

Biblical Studies Bulletin

Edited by Michael B Thompson—Published Quarterly—Read Religiously—Disposed of Reluctantly—Free to Grove Biblical Subscribers

Contents ————— Issue 32: June 2004

- 1 *BOOKS IN BRIEF* Three new volumes with nice covers from Eerdmans
- 2 *LETTERS TO THE EDITOR* A sudden rush of correspondence leaves us breathless
- 4 *BOOK REVIEWS* A major OT study and an introduction to the LXX
- 5 *HUMOUR, ETC* More painful puns and an obscure definition
- 6 *COMPUTER CORNER* Bible audio and graphics downloads, software reviews

Comments on Commentaries will reappear in the next issue of BSB.

Books in Brief —————

Stanley Porter (ed), *Reading the Gospels Today*. Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN 0-8028-0517-5.

This collection of papers originally given at a conference in Canada in 2002 is a mixed bag and a bit of a 'sleeper', but it contains at least two essays that would be of particular interest to many of our readers. Craig Evans' piece on the synoptic problem is a fine introduction for those who wonder whether the issue has any real value for exegesis. Anticipating the concerns of theological students who first encounter synoptic theories, he looks at the light Markan priority sheds on Mark 1.2f par; 1.12f par; 4.35-41 par; 6.1-6 par; 8.14-21 par and 8.27-30 par. A second gem is Lee Martin McDonald's essay on the origin, use and authority of the gospels in early Christianity. Among the other authors contributing to the volume are Andrew Lincoln and Al Wolters.

Luke Timothy Johnson, *Brother of Jesus, Friend of God. Studies in the Letter of James*. Grand Rapids / Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN 0-8028-0986-3.

The author of the Anchor Bible Commentary on James, Luke Johnson has gathered together and edited a number of his previously published essays and lectures on issues relating to James, together with two new studies written since the publication of his commentary. The academic level of the book is relatively high, and it will appeal primarily to scholars, although it is very readable. Along with Richard Bauckham's excellent introduction this work forms one of the most helpful volumes on James, apart from commentaries. Johnson dates the letter early, and he does not see James at odds with Paul or Pauline theology.

Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy. The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN: 0-8028-3989-4.

A revised edition of the author's doctoral work first finished in 1991, this important, nuanced study argues that neither Paul nor the Corinthians were ascetics, and that the proper background of 1 Cor 7 is the Cynic and Stoic debates about the place of marriage. Deming helps us to see how positive Paul was both about celibacy *and* marriage, and concludes *inter alia* that 1 Cor 7.1b is a quotation from the Corinthians who have been influenced by Cynic ideas. Dense and still showing signs of dissertation-speak, this will be a standard reference for academic libraries and those wanting to plow deep into the thought of 1 Corinthians 7.

Letters to the Editor

Whether it was the transit of Venus, a better British showing in Eurovision, or something they ate we'll never know, but somehow people have been moved recently to contact us in unprecedented numbers. Ok, five.

For those of you who have not already heard enough, in response to last issue's review of Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ we received this from Richard Higginson, Ethics lecturer and colleague at Ridley Hall:

Thanks for your views on the film. I myself went to see it and my views were rather different from the many others that have been relayed to me. The amount of violence is excessive. Quite apart from the concentrated scourging, the Roman soldiers flog Jesus almost continually from the moment they arrest him to the moment they crucify him. Extraordinarily, the crucifixion almost comes as a relief after all this flagellation. Quite apart from whether this is historically accurate, the fact that Jesus is the continual object of violence means that he comes over as a rather passive (and not all that interesting) figure). The characterisation of other individuals like Mary, Pilate, Judas etc is much stronger.

Interestingly, the amount of violence inflicted by the Romans makes the charge of anti-Semitism about the film rather absurd. Jesus certainly cops it in no uncertain terms from Gentiles as well as Jews. I also feel the scale of violence is counter-productive in that it has resulted in the film being classified as an 18 in this country, whereas I think it would be much better if it has been a 15 and therefore seen by many more teenagers. There are powerful and interesting scenes in the film, not least some of the flashback scenes. But overall I felt rather disappointed.

