

Despite my differences with Pugliese's views, I appreciate the fact that he takes on an issue of great importance and grapples with it in a substantive way. Seminary and graduate students will profit from reading his work.

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Seibert, Eric A. *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009. xii + 347 pp. Paperback, \$22.00.

Eric A. Seibert seeks to clarify the Bible's picture of God by addressing certain problematic portrayals of the OT narratives. The introduction, "Thinking Rightly About God and the Problem of the OT," is almost as provocatively titled as the book. *Disturbing Divine Behavior* is divided into three parts, an epilogue, and two significant appendices, "Reexamining the Nonviolent God" and "Inspiration and the Authority of Scripture." The latter appendix will be of special interest to scholars in biblical studies and systematic theology. There are also three online features available for downloading at Seibert's website, including (1) advice on using the book as a class text, (2) sample study questions on the book as a whole, for each chapter and both appendices, and (3) an entire syllabus for Seibert's course on "Topics in Biblical Theology: Divine Violence."

Early on, Seibert complicates his task by referencing Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer's comment on his own catechistic experience. Nelson-Pallmeyer remembers being silenced by an authoritarian instructor when he raised questions about God's drowning everybody, allowing earthquakes, and consigning babies to hell because they died before being baptized (8). Seibert dedicates chapter 4 to addressing the problems presented in these types of events and to reviewing various ways people justify God's odd OT behavior, including approaches such as "divine immunity," "just cause," and the "greater good."

Consistent with the "divine immunity" approach, whatever happens in God's name is appropriate since God *qua* God cannot err (71-74). According to the "just cause" explanation, whatever God does, he does with good reason. Illustrative of this is the universal flood of Genesis 6-8, necessitated by widespread human wickedness (74-77). In the "greater good" approach, a "subcategory" of "just cause," Seibert underlines the limitations of arguments by scholars such as Gleason Archer (*Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*), Terence Fretheim (*God and Violence in the OT*), and Tremper Longman III (*The Case for Spiritual Continuity*) (77-80) to show that the end of "greater good" cannot be justified, especially given the suffering of some of society's most innocent in the process of mass destruction.

Seibert finds all these methods unsatisfactory because they are all subject to the same “control belief” and related assumptions, viz., that God actually says what the OT claims he does, and that the OT accurately reflects history (115). Given the importance of such control beliefs, he sets out to test and disprove their validity, countering that apparent historicity does not establish historicity; questioning biblical accounts does not reflect a spiritual problem; accepting Jonah as fiction does not mean that the entire Bible is “a bunch of campfire tales with little or no basis in history” (119); and faith is not jeopardized, or at any rate should not be, by our positive, negative, or neutral answers to these historical questions.

Continuing his quest to resolve the historical question, Seibert dedicates the most space to addressing the claim that doubting the historicity of biblical accounts undermines biblical authority (120-124). To reject that position, he disputes, with little conviction, Douglas Stewart’s argument that the Jonah narrative as historical fact is existentially more compelling than Jonah as illustrative fiction. God’s enforceable revelation impacts the reader more than some theoretical proposal about what God might do or wish to happen in a given situation. Seibert disputes this. He illustrates his point by comparing the emotional impact between J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and a true story of his visit to a laundromat, at which time he was warned by another customer that gas had been poured into some of the machines. After being directed to undamaged machines, he finished his laundry and drove home. Seibert’s view is that his story will probably not “cause anyone to change his or her thinking on topics such as loyalty, good versus evil, or the courage to act with moral conviction” (124). Given the moral and rhetorical distance between his laundromat story and the biblical story of Jonah, Seibert might just as easily have given us a real shopping list from any dry-goods store or an inventory of highway roadkill victims, in order to prove his point that narrating facts does not necessarily alter behavior. What becomes apparent is that Seibert’s neutrality about biblical historicity is, as surely as with others, a function of his own control beliefs. Biblical writers, he knows, did not mainly write to preserve the past, but to portray it instructively (125). Reading their portrayals as factual rather than as instructive distorts the purposes of both writer and story, jeopardizes Christianity’s reliability, and distorts God’s character (125-129).

As promised in his introduction, Seibert writes his tenth chapter to provide “the basis for making . . . all-important distinctions between the textual and actual God” (12), since it is this distinction that will deliver Bible readers from the perils of belief in the mean-spirited and capricious deity whom the OT literally portrays. He leads off the chapter with an epigraph from Gareth Lloyd Jones that is certainly sound in what it affirms and certainly odd in its implication that some Bible teachings contradict what we know of God in Christ. The chapter’s “two major assumptions,” both entirely admirable, are

that Jesus most clearly and completely reveals the Father's character (185), and that God's character is consistent (186). However, Seibert's search for this consistency of character leads him beyond OT address, since substantiating it requires him to reject both OT and NT portions of Scripture. Despite his earnest desire to follow and obey the Bible, his modifying condition for such obedience turns out to be only "insofar as it reflects the will of the God Jesus reveals (280)." To this end, each reader must develop her own "dual hermeneutic" that allows for rejection of unworthy OT portrayals of God "without regarding the passages in which they reside as theologically useless (12)." Developing this dual hermeneutic, complete with its obviously individualistic options for selection and rejection of biblical material, is the purpose of chapter 11 (209-222).

Seibert's work successfully depicts the intellectual struggle to maintain faith in the Bible while privileged with an enlightenment that, for many, has overtaken the OT's ethical unruliness. That struggle is complicated by references such as Nelson-Pallmeyer's that confuse the challenge to biblical morality by lumping together biblical accounts and awkwardly unbiblical teaching. Beyond this, Seibert's Appendix A acknowledges that he may not yet be perfectly satisfied with the NT either. He continues to pursue an interpretation of Jesus as thoroughly nonviolent as he grapples with the problem of divine mass destruction. In the end, he concedes that whereas Jesus' eschatological judgment teachings may yet involve "some degree of divine violence" (253), that violence remains "outside the space-time continuum, only for a limited period of time, and only for the sake of final punishment" (ibid.). Because the objects of that violence are sentient creatures, Seibert will likely remain committed to his project of divine recreation after the image and subject to the ethical authority of sophisticated modern humanity. Happily for those who share that vision, he is well on his way. For those interested in a contrasting reading, according to which subjectivity does not determine what is to be kept as divine or discarded as human and inhumane, Barna Magyarosi's recent work on *Holy War and Cosmic Conflict in the Old Testament* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society, 2010) may prove a helpful corrective.

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LAEL CAESAR

Suriano, Matthew J. *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2. Reihe, 48. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010. xvi + 211 pp.

This book is an expanded revision of the author's doctoral dissertation at the University of California, Los Angeles. It consists of a sociopolitical study of the formulaic language of royal epilogues in the book of Kings. Although