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Book Reviews

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***Figuring Resurrection: Joseph as a Death and Resurrection Figure in the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism.* By Jeffrey Pulse. Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2021. 288 pages. Paperback. \$30.00.**

I remember when it first dawned on me that the largest sustained story in Genesis was about a figure through whom the Messiah *would not* come. When seen as a whole, the Book of Genesis invites the reader to follow God's promises—always in apparent danger or threat of thwarting. From Adam to Seth, Enoch to Noah, the flood to the tower of Babel, and then particularly located in Abraham, a wandering Aramean, we are always looking for the Seed of the woman to crush the serpent's head. On the macro level, the first eleven chapters establish the cosmos, fallen creation, and our Lord's mercy. Chapters 12–25 locate this gracious promise to Abraham. Chapters 26–36 track the promise from Isaac to Jacob. And then from chapter 37 to the end, it is almost entirely centered on Joseph, where one might expect to seek the fulfillment of God's promise. As it turns out, the promised Seed comes *not* through Joseph but Judah, another unlikely figure (see Genesis 38). It is this strange (anti-)climax that Professor Jeffrey Pulse puts his finger on, trying to make sense of what the Lord is doing with Joseph (and, in part, Judah) in his *Figuring Resurrection*.

Largely adapting his doctoral dissertation through the University of Durham for popular consumption, Pulse seeks to recapture the particular characteristic of death and resurrection in the figure of Joseph. By way of the Masoretic Text in its final form, he seeks to rescue the narrative and character of Joseph from the overt moralism found in the Targumim, the overly dramatic savior of the Septuagint, and the hopelessly atomized decomposition left by the historical critics. Running with Brevard Childs's canonical approach and informed by the literary insights of Robert Alter and Jon Levenson, Pulse appeals to a unified theological narrative of the text that reveals Joseph as the source of Israel's hope in the resurrection. So as not to miss the forest for the trees, he favors a synchronic, rather than diachronic reading of the text, always calling us back to the whole from the part.

To accomplish this, he appeals to various motifs laden within the text, which he believes are essential threads that weave together the tapestry (or garment?) of the whole (7–8). Cumulatively, these invite a “deeper sense” to the narrative. With particular focus on chapters 37–50, Pulse notes an abrupt shift in literary style—one that includes “inordinate doubling” (6) and a preponderance of “downward/upward” movements. Lingering is the question: why? Why is this section set apart? Is it merely transitional from a patriarchal to a tribal era? Why the concentrated motifs? And what does such a shift in style and substance do to the reader and hearer of the Masoretic Text?

Pulse sees an intentional, christological meaning to the text. Surprisingly though, as the death-and-resurrection figure of the Old Testament *par excellence*, Joseph functions more like an Esther figure, playing a supporting role, albeit of great magnitude. In Pulse’s estimation, he is neither the savior nor the morally unscathed; rather, through the Joseph story, Judah finds an unexpected restoration and resurrection, guarding the promised Seed from being snatched by the birds, scorched by the sun, or suffocated by the thorns. In fact, it seems to be for Judah’s sake that Joseph’s character finds little defense. Whether Pulse makes more of it than is actually there, he is troubled by Joseph’s refusal to leave Egypt, his apparently boastful dreams, what may be his spying on his brothers, and why he was home alone with Potiphar’s wife in the first place. Cumulatively, Joseph offers a poor resume for ethical exaltation, which suggests that this may not be the point.

In the end, Pulse leads us out of the entrapments of historical criticism and more deeply into the theological thrust of the holy authors. It is as much a hermeneutical defense of a unified theological narrative as an analysis of the latter portion of Genesis—in theme, structure, and character. While Part III may have been necessary for a dissertation—comparing other translations and extrabiblical texts to the Masoretic Text—it adds little to the average reader. Instead of tracing the trends of biblical interpretation since 1980 in general, it would have been more interesting to see how this section of Genesis was particularly received and understood across the generations from the early church fathers until today. Of course, asking a book for something other than it sets out to do is asking for a different book. The one we have nicely adorns an early confession of our Lord’s death and resurrection—extolling divine authorship, critiquing undue moralism, and providing hope for Israel of old, as well as hope for us.

