

ABSTRACTS AND CRITICAL BOOK REVIEWS

I found Mullins' book a natural attraction. I believe it should be insightful to others with an appreciation for the doctrine of God. Divine temporality is more tenable with biblical theology, than timelessness that is pillared on classical philosophy. For evangelical scholars who want to have more reasons and value for their stand on divine temporality, *The End of the Timeless God* is the right book to have on the shelf as part of cutting edge material.

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A Biblical History of Israel, by Ian Provan, Philips V. Long and Tremper Longman III. Second edition. Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2015. 486 pp. ISBN-978-0-664-23913-8. Softcover US\$29.00.

There are many books that have been authored on the history of biblical Israel, and many of them are introductory to the origin and development of the nation of Israel in general. In *A Biblical History of Israel*, the three authors somewhat take a rather unique approach to this general tradition. My goal in this critical book review is to make a quick overview and analysis of the arguments proffered by the authors for a biblical based history of Israel.

The three authors, all of them professors; Ian Provan, Philips V. Long and Tremper Longman III, are acclaimed biblical professors of the Old Testament. Ian Provan, a PhD graduate of Cambridge University, whose main academic work focused on one of the historical books; Kings. He studied biblical archaeology and medieval history. A scholar with a track record of publishing books and articles. A minister of religion in the Church of Scotland. At a mature age of 60, his teaching career has seen him through the academic corridors of the universities of Edinburgh, Wales, and College of Kings among others. He currently lives in Canada and teaches Biblical Studies at the Regent College.

Philip V. Long, born in 1951, got his PhD from Cambridge University. His dissertation was on the reign and rejection of king Saul. Besides, he has earned degrees from Wheaton College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He also studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. A published scholar and a Presbyterian minister of religion. Also, he has

contributed in the translation of the NIV Bible among other outstanding academic endeavors. He currently teaches at the Regent College.

Tremper Longman III, holds an MPhil and a PhD from Yale University, in addition to degrees earned from Ohio Wesleyan University and Westminster Theological Seminary. Born in 1952, an outstanding theologian whose major contributions include the New International Commentary on the Old Testament Dictionary, with special focus on the books of Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes. His teaching experience has taken him to Fuller Theological Seminary and Canadian Theological Seminary, and currently serves at the Regent College.

For scholars who are abraded with studies on the OT and specifically on the history of Israel, it has become common practice among critics to refute the reliability of the historicity of the OT. This is a trend that has been accelerated since the enlightenment period with the arrival of the historical critical method popularized in the 19th century by Julius Wellhausen. Archaeology and scientific methodologies have contended for a superior place above the biblical history. Narratives of the bible have been given a fresh look and at best relegated to the peripherals when discussing the historical background of Israel. Provan, Long and Longman, in their book seek to re-ascertain the primacy of biblical history in the discussion of a history of Israel. The three are evangelical scholars whose scholarly perspective takes the bible as authentic and preferred document to establish the history of Israel. Other branches of learning do have a place in the discussion, but not to replace Scripture.

The book is outlined in a simple and coherent and easy to follow structure. The first part deals with historical and historiographical elements and their relationship to the bible. Part two deals with the history of Israel from Abraham down to the Persian Empire. Sub sections that follow make it easy for the reader to follow the authors' discussion chronologically. For purpose of our critical analysis we will further break the parts as we discuss each of the elements they contain.

Part one is divided into 5 sections; How scholars try to kill OT history, knowledge and faith, knowing about the history of Israel, narratives of the past and a biblical history of Israel. Long, Provan and Longman analyze the reasons why there is an attack on the OT and its historicity. They do so by doing a response to the arguments that have been posited by critics. All the five sections are connected in their thematic focus in that they seek to look at the real causes that have negatively impacted OT history and historiography.

In the first section, the authors take examples of scholars who are critical of the historicity of the OT head on. These are Soggin, Miller and Hayes, to begin with. They analyze their arguments and make a response to their

positions against the biblical option. It is apparent to the three scholars that much of what Soggin, Miller and Hayes are positing conclusions based on claims rather than solid evidenced scholarship.

In section two, they look at knowledge and faith and focus at Thomas Thompson a critic of the OT, whose assertions they argue against in the light of the biblical record. However, they bring something new to their observation, i.e., Thompson is making arbitrary claims that are epistemological in nature (p. 38). In other words they attempt to take a unique look at the scholars' work, for all the scholars they analyze, by looking at the macro picture and driving factors of the reasoning behind it.

The third and the fourth section are closely related in that Provan, Long and Longman are addressing issues related to ideology, archaeological, textual and historiography. They make a response to Baruch Halpern (p. 59), who describes a view of accepting the OT text as "puzzling." In addition they tackle Perez who asserts by implication that the OT's narratives are "non-absolute," (p. 102). Shearer West's arguments that reduce the OT text a mere "representation" (p. 102) of a deeper reality, are not spared either. In these two sections the authors deal with biblical narratives in the light of the questions of fiction or reality.

