

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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News Briefs —————

A Change of Pace —————

After eight years of scrambling to knock together material for *Biblical Studies Bulletin*, I've decided readers need a break from my idiosyncracies. In our ongoing experiment to attempt to detect the presence of life in our readership, the next few issues will therefore be edited by other members of the Grove Biblical Group. The exact identity of our guest editor(s) shall be determined by a combination of negotiation, cajolery, and (if necessary) the threat of physical violence at our next Biblical Group meeting in January. Ridley's Principal is going on a well-earned sabbatical for a term, and I shall be in the hot seat for several months, hence the need to cut back a bit on the extra-curricular activities.

Book Notice —————

Two new books of interest to students of the New Testament are Craig L Blomberg's *Making Sense of the New Testament. Three Crucial Questions* (Leicester, IVP, 2003 [but only now available in the UK]; ISBN 1-84474-034-X) and *The Face of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, edited by Scot McKnight and Grant R Osborne (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Baker Academic/ Apollos, 2004; ISBN 1-84474-039-0).

Blomberg's three questions are (1) Is the New Testament historically reliable? [answer: basically yes]; (2) Was Paul the true founder of Christianity? [answer: no, Jesus was, and Paul faithfully follows him]; and (3) How is the Christian to apply the New Testament to life? [answer: carefully and graciously, using all the best tools we can]. Writing from a conservative evangelical background (reflected especially in his discussion of marriage roles in Eph 5), he offers succinct responses which may be helpful for college students and lay people wishing to go deeper in their study of the Bible.

McKnight and Osborne have put together a collection of articles from a wide range of front-rank scholars (most of whom are evangelical or sympathetic) in an attempt to survey the state of modern scholarship across the range of NT writings. Although some essays are more successful in fulfilling this task than others, the book is a valuable addition that will help serious students (and scholars) keep abreast of recent developments in research.

Book Reviews ---

B S Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; ISBN 0802827616). When I wrote *Comments on Commentaries* about Isaiah a few years ago, I could only dream of the forthcoming Isaiah commentary by Brevard Childs. Since it was published (2001), my enthusiasm has continued to grow: there is nothing that comes close in addressing both historical-critical and literary-canonical concerns. Particularly with the book of Isaiah, it seems to be vital to engage both of these two very different approaches.

It turns out that Childs himself wasn't satisfied with his commentary. He was frustrated by the constraints of space that didn't allow him to explore the history of interpretation of Isaiah and its Christian application. This is the purpose of this 'sequel', focusing on the impact of Isaiah in shaping the doctrines and practices of the Church. It begins with the early reception of the Septuagint and continues to look at Isaiah through the work of nine early fathers (including Irenaeus, Origen, Jerome and Chrysostom) through the medieval period (Thomas Aquinas) to the reformation (Luther and Calvin) and on to a brief but breath-taking overview of more recent scholarship. Who but Childs could do this so carefully? Throughout, his focus is on hermeneutical issues: how have these scholars and preachers struggled to understand Isaiah as the Church's Scripture, indeed, as gospel?

Although Childs' aim is to seek the 'family resemblance' within the Christian exegetical traditions examined, I confess to finding his final chapter on the similarities less exciting than his magisterial coverage of the diverse history of reception across nineteen centuries. Well into his retirement, Childs is concerned to set a few records straight as to his canonical method, the importance of history and the understanding of language as referential. The really great achievement of the book lies in demonstrating a principle he has always propounded: that of the value of the history of interpretation. As a twenty-first century reader of Isaiah, I for one am thrilled to be enlightened as to the branch on which I sit, which, perhaps in an attempt to atone for the Holocaust, makes me realise I hesitate for too long before reading the Old Testament from the perspective of the New.

Jo Bailey Wells, Lecturer in Old Testament, Ridley Hall

Philip Jenson, Lecturer in OT at Trinity College (Bristol), secretary of the Grove Biblical Group, master of metaphors and father of some of our godchildren, offers the following two reviews:

G K Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Leicester: Apollos, 2004; ISBN 0830826181). This impressive book is introduced by a striking question about Revelation 21–22: how are the elements of this future vision (new heaven and new earth, city, garden, Tabernacle or temple) related to one another? The startling answer is that they are one and the same, for the text describes the fulfilment of God's goal for his original creation, a universal expansion of his special presence through the high priestly service of humanity. There follows a grand tour of the key texts where the author points out multiple close links between Eden, the Israelite Tabernacle and temple, Jerusalem, Jesus, the church, and the restored creation. The proposed parallels and symbolism are backed up by reference to non-biblical contemporary writings (e.g. Ancient Near Eastern texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls), and the later Jewish and Christian interpretive tradition.

