “it may be possible to regard verse 12 as a relative rather than absolute prohibition. . . . Was Paul, in fact, saying that no woman should teach without first taking time to learn . . . ?”⁷ In the third edition, Padilla now states categorically, “Paul’s prohibition of women teaching men in the congregations at Ephesus was based on a problem of *character* not gender. . . . This text should not be the basis for the denial of women’s ordination” (95–96, emphasis original).

Padilla’s interpretation affirms the standard egalitarian argument that *authenteō* (“exercise authority,” ESV) in 1 Timothy 2:12 is “without question . . . pejorative” (94). That is, Paul sees the problem not merely as women exercising the authority over men that is associated with teaching the congregation but “instruct[ing] the men in a ‘heavy-handed,’ domineering and disrespectful fashion” (94). Additionally, the false teaching had made inroads especially among the church’s women, and their propagation of it needed to be halted (26, 86, 192, 195–97, 250). Padilla argues that Paul appeals to Genesis not to provide a rationale for excluding women from public teaching altogether, but to illustrate what happens when women seek to dominate the men who are appointed to teach them (95). The debate is too involved to engage in detail here, but two observations may be made. (1) Certain points that Padilla makes to support his understanding—Paul’s call for womanly *sōphrosynē* (“self-control,” ESV) that frames the passage (2:9, 15), the need for a good testimony among outsiders, Eve’s creation as Adam’s helper, and the circumstances of the Fall as an instructive illustration—seem as if they would support a complementarian understanding of the passage equally well, or even better. (2) Because Padilla’s case rests heavily upon the definition of *authenteō*, he would have done well to engage the most recent edition of the key complementarian volume on the passage, edited by Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner.⁸ There, Köstenberger responds to the sort of objection Padilla raises against his work on *authenteō*, and Al Wolters provides his most recent treatment of the term, finding it *non-pejorative*.

Interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15 vary enough that there may be no “majority position,” strictly speaking, but Padilla’s understanding is not uncommon. He understands *sōzō* (“saved,” ESV) as deliverance from sin and explains, “If the women at Ephesus are to be saved, they need to reject the pattern of women who rejected the feminine cardinal virtue *sōphrosyne*.” Instead, Christian women should “follow the pattern that is ‘proper for women who profess reverence for God’ (v. 10), which includes a virtuous home life, with the bearing of children” (96).

In 1 Timothy 3, Padilla finds a good deal of overlap between deacons and overseers, arguing that “holding the mystery of the faith” (v. 9; cf. Titus 1:9) parallels “able to teach” (v. 2) and supports an understanding of the office of deacon that involves a teaching ministry—an interpretation that seems difficult to sustain. He suggests that “the overseers *tended* to concentrate on teaching and pastoral care, while the deacons *tended* to concentrate more on assistance to the overseers and congregation. But their respective functions were not as sealed off from one another as is often thought” (109, emphasis original). Padilla sees the “women” of 3:11 as female deacons, who as such were involved in the

⁷ *Pastoral Epistles*, 2nd ed., 86, 90 (emphasis added).

⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016). In the interest of full disclosure, note that I assisted in the preparation of this volume.

teaching ministry of the church (39, 107). His view of the two offices and the role of women in the church leads him to assert, “The leaders in the churches must be godly men and women who have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach the Scriptures competently and care pastorally for the congregation, similarly to the way parents care for their children” (110). In response, while it is true that older men and women are described in 5:1–2 in a way that suggests a general fatherly and motherly role in the church, it is noteworthy that 3:1–7 clearly envisions males as overseers.⁹ Following the work of Andrew Clarke, Padilla also distinguishes elders as church leaders generally (not officeholders) from the overseer (typically one of the elders) as filling a formal office (239).

Padilla rightly doubts that 1 Timothy 5 describes an order of widows (and, oddly, omits discussion of 5:7–8) but understands Paul simply to address a case of limited resources in the church. Unusually, though, while he understands the “one-woman man” of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 to mean a man who is faithful to his wife (106, 242), he interprets the “one-man woman” in 1 Timothy 5:9 more specifically as an *univira*, a widow who had vowed not to remarry and was thus particularly vulnerable financially. He finds the disputed verse 12 to envision young widows apostatizing in marrying unbelievers, rather than renege on an initial vow of service (129–30).

Padilla frames his discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16–17 in terms of an “orthodox and evangelical understanding of inspiration” against “a liberal view of the Bible” (209), emphasizing the “divine authority” resulting from inspiration (207). He does not mention inerrancy as a corollary of 2 Timothy 3:16 in his commentary discussion and elsewhere has noted, “While, to be sure, the assertion of the God-breathed nature of Scripture provides it with considerable trustworthiness, it is a caricature to say that the text is directly dealing with ‘the pristine character of the autographs.’”¹⁰ In describing God speaking through Scripture, Padilla quotes without comment both Calvin and Barth in the same breath (206–7), apparently seeing more continuity between their views than is warranted.¹¹

The elder’s children in Titus 1:6 as *pistos* are not understood to be “trustworthy” but “believers.” Padilla leans on the Greco-Roman understanding that children in a household normally adopted the religion of their father, arguing that an elder’s children not doing so would have bespoken his incompetence and hindered gospel ministry. Padilla allows that a different cultural understanding, as in the West today, would modify the requirement.

Padilla’s volume has many strengths, not least its unapologetic embrace of Pauline authorship and engagement of the Greco-Roman context. I often found myself nodding along with and gaining insight from Padilla’s clear textual exposition. Those who read the Pastorals from an egalitarian stance

⁹ For a view similar to Padilla’s in terms of deacon authority, but which maintains the teaching office as limited to overseers and for males only, see Benjamin Merkle, “The Authority of Deacons in Pauline Churches,” *JETS* 64, vol. 2 (2021): 309–25.

¹⁰ Osvaldo Padilla, “Postconservative Theologians and Scriptural Authority,” in D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 654. This essay provides a fuller discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16 in response to Stanley Grenz.

¹¹ The discontinuity is demonstrated in, e.g., David Gibson, “The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture,” in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 277–82. The content of Padilla’s 2017 ETS session, “Postliberals and Inerrancy: Do They Point the Way Forward?,” suggests more sympathy with Barth’s understanding of inspiration than many conservative interpreters would be comfortable with.

will find the work to be a helpful and robust summary treatment of the letters. Padilla's interpretive decisions, however, place the volume into a niche that will make it less likely an acquisition for complementarian interpreters: those looking for a robust egalitarian reading of the Pastorals as a foil will want something more thorough, while pastors and scholars looking for a concise and informed exposition of the text will find a good deal to appreciate, but not as useful a work as they might desire.

Chuck J. Bumgardner

Biblical Worldview Specialist | BJU Press

Craig G. Bartholomew. *The Old Testament and God. Old Testament Origins and the Question of God. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022. 527pp. + 30pp. (front matter) + 50pp. (back matter).*

Bartholomew proposes to do in this book, and in the volumes that follow in the series, what N. T. Wright did in his Christian Origins and the Question of God series. Specifically, Bartholomew wants to move OT beyond the paradigms of historical criticism and postmodernism. He observes, “Especially after the postmodern turn, it is fine in mainstream OT studies to be a naturalist, a Marxist, a new historicist, a Foucauldian, a Derridean, an exponent of queer and transgender theory, a postcolonialist and so on, but heaven forbid one should be a theist, let alone a full-blown Christian theist” (xviii). And yet, Bartholomew does not think it possible to move back to a pre-critical approach to OT studies. For instance, he is ambivalent about when and how the exodus and conquest took place (5n8) or when Genesis 10 is to be dated (6, n. 12).

