The phrase “biblical theology” allows for several possible meanings. It can mean “theology of the Bible” and in this sense it is pervasively used in the scholarship for various efforts to make sense of the whole of the Bible (or of one of its parts) on its own merits, i.e. to present some overall, common message of the sometimes quite disparate writings constituting the Christian canon. Alternatively, “biblical theology” can also mean “theology based on the Bible,” i.e. the effort to show the linkage of some theological conception to the biblical texts. There is no sharp contradiction between the two approaches, but I would decisively place Grindheim’s book into the latter group. It does not strive to find some principle or structure that would enable to grasp the Bible as a whole, it has such a structure already in hand.

With respect to the title, the reviewer tends to ask three simple questions: What theology is presented here as “biblical”? What image of the Bible is drawn by it? Who is to be introduced to such theology and its Bible? Both the structure of the book and its language are quite straightforward, so the answers are not difficult to find.

Theology that supplies the basic structure of the book may be identified as the “classical” Christian doctrinal scheme of evangelical flavour, presented in the form of “salvational history”. The book starts with a chapter about the main subject of the Bible, “God who interacts,” followed, somehow unexpectedly, by a special chapter dedicated to the supra-terrestrial beings (Satan, angels and demons). Then begins the proper story: going on over creation, hamartology, four covenants, cultic (sacrificial) and other means of (provisional) mending of the relationship between God and his people, rise of hopes for the messianic saviour, christology, two chapters on soteriology (saving work of Christ and its appropriation by the believers), pneumatology, ethics of the redeemed life (sanctification), ecclesiology, sacramentology and eschatology.
Each theme has its own chapter with inventive titles, successfully avoiding the technical terminology used above. The chapters are further subdivided into shorter sections with connecting summaries, lists of several more specialised titles for further reading and with a couple of “review questions”. The style of the expositions is concise and unproblematic, predominantly simply giving account of the biblical assertions, occasionally explaining in more detail some concept or particular text. Probably characteristically for the theological position of the author, by far the longest exposition is dedicated to the theme of justification (143–152). The texts from different parts of the Bible are adduced according to the logic of the exposition, the inner coherence of the Bible enabling such usage is rather presupposed than argued.

That takes us to our second question. The depiction of the Bible emerging from this introduction is simplified indeed, perhaps oversimplified. The perspective is exclusively synchronic, historical questions “behind the texts” are not asked. The Bible is taken at its face value, read in the “first naivety.” The views about the issues of “literary introduction,” as transpiring from the background of Grindheim’s expositions, are extremely conservative: Moses does not seem to be regarded as the author of the Tora, but the whole of traditional corpus Paulinum is taken as written by Paul, both Petrine epistles are ascribed to apostle Peter, Johannine writings to apostle John, etc. Jesus’ address to Peter about “founding the church on that rock” (Matt. 16:17–19) is discussed with respect to interpretation of its individual parts, but its authenticity is taken for granted: “We have seen that Jesus established the church ...” (183).

The Bible is presented as a book neatly coherent, the differences and possible discrepancies are usually explained away. E.g. the obvious tension between James and Paul is attenuated by maintaining that the two use the same terms (faith, justification) for different realities (153), the contradictory chronologies of the passion in the Synoptics and John are passed by in silence, the notion of development in Paul’s (or early Christians’) thought about the last things is turned down (220). The obvious problem of difference in the style of speech between the Johannine and the synoptic Jesus is not dealt with: whatever the Gospels present as Jesus’ words is taken as such.

The Old Testament is given much less space than the New (88 out of 262 pages) and the relationship between the two is conceived in the typological paradigm: “fulfilment” is one of frequently used keywords, often understood with the nuance of surpassing or replacement.

Some of the assertions seem to be brought about by the author’s wish more than by anything else: e.g. presenting of Isa. 53 as “the most important text that New Testament uses to explain the significance of Jesus’ death” (85). In my view it is rather puzzling, why in the New Testament clear references to the text that