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Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

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6-25-2018

### Footnotes: More on the Old Testament + Summer Reading

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#### Recommended Citation

Turner, B. (2018). Footnotes: More on the Old Testament + Summer Reading. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-footnotes/8>

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# Footnotes<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Curated Resources for Ministers



## Welcome to Footnotes

I'll keep this one short, since I'm catching a week of vacation with the family. I know you might be busy, too...so much that you don't have time to read long emails. If you can't get to all of these, just create a folder in your email and keep them together. Some of you have asked about whether these will be archived somewhere in the future. That is likely; I'm working out some technical issues. [Like many husbands, I realize that "I'm working out some technical issues" means it may get it done in 5-6 years].

And please continue to forward these emails to others who might find Footnotes helpful to their ministry. There is a button at the bottom where they can subscribe.

I'm excited to share the second part of the conversation with our Hebrew Bible scholars. I've found their guidance really helpful. I hope that you can say the same. Okay, let's hear more.



## Footnotes Roundtable: The Old Testament, Part Two

**John D. Fortner.** Retired Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East Studies, Harding University.

**Nathan Bills.** Independent Scholar. Ph.D. Duke University.

**Lance Hawley.** Professor of Old Testament, Harding School of Theology.

**I've observed that we often teach our children about a really specific set of stories (Genesis 1-11, the Exodus story, King David, Daniel 1-6, and Jonah, to name a few), while giving less attention to some other sections. Does this line up with your experience? What do you perceive is going on here?**

NB: The OT gives great grist for VBS productions, doesn't it?! On the whole I think we haven't known what to do with the OT as a witness to God and a resource for Christian living. Some of this is a reflex of our Restorationist hermeneutic, while some of it is the challenge of the unfamiliar world and literature of ancient Israel. To say we need better teaching on the breadth of the OT is obvious. At our congregation the education program has committed to study of an OT book/text one quarter of every year. We contract specialists in the OT (professors in Church of Christ-affiliated schools) to write our class material. I wish more of our churches took advantage of our people who've trained in Scripture and the related disciplines to write quality Bible school curriculum.

JF: Yes! The "VBS canon" also includes: Noah & the "gopher" wood; the Tabernacle & its paraphernalia; Nadab & Abihu & "strange fire"; the fall of Jericho; the story of Naomi, Ruth, & Boaz; Naaman the Syrian leper; the Elijah / Elisha cycle; Naboth's vineyard; the story of Esther; and Ps 23. It is ironic that we sometimes cite a story drawn from a canon which we pronounce "no longer binding or authoritative on the church today" to buttress or illustrate principles or truths we teach the church.

This practice reflects a well-meaning but desperate attempt by the church to find relevance for a canon which is regarded as superseded by the NT literature. We all like stories, especially children. The OT is a treasure trove of good storytelling. If we can draw out a life lesson from one of these stories, the OT redeems itself as a kind of "left-handed" resource for the church. An extension of this kind of "use" and abuse of the OT is an artificial linking of OT prophecies to their NT fulfillments. In the process of doing this, OT prophetic texts are stripped of meaning in their original context and given meaning only in the way NT writers make use of them. Again the prophets are robbed of their power as voices for righteousness and justice and are reduced to a "left-handed" resource for Christian evidences.

LH: Yes, I think we gravitate to origin stories and stories of human interest from which we can draw (or spin) a moral point. I suppose that this is partly because these stories are teachable for young minds. But it may also be because adults do not know much beyond these stories. It takes a lot of patience and study to appreciate the poetic portions of the Hebrew Bible. Maybe the biggest gap in our Bible curriculum is teaching on the Babylonian exile, since it was such a historical crux for so much of biblical literature.

**Many have noted that biblical literacy is on the decline. Yet, this is hardly a new thing. So, let's try this: what does it mean to be biblically literate? What information from the first 39 books would you have people understand.**

NB: I would aim to have believers understand the broad contours of the story and to have a sense of how and where bits of the OT "fit." A basic sense of the sequence of the story would be on point: progression of the people, covenants, the major plot turns (e.g., land, royal government, exile, return). In all, I would want to teach toward helping our folk to be able to articulate the importance of Yhwh's work in and with with Israel as the story climaxing in Jesus. Every once in a while we need a sermon that paints the bigger picture so that our churches are reminded of the way the whole hangs together.