The book divides into four parts, which Bartholomew helpfully summarizes in the Introduction (xxvii):

- Part 1 seeks to answer the question: “What should we do with the Old Testament?”
- Part 2 develops a range of tools for answering this question from a critical realist perspective.
- Part 3 examines the major world views of the Ancient Near East against which background we read the Old Testament.
- Part 4 brings all this to bear on the central character of the OT, YHWH, the God of Israel.

Bartholomew seeks to begin each part inductively—his work is a species of biblical theology—and then move into debated areas of OT studies, epistemology, ancient Near East (ANE) worldviews, and theology. For instance, Bartholomew begins the book with an examination of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 from which he concludes that the OT must be studied along *historical*, *literary*, and *theological* lines. Holding these three dimensions together positions him against historical criticism, which divides books into redactional layers rather than engaging in literary readings, and against postmodernism, which dispenses with history and reads “against the grain” of the Bible’s own theology (79).

If part 1 introduces the reader to the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the OT, part 2 investigates each dimension more deeply, giving a chapter to each. Before these investigations take place, however, Bartholomew devotes a chapter to epistemology. Like Wright, he proposes that Christians adopt a *critical realist* framework. The *critical* points back to Kant and his recognition “that the knower influences the results of the knowing process,” and the *realism* indicates that, unlike in Kant’s thought, “we can know [the world] as it is” (93). An important concept that Bartholomew introduces at this point is *stratification*, which means that there can be “multiple accounts of the same things or events” that are all true (95). He gives an example of the analyses that a physicist, historian, builder, detective, ecologist, poet, and resident would give of a house that has burned down. Each one could give different, but entirely true, accounts of what happened. In contrast to postmodernism, however, critical realism recognizes that some accounts may be false and contradictory.

In part 3, Bartholomew examines the worldview of ANE people groups. As a preliminary to this survey, he must address the issue of mythology. Bartholomew thinks that ANE myths are not just

metaphors: ANE peoples believed in the gods that their myths spoke of. And yet myth is not to be defined so broadly that it includes all worldviews. Thus, the OT is not a mythological book but a book that stands opposed to myths.

After surveying the worldviews of the Sumerians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Arameans, Phoenicians, Canaanites, and Persians, Bartholomew picks up the phrase “the Mosaic distinction” to highlight the great difference between Israel and the surrounding nations in the matter of God and the gods. Among themselves, the various polytheistic cultures could “translate” between their different systems. Different cultures may have had different sun gods, for instance; but both had sun gods. With Israel, however, there was the true God, and all other gods were idols. This “Mosaic distinction” is fundamental, being rooted in Israel’s central narrative, the exodus. However, Spinoza, the founder of historical critical approaches to the Bible, equated God and nature. He rejected “the Mosaic distinction.” Historical criticism is therefore not “simply . . . the triumph of neutral, objective science” but part of a worldview that is alien to the worldview of the OT and more of a piece with the polytheistic ANE worldviews that surrounded Israel (372).

The final section of the book is a single, lengthy chapter that positively presents the God of the OT. Bartholomew begins with the OT’s presentation of God as the *living God*, noting that this presentation of God distinguishes him from dying and rising gods like Baal as well as from idols. It also identifies God as one who acts. Bartholomew recognizes that the OT’s descriptions of God’s actions, and even its description of him as living, are anthropomorphic. He cautions, however, against the classical theism of Maimonides and Aquinas, which views such language as unworthy of God. He argues that since humans are made in God’s image and since God reveals himself through his actions, we come to truly know God through anthropomorphic language rather than through “philosophical speculation” (402).

Drawing on Colin Gunton and Karl Barth, Bartholomew critiques even post-Reformation classical theology for not recognizing sufficiently that their abstract language about God is metaphorical. The danger is that abstract language actually distances interpreters from God’s own self-description. Bartholomew argues that “to think of God mainly in terms of intellect,” as Thomas does, “results in a conception of God at odds with the biblical rendition of God according to which God is mainly known *through his particular acts in history*” (404). He further argues, “Classical theism tends to restrict its focus to cosmology rather than attending to the divine economy. . . . According to Gunton, such an approach is in danger of collapsing into Spinoza’s pantheism or Kant’s idealism. If the negative way is pushed, one ends up with the unknowable God of Kant” (405). Bartholomew observes that Spinoza and Kant (both of whom were foundational figures for the historical critics) rejected the historical narratives of Scripture because they were incompatible with their vision of god. Part of the problem, Bartholomew avers, is that Aristotle promoted the view that “metaphorical language can always be replaced with literal language” (407). Thus, the goal of some theologians is to purge their theological talk of metaphor—which puts them at odds with the Bible’s speech about God. He notes that more recent linguistic studies have argued that metaphors are inescapable in all language and not something that hinders clear understanding.

This groundwork laid, Bartholomew looks at metaphors used to identify YHWH, the name YHWH itself, and the importance of divine action in the OT. He concludes the book by arguing for the reality of divine revelation and the failure of historical criticism.

Bartholomew's volume makes many significant contributions, not least his survey of how historical, literary, and theological readings of the OT are to be pursued. His defense of the term *Old Testament* and its interpretational relationship with the new are helpful, as is his definition and defense of worldview. Likewise, his treatment of ANE worldviews rightly maintains the "Mosaic distinction" that is blurred in many comparative studies, even from evangelicals. Most worthwhile of all was the sustained critique of historical criticism. Bartholomew rightly recognizes that historical criticism is not a neutral method but part of a worldview at odds with the worldview of the Bible itself. Bartholomew does not always reject the conclusions of historical criticism, however (note his comments above about not returning to pre-critical interpretation of Scripture), and his conversation partners are not conservative evangelical scholars. This means that some of his strong rhetoric against historical criticism loses some of its punch in practice.

A similar dynamic is at work in Bartholomew's discussion of God. He rightly worries that certain versions of classical theism make God inert and unknowable, and he rightly asserts that the Bible presents God as one who speaks and acts. He is correct to resist the impulse to strip all metaphorical language from theological talk about God, since God has chosen to reveal himself in such language. He seems to think that Colin Gunton provides the way forward, however, and he fails to interact with the systematic theologians involved in the current renaissance of classical theism. These theologians rightly warn against Gunton's social trinitarianism, and the best of them seek to root their classical theism in Scripture. Yet some within this movement need the cautions that Bartholomew raises. Bartholomew has a remarkably wide skill set, being well-versed in OT biblical studies, hermeneutics, philosophy, and Christian worldview in the Kuyperian and Dooyeweerdian tradition. If, however, he has had the same deep engagement with post-Reformation scholastic theology and its heirs, it is not evident in this volume at the key point where engaging that theology was most important.

In sum, Bartholomew's inaugural volume in the *Old Testament Origins and the Question of God* series does an excellent job of surveying and critiquing the current state of OT scholarship. Many of his proposals are also valuable. Bartholomew is not always a sure guide, however, and his work would have been strengthened by more interaction with post-Reformation orthodox theology and with conservative scholars.

Brian C. Collins

Biblical Worldview Lead Specialist | BJU Press

Lewis and Sarah Allen. *Resilient Faith: Learning to Rely on Jesus in the Struggles of Life*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 216pp. + 10pp. (back matter).

