The thesis advanced in *Adam as Israel*, a revision of Postell’s doctoral dissertation, is that Gen 1–3, when understood as the introduction to the Torah and to the Tanakh as a whole, “intentionally foreshadows Israel’s failure to keep the Sinai Covenant as well as their exile from the Promised Land in order to point the reader to a future work of God in the ‘last days’” (3). Genesis 1–3, in other words, contains the story of Israel “writ small,” a reading that does not promote faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant but rather serves a prophetic agenda. This interesting and suggestive work has seven chapters, followed by a bibliography, Scripture index, and subject and name index.

After a brief introductory chapter delineating the book’s purpose and thesis, chapter 2 offers a broad (and somewhat thin) history of interpretation, categorized under the headings of “Pre-critical Approach” and “Critical Approaches,” followed by a section on “Challenges to Critical Approaches.” The first section reviews Jewish interpretation, Jerome, Nicolas of Lyra, John Calvin, Johannes Coccejus, and Matthew Poole; the next section offers a cursory survey of biblical criticism, the names of Astruc, König, Gunkel, and von Rad being noted. Postell’s aim here is to justify a final-form reading of the Pentateuch.
The third chapter, rehearsing recent studies since 1990 that “have significant correlations with this book” (27), provides a useful service; particularly welcome are the summations of the fertile studies by Schöckel and Erlich. Collectively, chapters 2 and 3 note: (1) a return to the acceptance of the unity of Gen 1–3, (2) an increasing openness to a prophetic final shaping of the Pentateuch, and (3) scholarly support for parallels between Gen 1–3 and Israel’s biblical history, all paving the way for Postell’s labor “to connect the dots leading from the Pentateuch to the Primary History, and from the Primary History to the canonical Tanakh” (42).

In the fourth chapter Postell makes his working methodological assumptions explicit, defining his text-centered approach, first negatively: not ahistorical, not divorced from authorial intentionality, not locating meaning in the reader, not locating meaning in the canon. Moving to a positive description in the next section, Postell marks out his approach as an interpretation of the text rather than an event, then goes on to discuss textuality, intertextuality and interpretation, and types of intertextuality. The chapter is rounded off by a short look at “compositional analysis,” noted as another “distinctive component of the text-centered” approach (73).

The substance of Adam as Israel is to be found in the roughly seventy pages of chapters 5 and 6, “A Text-Centered Analysis of Genesis 1–3,” parts 1 and 2, whereby Postell traces “intentional inner- and intertextual links between Genesis 1–3 and Israel’s later biblical history” (75). After a consideration of the relationship of the two creation accounts, chapter 5 looks at Gen 1–3 in light of the pentateuchal “land theme” and then from the perspective of a prototypical Sinai covenant between God and Adam. In the former section Postell rehearses the parallels between Adam and Israel, as God “graciously prepares and gives a special ‘land’ to Adam (Israel),” occupation of which, for both Adam and Israel, is contingent on the “fulfillment of the creation mandate to subdue and conquer the inhabitants of the ‘land’ (1:26, 28)” as well as on obedience to divine commandments (82). Along the way, he strengthens the comparisons thematically and lexically under the following headings: “Prototypical Parting of the ‘Exilic’ Waters”; “Prototypical Preparation of the Promised Land”; “Prototypical Mandate to Conquer the Land.” In the second section of chapter 5, on the Sinai covenant in Gen 1–3, Postell reviews the familiar parallels between creation and the construction of the tabernacle and between Eden and the tabernacle structure. The chapter closes with his putting “forward several reasons in support of viewing Genesis 1–3 as the establishment of a prototypical Sinai covenant between God and Adam (and Eve)” (115), such as the primal couple’s violation being a transgression of the tenth commandment, the Eden story’s leitmotif of “food” foreshadowing the legislations of Lev 11 and the element of contingency in the relationship of God to Adam (and later Israel), among others.
Chapter 6 continues the text-centered analysis under the heading “Seduction and Exile in Genesis 1–3,” where “Adam and Eve’s seduction by the ‘inhabitant’ of the land foreshadows,” so argues Postell, “Israel’s future seduction by the inhabitants of the land and subsequent exile” (120). Intriguing comparisons between the serpent and the Canaanites are drawn here and between Adam’s transgression and expulsion and Israel’s failure under the Sinai covenant and consequent exile. This chapter closes with a look at the bookends of the Pentateuch, construed so as to lend a prophetic “pessimism” regarding the Sinai covenant. Postell reviews thematic and lexical links between Genesis and Deuteronomy, noting how both books end with a paradigmatic Israelite (Jacob, Moses) “waiting in exile for God to fulfill his promises regarding the ‘last days’ ” (135).

