

LOUISE A. GOSBELL

»The Poor, the Crippled,  
the Blind, and the Lame«

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

369

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**Mohr Siebeck**

Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe

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469





Louise A. Gosbell

»The Poor, the Crippled,  
the Blind, and the Lame«

Physical and Sensory Disability  
in the Gospels of the New Testament

Mohr Siebeck

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ISBN 978-3-16-155132-1 / eISBN 978-3-16-155920-4

DOI 10.1628/978-3-16-155920-4

ISSN 0340-9570 / eISSN 2568-7484

(Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe)

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

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The book was printed by Laupp & Göbel in Gomaringen on non-aging paper and bound by Buchbinderei Nädele in Nehren.

Printed in Germany.

For my family who made this work possible:  
Mark, Lily, Ruby, and Maisy Gosbell



## Preface

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed,  
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the father through him.”  
Colossians 3:17

This study is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation which was completed at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia in 2015 under the supervision of Professor Larry L. Welborn and Dr. Brent Nongbri.

While no major revisions were undertaken for the published version, I have decreased some of the discussions contained in the secondary literature in some sections while increasing it in others. I am grateful to Dr. Tobias Nicklas and Mr. Klaus Hermannstädter and others at Mohr Siebeck who were instrumental in this refining process. In addition, I would like to thank my thesis examiners whose feedback and recommendations were also immensely helpful in the revision process. I am grateful to Professor Candida R. Moss, Dr. Annette Weissenrieder, and Dr. Sharon Ringe for their recommendations in this respect. Thank you also to Dr. Wolfgang Grünstäudl and Dr. Uta Andréé for their assistance with recommending some of the German literature utilised within this publication.

This monograph, and the preceding doctoral thesis, would not have been possible without a faithful group of family and friends who assisted with babysitting and school pick-ups and drop-offs while I was studying or away on conferences. I would also like to thank those who assisted with reading over portions of my dissertation prior to submission. Those brave people include Prof. James R. Harrison, Jane Kelly, Anita Terry, Rod McLeod, Cathy Landall, Dr. Emmanuel Nathan, James Unwin, Dr. Katy Valentine, and Tara Stevenson. Thank you also for ongoing encouragement and prayers: CBM & the many volunteers with the Luke 14 program, especially Lindsey Gale and Rob Nicholls; the staff at Anglican Deaconess Ministries & Mary Andrews College, especially Rev. Jackie Stoneman and Dr. Karin Sowada.

Thank you also to the members of the New Testament and Early Christianity (NTEC) group who meet on a monthly basis at Macquarie University under the guidance of Dr. Don Barker. This group provided invaluable opportunities for presenting dissertation material as it was being written as well as the opportunity to hone presentation skills and listen to constructive feedback. I



am grateful for many discussions that took place during these monthly meetings. Thank you to the chairs, presenters, and participants at the Healthcare and Disability sessions at SBL which I was fortunate enough to attend in 2011 (London), 2012 (Chicago), 2014 (San Diego), and 2015 (Atlanta). Thanks also to the presenters & participants at the 2013 Disability and God's People conference in Auckland, New Zealand as well as the 2014 Stavanger Conference on Health, Religion and Disability in Stavanger, Norway. Once again, the feedback and conversations at these conferences were vital in the shaping and refining of many of the arguments throughout this publication.

I am incredibly grateful for the diligent and dedicated supervision of Professor Larry Welborn who, from the beginning, saw the vision I had for this research project. Despite the tyranny of distance and the plethora of other students vying for Professor Welborn's time, he has given me ongoing support and encouragement. In addition to Professor Welborn, I have also been fortunate enough to have had the wisdom and guidance of both Dr. Brent Nongbri and Macquarie Honorary Fellow, Professor James R. Harrison. Once again, I cannot understate the wisdom and guidance offered by both scholars during my candidature. Thank you also to Professor Alannah Nobbs and the other staff in the Ancient History department at Macquarie University.

