

For the intermediate Biblical Hebrew student, the book of Ruth, with its standard grammar, engaging and dramatic story line, and frequent usage of feminine verb forms, is an excellent choice for a student's text. The author has maintained a high level of accuracy. There are few, and only minor, omissions. However, it would have been helpful to also indicate where a given form is pausal. A more specific omission is on p. 35, where a verb is said to be from the Št\* stem. There is no entry in the abbreviations to tell the student that "Št\*" stands for the Hišthapel\* stem of the verb.

Computer programs, such as BibleWorks, Logos, and Accordance, provide instant details at a number of different levels. Vance's contribution is to provide a concise presentation of both the instant details and selected discussions of grammarians that captures the details found in computer software, but in a useful format designed specifically for the student to work independently. Worksheets that correlate with the book may be found online at [www.hendrickson.com/academic](http://www.hendrickson.com/academic).

Having listened to my students' praise of Vance's book, and having been duly impressed myself, I have found that while the book achieves the purpose for which it was intended, it cannot replace the intense word-by-word analysis that is done in a classroom setting. Vance often gives only a minimum of meanings for a word, which may lead students to believe that these are the only possible interpretations. In reality, the richness of a word's meaning may be understood fully only by comparison with similar usage elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

There is no substitute for searching through the various grammars oneself, comparing one analysis with another, and coming across related words and concepts. While computers and books, such as the one under discussion, are helpful, I fear that students will tend to use these tools to produce superficial research and fail to probe the deeper, more subtle nuances of the text.

If Vance's book is used as a supplement—and not as the sole source for understanding the biblical text—the student is free to function at the deeper level of scholarship, while cultivating a sense of progress and security. Unfortunately, I know that many busy students go first to the reader and then do any additional work with whatever little (or nonexistent) time is left. "Crutches" and "training wheels" are useful, but students who never practice "walking" or "riding" on their own, will cripple their development. Controlling student study habits is an ongoing pedagogical dilemma for the teacher.

Pedagogical tensions and struggles do not devalue Vance's work. His book remains an excellent resource for the teacher and student, especially the independent student.

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CONSTANCE CLARK GANE

Water, Mark, ed., comp. *The Encyclopedia of Prayer and Praise*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004. xvi + 1184 pp. Hardcover, \$39.95.

Mark Water is a prolific writer on a variety of biblical and religious topics "made easy" for the public at large. In the last four years, he has edited several encyclopedias, including *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Martyrs* (Baker, 2001) and *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Baker, 2001).

The *Encyclopedia of Prayer and Praise* is a reference work, featuring prayers and writings about prayer. The author's aim is to bring together a collection of "edifying" prayers; he specifically confines himself to Christian prayer, which he defines as a prayer addressed "to one of the Trinity" (xiii). His emphasis is on the rich heritage of classic Christian prayers throughout the history of the church, from the first to the nineteenth century.

The *Encyclopedia* is organized into two parts. Part 1 is similar in scope to, e.g., *The Complete Book of Christian Prayer* (1998, Continuum). Prayers are presented by topics pertaining to the life of the church, human experience, and the various moods and experiences of Christian life. The prayers were written by men and women from all over the world and from many walks of life. A number of meditations inspired by *lectio divina*, a profoundly biblical practice, brings part 1 to a close. The various sections in this part are cross-referenced to source writings presented in the next part of the book.

The value of the *Encyclopedia of Prayer and Praise* as a historical document resides foremost in the second part, which complements the prayers themselves with rich classic literature about prayer. Approximately 540 pages are devoted to extracts from classic Christian teaching on prayer from the last 1,900 years. A number of theologians and spiritual leaders are featured, beginning with the earliest times of the church. Part 2 also includes a number of entire prayer collections and introduces in its last pages stories about prayer, spanning various prayer experiences, and quotations from simple individuals to great religious personalities. To conclude from here, however, that this is “the largest collection published in the 21st century” (xvi) amounts to an overstatement, considering that we are just at the beginning of the century.

Parts 1 and 2 are separated by an index of authors and sources and an index of subjects. An appendix of biographical information provides dates and brief information on the various writers. Unfortunately, these tools are not very practical, as they are located between parts 1 and 2 rather than at the end of the book. Equally regrettable is the inconsistency of the biographical index, which was not compiled in a rigorous manner. At least 40 percent of the authors included in the book are missing from the list, which makes consultation difficult. The prayers and texts are written in clear and accessible modern English, which is particularly valuable when one considers the great number of texts translated from ancient languages. Sources used include the great classics of the sacred Christian texts, as well as devotional and secular literature. Again, the lack of a systematic listing of all the sources used and their publication information places the *Encyclopedia* at the margin of scholarly use and qualifies it rather for use by the general public.

