LESSON 1

HOW SHOULD WE READ THE BIBLE?

INTRODUCTION

During the Second Missionary Journey, the Apostle Paul and Silas stayed briefly in the city of Berea, having fled persecution in Thessalonica after having been there for only a few weeks. Luke, writing the account of the stay, singles out the Bereans for particular commendation, saying: "***These*** [Bereans] ***were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so***" (Acts 17:11). Paul's commendation is not just that the Bereans were receptive to the Gospel, which they were, but that they evaluated his claims by searching the Scriptures. This is serious dedication to being "Bible believing."

A key hallmarks of historic Protestantism is a commitment to the preeminent authority of the Bible. However, many—perhaps most—people, if they read the Bible at all, read it devotionally: a few verses or a short passage with some inspirational thoughts by the devotional writer. Such an approach reveals more about the mind of the devotion writer than that of the LORD, who inspired all Scripture. If we are to be truly "Bible believing," then we need an approach that understands the Bible comprehensively and holistically.

Books explaining how to study the Bible typically focus on two things: exegesis and hermeneutics. Exegesis looks where a passage is situated in the overall context of a book, analyzes the logical organization and flow, and observes key words in the passage. Knowing the original languages can be an asset in this regard. **Exegesis aims to understand what a text is saying**. **Hermeneutics tries to get at what a text means**. Hermeneutics includes understanding the historical context behind the passage, assessing what the author intended, what the original readers understood it to mean, and what it can mean to us today. Exegesis and hermeneutics go together. Most books on how to study the Bible, however, do not go beyond this, and as a result, Christians are left to fend for themselves in reckoning how different parts of the Bible relate to one another. What Christians need is a framework to see how the Bible fits together.

The Bible is complex. It is made up of 66 individual books, with genres encompassing historical narrative, law code, poetry, wisdom literature, romance, epistle, and apocalypse. It was written over a period of 1,500 years by some 40 authors, each with their own unique style. At the same time, since these books were infallibly inspired by God, God is the ultimate author and all Scripture is the very Word of God. That means that despite the diversity in the Bible there is also a fundamental unity to it. If we are to read the Bible rightly, then we need some kind of **Biblical Theological** approach. Here we are using the term in a more technical sense than simply the notion that all theology should be based on the Bible. Biblical theology is a way of reading the Bible that grapples with this unity and diversity, of how the Old Testament relates to the New and in both change and continuity and how the canon of Scripture came together.

DELVING DEEPER

I. What is Biblical Theology?

In defining the term, "biblical theology," we will rely on Geerhardus Vos's 1949 landmark book, *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*. Vos was a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1893-1932, and is widely recognized as the father of modern conservative Reformed biblical theology. He defined biblical theology as "that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible." That is, **biblical theology is not just about God, but tries to understand how God revealed Himself in His Word over time**. It is an historical approach, rather than simply a dogmatic one. It captures the unfolding narrative of the Bible and complements systematic theology, which looks at the doctrines of the faith from the totality of all Scripture.

Vos observed four factors from the diversity and unity of the Bible, which are fundamental for us in understanding the character of Scripture:

1. **The Bible is progressive**. God's revelation unfolded over time, rather than all at once;
2. **It is organic**. It unfolded organically, like a tree developing from a seed to full maturity;
3. **It is realistic**. Scripture was grounded in the actual circumstances of history, in real time and space;
4. **It is occasioned.** God gave it in response to the practical religious needs of His people rather than for their abstract speculation.[1]

Vos's observations about the nature of Scripture are complemented by observations from Yale scholar Brevard Childs in his 1992 book, *Biblical Theology, A Proposal*.[2] Childs (1923-2007) was an influential Old Testament scholar, and although he was not a conservative, he criticized previous critical scholars for how they collectively undermined an understanding of the cohesiveness of Scripture.