I would especially like to thank my incredible family for allowing me the opportunity to complete this work. I cannot adequately express the multi-tasking, super-human skills of my husband Mark. During the time of my thesis and the revision process he has cooked, cleaned, bathed children, painted bedroom walls, taught his primary school class, attended "Frozen" birthday parties, played music, taught Sunday School, built guitars, fed cats, babysat other peoples' kids, baked birthday cakes, acted as assistant to the tooth fairy...what can't this man do? One thing is certain: I could never have completed this work without his unfailing support and encouragement. He could always visualise the end goal even when I could not. And to my three amazing children – Lily, Ruby, and Maisy...what a journey! When I began the dissertation, I attempted to keep study and home life in separate compartmentalised boxes. That worked for a little while, however, by the end of the project, I had spent many days and nights at Macquarie University and became intimately acquainted with the lounge in the PhD study rooms which sufficed as a make-shift bed for the small snatches of sleep I was able to acquire. And my girls have endured all this, patiently looking forward to having their mum back on duty. I am looking forward to sleeping more than 8 hours a night and in a place specifically designated for sleep. I could not have reached the end without your support and encouragement.

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## Abbreviations

AA	<i>Archäologischer Anzeiger</i>
AAASP	American Anthropological Association Special Publication
AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Anchor Bible, 1992
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACIT	Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies
ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
AGSK	Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse
AHB	<i>Ancient History Bulletin</i>
AJA	<i>Journal of the Archaeological Institute of America</i>
Am J Med Genet	<i>American Journal of Medical Genetics</i>
Am J Phys Anthropol	<i>American Journal of Physical Anthropology</i>
AncSoc	<i>Ancient Society</i>
AN	<i>Ancient Narrative</i>
Ann Med Interne	<i>Annals de Medecine Interne</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
AR	Art & Religion
ARIDSup	Analecta Romana Instituti Danici Supplement
ASMA	Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity
ATI	<i>American Theology Inquiry</i>
AU	<i>Der Altsprachliche Unterricht</i>
AUS	American University Studies
BARIS	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BFPLUL	Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège
BHM	<i>Bulletin of the History of Medicine</i>
BI	<i>Biblical Interpretations</i>
BibSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BICSSup	Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London Supplement
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BKBC	Bible Knowledge Background Commentary

BMCR	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
Brain Dev	<i>Brain and Development</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
Bull Hist Med	<i>Bulletin of the History of Medicine</i>
Bull Schweizer Gesell Anthrop	<i>Bulletin der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CA	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblical New Testament
ConcC	Concordia Commentaries
CPhil	<i>Classical Philology</i>
CPNIVC	College Press NIV Commentary
CQ	Classical Quarterly
CRJ	<i>Christian Research Journal</i>
CSM	<i>Culture et Société Médiévals</i>
Dev Psychol	<i>Developmental Psychology</i>
Disabil Soc	<i>Disability and Society</i>
DSD	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
DSQ	<i>Disability Studies Quarterly</i>
ECL	Early Christianity and its Literature
EMC	<i>Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views</i>
ETL	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis</i>
Evol Psychiatr	<i>L'Evolution Psychiatrique</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
Exp	<i>Expositor</i>
FAT	<i>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
G&R	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
GLO	<i>Graecolatina et Orientalia</i>
GRBS	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
HCQ	<i>History of Childhood Quarterly</i>
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
HSCPh	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HumSup	Humanitas Supplementum
HUT	Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJHSS	<i>International Journal of Humanities and Social Science</i>
J Archaeol Sci	<i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i>



J Art Hist SAS	<i>Journal of Institute of Art History of Slovak Academy of Sciences</i>
J Med Phil	<i>Journal of Medicine and Philosophy</i>
J Relig Health	<i>Journal of Religion and Health</i>
J Relig Disabil Health	<i>Journal of Religion, Disability, and Health</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBQ	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
JECH	<i>Journal of Early Christian History</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGRChJ	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JRASS	Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series
JQR	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
JWI	<i>Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
LBS	Linguistic Biblical Studies
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
MBCBSup	Mnemosyne Bibliotheca Classica Batava Supplement
MedSec	<i>Medicina nei Secoli</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NDSB	New Daily Study Bible
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplement Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTAM	New Testament Archaeology Monograph
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OAth	<i>Opuscula Atheniensia</i>
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> . Edited by A. P. Kazhdan et al. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991

OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
POC	<i>Proche Orient Chrétien</i>
PRSt	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
RÉA	<i>Revue des Études Anciennes</i>
Rehab Couns Bull	<i>Rehabilitation Counselor Bulletin</i>
RSSD	Research in Social Science and Disability
S&A	<i>Slavery and Abolition</i>
SAM	Studies in Ancient Medicine
SBA	Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft
SBJT	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Supplement Series
Sci Context	<i>Science in Context</i>
SEÅ	<i>Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok</i>
SEM	Studies in Early Medicine
SHBC	Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary
SHJ	<i>Studying the Historical Jesus</i>
SJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTSS	Society for Old Testament Study Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SS	Semeia Studies
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
SVTQ	<i>St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly</i>
TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TAPA	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TB	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TJT	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
UNT	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
Wilcken	U. Wilcken, <i>Griechische Ostraka aus Aegypten und Nubien: Ein Beitrag zur antiken Wirtschaftsgeschichte</i> . 2 vols. Berlin: Verlag von Giesecke and Devrient, 1899
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

I'm more than you know.  
I'm more than you see.  
I'm more than you'll let me be.

...

You don't see me, but you will.  
I am not invisible – I am here.  
There is no 'them' – there's only 'us.'"

*U2 Invisible*

A fundraiser for (RED) –  
to raise funds and awareness to help eliminate HIV/AIDS.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Introduction

In 2014 Irish band U2 released a song entitled *Invisible* as a fundraiser for (RED), a charity organisation working for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS.<sup>2</sup> The message of the song, at least in the way I interpret it, is that despite the large numbers of people living with HIV/AIDS<sup>3</sup> the experiences and needs of these people are often overlooked and neglected. Not only is the issue of HIV/AIDS underrepresented in terms of community action, health promotion, and media coverage, but those living with HIV/AIDS also experience the added complication of having an illness that can appear asymptomatic and therefore hidden. But in response, U2's song announces that despite the invisibility of the illness upon one's body or the invisibility of the issue in the greater community, people living with HIV/AIDS are present in our communities and cannot continue to be ignored and overlooked. The song

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<sup>1</sup> Bono and The Edge, *Invisible* (Recorded by U2; Dublin: Island Records, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> (RED), "Bank of America and (RED)." Cited 22 October 2014. Online: <http://www.red.org/en/learn/partners/bank-of-america>.

<sup>3</sup> According to the World Health Organisation, in 2013 there were 35 million people living with HIV worldwide (WHO, "Global Summary of the AIDS epidemic 2013." Cited 3 November 2014. Online: [http://www.who.int/hiv/data/epi\\_core\\_dec2014.png](http://www.who.int/hiv/data/epi_core_dec2014.png)). However, "97% of those living with HIV reside in low and middle-income countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa" (Aids.gov, "Global Statistics." Cited 3 November 2014. Online: <http://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/global-statistics/>).

reminds us that though we might be separated by distance, language, culture, and ethnic background, we are linked through our common humanity: “There is no ‘them’ – there’s only ‘us.’”

I was struck by the imagery of the song and how it addresses the way in which we perceive, interpret, and respond to marginalised groups within our society.<sup>4</sup> According to the 2010 World Report on Disability, the World Health Organization (henceforth, WHO) estimates that approximately 15% of the world’s population live with some form of disability.<sup>5</sup> This percentage equates to approximately 785 million persons 15 years and over, with 2.2% – approximately 110 million people – having “significant difficulties in functioning.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the prevalence of disability and the fact that with medical advancements and ageing populations the numbers of people with disability is actually on the increase,<sup>7</sup> people with disability are still very much invisible members of our communities. As a result, many people with disability experience greater difficulty accessing community services, education, transportation, communication and other vital services in comparison to their able-bodied counterparts. In fact, people with disability are more likely to be victims of rape and violence, less likely to receive legal protection, more likely to be excluded from mass education, be underrepresented in positions of power, and be more reliant on state benefits and/or charity.<sup>8</sup>

It is this lack of access that has led disability activists to describe people with disability as a “key defining social category”<sup>9</sup> as well as “the world’s largest minority” group.<sup>10</sup> Unlike other categories of individuals identified as marginal and/or experiencing broad scale discrimination whether on the basis of gender, race, or sexuality, the ties that bind people with disability appear on

---

<sup>4</sup> There are strong overlaps between the issue of HIV/AIDS and disability. Not only does the WHO classify AIDS as a form of disability, but research indicates that those with disability are more likely to become exposed to the HIV virus than their able-bodied counterparts [e.g., UNAIDS, WHO, and OHCHR, “Disability and HIV Policy Brief,” (April 2009): 1. Cited 22 October 2014. Online: [http://www.who.int/disabilities/jc1632policy\\_brief\\_disability\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/disabilities/jc1632policy_brief_disability_en.pdf)].