And this one from Simon Coupland:

Like you, I was distinctly underwhelmed, and I think it has a lot to do with the fact that as someone who is profoundly interested in and engaged with the story I couldn't help but be distracted by the strange trees which keep blocking out the wood. The fact that Pilate speaks to the crowd and to Jesus in Aramaic, but Jesus answers in Latin, for instance. Why? Because it's the language of the mass? It's hardly a likely situation, nor is it found in the gospels. And there are all those other odd Roman

Catholic touches - some of which you mention: Veronica, the slow motion falls... Also the fact that when Mary's around - even in Jesus' childhood - they're alone; no brothers and sisters around! And why does John keep calling Mary 'Mother', long before the John 19 scene at the cross? And then there was the very bizarre - and prolonged - scene of Pilate's wife giving Mary some towels to mop up the blood after his flogging. I note from Ann Wroe's book on him that Pilate's wife is seen as a saint in certain strands of the church - presumably Mel belongs to one of them. The other very bizarre scene was the earthquake almost destroying the temple, with little emphasis on the curtain being torn in two! For another oddity I'll have to wait till it comes out on video, but it looked very much to me as if the soldiers tore Jesus' robe as they pulled it off him at the cross, rendering the gambling scene somewhat pointless! All of this - and more - kept creating a distance between me and the film, and so this unintentional *Verfremdungseffekt* [Ed: 'foreign effect'] stopped me from entering into the film and feeling its undoubted power. The perils of being an academic!

Yet somehow people are being moved by the film. James Blandford Baker writes, I got BSB this morning with your piece about the Passion of Christ. I thought you might be interested to hear what effect it is having in sophisticated West London! Yesterday a couple and their two children came to church for the first time. When asked why they had come they said to me, 'We have suddenly realised what Jesus did is terribly important and we need to think about how it affects us.' In other words it has moved people from almost no knowledge of Jesus to an engagement with the cross and a desire to know more. I would love to know if similar things are happening round the country.

Responding to the lead article in Issue 30 of BSB, Keith Gruneberg writes, A book to add to Philip Jenson's survey of those dealing with homosexuality and the Bible is the recent Church of England House of Bishops study *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*. As well as discussing the obvious Old and New Testament texts head-on in a chapter on 'Homosexuality and biblical teaching', the chapter on 'The theology of sexuality' also contains a lot of biblical material. The book aims to set out the debate rather than come to conclusions on everything, and so it is a useful overview and critique of what has been said. And, contrary to the impression the media wanted to give, it doesn't push a liberal agenda (though of course some will wish it was more conservative). It accepts that the scholarly consensus is still that key biblical passages oppose homosexual behaviour. It also rules out some revisionist views of sexuality as incompatible with an Anglican understanding of the authority of scripture. We have to read scripture in the light of reason (including contemporary moral intuitions), but must not set human reason above it. Anglicans can't believe anything they like without paying attention to the Bible!

Finally, in response to our last Grove Biblical booklet, Refreshing Bible Study, Arderne Gillies (Minister of Chorleywood Free Church - Baptist, Herts) writes, A pleasure and a stimulus to read as your books always are. You invited suggestions about resources to help tell the 'big story'. One of the organisations doing

this which I think is brilliant is 'Walk Thru the Bible' (www.Bible.org.uk). They organise seminars for churches which tell the whole big picture story of the Old or New Testament in a day, with keywords and hand signs to help you remember. It is a first class, fun, memorable and exciting way to learn. The organisation also runs Bible Explorer, a similar programme but with more detailed interactive story telling, for 9, 10 & 11 year olds in Primary Schools, where trained presenters teach the whole Old Testament or New Testament over a period of 5 (usually weekly) one hour lessons. Children love it, and schools are very impressed too. I trained as a presenter of this late last year and have taught it in two of my local primary schools in the past term. A brilliant resource for putting over the story line of the entire Old Testament. It has enriched me no end, and judging by the kids' reaction they have thoroughly benefited from it too.

Thanks, Arderne, for the reminder about WTB which has been mentioned before in BSB. We'd like to be quick to note that B31 Refreshing Bible Study was simply a collection of a few ideas from some members on the Grove Biblical Group team and was meant to encourage the sharing of more ideas. We welcome follow-up ideas for subsequent volumes that offer more help with different Bible study methods.

Book Reviews

Kenneth A Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003. 662 pp. ISBN: 0-8028-4960-1.

The scope of this book is nothing less than the entire sweep of Old Testament history, and Kitchen introduces an impressive amount of evidence for the historical reliability of most OT narrative. The style is dense but lively, even colloquial. It's also swashbuckling, with a good deal of polemic against 'minimalists' and other sceptical scholars, who are accused of not doing 'their Near Eastern homework' or of 'squirming and wriggling away from the facts'.

More often than not, the approach and its results are persuasive. But in one area that this writer knows quite a lot about, there are obvious weaknesses. Kitchen wants an Exodus and Conquest in the 13th century BC, which requires a Late Bronze Age city at Jericho for Joshua to attack. There is no sign of one, but Kitchen thinks a long period of erosion is sufficient explanation. However, his '400 years of erosion' are fanciful, and if a Late Bronze Age city had really existed and been eroded, the products of that erosion would not have disappeared completely (they can't all have ended up 'under the modern road' etc).

