

Biblical Studies Bulletin

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New Resources —————

In 1998 IVP produced a chunky and under-rated volume entitled *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, edited by Donald K. McKim. With relatively little fanfare (or did I just miss it?), this has now been significantly revised and extended, with a larger page size and formatted to match the wide range of impressive biblical studies 'dictionaries' characteristic of this publisher. Thus, under the same editor, we now have a *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Nottingham and Grand Rapids, IL: IVP, 2007; xxviii + 1106 pp; hb; £29.99; ISBN 978-1-84474-194-6).

At a time when the history of interpretation is rightly coming much more into focus, and the ongoing significance of prior interpretations is being felt more deeply than for a long time, this is a wonderful resource. The bulk of the dictionary consists of 229 biographical entries, now arranged in alphabetical order (in contrast to their appearance in chronologically-ordered sections in the earlier edition, when there were 102 entries spread over six different eras). Although there is no pro-forma approach adopted, entries typically subdivide into sections on the life and context of the interpreter, an analysis of their major works, then themes in their works (sometimes as separate headings), and then often a brief concluding paragraph on their significance. Bibliographies, notably longer in this revision, divide into the main works of the person discussed and then critical studies of them. Now gathered at the front are the six lengthy essays which originally opened the chronological sections of the earlier edition, in two cases elegantly updated by Anthony Thiselton.

In general, my sense is that articles preserved from the 1998 edition have been only minimally updated, which leads to some odd results in the case of scholars still living at that time (eg James Barr and Brevard Childs, for whom major works are not discussed). But probably the great value of this work is in its offering of

concise and well-informed summaries of figures from longer ago. It is theologically broad: catholic with a small 'c' (and of course frequently talking about figures from before a time when today's labels made sense). I wonder if the study of the history of interpretation is one of the most theologically constructive ways of realising how much readers play a part in scriptural interpretation, and sermons which take on board just a little bit of that history seem to me to invite their hearers into a wider and more fascinating world than is present to our day-to-day experience. One may hope then that this wonderful resource will broaden many horizons, in both academy and church.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, Durham

Book of the Year?_____

Congratulations to Richard Bauckham, whose excellent book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Cambridge / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) has won the 2009 Michael Ramsey Prize for theological writing, an award designed to highlight fresh and original works which change the theological landscape while nourishing the life of the church. (Previous winners were, in 2005, Tom Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, and in 2007, Fr Timothy Radcliffe's *What is the Point of Being a Christian?*) Grove readers will recall B48's digest by Prof Bauckham himself, *The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*. Watch forthcoming Grove titles carefully to spot the 2011 winner in due course...

The Other Holy Land_____

Many people travel to Israel for pilgrimage or study tour, but there is also much to see in Turkey. I had the privilege and pleasure of joining a pilgrimage / study tour of the seven cities of Revelation with Derby Diocese in May, and it was a great experience. We were able not only to visit the seven cities themselves, but also other important sites such as Miletus, Priene and Aphrodisias.

Excavation in the past has been undertaken by parties from different countries, notably the UK and Germany, but it appears that the Turkish authorities are taking a much greater interest now. As a result, much of Laodicea has excavated in the last five to six years, and it is possible to walk down the main street and see typical homes in a way that was not previously possible. Whilst we were there, active excavation was continuing; I don't think I will forget the sight of a man with a hammer 'encouraging' two pieces of column to go together!

There is an increasing number of books on the seven cities available. But I took with me an academic work by Steven Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, subtitled 'Reading Revelation in the ruins' (1999). Friesen is one of the leading authorities on the significance of the first century cult for our understanding of Revelation.

Friesen offers some illuminating case studies from the different cities. At Miletus, in front of the *bouleuterion* (or council chamber), there is a monumental altar set within a peristyle courtyard, but of a later date. Friesen draws together evidence showing that this was not a tomb, as first thought, but an imperial altar set at the heart of local decision-making. At Aphrodisias there is an imperial cult sanctuary known as the Sebasteion. It contained within it female statues depicting the nations (*ethnoi*) that has been conquered by imperial Rome, the figures frequently depicted as submissive and humiliated. The museum on site includes a plinth marked *ETHNOUS IOUDAION*. Around the walls were various reliefs depicting emperors subduing personified nations, and conquering both land and sea. All this contributes fascinating background to the rhetorical context for reading Revelation.

Friesen cites reasons to believe that the colossal statue in the Ephesus Museum was of Titus, not of Domitian. But his overall argument demonstrates the steady progression of the imperial cult, from respect and veneration on the fringes of the cities, into the precincts and ending with altars at the centres of local power. You can see my best pictures on Facebook. Find my profile if you are a user, or go to: <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=97228&id=573122343&l=61000df2b2> if not.

Revd Dr Ian Paul, Dean of Studies, St John's College, Nottingham

Comments on Commentaries

The book of Proverbs was widely neglected in Christian interpretation during much of the twentieth century. Two commentaries that set the standard at the turn of the 19th/20th century were **Delitzsch** (1873; ET by Gaston, 1875) and **Toy** (ICC, 1899), and both can still be consulted with benefit. **McKane** (OTL, 1970), an influential commentary in the seventies and eighties, made a strong case for the proverbs being atomistic. He saw a linear development from secular to religious proverbs, but such an understanding of ancient wisdom literature has now largely been abandoned. The commentary is nonetheless very valuable for its excellent introduction to ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts that are similar to Proverbs and for its excellent detailed discussions of the text, grammar and syntax of individual verses.

