

*Hope for God's Creation* helps fill a lacuna in conservative Christian scholarship by offering a balanced and persuasive theological argument from the Scriptural witness that describes how caring for God's created world is an important part of following Christ, even as God's people ultimately look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

William G. Fredstrom  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Seymour, IN

**FINDING PHOEBE: WHAT NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN WERE REALLY LIKE** by Susan E. Hylen. Grand Rapids, MI. Eerdmans, 2023. 188 pages. \$21.99 (paperback).

In *Finding Phoebe*, Susan E. Hylen provides a necessary corrective to modern caricatures of the roles and agency of women in the ancient world. She deftly weaves together primary classical sources and biblical texts to challenge the idea that women in the Roman Empire were necessarily passive and helpless. Using the figure of Phoebe in Romans 16 as her guiding light, she shows the myriad ways in which Roman women exercised agency and authority in both society at large and in early Christian communities.

Hylen organizes *Finding Phoebe* thematically and divides the work into four parts: Wealth and Property, Social Influence and Status, Virtues of Women, and Speech and Silence. Each of the parts is then broken down into four chapters, each of which discuss a particular subcategory of the theme. A strength of this organization is that the themes are organized around Roman sensibilities, rather than contemporary categories. Thus, Part 1: Wealth and Property includes chapters not just on property ownership and property management but also on marriage and occupations. The remaining three sections continue this organization around Roman social concerns. The chapters within each section are brief, usually around 10 pages, with the last two to three pages devoted to New Testament texts and study questions.

Each chapter of the book begins with examples from the lives of women in the Roman Empire. Sometimes, as in the first chapter, Hylen weaves together a hypothetical family out of her own reading of primary source documents. In other chapters, she presents primary sources such

as inscriptions or the writings of Plutarch to illustrate the social situation. After painting the picture of Roman life in general, Hylen then invites readers to consider how that picture affects their readings of New Testament texts. The book is well-suited to help students learn to interpret biblical texts as it provides both close-reading questions, e.g. “Look in the passage to identify wording that would suggest to ancient readers that the woman is a property owner” (19) as well as broader reflection activities, e.g. “Use the space below to write your reflections about women’s property in the New Testament. You might also note other passages that you want to look up or any new ideas you have as a result of this chapter” (21). The chapters also contain images and charts that help the reader to organize their thoughts.

As someone who has used *Finding Phoebe* in the classroom, I must concur with Amy Peeler’s blurb on the back cover that it is an “educator’s dream.” This book functions especially well at the introductory level,

when students are learning the work of biblical interpretation, as Hylen’s exercises guide them into paying attention to the texts in front of them. Beginning each section with Roman examples also helps students to understand that the New Testament is part of a greater cultural context and works to challenge their assumptions about women in the ancient world. The breadth of topics covered in the book also means that it can be used as a foundational textbook for courses instead of just as a supplementary piece. In addition, while most geared towards the Pauline epistles, *Finding Phoebe* also draws on Gospel texts and the book of Acts and so could be used in Gospel courses or general introductions to the New Testament. The book is also written at an accessible level that makes it an ideal choice for Bible studies and other congregational



applications.

At the same time as I endorse this book for use in the church and classroom, it's important to note its limits. The book is written at an introductory level and does not incorporate much interaction with Greek or Latin (in fact, where referenced, the Greek is transliterated). As such, an educator would have to design their own primary languages activities. Though it would add to the cost of production, the book would be strengthened by including the relevant classical texts in Greek and Latin in the endnotes instead of referring the reader to English sourcebooks. Finally, more advanced students will find the book tantalizing, but at times frustrating. Though the lack of footnotes enhances readability, it does leave students unable to trace the claims that Hylen makes. More problematically, Hylen makes no reference to other scholars and the book lacks a bibliography. Though it does not prevent me from using and recommending the book, it does mean that educators will need to spend time formulating their own bibliographies on the topic.

Once again, when evaluated as an introductory workbook, *Finding Phoebe* is excellent. I heartily recommend it for Bible studies and introductory classes with the confidence that it will help students, pastors and scholars to dismantle stereotypes of ancient women and become better readers of the biblical text.

Kristofer Dale Phan Coffman  
Luther Seminary

**PRIESTS OF HISTORY: STEWARDING THE PART IN AN AHISTORIC AGE** by Sarah Irving-Stonebraker. Grand Rapids, MI Zondervan Reflective, 2024. 225 pages. \$29.99.

In *Priests of History*, Sarah Irving-Stonebraker takes on a task of Sisyphean proportions: trying to convince people, specifically Christians, to care deeply about history. To be fair, not all individuals dislike history; in fact, there are many history buffs among us. That said, there is an undeniable antipathy towards the importance of history, especially in American culture. However, Irving-Stonebraker is Australian, and trained in England, so perhaps her optimism stems from those factors.

When I was asked to review this, I gladly accepted. Like Irving-Stonebraker, I am a professional historian, and I enjoy regaling individuals with the endless benefits of knowing about our past. Irving-Stonebraker