

Review: How (Not) to Read the Bible

January 25, 2021

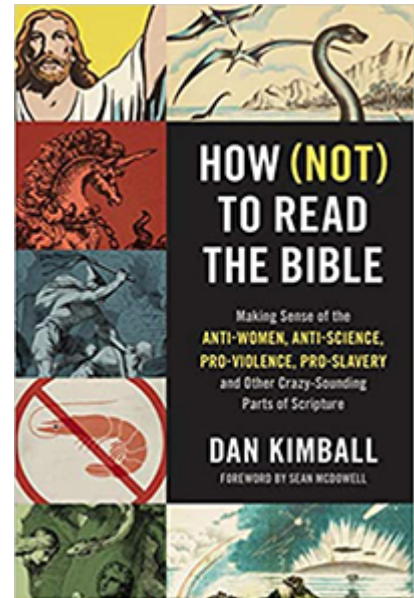
How (Not) to Read the Bible:

Making Sense of the Anti-Women, Anti-Science, Pro-Violence, Pro-Slavery and Other Crazy-Sounding Parts of Scripture

By Dan Kimball (Zondervan)

Dan Kimball, a prominent voice in the Emerging Church movement, grapples in his latest book with what he sees as a growing trend—using the Bible to discredit the Bible.

Memes and websites frequently make much of strange or controversial verses in the Bible, leading many to view Christianity and its adherents as unbelievable. Kimball seeks to engage people unfamiliar with the Bible, to take them seriously, and to help them read the Bible more accurately. *How (Not) to Read the Bible* encapsulates that effort.



Kimball takes on simple things like unicorns and footballs, and more complicated and thorny issues like God permitting slavery in the Mosaic law, calls for brutal violence—even against children—and treatment of women as property. He contends Christians don’t have the option anymore to ignore these topics in the Bible. They must examine the Bible’s difficult passages and form a ready response to questions about them.

Lest someone be concerned about Kimball’s view of Scripture, he states his position early and plainly, that “every word in the original documents of the Bible is exactly what God wanted it to say.” He also starts with “four facts about how to read and how *not* to read the Bible.”

When reading the Bible, a person must remember the Bible is a library of books, rather than a single book. It is “written for us, but not to us.” Furthermore, “never read [just] a Bible verse,” but keep the verse in the context of the storyline. And remember, Jesus is the focal point. These four facts are not sufficient in themselves to convince a skeptic of the Bible’s truth but help to keep the Bible in perspective.

Kimball uses the rest of the book to respond to specific questions about the

trustworthiness and relevance of the Bible today. He examines some Levitical laws—a frequent focus of derision among skeptics—within their historic context and as they appear in the New Testament. As the subtitle indicates, Kimball also does not shy away from addressing criticisms of the Bible’s instructions about slavery and other difficult passages. One addition to the subtitle is his treatment of the Bible’s claims to exclusivity—Jesus as the only way to God.

Kimball’s main audience is anyone without knowledge of the Bible beyond what they have seen in memes and skeptical websites. The writing is accessible to youth, as well as adults.

How (Not) to Read the Bible is best as the start of what may be a long conversation. Much skepticism is savvy and won’t be impressed by Kimball’s vague references to experts. Perhaps for that reason, the book is intended to be used in small groups and has a companion curriculum available on Kimball’s website.

*Eric Black, executive director, publisher, editor
Baptist Standard*