JF: Being "biblically literate" includes but by no means is exhausted by knowing biblical chronology, timelines, historical and biblical "facts." Biblical literacy requires some knowledge of the literary genres, language & imagery, and figures of speech found in the OT. A person who is biblically literate has abandoned a "proof-text" approach in favor of learning how to think theologically about Scripture. People should have an appreciation of God's deep on-going involvement in human existence. Knowing that revelation through Scripture, though divine, is also deeply rooted in and reflects human culture. That "torah" means primarily "teaching," "instruction," "revelation" rather than "law" only. Some understanding of how the covenants God / Yahweh made with Noah, Abram, and David (including the Jeremiah new covenant) complement one another, and an appreciation of the continuing theological implications of the covenants in the life of the church. That when NT authors interpret OT prophets, the NT writers are providing the *fullest meaning* of the prophecy, *not* the original nor the *only* meaning of that prophecy.

LH: If knowing biblical information is like knowing vocabulary words, then information does not entail biblical literacy. Being able to "speak Bible" is not about knowing information, but having a synthesis of the language and the ability to speak it with wisdom. That being said, I suppose I would define basic biblical literacy as having a rough outline of the story of Israel: Origins (Genesis-Exodus), Covenant (Sinai to settlement), Kingship (the monarchy), exile, and post-exilic struggles. The next step would be situating biblical books and characters in these categories.

**Name 3 Old Testament scholars not named Brueggemann that you think every minister should be reading.**

NB: Ellen Davis; Terence Fretheim; Chris Wright.

JF: Terence E. Fretheim; Brevard S. Childs; James L. Crenshaw; Ellen Davis.

LH: There are not many general practitioners who are also prolific scholars, so it is really difficult to answer this question. I don't have a scholar of whom I read everything they write or that I would recommend carte blanche (including Brueggemann). John Goldingay is my go-to recommendation for this question. John Walton and Peter Enns also come to mind as scholars who write with faith communities in mind. Most of the scholars I *really* like research and write in particular areas (e.g. Michael Fox for Wisdom Literature, Jacob Milgrom for Leviticus, Mark Smith on Israelite Religion, and Thomas Dozeman on Exodus).

**If pocket New Testaments were printed with two books other than Psalms and Proverbs, which would you insert instead?**

NB: Genesis and Exodus. They set the stage and shape the paradigm for God's mission.

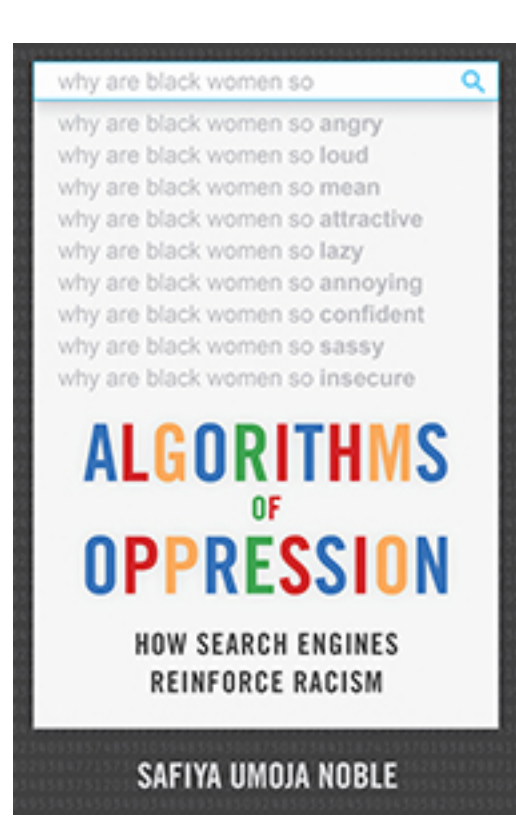
JF: Well, I would very much like to *keep* Psalms and Proverbs. However, since that breaks the rules, I would insert Genesis and Isaiah

LH: Exodus, Isaiah



## Shorts

Book Reviews for People in a Hurry



SAFIYA UMOJA NOBLE  
**Algorithms of Oppression**

Noble's book takes a huge swing, suggesting that Google's search is systematically rigged to reinforce racism. Since Google is all about keyword searching, I'll use one here. Does Google's search engine *reflect* the culture of racism or does it actively *reinforce* it? Change the word *reinforce* to *reflect* and the book doesn't sell as many copies. And yet, her research does a much better job of citing patterns of racism among the population who uses Google than it does in implicating the Mountain View company of any troublesome patterns of conduct. That said, the book's thesis is fascinating, and worthy of a checkout at your local library.

CELESTE NG  
**Little Fires Everywhere**

I should've stuck this in the summer reading issue, but I hadn't finished it yet. It is a great example of the role of minor decisions and how they become major when mixed with the circumstances of other people. The last fifty pages are worth the whole read. It is worth buying at full price now, yet its popularity on the retail shelves might also forecast it being a regular at yard sales three summers from now, where it will probably go for a quarter. Your call.

## A Few More Footnotes.

1. [What Teens Really Say about Sex and Drugs.](#)
2. ATLA has done a nice job of increasing collections in their [Digital Library.](#)



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