Childs argued, first, **that there is a fundamental stability and unity to the biblical text.** Earlier critical theologians said the text of the Old Testament was constantly in flux and that the Jewish canon was not closed until late in the first century AD. To the contrary, Childs said that the people putting the Bible together believed the particular books of the Bible were religiously authoritative in their lifetimes. This mitigated any temptation to alter the texts, and fostered extra care in assembling the canon of the Old Testament. Childs observed that the Hebrew Bible seemed to be fixed before the first century AD. The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, writing in the first century AD, listed the books of the Hebrew Scripture, and his list contained all the books that compose our Old Testament. Moreover, in the debates between Jesus and the Pharisees in the Gospels, both sides presume

[1] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), 4-8.

[2] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology, A Proposal* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

the same set of biblical books, and neither accused the other of using books that were not accepted as canonical. In fact, in debates between Christians or Jews neither cite from the Apocrypha, as they did not see it as authoritative.

Second, Childs said that **there is an essential continuity between the New and Old Testaments.** He observed that in the New Testament period, Christian witness to Christ depended on the Old Testament. This meant that Christians needed to adopt the commonly accepted Hebrew canon. The juxtaposition of the two testaments to form the Christian Bible arose not simply to establish a historical continuity between Israel and the church, but as an affirmation of theological continuity. A most striking feature in the juxtaposition of the two testaments is the lack of any Christian editorial activity on the Old Testament. The New Testament is neither a commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures, nor a revision of them, nor a rejection of them. The New Testament is incomprehensible apart from the Old. The Old Testament is promise, the New fulfillment.

For Childs, **biblical theology needs to reflect on the unity of the testaments and the relationship of them to the life of the community**. It needs to respect the original integrity of each testament and the continuities and discontinuities between them, hearing the whole of Christian scripture in light of the full reality of God in Jesus Christ. These are observations that conservative Reformed and evangelical Protestants can readily affirm.

II. What Are Some Different Ways of Reading Scripture?

The observations Vos and Childs made regarding the character of Scripture—namely, that the Bible unfolds progressively, is organic, realistic, occasioned, and exhibits a fundamental stability and an essential continuity between the Old and New Testaments—set solid baseline assumptions for how we should read Scripture. Reformed Protestants read Scripture with a covenantal hermeneutic and that is what we will use for the remainder of this course. However, that is not how many Protestants have read Scripture over the centuries. So, before we turn to a covenantal approach, it is worth examining three major alternative ways which many non-Reformed Protestants read Scripture: "Law and Gospel," Dispensationalism, and Critical Theology. All of these approaches effectively foster a discontinuous reading of Scripture, rather than the unity of Scripture.

The "Law and Gospel" Hermeneutic

The "Law and Gospel" approach uses the soteriological doctrine of justification by faith alone as the prism through which to interpret all of Scripture, and is most commonly associated with the Lutherans. While Martin Luther himself did not explicitly come up with it, it accords with his general view that the primary emphasis of the Law is to convict men of their sins and it is reflected in subsequent Lutheran writings and confessions.[3] The essence of this hermeneutic is that in every passage one should look for something to convict us ("Law") and

[3] Horace Hummel, "Are Law and Gospel a Valid Hermeneutical Principle?" *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 2-3, pp. 181, 184-185.

something that speaks of the Gospel.[4] The purpose of this way of reading Scripture is to move people to dependence on the sufficiency of Christ. Its strength is in its Gospel and Christ-centeredness, and it is well-suited to preaching. At the same time, it does not explain the historical aspects of Scripture or its progressive unfolding and it does not naturally arise out of the text. It is notably subjective, since there is ambiguity as to how to exegete texts to neatly fit into either the category of Law or Gospel. As a result, in the past century this subjectivity has fostered liberalism in Lutheran circles, with theologians creating a canon of preferred texts within the canon of Scripture to emphasize "Gospel" over "Law." Such subjectivity also means that orthodoxy is a process to be achieved, not doctrines to be rested upon.

