

# Biblical Studies Bulletin

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

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## News Briefs —————

### Your Guest Editor —————

Another edition of *Biblical Studies Bulletin*, the inimitable Mike Thompson is still taking his well-earned sabbatical from *BSB*, and the lot has now fallen to me to take on this issue's editorship. As ever the standard of the Bible jokes remains low and falling lower. You could play your part in eliminating them completely by writing in and telling us what you would find useful in *BSB* in future editions, entering our competition or reviewing a book or two that you have come across. This time round we have some good news for Macintosh users in the Computer corner and some up to the minute comment on a biblical news story that made it onto the BBC news.

*James Blandford-Baker*  
Vicar of St Dunstan's, East Acton, London

### Oxyrhynchus and the Devaluing of the Beast —————

It is not often that manuscripts or textual criticism hit the headlines. But some new work on the papyri excavated at Oxyrhynchus (which lies on a Western branch of the Nile, 160 km south of Cairo) made a number of newspapers and web sites, which suggested that 'Satanists, apocalypse watchers and heavy metal guitarists may have to adjust their demonic numerology' (see <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/11134>).

The matter that caught their attention was the 'discovery' of a new variant of Rev 13.18, in which the number of the beast is given not as 666 but as 616. The papyrus 4499 from Oxyrhynchus came from the rubbish dumps outside the city, which were discovered in the nineteenth century and excavated extensively up until the 1930s. However, many of the documents were blackened with age and illegible—but recent

developments in multispectral imaging have revealed new readings and confirmed some uncertain ones.

There are two slightly strange aspects to the recent stories. The first is that I knew, from my own studies, that this variant reading was already known; it is given as a footnote in the RSV and other reliable English versions. When I checked the apparatus, I found that the variants come from C (Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus from the fifth century, kept in Paris), and (in letter-numeric rather than verbal form) in P115 from the third or fourth century—which turns out to be the very manuscript, Oxyrhynchus 4499, that is grabbing the headlines! So the reading of this papyrus and its place in the apparatus has already been well-established for some time. Perhaps someone on the project has been deploying some PR flair, or a journalist has spotted the opportunity to make a headline.

The other strange aspect to all this relates to the Oxyrhynchus project online explanation of the numerology. (The manuscript can be found at <http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/beast/beast616.html> with links to the explanation as well as the history of the excavation.) The commentator explains the Greek practice of isopsephism, and quotes Suetonius' use of it in relation to Nero, but then goes on to comment that no-one knows the key to 666/616 but that it certainly cannot also relate to Nero. As any reader of B 28 *How to Read the Book of Revelation* will know, he is wrong on both counts. There is now a fairly wide consensus supporting a solution first identified in the 1840s—prior to the excavations at Oxyrhynchus—which does identify the number as referring to Nero, and which is doubly certain precisely because it explains the existence of the variant reading 616 in question.

Clearly there is still plenty of work to be done in disseminating sound readings of Revelation.

Ian Paul

*Dean of Studies and Lecturer in New Testament, St John's College, Nottingham*

## Book Reviews

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### Scripture and the Authority of God

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Tom Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005) ISBN 0 281057222, £7.99

A recent discussion in my church concerned the place of the Bible in the Christian life. One woman looked at me, puzzled. 'But everybody knows the Bible can mean whatever you want it to mean,' she said. She spoke with the confidence of one who knows her views are simply self-evident.

In such a climate, how can we speak of the Bible as 'authoritative'? How can it be appropriately interpreted and applied today? In slightly over 100 pages, Bishop of Durham Tom Wright attempts to answer these questions. Much of the book sets the context of the current debate over Scripture, with a particular focus on the history of interpretation and the challenge of postmodern deconstruction.

Wright is particularly keen to critique the oft-repeated claims of our age which

have the effect of neutering biblical authority: that all texts are merely mirrors in which we see our own reflection; that tradition and reason are separate, equal sources of authority alongside scripture; that the church has authority over Scripture, since it was the church which decided the canon of the Bible. This latter assertion, says Wright, ‘makes a rather obvious logical mistake analogous to that of a soldier who, receiving orders through the mail, concludes that the postman is his commanding officer. Those who transmit, collect and distribute the message are not in the same league as those who write it in the first place.’

