

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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

Contents ————— Issue 41: Sept 2006

- 1 *NEWS IN BRIEF* *Eschaton* delay, Holy Land diary and the Exodus debate
- 2 *BOOKS NOTICES* Four more, including the NICNT Pastorals
- 3 *HUMOUR* A Bible rap that may make you smile
- 3 *COMMENTS ON COMMENTARIES* Peter Head handles Hebrews
- 5 *LETTERS TO THE EDITOR* More Hebrew help and two new commentary series
- 5 *TRANSLATION MATTERS* *Arrabon*, biers and more
- 6 *COMPUTER CORNER* Accordance keeps improving

News in Brief —————

BSB will continue —————

Well, obviously; you're reading it. In response to last issue's appeal, I received exactly 31 positive responses on the first day, and to date 147 of you have written in to ask for more. Replies came from a wide range of folk, from bishops to baptists, with many claiming not to be righteous (their humility proving the appropriateness of their vote). Thanks for your encouragement; the Grove biblical group will explore how to share more responsibility for future issues to keep you informed and amused.

Holy Land Exploits —————

Once again, Stephen Travis and I led a group of 35 theological types (ordinands and independents, male and female, Protestant and Roman Catholic) on a three-week study tour to the Holy Land, based at Tantur (just outside of Bethlehem). Two days before we were due to travel to Galilee for the last week of our trip, rockets began hitting Tiberias. As a result, for the first time we had to cancel our stay in northern Israel.

It was good to revisit the Pool of Siloam, where people have been digging in earnest to uncover the Herodian stonework around a much grander pool than the modest medieval one at the end of Hezekiah's tunnel. Last year we could only look at the dig from a distance; now it is possible to walk about on the rapidly expanding site. You can see some fine pictures of it, old and relatively new, in the Bible Places website (www.bibleplaces.com/poolofsilaoam.htm); see also the BAR article if it is still available online (www.bib-arch.org/bswbOOSilaoam.html).

The new approach ramp for the Temple Mount (mentioned in last September's issue) is now open, allowing archaeological excavations underneath the old one. We were delighted to be permitted, for the first time, to be able to walk alongside the top edge of the eastern wall of the Temple Mount, the probable location of Solomon's portico (John 10.23; Acts 3.11; 5.12); the Dome of the Rock and the El Aqsa mosque remain closed to non-Muslims. In the Armenian chapel of the archangels in Jerusalem where we went for Vespers one evening, we spotted a relatively old, massive painting of the Last Supper that on first inspection would give Dan Brown more ammunition for his Da Vinci thesis. Present with eleven bearded disciples, one beardless young person that could easily pass for a female is very close to Jesus at his right hand. Unfortunately for Brown's view, Judas Iscariot is definitely present, holding a money bag. Clearly an ancient way to indicate the apostle John's youth was to distinguish the beloved disciple from the others as much as possible in appearance, without a beard and with features that could be construed as feminine--if one judged only by aesthetics, confidently dismissing the biblical evidence.

Would I recommend others to go to Israel? If the current cease fire holds, absolutely! We again were warmly received by Palestinians in Bethlehem, and we felt very safe in our travels in and around the old city of Jerusalem. Now more than ever the peoples of the land need tourists to come and support the economy.

The Exodus Debate Continues

The latest online edition of the Biblical Archaeology Society (www.bib-arch.org) features several interesting articles debating the relative merits of the two-hour History Channel special, 'The Exodus Decoded'. For those who haven't seen the television programme (and that includes me), its basic thesis is that the exodus took place ca 1500 BC, with the eruption of the volcano at Santorini providing the background for some of the biblical plagues. The discussion is lively and hardhitting; if it's not available online when you read this, you can find it in a recent issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

Book Notices

The long-awaited volume on 1-2 Timothy and Titus in Eerdmans' New International Commentary on the New Testament series has finally arrived, and looks to be very good (pp xlviii + 886; ISBN 0802825133). The author, Philip Towner, wrote a finely balanced doctoral dissertation (*The Goal of Our Instruction*, JSOT Press, 1989) on the theology and ethics in the pastorals under the supervision of Howard Marshall, and has followed that up with a number of articles. The title page of Professor Marshall's own recent ICC commentary states that he wrote in collaboration with Towner. So here we have someone who knows the terrain very well, and who interacts fully with other recent 'heavyweight' commentaries, including those by W D Mounce (Word), L T Johnson (Anchor Bible) and of course his own *Doktorvater*.

Although previous volumes in series have provided their own translations of the underlying Greek text, Townsend does not want to add to the proliferation of

translations (he directs translation for the United Bible Societies), and so chooses the TNIV as a base. He argues a nuanced for the authenticity of the letters as coming ultimately from Paul, and the critical factors influencing his reading of 1 Tim 2.8-15 are (1) the wealth and influence of the women in question, (2) the emphasis elsewhere on heresies, and (3) Bruce Winter's work on the emergence of promiscuous and dominant 'Roman women' as a social phenomenon in Paul's day.

