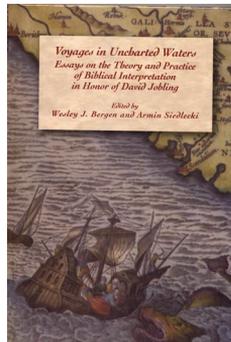


○ **REVIEW OF WESLEY J. BERGEN AND ARMIN SIEDLECKI (EDS.), *VOYAGES IN UNCHARTED WATERS: ESSAYS ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN HONOUR OF DAVID JOBLING* (SHEFFIELD: SHEFFIELD PHOENIX PRESS, 2006)**

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‘Uncharted Waters: The Voyage of a Prairie Schooner’ introduces the book: Jobling’s work has sailed into uncharted waters yet his professional career has played out on the Canadian prairie, hence the prairie schooner. The introduction tells us of the range of both Jobling’s interests and of the essays in the collection. Reading the Festschrift is both challenging and rewarding since it provides both focused and broad essays that, as a whole, give a valuable overview of many areas of biblical studies lying outside traditional historical-critical concerns.

There are three main parts that reflect Jobling’s scholarly career and changing foci. First is *Post-Structuralism*, that is, a move beyond the positivism of structuralism with its claim that structure is natural to view structure as rhetorical while keeping much of structuralism’s method and questions. There are five essays in the section.

‘Surviving Babel’ by Gary Phillips is a meditation on the Babel story, particularly its themes of hubris and violence, and on the survival of the story in written and other forms from ancient to contemporary times. Derrida uses Babel to explore philosophy and the violence inherent in it while Levi reads Auschwitz and the Holocaust, the modern symbol of violence, through the lens of Babel. Phillips extends the question of violence into the Bible’s presentation of God and covenant. The Tower of Babel is not a simple biblical story useful only to explain why we speak different languages.

George Aichele’s ‘Postmodernism and the Death of “Man”’ is the most philosophical of the offerings and the least focused on the Bible. It’s a tour of the premodern, the modern and the postmodern from Descartes to Deleuze and Derrida. These are useful categories for Aichele but not markers for distinct ‘ages’; a significant aspect of postmodernism is the acceptance of diversity

and plurality in human endeavours. There is no one way to analyse the past, to divide it into 'periods'. He ends with intriguing thoughts on postmodern religion as a new polytheism, a hybrid of the latter and of monotheism.

'Judges 1: The City of Writing, the Sacred, and the Fragmentation of the Body' by Francis Landy is a close reading of parts of Judges 1, a liminal text between Joshua and Judges. It is filled with odd details of geography, body parts (Adoni-bezek's thumbs and toes) and genealogy and Landy mines it for examples of ambiguity, particularly through the tangled genealogy of Caleb and Othniel, the first judge. Landy footnotes the many others who have noted, or missed, the details and the problems whether they agree or not with him. His reading is rich on its own and the footnotes only add more richness and diversity.

Robert Culley's 'Isaiah 38: The Meeting of Two Genres' analyses both the narrative of Hezekiah's illness and recovery and the thanksgiving psalm. Genre is a feature of text and language, a way of talking about a theme, here rescue. Both narrative and poem speak of the threat to Hezekiah and the rescue although in different style and imagery. The two genres, in contrasts and agreements, enrich the presentation of Hezekiah's story but Culley stays at a level of generality that I found unsatisfying after Landy's unrelenting attention to detail.

Matthew Mitchell's 'Scholars of Repute' closes the poststructuralism section looking ahead to ideological criticism. The essay concerns reputation, particularly the reputation of Ferdinand Christian Baur, a mid-nineteenth century scholar noted for rooting Christianity's origins in a struggle between Peter and Paul and their followers. Mitchell is not concerned with Baur's work on its own but with his 'reputation'. This is a rhetorical study of biblical scholarship and how it reacts to a preceding scholar, especially one with repute. It's a fascinating exploration of why scholars reject or accept Baur on Paul. Although a major reason for rejection is Baur's involvement with theory when nuts-and-bolts exegesis is what is needed, Mitchell's concern is with the type of arguments and evidence offered, not with who's right or wrong.

Siedlecki introduces *Ideological Criticism*, treating the diversity in the use of the terms ideology and ideological. In this collection they appear in the sense of the thought-worlds, assumptions and prejudices of both the original texts and of the range of biblical scholars studying them. Any method has its underlying ideology. Ideology can have positive or negative results or a mixture, but it is not a set of beliefs that are only subjective and that need to be overcome to move to objective truth. Ideological criticism challenges any such claims to a totalising and value-free hermeneutics. There are four essays in this section.

In 'The Law of the Jealous Man' Roland Boer reads the law in Numbers 5:11-31 in view of the studies that refer to it as the Sotah, the 'wandering wife' in Hebrew, and treat it as a text about adultery. This reflects a need to normalise this ancient and odd 'law'. Through close reading of text and commentaries Boer produces an estrangement effect in the sense of the Russian Formalists: to make the familiar and cozy unfamiliar and strange. This is a text about the husband's suspicion or obsession that his wife has been with another man whether there has been adultery or not: 'He is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself' (Num 5:14). The husband needs to ensure that his wife produces his children not those of another. Boer regards the 'waters of bitterness' as a magic ritual without any effect other than that hoped for by priest and husband.