He also highlights ‘misreadings’ of the Bible within conservative circles, including the end-times rapture, prosperity theology, and seeing the state of Israel as the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. In response to what he sees as errors on both the theological left and right, Wright attempts to formulate a high view of scriptural authority for our own day, based on his own ‘five-act’ proposal, previously outlined in *The New Testament and the People of God*.

This is lively, bracing stuff—especially when Wright lays into liberal clichés about Scripture with the vigour of Aragorn lopping the heads off orcs. Highly recommended.

Mike Starkey  
Vicar of Holy Trinity, Twickenham

## Women (and Men) in the Bible

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Ronald W Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis and Gordon D Fee (eds), *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Apollos, 2005) pp 528

Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of 118 Disputed Questions* (Apollos, 2005) pp 856

These two weighty books, first published last year in the USA, are deliberately paired by IVP. *Discovering Biblical Equality* contains contributions from 23 evangelical scholars on the historical background, the biblical texts, hermeneutical, theological and cultural perspectives supporting gender equality in every area. *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth* contains Wayne Grudem’s systematic refutations of 118 evangelical feminists’ theological and biblical claims. Supporting the view that women are in submission to men in the church and the home, his theme is that there is a connection between the views put forward by evangelical egalitarians and a slide into liberalism and denial of the Bible’s authority.

And therein lies my dilemma. They are both thorough, heavily footnoted, academic and biblical, written by scholars who know their Greek and Hebrew. But they are passionately arguing from opposite sides of the debate on the role of men and women in home and church. Churches have to be on one side or the other. There is no middle ground—women either do preach and lead or they don’t. Yet many of us are not in a position to grapple in depth with the issue as these authors have done. How do we make up our minds?

PS Actually I have made up my mind.

Margaret Killingray

# Competition

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Every now and then I am asked to speak at a local church about how to read the Bible. Amongst other things, I always try and emphasize the importance of (on the one hand) reading closely, observing the detail of the text in question, and (on the other) reading in the wider context of the passage, the book and even the whole Bible. One of the things that the people I speak to appear to struggle with most is having an overview of the Bible as a whole, the big picture, the overall context in which they can locate the passage they are reading. If I ask whether they would like me to summarise the story of whole Bible in, say, five minutes, there is always a resounding 'YES!'

So, here is the challenge: could you write the story of the whole Bible in 750 words?

We will publish the best effort in BSB, and others on the Grove web site—and the top three entries will be able to claim a free Grove booklet of their choice. Marks will be given for referring to all the different parts of the biblical story, for deployment of biblical language and imagery, and for overall artistry and coherence. Marks will be deducted for going over length!

So get writing—we are waiting to hear from you!

*Ian Paul*

# Bible Humour

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- I am a Frisbyterian. We believe that when you die your soul goes up on the roof and you can't get it down.
- Some time ago we reported on Biblical scenes developed in the child's construction medium, Lego. Now someone has built a church (complete with congregation) out of the little plastic bricks in memory of their dead cat, Precious. The Biblical bit is a reflection on Psalm 27 for the plastic congregation of a plastic church. Have fun at <http://www.amyhughes.org/lego/church/>

# A Question of Integrity?

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When I was first a student of biblical studies, I was introduced to some classic compromises in translation. Prominent among these was the NIV of Hosea 6.6 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' which follows the Septuagint (the Greek OT) which Jesus quotes, rather than following the Hebrew (Masoretic text) 'I desire steadfast love (*hesed*).' Although it is hard to defend this approach on grounds of translation, the alternative has the unfortunate effect of making Jesus look as though he didn't know his Bible.

More recently I have been conscious of other questionable translations in a variety of contexts. Those who know me won't be surprised to hear that a number come from the last book of the New Testament, but the examples are not limited to this.

