

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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

Contents ————— Issue 33: Sept 2004

- 1 *NEWS BRIEFS* Visiting the Holy Land, plus the cave of John the Baptist?
1 *BOOK REVIEWS* A rebuttal to *The Da Vinci Code*, and more
3 *LETTERS TO THE EDITOR* My German needs improving, etc
4 *COMMENTS ON COMMENTARIES* John Proctor brings us up to date on Matthew

News Briefs —————

A Trip to the Holy Land

In late July I returned alive and intact after co-leading another ecumenical group of theological students on a three-week study tour to the Holy Land based at Tantur, outside Bethlehem. The sites were deserted, the pound was strong, and the people (especially the Palestinians) were as always very friendly and extremely glad to see us. Our group never felt in danger; we did not go to Gaza. Unemployment is now 80% in Bethlehem, and the economy there desperately needs tourists to return. Aware that things can change quickly I want to encourage anyone who is thinking about going to the Holy Land to do so. I'm already looking forward to next year's trip. One new development that deserves special mention is the Nazareth Village (www.nazarethvillage.com); include it in your itinerary if you can.

The Cave of John the Baptist?

I bet you didn't know he had one. British/Israeli archaeologist Shimon thinks he did; it's in Ein Karim, the village in which tradition says John was born and raised. For details, have a look at (<http://www.tfba.org/projects.php?projectid=3>). Mark Goodacre's weblog (http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2004/08/more-on-john-baptist-cave_109290381144680034.html) has done a good job keeping up with the story.

Book Reviews —————

Darrell L Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004. ISBN 0-7852-6046-3. A year ago in issue 29 I commented on the popularity of Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. Little did I know that it would stay at the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list for 35 weeks. The novel continues to sell well, and many are being influenced by its entertaining but ridiculous claims. With the prospect

of it being made into a film for 2005 (rumours that Harrison Ford would star are unlikely), the danger of its notions misleading the unwary is increasing.

Those looking for a readable and robust response will find one in Darrell Bock's 188 page rebuttal. Chapters look at the questions, 'Who was Mary Magdalene?', 'Was Jesus Married?', 'Would Being Single Make Jesus Un-Jewish?', 'Do the So-Called Secret, Gnostic Gospels Help Us Understand Jesus?', 'How Were the New Testament Gospels Assembled?', 'Does Mary's Honored Role as Apostle Match the Claims of the New School [*ie the Jesus Seminar*]?', and 'What is the Remaining Relevance of The Da Vinci Code?' A final chapter, 'The Real Jesus Code', offers a helpful perspective for newcomers to the message of Jesus, and the book ends with a bibliography and glossary.

Bock brings a conservative, Protestant perspective, but the warm foreword by Francis J Moloney, Dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America in Washington DC observes that he writes with a light touch that is accessible. Sensible, succinct, and eirenic.

The Editor

Christopher J H Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Leicester: IVP, 2004. £19.99. ISBN 0830827781. Chris Wright has been one of the very few scholars saying sensible things about Old Testament ethics in recent years, and so this volume is to be warmly welcomed. Admittedly it is not new in an absolute sense, for it includes a synthesis of previous books and articles. But these have all been thoroughly revised, and there are new things (e.g. a chapter on ecology). The overall argument is also significantly enhanced by being set within a more comprehensive and coherent discussion. Although there is a lot of detail, it is extremely well organized, and reading is lightened by the occasional analogy or application to the present. Perhaps the most significant insights are that the imitation of the Lord is at the heart of OT ethics, and that this is worked out in a corporate, covenantal framework. It is not the individual, but the extended family that is central and which played a vital role in working out God's expectations in the theological, social and economic realms. The well-being of the community is the goal of an individual's ethical behaviour, or the basis of prophetic criticism. Throughout there is extensive engagement with other scholarship. In the third and final part this becomes primary, and there is an important discussion of the relationship between interpretation and biblical authority. This is an outstanding volume and I warmly commend it, not least because anyone who reads it will also gain a fine introduction to OT theology, and how the OT can be interpreted so that it powerfully addresses the present.

Philip Jenson, Trinity College, Bristol

J Blenkinsopp, *Treasures Old and New*. Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN: 0802826792. The subtitle suggests a book of theology, and a theology of the Pentateuch. This book is neither of those. Blenkinsopp is a (now-retired) scholar working in the traditional (and relatively conservative) historical-critical vein. He would not hold to the possibility of any single *theology* of the Pentateuch, let alone the Old Testament. So this is a collection of essays in which the 'old' treasures (depending

on your own perspective) consist of a re-visiting of (for example) the documentary hypothesis with respect to the Sinai narrative and the 'new' treasures represent an updating of the critical approach in the light of more recent and popular rhetorical (Walter Brueggemann), literary (Robert Alter) and canonical (Brevard Childs) approaches. The final product is a readable and relevant—yet traditional—tack on a set of texts that continue to tease and defy critical scholars. If some sort of apology were appropriate for the way historical-critics have sometimes handled the Pentateuch, perhaps this is it. Blenkinsopp manages to be critical yet constructive, and as ever wise and careful.