In a society where reported mental health struggles are skyrocketing and the definition for “adult” continues to be pushed further and further down the age continuum, Lewis and Sarah Allen give us a refreshing and practical book that presses into the question, “How can a believer have resilient faith?” Resilience, “an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change,” is a diminishing character quality in our world today.¹ The Allens (husband and wife) wrote this book specifically targeting young adults, though the material will be helpful for any believer. I think it will be particularly useful for new Christians or for those who have not had much personal discipleship. The book’s purpose is to help believers persevere and to give the believer Bible tools in order to do so. The Allens define resilient faith as “the grace-shaped habit of keeping on trusting Christ even when life is hard, of relying on God’s power to obey Jesus in difficult times” (4). Lewis and Sarah demonstrate this grace in giving us a fine resource to use with brothers and sisters who are young in years or young in the faith.

The book is divided into nine sections or “parts,” with the Allens tag-teaming in the writing of chapters within each section. They take Ephesians 6:10–18 as their “base” passage for the book but utilize many passages of Scripture throughout the book as they walk the reader through the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that shape a resilient faith.

Part 1 examines our initial response to trouble or difficulty. Do we retreat into ourselves? Do we turn to sinful distractions? Or do we retreat, like Jesus did, by running to the Father? Chapter 1 shows us how Jesus exhibited dependence and trust in his loving Father, and we are called to rest in and run to our loving Father. The authors observe, “To be righteous is to be connected and dependent, not disconnected and self-reliant” (14). Chapter 2 points us to the all-seeing, all-caring Lord. It discusses our propensity to turn to self-pity and a downward thought spiral of our losses, hurts, and grievances, rather than running to the Lord with honest words. Jesus sees. Jesus cares. And because he sees and cares, chapter 3 reminds us that we should respond to him in humble, active obedience. Even in the midst of trouble, *especially* in the midst of trouble, we must do the next right thing.

Part 2 points us to the importance of rest in our pursuit of perseverance. I found this section to be particularly refreshing in a book about resilience. Remembering God’s design for Sabbath rest (chapter 4) and daily rest (chapter 5) helps recenter our dependence upon God as weak, limited creatures. The Allens are not focused on the theological debates about the Sabbath but on seeing the Lord’s Day as a gift, a rest. “Sabbath rest is simple because at its heart it is a celebration of what God has already done and is doing, rather than an attempt to perfect something new ourselves” (40). In discussing the importance of having a spirit at rest rather than a spirit of restlessness, we are pointed to the centrality of our own pursuit of looking to Christ and looking away from distractions (49). Our rest is in a Person.

¹ Merriam Webster online dictionary, accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld.

Hope is the theme of part 3, and chapter 6 asks us to look into our hearts and examine our hopes. Where are our dreams, our aspirations, our expectations centered? We are pointed to Christ, and specifically to his cross. Our true hope is in his gospel work, in what he did through his death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf! Our hope is also grounded in our future expectation, heaven. “Glory is waiting for us” (64), and chapter 7 opens the doors of heaven and lets some of its brightness shine out to us. Chapter 8 asks how our present hope is affected by the truths of the cross and of heaven. It makes the connection that Scripture makes between suffering and hope. Our suffering actually *produces* hope when we respond to it in the Spirit, because hope “is God’s powerful gift” (74).

Part 4, entitled “Body Life”, reminds us that “spiritual life isn’t separate from bodily life” (77). As a biblical counselor, I assent wholeheartedly. Sometimes well-meaning believers focus exclusively on the soul and miss the holistic nature of a person. The soul affects the body, and the body affects the soul. We are, as Nancy Pearcey states, an “integrated psychophysical unity” (78), and we are woven together by God, body and soul (Ps 139:13–16). The authors point to the importance of viewing eating and exercise as gifts from God, to be stewarded for his glory. “Everything we do matters to God” (90). This is a practical section of the book and spoke much needed truth. It is one of the highlights of the book, in my opinion, because of its uniqueness in a book about faith.

The gospel, with its power to save and sanctify, is the center of section 5. Ephesians 6 serves as a springboard to help us meditate on the gospel daily (chapter 11), use the gospel in our battle against sin and Satan (chapter 12), and walk by faith in Jesus’ purchased righteousness (chapter 13).

Making much of the means of grace comprises the final four sections. The Word of God, prayer, and the local church are emphasized in turn. Section 6 shows us the power of God’s words, the importance of confession and forgiveness, and the necessity of truth (found in the Word) in order to stay faithful in weakness. Section 7 shows us the importance of godly habits. J. I. Packer said, “Habit forming is the Spirit’s ordinary way of leading us on in holiness” (151), and the Allens challenge readers to live out their faith in their daily choices. We are called to memorize the Word, storing it in our hearts (Ps 119:11), and to share the Word, ministering grace as Jesus did.

Section 8 is a call to prayer, prayer that shows dependence and prayer that intercedes for others. We are specifically encouraged to pray for those who annoy or frustrate us, looking for evidence of his grace in their lives. We can expect God to work in changing our attitude towards them. Lewis admonishes us to pray for what the Spirit desires. “When the Spirit is at work, he is driving us to Jesus, to his kingdom priorities, and to care about and pray for what he wants” (184).

The final part of the book exalts the local church and God’s purpose of having his children grow *together* into Christ. “The hardest thing for struggling Christians to recognize is that church is exactly the community they need” (193). God designed the body to build itself up in love as each part does its work (Eph 4:16). As the Allens remind us, worship nurtures faith (195). The church, like a family, does not choose each other as a friend group would. That is God’s wise intention at work. It is the very diversity of the church, united around the truth and the gospel, that allows its people to serve one another well and shape one another into Christlikeness.

I love the conclusion of this book: success in the Christian life is standing firm in Christ (215). It is not easy, but it is simple. So many young Christians flounder in their faith when the going gets

tough. They despair in the battle against sin when the same besetting temptation overtakes them. They grow bitter over the deep hurts or ongoing suffering that plagues them. They search psychological labels and self-help podcasts and Bible app plans for an answer to what they must be missing. Why is this so hard? How are they supposed to keep going? Lewis and Sarah Allen bring us a book with wise answers, set in a readable and simple format. God has given us everything we need that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of his Son (2 Pet 1:4). The chapters are short, and the flow of the book overall feels natural. One of the best features is the set of questions at the end of each chapter, placed under the heading “reflect.” Each reflection asks specific questions and helps the reader apply the chapter in real-life ways. The reflections are also rich with Scripture and cause the reader to meditate on the Word as he considers the questions posed. At the end of each reflection, the Allens have written a prayer that the reader is asked to pray. This puts into practice the very things the Allens are trying to teach throughout the book.

I believe *Resilient Faith* is an encouraging read for any Christian and a good resource for believers engaged in discipling or for “young” believers. I have no significant criticisms of the book. While I did not find the Allens to be unusually gifted writers, I did find much wisdom to glean. I appreciated the consistent wedding of position and practice, of doctrine and life, all in a spirit of grace and Spirit dependence. This, in my opinion, is one of the greatest gifts we can give the younger generation. We are calling them to look to the great cloud of witnesses that has passed before and to run with endurance the race set before them, looking unto Jesus. Yes, standing firm in Christ *is* indeed the answer.

Rachel Dahlhausen

Women’s Counselor | Bob Jones University Student Care Office

Michael J. Vlach. *Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpretation Principles That Guide Dispensationalism's Understanding of the Bible's Storyline*. N.p.: Theological Studies, 2023. 111pp.