The last and final section deals with a biblical perspective to the history of Israel. In this section, the three are discussing the rational why a biblical perspective is to be preferred following a careful analysis of the other arguments from the critics of the historicity of the OT. This section seems most appropriate in that it gives the reader a quick connection to the main issue the authors are contending for, i.e., the bible is a reliable text to establish a history of Israel. In this regard they proffer few positions to effect this option; the bible is historical, the OT text must be uniquely studied and taken as is. Extra non-biblical texts help understand the OT text but should not be considered more seriously (p. 141). The bible scholar should be "attentive," (p. 142) to other disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, without making them an authority on the history of Israel.

Part two of the book is carefully divided into seven sections that are taking the journey of Israel from the progenitor of the nation Abraham to the period of the Persians. What is common in these sections is their interrelatedness that gives a flow of the author's thematic issue a binding thread. The book's main focus is kept alive in all the sections. The Genesis account and exodus, the conquest, the three phases of the monarchical periods, exile and post exilic periods, and a conclusion.

In the first section, Long, Provan and Longman, because they are arguing for a historicity of the OT text, begin by looking at the life of Abraham in the context of the Ancient Near East (ANE). The patriarchs setting, their progression from being pastoralists, through the period of

Egyptian bondage, right to the exodus and wilderness wondering for 40 years. By looking at the life of the patriarchs, the authors are playing on the ground of critics, and from there seek to show both historically and through historiography how the narratives evidence the fact of genuine history. The mention of Israel on the Merneptah (p. 155), is noted among other evidences to argue for a historicity of Israel. Provan, Long and Longman note the arguments of other scholars who have argued for the historicity of Israel, among them Kenneth Kitchen who first apologizes and then observes that to refute Israel's historicity is "con-nonsense-us" (p. 155), in contrast to the usual claim that says there is "consensus" (p. 155) concerning the denial of Israel's history.

The narratives of Joseph play a key role in the argument for a historical Israel (p. 172), along with its theological implications. Theological implications are an example of what happens when the history of Israel is denied. Joseph's connection to Egypt and the chronology of figures that are attested in Egyptology, all these facts argue for a historical Israel.

Moses, the liberator of Israel is brought into the discussion. This is so because the narrative of the birth of Moses is attributed to the Akkadian king, Sargon's legend of birth in Mesopotamia. The authors then make an analysis of Hebrew Bible and the ancient texts to dispute the Sargon legends. Diminishing such legends is a case for a historical Israel for Provan, Long and Longman.

The exodus date has generated debate even among those who accept the historicity of the bible but are divided among the minimalists and maximalists. The authors take opportunity of this issue for it is also used to argue for a non-historical Israel. The authors place 1446 BCE as the date of the exodus calculating from 1 Kgs 6:1 which states the building of the temple in 966 BCE, 480 years after the exodus (p. 185). They put attention to this because archaeological data that has been interpreted has mainly been attributed to a 13th century BCE for the exodus, and this discredits the record of the bible as a historical document upon which to construct a history for Israel.

The early monarchical period make the third section the book. Its chronology is carefully dealt with in light of the ANE. A long-standing controversy has existed on the historicity of King David. The debate rages on to this day. By looking at this issue Provan, Long and Longman have plunged into the ring of a disputed biblical character to show case their argument and proffer a suggestion to accept the historicity of David (p. 266). The choice of David, is hoped, serves as a response to anyone who might pose a challenge to their argument as to why they did not select to prove their case of argument on this bible character. The Solomonic kingship and the issue of Jerusalem is also discussed here, though it is fully developed in the fourth section that follows it. Both sections are very much

connected for they focus at David and Solomon. Section three deals mainly with the chronology and the works of King Solomon and how they correlate to the text (p. 318) and archaeological evidence (p. 322).

Section five of the book is a historical discussion of the division of the monarch (p.343). It makes a chronological discussion of the kings of Israel's (p.350) alongside the chronological list of Assyrian kings (p. 353), and the Pharaohs of Egypt (p. 372), to showcase historicity of Israel. Later the authors trace the fall of Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The fall of Israel and Judah is documented in the annals of ancient documents and is attested in historical texts just as the bible records. This is the argument of the authors in their apologetic treatise.

Section six is a discussion of the exile of the Jews from Judah following a chronology of succession of kings and historical events in the OT text. The authors focus at the text more, to discuss their case against minimalist advocacies and insist, for example, that the exilic period must remain as 586 and 539 when the decree by Cyrus was done (p. 379). Jill Midlemas' argument that the period should be renamed templeless, period, is refuted. To go further than this, the authors look at the post exilic period and the fall of the Babylonian empire. The authors have placed the nation of Israel in the context of other nations, to show how historic Israel is as stated in the bible.

