

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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We expect Comments on Commentaries to reappear in the eschaton. Or perhaps the next issue.

Competition Conclusion —————

In *BSB* 36 Ian Paul challenged readers to write the story of the whole Bible in 750 words. A veritable number of entries came forth—let's say they reached double digits and leave it at that. Entries were judged with varying degrees of scrutiny by eight faithful from the Grove Biblical group, with member Philip Jenson proving the most scrupulous. It was a close competition; the judges were split among themselves (proposing five different winners) but maintained Christian unity.

Here are some of their comments; can you spot your entry?: 'This is great', 'I wasn't too excited', 'wacky', 'too tongue-in-cheek to win', 'not quite the Bible story but interesting', 'creative, but some gaping holes', 'suddenly I was in the Twilight Zone', 'What a weird collection', 'curious, possibly docetic', 'What is hard is getting the right degree of allusiveness—telling the facts in such a way as to open up the theology', 'Good job we've got the Bible.'

Anyway, many thanks to all the good sports who sent something in. Our winner is Robin Stockitt, who gets a free subscription to the Biblical series for a year, a booklet of his choice, and a one-off payment of fifty times my annual salary as *BSB* editor. Second prize goes to Richard Briggs; third is shared by Robin Thomson and Veronica Zundel, all of whom get a free booklet. They too shall enter google immortality by having their entries posted on the Grove website.

Here's Robin's entry:

At the centre of creation lies a heartbeat: tick...tick...tick...tick. At times the beat quickens, during moments of high anticipation, but then it returns to its steady rhythm,

without pause, without hesitation, day after day, year after year, unending. It is the pulsing life blood of love flowing from the heart of God towards all that he has made. One day this God will visit his creation in person. He himself will go and participate in the life of humanity. He will laugh and cry, encourage and admonish, educate and confuse, suffer and die, and rise again to the surprise, delight and dismay of the people with whom he lived. But this is to rush ahead to the end of the story.

At the heart of the Bible is a struggle. It is the story of a great drama in which humanity tries to keep in step with the heartbeat of love. Occasionally God and his people walk in harmony, shoulder to shoulder in sweet communion in the cool of the day. It was like this at the beginning for Adam and his wife given paradise to enjoy and guard. And there were holy moments of great intimacy too for Abram, Moses, Elijah, David, Isaiah, John and Peter. These were ordinary humans who felt the pull and tug of the heartbeat of love upon their souls and responded to it. And yet the struggle to hear and to heed God's voice was often lost by those very same people who, last week, had followed God's insistent call so carefully.

At times the struggle was lost by a whole nation, God's chosen nation, Israel, despite the pleas and warnings of the prophets, God's spokespeople, who bravely stood up in his name. 'These people, whom I love to bless,' announced God one day, 'will be a vehicle for blessing to spread to the whole world. They are blessed, not because they are more loved, but simply so that others might, through them, discern and enjoy me too.' God took these people, a rag-tag collection of unknown tribes, and through an extraordinary tale of enslavement in Egypt, rescue and deliverance across a harsh and forbidding desert, shaped them into a people that belonged to him. But alas, all too often, the blessing was kept to themselves and thereby it began to decay. The prophets came to call them out of their stupor and stubborn rebelliousness. 'Trust' called out Jeremiah in the heat of political turmoil. To no avail. 'Be merciful' declared Micah when the temptation was to be harsh and unyielding. But no-one heard.

And so it continued year after year, king after king, prophet after prophet until one day all God's chosen people were taken away to a distant land—the land of Babylon—where they remained for 70 years, in order that they might learn that mercy is better than sacrifice and love, for God and neighbour, is more important than anything else in the whole world. Those who heard the heartbeat and remembered from whence it came wrote down their struggles and heartaches, as well as their joys and times of jubilant thanksgiving. Their prayers and poems were collected together in the Psalms and became a treasured library.