David Gunn opens 'The 'Good Commentator': on Joseph Hall, Laurence Sterne, Biblical Narrative, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel' noting that both Frei and Prickett see a shift in

the late eighteenth century to reading the Bible as a narrative, like the recent novel. Sarah Trimmer and Laurence Sterne are two examples. Gunn questions this as a late eighteenth century development and finds earlier examples of narrative and dramatic reading in the Elizabethan dramatists and in the early seventeenth century works of Joseph Hall who delved into characters, their thoughts and their motives. The goal was to teach and encourage moral behaviour. Gunn draws his examples from Judges and has lengthy quotations from those analysed. He provides insight into how people read and responded to biblical narrative.

In 'The Pentateuch and the Origins of Israel: Ideological Leakage Around the Master Narrative' F. Volker Greifenhagen notes that although there are a variety of views on Israel's origins in Hellenistic and Roman writers, the majority favour an Egyptian origin. Greifenhagen proposes that the Pentateuch, in which Israel comes from Mesopotamia, was composed in part to challenge the theory of Egyptian origin. Mesopotamian origins upstage the exodus and make it a secondary origin. He finds other hints, 'ideological leakage', that the narrative weakens evidence that Israel originated in Egypt. Both Joseph and Moses are Egyptianised and yet are major leaders of Israel; Joseph takes them into Egypt and Moses leads them out.

Tina Pippin's 'Signs of Empire, Signs of Apocalypse' focuses on the obsessive signs of Empire, both the Evil Empire and the Heavenly Empire, in the Apocalypse of John. The essay is reminiscent of Aichele's in its concern for the contemporary impact of and reaction to the Apocalypse. Pippin discusses a large number of writers including Barthes, Lyotard, and Hardt and Negri among the good guys and LaHaye (Left Behind series) and Lindsey on the other side. She ranges from the biblical text and the long series of millennial hopes it engendered to the contemporary scene including the brutal war in Iraq.

Bergen introduces *Global Readings* with 'Global readings: Reading the Bible in Kansas and Beyond' that acknowledges Jobling's influence by describing his course on global exegesis. The course introduces students to biblical interpretations from other cultures and engages these as far as possible on their own terms, not judging them by Western academic criteria. The students struggle with the new and the different and in this engage their own assumptions and ways of reading. There are five essays in the section.

In 'The Vocation of an African Biblical Scholar on the Margins of Biblical Scholarship' Gerald West offers an autobiography of his development in theology and biblical studies against the backdrop of the South African struggle against apartheid and the place of church and biblical studies in that struggle. He begins over 30 years ago and details many of the reactions and changes, both positive and negative, in society, church and academy and their effects on him and his studies. He stresses the complexities of the situations, for example, in biblical studies and the varying approaches adopted in employing the Bible as a resource against apartheid.

In 'Whoring Dinah: Poly-nesian-Reading Genesis 34' Jione Havea reads Genesis 34 (Dinah) in tandem with stories of two other women. Zipporah defends Moses from YHWH's attack (Exodus 4) and Tamar has two fateful encounters with her father-in-law Judah (Genesis 38). His reading is intense and the threefold focus produces both insights and questions. For Havea a poly-nesian ('many islands') reading is polytextual and transgressive reflecting the multiple origins and the trans-culture of the islanders due to their voyaging past. The transgressive aspect challenges the strictly Western readings of the colonial missionaries.

Edgar Conrad's 'Looking into Vision: See-Sawing in Prophetic Books' reviews the main words for vision in the Hebrew Bible, particularly *chazon* and *mar'eh*. *Chazon* is the normal word for

a prophetic vision usually received at night in the temple and concerning the future, near or distant. When other terms occur in the prophets their 'visions' are different in form and content. He discusses Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos and Zechariah. Conrad notes that this plurality in prophetic vision is partly obscured in using the one English term 'vision'. He concludes that the prophets with their strange visions of God and of the future are disturbing, alien characters at some distance from the social critics and preachers of much biblical criticism.

Norman Habel's 'What Kind of God Would Destroy Earth Anyway? An Ecojustice Reading of the Flood Narrative' was an intriguing essay for me. He reads the flood story taking into account the behaviour and fate of humans, animals and the earth. Two rationales are offered for the Flood: human sin that leaves animals and earth innocent and the corruption of all flesh on the earth that still leaves the earth innocent. Habel's question in his title, which also closes his essay, challenges this God who would destroy all to punish some. The promise to not destroy or corrupt again is a way to exonerate God for his brutal destruction of the earth.

The Festschrift closes with two Afterwords from Christopher Lind ('Personal Reflections') and Norman Gottwald ('A Personal Tribute to David Jobling, Fearless Frontiersman'). These provide more biographical notes on David Jobling, the biblical scholar, and fill in his portrait with solid glimpses of him as editor, teacher, preacher (a regular in the pulpit at St Andrew's) and theologian. For David the latter is how he understands himself at the close of day.