Michael Vlach's *Dispensational Hermeneutics* provides a highly readable primer on the core principles of interpretation that *distinguish* dispensationalism from its theological alternatives. All orthodox systems of theology concur on certain foundational theological and hermeneutical points. These areas of commonality are not the focus of this book. Instead, *Dispensational Hermeneutics* surveys the interpretive concepts of normalcy, consistency, integrity, and induction that lead to dispensational theology. Vlach captures and describes the essential points of conflict between dispensationalism and alternative theological systems while maintaining a resolute but irenic tone. He demonstrates hermeneutical consensus among dispensationalists by referencing credible dispensational academics like Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, Elliott Johnson, Robert Saucy, Mark Snoeberger, Paul Tan, and Mark Yarbrough in outlining ten key principles of dispensational interpretation.

The first chapter treats the *theological* commitments of dispensationalists that are distinct from alternative systems of theology. These set the stage for the interpretive principles that follow in later chapters. These theological commitments include a recognition of “the necessity and centrality of a mediatorial earthly kingdom of God” (12); a “focus on the biblical covenants and all their dimensions” (13); the “continuing significance of ethnic/national Israel” (16); the “distinction between Israel and the Church” (18); the “continuing significance of geo-political nations” (19); and “Premillennialism” (20). Every one of these theological commitments derives from normal, consistent, inductive hermeneutics. To arrive at a different theological conclusion, one must replace normal interpretive principles with special interpretive principles, consistent principles with inconsistent principles, or inductive principles with deductive principles. Dispensationalists defend the nature of Scripture as *different* from any other work of literature in certain respects—having God as its author (inspiration), absolute truth as its quality (inerrancy), and a simultaneous record of God's work through the ages and his plan for the future as its content—but dispensationalists also defend the nature of Scripture as *the same as* other works of literature in other respects—having human authors and readers with human limitations as an audience.

Chapter 2 explains dispensationalism's first three interpretive principles. First, dispensationalists maintain a “consistent use grammatical-historical hermeneutics” throughout all of Scripture regardless of biblical genre (23). Vlach shows how adherents of alternative theological systems tend to follow the grammatical-historical method in their handling of *most* scriptural texts while jettisoning this method in favor of a symbolic hermeneutic in regard to prophecy. Admittedly, they *must* do so in order to justify several theological precommitments. A grammatical-historical interpretation of prophecy leads to a theological outcome similar to dispensationalism. Vlach shows the connection between grammatical-historical and literal interpretation, and he indicates how the use of figures of speech (including symbols and types) is consistent with literal interpretation. He shows how—contrary to claims by dispensationalism's hermeneutical opponents—a literal hermeneutic is necessary to prove Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus would not be recognizable had he not fulfilled hundreds of OT prophecies

regarding his birth, ministry, and death literally. Next, dispensationalists insist on a “consistent contextual interpretation of OT prophecies” (32). This principle intersects integrity because to supplant the grammatical, historical, and contextual meaning with a meaning wholly foreign to what was actually spoken calls into question the integrity of the author. Vlach draws specific attention to “the ethical nature of promises and covenants” (34). Given the necessity of fulfilling a covenant in exactly the terms in which it was given, the reader wonders if theologians who advocate certain alternative systems would feel ill-used if they signed a contract with a mechanic to have their car fixed only to have the mechanic tell them he satisfied the contract by fixing a differing person’s house. If God can promise Israel a physical, geographically bounded land but mean that the Church will experience spiritual salvation, then the very essence of truth is shaken. The chapter concludes by clarifying the concept of *testament priority*. While some theologians emphasize “New Testament Priority”—by which they mean that they are the arbiters of what NT ideas to read back into the OT, what promises are to be reinterpreted, and what concepts are to be wholly reimagined in terms foreign to the original—dispensationalists defend “Passage Priority.” Vlach describes this simply as “the meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage” (35). Later passages can add information or clarity, but they never contradict, undermine the meaning of, or reimagine the earlier text in a way that transforms its meaning.

In chapter 3 Vlach expands the interpretive principles of dispensationalism in the direction of integrity by articulating four concepts: “Old Testament prophecies not repeated in the New Testament remain relevant” (40); “Old Testament eschatology expectations are reaffirmed in the New Testament” (43); “Progress of revelation does not cancel or transform unconditional promises to the original audience” (50); and “Fulfillments occur with the two comings of Jesus” (53). Every one of these principles advocates an understanding of what constitutes truth and integrity based on the Scriptures themselves as well as common human experience. That is, Vlach shows that dispensationalists did not invent these interpretive principles in order to substantiate a theological system. Rather, these principles derive from the nature of truth itself and find further warrant in human experience. Far from repudiating, reinventing, reimagining, or reinterpreting the OT, the NT simply shows that the OT properly and correctly predicts both the spiritual and physical promises that relate to Christ’s two comings. It is not, then, truly spiritual to do away with the clear historical meaning of the OT in favor of the NT.

Chapter 4 presents three principles of interpretation that relate to the complexity of interpreting OT events and prophecies. These include the existence of “partial fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies” (57); “Jesus as means of fulfillment of the Old Testament” (61); and “Types, yes! Typological interpretation, no!” (71). Each of these principles demonstrates that the spiritual emphasis of the New Testament does not replace the Old, nor does the apparent fulfillment of only certain spiritual aspects of OT prophecies warrant reinterpreting the rest of the prophecy as symbolic. There is strong evidence from Jesus’ quotation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18–19 that Jesus understood his first coming was to fulfill only part of the aggregated prophecies of the OT. There is, then, simply no need for theologians to absorb or dismiss the physical promises to Israel by assigning them to alternative symbolic realities.

Chapters 5 and 6 parallel the previous chapters by exploring what other theological systems claim as key interpretive principles that differentiate those systems from dispensationalism. These principles tend to be deduced from a theological examination of the NT evidence regarding the Church coupled with the assumption (which dispensationalists find unwarranted) that Israel either is *replaced* by the Church or *is* the Church. Once theologians deduce these principles, they read them back into the OT. Vlach argues that “there are no examples where a New Testament passage overrides the original meaning of an Old Testament text” as understood by grammatical-historical interpretation (79). Thus, he contends that the deductions that theologians have made are actually founded on air. They stem less from Scripture than from external human assumptions about Scripture. “New Testament Priority” is an assertion and an illusion, and it can even be made to sound very spiritual and sophisticated, but it does not square with biblical reality.

Some of the strongest divergences among conservative theologians stem from competing hermeneutical views. Dispensationalists insist on normalcy, consistency, integrity, and induction as core interpretive principles in reading Scripture. These principles work from the text to the system—they reflect normal communication. Competing systems tend to require interpretive irregularity, inconsistency, a radical reimagining of what was written, and deduction based on axioms within the system. *Dispensational Hermeneutics* does not claim that the “right hermeneutic” can be settled conclusively, but it does offer the reader a clearer understanding of how dispensationalists arrive at their theological conclusions.

Brian R. Hand

Professor, New Testament Interpretation | BJU Seminary

Jack M. Holl. *The Religious Journey of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Duty, God, and Country*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 329pp. + 15pp. (back matter).

What American president was the first to join a church and be baptized *after* his inauguration? He also is the only president to date who wrote and delivered his own prayer at his inauguration. As president he supported successful efforts to add the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and to adopt “In God we trust” as the national motto of the United States. He likewise initiated the annual National Prayer Breakfast.

