



Book Review: The Blue Parakeet

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by Scot McKnight

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Scot McKnight's wife Kris refers to his latest book, *The Blue Parakeet*, as "one of his readable ones." The book is, in fact, one of his most readable, which is most fortunate given the importance of the subject matter. Although Scot McKnight is something of an avid birder, the book's title is really only a metaphor, not a literal description of the subject at hand. For that, the book's subtitle, "Rethinking How You Read the Bible" sums it up. And if you notice that the image of the book cover glows just a little, it's no accident – the book deserves a glowing review.

The introductory chapters naturally explain the metaphor from which the book takes its title, as well as outline the author's own past approach to the Bible. As well, he gives us an overview of three of the most common approaches to the Bible: reading to retrieve, "those days, those ways", and reading through tradition. In fact, most people use a combination of these approaches, but McKnight also contends that most people are not aware of how exactly they read the Bible. He provides a questionnaire in an appendix to assist people in thinking through their own approach. The second approach, "those days, those ways," is where McKnight spends most of his time in the book, describing how to translate "those ways for those days" into "these ways for our day." He sums up this theme (p.27-28) like this:

God spoke in Moses' days in Moses' ways, and
God spoke in Job's days in Job's ways, and
God spoke in David's days in David's ways, and
God spoke in Solomon's days in Solomon's ways, and
God spoke in Jeremiah's days in Jeremiah's ways, and
God spoke in Jesus' days in Jesus' ways, and
God spoke in Paul's days in Paul's ways, and
God spoke in Peter's days in Peter's ways, and
God spoke in John's days in John's ways, and

and we are called to carry on that pattern in our world today.

McKnight writes, “The biblical way is the ongoing adoption of the past and adaptation to new conditions and to do this in a way that is consistent with and faithful to the Bible.” (p.29) The method he advocates melds the “return and retrieve” method, which “return[s] to the times of the Bible in order to retrieve biblical ideas and practices for today” (p.25-26) and the “reading with tradition” method, which goes back in time to the Bible in order to come forward in time to the present. The introduction concluded, the first three parts of the book are separated into story, listening, and discerning, or “What is the Bible?”, “What Do I Do with the Bible?”, and “How Do I Benefit from the Bible?”. These represent three key concepts in biblical interpretation as McKnight describes it.

Part one discusses some attempted shortcuts in Bible reading, one of which sees (for example) the Apostle Paul as a Maestro who organizes and arranges everything necessary to understand the Bible’s message, such that his writings become the grid for all of theology. (This observation and its description will resonate with many post-Evangelicals.) Also in this section, McKnight introduces the memorably-named “wiki-story” to describe the story in the Bible as part of a larger overarching story that is shared and continues to be written.

Part two deals with “listening,” where we approach the Bible not simply as a historical document or prescriptive guidebook, but as God’s written communication with us. This, McKnight suggests, is a relational approach to the Bible. He also observes that the Bible is filled with examples of people who did and didn’t listen. “Good reading,” he writes (p.103), “is an act of love and therefore an act of listening.” From here, he steps into a chapter on “Missional Listening,” also called “The Boring Chapter.” I would protest that I did not find the chapter boring at all, but then I didn’t see the original unedited draft! Of course, if the point of studying the Bible in the first place is to learn how then we should live, it stands to reason that some missional impact will emit from our deep listening to the text.

The third part deals with discerning, where application can be found. As I understand it, the discussion of A.J. Jacobs’ [The Year of Living Biblically: One Mans Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible](#) is not intended to be understood as a good example of biblical application. Instead, McKnight steps through a number of thorny issues to illustrate how the approach to the Bible that he describes employs discernment at this last step in order to move the interpretation through to a present-day application which is not necessarily a literal following but which nevertheless remains true to the Biblical text.

The fourth part of the book is in fact a hidden gem, for here McKnight tackles the issue of women in leadership as a “test-case” of how to go back to the text, take what is written, understand its context, and then bring it forward to become words for our day. Given the constraint of space in the book, this is not an exhaustive treatment of the subject, yet it deals with most of the major points of contention surrounding the issue. As such, it is both a summary primer on the subject of women in ministry and an example of how we can approach the Bible and bring its words into our present setting. The book concludes with five appendices supporting the material found at earlier points in the book. Overall, I found it to be an enjoyably easy read, but one which still managed to treat each point as thoroughly as necessary. Without reservation, I would recommend the book to any Christian grappling with how to take what at times can seem to be archaic language and ideas and faithfully bring them forward and apply them to everyday life in the present day.

In a time when many segments of the church are re-examining themselves, their practices, and their theology, McKnight’s contribution to a renewed approach to the Bible will prove a most helpful contribution to this practice of reexamination – particularly for those attempting to challenge so many of their past assumptions without running off the rails. In many ways, The Blue Parakeet is a treatise of

wisdom for its time, and not only this time, but each new era that attempts to consider the cultural gulf between the world of the Bible and the world beyond the window. The Blue Parakeet deserves a place beside Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's classic, [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#)

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