Jo Wells, Ridley Hall, Cambridge

P G Kuntz, *The Ten Commandments in History: Mosaic Paradigms for a Well-Ordered Society*. Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. ISBN: 0802826601. No Grove book could compete with this, though B17 (*Using the Ten Commandments*) addressed the same core subject: how to interpret principles 'set in stone' in the light of changing circumstances. Kuntz's motivation for this (post-humous) magnum opus is political. Spurred by a negative Supreme Court ruling on the ten commandments he committed a decade of work in an attempt to reassert their place in American education and society. The result is a fascinating account of their history of interpretation from medievals to reformers to moderns. To my surprise, the latter category is dominated by Enlightenment rationalist philosophers. This best reveals Kuntz's paradigm—he seeks to demonstrate the universal relevance of the Decalogue to all circumstances, addressing modernist concerns (outlined at the start) by modernist means. I confess this approach does not scratch where I itch; I do not look for an apologetic approach to the ten commandments, nor is it my priority to convince those beyond Judeo-Christendom of their relevance. Nevertheless the account is fascinating. The history of interpretation of texts is a great antidote for the amnesia and myopia of contemporary crisis. We may discover when we panic that we do so too easily: or that we are not alone.

Jo Wells, Ridley Hall, Cambridge

Letters to the Editor

I've discovered a new way to generate contact from readers: make a mistake. A bit like parish ministry, I guess. Anyway, my less-than-stunning translation of *Verfremdungseffekt* as 'foreign effect' in Simon Coupland's letter last issue awakened a dawn chorus of friendly corrections. That's the last time I lazily depend on a web translation page. The winner of the unannounced correction contest is Humphrey Osmond of Cheltenham (honorable mention goes to Heather Cooke), who helpfully explained the origin and meaning of this word ('a notion and technical term developed by Bertolt Brecht in his theorizings about the theatre and techniques of drama'), usually translated 'alienation effect'. I draw some comfort from the fact that Humphrey says the normal English translation really doesn't really do justice to the meaning of the word either!

Eagle-eyed Greg Forster writes concerning last issue's Computer Corner:

I was intrigued to see that audioscripture are offering files of the Bible, KJV, read in Spanish. Is this some hitherto unknown incident in Scottish History in which King James VI reigned in Madrid as well as Edinburgh? Please enlighten us.

Do not try to sell this man a used car.

Revd Peter van de Kastele (Oxford) adds about Mel Gibson's The Passion of Christ:

'In the film it seemed to me the scourging was unnecessarily prolonged while also being unrealistic. My reading of naval history and Patrick O'Brien novels tells me that only a few lashes of the cat-o'-nine tails could make bare the ribs of a man under punishment. I assume that a Roman scourging would not have been any less horrendous...'

David Wilson writes from St John's Vicarage in Winsford,

On the subject of MP3 audio bibles the following link is also useful - they will supply the whole World English Bible (a revision of ASV) on 2 CD's for around £7 (Christmas 2003) to avoid endless downloads completely free of any copyright restrictions so one can copy and give it away etc. The OT is particularly interesting having the 'LORD' as 'Yahweh', and quite changes the feel of the psalms for me (in a positive sense): <http://www.audiotreasure.com>

Comments on Commentaries—

An assessment of commentaries and other works on books of the Bible to keep you up to date with what will help in preaching and teaching in the local church.

Matthew

(This is a revision and updating by John Proctor in August 2004, of David Graham's contribution to BSB 4 in June 1997)

D Hagner's 2-vol Word Commentary (Word, 1993/5) is a mine of information (knowledge of Greek helps), certainly one of the best available. Hagner goes beyond the exegetical to the theological, though not all of his points emerge from the text itself. The 3-vol work by **W D Davies** and **D Allison** in the new International Critical Commentary series is now complete (T & T Clark; now Continuum, 1988/91/97). In exegesis this just takes the lead over Hagner, especially on the Jewish context of the gospel. There is a good deal of theology in it, although some points are made very compactly. Expensive and demanding (Greek again) the volumes are a lifetime investment. **U Luz** has now finished his 4-vol German commentary, and has promptly rewritten the first volume on chapters 1-7, a hundred pages longer than before. So the English translation of this (Augsburg, 1990) will probably also be revised before long. There is also an English translation of Chapters 8-20 (Hermeneia, Fortress) – a section which Luz has promised not to rewrite. As well as exploring questions of source (the story behind the text) and narrative (the story in the text), Luz also discusses the history of influence of each passage (the story of the text). These sec-

tions are fascinating in their own right, and as the commentary goes on they become ever more wide-ranging, with much about Christian art, music and drama in the chapters on the passion of Jesus.

These three 'heavyweight' commentaries complement each other very well because of their differing approaches. **R Gundry's** *Matthew: a Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (2nd ed, Eerdmans, 1994) should perhaps be added, but it is hard work to use, and not always rewarding, especially if the reader does not buy his view of composition and redaction. Only just short of the heavyweight category is **D A Carson's** contribution to the *Expositor's Commentary* (Vol 8; Zondervan 1984; since reprinted by Hodder in 2 vols). Carson is the most conservative of these major commentators. He has done his homework with great care, and regularly launches into very thorough explanations of particular exegetical, historical or theological points.