<sup>5</sup> WHO, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva: WHO, 2011), 8.

<sup>6</sup> WHO, *World Report*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> WHO, *World Report*, 236.

<sup>8</sup> Dan Goodley, *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability History: Why we need Another ‘Other.’” in *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader* (ed. Tanya Titchkosky and Rod Michalko; Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2009), 31–37, here 31–32.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Wainwright from Action on Disability and Development International as quoted in Karen McVeigh, “Disabled ‘world’s largest minority.’” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June, 2011. Cited 24 October 2011. Online: <http://www.smh.com.au/world/disabled-worlds-largest-minority-20110610-1fx19.html>).

first impression to be much more tenuous.<sup>11</sup> Rather than being grouped together on the basis of “biomedical conditions” or “diagnostic categories,” people with disability are considered a distinctive group based on a shared “social and political experience.”<sup>12</sup> In this sense, this minority group “is arguably more heterogeneous than those of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation.”<sup>13</sup> Christian disability advocate Nancy L. Eiesland wrote of her experiences as a woman with a physical disability stating that

people with disabilities are distinguished not because of our shared physical, psychological, or emotional traits, but because ‘temporarily able-bodied’ persons single us out for differential treatment. Although people with disabilities span a broad spectrum of medical conditions with diverse effects on appearance and function, studies indicate that whatever the setting, whether in education, medicine, rehabilitation, social welfare policy, or society at large, a common set of stigmatizing values and arrangements has historically operated against us. This recognition has led activists and sociologists to argue that persons with disabilities constitute a minority group, shaped primarily by exclusion.<sup>14</sup>

The last 40–50 years has seen a growing interest in the social status of people with disability and their representation within society. In the 1970’s, following on from the women’s and racial anti-discrimination movements, a disability rights movement began aimed at addressing “the social problem (of) the oppressive marginalization of persons with disabilities.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, disability advocate Diane Driedger famously referred to this movement, which was viewed as being well overdue,<sup>16</sup> as “the last civil rights movement.”<sup>17</sup> The aim of this disability rights movement, according to disability sociologists, was to shift attention away from “medical diagnoses of individual pathology, associated functional limitations and culturally determined deficits”<sup>18</sup> to focus instead on the “‘disabling’ economic, political and cultural barriers that prevented people

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<sup>11</sup> Nancy L. Eiesland suggests that the “differences among persons with disabilities are often so profound that few areas of commonality exist (*The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 23).

<sup>12</sup> Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University, 1998), 12.

<sup>13</sup> G. Thomas Couser, “Disability as Diversity: A Difference with a Difference,” *Ilha do Desterro* 48 (2005): 95–113, here 96.

<sup>14</sup> Eiesland, *Disabled God*, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Jerry A. Winter, “The Development of the Disability Rights Movement as a Social Problem Solver,” *DSQ* 23.1 (2003): 33–61, here 33.

<sup>16</sup> Lennard J. Davis, “Introduction,” in *The Disability Studies Reader* (ed. Lennard J. Davis; 4th ed.; New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–14, here 1.

<sup>17</sup> Diane Driedger, *The Last Civil Rights Movement: Disabled Peoples’ International* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1989), *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Oliver and Colin Barnes, *The New Politics of Disablement* (2nd ed.; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 11.

with impairments...from participating in mainstream society as equal citizens.”<sup>19</sup>

The recent development of critical disability theory “and the recognition that the category of disability is both constructed and representative of social experiences and culture has had a profound impact on historical studies.”<sup>20</sup> In light of these recent developments in critical disability theory, it is the aim of the current study to use disability as a lens through which to explore a number of key gospel passages anew. Although these pericopae have been examined at length by biblical scholars, they have rarely been examined specifically in relation to disability. Using the cultural model of disability as the theoretical basis for this examination, we contend that the gospel writers, as with other ancient authors, use disability as a means of understanding, organising, and interpreting the experiences of humanity. These investigations thus allow us to consider the way in which the gospel writers reinforce and reflect, as well as subvert, culturally-driven constructions of disability in the ancient world. We contend that the use of disability as a lens through which to assess the New Testament will afford us the opportunity to evaluate the gospel material from a new and illuminating perspective and thus contribute to the growing field of disability and biblical studies.

