

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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News Briefs —————

Your Guest Editor —————

Biblical Studies Bulletin has been edited and often largely written by the inimitable Mike Thompson since it began, but he is taking a well-earned sabbatical from *BSB*, and it has been my lot, as secretary of the Grove Biblical Group, to take on this issue's editorship. If it looks a more of a one man publication than usual, then this properly reflects my lesser ability in soliciting contributions. If any of our readers would like to give the next guest editor an easier time, then we would be delighted to receive letters, reviews (or books for review), Bible jokes, or anything at all on the Bible that you'd like to share.

Philip Jenson, Trinity College, Bristol

Knowledge of Luke in Israel? —————

Our resident textual expert, Peter Head, draws attention to the following:

Recently scholars have found a fourth century inscription in the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem which provides interesting evidence for the knowledge of Luke's Gospel among Christians in Jerusalem. The very worn inscription commemorates the tomb of Simeon and, in translation from the Greek, says: "The tomb of Simeon who was a very just man and a very devoted old (person) and waiting for the consolation of the people." This clearly echoes Luke 2.25 (offering support for the text reflected in the original script of Codex Sinaiticus), and is the earliest archaeological evidence reflecting knowledge of the gospels in the Holy Land.

The inscription has recently been published in E Puech & J Zias, "Le tombeau de Simon

et Zacharie dans la valle de Josaphat," *Revue Biblique* 111 (2004) 563-577. Photos of the inscription can be found at http://www.joezias.com/JoeZiasWebsite1_files/image001.jpg and http://www.joezias.com/JoeZiasWebsite1_files/image007.jpg. A helpful line drawing of the Greek text can be seen in some AP news reports (e.g. <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/3541452>).

Discovery of Peter's tomb

At <http://www.cathnews.com/news/502/107.php> there is a remarkable report that Vatican archeologists believe they have identified Peter's tomb in Rome's St Paul Outside the Walls basilica. This follows the discovery of a stone coffin during excavations carried out over the past three years. Far less convincing are the links to reports that the site in Cana of Jesus' miracle of turning water into wine has been found, and a cave used by John the Baptist.

TNIV (Today's New International Version)

The latest translation to hit the shelves is the revision of the now venerable NIV. Unfortunately the offer of a free copy is only for those in Canada and the US, but you can find out some information about it (go to <http://www.tniv.info>). Its moderate approach to using modern inclusive language has aroused a great deal of opposition in the US (eg <http://www.cbmw.org/resources/tniv>).

Book Reviews

Parables

I keep trying (unsuccessfully) to understand the parables, so I'm grateful for the following survey of recent books by John Proctor:

The parables of Jesus are surely among the most accessible and attractive portions of scripture. Everyone loves a story. What could be more ordinary than sowing seed, sorting fish, or throwing a party? But they are elusive too. It is hard to put your finger on them and pin them down. They slide around the mind like a globule of mercury, casting flashes of light in all sorts of different directions. So the parables are a recurring theme, to which writers on the New Testament often return – not because anyone expects to say the last word on the subject, but because these stories constantly seem to offer something new.

In the last few years there has been a little torrent of new books. Here are ten.

- **Michael Ball**, who writes *The Radical Stories of Jesus* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2000), is a Baptist minister in Wales. He has done his homework amid the serious academic writing. Now he explains with clarity and depth how the parables worked, and ends up talking of their use in the pulpit.
- **Mary Ann Beavis** edits *The Lost Coin* (London: Sheffield Academic [now Continuum], 2002). It is all by women, and focuses on female characters in the stories, or on women's insights into their meaning.

