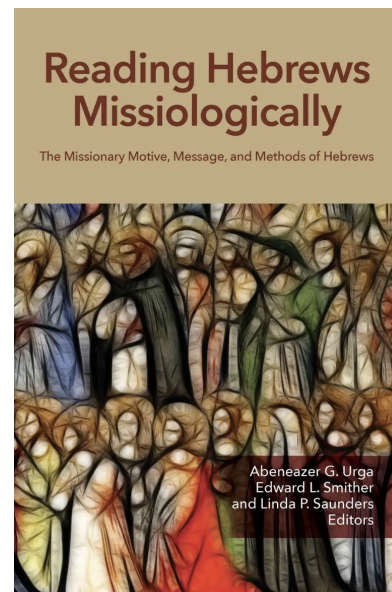


Abeneazer, Urga, G; Smither, Edward, L; Saunders, Linda, P. *Reading Hebrews Missiologically: The Missionary Motive, Message, and Methods of Hebrews*. Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2023.

Reviewed by Wendal Mark Johnson

Reading Hebrews Missiologically is a theological and missiological collaboration between bible scholars and missiologists connected to Columbia International University. This book aims to help readers understand and apply the latent biblical missiology found in Hebrews. While some scholars have argued that Hebrews primarily deals with internal church issues, *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* presents a compelling case to the contrary. It argues that Hebrews has a missional theology that manifests itself in robust missional applications for Christian missions and ministry.

This book brings together 12 evangelical authors with specializations in biblical studies and missiology to consider Hebrews' unique missional motives, messages, and methods. The authors are men and women from diverse cultural backgrounds, which makes their theological insights and missional applications of Hebrews even more interesting. In general, the essays in *Reading Hebrews Missiologically* are characterized by robust theological, historical, and missiological engagement, all written within a clear context of evangelical theology and active missional engagement.



Summary of Contents

Reading Hebrews Missiologically is divided into three broad categories. The first four essays deal with the missionary motivation of Hebrews. The next three essays expound on the missionary message of Hebrews. Then follows an additional four essays that engage with the missionary methods of Hebrews. Finally, the book concludes with a helpful critical review of the text itself offered by veteran missiologist, Robert L. Gallagher.

In Chapter 1, Matthew Bennett argues for the fascinating missiological hypothesis that Hebrews is a narrating of the world's true meta-narrative in the light of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In chapter two, Linda Saunders argues that the *Missio Dei*, understood to be the story of God's plan of redemption revealed in the person and work of Jesus, is the grand narrative of Hebrews. In chapter 3, Allen Yeh argues the idea of Christ being outside of the gate, mentioned in Hebrews 13, and helps the Christian reconfigure where mission ministry should best occur in the present-day reality. Michael Naylor argues, in chapter 4 that Christ's incarnation was essential for Jesus to fulfill his role as messianic heir and great high priest. Based on his fulfillment of these two roles, God's plan of redemption is fulfilled, and God's global mission advances.

In part 2, the book shifts focus to consider Hebrews' missionary message. In chapter 5, Ed Smither highlights the book of Hebrews' emphasis on missionary hospitality. Jessica Udall shows, in chapter 6 that Hebrews presents a picture of God's people on mission in this world as pilgrim people passing through this world, not as permanent citizens of this world. In chapter 7, Irwyn Ince argues that Hebrews teaches that Christ can be trusted to be in control amid the chaos that defines so much of life and ministry for so many of God's redeemed.

In part 3, *Reading Hebrews Missiology* takes up the question of Hebrews' missionary methodology. In chapter 8, Abeneazer Uрга argues that Hebrews has a robust missionary theology. In chapter 9, Sigurd Grindheim makes the case that the coming of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ has direct

missional applications, particularly in how Christ's incarnation modeled how all relationships of power should be conducted. Jessica Janvier shows how African Americans used Hebrews for missional motivation from the antebellum period in US history to the twentieth century, in chapter 10. Sarah Lunsford concludes this section in chapter 11 by showing how Hebrews gives priority to rigorous discipleship. This commitment to robust discipleship should continue to define and conduct missionary engagement around the world.

