



R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*

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A book titled *Biblical Reasoning* piques one's interest about its contents. Will it describe forms of rhetoric or techniques of persuasion? The subtitle suggests something different: *Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. Ah, this may be a contribution to the theological interpretation of Scripture, focusing perhaps on how much of Jesus and the Spirit we should look for in the Old Testament. The introduction does not at first disabuse one of either notion but suggests something much broader: the goal is 'to assemble a toolkit...to enable better exegesis', with the ultimate end of seeing God (p. xvii). The co-authors have their doctorates in New Testament from Cambridge (Jamieson) and systematic theology from St. Andrews (Wittman). Jamieson is associate pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, while Wittman is assistant professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Seminary in Louisiana. Wittman is the primary author of chapters 1–6; Jamieson, of the introduction and chapters 7–10. Not surprisingly, they hope to bridge the divide that often separates their disciplines, convincing each 'side' that they need more of the other.

What the book actually provides is quite different from an exegetical toolkit. The two main foci of the volume boil down to the need for seeing God as the end goal of Scripture study and for recognising that God as the Christian Trinity. The authors neither affirm nor deny they are practicing the theological interpretation of Scripture, claiming that the label has no relevance for them. Throughout the book, they present seven principles that yield ten rules for exegetical practice that are elaborated and/or defended in nine chapters, with a tenth chapter 'putting the rule-kit to work' in 'reading John 5:17–30' (p. 213). The principles involve affirming the inspiration of Scripture as part of God's wise pedagogy to educate fallen human creatures to see his glory, understanding God as qualitatively distinct from his creation, exhibiting every perfection, disclosing himself in Triune form, with ontological equality but functional distinctions in the incarnation such that their relations of origin are not interchangeable. The Son, Christ, is fully divine and fully human, without confusion, change, division or separation between the two natures. In other words, the authors wish to robustly defend classic credal orthodoxy.

The rules that follow involve reading Scripture as a unity (the analogy of faith), learning how the parts function in the larger theological vision of the whole, and interpreting in light of the historic affirmations about God, as well as about each person of the Godhead. Thus, we will find statements about one person of the Trinity in one context ascribed simply to 'God' elsewhere and vice versa, or one activity of one person at times ascribed to another, within the limits that only the Father generates the Son, and only the Father and Son generate the Spirit. Christ's two natures create the same

diversity of expression; sometimes what is predicated of Christ is strictly true only of one nature, but we must turn to a different portion of Scripture in order to learn that.

Jamieson's chapters largely succeed in anchoring the principles and rules in key portions of the New Testament and in showing how Scripture in fact supports them. Wittman's chapters alternate between this and appealing to important ancient theologians, so that one is not always clear how much he thinks he has defended and how much he has merely affirmed. For both authors, John, Paul and Hebrews predominate when they seek biblical support for their affirmations. No extra-biblical reasoning is brought to bear, though, to defend the use of Scripture as their authoritative foundation in the first place.

A handful of passages are helpfully illuminated by our authors' principles and rules. They make sense of otherwise conflicting statements in John about whether God or Jesus judges people. They illuminate Paul speaking of one person of the Godhead working in or through another and any of them working in and through God's people. They remind us of Christ's eternal, glorified *humanity*, which causes some category-collapsing from the ascension onward. But what of the major portions of Scripture about the covenants with Israel, Messianic prophecy, praise and lament, the kingdom of God, problems in the church and apocalyptic eschatology?

Biblical Reasoning should help readers committed to biblical authority to see how much Scripture supports the classic christological and trinitarian affirmations of early church history. It might help some theologians recognise that biblical scholarship can at times help rather than hinder them. It seeks to convince the biblical scholar sceptical of systematics to embrace them more eagerly. It does not appear to provide an exegetical tool kit, in the conventional sense of enabling someone to perform a task they couldn't otherwise accomplish. How these rules are relevant to the sizable majority of the Bible is barely ever addressed. What Jamieson and Wittman do, they do very well. But it is far less than what they lead readers at the outset to believe they are doing.

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