- **David B Gowler** asks *What are they saying about the Parables?* (New York: Paulist, 2000). This series condenses a mountain of academic writing into molehill-sized books, and almost makes you believe you have read it all for yourself.
- **Arland J Hultgren** is an American Lutheran professor, who reads widely and writes with lucid care. *The Parables of Jesus* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000) is full of able and learned treatments of individual parables. There is not so much on general issues. Good exegesis; but you would need to get from text to sermon yourself.
- **Richard N Longenecker** edits *The Challenge of Jesus' Parables* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000). In this very well organised book, a dozen experienced NT scholars cover the range of gospels material. Mostly the accent is on what the stories meant, but the need for response on our part is not overlooked.
- **V George Shillington** (ed), *Jesus and his Parables* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark [now Continuum], 1997), includes ten essays by different authors, often drawing attention to social, economic and cultural aspects of the stories. Some of the angles are fresh and thought-provoking: the Prodigal Son becomes 'a dysfunctional family and its neighbours'.
- **Anna Wierzbicka** is a Roman Catholic, a professor of linguistic philosophy in Australia. *What did Jesus mean?* (Oxford: OUP, 2001) argues that the marrow of many of the major parables can be extracted in simple words that can cross barriers of language and culture. Does she freeze-dry the thrill of the story? Or has she released a truly catholic Jesus? Maybe a bit of both.
- **Stephen I Wright's** *The Voice of Jesus* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000) surveys how six of Luke's parables have been understood across the Christian centuries. Wright talks of the potential the stories have for expansion, for the taking up of their insights and challenges in the reader's own world. He also writes the much smaller *Tales Jesus told* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), which treats about twenty parables in bite-sized chapters. Like Shillington, but with a lighter touch, he offers angles you've never thought of before.
- And the tenth...? 'Sweep, and listen' (Beavis, p37). Be the tenth book **yourself**.

John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge

The Drama of Scripture

Craig G Bartholomew and Michael W Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). ISBN 0801027462. In many fields of study, both Christian and secular, there has been a growing interest in story and narrative. Tom Wright has suggested a particularly evocative analogy for how the Bible relates to the Christian life, based on a five act play (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, Church), but did not work it out in detail. Now Craig Bartholomew (a NT scholar) and Michael Goheen (a missiologist) have together written a book that expounds this five or, as they prefer, six act play (the sixth act is the End). An excellent prologue suggests that the Bible is like a Cathedral, which has many doors (themes) and different paths through it. They suggest that the main doors are covenant and kingdom, two sides of the same coin. What follows is a fine introduction to the biblical story focusing on these twin themes.

Yet on finishing the book I wondered why I didn't feel as satisfied as I thought I would. One problem is that the six main chapters of the book are very unequal, reflecting the proportions of the biblical material. Acts 1, 2 and 6 are covered very quickly indeed, while in the longer chapters I found myself losing sight of the original simple model as we explored history, geography and text in some detail. Further, the focus on the Bible has meant that little is said about the value of the scheme in analyzing how the Bible relates to key contemporary issues (ethics), or how Christians might improvise their lives faithfully in harmony with the story (spirituality). So while glad to have this volume, I hope that it will sometime soon be joined by companion volumes that explore the drama of scripture from other perspectives.

Philip Jenson, Trinity College, Bristol

Films and the Bible

There's a growing interest in how the Bible is being interpreted in film. Here are a few helpful resources:

- A good starting point for links to discussions of Jesus on film is at <http://www.ntgateway.com>
- Christianity Today has regular reviews of films, and you can sign up for an email notification (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies>)
- For lists of the available DVDs and books, try typing in 'reel bible' under the listmania option at www.amazon.com. This is the American Amazon site, since there is intense interest in the topic in the land of Hollywood.
- For a fascinating attempt to integrate film, novel and contemporary scholarship, those willing to tackle some hard reading can try Brian Britt, *Rewriting Moses: The Narrative Eclipse of the Text* (T& TClark/Continuum, 2004). There is taster for this at http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Britt-Moses_Myth.htm

Readers are invited to let us know about other helpful discoveries in this field.

Bible Humour

- If you are interested in JEDP or MLQ or any other form of source criticism, then you may be amused by the results of some research on the New Testament: <http://www.srcf.ucam.org/~ac435/sauce.jpg>
- Jeff Larson has an impressive catalogue of cartoons, including a number on the Bible. I wasn't impressed by many of them, but you can judge for yourself at <http://thebackpew.com/>
- I wouldn't want to be without Robert K. Short, *The Bible According to Peanuts* (London: Collins, 1990). I frequently make use of these wonderful cartoons in my teaching.