Mark Reasoner's *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005; xxvii + 194; ISBN 0-664-22873-9) is a little gem. Identifying twelve critical interpretative *loci* (1.16f; 19-21; 3.21-28; 5.12, 5.18-21; 7.7-8.4; 8.28-30; 9.16-19, 20-23; 10.4; 11.25-27; and 13.1-7), it summarizes decisive contributions made to each passage through history. By the end of it the reader has begun to grasp something of the variety of Christian interpretation (including the 'New Perspective')—who has said what and why. Ideal for students and as a resource for formal courses on Romans.

The Africa Bible Commentary (Zondervan, 2006; 1616 pp; ISBN 0310264731) is the product of seventy African theologians. According to the publishers, 'it is the first one-volume commentary ever created to help pastors, students, and lay leaders in Africa apply God's Word to distinctively African concerns, yet its fresh insights will have a universal appeal...Interpreting and applying the Bible in the light of African culture and realities, it furnishes powerful and relevant insights into the biblical text that transcend Africa in their significance.'

Coming in late October, *The Bible in Limerick Verse* by the Revd Christopher Goodwins combines his separate volumes on the Old and New Testaments into an enlarged, enhanced, improved collection of 1001 limericks (including 300 new ones). The ISBN is 1905047592, the price is £9.99, and the publisher is O-books (www.o-books.net).

Humour

Is size important? If your internet connection is fast enough and you can endure the lame introduction, you (or your youth group) might get a kick out of the Bible rap (www.youtube.com/watch?v=EobF2TM9Fig&search=Bible). Something else...

Comments on Commentaries

An assessment of commentaries on books of the Bible to keep you up to date with what will help in preaching and teaching in the local church. This issue's survey is by Dr Peter Head, Sir Kirby Laing Research Fellow at Tyndale House, Lecturer in New Testament at Cambridge University, and Grove Biblical Group member extraordinaire.

Hebrews

Hebrews is a wonderful testimony to the supremacy of Christ and a robust encouragement to perseverance in the faith, but the Greek can be a bit tricky and we can

all do with some help in tracking the argument. So what commentaries are useful? When I was a student, **FF Bruce** (NICNT, 1964) was recommended to me as the best commentary on exegesis of the text and **PE Hughes** (1977) as the best on the theology. Of these Bruce has probably lasted the better as a general commentary on Hebrews; Hughes' interest in reading Hebrews in the light of the rest of the NT may actually blunt his appreciation of its distinctive theological witness.

Later, in giving lectures on Hebrews I found **HW Attridge** (Hermeneia, 1989) absolutely wonderful as a careful reading of the text at a range of different (and fairly technical) levels. **WL Lane** (Word, 2 vols 1991) complemented this with more attention to the structure of the argument, the biblical theology assumed and implied by the use of the OT, and an attention to the pastoral nature of the argument (as well as its contemporary applicability). Lane also makes a strong case for a Roman destination for the letter, a view which hasn't persuaded everyone, but I think is pretty plausible [*Ed: I agree*]. Increasingly I found the older commentaries by **BF Westcott** (Macmillan, 1889) and **J Moffat** (ICC, 1924) not so useful; Westcott especially seems to over-read fine distinctions in the Greek.

But now we have a further array of offerings. **Paul Ellingworth** (NIGTC 1993) is best as an aid to careful consecutive reading of the Greek text (on which it is excellent), less strong on the flow of thought. **David A deSilva** (Eerdmans, 2000) offers a 'Socio-Rhetorical' approach, which basically stands for a range of rhetorical, social-scientific, cultural-anthropological and ideologically oriented approaches. There are a lots of things that this commentary doesn't do, but it is stimulating and challenging and is by no means antiquarian; 'Bridging the Horizons' sections bring large sections to bear on contemporary situations in creative ways. This will help you think new thoughts (even if some of them are: 'this can't be right').

Even more directed to contemporary application is **George H Guthrie** (NIV Application, 1998) which has large print, anecdotes, songs and hymns etc., but it is based in a careful study of the text. **Craig R Koester** (AB, 2001) offers a general commentary with two distinctive emphases: relating the text to the dynamics within the community for which it was written and an attention to the rhetorical aspects of the text. Not really commentaries at all but worth mentioning are **Robert P Gordon** (Readings, 2000) which is a helpfully independent reading of Hebrews from an Old Testament scholar with a sense of humour; and the IVP Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture volume on Hebrews (edited by **EM Heen & PDW Krey**, 2005) which is a chain of snippets from patristic commentators (OK for dipping, but not the main course).

