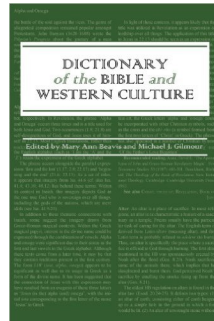


Dictionary of the Bible and Western Culture,
edited by Mary Ann Beavis and Michael J.
Gilmour

Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012 | xviii + 620 pages | ISBN:
978-1-907534-79-9 (hardcover) £60.00

Both Beavis and Gilmour are practising biblical scholars and pop culture experts. Their edited book is one of the latest in a long line of religious reference works that makes this sacred Judeo-Christian text even more relevant to contemporary western audiences who need “basic, easily accessible information” (vii) within our increasingly biblically illiterate, post-print, post-Christian world. It deftly bridges the gap between biblical studies and the humanities with non-confessional, cross-



disciplinary entries that begin with a “discussion of biblical terms in their original settings, and then illustrate occasions when those terms reappear in later cultural artefacts” (vii), particularly, film, television, music, and the fine arts. As such, this stand-alone text sits comfortably alongside *The Cultural Dictionary of the Bible* (1999), *A Concise Dictionary of the Bible and its Reception* (2009), *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (2011), and the ongoing multi-volume *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception* (2009–).

Structure-wise, it consists of the usual academic apparatus comprising of title, publication details, “Contents,” “Preface,” “Recommended Reading,” “Abbreviations,” and “Contributors,” followed by “a little more than one thousand” (viii) A–Z entries of varying length ranging from “A day is like a thousand years” (1; first page number used only, and hereafter) to “Zophar” (620), written by “more than two hundred scholars” (viii). In addition to listing the obligatory people, names, and places, it was a delight to see many “famous” scriptural phrases explicated, such as: “Camel through a needle’s eye” (76), “Eye for an eye, tooth for tooth” (148), “Gird up your loins” (183), “How are the mighty fallen!” (221), “Keys of the Kingdom” (275), “Seek and you shall find” (475), “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing” (606), etc. In the majority of instances, the entries are followed by “Recommended reading” and “See also” sections, plus bracketed author initials.

The book is easy to read in its two-column format; however, many annoying glitches marred the work as a whole, even if not necessarily noticeable within a single entry. For example, “Bibliography” instead of “Recommended reading” in “Abel” (3), inconsistent “Recommended reading” reference style throughout, notably, first author name in full (e.g., 4, 88, 160, 228, 347, 429, 520, 618) versus initials only (e.g., 3, 69, 119, 209, 304, 421, 521, 567). Yet the most damning proof-reading blemishes were the (near) identical duplication of the same authored entries in two different locations, namely: “Azariah, Prayer of” (38) and the redundant “Prayer of Azariah” (411), “Zelophehad, Daughters of” (617) and the redundant “Daughters of Zelophehad” (107).

The omission of many “Recommended reading” sections, which were easy to accommodate, was puzzling, for example: “Abraham” (5), “Ark of the Covenant” (31), “Garden of Eden” (175), “Jews, Judaism” (251), “Joseph of Arimathea” (262), “Moses” (348), “Old Testament” (382), “Sinai, Mount” (503), “Twelve Apostles, the” (563), and “Women” (606). Similarly, there were many missing “See also” sections, notably: “Ananias and Sapphira” (17), “Barabbas” (43), “Great commission, the” (195), “Life” (298), “Lost

tribes" (307), "Macedonia" (314), "Many mansions" (321), "Tarsus" (535), and "Zelophehad, Daughters of" (617), although its redundant duplication "Daughters of Zelophehad" (107) included it! Furthermore, there were linkage omissions within the "See also" sections which *were* warranted, for example, "Book of the Law" (67) connected to "Law" (289), "Book of Life" (68) connected to "Life" (298), "Pontius Pilate" (407) connected to "Barabas" (43), while "Blood of the Lamb" (62), "Brothers of the Lord" (73), "Dreams" (123), "Eternal life" (141), and "Mary, Childhood of" (327) had *no* "See also" or "Recommended reading" sections.

