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## Hays' "Reading with the grain of Scripture" (book review)

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# Book Reviews

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Hays, R. B. (2020). *Reading with the grain of Scripture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company. 467pp. \$55.00 ISBN 9780802878458

New Testament scholar, Richard B. Hays, has selected various essays, conference papers, and presentations from the past 25 years of his career and compiled them together to form this book. Since each essay was written at a different time and often for a specific audience, there is not much connection between the chapters. However, the unifying theme of Hays' work is coherence and the role of narrative in Scripture (mostly New Testament). The 21 essays (plus a conclusion and epilogue) are organized under four main parts of the book, which will be summarized below.

Part One contains four essays that deal with aspects of interpretation of Scripture. In the first essay Hays highlights the importance of narrative interpretation for understanding the theological unity of Scripture. However, he is clear that methodology alone is not what leads to this perspective of coherence and unity, but rather the substance of the content of Scripture. In the three other essays here Hays discusses reading Scripture in light of the resurrection, having eyes of faith (including the practice of "theological exegesis"), and figural reading ("reading backwards").

In Part Two Hays touches on issues related to the quest for the historical Jesus. Areas of focus within this broader topic include a critique of the Jesus Seminar, a theological evaluation of N.T. Wright's approach to New Testament writings, the work of Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), and the quest for studying the historical Jesus.

Hays explores Paul's theology and writings in Part Three of this book. The range of essays here include: Christology, soteriology, apocalyptic themes, and pneumatology (Romans 8 in particular), a reflection of the Gospel presented to a gentile audience in Romans, Paul's theology regarding "Israel," and the interaction between theology in Acts and Paul's letters.

Part Four broadly addresses New Testament theology. This diverse section includes essays on Christology in the Apocalypse of John, "new covenantalism" in Hebrews, a critique of what Hays calls "Bultmann's Misreading of Pauline Anthropology" (p. 325), the place for "the law" in the Christian story, Romans and the Nicene Creed,

eschatological reflections around the year 2000, and a conclusion on developing a hermeneutic of trust rather than suspicion. The epilogue is the valedictorian lecture Hays delivered at Duke Divinity School upon his retirement.

This collection of essays is a gem for the biblical student and scholar, especially those with an interest in coherence and cohesion of Scripture and New Testament theology. While the essays do not necessarily relate to one another, this will be a valuable resource for those with an interest in interpreting the New Testament as well as those who may have interest in a specific essay. Those familiar with Hays' research will not be surprised that the overarching message in this entire work is an affirmation that, "The real work of interpretation is to *hear the text*," (p. 400).

**Reviewer**

Julianne Burnett, Asbury University