Many American Evangelicals have propounded a variant Law-Gospel distinction to Scripture. In this, they see Law and Gospel not in every text of Scripture (as the Lutherans would) but in the division between the Old and New Testaments, with the Old Testament being "Law" and the New Testament being "Gospel." In reality, this does not accurately reflect the content of the two Testaments, since one can find elements of Law and Gospel in both Testaments. It also *de facto* marginalizes the Old Testament, akin to the ancient heresy of Marcionism. Marcion was a leading Gnostic heretic in the mid-second century AD who thought that the God of Old Testament was harsh and judgmental, while the God of the New Testament was loving. Accordingly, Marcion considered the only valid texts of Scripture to be Luke's Gospel and most of Paul's letters, thereby bowdlerizing the canon of Scripture. Approaches through the centuries that dismiss the relevance of the Old Testament to the Christian faith thus tend to follow in Marcion's footsteps.

The Dispensational Hermeneutic

Among American Evangelicals, Dispensationalism is the predominant hermeneutical approach, even if many are not familiar with that name per se. Dispensationalists often present their hermeneutic as simply the "literal" way of reading the Bible, as opposed to an "allegorical" way. Unlike the "Law and Gospel" hermeneutic, it is a coherent system rather than just an interpretative principle. It was developed by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an Anglo-Irish evangelist, who held a sharp distinction between law and grace, a radical separation between the "earthly" and "heavenly" peoples of God in Israel and the

[4] C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, trans. W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1929). The definitive statement of the "Law and Gospel" approach was given by C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887), the first President of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the President of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. In a series of lectures in 1884-85 on "The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel," Walther said that Law and Gospel are found throughout the Bible, and this is the lens through which all of Scripture is interpreted. Law and Gospel must be kept distinct, although this need not lead to simplistic dichotomies between the human and the divine or the Old and New Testaments. Law must precede Gospel in its articulation, since Law prepares man for the Gospel by showing him his need. As W. H. T. Dau noted in the preface to the 1929 published version of Walther's lectures, this approach is necessary because God confronts man at all times in His holy will and His gracious will and man needs to know where he stands according to either will.

Church, and a heavy emphasis on premillennial eschatology. C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) expanded upon Darby's ideas in notes for a study Bible published in the early 1900s, which became perhaps the bestselling study Bible ever.

Unlike the "Law and Gospel" approach, Dispensationalism self-consciously tries to be historically grounded. Scofield saw biblical history divided into different epochs,[5] each of which involved a test which God gives man and man inevitably fails, thereby showing that salvation is entirely of God. In a sense, Dispensationalism sees a kind of a repeat of Adam's sin in the Garden throughout the different dispensations. These dispensations were seen as rigidly separated from one another, which meant that promises God made to a people in one dispensation only applied to them. Thus, in practice, the key doctrine in Dispensationalism is not the dispensations, but the difference between ethnic Jews ("Israel") and Christians ("the Church").[6] Because each dispensational period is considered to be self-contained, God's promises to earthly Israel apply only to the Jewish people, and the church will not share in these blessings. This division into two peoples also drives the heavy emphasis Dispensationalists place on end times theology (eschatology), since they see Christ's establishment of a literal 1,000 year kingdom as the only way God can fulfill His promises to the Jews.

In practice, the concept of rigidly separate dispensations, each reflecting a different kind of testing on mankind, emphasizes God's judgment rather than His historical redemptive working. This begs the question as to why this is necessary if Christ's work alone is sufficient for salvation. Moreover, the idea that there are effectively two peoples of God—Jews and Christians—logically leads to the conclusion of two ways of salvation, although most Dispensationalists will deny this. In the end, Dispensationalism fosters a discontinuous reading of Scripture, which means that most of the Old Testament is not relevant for Christians, thus bringing into question the unity of Scripture. It, too, ends up with a bowdlerized canon of Scripture, like the Lutheran "Law and Gospel" approach.