Obviously, anyone reading the title of the book being reviewed knows the answer is Dwight D. Eisenhower. His story stands out among American presidents not because he was religious, for most American presidents have professed some kind of religious opinions that they more or less sincerely believed. Rather, Eisenhower’s religious views are important for the way they both reflected and shaped religious discussion during the Cold War in the 1950s. Jack Holl has written a first-rate study of not only what Eisenhower said and did as president but also the background of how the president came to hold his religious opinions.

Eisenhower’s views and actions reflect an idea that sociologist Robert Bellah famously described as American civil religion.¹ This quasi-religious public faith entails religious ideas that may be endorsed by the state (such as freedom of religion), an idea of God, and certain “beliefs, symbols, and rituals” that reflect religious ideas. Although respectful of religion, American civil religion is not Christian. However, it sometimes derives concepts from Christianity such as the United States as a new Israel. Civil religion is the sentiment that allowed Martin Luther King Jr. in the March on Washington to tell the crowd, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” *creed* referring to the Declaration of Independence. Some may rightly view the idea of civil religion negatively as a façade or political ploy. Yet the religious ideas of Eisenhower demonstrate how such public faith can be sincere and even coherent, but still ultimately inadequate from a Christian point of view.

Holl covers Eisenhower’s entire life in order to provide the fullest possible background to his religious views. Perhaps the most interesting religious facet of his youth was his family’s links with the River Brethren, an offshoot of the Mennonites, and his parents’ adherence to a branch of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, both groups known for pacifist teachings. The irony of such a background for the Supreme Allied Commander in World War II is evident, but there is little evidence that his parents’ religious allegiances significantly affected him. Eisenhower’s parents allowed their children great liberty in religious matters, and the future president took advantage of that fact to devote little attention to religion.

World War II likely turned Eisenhower’s thoughts toward religion. The widespread destruction and death of war would lead almost anyone to consider religious ideas to try to make sense of the carnage, as it did with Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War. For Eisenhower, however, the appeal was even stronger as he opposed totalitarian ideological systems—first Nazism during the war and then

¹ Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1–21.

communism during the Cold War. Religion for him became a component of democratic principles, as seen in a commonly quoted but misunderstood statement by Eisenhower: “Our form of government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.”² His point was that democracy requires a religious, theistic framework, which Christianity and Judaism provided in the American context. Religious faith is the bedrock of democratic ideals. Eisenhower’s religious gestures, such as his inaugural prayer or advocating the motto “In God we trust,” served to undergird the democratic traditions of the United States and the West in general.

Holl shows how Eisenhower applied his ideas politically if sometimes inconsistently—notably with the Civil Rights movement and nuclear proliferation, moral issues that challenged the president in working out how religion should influence public policy. Holl also devotes considerable discussion to the friendship of Eisenhower and Billy Graham. Their alliance seemed to be the very embodiment of civil religion and religious renewal in the 1950s, but the author shows that the interests of the president and the evangelist, while compatible, were not identical. There is a revealing discussion, for example, of how the Graham organization interviewed the former president in his retirement about his religious views and sought politely but vigorously to get Eisenhower to recount an evangelical conversion. He never did so.

The author has well described Dwight Eisenhower’s religious journey. If the discussion does not always put religion at the center of Eisenhower’s life, that has more to do with the subject than with the author. The work is a useful survey of Eisenhower’s religion with a relevant consideration of the engagement of religious belief and American politics.

Mark Sidwell

Professor, Division of History, Government, and Social Science | Bob Jones University

² For the history of this phrase and explanation of its background and meaning, see Patrick Henry, “‘And I Don’t Care What It Is’: The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (1981): 35–49.

Vern S. Poythress. *Redeeming Our Thinking about History: A God-Centered Approach*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 227pp. + 18pp. (back matter).

Those who debate a Christian understanding of history from an academic point of view tend to fall into one of two camps. On the one hand are professional historians who stress the limitations of human knowledge and are cautious about precise applications of biblical ideas, such as how or even whether one may discern the role of providence in history. On the other hand are scholars who focus on theology or biblical studies and who believe that one may use the testimony of Scripture as a basis for firmer conclusions about the nature, course, and analysis of history. The first group emphasizes the uncertainty of human knowledge and the second group the certainty of religious truth. The author of this work is definitely in the second camp, and this book is in fact a fine example of this emphasis.

Vern Poythress is a systematic theologian and NT scholar who has been a long-time member of the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary. He has given a great deal of thought to a Christian approach to the humanities, having previously written volumes on redeeming the study of mathematics, philosophy, and science. From this perspective, he has written a guide to help show how a Christian might think about history.

Basic to any such discussion is how the author views the nature of history. For his fundamental structure, Poythress follows the common outline for laying out a biblical worldview under the concepts of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. In addition, he adopts a not uncommon fourth point: Consummation. Those who use the simpler framework likely see history subsumed under Redemption, reflecting how Christ's work of redemption unfolds historically and climaxes with the final fulfillment of that work at the end of time. The idea of Consummation, however, does mesh well with the study of history by pointing to the end, or goal, of history with an emphasis on the process through which humanity reaches that end. As for history itself, the author sees its components as events, peoples, and meanings, and he uses those categories for his discussion.

Another feature of any sound Christian approach to history must obviously be how it relates the biblical data to the discussion. This aspect is a strength of this book. Poythress says that when God calls his people to remembrance, as in instructing children, God refers to history in the Bible, providing something of a model for our own approach. To facilitate such an approach, the author provides a handy assembly of texts relating to knowing and studying history. The "Psalms of remembrance" (cf. Pss 105–107), for example, demonstrate how history is wrapped up with revelation. (One could extend the idea to other summaries of the history of God's people in specific portions of Scripture, such as Stephen's defense in Acts 7.) Poythress recognizes human limitations, such as observing that historical generalizations are not the same as natural law. Likewise, he allows for the uniqueness of inspiration as elevating biblical history to a higher level than other forms of history but says the human element of Scripture suggests a role for humans in creating historical writings.

A major portion of Poythress's work considers the Christian's treatment of providence in history. The author illustrates providence in history with two everyday examples: prayer requests (and the answers to those requests) and testimonies of conversion. Both involve events and the interpretation of those events through a biblical lens. Even more to the point, they emphasize the role of God in

those events and interpretation of them. More broadly he lays down what he sees as key principles for understanding providence in history: God's universal control, the glory of God, benefits even to the undeserving, positive value of trials, retribution, and moral and spiritual evaluation. Identifying such principles separates him from popular concepts of providence in history, which focus mainly on nearly miraculous interventions of God in history such as the storm that scattered the Spanish Armada. Poythress's principles suggest wider (and subtler) ways of considering the role of providence in history and point to further avenues for exploring this concept.

Earlier we suggested two camps in approaching the study of history: Christian historians and theologians. Poythress himself highlights this contrast through his extensive interaction with Jay Green's *Christian Providentialism: Five Rival Versions*. Green's work provides a counterpoint, advocating a more circumscribed approach to finding providence in history. Here Poythress firmly argues for ideas such as providentialism and an unambiguous Christian viewpoint in writing history. If nothing else, he reminds us that debates over God's role in history are not over.

There are, however, a couple of cautions. Poythress appears to chide those who write in a neutral, academic tone in order to present their work in scholarly journals or conferences. Granted the need to present a positive Christian viewpoint, there is also a need to address a secular audience in a manner that they will accept, or there will be no forum for presenting anything. We also come back to the nagging question of how well we can discern providence in studying history. Poythress's illustrations of prayer and conversion are helpful, but they are not precise parallels to historical study. In the author's examples, the subjects (the one praying or being prayed for, the convert) have a personal knowledge and experience that make the workings of providence subjectively more evident. Historians, using sources to which they have no such personal relation, lack this insight that validates the role of providence.

