

Uriah Y. Kim & Seung Ai Yang. *T&T Clark Handbook of Asian American Biblical Hermeneutics*. London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019. 526 pages. \$158.40 ISBN 9780567672629.

On the last day of class back in fall 2016 in Berkeley, California, as a typical first-time teaching Ph.D. student of the social media generation, I was eager to post a group picture of the class on my Facebook page, and I titled it “Luke-Acts: Postcolonial Reading.” The first response to this brave but also naïve post was a not very friendly comment from someone I didn’t know – a white, older male – who asked, “What in the world is ‘postcolonial reading’? It sounds like something California trendy.” My youthful and hopeful desire to share what had been going on in my life and to point to another way of reading the Bible had become a target of suspicion. I wondered, “How can a way of reading and exploring the Bible that is much needed by one person be looked down on, if not despised, by another?”

By the same token, someone might ask, when seeing this book on a library bookshelf or on Amazon, “Do we need a book on Asian American biblical hermeneutics? What is Asian American biblical hermeneutics in the first place?” Such readers, however, will be surprised by the different Asian American identities, experiences, and aspirations presented in this edited volume. If readers are looking for a particular set of methods for Asian American biblical hermeneutics, they *may* be disappointed because this handbook does not provide a step-by-step roadmap to Asian American reading of the Bible. But, if readers are looking to learn more about the struggles and efforts, albeit not always successful, of Asian Americans, in particular of biblical scholars, they *will* be satisfied because this volume is full of such stories.

The editors – Uriah Y. Kim and Seung Ai Yang – state the aim of this handbook in the introduction: “to meet growing interest in reading the Bible among the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group as well as the challenges of developing specific interpretive strategies that take account of the history and experience of Asian North Americans” (p. 1). This ambitious vision is manifested in the three-part structure of this volume: *contexts*, *methods*, and *texts*. In part one – contexts – the handbook focuses on the pressing issue of Asian American identity and on six Asian subgroups in the United States in order of population size: Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Japanese. Part two – methods – introduces eight widely used critical methods in biblical interpretation: “historical, social science, literary, theological, feminist, postcolonial, liberationist, and queer criticism” (p. 5). They are presented not as competing methods but as a way to encourage readers to attend not only to the text and its context but also to their own context. Part three – texts – has twenty-two exegetical papers covering a wide variety of biblical texts and topics and using various approaches. The editors comment, “[T]his section is like a box of chocolates; there are all sorts of flavors and shapes” (p. 9).

One may ask, “Doesn’t the enormous effort of producing this handbook paradoxically racialize and thus affirm the marginalization of Asian American biblical scholars in biblical scholarship?” It could be. The works and stories of the thirty-seven scholars who contributed to this volume do not deny the discrimination against Asian Americans who often agonize because they can never be “American enough.” Yet, this book is not a byproduct of Asian American melancholy but a project that corrects the biased nature of much biblical scholarship. Jin Young Choi states, “While Asian American interpretation is racialized (‘marked’) by dominant biblical scholarship, white scholars’ work is deracialized in that whiteness is invisible and universalized in interpretation” (p. 137). Surely, this needs correcting.

I highly recommend this book to scholars, students, and dedicated readers of the Bible – both Asian and non-Asian – because it invites us to examine what is deemed to be normative and awakens us to the seemingly infinite interpretive possibilities of the Bible and of human lives. Or, if you are simply wondering, “What in the world is Asian American biblical hermeneutics?” take my word for it: this is a book for you.

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