The Historical-Critical Hermeneutic

Where American Evangelicals have gravitated toward Dispensationalism, theological liberals and modernists have gravitated toward a historical-critical hermeneutic. In our day, there is much talk of Critical Theory, such as Critical Race Theory or Critical Queer Theory and so forth, which academically and culturally has come into prominence in recent decades. In theological studies, however, critical theories have been around since the 1700s, drawing on fundamentally skeptical and atheistic assumptions from the European Enlightenment. Unlike Dispensationalism and the "Law and Gospel" approach,

[5] Classic Dispensationalism, ala Scofield, envisioned seven dispensations: (1) Innocency (Eden before the Fall); (2) Conscience (from the Fall to the Flood); (3) Human Government (from the Flood to Babel); (4) Promise (from Abraham to the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt); (5) Law (from the Exodus to John the Baptist); (6) Grace (the present church age until the Second Coming of Christ); and (7) Kingdom (the reign of Christ from His Second Coming until the Final Judgment). Other Dispensationalists have come up with different dispensations.

[6] In recent decades, Progressive Dispensationalist scholars have moderated the hermeneutic, recognizing more connections between Jews and Christians and more applications of the Old Testament promises to the church, but still hold a distinction between the two groups.

there is not a single overarching hermeneutic promoted by historical-critical theologians but a wide range of often contradictory views. Historical criticism, also known as "Higher Criticism,"[7] tries to take history seriously, especially the progressive nature of Scripture's composition, the human literary styles and genres, and the situation of the original recipients. Nevertheless, such higher critics do not assume that Scripture is the word of God, but rather, that it is a particular people's reflection on the "divine."

The weaknesses of this hermeneutic are manifold. First, all critical methods approach the biblical text from a starting point of skepticism which leaves historical judgments open to revision and fundamentally uncertain. They also assume that present experience determines the probability of the past, that is, if things like miracles do not happen today, then they could not have happened in the past either.[8] Such assumptions tend toward a radical skepticism. The most obvious example of this is the emergence of scholars known as biblical minimalists, who go so far as to assert that there never was an ancient Israel because all testimony from or linked to the Bible is suspect. Second and related, historical criticism emphasizes the divisions of Scripture against the possibility of unity and leads to creating a "canon within a canon" by rejecting or accepting the traditional books of Scripture as they judge appropriate.

Underlying these issues is the fact that there is no single unifying methodological approach, which leads to critical scholars being divided among themselves. Source critics, for example, who have discounted the unity of the Pentateuch on the basis that the proposed sources underlying the text were poorly stitched together by an unknown editor, are in turn challenged by redaction critics who observe that the same books show a high degree of literary coherence. In reality, one cannot have it both ways. Summing up his critique, Childs said that "The paradox of much of Biblical Theology [as a critical movement] was its attempt to pursue a theological discipline within the framework of the Enlightenment's assumptions that necessarily resulted in its frustration and dissolution."[9] Such a divided and contradictory way of reading Scripture is not the way to read the Bible.

III. What Did Christ Teach About How to Read Scripture?

The hermeneutical approaches presented do not bring Scripture together, are inorganically developed, and see Scripture as discontinuous. If God has revealed Himself to us, then clearly there must be a better way of reading Scripture, one that binds it together, that explains its unfolding development, and that provides a narrative focus. But what would constitute a better approach? Does the Bible itself gives us insight how it should be interpreted? We would

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[7] J. I. Packer, "Higher Criticism" in the *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 2044.

[8] See Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible; Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker, 1990), 83-103, and Robert B. Strimple, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* (Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1995), 7.

[9] Childs, 12.

suggest that it does. In two post-resurrection appearances in Luke's Gospel, **Jesus explained to His disciples how the Scriptures all point to Him**. In the first instance, He came alongside two disciples on the road to Emmaus who were mulling over the event of the crucifixion and the reports of His resurrection. They did not recognize Him at first and when He queried them, they recounted what happened over the previous days.

> ***Then he*** [Jesus] ***said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:*** [26] ***Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*** [27] ***And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself***" (Luke 24:25-27).

In the second instance, He met with the Disciples and gave them proofs as to the reality of His resurrection.

> ***And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*** [45] ***Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scripture"*** (Luke 24:44-45).