In what follows in this chapter, we will discuss (a) the shifting academic trends within disability studies and their relevance for New Testament researchers (§1.2); (b) the benefits of bringing disability studies into dialogue with biblical research (§1.3); (c) the state of academic research into people with disability in Hebrew Bible and New Testament studies (§1.4); (d) the purpose, scope, and methodology of the current study in light of the foregoing review of disability studies (§1.5).

## 1.2 Disability Studies

While disability advocates claim the academic world initially failed to respond to the growing disability movement,<sup>21</sup> eventually a specialised field of disability studies developed, foregrounding the “experiences, portrayals, and social treatment” of people with disability.<sup>22</sup> This research was not limited to any one academic discipline but became a diverse interdisciplinary academic

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<sup>19</sup> Oliver and Barnes, *New Politics*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Joel S. Baden and Candida R. Moss, “The Origin and Interpretation of *šāra’at* in Leviticus 13–14,” *JBL* 130.3 (2011): 643–62, *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Willie V. Bryan, *Sociopolitical Aspects of Disabilities* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 2010), 7–8.

<sup>22</sup> Heike Peckruhn, “Disability Studies,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Gender Studies* (ed. Julia M. O’Brien; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 101–11, here 101.

field. Thus, disability studies does not represent a unique and specialised methodological approach but serves as a lens through which scholars can view their specific areas of research, whether that is in education, law, technology, humanities, or any other area of investigation.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the earliest works in the field of disability studies were written in response to what disability advocates have labelled the medical model of disability, a framework that situates the ‘problem’ of a ‘disabled’ body firmly in the context of an individual’s pathology and/or deficit.<sup>24</sup> In response, the earliest writers in the field of disability studies wrote in order to demythologise the ‘disabled’ body and “debunk the fictions of desirability that invest the ‘able’ body.”<sup>25</sup> For these contributors to disability studies, the ‘problem’ of the ‘disabled’ body is not that it must be pathologised, rehabilitated, or cured, but that our social structures are created with the able-bodied in mind. What needs to be addressed and fixed is not the individual with disability, these writers have argued, but rather, it is our societal expectations and structures that limit access for those with bodies outside of what is deemed ‘normal.’<sup>26</sup> Conse-

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<sup>23</sup> We understand the irony of relying on sensory imagery (e.g., “lens”/“view”) to describe the experiences as well as the interpretive processes of disability studies. We note here the work of Louise Lawrence in pointing out the sensorially-centred language often used in association with the biblical texts. Lawrence states, for example, “In biblical studies the frequently employed metaphor of the biblical ‘text as a window’ through which one either looks ‘behind’, ‘at’ or ‘in front of’ belies the sight-centricity of exegetical ‘outlooks’, ‘lenses’, and ‘perspectives’” (*Sense and Stigma in the Gospels: Depictions of Sensory-Disabled Characters* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], 25). However, we note that this terminology is employed by numerous disability scholars as a means of describing the combination of disability studies with other forms of academic pursuit (e.g. Joel S. Baden, “The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* [ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011], 13–28, here 20; Jane S. Deland, “Images of God through the Lens of Disability,” *J Relig Disabil Health* 3.2 [1999]: 47–81; Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008], 70; Holly J. Toensing, “‘Living at the Tombs’: Society, Mental Illness, and Self-Destruction,” in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* [ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper; SS 55; Atlanta: SBL, 2007], 131–43, here 133; Peckruhn, “Disability Studies,” 102).

<sup>24</sup> A more comprehensive description of this model as well as other models will be outlined in §2.2.1.

<sup>25</sup> Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, “Re-engaging the Body: Disability Studies and the Resistance to Embodiment,” *Public Culture* 13.3 (2001): 367–89, here 368.

<sup>26</sup> Lennard J. Davis, for example, suggests that while early studies of race focused on the ‘otherness’ of the “person of color,” more recent studies focus their attention on “whiteness.” In the same way, disability studies too have shifted from focusing on the phenomenology of disability to instead focus on society’s construction of normalcy. Davis states “the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to



quently, the ‘disabled’ body should not be viewed as an anomaly, but as a natural part of human diversity. In this sense, disability is “an inescapable element of human experience.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, this inescapability is reflected in the projected statistics for disability with the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggesting, “the number of Australians with a disability appears likely to increase during the twenty-first century,”<sup>28</sup> a statistic replicated across the globe.<sup>29</sup>