And of those provided recommended readings, one puzzled at their selection when "better" references abounded, for example: "Caiaphas" (75) recommended a 1993 New Testament Who's Who, "Festivals" (159) recommended a 1976 book on Deuteronomy, "Holy Spirit, the" (218) recommended a two-volume 1966 commentary about John, "Sermon on the Mount" (477) recommended a 1995 and a 2001–2007 book on Matthew; and yet, dedicated scholarly books, chapters, and articles exist on the *exact* entry topic. One also wonders at the wisdom of including non-English recommended readings in the entries for "Cock" (93), "Eli" (130), "Offering" (379), "Ten Commandments" (539) and "*Vaticinium ex eventu*" (577). Especially for an English language textbook wherein the editors claimed: "we have in mind readers without the specialization of formal biblical studies, and even those not familiar with the Bible's basic content" (vii), and presumed lack of multiple language skills.

Somewhat annoying were the many pertinent film examples that were missing within a book deliberately devoted to fusing Scripture with western (particularly, popular) culture. For example, Moses's epiphany in *The Ten Commandments* (1956, dir. Cecil B. DeMille) for "Burning bush" (73), *Oh, God!* (1977, dir. Carl Reiner) starring George Burns as the Almighty, and in its two sequels, for "God" (185), the heaven scenes in *The Green Pastures* (1936, Marc Connelly and William Keighley) for "Heaven" (210), and the hell scenes in *Deconstructing Harry* (1997, dir. Woody Allen) for "Hell" (212). Disappointingly, these four entries had *zero* film examples, and did not adequately fulfil the second of the editors' two claims, namely of illustrating "occasions when those terms reappear in later cultural artefacts" (vii).

Also annoying was the provision of two different names for the one entry-cum-header with *no* additional entry (with or without redirection) for the other name, as was correctly done regarding "Bilhah and Zilpah" (58) with its associated redirection "Zilpah (see Bilhah and Zilpah)" (619), and other

examples throughout. The troubling omissions concerned: “Asherah (Ash-toreth)” (34), “Beelzebub/Beelzebul” (49), “Giants (Nephilim)” (182), “Gog and Magog” (186), “Hophni and Phinehas” (219), “Kingdom of God (Kingdom of Heaven)” (277), “Priscilla and Aquila” (415), “Serpent/Snake” (478), “Uzziah (Azariah)” (574), and “Harp and lyre” (206). Furthermore, although there was no “Lyre” entry per se, a “See also Lyre” (582) redirection *was* given in “Voice of the turtle” (581).

Especially puzzling was the troubling “Zipporah/Tzipporah” (620). The name “Zipporah” is frequently mentioned in multiple entries therein (e.g., 181 (4x), 251 (2x), 341 (6x), 591, 620 (3x)) thus justifying its “Z” (not “T”) alphabet location, and yet “Tzipporah” is frequently mentioned within the “Zipporah/Tzipporah” entry (11x) compared to “Zipporah” (2x - entry header and book title, but *nowhere* else therein, not even to explain it as an alternate spelling). So, why did the author favour “Tzipporah” spelling exclusively in the “Zipporah” location?

As with every dictionary, what was left out can be just as upsetting as what was put in (correctly or otherwise), which for this author was the missing entry of “Jehovah” (Exod 6.3; Psa 83.18; Isa 12.2, 26.4 KJV), even if only as a redirection to “Yahweh, YHWH” (614) and “Lord” (303). This is annoying considering that “Jehovah” (245, 303 (2x), 484, 526, 614), “Yahu/Jehovah” (38, 411, 443), “Jehovah’s Finger” (162), and “Jehovah’s Witnesses” (e.g., 26, 54, 138, 180, 376, 443, 586) were frequently mentioned throughout the dictionary (and many lay readers would have been exposed to the name due to JW proselytizing activities).