Among the 'middleweights', **E Schweizer's** *Good News according to Matthew* (SPCK, 1976 - now out of print) follows a similar pattern to his other gospel commentaries with an interest in theological issues shining through. **D Hare** (Interpretation; John Knox, 1993) writes in a series aimed at preachers, with clear, readable comments and a practical and contemporary slant. **D Harrington** in the *Sacra Pagina* series (Glazier/Liturgical, 1991) combines notes on exegesis with readable interpretation, distilling current ideas. **F D Bruner's** (Word, 1987/90) two volumes, *The Christbook* on ch 1-12, and *The Churchbook* on ch 13-28 emphasize theology over exegesis [*Ed: recently revised; see the review earlier in this issue*]. **R T France's** Tyndale Commentary (IVP, 1985) offers a good, easy to use commentary, with a lot of useful discussion in a short space. **C Blomberg's** *New American Commentary* (Broadman, 1992) gives a good, all-round treatment from a conservative theological perspective, as does **L Morris's** *Pillar Commentary* (Eerdmans/IVP, 1992). A careful and respected commentary from **R Schnackenburg**, one of the most eminent of German Roman Catholic scholars, has recently appeared in English: *The Gospel of Matthew* (Eerdmans, 2002; originally 1985/87).

M Davies (Readings; Sheffield, 1992) uses a more narrative-literary method. A very condensed version of her 'reading' of Matthew appears in *Expository Times* (May, 1977). **D Garland's** *Reading Matthew* (SPCK, 1993) offers useful literary and theological comments, augmented by numerous references to other primary sources. **J A Overman's** *Church and Community in Crisis* (Trinity Press, 1996) is a very readable commentary, from an expert in Matthew and Judaism. His reading of the gospel as close to Judaism is similar to **A Saldarini's** work on Matthew, but even for those who do not share this view of the *Sitz im Leben* (but prefer the position of others like **Stanton**), Overman is useful. **G Montague's** 'cross-cultural' commentary *Companion God* (Paulist, 1989) is an interesting idea. **R H Smith** (Augsburg, 1989) gives a moderate and fairly brief commentary, aimed at preachers. **W Carter's** commentary, *Matthew and the Margins* (Orbis, 2000), is attracting a good deal of attention by its sensitivity to issues of liberation theology.

Among smaller commentaries - less threatening to new preachers - and indeed to the bank accounts of older ones - are **M Green**, *The Bible Speaks Today: the Message of Matthew* (IVP, 1988, revised 2000), which is a readable and careful exposition. **D Senior's** *Abingdon NT Commentary* (Abingdon Press, 1997) is the work of an

experienced Roman Catholic scholar, intended to help interested lay people. **I H Jones** writes the Epworth Preacher's Commentary (Epworth Press, 1994) in a series designed to support the sermon preparation of Methodist lay preachers. **J Proctor's** People's Bible Commentary (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2001) is aimed particularly towards people who are fairly new to preaching or leading Bible study. And **N T Wright's** 2-vol **Matthew for Everyone** (SPCK, 2002. 2 vols) is both lively in style and learned in substance. Wright has many of the virtues of **W Barclay's Daily Study Bible** (St Andrew Press, rev ed 1975. 2 vols), which was written with beautiful clarity to support and encourage daily Bible reading; but it is now a little dated.

Some books discuss themes in Matthew rather than commenting directly on the text. **R T France's** *Matthew - Evangelist & Teacher* (Paternoster, 1989; about 300pp) is a thoughtful and accessible orientation to Matthew's purposes, and a good companion to France's commentary. **G N Stanton's** *Interpretation of Matthew* (SPCK, 2nd ed 1995) is an anthology of landmark essays in 20th-century Matthean scholarship. **U Luz's** *Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (Cambridge University Press, 1995, about 200pp) condenses many of the ideas of his commentary in a readable and affordable format. **J K Riches'** contribution to the New Testament Guides series (Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, about 150pp) orients the reader to the how, why, when and where of Matthew's writing. **D Senior's** *What are they saying about Matthew?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996, about 150pp) summarises and compresses a great deal of academic debate in a very short space. *W Harrington* presents *Matthew: Sage Theologian* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1998, about 150pp). And recently **A-J Levine** edited **A Feminist Companion to Matthew** (Sheffield, 2001, about 250pp), discussing particularly passages where gender issues are important.

[Ed: Another relative heavyweight is Craig Keener's (*Eerdmans*, 1999), which I find sometimes has useful social/historical background material not readily available elsewhere]

Grove Biblical Series

This month's booklet is B 33 *When Should We Divide?*, by Michael B Thompson, Vice-Principal of Ridley Hall, lecturer in New Testament for the Cambridge Theological Federation, and overworked editor of *Biblical Studies Bulletin*. Looking at what the NT contributes to the controversial issues of schism, false teaching and discipline facing the Church today, it urges courage both to maintain Christian unity and to exercise appropriate, redemptive discipline. Required reading.

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