Three of the Best

This edition our guest is Dr Bruce Winter, Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge. Tyndale House is an unparalleled resource for biblical studies, and Bruce has been a welcoming presence to innumerable students and scholars. He is especially interested in the intersection of the Graeco-Roman World with the New Testament.

After the Bible the three books which have influenced me most are:

1. Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (1962). He points out the problem that for theologians God becomes the object of study rather than the recipient of our worship. This was important for me in my training, and even more in research, and shapes my current thinking in many ways.

2. Edwin Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century* (1960), which made clear to me the importance of understanding the cultural setting of early Christianity and the counter-cultural nature of Christian teaching and living (both then and now). This led me to do research on understanding the New Testament in its first century at Macquarrie University (where I specialised in Paul and Philo).

3. J.A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (1967). This showed me that the Roman Empire was a civilisation undergirded by law and helped me understand some of the issues which would have faced Christian converts in the first century and some of the legal issues in relation to New Testament teaching in a whole variety of new ways.

Computer Corner

As you may be aware, the Grove editorial board has a bias towards Macs and the amazing Accordance Bible software. However, we are happy to publicize other packages, and we've received a note from Canon Kenneth Gordon about the Logos Bible Software. He writes:

Since it was first mentioned in *Biblical Studies Bulletin*, in March 1997 (Vol 3), Logos Bible Software has developed greatly from the rather basic Logos 1.6. The current version (Series X [2.1c]), has several "packages" ranging from Christian Home Library to Scholar's Library. There is also a wide range of Add-ons and e-books, all of which link in seamlessly with the core packages. There are many original languages tools and aids too. These can all be examined at <http://www.logos.com> and a demonstration video is also available there.

BSB has mentioned Logos only once since the first reference in 1997, whereas Accordance (for understandable scholarly reasons) seems to be mentioned in nearly every issue. However, I would suggest that most ordinary working clergy, who have probably followed most of the world by having a PC with Microsoft Windows operating system, would find Logos more than up to the job for regular study needs in the course of their preaching ministry. In fact, any dissenting academics who have eschewed the Apple Mac and gone PC must surely already be using Logos to their great gain and genuine satisfaction (see academic recommendations on the

Logos website). Being myself now retired and also pursuing an academic course of postgraduate study, as well as continuing an active preaching ministry, I am finding it increasingly rewarding and useful. Other readers of *BSB* who are not already committed to Accordance should certainly consider Logos, especially if they already use a PC.

It's certainly true that I envy the range of content (and the prices) available for Logos modules, but then recall my nightmares about Window.... We wish Canon Gordon every success with his studies and his ministry and encourage similar contributions.

Grove Biblical Series

This month's booklet is by a leading scholar in the Dead Sea Scrolls material, Professor George Brooke, who occupies the John Rylands Chair in Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University. In B35 *The Qumran Scrolls, the Jewish Jesus, and the New Testament*, he looks at the value of the Dead Sea Scrolls for understanding Jesus and the early Christian church in the wider Jewish context. Doubtful theories that tend to be proclaimed as radically new explanations of Christianity are rightly questioned, but he also points out common issues that both Jesus and the Qumran scrolls tackle, albeit with very different results. George supplied a detailed bibliography for those wishing to follow up various matters, and this is available on the Grove website (www.grovebooks.co.uk/online_resources.htm).

Perhaps I might mention that George is also editor of the *Society for Old Testament Study Booklist*, a reasonably exhaustive set of reviews of academic books published on the Old Testament. This is also part of the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (JSOT)*. If there was only one professional OT journal I was allowed to take, this would be it — lively, creative, and always things to disagree with. There is at present a free month's subscription for web access to *JSOT* and other journals at <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/Journalhome.aspx>.

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