The post-exilic period is considered with special focus at characters such as Zerubbabel, Haggai and others, as historical figures in the Persian era. These figures and others such as Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah are discussed along with the building of the second temple in the historicity argument for Israel. In the end elements of the inter-testamental period is given attention to buttress the same case for a historical Israel (p. 408).

Provan, Long and Longman have demonstrated consented effort that takes much from their experience and training as OT biblical scholars, to present a book of outstanding quality. Scholars who are sceptical about a single authored book's biases, though this is difficult to rule out for anyone, here find less to highlight this weakness. The three have written their volume with no apology that they are evangelical scholars on a mission to defend the plausibility of a history of Israel based on the bible, in their book, *A History of Israel*.

The book begins with an establishment of common ground understanding, when they first discuss what history and historiography mean to the study of OT or the Hebrew Bible (HB). I find this most appropriate for a scholarly discussion of this nature to have, for the reason that a common ground of working definitions is helpful to engage in a fair discussion on any given subject. The authors do not want to assume and be naïve about the need to academically operate on the same platform when

it comes to a controverted issue, such as the historicity of the HB. They did not only manage to express their position with clarity but also leave very little if no options for denial of their propositions on the subject.

The book is consistent with its early observation spelled out on the very beginning, i.e., the use of other branches of learning is not to take the place of the bible in the construction of a history of Israel. The authors have been very consistent in this stance and where they took to make references to archaeology or other ancient texts they let the biblical text speak for itself. While we cannot dispel archaeology, it should be used to add to the understanding of the biblical text, rather than a judge and arbitrator of the biblical text, so they seem to declare.

Any discussion on chronology is bound to add value to any historiographical document or history. The fact that Provan, Long, and Longman chose this tool in their study is highly commendable. It is a method that creates an even and common ground when talking about historical disputes of this nature. In this case, Assyriology and Egyptological chronologies have been used in the chronological investigation of a historical Israel. This was not as exhaustive, as one might have desired, nevertheless it served the intended purpose, i.e to show that Israel fits in the historical chronological timelines of the world that surrounded it.

Scholarly claims must be followed through and not left to themselves, even if they are said to be a common consensus, among scholars. What is consensus is not necessary reality of obtaining facts. The authors help us appreciate and exercise critical thinking in this regard. Theological enterprise is a venture of question asking and attempting to establish solid responses as answers. The authors help us to refuse claims that are not based on untenable arguments.

This is a book that captures the entire timeline of the historical development of Israel from Abraham to the post-exilic period and the building of the second temple. In the process of discussion it makes use of the text, archaeology, anthropology, chronology among other areas of learning, to argue in favor of a biblical history of Israel. As if that is not enough it picks on current OT debated issues on historicity, such as the character of King David. Most convincing is the fact that they share the bankruptcy of attempting to prove, the biblical text using other methods outside the biblical history.

However, I would have expected to see in the book, elements of Israel about their temple cultus or religion in the discussion of the biblical history of Israel. The temple cultus takes a center stage of the economy of Israel's existence. It would have been interesting too to see a discussion on honour and shame, a typical cultural trait or practice of the ANE peoples, included

in the discussion. These few elements might have added interesting value to the arguments posited by the authors. Though the book excludes these Israelite or ANE elements, the book is an excellent scholarly material for use by any evangelical who refutes the historical critical methodology and its variations, of interpreting the HB. Graduate students in biblical studies and particularly OT, and professors alike, will find this resource book highly invaluable.

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Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology, by Darrell L. Guder. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xiv + 203 pp. ISBN: 0802872220. Softcover US\$ 19.

The purpose of the book is to show that though Christianity is religion of mission, the spirit of mission had been lost for many centuries due to misunderstanding of the true meaning of mission by giving wrong meanings to mission and using incorrect methods of evangelism which led to dissention and conflict. It also emphasized on how the Christian church could understand the true meaning of mission and get back to the early Church's spirit of mission by avoiding the spirit of division and using appropriate methods in order to evangelize the world and advance the kingdom of Christ.

Darrell L. Guder notes that the study of mission focused on methods and practices, and the theory that support them. Since Mission comes before theology, it is the mother of theology not vice versa. Mission needs two important things: commitment to evangelizing the world and the strategy how to do it (p. 5). The study of mission requires series theological engagement within the different cultural context. This needs to consider the local culture and tradition in order to do theology of mission. This new fact (theology of mission) was the result of modern missionary movement (p. 6).

Guder credited Karl Barth, one of the prominent protestant theologian of the twentieth century, for igniting the theological revolution that resulted in global discussion of mission that reshaped the theology of mission (p. 7). According to Karl Barth, the concept mission was originated from God himself that the Father sending the Son, the Father and the Son