Luke (and the other Gospel writers) give only glimpses as to what Jesus did in the forty days between His resurrection and His ascension, but by highlighting these two appearances and not others, Luke is making the point that the fundamental lesson Jesus wanted the disciples to learn before He ascended was how to read the Bible. They needed to know that since after He bodily departed from them what they would have left is His Word. The fact that Christ says the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms—a formula corresponding to the three major literary groupings in the Hebrew Scriptures (*Torah*, *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*, with latter literally meaning "the Writings")—all point to Him shows that the totality of Scriptures is about Him, not just select portions. Christ's people needed—and still need—to understand this.

But what does it mean that all of Scripture points to Christ? In antiquity and in the Middle Ages, many Christian thinkers adopted a hermeneutic approach of allegory, with the aim of trying to see Christ in all of Scripture. This approach devolved into subjectivity and mysticism. The Reformed tradition, however, has rightly recognized that the most organic and best way to see Christ in all of Scripture is covenantally. In the ancient world, covenants were the legal mechanism by which a suzerain king would bind a vassal to him and regulate their relationship, holding out blessings as an incentive for obedience and sanctions to punish disobedience. In the Bible, God's covenants with His people explain both the change and development of the redemptive historical narrative. It is through the unfolding of the covenants that we see Christ and His Kingdom as the true King and the true Kingdom, whose coming was foreshadowed in the Old Testament and inaugurated in the New Testament. God's judgment and His

grace, His desire for a people for Himself to commune with, His love for them, and His desire that they reflect Him, all relate to this covenantal thread.

This covenantal hermeneutic was not something the Reformers came up with out of thin air. Church historian Richard A. Muller has shown that even before the Reformation Medieval theologians and scholars began making a turn toward interpreting the Bible better on exegetical grounds, as part of the Renaissance interest in getting back to the sources (*ad fontes*).[10] The desire was to understand the Bible on its own terms as a comprehensive whole rather than merely as a sourcebook for the Church's dogmatics. The Reformers developed this further during the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, fleshing out the centrality of the covenant to interpreting the Bible.

CONCLUSION

This course is an introduction to covenant theology, but it will also be more than that. We will go through the standard covenantal divisions: the Covenant of Works in Adam and the Covenant of Grace in Christ; the Covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the New Covenant. But, in an approach that will differ from most treatments of covenantal theology, we will also discuss biblical history between these covenants, so as to get a sense of the unfolding narrative. This will entail looking at some of the lesser-known covenants beyond those just listed. We will see how the biblical books cluster along a series of seven compositional periods and how that helps us to see the biblical narrative as real history, as well has how to rightly contextualize the different books of the Bible. Augustine of Hippo once said that Christ is in the Old Testament concealed, and in the New revealed. We will see that as we go through our survey of Scripture, and because all Scripture points to Christ, we will conclude the course with a multi-lesson study on the doctrine of Christ, as laid out in the Westminster Standards. The goal of this course, therefore, is not only to know Scripture better but to know our Lord better.

[10] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, vol. 2, 2d ed., Holy Scripture; The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic 2003), 213-223, 524.

AFTERWORD

The focus of this lesson has been on the need to have a biblical theological approach to reading Scripture. In terms of the current contemporary approach on how to read Scripture exegetically and hermeneutically, two books are recommended: *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (now in its fourth edition) and *God-Centered Hermeneutics* by Vern Poythress. Although I disagree with Fee and Stuart regarding Bible translations (they are bullish on modern translations, whereas I think those based in the Textus Receptus are to be preferred), their book is excellent in helping readers understand the different genres of Scripture and they have wise words regarding the use of commentaries. Poythress's book is a good introductory primer on hermeneutics. Most books on hermeneutics seems to focus on methodology—i.e., how to go about deriving meaning from a biblical text—and Poythress is no different. Many books on hermeneutics can veer into the highly technical but Poythress is exceptional in explaining the concepts in a clear, accessible manner while still providing a fairly comprehensive overview of the topic. While these two books are good exemplars and certainly worth having in one's library, my issue with them and with the current approach more generally on how to read the Bible is less in what they say, but in the fact that they do not go far enough. It is one thing to know that God, as the ultimate author of Scripture, provides the unifying thread behind the books the Bible; it is another thing to articulate what that thread actually is. Poythress, et al, does the former but leaves it up to readers to discern the latter. It is the contention of this course that covenant theology provides that unifying thread.

