David Crystal, *Begat. The King James Bible & the English Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Crystal sets out to provide an answer to the question 'How many commonly used English expressions are derived from the language of the Bible?' He concludes that the answer ranges from 18 to 257, depending on how the question is interpreted, with 18 representing the number of expressions actually originating in the King James translation and 257 the popularized by the King James version (and its eighteenth-century revisions) but also found in at least one of the earlier translations on which it was based. Although Crystal focuses on the language of the King James version, it would be impossible to discuss his subject without reference to the history of biblical translation. He acknowledges that 'much of the memorable linguistic distinctiveness of the King James Bible in fact originated with Tyndale' (7) but argues that this language would not have become more widely known if were not for the King James version.

Crystal also makes the useful observation that there are many ways in which the Bible has not influenced later English. We do not use the same spelling or punctuation systems and our pronunciation is entirely different. Although Biblical grammar does continue to influence religious discourse (e.g. the survival of the singular second person pronoun *thou* and its distinctive *-est* inflection), continuities with contemporary grammar cannot be attributed to the influence of the Bible. Individual words that can be traced to direct Biblical influence are also relatively few in number: Crystal offers, for example, *begat* (Genesis 5:6 and many other places), *talent* (Matthew 25:14-29), and *scapegoat* (Leviticus 16:8). In comparison with Shakespeare, if we look at individual words alone, the Bible's influence is negligible. However, Crystal notes that fewer than a hundred of Shakespeare's expressions are used productively in Present Day English.

Quotation and direct allusion are not sufficient qualification for the idioms discussed in this book: Crystal includes only those that have been used with broader reference or with greater flexibility. Some later users may have been aware that an expression originated in the Bible, but others may not. The body of the book consists of individual accounts of the use of expressions derived from the Bible. These are presented in the order they appear in the text, which means that Crystal's chapter headings offer a summary of the contents of the Bible: *let there be light* (Genesis 1:13), *be fruitful and multiply* (Genesis 1:22, among other occurrences), *my brother's keeper* (Genesis 4:9), *two by two* (Genesis 7:9), *coat of many colours* (Genesis 37:3), and so on. We also gain a sense of his experience of reading the Bible from beginning to end while doing the research for this book. The benefit of this approach is that it offers a new perspective on the Bible by identifying which books have had the most influence on later English: 'From Deuteronomy to Ruth we enter the first of several linguistic wildernesses, as far as biblical influence on modern English is concerned' (71). It should be no surprise that the gospels are by far the most fruitful sources of Biblical idiom.

For each idiom, Crystal provides examples of their use in literature and their manipulation in headlines and in political and advertising campaigns. Many have also been re-used or re-worked in the titles of books, television programmes, films, and songs. His approach is most easily explained with an example. *O ye of little faith* was first used in Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 16:8 and Luke 12:28, with *thou of little faith* occurring in Matthew 14:31. Crystal comments that 'It's now used as a good-humoured riposte which we can make to anyone who doubts our claimed ability to do something' (167). He finds that words such as *imagination, shame, humour, patience, memory,* and *vision* have

all been inserted into the phrase in place of *faith* and that it has also been turned into an insult: *O ye of little brain*. Using online searches, Crystal located some more inventive re-interpretations of the phrase:

> O ye of literal faith [on issues of biblical interpretation]
> O ye of liberal faith [on party political policy]
> O ye of too much faith [on placing trust in marketing predictions]
> O ye of limitless faith [on continuing to support a team that isn't playing well] (168)

His final example comes from an episode of *The Simpsons* depicting Lisa's spiritual quest following the destruction of her local church (by Homer and Bart): *She of Little Faith*.

Although these examples might seem trivial, they demonstrate that some Biblical phrases have become part of the productive resources of Present Day English, even in secular contexts. The examples also enliven Crystal's account and ensure that he is offering more than might be found in a book of quotations. *Begat* is both an entertaining and erudite book, suitable for reading cover-to-cover or for casual browsing. For some, it may be that the 'Index of Expressions' proves the most useful part of it, because this allows the book to be employed for reference. It also allows me to end this review with a quiz. Where are the originals of the following phrases to be found in the Bible?

a) old wives' tales
b) double-edged sword
c) play the fool
d) fly in the ointment
e) wheels within wheels
f) go the extra mile
g) filthy lucre
h) cradle to the grave
i) Be afraid. Be very afraid
j) I yam what I yam

[Answers: **a)** 1 Timothy 4:7 **b)** Hebrews 4:12 **c)** 1 Samuel 26:1 **d)** Ecclesiastes 10:1 **e)** Ezekial 10:10 **f)** Matthew 5:41 **g)** 1 Timothy 3:8 **h)** Job 10:19 **i)** Jeremiah 2:12 **j)** Exodus 3:14]

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