In the final chapter Postell considers the question of Gen 1–3 serving as an introduction to the Tanak, investigating the inner-biblical evidence for defining one particular shape of the Hebrew canon, then exploring how the opening chapters of Genesis may fit into the logical formation of it. The “seams” of the Tanak are examined, along with the close of the canon via Chronicles. Both the Torah (Deut 34:10) and the Prophets (Mal 3:23 [Eng. 4:5]), for example, end with the hope of a coming prophet, and Chronicles, forming an inclusion with Genesis, focuses that expectation upon the line of David, on a coming conquering king. These factors contribute to defining Torah observance in the final form of the Pentateuch as “to believe in the one about whom Moses testified and through him, to experience the realities of a circumcised heart” (167).

This book offers a thoughtful and largely persuasive reading of Gen 1–3, along with its role within both the Pentateuch and the Tanak. The following criticisms, therefore, are not meant to detract from Postell’s contribution. In the second chapter’s history of interpretation, the “Pre-critical Approach” section would have benefited by a review of intertestamental literature, especially Jubilees, and the part dealing with rabbinical “Jewish Interpretation” could have been expanded quite fruitfully as well. Also in this chapter, while the introduction highlights Julius Wellhausen as marking “an important turning point” in the history of interpretation (5), his theory is not addressed in the critical approaches section (though seemingly obligatory and at least helpful for the nonacademic), but rather the reader is simply informed that Gunkel and von Rad “assumed Wellhausen’s sources and their dating” (15, 16; cf. 9). Later, however, in the “Challenges to Critical Approaches” section, we are introduced to aspects of his Documentary Hypothesis (16–17)—rearranging this material would lend more clarity. Regarding chapter 4 on methodology, the book’s overall flow would have been facilitated if the editors had excised this chapter as overly reflective of its original dissertation genre, easily footnoted (e.g., with reference to Sailhamer’s methodology).
More substantively, while the analogy between Adam and Israel is established beyond doubt (and this relationship, of course, is not novel), the precise nature and function of that parallel merits further investigation. Some of the language utilized by Postell—for example, Adam as “not only the forerunner of Israel’s ‘future,’ but its embodiment” (114), the serpent’s “role as a prototypical Canaanite” (104)—along with the proposed function of Gen 1–3 (confirming Israel’s failure under the Sinai covenant), may leave one with the impression of an allegorical or, at least, parabolic reading—the text-centered approach’s definition as “not ahistorical” notwithstanding. To the point, the priority of Gen 1–3 as “the fountainhead of all biblical theology” (1) may get lost in such a reading where, with a previous generation of scholars, creation is interpreted through the lens of the exodus/Israel rather than vice versa. A case in point is where the separation of waters in Gen 1:2 is referred to as the “Prototypical Parting of the ‘Exilic’ Waters” (95). There has been a growing consensus among scholars that all theology is creation theology, that the exodus, for example, is to be understood as an act of new creation (see, e.g., T. E. Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation,” *Interp* 45 [1991]: 354–65). Thus, while there is a reciprocal relationship among parallels, to be sure, one nevertheless wants the wheel turned the other way: Israel as Adam, Sinai as a republication of the Adamic covenant, and so on, rendering a canonical reading that is also sensitive to the history of redemption. More deeply, greater weight should have been given to the position of Gen 1–3 within the Primeval History of Gen 1–11. Here some interaction with David Clines’s section on the universal context of the Primeval History in *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT, 1978), cited once as a secondary source (143 n. 74), would likely have fostered such a sensitivity to how Israel’s role functions within that context historically. As a concrete example of our point, Walter Vogels (*God’s Universal Covenant* [University of Ottawa Press, 1979]) has made a compelling case that Israel’s covenantal history parallels the universal history (and possible covenant) depicted in Gen 1–11, so that Israel finds itself in exile in a similar fashion to the exile of humanity from the tower of Babel (and Eden). Abram’s call (and thus Israel’s role in history) becomes God’s solution to humanity’s exile, and as God eventually gathers dispersed Israel there is also hope for the gathering of the nations. In short, the parallels between Israel and Adam may be with a final view to the nations and not meant to delimit God’s concern to Israel alone—a reading perfectly in accord with Postell’s overall thesis of a canonical bent toward the “last days.” These comments, then, do not dispute that Gen 1–3 may be read as the history of Israel “in a nutshell.” Rather, at issue is how that parallel functions within the context of the Primeval (as well as the Primary) History—this function, I suggest, should not be limited merely to commentary on the Sinai covenant.

These observations aside, Postell’s *Adam as Israel*, filled with rich exegetical insights and engendering many suggestive “rabbit trails” to pursue, is a solid contribution to biblical
theology, joining a growing body of scholarship that, through holistic readings, marks a critically minded return to an earlier understanding of the Hebrew and Christian canons. Readers will be impressed afresh concerning the profound significance of the Eden narratives, along with the highly complex literary artistry at play within the Tanak. If every support to his proposition that this body of literature is shaped with a view to faith in “the one about whom Moses testified” (167) is not found to be equally tested, the ones that are so will ensure that Postell’s thesis remains an influence on—and challenge to—alternative readings.