The must-read book on Biblical Theology is Geerhardus Vos's book of the same name, *Biblical Theology, Old and New Testaments*. Vos himself admits that he would have preferred to title the book something along the lines of the history of special revelation, but the publisher disagreed with that. Although that probably would not have been any more attractive or understandable from a sales perspective, it would have been more descriptive and more accurate. Vos's focus is on how God revealed Himself in a progressive manner throughout the entirety of biblical history. It is groundbreaking in its insights, as well as a throughgoing refutation of critical biblical theology as it had developed through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Vos has been inspirational to subsequent generations of Reformed scholars and it would be no exaggeration to say, as the lesson does, that he is the father of biblical theology in the modern Reformed tradition. One is also strongly encouraged to read Vos's other works as well, including his systematic theology, *Reformed Dogmatics*; his natural theology in the eponymously named, *Natural Theology*; and his shorter writings in the book, *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

The question of how to see Christ in all of Scripture and the relationship between the Old and New Testaments has been a key focus for many scholars in the past fifty years. Greg Beale has focused his professional career on the connections between the Old and New Testaments and has produced a number of excellent studies and reference works. Among these are: *Handbook on the New*

Testament Use of the Old Testament, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (with D. A. Carson), and *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (with D. A. Carson, Benjamin Gladd and Andrew Naselli). Some other notable works in this regard, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* by Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* by Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* and *The Unfolding Mystery, Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*, both by Edmund Clowney, *Old Made New, A Guide to the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by Greg Lanier, and *Seeing Christ in All of Scripture, Hermeneutics at Westminster Theological Seminary*, by a number of the seminary's professors.

In terms of the alternative approaches highlighted in this lesson—Law and Gospel, Dispensationalism, and Historical (or Higher) Criticism—there is little on the Law and Gospel approach that this writer has found beyond C. F. W. Walther's book, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, from the nineteenth century. Walther's work still seems to be the standard for this approach.

In contrast, many books have been published providing an overview and critique of Dispensationalism. A succinct but strong-perhaps even harsh—indictment of Dispensationalism can be found in John H. Gerstner's booklet, *A Primer on Dispensationalism*. More nuanced, irenic, and recent critiques have been made by Vern Poythress in his *Understanding Dispensationalists* and by Robert McKenzie in his *Identifying the Seed, An Examination and Evaluation of the Differences Between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*. Poythress focuses more on how Dispensationalists reach their hermeneutic conclusions, and thus tries to understand them on their own terms. As the subtitle to McKenzie's book indicates, he is more focused on comparing Dispensationalism with covenant theology. Since contemporary Dispensationalism is not monolithic, another useful book is *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism, A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, edited by Herbert W. Bateman IV. This book is a series of essays by Dispensational theologians about differences between the traditional Dispensationalism of C. I. Scofield and more recent scholars like Darrell Bock. Understanding these differences is important in avoiding caricatures when engaging current Dispensationalists.

Regarding historical criticism, one is most likely to encounter this in scholarly works, such as commentaries, or in works about religion written by non-theologians. Most conservative theology opposes historical criticism, so critiques are ubiquitous. Some good introductions include *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology* by Eta Linnemann, *The Modern Search for the Real Jesus* by Robert B. Strimple, and *Can We Trust the Gospels* by Peter J. Williams. Linnemann, in particular, is noteworthy as she herself was an accomplished German historical critical scholar in the tradition of Rudolf Bultmann, who came to see the fallacies of that approach and ended up leaving academia as a result. Strimple and Williams show the pervasive skepticism that colors historical critical thinking.