

BOOK REVIEW

Goldingay, John, *Reading Jesus's Bible: How the New Testament Helps Us Understand the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017). vii + 262 pp. Pbk. \$24.00.

For over two thousand years, the Christian church has confessed that Jesus came to inaugurate and establish a 'new covenant', but of what significance is the First Testament after Jesus has come? How does the New Testament make use of these writings? What cues does it give for our interaction with them? Goldingay's *Reading Jesus's Bible* looks at five facets of the ways the New Testament relates to the First Testament, particularly through the book of Matthew, in order to better understand the Old Testament itself. In other words, Goldingay states that with this volume one 'will consider ways in which Jesus and the first Christian writers used the First Testament and thus gave us pointers toward ways in which we might approach it. And in light of looking at and through some of those lenses that the New Testament uses, we will look at the nature of the First Testament itself' (p. 4).

Aside from a (non-annotated) 'for further reading' section, a concise introduction and conclusion, and subject and Scripture indices (regrettably, there is no name index, so some authors that appear in the footnotes are not readily traceable), *Reading Jesus's Bible* is divided into five chapters of roughly equal length, each of which delineates one of the five main ways that, according to Goldingay, the New Testament uses the First Testament: (1) Story: the First Testament tells the story of which Jesus is the climax; (2) Promises: the First Testament declares the promise of which Jesus is the fulfillment; (3) Ideas: the First Testament provides the images, ideas and words with which to understand Jesus; (4) Relationship: the First Testament lays out the nature of a relationship with God; and (5) Life: the First Testament provides the foundation for Jesus' moral teaching insofar that it invites us to study what the Scriptures have to teach us about the way we should live. Each chapter also ends with five brief 'questions for discussion'.

Concerning why Goldingay chose the book of Matthew as his template, the author states that ‘the opening pages of the New Testament offer an instructive set of concrete illustrations of what the First Testament signifies for the New Testament’ (p. 2). Although he acknowledges that most of the New Testament operates in the same way with respect to Jesus and the Old Testament (i.e. that the New Testament writers explain who the Messiah is by looking at him in light of the First Testament), Goldingay claims that ‘the opening chapters of Matthew happen to operate that way in a particularly systematic fashion’ and that irrespective of whether the author was consciously aiming to achieve this end ‘he succeeded in what he was doing’ (p. 2). Thus, Goldingay states: ‘a convenient approach to considering our question is to start from Matthew’s approach; we can then also look at insights from other parts of the New Testament alongside Matthew’ (p. 2).

With respect to the importance of this subject, as a whole, Goldingay maintains, using 2 Tim. 3.15-17 as his support, that ‘while the First Testament is important in a particular way to Jews who believe in Jesus, it is also important to the whole church if it wants to understand Jesus, or to understand God, or to understand itself’, because, according to Goldingay, Paul claims that the writings of the First Testament are ‘able to make one wise in a way that leads to salvation *through faith in Christ Jesus*. The First Testament (Paul says) is monumentally important to anyone who wants to trust in Jesus and live for Jesus’ (p. 4, emphasis original).

There is no need in this review to delineate at length the content of each of the main chapters. Suffice it to say that each chapter seeks to expose the meaning or significance of a small portion of the Gospel of Matthew (namely chs. 1–5) alongside certain other portions of the New Testament in light of the context of the First Testament and the five-fold ‘grid’ mentioned above. The volume is replete with extensive direct biblical quotations.

This last point leads to my first critique of this volume. Far too much space seems to be misused by directly quoting Scripture (some quotations even extend to nearly a full page in length) rather than engaging the text and the issues at hand or further developing the author’s thesis and arguments. Although some chapters do make somewhat less use of direct quotations of Scripture than others, it would be fair to say that almost ten percent of the two hundred and fifty pages of this book is taken up with direct quotations of Scripture. One questions the pedagogical benefit and scholastic necessity of such activity and may also ponder any potential relationship that might exist between the extensive quotations of Scripture and the fact that the author

states that 'translations from the Old Testament are my own and are adapted from a draft translation of *The Old Testament for Everyone*' (p. vii).

Another concern involves the lack of scholarly engagement throughout, as evidenced through the paucity of footnotes and other references. Given the complexity of the subject matter, it would behoove the author to more circumspectly engage the issues at hand from a scholarly standpoint and to have provided greater detail and support for some of his ideas. Does not the fact that *Reading Jesus's Bible* seems to be pitched at a more 'general' audience perhaps make it even more desirable to show the evidence for one's conclusions? Surely one should not refrain from mentioning the scholarly foundation upon which one stands merely because a given work is not 'scholarly' per se.

Alongside this, Goldingay's (non-annotated) 'for further reading' section also fails to note many of the key 'introductory' works that concern the use of the Old Testament in the New—volumes that would undoubtedly be of benefit to the beginner and introductory student, which is Goldingay's target audience. This absence surely limits the reader's ability to orient themselves to the discipline as effectively as could otherwise be possible.

Other, more significant, criticisms include the rather glib way that Goldingay handles complex and highly debated matters. For example, since there is no glossary and little documentation in the way of footnotes, the uninitiated student might fail to appreciate that concepts such as 'typology' or '*sensus plenior*' (which is not even mentioned in the index!) are actually highly debated topics involving a multiplicity of viewpoints. Other key terms, such as 'allusion' and 'echo' are also not thoroughly defined. Some readers may also more than quibble about other topics that are often brought up without caveats or discussion, such as Goldingay's belief that Genesis–Deuteronomy could easily have been the prequel to Joshua–Kings (see p. 53).

Finally, some evangelical readers may also take issue with the seemingly *laissez faire* approach that the author takes to matters relating to biblical inerrancy or the historical accuracy of the Bible, such as Goldingay's statement that 'the book of Jonah is (divinely inspired) historical fiction' (p. 58) or the rather bald assertion that Jericho and Ai were not occupied at the time of Israel's entry into the land, something that Goldingay states 'would obviously make the job a lot easier' (p. 47). With respect to what Goldingay calls 'the facts', the author uses the analogy of a movie, stating

God apparently knew that narratives based on facts but incorporating divinely inspired reflection and divinely inspired imagination were the

kind of writings that could fulfil his purpose in a way that simple history would not. It is important to a movie that claims to be based on facts that it really is based on facts, and it is important to the First Testament that it is based on facts. But studying the First Testament does not mean focusing on establishing exactly what happened and finding the point where fact gives way to imagination. It means reading the story that we have (pp. 12-13).

In sum, while there is no question concerning the author's scholastic capabilities or his astuteness with matters of theology and church life, one is hard pressed to ascertain precisely what benefit one may gain from reading this volume, especially when it is compared to some of the other introductions to the subject. The lack of engagement with the scholarly world at large severely limits the usefulness of this volume as a textbook for graduate or undergraduate study, and its sheer length would surely preclude it from being assigned as supplemental reading in a course. Even those who are engaged in pastoral work or more serious small groups would undoubtedly benefit from having a more well-rounded introduction to the subject. That being said, however, as Craig G. Bartholomew states in his endorsement on the back cover of the book, 'if this book inspires us to attend more closely to the terrain Goldingay covers ... this ... work will have done its job' (back cover).

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