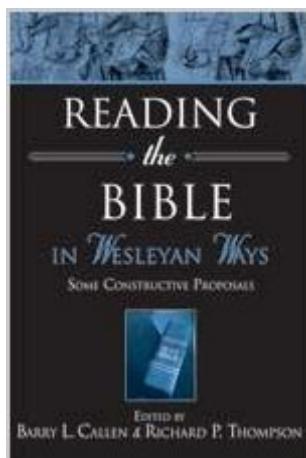


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# Reading The Bible In Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals



## **Synopsis**

Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways is comprised of significant essays by outstanding scholars. They represent and address the Wesleyan theological tradition and convey insights vital for today's Bible readers regardless of their denomination or tradition. The authors address Wesleyan ways of reading the Bible that focus on the ministry of the Spirit of Christ to illuminate the present significance of the text; recognize the role of faith community as the crucial location of Scripture's meaning and present significance; highlight the importance of spiritual maturity and unity with other believers in the pursuit of God's love.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 248 pages

Publisher: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City (March 1, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0834120488

ISBN-13: 978-0834120488

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.8 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #444,105 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #111 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Methodist #1128 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Apologetics #2274 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Bible Study & Reference > Criticism & Interpretation

## **Customer Reviews**

H. RAY DUNNING is professor emeritus of theology at Trevecca Nazarene University. He holds an MA and a PhD from Vanderbilt University and has served as a pastor, lecturer, and speaker in numerous churches around the United States. Dr. Dunning has authored and edited numerous books on Christian faith and practice, including Grace, Faith, and Holiness; The Second Coming; and Biblical Resources for Holiness Preaching (2 volumes). Barry L. Callen serves as a professor of Christian Studies at Anderson University in Anderson, Indiana. Dr. Richard Thompson is the Professor of New Testament at Northwest Nazarene University where he has served as the Chair of the Religion Department. He has authored numerous publications and articles and holds a Ph.D. from Southern Methodist University and an M.Div. from Nazarene Theological Seminary.

The thought that Wesleyans and Calvinists read scripture differently had been circling around in my head for several months when I came across 'Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways.' I was floored when my own thoughts were confirmed by one of the included essays. Robert Wall notes that "...Arminius (whom Wesley follows at this point) understood Scripture's authority in functional terms, whether to confirm the actual experience of conversion or to interpret the holiness of life for a particular setting...Those of Calvinist traditions, on the other hand, tend to press for a uniform interpretation of Scripture and its single meaning that justifies a creedal and uniform 'orthodoxy' - one book, one faith. Scripture's authority is viewed in propositional terms..." In other words, Wesleyans and Arminians tend to view scripture's authority more as a result of the fact that God reveals himself and speaks through it. The Scriptures are sacramental. They function as a sort of medium through which God communicates with his people. So the historicity of every little detail is less important than the fact that God speaks through it. I've come to realize that God didn't intend Genesis to give us an exact history of the world. And asking 'How old is the world, according to the Bible?' is akin to asking 'Do I have to be baptized to be saved?' It's the wrong question. We get baptized because Christ calls us to. Not because it's a hoop to jump through in order to get to Heaven. Likewise, we read Genesis to meet Christ in his word. Not because it's the 'Authorized History of the World'. At the same time, I understand the concerns of staunch Young Earth Creationists (I used to be one). They're genuinely worried about a drift toward liberalism, a casting off of God's word, etc. I think though, that if conservative Wesleyans better understood their hermeneutic, they'd realize that many of the arguments that they've attached themselves to on this issue are driven by Calvinistic concerns. Not biblical ones. As I read through 'Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways', I was confronted again and again with theories that I had already been practicing though I had never really thought them out. They flowed naturally out of the Wesleyan-Arminian influences that had shaped my thinking through the years. So, for example, though no preacher I grew up listening to would have described scripture as 'sacramental' (as Robert Wall does in his essay, 'Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture'), in practice they all treated it that way. The same could be said for Wall's other ideas. And it isn't just that essay. Each essay included in this book fleshes out a different aspect of Wesleyan hermeneutics. Geoffrey Wainwright explores the way Wesley (and Wesleyans) saw all three persons of the Trinity working together to provide and clarify scripture. Richard Thompson compares Wesley's methodology with the more modern literary-critical method (noting both similarities and differences). Clark Pinnock argues that God is still speaking through his word - and will continue to do so until Jesus returns. Though the essays are by a variety of different scholars - from various Wesleyan denominations and movements - there is a cohesiveness to the

work that I've found lacking in many other books of essays. The only essay that felt semi-out-of-place was the last one, 'Wesleyan-Holiness-Feminist Hermeneutics: A Historical Rendering with Contemporary Considerations'. And even this one wasn't bad so much as it didn't really feel like it belonged with the others. With all of that praise, you might think that I found no flaws at all. That isn't the case. I didn't agree with every argument or statement. There were moments when I seriously questioned some of the assertions. But these essays never failed to make me think. And that - in my opinion - is the purpose of any good book. Over all, it's an excellent collection of essays that will force you to think about the way you interpret Scripture. We should strive to think deeply about our hermeneutic, whether we're Wesleyans, Calvinists, or something else entirely. We should strive for consistent, clear, holistically-biblical interpretations of scripture. 'Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways' will help you think through the way you interpret scripture whether you're a Wesleyan or not. Oh, and the essay, 'Women as Bible Readers and Church Leaders' is one of the best brief defenses of women in ministry I've ever read. Don't miss it.

I really enjoyed this book. It is a great collection of short writings about how to better understand and read the Bible. Awesome tool.

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