These cautions notwithstanding, any Christian who wishes to approach the study of history from a biblical perspective would do well to read this book. Despite its being on a weighty topic, the work is approachable. The structure of the book facilitates study. Poythress writes short, easy-to-digest chapters focused on particular issues. Also, the outline of each chapter is clearly articulated, notably through the headings that guide the reader through the argument step by step. More important is the book's case for bringing the Scripture to bear on the study of history. Perhaps the greatest value in terms of contemporary debate is his defense of providentialism. Poythress does not answer all the challenges in discerning and applying providence, but he does make a case for ongoing work on the topic.

Mark Sidwell

Professor, Division of History, Government, and Social Science | Bob Jones University

Dale Ralph Davis. *Luke 1–13 and Luke 14–22. Focus on the Bible*. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2021. 240pp. + 10pp. (back matter) + 13pp. (back matter); 240pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 15pp. (back matter).

I have long recommended Davis’s commentaries on the OT books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; historical narrative is something of a specialty for him. (*The Word Became Fresh* is his excellent guide on how to preach historical narrative.) His work on Luke is of the same character and quality. His commentaries provide an enlightening and enjoyable way to work through any of those books. (I read straight through his two-volume Kings commentary last summer.) Most biblical commentaries tend to be technical resources written for reference. Davis’s commentaries, in contrast, are eminently readable texts.

As former professor of OT at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS) with decades of pastoral experience to boot, Davis is on familiar terms with highbrow literature and donnish debates. Most of that, however, he confines to occasional footnotes, leaving the commentary itself an undistracted interpretation of the text, interwoven with illustration and application. Especially fond of historical and biographical illustrations, he has a particular penchant for baseball and the Civil War. He does not ramble or fill the page with fluff, devotional or otherwise. His focus throughout remains riveted on the text—an expositional commentary built solidly on a seasoned analysis of the exegetical details of the text. (If you’re wondering why an OT prof is writing a commentary on Luke, he explains that in the one-page preface.)

Davis does not think that Luke’s “orderly account” (1:3) necessarily implies that it is slavishly chronological but, rather, “a connected, coherent, and generally sequential account.” Zechariah’s answered prayer in 1:13 was clearly his long-since abandoned prayer for a child (1:21); and his muteness was both a chastisement and a merciful guarantee: “if the mute-threat is true, so is the child-promise!” (1:20). Davis gently chides commentators who explain away kingdom promises (like those in 1:32–33, 73–75) as merely metaphorical and spiritual, “whether one sees it occurring in some ‘millennial,’ earthly reign or in the new heavens and new earth” (1:27, 40–41). He rightly identifies the real gist of the miraculous births by both Sarah (Gen 18:14) and Mary (Luke 1:37); this core issue in both cases was not the ability of divine power but the certainty of the divine promise (1:21, 29).

Davis is selective about which bogs he wades into; even when he steers clear of some of the more technical scholarly textual disputes, his footnotes often weigh in at some length on such issues while the main text remains focused on the bigger issues (1:43, 79). He rejects the notion that “Abba” is merely “a little child’s term” for father “equivalent to ‘Daddy.’” It is a term of relational familiarity “commonly used within the family circle” by “adult children” as well (1:196). Davis spends two pages arguing that Luke’s reference to Jesus’ “set[ting] His face to go to Jerusalem” is more than “a mere literary idiom” to describe his resolve, or even a passing allusion to Isaiah 50:7. Rather, Luke wants his readers to connect this reference to the larger Servant Song context of Isaiah 50 and “the words of the ‘suffering servant’ there”—including not only his obedient resolve but also his confidence in Yahweh’s help (1:166–67).

Davis astutely identifies the New Covenant passage Ezekiel 36:23 as the biblical-theological context for the first petition of the Lord's model prayer: "Father, may your name be sanctified." Praying this, then, explicitly involves praying for the coming eschatological reality that will be the means for the international sanctification of God's name prophesied in Ezekiel 36—the conversion and "final restoration" of Israel "to the land." Indeed, "the parallel petition, 'Your kingdom come,' supports this view" (I:198). Davis recognizes a "wisp of humor" in Jesus' follow-up parabolic instruction regarding the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–13). The interpretational fulcrum, he notes, lies in the word *anaideia* which, he concludes, does not refer to the knocker's "persistence" or the friend's "desire to avoid shame," but the knocker's "chutzpah" (Davis translates it "audacity"). Davis applies this to our willingness to bring even our most "embarrassing" requests to God, but he comes closer to the parable's central point when he suggests that "Jesus may well intend a how-much-more argument" here, as he "clearly" does in 11:11–13. The picture we are meant to carry away is the "contrast between the crabby friend" awakened at midnight and our "willing heavenly Father" (I:201–3). We are incurably suspicious of God; but "He doesn't analyze the grammar and requests in your prayers looking for loopholes in order to" give you something you didn't mean to ask for (I:204).

In the topically related parable of the unjust judge, Davis notes contrasts between God and the unjust judge (in attitude and character) as well as parallels (eventual justice, though delayed) (II:79–80). That parable on the necessity of persevering prayer (18:1) closes with a question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find [literally] the faith upon earth?" (18:8). This is not a reference to whether the Christian faith will endure, nor whether there will be believers when Christ returns; rather, as Davis notes, "the faith that Jesus speaks of is the faith that shows itself in persevering prayer"—that is, Jesus says, "this kind of faith that I have just been talking about" that keeps praying to God even in the face of delay (II:81).

The rich young ruler's problem, Davis explains, was not with the second table of the law but with the first: "Jesus' demand was a test case . . . that exposed his *first commandment* problem. . . . He was an idolator; he had another God" (II:99–100). Davis insists that the "Son of Man" title in Daniel 7:13 is "an *individual* figure and that 'Son of Man' does not merely denote the corporate people of God" as some have tried to argue (II:153). He is also careful to note the distinction between the plural "you" in 22:31 (all the disciples will be "sifted") and the singular "you" in 22:32 (Jesus promises to pray for Peter specifically) (II:172).

Amid his comments on the last supper, Davis inserts a three-page excursus (II:165–68) on the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 that is, on the whole, quite helpful: "Contemporary Gentile believers must not assume that the covenant is all ours and that Israel has no more place in it. It is, strictly speaking, *their* covenant. We must not think that we can high-jack this covenant as our own—rather we piggyback on Israel's privileges in that covenant" (II:166). "The cup" of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is the cup of God's wrath and judgment on human sin; this explains "the *rightness* of Jesus' request" to avoid it if possible. This aversion to "absorbing God's wrath underscores the *righteousness* of Jesus and the perfection of His human nature. . . . His hesitation is a godly one. There would be something wrong if He *didn't* flinch at this" (II:180). We have no record of Jesus' conversation with

the disciples on the road to Emmaus, but Davis walks through about ten passages that may well have filled the space between 24:27 and 28 (II:227–29).