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***1 Kings 12–22.* By Walter A. Maier III. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019. 752 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.**

Maier's second volume on the Book(s) of the Kings picks up where the first left off with no lapse in scholarship, theology, or accessibility. It is an unfortunate reality of publishing that the introductory chapters from the first volume are not included here in the second. All this is to say, take up volume one along with volume two.

Maier's interaction with the Hebrew language is again comprehensive. The textual notes are thorough, perhaps too much so for the average reader. This is in part because he does not shy away from translational or interpretational difficulties. Rather he gives each possibility its due and explains why he takes the position he does. This open dialogue with the text and the scholarship is helpful in giving a wide variety of views, though some may find it overwhelming. Indeed, Maier does seem hesitant at times to take any position, which may create further confusion.

But the commentary is certainly not an exercise purely in grammar. Though his textual work is thorough, his commentary rises to match it. Maier strives to keep Christ at the center of his reading of the Scriptures. A fine example is found in his discussion on the contest at Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18 (1359–1415), where Maier shows Elijah as a foreshadowing of Christ and pointing to the ultimate victory in the contest between God and Satan (1414–1415).

Nor should we consider this work as purely exegetical or systematic. One excursus is in fact a homily on Luke 18, which encourages persistent prayer in the life of the believer (1416–1418). Some readers may find certain portions of the commentary to be "sermonic"; the commentary on 1 Kings 17 (1316–1336) is one example of this. Nevertheless, Maier makes helpful connections between explication and application. Exegesis must ultimately serve the work of the church.

The many excursus included throughout the work are excellent. They are concise but not lacking. Here the work expands to include not only the Books of the Kings but the Old Testament and the Scriptures as a whole. He uses these excursus to build a cultural backdrop ("Baal and the Canaanite Religion," 1299–1303); discuss Luther's exegesis of 1 Kings and the Old Testament as a whole ("Luther and 1 Kings 17–19," 1568–1576); and explore related topics that encourage the reader to consider Old Testament theology on a broader scale ("The Old Testament and the Efficaciousness of the Word of God," 1477–1479).

Maier delivers with his second volume on 1 Kings. Students, scholars, pastors, and laity will find helpful discussion and insight into the often-overlooked historical Books of the Kings. It is a well-rounded volume which, while certainly focused on 1 Kings, also offers valuable insights on exegetical principles, Old Testament theology, and even preaching and pastoral care.

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***Evidence That the Bible Is True: The Apologetics of Biblical Reliability.* By Allen Quist. Kendallville, Indiana: Self-published, 2020. 181 pages. Softcover. \$11.95.**

Allen Quist—Adjunct Professor of Christian Apologetics at Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary and member of the Committee on Doctrine for the Evangelical Lutheran Synod—is no newcomer to evidentialist apologetics. In this self-published book (his ninth), the author answers the question, “What is the evidence for believing the Bible is true?” by “describing some of the most recent and important evidence verifying the Bible’s claims” (7).

The introductory chapter shows the need for defending the Bible’s reliability against the ongoing attacks of our secular age. Congregation members should be familiar with the evidence supporting the Bible as true against the ever-encroaching skepticism of naturalism—both to uphold younger members in their faith and “to provide evidence to the world that the message of Christ is true” (9). The next twelve chapters deal with specific topics: creation (how the complexity of DNA or a single-celled organism undermine the evolutionist worldview), Sodom and Gomorrah and the crossing of the Red Sea (archaeological evidence best explained by the biblical accounts), Job’s *behemoth* and *leviathan* (a dinosaur and a Super Croc that fit all of the evidence), various lists of reliability criteria (for true and false prophets, New Testament authenticity, and eyewitnesses), the Shroud of Turin (evidence supports its authenticity), and answering skeptics (responding to Bart Ehrman’s arguments against the reliability of the Bible). In each case, the author provides sufficient evidence to conclude in favor of biblical reliability.

Throughout the work, Quist presents a balanced position of apologetics vis-à-vis evangelism and faith. The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture (ch. 14) are a matter of faith: “It is possible to prove reliability; it is not possible to prove inerrancy” (146). Nevertheless, inspiration and inerrancy have a solid foundation in the observable evidence Quist has presented.