And so God's time drew near. It was the time for his appearing, for his coming to his own people. He called himself Emmanuel, God with us or Jesus, God the Saviour made flesh. He chose to come in disguise, as an infant in an unknown village to a simple peasant girl. He came to those who had lost their way, who had become deaf to the pulsing beat of love, who were blind to the yearning of God for them. This Jesus, God's own Son, would enter their darkness to find them. He would even enter death for them, in order that they might know, that in God's great drama, forgiveness, reconciliation, and a new beginning were available for all. When Jesus rose again after three days, everything became new. God's people were no longer

those who simply named themselves, 'Israel.' Jesus had flung the doors of kingdom of heaven open wide for all to enter. The community that gladly walked through those doors of welcome, called themselves the 'called out ones' or the 'ekklesia' or 'the church' made up entirely of people. The remainder of the Bible concerns the struggle of this new community to understand itself, its relationship to Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth who had come to reveal God to them and to tell them all about the heartbeat that never stops. It is an unfinished story

Tick...tick...tick—tick

Philip 'scrupulous' Jenson, our beloved Old Testament lecturer, observes that Robin's entry lacks reference to the law and has a more romantic flavour than Torah. I hasten to add that Philip did not teach Robin, although I did. Readers should be assured that entries were marked blind...

Book Notices

One new (2005) and three relatively new (2004) books on my review shelf from Eerdmans are eager for attention and need to be moved.

The new book, *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* is by Larry Hurtado, Professor of New Testament at the University of Edinburgh. This collection of lectures and formerly published essays offers an accessible way into a subject developed at length in his award-winning *Lord Jesus Christ* and in Larry's other shorter monographs. His work, as ever, is sure-footed and sensible, as he investigates early Christian devotion to Jesus as a key to the early development of Christology. This book also makes a contribution in its chapters on opposition to Christians and the personal cost of persecution.

Two *festshrifts* (or I should say *Festschriften*) reflect British evangelical concerns and conclusions and those of largely American, mainstream scholarship, respectively. P J Williams, Andrew D Clarke, Peter M Head and David Instone Brewer have edited one for Bruce Winter, the Warden of Tyndale House here in Cambridge: *The New Testament in its First Century Setting: Essays on Context and Background*. Sheila E McGinn edits a more focused collection of essays on Romans in honour of Robert Jewett: *Celebrating Romans: Template for Pauline Theology*.

Both volumes include contributions on the death of Christ that highlight the contrasts. David Peterson in Williams *et al*, writes on atonement in Luke-Acts. Emphasizing the use of Isaiah, he finds that Luke seeks to give us 'a comprehensive and cumulative picture' of the saving significance of Jesus' vicarious death. Jeffrey Gibson in McGinn's volume offers a wide-ranging survey of the use of 'dying for' language in Greco-Roman literature before concluding that 'Paul was engaged in a profound polemic against the prevailing values of his day with respect to what ordinarily was thought to create personal and public "salvation."' As with most collections of essays, both books look to be curate's eggs.

David Instone Brewer's first volume in the TRENT series (Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament), *Prayer and Agriculture* (2004) is a technical study

of early rabbinic teachings and how they shed light on the New Testament. For each saying it includes a modern English translation with the original text in unpointed Hebrew, plus discussion of significance and dating. The introductory chapter will be especially helpful for students. Also of particular interest in this volume are texts relating to the Shema and how it was recited.

Book Reviews

Sigmund Mowinckel, *He that Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism* (first pub 1956; Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005).

Nothing pleases a publisher more than being able to reprint an old classic. Publication costs are lower and they know that the book is a good one. I am personally very pleased to see the re-publication of this important work. It forms the spring board for a lot of modern discussion on the nature of Messianic expectation, and although many people (myself included) disagree with Mowinckel's conclusions, his careful scholarship and detailed examination of texts are immensely valuable.

Mowinckel splits his book into two halves. The first half looks at biblical passages, focussing on the development of a hope for a future king and the significance of the servant of the Lord passages within Messianic expectation. The second part traces the development of an expectation of a national Messiah and looks at the role of the Son of Man in this expectation.

Of course the real problem with this book is that it was written in 1956 at a time when some of the most important extra-biblical material on the Messiah was not available. This is not Mowinckel's fault but it does limit its contemporary value. If you already possess some of the significant modern texts on messianic expectation, such as William Horbury's 1998 volume *Jewish Messianism and the Cult of Christ* or James Charlesworth's edited volume of essays *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (1992), then this volume will undoubtedly enhance your collection. If you have read nothing so far on Messianic expectation, this is not the place to start because modern reflections on the nature of the Messiah cannot ignore the Dead Sea Scrolls and other such texts.

