

## DAVIES, GWYNNE HENTON (1906-1998), Old Testament scholar

**Name:** Gwynne Henton Davies  
**Date of birth:** 1906  
**Date of death:** 1998  
**Gender:** Male  
**Occupation:** Old Testament scholar  
**Area of activity:** Scholarship and Languages  
**Author:** D. Hugh Matthews

Gwynne Henton Davies was born in Aberdare, Glamorgan, in 1906. He was the son of John Davies and Edith Henton. His father's family had moved to the Valleys in search of work from the Vale of Glamorgan, and his mother came from a family of rural tailors in Pembrokeshire. His parents had married in 1904 and Gwynne was born in 1906, his brother, John Mansel, being born five years later. He was educated in the local primary school in Aberdare from where he gained a scholarship to Aberdare Grammar School. The family were members in Calfaria Welsh Baptist Church in the town, and it was there that he was baptised at the age of seventeen. He succeeded in his matriculation examinations in Aberdare at the age of sixteen but was sent away by his parents to Perse School in Cambridge, a private school that specialised in teaching the Classics. While there, he developed an interest in studying Hebrew. At the end of his school course he was offered a place to study Philosophy in Queen's College, Cambridge, but because his father had committed himself as guarantor of relative who had been declared bankrupt, he was forced to abandon the opportunity to study in Cambridge. He returned home to Wales and in 1924 he was admitted as a Philosophy undergraduate to the University College in Cardiff. A year later, he was accepted in the Baptist College in Cardiff and changed his main University subject to Hebrew. He was awarded a first-class honours B.A. in Hebrew and Syriac, and was awarded a Master's degree with distinction in 1928 for a thesis entitled 'Origin and Development of the Idea of Theocracy in Israel'. He began work on a University of Wales postgraduate B.D. but in 1931 was awarded scholarships by the Dr Williams Trust and the Baptist Union of Great Britain to undertake an Oxford B.Litt. degree. The degree was awarded in 1933 for a thesis entitled 'The Covenant in the Old Testament'. He went to Germany to study in Marburg for a time under Karl Budde and Rudolph Bultmann, but returned to Wales to complete his B.D. in 1935 gaining a distinction in Church History.

He married Annie Bronwen Williams from Cardiff in Woodville Road chapel, Cardiff, in September 1935. Two daughters were born to them: Yona Wynfron Henton and Edith Elaine Henton.

From 1935 to 1938, he was minister of West End Baptist church in Hammersmith, London, before becoming the Hebrew and Old Testament tutor in Bristol Baptist College (1938-51). In 1951 he was appointed the first professor in a newly established Department of Old Testament Studies in Durham University. There he remained until 1958 when he was elected Principal of Regent's Park College in Oxford. In the same year, Glasgow University awarded him an honorary D.D., while Oxford University bestowed an M.A. on him in order that he could teach students there. Stetson University in Florida, awarded him an honorary D.D. in 1965. When he went to Regent's Park, the College had only recently been recognised as a Permanent Private Hall of Residence by Oxford University and during his years as Principal, the College was opened to non-ministerial students and site was enlarged and developed in the form of a quadrangle.

Throughout the years, Gwynne Henton Davies had been an active member of The Society for Old Testament Study, contributing several articles to its journal after 1946 and being honoured with the presidency of the Society in 1966. Another honour that he was awarded was the presidency of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (1971-2).

In 1970 S.C.M. published a Festschrift edited by John I. Durham and J. R. Porter entitled *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in honour of Gwynne Henton Davies*. The book was also published in America by Knox Press, Virginia. Mercer University Press published a revised version in 1983.

Gwynne Henton Davies remained principal of Regent's Park until his retirement in 1972, when he and his wife retired to his mother's home county and made their home in a cottage in Broad Haven. He continued to travel abroad, preaching and lecturing. This continued after the death of his wife in January 1992 and he was on his thirty second visit to America when he died in Charlotte, North Carolina, on 22 October 1998. He was cremated two days later in Charlotte and his ashes were returned to Wales to be scattered in Headlands, Broad Haven, on 4 November 1998.