In a work of such comprehensive scope, it is surprising that there are not many prayers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The “many hundreds of contemporary prayers” claimed by the author represent only a handful of writers. Actually, 365 prayers come from a single collection by Donna L. Hammond. The author justifies this limited inclusion by arguing that the *Encyclopedia* is meant to be a collection of “classic” Christian prayers. In that perspective, the time frame chosen (namely, up to the end of the nineteenth century) seems arbitrary and unconvincing. Also, the author’s argument that “over the past 50 years we have been very well served with books of contemporary prayers” and that he wants to avoid duplication (xiii), falls short of one’s expectation when opening the *Encyclopedia*. The value of this book lies precisely in the fact that it presents a sampling of the entire Christian prayer tradition in a single volume. To omit the inclusion of prayers that translate into today’s language the unique needs of a century marked by its own political and social situation, is a major drawback. The addition of twentieth- and twenty-first-century prayers, and especially teachings about prayer, would have made this *Encyclopedia* a more complete, more practical, and more relevant reference work.

In spite of its shortcomings, Water’s *Encyclopedia of Prayer and Praise* is a valuable tool for ministers, church historians, and researchers in Christian liturgy and spirituality. It is a treasure-trove for liturgists, who are searching for fresh or traditional material. Musicians seeking for new liturgical texts to be set to music will find it equally helpful.

Reaching back through time and space, the *Encyclopedia* becomes an illustration of the continuity and unity of Christian spirituality throughout the ages, reminding us how much today's church can find inspiration in the old and traditional expressions of liturgy. The *Encyclopedia* also becomes an inspiring devotional book: by offering its prayers, reflections, and meditations like cameos of past prayer life and experience, it brings enrichment to present-day personal spirituality and prayer practice. In a time when more and more congregations are looking for a solid framework for their liturgy, when many individuals long for a better structuring of their personal prayer life, this book provides abundant material for both purposes.

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LILIANNE DOUKHAN

Witherington, Ben, III. *The New Testament Story*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. x + 283 pp. Paper, \$18.00.

In this book, Ben Witherington III, Professor of New Testament Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, in a sense complements his *New Testament History: A Narrative Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). Intending to provide an "introduction in miniature" (ix) to the NT, Witherington consistently avoids the traditional schemes and critical jargons common to more technical introductions. The book focuses on the story of the NT and the stories within the NT in their relation to the life of Jesus.

Part 1 traces the development of the NT story in the scriptural canon. The first chapter discusses the oral culture in which the NT originated and suggests that an oral NT preceded the written one (4). During this oral period the first sacred traditions (e.g., hymns, creedal fragments, prayers, and sermon summaries) began to take shape (17-20). The extant fragments of such traditions in the NT documents demonstrate, among other things, the inadequacy of theories of a Christology that evolved from primitive to more sophisticated forms as Christianity moved away from its Jewish Palestinian roots (20-21). At an early period, apparently for worship and teaching purposes, the sacred traditions were written down in what can be called pre-NT narratives (chap. 2), which were basically collections of Jesus' sayings and stories (e.g., Q, M, L, miracle stories, and passion narratives). As the church began to spread to foreign territories and the eyewitness generation began to die, such narratives were then used to produce the NT as we know it (chaps. 3 and 4). Witherington begins by discussing Paul's letters, which were the first NT documents to be written. The transmission of early traditions by teaching and preaching is what secures the continuity between Jesus and Paul, who is not to be understood as the founder of Christianity (48). This section includes helpful discussions on the dating, authorship, and literary genre of the Epistles and Gospels, as well as their main literary and theological traits. Part 1 ends with a summary of the historical process through which the NT documents were collected into the canon (chap. 5). Witherington's view is that the canon was not imposed, but recognized, though "orthodoxy preceded the canon, and helped the process of discerning what the canon should look like" (103).

Part 2 studies the stories that are alluded to or told in the NT. The discussion follows a narratological approach and the stories are presented in a roughly chronological order. The purpose is to investigate the NT narratives in order to discover "the story" they are trying to tell (109, n. 1). Again Witherington begins with Paul (chap. 6) and how he uses the stories of OT characters, such as God, Adam, and Abraham, to tell the story of Jesus. After Paul, the discussion moves to other parts of the NT; and then to Paul's own story, as told first by himself and then by Luke in