Best buy? For preachers probably still Lane who does everything pretty well.

Peter Head, Cambridge

[Ed: William Lane's very readable paperback, Hebrews: A Call to Commitment (originally published by Hendrickson, now by Regent College Publishing; 1988/2004) is a fine tracing of the letter's argument and summary of his commentary. If you can't get it from your local bookstore, it can be bought for about six pounds from several vendors through Amazon]

Letters to the Editor

Patrick Blair writes from Lymington,

'As a contribution re keeping up Hebrew, I use *More Light on the Path*, daily scripture readings in Hebrew and Greek by David Baker & Elaine Heath, published by Baker books in the USA [ISBN: 0801021650]...it may help some reader to have it as a refresher which is not too demanding.'

Thanks, Patrick. This is a companion volume to an earlier Light on the Path; both offer daily Greek and Hebrew verses to translate with a bit of help.

Dr Tim Meadowcroft, one of the righteous supporters of BSB, writes from New Zealand, Regarding commentary series, you might be interested in two efforts, both of which I am involved with. The first is the Asia Bible Commentary series supported by the Asia Theological Association, published in both Singapore and India. Six volumes out so far. The other is the Hypertext bible commentary series (www.bible.gen.nz). One volume now in final form, others pending, and a supporting on-line dictionary project under way.

Thanks, Tim!

Translation Matters

In a kind letter supportive of BSB, Frank Gough from Bromley sent me a handout revealing the work he has done on the difficult root to translate found in the Greek words epieikeia (Acts 24,4; 2Cor. 10,1) and epieikes, (Phil. 4,5; 1Tim. 3,3; Titus 3,2; James 3,17; 1Pet. 2,18). According to William Barclay, epieikeia is 'the most untranslatable of Greek nouns', and Karl Barth said it was 'hardly rendered in translation by a single word'--quite a claim given the German language's capacity to create composite vocabulary. Anyway, Frank goes on to write,

I have recently done a little study on arrabon [both the Hebrew original and the Greek derivation; 2 Cor 1.22; 5.5; Eph 1.14]; having studied law, and done legal work both before and after ordination, the legal parts of the Bible interest me. Abraham's purchase of the field of Machpelah, for example, and Boaz's confirming his agreement to be the redeemer of Naomi and Ruth (which is a type of contract where its form is critical, as used to be the case in English law for a covenant, though that is no longer so). In early Greek law, a contract was confirmed by one party picking up a stone from the ground and passing it to the other party (cf. Boaz's sandal). When that contract was a betrothal, the man at one stage started to give his lady a semi-precious or precious stone and later that was put in a ring. It is interesting that the modern Greek word for engagement ring is arrabon.

Interesting indeed! A sermon illustration here, perhaps?

John Oakey (apologies, John, for 'Oakley' in our last issue) writes from St Albans,

Another oddity is the story of the widow of Nain's son (Lk 7.14) where NIV speaks of the lad being carried in a coffin, which is absurd. The Jews in those days did not

bury their dead in coffins. Did someone thoughtfully provide Lazarus with a handy crowbar? The word 'bier' is correct and well understood [*Ed: that depends...*]. Biers may be seen in old churches and museums. A case of 'dumbing down' perhaps? NEB, JB and NRSV all offer 'bier'.

While working hard on his Word series commentary on Acts, Steve Walton kindly paused to suggest in response to an earlier letter from Michael Wray on difficulties translating the phrase 'the Jews' in John's gospel that the TNIV is helpful. It translates hoi Ioudaioi contextually as 'Jewish leaders'. I like what I've seen of the Today's NIV translation; it's fixed a number of problems in the original NIV, and is the one I would recommend for most people, if asked for an opinion. See their web site, www.tniv.info for more information.

Computer Corner

• The latest and greatest version of Accordance has now been released (7.03), making the best software for biblical study even better. New features include improved facilities for multiple users, better tools for text comparison and automatic highlighting of differences, the ability to search for Greek roots (e.g. finding not only *lambano*, but *paralambano* forms in the same search), new graph and chart options, lots of options to customize layouts and screens and a slide show option for presentations. For details go to their website (www.accordancebible.com).

Grove Biblical Series

This month, Grove veteran John Proctor looks at the Gospel of Luke, which is the featured gospel in the Revised Common Lectionary for the next few months. A superb teacher in the Cambridge Theological Federation, John offers an excellent introduction to Luke's purpose and content in a booklet that will be accessible and helpful for a wide range of readers.

Individual titles in the Biblical Series are available direct from Grove Books at **£2.95 each**. Annual subscription (4 books) costs **£8.50, a saving of 28%**. Call, fax, email sales@grovebooks.co.uk or visit www.grovebooks.co.uk to order.

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