Disability studies proposes that disability is a “significant and powerful system of representation,” similar to those of gender, race, and sexuality, that “assigns traits to individuals, and discriminates among them, on the basis of bodily differences.”<sup>30</sup> At the centre of each of these socio-political categories is bodily difference and the extent to which an individual departs from a socially prescribed norm. However, “the border between the disabled and the non-disabled is less permanent and more permeable than those between races and genders.”<sup>31</sup> While it is extremely difficult to change one’s gender, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, by contrast, disability represents an “open minority.”<sup>32</sup> As technology advances and new forms of rehabilitation are developed, it is possible for bodies to pass from ‘disabled’ to nondisabled. At the same time, the opposite is also possible with people acquiring disability during their lifetime as a result of injury, ageing, illness, or accident. Despite this, instead of motivating the general populace to alter any disabling societal structures, disability advocates suggest that the prevalence of disability and its inevitability merely generates a response of “anxiety and discomfort”<sup>33</sup> from the temporarily able-bodied portion of the community. And yet, it is precisely

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create the “problem” of the disabled person” (*Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* [London: Verso, 1995], 23).

<sup>27</sup> Couser, “Disability as Diversity,” 96. Disability writer Lennard J. Davis suggests “the only universal (of humanity) is the experience of the limitation of the body” (*Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism and Other Difficult Positions* [New York: New York University Press, 2002], 32).

<sup>28</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Australian Social Trends March 2011 – Life Expectancy Trends Australia,” (March 2011), 5. Cited 10 November 2014. Online: [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/LookupAttach/4102.0Publication23.03.112/\\$File/41020\\_Lifeexpectancy\\_Mar2011.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/LookupAttach/4102.0Publication23.03.112/$File/41020_Lifeexpectancy_Mar2011.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Scott M. Lynch, J. Scott Brown, and Miles G. Taylor, “Demography of Disability,” in *International Handbook of Population Aging* (ed. Peter Uhlenberg; International Handbooks of Populations 1; Heidelberg: Springer, 2009), 566–82, *passim*; Colin D. Mathers et al., “Healthy life expectancy in 191 countries, 1999,” *The Lancet* 357 (2001): 1685–91, *passim*.

<sup>30</sup> Couser, “Disability as Diversity,” 101.

<sup>31</sup> Couser, “Disability as Diversity,” 96.

<sup>32</sup> Deborah B. Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>33</sup> Couser, “Disability as Diversity,” 101.

this inevitability disability advocates argue, that means the issue of disability should not continue to be ignored.

Disability studies involves more than just scouring texts for allusions to physical, sensory, or cognitive deviations, but questioning the value that a body is assigned within its own historical, social, political, and religious milieu. Each culture and society attributes different values to those bodies deemed 'deviant',<sup>34</sup> that is, those bodies which divert from societal norms.<sup>35</sup> In this sense, writers in the field of disability suggest that "cultures map personal and moral traits arbitrarily onto somatic anomalies and reserve certain privileges and rights for those deemed normal."<sup>36</sup> It is not simply that a certain literary or historical text includes characters who are blind or of short stature, but what is significant is the way in which these physical characteristics are employed in order to represent one's place in the social framework of the texts. Just as representations of disability should be interrogated in various academic disciplines, so must they be assessed within the historico-religious conventions of the biblical material.

### 1.3 Disability and Biblical Studies

Disability studies has become a burgeoning field of enquiry within biblical studies over the last 10–15 years. Part of this growing interest in disability can be attributed to a developing interest in the nature of embodiment.<sup>37</sup> Halvor Moxnes proposes that "'the body' is not just another topic in addition to a list of topics,"<sup>38</sup> but rather, ideals regarding the body are woven into the fabric of individuals and societies. It is through our bodies that we know ourselves and

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<sup>34</sup> On the nature of 'deviancy' as thoughts, characteristics, and behaviour that depart from 'normal' societal expectations, see Marshall B. Clinard and Robert F. Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behavior* (15th ed.; Boston: Cengage Learning, 2016), *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> On disability as a form of bodily 'deviance,' see Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 19–20; Clinard and Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*, 456–86.

<sup>36</sup> Couser, "Disability as Diversity," 103.