Further, with Kitchen's dating of these events, the second king Jabin of Hazor (Judges 4-5) would have reigned when Hazor was a ruin, so Kitchen says he must have reigned 'from another centre' while retaining the old title 'king of Hazor'. Kitchen adduces parallels to support this (a feature of his method), but fails to explain the precise appellation 'king of Canaan who ruled in Hazor' (Judges 4:2). In such cases it is surely Kitchen who is 'squirming and wriggling away from the facts'.

Notwithstanding my occasional disagreements with Kitchen, this is a hugely

impressive book, packed with detail and energetic argument. There are tables, maps, line drawings and a hundred pages of notes.

John Bimson, Trinity College, Bristol

R Timothy McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research*. Grand Rapids/ Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003. ISBN: 0-8028-6091-5.

McLay offers an introduction to what the LXX is and how it might be used. There are frequent references to more advanced scholarship, and a very detailed bibliography, so that readers can follow up the areas which interest them.

An introductory chapter guides the reader through the terminology of LXX study, and indicates the complexity inherent in trying to identify what might have been the normative text at any given time. We then get discussions of how scripture was used in the NT, what it meant to cite or quote a source, just how free such use might be, and how to decide the original language of the quotation's source (chapter 1); the possibilities and practices of translation technique (chapters 2 & 3); the origins of Greek Jewish scriptures and how the texts developed and are related (chapter 4); and the linguistic and theological impact of the LXX on the NT and the early church (chapter 5). A final chapter summarizes the whole.

Throughout the book, McLay illustrates his argument with examples from citations in the NT. The discussions are clear, well structured and detailed, and will give the knowledge and framework for further analysis by the reader. Although he translates the words and phrases under discussion, a working knowledge of both Greek and Hebrew helps for understanding all the subtle points he enumerates.

McLay assumes no prior knowledge of terminology or of the history of LXX scholarship. His explanations of midrash, targum and pesher will be read gladly by puzzled students, as will be his detailed analysis and explanation of all the elements of language which influence translation, and the mechanics of translation between very different types of language, with the resultant gains and losses. He points out both the variations which occur naturally when translating and those changes which may be significant in indicating that texts are being reinterpreted in a new way.

Not only does the discussion look back to the Jewish roots of the texts and the use of citations, but it also looks forward to the effect of the use of Greek rather than Hebrew sources on the theology and exegesis of the early church.

The book is easy to follow and easy to refer to. It does not pretend to be the ultimate scholarly discussion of the relationship between the LXX and the NT, but someone who has read this book will be in a position to follow up the subject in specialist literature and to understand what is read.

Naomi Wormell, Ridley Hall, Cambridge

Humour, etc

The following come from the internet, including Mikey's funnies at the Youth Specialties web site (<http://www.youthspecialties.com>).

Q. Which Bible character had no parents?

A. Joshua, son of Nun.

Q. What's the phone number of the Garden of Eden?

A. ADAM-8-1-2

Frisbeterian = Someone who believes that when you die, your soul goes up on the roof and you can't get it down.

Computer Corner

- Ian Paul points out that www.audioscripture.com is a good site where you can download free MP3 files of the Bible (KJV) read in English, Spanish or other languages (including Hebrew).
- For details of sources for biblical images usable in Powerpoint etc, go to <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/TTech/TTech026.htm>
- For a brief overview of assorted software programmes for Bible study, have a look at http://www.faithtoday.ca/article_viewer.asp?Article_ID=122
- For a longer review of different programmes for Bible study on an Apple Mac, go to http://www.applelinks.com/pm/more.php?id=360_0_1_0_M
- For a web site devoted to nothing other than reviewing Bible software on all platforms, go to <http://perso.wanadoo.es/rgomezp/>

Grove Biblical Series

This month's booklet is B 32 *Matthew's Jesus*, by John Proctor, lecturer in New Testament for the Cambridge Theological Federation and Vice Principal of Westminster College. John's many years of experience studying and teaching are reflected in this refreshing guide which offers insight and ideas not only for newcomers to the most popular gospel in the early church, but also for experienced readers, preachers and teachers.

Individual titles in the Biblical Series are available direct from Grove Books at **£2.75 each**. Annual subscription (4 books) costs **£8.50, a saving of over 20%**. Call, fax, email sales@grovebooks.co.uk or visit www.grovebooks.co.uk to order.

Contributions to BSB should be sent to: The Editor, *Biblical Studies Bulletin*, at the Grove address below (or via email to: mbt2@cam.ac.uk). Unsolicited material is welcome, but it cannot be returned.

GROVE BOOKS LIMITED

RIDLEY HALL RD CAMBRIDGE CB3 9HU

Tel: 01223 46 47 48 Fax: 01223 46 48 49

ISSN: 1365-6090