

Critique of a Biblical or Theological Website:

The Amateur Exegete

The Amateur Exegete is a blog dedicated to popularising biblical studies from a secular point of view. AE, whom we will refer to by his real name Ben, provides commentary on issues in theological discussions and says that he is motivated by his “love for and interest in the Bible.”¹

Ben is clearly well versed in biblical scholarship. His blog details various debates concerning early Christianity and the origins of the Bible, and contains many reviews of books published mostly, but not entirely, by academics in the fields of biblical studies and theology. He also occasionally delves into Assyriology, Egyptology, and Classics. Of special note is the wide diversity of biblical scholars he has read. In a video posted on his YouTube channel detailing his book collection,² he possesses the works of theologically conservative scholars such as D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo (both PhD, University of St. Andrews). This suggests an admirable ability to read scholarship from those whom he disagrees with.

Ben’s contributions to lay discussions of biblical studies heightened in January of 2022, when he featured Dead Sea Scrolls expert Kipp Davis (PhD, University of Manchester) on his blog to critique the claims of Egyptologist David Falk (PhD, University of Liverpool) regarding theologically significant textual issues in the Book of Deuteronomy.³ Davis wrote a guest post on the Amateur Exegete critiquing Falk’s analysis, but also made a more general critique of his person and credentials, entitling the post “‘*Stay in Your Lane*’

¹ The Amateur Exegete, “About,” Accessed 31/10/22. <https://amateurexegete.com/about/>.

² Ben – The Amateur Exegete, “A Tour of My Personal Library,” Youtube, July 2022. <https://youtu.be/PRjJRrKE2JQ>.

³ For a summary of these issues, see Michael S. Heiser, ‘Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 158 (January-March 2001): 52-74.

Why David A. Falk Should Refrain from Impersonating a Biblical Scholar on YouTube,” demanding that Falk should “leave the biblical scholarship to actual biblical scholars.”⁴

Ben provided his own approval of the post, saying that “Davis demonstrates what I find to be the hallmarks of good scholarship: measured language, knowledge of and appreciation for other scholars in the field, and a desire for truth.”⁵ Falk produced a lengthy response video to Davis, referring to the Amateur Exegete as “hostile to the bible and bible-believers”⁶ and Ben as “a poor judge of character, a poor judge of scholarship, or both.”⁷

Having a noted DSS scholar as a guest publisher is no small feat and it is clear that Ben has taken the time to read plenty of secondary texts from a wide range of scholars. Ben provides a useful and important conduit through which lay-people can access the works of biblical scholars. However, Falk’s less than praiseworthy response to Ben’s collaboration with Davis, in which he contends that Davis committed “prima facie libel” against him,⁸ raises some questions regarding his ability to impartially wade into these discussions, irrespective of his aforementioned willingness to read scholars he disagrees with.

Additionally, there are examples elsewhere in which Ben has provided only partial citations or misrepresented primary data. For example, in 2019, Ben engaged with Christian apologist Erik Manning regarding the Christology of Mark’s gospel. Ben appears to underplay the significance of Mark 14 where Jesus declares himself as the one who will come on the clouds of heaven. Ben insists that “‘coming with the clouds of heaven’ no more

⁴ Kipp Davis, “Stay in Your Lane’ Why David A. Falk Should Refrain from Impersonating a Biblical Scholar on YouTube,” *The Amateur Exegete*, Jan 2022. Accessed 28/10/31. <https://amateurexegete.com/2022/01/02/stayinyourlane-guestpost-kippdavis/>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ David A. Falk, “Dr. Falk Takes on Kipp, a Vile Clown Who Wants to Rule the Road,” p. 3. Accessed 28/10/22 [http://www.egyptandthebible.com/Response to Kipp 20220120n.pdf](http://www.egyptandthebible.com/Response%20to%20Kipp%20202120n.pdf).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, 4.

signifies divinity than it did in the original context of Daniel 7:13 where the son of man comes on the clouds and is presented to God.”⁹

We must observe that the term “cloud-rider” originates with ancient Near-Eastern epics in describing their divine characters. The Enuma Elish, for example, speaks of the god Marduk mounting “the storm-chariot.”¹⁰ The Ugaritic Baal Cycle similarly has the god Baal described as the “cloud-rider.”¹¹ It is clear that the author of Daniel repurposed these titles for Yahweh, and it is likely that Mark has done similarly in referring to Jesus.

It seems bizarre that Ben does not establish the link between the “cloud-rider” motif and Mark’s gospel, especially when he has made it clear elsewhere that he is explicitly aware of it. In another post critiquing the evangelist Ray Comfort, Ben quotes the Baal Cycle,¹² saying that “whoever composed the Baal Cycle and other ancient Ugaritic texts were observers of the natural world, connecting it to their pantheon of gods.”¹³ Would this connection not also apply to Mark and his attribution of the title to Jesus? Additionally, for all of Ben’s reading of “conservative” scholars, he seems to not be aware of recent key thinkers in this particular debate including Chris Tilling,¹⁴ Michael Bird,¹⁵ and Simon Gathercole.¹⁶

In conclusion, The Amateur Exegete provides a sufficiently intermediate approach to biblical studies and his admirable passion for the topic clearly runs deep. His assertion to be

⁹ “Musings on Mark: A Brief Response to Erik Manning on Mark’s Christology,” *The Amateur Exegete*, December 2019. Accessed 31/10/22. (<https://amateurexegete.com/2019/12/05/musings-on-mark-erik-manning-on-markan-christology-a-brief-response/>).

¹⁰ Enuma Elish IV.50, taken from E. A. Speiser, ‘Myths and Epics from Mesopotamia’ in James B. Pritchard (ed.) *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 29.

¹¹ Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle, Volume I. Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1-1.2*, (Leiden/New York/ Koln: Brill, 1994); 49-52, 91, 94, 97.

¹² He additionally quotes from the same translation by Smith as I have above.

¹³ “Invasion of the Bible Snatchers: Ray Comfort’s ‘Scientific Facts in the Bible’—Poured Upon the Earth,” *The Amateur Exegete*, September 2021. Accessed 11/11/22. (<https://amateurexegete.com/2021/09/20/invasion-of-the-bible-snatchers-scientific-facts-in-the-bible-by-ray-comfort-poured-upon-the-earth/>).

¹⁴ Chris Tilling, *Paul’s Divine Christology*, (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

¹⁵ Michael F. Bird, *Jesus Among the Gods: Early Christology in the Greco-Roman World*, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2022). This text was not available to Ben earlier this year, but Bird had already published other works on New Testament Christology.

¹⁶ Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

one concerned with the truth should be accepted at face value, but is undoubtedly hampered by some overt blind spots in his research. One cannot be expected to have read every relevant book or article on a given topic, especially one as wide and diverse as theology. But given Ben's propensity to enter such discussions with the knowledge he does have, it is inexplicable as to why some sources found in his own bibliography are misused, and why other sources, most of which are readily available to him as a layman, are missing.

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