Finally, in chapter 12, Robert Gallagher provides a critique of *Reading Hebrews Missiology*. I found his critique to be both helpful and insightful. His observations are measured and are a good example of objective analysis and amicable critique.

Critical Evaluation

A brief critical evaluation of this book requires three key points: a big idea, an observation on the use of key missiological words, and a comment on a lost missiological opportunity. First, a big idea. As a rule, I found all the essays to be well-researched, easy to read, and seeking to tease out genuine missiological applications from the book of Hebrews. I found Matthew Bennett's article to be truly thought-provoking. Bennett argues that Hebrews narrates the biblical worldview for those newly coming to faith in Christ, showing that the biblical worldview responds to the great questions asked by all: From where do I come and why am I here? What has gone wrong with the world? What is the solution to the world's greatest problem? Where is this world going? Hebrews introduces the new believer to this comprehensive worldview and invites the new believer to embrace this worldview as his or her new identity. I found this to be a tremendous missiological insight.

Second, the book's essays are all defined by clear evangelical commitment. However, the reader will do well to keep in mind the difference between missional and missions. Several of the articles engage with ideas that most readers would understand to be traditional missionary engagement,

that is, in the sense of engaging in the core missionary task: engaging the lost, evangelism, discipleship, church planting, leadership training, and exit to partnership. Several of the articles speak of local church ministry according to Hebrews as being missional. This is certainly an appropriate usage. However, the reader would be advised to remember that missions and missional are not always used synonymously. The term *missions* normally refers to the core missionary task, as mentioned above. The term *missional* could best be described as the church's identity having "to do with its very nature, what the church *is* in light of its being created by the Spirit."¹ It is the church living out its mission to be the church in its ministry context. Remembering this simple distinction helps the reader understand and appreciate several of the articles that regularly use the term missional.

Finally, I felt Allen Yeh missed an opportunity to show how Christ calling His people to join him outside the camp was a calling to join him in his mission to the Gentiles. Yeh explains Christ's going outside of the camp² as a calling for his followers to work among the poor. He understands this calling from the perspective of Liberation Theology.

Having lived and worked in Latin America for 30 years, I am keenly aware of Liberation Theology, both in terms of its philosophy and its actual practice. I weekly worship and minister in an urban poor community. I respect any call and any practical engagement that brings Kingdom hope to those living in soul-crushing urban poverty.

However, I disagree with Yeh that Christ's calling His people to the margins was a missiological end in and of itself as if God's preferential option for the poor and ministering in that context was the essence of the Christian mission. On the contrary, God's people are called to the margins of societies because the Christian mission calls God's people to reach the least, the last,

¹ Craig Van Gelder and D. J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective* (p. xvii). (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2011), xvii.

² "Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured." Hebrews 13:13, ESV.

and the lost. Not always, but often, the least, the last, and the lost are to be found in the margins of any given society. For this reason, God's people must be there as well, ministering the Gospel truth in word and deed. F. F. Bruce commented on Hebrews 13.13 with these words:

Jesus claimed the world outside for himself. Other Jewish Christians, Hellenists like themselves, had taken the initiative in evangelizing the Gentile world. The future lay not with the "camp" but with the Gentile mission; let them exchange the imagined security of their old associations for the new venture to which Jesus was leading his followers. Time and again in the history of the people of God a similar call has come when a new advance must be made into the unknown and unfamiliar, to occupy fresh territory under the leadership of Jesus.³

It has been my experience that Liberation Theology does not advance the Christian mission and many times does little to alleviate the very suffering that all desire to see improved. As an alternative option, *Business as Mission* (often referred to as BAM), a concept deeply grounded in the Great Commission's belief and practice, is often the best way to bring about lasting, substantive change for those suffering most from urban poverty's soul-consuming grind.

In conclusion, I recommend this book for those desiring to read a rigorous biblical and missiological analysis of a key biblical book. The reader will be rewarded with a broader and deeper understanding of how God's mission works itself among the nations in a book that has so much to say about God's redemptive plan of salvation.

³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 382.