Although numerous feature films were mentioned, the examples chosen frequently lacked crucial identifier details (e.g., year released, director names), and in some cases, the title provided was technically incorrect or even misleading. For example, the (redundant) entry “Daughters of Zelophehad” stated: “A motif of female inheritance of the father’s assets appears in modern literature and film (e.g., *Lara Croft, The King of Texas*)” (108; see also 618). However, “Lara Croft” is not an example of modern literature; but rather, she is a video game-cum-feature film character (with associated spin-off publications). And if the author considered it a feature film (not literature) example, then the correct title is *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001, dir. Simon West) and/or its sequel *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003, dir. Jan de Bont). Furthermore, if “*The King of Texas*” (108) was meant to be the film example, then it is also technically incorrect because *The King of Texas* (2008, dir. René Pinnell) was a documentary about Eagle Pin-

nell, an independent Texas filmmaker, whereas *King of Texas* (2002, dir. Uli Edel) dealt directly with female inheritance issues and was thus the correct title-cum-example.

In other troubling instances, film release dates were provided but not the film titles, for example, “David” (108) stated: “while movies starring Gregory Peck (1951) and Richard Gere (1985), among many others, have tried to bring David’s life to the screen” (108). However, the two relevant (but totally ignored) film titles were “*David and Bathsheba* (1951, dir. Henry King)” and “*King David* (1985, dir. Bruce Beresford),” which is more accurate, useful, and user-friendly information (without but preferably with the associated actors’ names). Other entries included the film title, release date, and a significant name, but without stating the relevance of that name, for example, “Delilah” (114) stated: “Cecil B. DeMille’s film *Samson and Delilah* (1949)” (115) without specifically identifying DeMille as its director. Yet, how are readers unfamiliar with Hollywood history expected to know this important technical fact?

Similarly, “Witch of Endor” (604) referred to “the character named Endora from the television series *Bewitched*” (605), but neglected to provide the name of the actress, Agnes Moorehead, and her appearance in 219 different episodes during its 1964–1972 run, or any other details. To enhance this entry, the author could have also mentioned “Endora” (Shirley MacLaine) from the feature film *Bewitched* (2005, dir. Nora Ephron), or better yet, the “Witch of Endor” (Dov Reiser) from the TV movie, *The Story of David* (1976, dir. David Lowell Rich and Alex Segal) and the “Witch of Endor” (voiced by Christine Pritchard) in the “David and Saul” segment of *Testament: The Bible in Animation* (1996, dir. Gary Hurst).

Given the wealth of film and television examples employed throughout, it is disquieting to note that the dictionary contained *no* pictures, graphic illustrations, or screen shots to visually reinforce their entry content; no doubt due to cost factors, but it would have been nice to have a few examples to practise what they preached. Overall, one would have thought that tight editorial control over the entry format parameters (and proof-reading processes) would have been a pre-production necessity, which would have minimised all these easily avoidable blemishes.

Nevertheless, there is a veritable feast of interesting factual information and vivid examples that more than compensates for the production errors. Beavis and Gilmour’s book is a welcomed biblical reference tool in a world bogged down with increasing theological complexity, specialist terminology,

and ever-growing pop culture manifestations that would be churlish to decry and counterproductive to deny; especially in this second century of the age of Hollywood. The wide-ranging topics, the numerous painstaking explanations and the gamut of western cultural examples make this text an interesting and thoughtful addition to any religion studies collection, whether for personal or professional purposes, for teaching or for preaching, whether by the layman or scholar, undergraduate or postgraduate.

Readers need only dip randomly into its pages to realise how much there is already known, how deep the Bible has penetrated western culture, and how much one can still learn once inquisitive appetites are whetted. One looks forward to Beavis and Gilmour's future reference works; possibly "A Dictionary of Western Biblical Pop Culture" that significantly expands upon their current, but frequently all-too-brief, examples.

Anton Karl Kozlovic
Flinders University