Davis’s commentary incorporates frequent practical, personal applications. He muses whether Mary’s mutually edifying fellowship with Elizabeth—despite their decades of age difference—might not be a biblical corrective to the modern church’s tendency to divide up its congregation according to age, background, social status, interests, etc. (I:32). Regarding Nazareth’s low esteem for one of their own (Luke 4), Davis addresses those who sit unmoved in churches for years or decades: “Being familiar with Jesus can be dreadfully dangerous” (I:82). “Judas,” Davis similarly cautions, “becomes a standing warning that closeness [proximity] to Jesus and faithlessness to Jesus can easily coexist” (I:111). To Jesus’ seemingly outlandish command that Peter cast his nets despite an entirely fishless night, Davis attaches a caution. “Jesus *does* at times seem to operate in ‘foolish’ and irrational ways that don’t make sense.” But be wary of assuming, therefore, that “Jesus *only* works in strange and bizarre and unexpected ways,” or that, if it seems nonsensical, it *must* be God’s leading. Sometimes, “if it seems weird, it may just be weird,” traceable to our thinking rather than God’s direction (I:89).

The Martha-Mary narrative (Luke 10) “should keep us from psychological interpretations that go on about how we really need both our Martha- and Mary-types in the church. You may find something like that in another text somewhere, but don’t try to drag it out of this one” (I:189). The core of this incident “is that true service for Christ does not consist in what we in our busyness can give Jesus but in receiving what He delights to give us, namely, His word.” Adding a pointed application to pastors, Davis—himself a pastor for decades—rubbishes advertisements appealing to the “busy” pastor who apparently “doesn’t have time to ponder or think or read” because he is too busy. “I repudiate the busy-pastor model. I don’t think there should be any busy pastors” if it means not having time to sit quietly at Jesus’ feet with Mary. Such “ministerial busyness . . . empties the soul” (I:192).

Not averse to making pointed applications to his own circle, he titles the second parable in Luke 18 (vv. 9–14) “The Presbyterian and the Publican.” Because Christ beheld hell in Gethsemane and in the cup, and experienced it quite literally on the cross, Davis issues a vigorous censure against describing our experience as “hell” or even as “our Gethsemane”—“since the ‘cup’ is unique, Gethsemane is unique.” To suggest that we may have a “Gethsemane” experience is “almost blasphemous” (II:181). Whereas there is much in the OT about Christ, Davis cautions against an overly “‘Christocentric’ approach to OT exposition” as though “everything or every passage in the OT is about Him”; such a view goes “beyond what Jesus actually says” in 24:44 (II:236).

One reason I like Davis so much is that his interpretational approach and instincts frequently mirror my own. That does not mean, of course, that I never disagree with him. Davis posits that Luke moves the Nazareth synagogue episode (Luke 4) earlier in his account for strategic reasons (I:78). It seems more likely (per some harmonies) that the Luke 4 episode (recorded only by Luke) was, in fact, early in Christ’s ministry, whereas Matthew 13 and Mark 6 record a later visit to Nazareth. The reference to a previous ministry in Capernaum (4:23) is easily answered by the long-distance healing of a sick child there, an incident recorded only by John (4:46–54).

Though I agree with Davis’s correction of how we understand the term “Abba” (I:196), his data for pre-Christian Jews addressing God as Father in prayer is incomplete; he cites several apocryphal

references, but there is important OT precedent for the practice as well (e.g., Ps 89:26; Isa 63:16; 64:8). Jesus distinctively *accentuates* this relational aspect of prayer, but his instruction in this regard is neither novel nor innovative.

Davis misses (in my opinion) the larger biblical-theological significance of the term “exodus” (9:31) in Luke’s version of the transfiguration account (I:157–58). Davis rightly identifies the divine dimension of the disciples’ “amazing density” in failing to comprehend Jesus’ predictions of his impending death and resurrection (in 9:45 and 18:34); but he never offers any explanation for that divine concealment and seems to overlook its express reversal in 24:45.

Part of Davis’s appeal is his down-to-earthiness conversational style, but sometimes it confuses cleverness with corniness and borders on Dad humor. He titles the section on the parable of the unjust estate manager (16:1–8) as “Slick, the Sly Steward,” refers to 18:15–17 as the story of “Jesus and the Little Shavers,” and summarizes the celestial celebration in 15:7, 10 as a time “when heaven throws parties and angels exchange ‘high fives’ over a repentant sinner” (II:35). Disagreements over details are to be expected in any commentary, and the intermittent colloquialisms amount to little more than the occasional raised eyebrow or indulgent groan. But Davis’s handling of the text itself is consistently serious, insightful, and penetrating.

For the ordinary Christian in the pew who wants to understand a book of the Bible better, I cannot recommend a more accessible or enjoyable commentary; for the Sunday School teacher or Bible study group, a more efficient and usable commentary; or for the pastor (“busy” or not), a more lively fellowship over the Scriptures with an informed and experienced fellow minister, than Davis’s commentaries, including this latest one on Luke’s Gospel.

Layton Talbert

Professor of Theology | BJU Seminary

John Piper. *Providence*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 700pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 40pp. (back matter).

Piper's work on divine providence is a *magnum opus* of mature, seasoned, theological thought that scouts out the global implications of this doctrine. The term *pastor-theologian* has become common currency of late. Piper's *Providence* exemplifies that combination; it is vigorously theological and insistently scriptural but also robustly pastoral, devotional, and applicational. *Providence* does not merely inform—it preaches.

A self-conscious sense of continuity guides the whole journey from beginning to end. Piper has painstakingly mapped out this journey and is careful to explain at the beginning of each chapter where we have been and, at the end of each chapter, where we are going. The excursion is divided into three unequal legs.

Part 1 (thirty pages) centers on “A Definition and a Difficulty.” Sovereignty conveys power, but providence adds the dimension of *purposefulness* (29). A concise expression of what Piper means by *providence* is God's all-embracing, all-pervasive, invincible, and purposeful sovereignty (18, 24; cf. 691). To several historic confessional definitions of providence Piper adds one additional clarifying statement: that God “freely and unchangeably ordain[s] and foreknow[s] whatever comes to pass . . . yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly” and in a way that “is compatible with moral accountability” (37). While Piper distinguishes between *providence* and *fate* (35–40), he never differentiates between *providence* and *miracle*, as is usual in many treatments of providence. The expansive scope of Piper's conception of providence explains the book's breadth (and length!).

The end for which God exercises his all-encompassing providence is no surprise: it is for his glory. But Piper helpfully teases out what that means (and what it does not). Confronting our inherent objections to such a self-exalting Deity, he concludes that “‘for his glory’ does not mean to *get* glory which he does not already have, but rather to display and vindicate and communicate his glory for the everlasting enjoyment of his people—that is, for all those who, instead of resenting God's self-exaltation, receive him as their supreme treasure” (43). That is, “God is really pursuing the exaltation of his beauty in the *enjoyment* of his praising people,” meaning that “*God's* self-exaltation is utterly different from all *human* self-exaltation” (53, 55). Indeed, as he says later, God “is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is an act of supreme love” (208, 209).

Part 2 (150 pages) focuses on “The Ultimate Goal of Providence.” This divides into three subsections. Section 1 explores the goal of providence both before creation and in the act of creation. The first category entails election and is most directly addressed in Ephesians 1: “not simply God's glory, but the *praise* of his glory” (1:6, 12, 14), and more specifically, “the praise of the glory of his *grace*.” That praise is the response of those chosen by that grace even “before the foundation of the world” (1:4). Then, in the act of creation, God “creates human beings in his image” and “commands that the earth be full of such images of himself,” making it “clear that God's goal in creation is the display of God” (62). But it is God's grace before the beginning that guarantees “the final worship of

heaven will be not simply . . . an echo of God's excellence in creation, but also . . . an echo of Christ's excellence in salvation" (64).