Although much of this has been noted before in the scholarly literature, to my knowledge this has not been done in such a comprehensive and ordered way. And although Beale recognizes that much may be speculative, by the end the cumulative argument becomes very persuasive. I would have liked a more nuanced exploration of the nature of symbol and metaphor, and a more sophisticated account of the unfolding imaginative interpretation of the biblical texts. Nevertheless, I found the scope and boldness of the argument enormously exciting, and an illustration of what good biblical theology can be. I also wondered whether it might be a vital resource for those of us called to lead worship. In an age where boredom and incomprehension characterises many who try out church services, this book may help us communicate the larger significance of what is going on with excitement, imagination and urgency.

J Barton and J Bowden, *The Original Story: God, Israel and the World* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2004; ISBN 0232524858). I have long been frustrated at the absence of a good introduction to the Old Testament somewhere between the Lion Handbook and one of the technical introductions. Now the eminent scholar John Barton has teamed up with Julia Bowden, an experienced school teacher, to provide a very attractive guide, *The Original Story* has maps, tables, pictures, cartoons, and all kinds of boxes with explanations, quotations, cross-references, potted biographies and topics for further thought. After a discussion of general introductory issues four sections discuss major themes, historical issues, institutions (also genres) and methods. The 283 pages include something on just about everything. Tendentious matters such as historicity are faced squarely, and the stance taken is never overly sceptical or dismissive.

Yet for all its virtues, I'm not sure this is the end of my search. Perhaps it is because the book only ends where I would begin: on the very last page comes a rather negative discussion of "Reading the Bible as Scripture". The dominant approach ultimately remains an objective historical-critical survey of the material. Perhaps this is inevitable for a textbook designed for schools, but there always remains a distance between the texts discussed and the way in which Christians (and Jews) find them a living word from God for them today. A related concern is that, despite

the title, the discussion of the biblical story is dominated by questions of reliability and historicity, rather than plot and purpose. Nevertheless, I am very grateful for its appearance, and I hope that many will be introduced to the fascinating world of the Old Testament through it.

Letters to the Editor

As I refrained from expounding on German vocabulary in the last issue, no letters have been except this one from Victor Perry, who writes,

Are any Ridley staff interested in the history of the English Bible? If so, they will know of the US Bible exhibition which is coming to the John Rylands Library in 2006. If they have not yet bought the accompanying book, *Let It Go Among Our People*, advise them to save their money. The book is full of mistakes, e.g. as I am asking about the Vulgate, we are told that Coverdale translated the Vulgate into Latin.

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.

Ephesians

Five years ago in BSB 13, Thorsten Moritz wrote a survey of works on Ephesians. Tonight I'm privileged to have Harold Hoehner, the author of the heaviest and most expensive commentary on Ephesians in print sitting beside me at the computer, so I thought I'd take advantage of the chance to ask him about the books that have appeared since Thorsten's article. Here's the gist of what he said:

J Muddiman's work (Black's NT Commentaries; London: Continuum, 2001) is fairly thin, not a hefty volume on the scale of Best, O'Brien or Lincoln. He holds to pseudonymous authorship. The commentary by **Thomas R Yoder Neufeld** (Believers' Church Bible Commentary; Waterloo, Ont: Herald Press, 2002) is more popular in style and not as thorough; he also holds to the pseudonymous view. **PHEME PERKINS'** contribution to the New Interpreter's Bible (Vol 11, edited by Leander Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) is (necessarily) a bit thin, and **MARGARET Y MACDONALD'S** study (Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2000), paired with her commentary on Colossians in this Roman Catholic series is again not very thorough because of limitations of space; she also follows the pseudonymous view. **Peter O'Brien's** commentary (Pillar; Leicester: Apollos, 1999) on the other hand is very full and good on exegetical issues; he holds to Pauline authorship. Overall, I'd put Best, O'Brien and Lincoln at the top. I can't remember much more; I've got a fantastic memory, but it only lasts three minutes.