- The NIV consistently translates *Christos* as 'Christ' in Revelation, so we can easily see that the word occurs seven times in the book. But the NRSV, somewhat inexplicably, translates one of these occurrences (in Rev 11.15) as 'Messiah.'
- In Rev 21.3, in its attempt to be gender inclusive, the NRSV declares that the home of God is with 'mortals.' But presumably the presence of the river of the water of life and the tree of life means that mortal is something the citizens of the New Jerusalem will not be!
- One reading that really baffles me (and is particularly important in the Church of England at the moment) is the translation of 1 Tim 2.12. The key word '*authenthein*' is a *hapax*, that is, it occurs only here in the New Testament. The more usual word for 'exercise authority' is '*exousiazein*' and the commentators agree that '*authenthein*' has the sense of 'misusing authority' or 'usurping authority.' So why is it that modern translations, almost without exception, translate this simply as 'have authority'? The AV correctly used the phrase 'usurping authority' and the only modern translation I could find on BibleGateway.com that continues this is something called the '21st Century King James.' I had never heard of this before, but here it is more faithful to its predecessor than the New King James.
- Another example is the anti-inclusive approach of the English Standard Version, defended (rather unconvincingly) in the *Church of England Newspaper* a few months ago—but that is another whole subject for debate.

Perhaps there are different reasons for each example. But is it the case that ideological conviction or the politics of the market are compromising integrity in translation?

Do you have particular bugbears in translation—apparently inexplicable inconsistencies or strange choices? Let us know! Send your comments to the Editor, [mbt2@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mbt2@cam.ac.uk)

Ian Paul

## Computer Corner

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- In our last *Biblical Studies Bulletin* Canon Kenneth Gordon wrote about the Logos Bible Software for PCs. Since then we have heard from Daniel Foster of Logos Bible Software informing us that the programme is to be made available on the Macintosh platform as a native OS X piece of software. Apparently Logos has been completely rewritten for the Macintosh so it will have a genuine Apple 'feel' to it. Also for those who went the PC way but would now like to return to the Apple fold, the developers are assuring users that they will not have to buy the programme again if they already own the PC version. User data files will also be completely interchangeable between the two systems. For more information visit <http://www.logos.com/mac> or <http://www.macbiblesoftware.com>
- OakTree Software (the developers of Accordance) is now officially distributing and supporting the BasiliskII Emulator for those who want to run Accordance on a PC. The Manual has been extensively revised and is available for download, as are the installers for BasiliskII. This allows PC users to try out the emulator with the Accord-

ance demo at no cost. A new CD-ROM with the Emulator will be available soon.

• OakTree Software also report that they have released Accordance Version 6.6 with a number of bug fixes and some new features. This free upgrade is recommended for everyone with version 6. New features include significant enhancements to the Atlas, copy as Transliteration, choice of browser font size, improved font display and option-close tab to close the other tabs in the workspace. The Mini-Manual and New Since 5 PDF files have been updated for version 6.6, and are available on the Documentation page. Accordance is also claimed to be fully compatible with the new version of Apple's OS X (Tiger). See <http://www.accordancebible.com/about/news.php> for more information on these Accordance announcements.

## Grove Biblical Series

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This month's book reflects on the fourfold Gospel, the church's response to the fact that there were many different written gospels circulating as early as the second century. Their very different presentations of Jesus raised considerable problems, but so (it could be argued) did the decision to accept not one authoritative account but four. This booklet compares the adoption of the fourfold Gospel with other responses to the plurality of writings about Jesus, and notes the challenges and opportunities that it continues to present today. It concludes with application for preachers, written by Philip Jenson.

Andrew Gregory is a Research Fellow at Keble College, Oxford, and a Research Associate in the Theology Faculty of the University of Oxford, where he is working on a project entitled 'The New Testament and the Second Century.' He is the author of *The Reception of Luke and Acts in the Period before Irenaeus* (2003) and editor (with Christopher Tuckett) of *The Reception of the New Testament in the Apostolic Fathers* (OUP, 2005) and *Trajectories through the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers* (OUP, 2005). He is also preparing a critical edition of some non-canonical gospels, and a commentary on the gospel readings of the Revised Common Lectionary (SPCK/Fortress, 2006). An Anglican priest, he assists in the chapel at Keble College, Oxford, and also in the parish church where he worships with his family and is responsible for the crèche.

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