Paula Gooder, *The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham*

Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Cambridge/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 216pp, £9.99. This book nicely takes on an issue raised in Chris Wright's recent Grove Biblical series booklet *Truth with a Mission*. An important biblical theme is God's particular choice of Israel—a choice which excludes everyone else. But it is also clear that God cares for all people, and that Israel's position is somehow for the sake of other nations (eg Genesis 12.3).

Spina's argument is that there are important stories in the Bible which challenge a simple distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. In each case the 'outsiders' receive God's favour and often act better than the 'insiders.' Spina looks in detail at the stories of Esau (Genesis 25–36), Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab and Achan (Joshua

2, 6 and 7), Naaman (2 Kings 5), Jonah, Ruth and the Samaritan woman (John 4). In each case he gives a sensitive exegesis of the biblical text, paying particular attention to his theme and drawing out implications for it. There is a sensible amount of detail in the text, with further discussion and references likely to be of interest only to scholars kept in endnotes.

The book is a model of how to read biblical stories with attention to both their narrative features and their theological significance. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it. The overall theme is broadly convincing, though a full treatment of the topic would need to reckon with the texts that are more exclusive too.

Keith Beech-Gruneberg, Director of Studies for the Diocese of Oxford

Translation Matters

John Oakey writes from St Albans:

A Question of Integrity? Surely the least helpful rendering/translation appears in 1 Corinthians 13.12, referring to reflections in a mirror. NIV offers 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.' NEB reads 'Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror...' How can that make sense in terms of today's products?

Likewise RSV offers 'Now we see in a mirror dimly,' which appears to miss the point entirely. Modern mirrors give sparkling reflections, sparing no spot or wrinkle. What passed for a mirror in Paul's day did not. Is it not the case that all he had was a piece of burnished metal or perhaps a small square of poor-quality glass which could be propped against a wall to provide a dim or even puzzling (!) reflection?

Then again, the idea of seeing oneself does not match with the future hope of 'seeing face to face'—clearly meaning seeing someone else!

If we must refer to reflections (I have no Greek), why not speak of them in a shop window or a pond where the image would be unclear? Even if a better word for mirror could be found, however, the switch of ideas from seeing oneself to meeting another person (God?) is indeed puzzling.

Corinth was known for its production of brass, but you're right that it could never be as good as silvered glass.

Computer Corner

- The Tom Wright web page (<http://www.ntwrightpage.com>) continues to develop as an excellent resource, featuring a number of the Bishop of Durham's lectures, papers and sermons, many of which are downloadable.
- James Blandford-Baker points out that owners of 3rd and 4th generation iPods can download Bible texts and audio (from www.bibleplayer.com); I would expect that there are also free Bible reading podcasts available through the iTunes music store.

- Roy Ciampa, Associate Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has made available a number of helpful files on exegesis and textual criticism that teachers and students may find interesting (<http://home.comcast.net/~rciampa>).
- For Windows people, BibleWorks 7 is now available with a host of serious scholarly tools including satellite mapping, geothermal imaging, and antigravity boots. Ok, the last two are still in development. For details visit their site (www.bibleworks.com). On the Mac side, Accordance is not standing still (www.accordancebible.com).

Humour

Is this humour or just going one better than our competition?

The Bible in 50 Words (sorta kinda)

God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, Abraham split, Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled, bush talked, Moses balked, Pharaoh plagued, people walked, sea divided, tablets guided, promise landed, Saul freaked, David peeked, prophets warned, Jesus born, God walked, love talked, anger crucified, hope died, Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread, God remained.

*from 'Top of the Morning' Book of Incredibly Short Stories, selected by
Brian Edwards (Auckland, New Zealand: Tandem Press, 1997) p 41*

Grove Biblical Series

This month's book, *Decoding Da Vinci* by Tom Wright responds not only to Dan Brown's bestseller, but also to five popular myths about Jesus and the Christian faith that need correcting. Vibrant, fresh and robust, this booklet by a first-rate New Testament scholar (who also happens to be a great communicator) has an important message that people need to hear today.

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