<sup>37</sup> Of note is Stephen Garner (ed.), *Theology and the Body: Reflections on Being Flesh and Blood* (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2011), *passim*; Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart, *Introducing Body Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), *passim*; S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim (eds.), *Bodies, Embodiment, and Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (LHBOTS 465; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), *passim*; Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), *passim*; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body: A Theology of Embodiment* (New York: Continuum, 1995), *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> "Body, Gender and Social Space," in *Identity Formation in the New Testament* (ed. Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winnige; WUNT I 227; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 163–181, here 165.

know each other. It is in our bodies that we experience life, illness, suffering, and eventually death. The body is thus “always more than a tangible, physical, corporeal object”; it is a “vessel of meaning of utmost significance to both personhood and society.”<sup>39</sup>

The way each society portrays, shapes, modifies, and interprets bodies is significant not just in understanding social attitudes towards the physical body but also in recognising that the body is a “microcosm of society.”<sup>40</sup> The body does not represent a universal, fixed ideal common to all cultures and periods of history and as a result, the body must be investigated with particular reference to the history, beliefs, literature, and cultures of any given society. In the process of any study on the body, one will inevitably encounter ‘deviant’ and/or ‘disabled’ bodies; those bodies which do not conform to a particular society’s expectations of normalcy.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it is a society’s belief in what constitutes normalcy that likewise dictates who is considered ‘deviant’ and/or ‘disabled’<sup>42</sup> whereby deviance is considered a type a departure from the “prevalent or valued norms” of any given society.<sup>43</sup> Theologically speaking, Deborah Creamer suggests that it has only been with the “advent of feminist and liberation theologies (that) a successful articulation (has) been offered regarding bodies as possessing unique and specific characteristics that affect theological reflection and practice.”<sup>44</sup> It is with this issue of embodiment as a backdrop that a dedicated field of research began addressing disability within biblical studies.

Prior to the beginning of an integrated disability and biblical studies approach, interest in disability in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament was limited. For many biblical scholars, references to disability in the biblical texts were not considered “worthy of critical inquiry”<sup>45</sup> in themselves but were

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<sup>39</sup> Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini, “Introduction: The Body in Symbolic Interaction,” in *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body* (ed. Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini; Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 1–18, here 3.

<sup>40</sup> Moxnes, “Body, Gender,” 166.

<sup>41</sup> See in particular the work of Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Herbert Graßl, “Behinderte in der Antike: Bemerkungen zur sozialen Stellung und Integration,” *Tyche* 1 (1986): 35–44, here 38.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Susman, “Disability, Stigma and Deviance,” *Social Science and Medicine* 36.1 (1994), 15–22, here 16; cf. Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> Deborah B. Creamer, “Toward a Theology that Includes the Human Experience of Disability,” *J Relig Disabil Health* 7.3 (2003): 57–67, here 63.

<sup>45</sup> Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper, “Introduction,” in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature* (ed. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57–67, here 5.

considered secondary to the primary purposes of the text.<sup>46</sup> For the small number of scholars who did address representations of disability, their assessment was usually limited to an attempt at diagnosis. This form of investigation, known as retrospective diagnosis, applies modern medical knowledge and terminology to the descriptions of illness found in the Bible and other ancient sources. Commentators using this methodology thus ‘diagnose’ Job’s sores as the result of smallpox,<sup>47</sup> Jacob’s blindness as the result of diabetes,<sup>48</sup> and Paul’s “thorn in his flesh” as caused by epilepsy.<sup>49</sup> This kind of inquiry ignores the fact that the biblical material is not medical in nature and does not intend to supply a precise list of symptoms or etiology. In addition, this approach also ignores “the different and changing cultural values attached to certain conditions.”<sup>50</sup>

While the New Testament gospels feature numerous examples of people with physical and sensory disability, in traditional biblical scholarship the presence of those with disability has been considered incidental. For many biblical scholars, the people with disability referred to in the gospels are not considered agents in their own right but exist only to highlight the actions of Jesus as a

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<sup>46</sup> Bruce C. Birch writes that in his study on the books of Samuel that he simply “skipped over” those texts which refer to various forms of disability. He notes: “I have been trained in Biblical scholarship with a limited awareness and understanding that has allowed me to spend decades in studying and teaching the Bible without noticing or paying any particular attention to the large number of references to impairment/disability in the biblical witness...It is socially easier not to notice such persons, and I suppose it had been easier for biblical scholars to give texts referencing impairment/disability only the general descriptive treatment accorded to a disabled character that enters the story or the minimal explanation given to a reference to impairment that crops up in a text” (“Impairment as a Condition in Biblical Scholarship: A Response,” in *This Aabled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies* [ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper; SS 55; Atlanta: SBL, 2007], 185–96, here 185).