Gwynne Henton Davies published much during his long life. His Festschrift contains a select bibliography of his works which include: 'The Presence of God in Israel', in *Studies in History and Religion*, H. Wheeler Robinson Festschrift, ed. E. A. Payne, London, Lutterworth Press, 1942, pp. 11-29; 'The Yahwistic Tradition in the Eighth-Century Prophets', in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, Theodore H. Robinson Festschrift, ed. H. H. Rowley, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950, pp. 37-51; *The Approach to the Old Testament. An Inaugural Lecture delivered on May 15, 1953, to the Durham Colleges in the University of Durham*: London, The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1953; 'Select Bibliography of the Writings of Harold Henry Rowley', in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, H. H. Rowley Festschrift, eds., M. Noth and D. W. Thomas; *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, III. Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1955, pp. xi-xix; 'Contemporary Religious Trends: The Old Testament', *The Expository Times*, LXVII, 1 (October, 1955), pp. 3-7; Joint editor with Alan Richardson, *The Teacher's Commentary*, London, SCM Press, 1955. Published in America as *The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary*, Harper and Brothers, 1956; 'The Literature of the Old Testament' and 'Exodus' in *The Teacher's Commentary*, above and with Alan Richardson, 'Genesis'; 'The Clues of the Kingdom in the Bible', *Interpretation*, XIV, 2 (i), pp. 155-60; 'Commending the Old Testament', in *The Raven*, No. 3, July, 1956; 'Astonish' and 'Remnant' in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson, London: SCM Press (1957); with A. B. Davies, *The Story in Scripture: A Shortened Text of the RSV.*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960; 'Alms', 'Ark of the Covenant', 'Bamah', 'Beauty', 'Breast-piece (of the High Priest)', 'Chief Priest', 'Dancing', 'Dwarf' in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. A-D, ed. G. A. Buttrick, Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1962, s.v.; 'Elder in the OT', 'Ephod (Object)', 'Footstool', 'Glory', 'High Place, Sanctuary', *ibid.*, vol. E-J, s.v.; 'Kneel', 'Levitical Cities', 'Leviticus', 'Memorial, Memory', 'Mercy Seat', 'Mezuzah', 'Minister in the OT', 'Nethinim', 'Phylacteries', 'Pillar of Fire and of Cloud', 'Praise', 'Presence of God', 'Pulpit', *ibid.*, vol. K-Q, s.v.; 'Sanctuary', 'Screen', 'Solomon's Servants', 'Sophereth', 'Swine', 'Tabernacle', 'Theophany', 'Threshold', 'Worship in the OT', *ibid.*, vol. R-Z, s.v.; 'Deuteronomy' in Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, eds. H. H. Rowley ac M. Black, London and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962, pp. 269-84; 'Selection and Training of Candidates for the Ministry: The Baptist Churches in Great Britain', *The Expository Times*, LXXIII, 8 (May, 1962), pp. 228-30; 'The Ark in the Psalms', in *Promise and Fulfilment*, Festschrift S.H. Hooke, ed. F. F. Bruce, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963; 'Judges VIII 22-23', *Vetus Testamentum*, XIII, 2 (April, 1963), pp. 151-157; 'The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament', *The Review and Expositor*, LXIII, 2 (Spring, 1966), pp. 129-34; *Exodus, Torch Bible Commentaries.*, London, SCM Press, 1967; 'The Ark of the Covenant', *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*, V (1967), pp. 30-47; *Preaching the Lord's Supper. The London Baptist Preachers' Association Diamond Jubilee Lecture*, 1967; 'A Welsh Man of God', *The Baptist Quarterly*, XXII, 7 (July 1968), pp. 360-370; 'Genesis' in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Nashville, The Broadman Press, 1969, pp. 99-304, 1968; with A. B. Davies, *Who's Who in the Bible, Teach Yourself Series*, London, The English Universities Press Ltd, 1970; 'Aaron', 'Balaam', 'Jethro', 'Joshua', 'Miriam', 'Moses', 'Zipporah' in *Harper's Dictionary of Biblical Biography*, ed. C. L. Wallis (1970); 'Gehard von Rad' in *Old Testament Theology in Contemporary Discussion*, ed. Robert Laurin (1970), with J. E. Morgan-Wynne, *The Last Seven Days* (1999).

### Author

D. Hugh Matthews, (1936 - 2020)

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'Autobiographical Sketch of the early life of G. Henton Davies, Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, Breakthrough Autobiographical Accounts of the Education of Some Socially Disadvantaged Children (1968), ed. Ronald Goldman, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1968), pp.40-56

Portrait in oils, painted by Robert Buhler, at Regent's Park College, Oxford

## Further Reading

Undeb Bedyddwyr Cymru: Davies - Gwynne Henton (1906-1998)

## Additional Links

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