The book seems to be written to educate congregation members regarding the evidence that supports the reliability of Scripture for use in apologetics. He ends chapter 15 with the petition, “God grant that we defend [the Bible’s] authenticity, . . . power, . . . inspiration of God, and . . . inerrancy” so that “we speak that which is true” (151). However, in the closing chapter, Quist notes that “countless people” admit that Jesus was a real person crucified under Pontius Pilate and that his

eyewitness followers claim Jesus rose from the dead; sadly, they “do not take the next step and acknowledge that it is true” (155). “To confess these truths is to cross the Rubicon” and enter the kingdom of Christ—such confession that can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit (156). Moreover, the rest of the chapter seems like an invitation for the skeptic to believe. Perhaps Quist does so to motivate congregation members to engage in apologetics. But that purpose for the chapter is unclear.

There are other less-than-satisfying aspects of the book. First, to substantiate many of his claims, Quist cites websites and non-credentialed “experts”—like Stephen Meyer quoting Bill Gates on YouTube regarding the complexity of DNA (14). These might be sufficient authority for the *believer* assaulted by secularism to accept the evidence presented, but the educated and the steeped skeptic will find the sources lacking authority. An apologist will need to research peer-reviewed journals and books for verification to use the evidence presented. Lastly, while the book is inexpensive, the quality of the publication could be improved: many images are pushed to the next page, leaving large blank spaces in the text, and the review copy came with excess glue across the bottom edge (causing pages to stick).

This book would provide a starting place to begin preparing to defend the Bible against some of the current attacks regarding its reliability. It would serve well for casual use because it is an easy read and inexpensive.

Don C. Wiley

***A Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians.* By David P. Kuske. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2019. 326 pages. Hardcover. \$41.99.**

With this book, Rev. Kuske adds yet another volume to Northwestern’s newest biblical commentary series. It is easy to see why the publisher repeatedly relies on Kuske. His style is clear and direct. His explanations of the Greek grammar and its effect on proper translation are straightforward and easy to understand, even for those whose Greek is rusty. His interpretation of the text falls squarely within the boundaries of traditional, confessional Lutheranism, even when it comes to the identity of the Antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2 (spoiler: it is the Roman papacy, 280). The ease with which he unfolds the nuances of meaning and sentence structure reveals his experience as a Lutheran educator, while the usefulness of his application of the text to parish ministry reveals his experience as a Lutheran pastor.

The book is divided into two parts, with each part corresponding to each epistle in the title. The introductory chapter of each part begins with the standard isagogic

information, presented in a most matter-of-fact manner. He spends little ink on debating the many opinions of scholars throughout history; instead, he gets right to the point and delivers the facts as he understands them. He then presents a clear outline of the whole epistle. In the first part of the book, Kuske explains his method of interpretation, which he calls “exegesis-based” (9); others call it “historical-grammatical.” He also explains his method of choosing which textual variant best represents the original autograph. This information is useful for understanding Kuske’s perspective and the exegetical choices he makes throughout the commentary.

After the introductory chapter of each part, each chapter of the commentary treats a chapter of the epistle. Kuske begins each textual unit with a diagram of the Greek sentence. He then gives the Greek text with his translation, followed by a clear elucidation of important ideas in the text in a bullet-point format. This is the meat of his commentary. He concludes each textual unit with a “Summary and Application,” where his pastoral demeanor shines in a more conversational tone.

Northwestern markets this commentary especially to pastors, calling it a resource for personal study, sermon writing, and Bible-study preparation. This book hits that bull’s-eye. It is neither too scholarly nor too “popular.” In some sense, this commentary gives the underlying exegetical foundation to Kuske’s earlier work for *The People’s Bible*, also a commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians. This reviewer found the sentence diagrams distracting; some took up more than a full page. Kuske’s bullet-point explanations did a better job of describing the sentence structure. But on the whole, this commentary does a good job of connecting the modern reader of 1 and 2 Thessalonians to the meaning of the Greek text. It is a useful and practical addition to the parish pastor’s study.

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