<sup>47</sup> A. Rendle Short, *The Bible and Modern Medicine: A Survey of Health and Healing in the Old and New Testaments* (London: Paternoster, 1953), 53–54; cf. Liubov L. Ben-Noun, “Figs – The Earliest Known Ancient Drug for Cutaneous Anthrax,” *Annals of Pharmacotherapy* 37 (2003): 297–300, here 298.

<sup>48</sup> S. Levin, “Isaac’s Blindness: A Medical Diagnosis,” *Judaism* 37 (1998): 81–83, *passim*.

<sup>49</sup> L. Muhammed, “A Retrospective Diagnosis of Epilepsy in Three Historical Figures: St Paul, Joan of Arc, and Socrates,” *J Med Biogr* 21.4 (2013): 208–11, *passim*.

<sup>50</sup> Peckruhn “Disability Studies,” 102. For more on retrospective diagnosis, see Lutz A. Graumann, “Monstrous Births and Retrospective Diagnosis: The Case of Hermaphrodites in Antiquity,” in *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies*; a capite ad calcem (ed. Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 181–209, *passim*; Karl-Heinz Leven, “‘At times these ancient facts seem to lie before me like a patient on a hospital bed’ – Retrospective Diagnosis and Ancient Medical History,” in *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine* (ed. Herman F. J. Horstmanshoff and Marten Stol; SAM 27; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 369–86, *passim*.

miracle worker. In this sense, the people with disability in the healing accounts are representative of the ‘fallen’ humanity that needs to be restored and redeemed through the ministry of Jesus.<sup>51</sup> The removal of disability is thus seen as a foreshadowing of the full restoration of all humanity at the eschaton. Though recent scholarship has moved away from a particularised view of disability and individual sin, many theologians and exegetes still promote the view that disability is a “manifestation of brokenness” connected with living in a sinful world.<sup>52</sup>

For many contributors to disability studies, this interpretation is problematic. Not only does it suggest that people with disability carry or represent more of the sinful and ‘fallen’ world than their nondisabled counterparts, but it also assumes that as they are the bodies of those with disability are unacceptable. In his critique of the Levitical purity system, David T. Mitchell suggests that inherent in this system and its desire for priests and offerings without blemish, is the presupposition that those with physical aberrations of any kind (including disability) are representative of the ‘Fall.’ He goes on to say that

While the New Testament seemingly breaks with this belief in disability as a sign of individual pollution, the healing of cripples still adheres to a desire for eradication – the temples are opened up by Jesus but only after the blemish has been miraculously removed...the emphasis in either case highlights not the integral nature of disability to embodied life but, rather, the moral imperative behind their social integration.<sup>53</sup>

Other contributors to disability studies find it problematic that people with disability are portrayed merely to accentuate Jesus’ ability to heal. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in their work *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*<sup>54</sup> suggest that disability regularly serves as

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<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Lunde, for example, sees Jesus’ healings of the “sick and unclean” as representative of “the sick, deaf, blind, and leprous nature of Israel as a whole” (*Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 255).

<sup>52</sup> E.g., “Disability, therefore, is either willed or allowed by God, not as part of the original good plan of creation but rather as the punishment for sinful deeds: disabilities are necessary evils” (Dawn DeVries, “Creation, Handicappism, and the Community of Differing Abilities,” in *Reconstructing Christian Theology* [ed. Rebecca S. Chopp and Mark L. Taylor; Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1994], 124–40, here 135; David W. Anderson, *Toward a Theology of Special Education: Integrating Faith and Practice* (Bloomington: WestBow, 2012), 46; Michael S. Beates and Andrew Vacca, “Retelling the Old, Old Story: Sharing the Gospel with those Living with Intellectual Disability” *CRJ* 37.2 (2014). Cited 4 November 2014. Online: <http://www.equip.org/articles/retelling-old-old-story-sharing-gospel-living-intellectual-disability/#christian-books-2>; cf. Paul T. Jersild, *Spirit Ethics: Scripture and the Moral Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 2000), 166.

<sup>53</sup> “Foreword” in *A History of Disability* by Henri-Jacques Stiker (trans. William Sayers; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), i–xi, here x.

<sup>54</sup> David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), *passim*.

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