Section 2 of part 2 concentrates on the goal of providence in the history of Israel. From God's call and covenant with Abraham to the creation of the nation at Sinai to the distant future "when ethnic Israel . . . will be grafted back into the olive tree of Abraham's covenant blessing," the goal of all God's providential dealings with Israel is the praise of his glory and grace (Isa 43:7, 21; 49:3; 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11). It is mildly disappointing that two pages unfold the significance of Isaiah 55:12–13 (82–83) yet overlook the burning bush that guarantees these remarkable eschatological blessings—the absolute trustworthiness of every word from the mouth of God (55:10–11). Piper perceptively explores ten theological ramifications of the divine name "I AM" revealed to Israel in connection with the exodus (90–92) and traces the repeated purpose of God to make himself known not only to Israel and to Egypt but to all the nations (93–94). Insights like gems strew the long journey tracing God's providence throughout Israel's history. "This commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me") was to be no more burdensome than the satisfied experience of a wife who has a perfect husband" (122). "The essence of sin is minimizing God and making much of self" (127). "Hezekiah's prayer did not appeal to the worthiness of Jerusalem to be rescued but to the worthiness of God to be worshiped" (141). "God's God-centeredness . . . is not a threat to our joy but the basis of it" (150).

Section 3 of part 2 explains the goal of providence in the design and enactment of the New Covenant. Here some of the weaknesses (in my opinion) of a covenantal approach surface. For example, the text of Jeremiah 32:39–41 is quoted (160), including the astonishing statement, "I will rejoice in doing them good, *and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness*, with all my heart and with all my soul." Yet Piper's explanation of the passage twice omits the text's explicit connection of God's whole-hearted, whole-souled commitment to Israel's restoration to the land. Instead, Piper's takeaway focuses exclusively on the soteriological and sanctificational blessings of the New Covenant. "God will rejoice over this transformed people with all his heart and with all his soul" (159), and God "pledges to secure these blessings with overflowing joy: 'I will rejoice in doing them good . . . with all my heart and all my soul'" (160). The soteriological blessings are grand indeed, but they are only the starting point of God's New Covenant promises to Israel. Nevertheless, Piper rightly identifies "one of the earliest expressions of the new covenant" in Deuteronomy 30 (161).

Piper writes that "the ultimate goal of God in his saving providence . . . was achieved through the suffering of the Son of God"—which means that "the ultimate reason that suffering exists is so that Christ might display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God by suffering himself to overcome our suffering" (171). But how did suffering originate? "If God planned the suffering of his Son before creation . . . then he foresaw the coming of sin and planned to permit it to enter the world" (175). Piper helpfully defends the notion of God's permission, "since God's providence does not govern all events in precisely the same way, and 'permission' is one way to describe some of his acts of providence"—including the Fall (175–79). Another feature of the New Covenant that Piper develops is the "progressive glorification" of his people (187ff.).

In part 3 (500 pages) Piper explores "The Nature and Extent of Providence." Having identified and elaborated on the goal of God's providence, Piper turns his attention in this largest section of the

book to the “nature and extent” of providence: “The new question is not *Where* is God taking the world? but *How* does he see to it (providentially!) that it gets there?” (207). What does providence include, what does it look like in operation, and—if it includes governing sinful human choices—how does he exercise this providence without becoming culpable for human sin (210)? Each succeeding chapter in this section explores the all-inclusive realms over which God’s providence reigns: nature, Satan and demons, kings and nations, life and death, sin, conversion, and Christian living, and global missions. And folded into each chapter are discussions of how his providence operates without impugning his righteousness.

Some of these discussions are extraordinarily astute and helpful. For example, God’s providential control over both natural, humanly instigated, and even demonically instigated events should have a profound impact on how we react to them. On the other hand, some of these discussions could use a bit more clarification. What, exactly, *is* the *nature* of God’s providential involvement in the growth of grass and the falling of rain, or in the sinful choices of a powerful king? Piper and I appear to disagree on the causes and progression of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart; but we may be closer than it seems if Piper were to apply to his treatment of Pharaoh some of the qualifying statements he makes elsewhere in the book, particularly concerning the *nature* and *means* of his providential control. (See my article on the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in this issue of *JBTW*.)

In any case, Piper’s work is peppered with insights that are both thought-provoking and inspiring. “The fear of the Lord is not the opposite of joy in the Lord; it is the depth and seriousness of it” (160). God’s judgment on Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4) demonstrated not only that “self-exaltation dethrones God” but also “dehumanizes man. The irony is that human autonomy feels like we have gained significance, when in fact we have lost sanity” (331). “God’s rule of every life is not bad news. It is glorious news” (375). Repentance “is one of the reasons God judged moral evil with physical pain. While fallen people do not value God, they do value being pain free. . . . God puts the call to repentance in the language everyone can understand—the language of pain and death” (504). Piper’s argument for the salvation of infants who die based on Romans 1:19–20 is intriguing (507–8).

It is in his conclusion, “Seeing and Savoring the Providence of God” (twenty pages), that Piper summarizes the fundamental tenets of his book most concisely. “Providence is the purposeful sovereignty that carries [God’s] plans into action, guides all things toward God’s ultimate goal, and leads to the final consummation” of all his purposes (691). It encompasses everything, including “the moral acts of every soul” but in such a way “that the preferences and choices of Satan and man are really their own preferences and their own choices” (691–92). That means that “God’s providence is decisive . . . but it is not coercive. That is, its ordinary way of working is to see to it [the literal meaning of *providence*] that Satan and man decide and act in a way that is their own preference, while fulfilling God’s plan at every moment” (692). This crucial and biblical qualification would have been enormously helpful and clarifying to incorporate into his discussion of Pharaoh. “*How* God does this” is, indeed, a mystery, “but *that* he does it is what the Bible teaches” (*ibid.*). (Psalm 33:15, a natural fit for this point, unfortunately does not surface in the book.) Piper tops off this monumental study with ten effects of embracing a biblical understanding of God’s providence, including its impact on our worship, our worldview, our appreciation of our salvation, our relationship to the surrounding culture,

our perception and interpretation of all reality, our patience and faithfulness amid difficult and inexplicable experiences, our resistance to unbiblical explanations, our confidence “that God has the right and the power to answer prayer” to change people’s hearts, our persuasion of the necessity of evangelism and missions, and our assurance of God’s eternal glory in us through our satisfaction in him (694–711).

Providence includes both a general and biblical index but, interestingly, no bibliography. That helps to explain an anomaly that immediately strikes the reader—the sparsity of footnote citations. The book includes only 116 footnotes (an average of one note every six pages); forty percent of the footnotes reference Piper’s other works or discussions elsewhere in the book itself. That is not particularly surprising, given Piper’s maturity and stature as a theologian and the breadth and theological depth of his other writings. What is perhaps a little surprising, especially for a book of this size and nature, is that only thirty-two percent cite outside sources, the most common being (unsurprisingly) Jonathan Edwards (ten times). The rest furnish either additional Scripture or some expanded explanation beyond the main text. Though Piper never explains this aspect of his writing strategy, one assumes that his goal was to concentrate our attention primarily on the teachings and implications of the biblical text itself, without bogging down the reader in either the debates or corroborations of other theologians—not unlike a massively extended, magisterial sermon. (Another reviewer describes it as “a long, sermonic essay.”) It lends the work a certain biblical-theological purity and authority, but some may wish for more pervasive evidence of interaction on a topic with such far-reaching theological implications.

Layton Talbert

Professor of Theology | BJU Seminary