Harold's own commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) is the most rigorous and up-to-date study of the Greek text available, with an extensive defense of Pauline authorship. Don't forget that an index to the previous commentary surveys in BSB (as well as the texts themselves) is available at <http://www.ridley.cam.ac.uk/bsb.html>

Computer Corner

• Dr Stephen Travis, longtime lecturer in New Testament, Vice-Principal of St John's College (Nottingham), co-leader with me of the annual British Trust for Tantor trip to the Holy Land, and all-round wonderful guy, has the following to say about a new a/v product:

On seeing a recent advert in *Biblical Archaeology Review*, I bought a set of 4 DVDs entitled *Above Israel*. These are made up entirely of aerial film, grouped as follows: (1) Jerusalem; (2) Galilee; (3) Samaria, Judea and the Dead Sea; (4) The Coast, Shephelah and the Negev. Each DVD has about 30 minutes of material, comprising a series of short sequences which can be used individually or grouped together. The set is available with a full sound commentary for \$199, or without commentary for less. The DVDs can also be bought singly. I am impressed by the quality and general usefulness of this unusual material for anyone involved in teaching Old or New Testament in college, course, church, school, etc. For more information, have a look at their website (www.preservingbibletimes.org), where you will also see news of a steadily increasing range of products. These include, for example, a resource book on *The Gospels in Context* and a DVD on *The Life and World of Jesus the Messiah: Overview of the Gospels* — a powerpoint-compatible resource designed to aid understanding of Jesus in context (\$59). You can get cheaper resources, but these are intriguingly different.

Preserving Bible Times, Inc. is a faith-based educational organization with a vision for preserving and presenting Biblical Truth and meaning through integrating the Biblical text with its visual, historical and cultural context. PBT's approach is to assemble creatively a 'tool box' of Bible Times related images and contextual elements that will allow the Scriptures to increasingly come alive for 21st Century readers as they did for 1st Century hearers. Consistent with its preservation charter, PBT has assembled some of the finest archives of Bible Times related images in the world. This includes thousands of high quality aerial and land photographic images of Bible Times archaeology, culture, geography, as well as hard-to-acquire museum pieces. In addition, PBT has assembled hundreds of hours of standard and High Definition land and aerial motion footage that is without peer. These visual and contextual resources are shared in a variety of educational ways to encourage an understanding of Biblical context and to further equip those serving in preaching and teaching ministries. The mailing address for Preserving Bible Times is P.O. Box 83357, Gaithersburg, MD 20883-3357, USA; email: info@preservingbibletimes.org.

• Still looking for a Christmas (or post-Christmas) gift for that deserving vicar or serious student of the Bible? The good people at Oaksoft (www.oaksoft.com) are having their annual December sale on modules for Accordance, the best (commercial) Bible software on the planet. With the British pound currently very strong against the dollar, the discounted prices on the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (originally \$360 but now \$199 or about £103), the *Essential IVP Reference Library* (\$129, about £67) and the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (\$99, about £52) modules represent excellent value for money. Also on sale are collections of Jewish texts and the Accordance Bible Atlas.

Six new CD-ROMs of Accordance texts are now available, including the Greek text of Josephus, grammatically tagged texts from the Aramaic Targums, the Greek Pseudepigrapha and Nestle-Aland 27th edition, the Biblical World in Pictures (1300 photos from the Biblical Archaeology Society, a collection of important Roman Catholic texts and documents in Latin and English, the CNTTS textual Apparatus of the four Gospels, an upgrade to the Theological Journal Library, and more. The latest version of the programme itself (version 6.4.1), can be downloaded from the website. Accordance is written for the Apple Mac, but it can run on Windows PCs with an emulator programme. For a review of the latter (and other independent reviews), see <http://www.accordancebible.com/about/reviews.php>

- Just to prove that we do notice PC software, for free Greek flashcard software, go to <http://www.crosswire.org/flashcards>
- You can now see a prototype of a digital version of the Nestle-Aland 27th edition of the Greek New Testament online, although the text is limited only to 1 John. The online version includes an extensive apparatus of Greek variants. For a glance at what's in production, go to <http://nestlealand.uni-muenster.de>
- Reader Victor Perry points us to <http://www.preceptaustin.org>, a website that he observes has a lot of content on biblical matters (from a conservative perspective) which many clergy will already be familiar with, but which may be useful to parishioners.

Grove Biblical Series

This month's booklet is B 34 *Ecclesiastes: a peculiarly postmodern piece* by Dr Doug Ingram, a member of the Biblical series editorial group who teaches Old Testament at St John's Nottingham. His intriguing study looks at the sharp contradictions in different interpretations of Ecclesiastes, and finds them rooted not in assumptions of interpreters but in the structure, argument and even words of the text. He then teases out some of the implications of this for our reading of the book, of Scripture and even of Christian living and mission in a postmodern context.

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.

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