Since the 1990s, however, the book's use in the Church has received a boost through an unusually high number of excellent commentaries. A key question about the interpretation of the book of Proverbs is whether or not the individual proverbs or sayings in chapters 10–31 should be read in isolation or in context with other proverbs in the book, either in the literary context of small groupings or across diverse chapters by looking at sayings that treat the same or similar themes. **Garrett** (NAC, 1993) provides a solid evangelical interpretation based on contextual arrangements. **Murphy** (WBC, 1998) is one of the best commentaries available, based on thorough exegesis, theologically rich and attuned to contextual arrangements. **Perdue** (Interpretation, 2000) has good, brief introductory sections with brief, practical statements on most verses that are specifically designed with the preacher in mind. **Van Leeu-**

wen (NIB, 1997) has a creative verse-by-verse interpretation with a view to practical application, mostly but not exclusively taking verses as contextually independent units. **Clifford's** commentary (OTL, 1999) replaces the earlier volume by McKane in the same series, providing a concise but theologically rich analysis of individual verses. **Whybray** (NCB, 1994) was one of the pioneers of interpreting individual verses in smaller groupings, and this commentary is less technical but based on thorough exegesis and theologically rich. It explains in an accessible way why the various English Bible translations differ from one another and is extremely helpful for sermon preparation. **Longman** (BCOTWP, 2006) has some good observations in the verse-by-verse commentary, interpreting individual sayings independent of surrounding materials, and includes compilations of verses on the same or similar themes that are very helpful for thematic sermons.

The last two commentaries mentioned here (both in two volumes) are highly technical and extremely thorough. **Waltke** (NICOT, 2004; 2005) writes from a decidedly evangelical perspective. The first volume includes a very thorough introduction with over 100 pages on the theology of Proverbs alone, followed by very detailed, exegetically sophisticated and theologically rich comments, interpreting each verse in its own right and in its literary context. As a whole this commentary is outstanding. There are just two minor drawbacks. First, there is so much material to wade through, but the effort is almost always worthwhile for those who persist. Second, there are many errors in the cross-references to verses elsewhere in Proverbs and the Bible. (This does not devalue the commentary, but all Bible references need to be checked individually, as there are errors on almost every other page in some sections.) **Fox** (AB, 2000; 2009) has written a very detailed commentary that draws on the best of the medieval Jewish commentators and his own highly original observations. Written from a purely academic perspective, it nonetheless has rich theological content and excellent detailed observations.

The volumes by Waltke and Fox are most recommended for academic study (and also valuable for sermon preparation), and the volumes by Murphy and Whybray are most recommended for sermon preparation (and also valuable for academic study).

Knut Heim, Lecturer in Biblical Studies, The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham

Book Reviews

James McKeown, *Genesis* (The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008; pp x, 398; pb; ISBN 978-0-8028-2705-0.)

The first volume in this new series was reviewed in BSB 50. In this volume as that one nearly the same amount of space is given to essays about Genesis as to sequential comment on sections of the text (170 pages against 176) in order to engage in 'theological exegesis of the text'. However I found myself rather disappointed by the theological engagement that was offered. For example there is an extensive

(64 pages) and not unhelpful discussion of how the key themes of descendants, blessing and land appear throughout Genesis. But this didn't lead on to significant discussion of the implications of all this for theology – or even for contemporary Christian faith. There is a 23 page discussion of 'Genesis and science' but this was essentially a discussion of whether Genesis should be read in a 'creationist' way rather than of the far more interesting question (to my mind) of what an interpretation of Genesis might contribute to a Christian understanding of science. Other sections – for example those looking at mission and the place of women – though briefer had more to offer. But overall rather than an exciting new attempt to do sustained and distinctively theological engagement with Genesis I felt we had a short commentary and a collection of essays whose contents are little different to what the intended readership of evangelical students and pastors would find elsewhere.

Keith Beech-Grüneberg, Diocese of Oxford

Ben Witherington's series of socio-rhetorical commentaries on the NT continues with *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians and the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007; pp xii+382; pb; ISBN 978-0802824882). Ephesians, he says, is a piece of epideictic rhetoric, dealing in general terms with ideas and values that deserve proclamation, praise or blame. It is a homily, an encyclical rather than a pastoral letter to a particular place. Colossians and Philemon, by contrast, are examples of deliberative rhetoric – persuasive, particular and problem-solving.

There is some borrowing of language from Colossians to Ephesians, but by a common author. And this is Paul – although possibly helped by Timothy or others. For the distinctive style of these letters reflects a deliberately affected 'Asiatic rhetoric'. In this part of the empire the tradition was of elaborate and effusive oratory, full of gracious and striking turns of phrase, with lengthy, flowing and complex sentences. That Paul wrote in this local register is a straightforward and credible explanation for the character of the writing. Yet that need not be a false or unworthy thing to do. Used with conviction and cultural relevance, careful rhetoric addresses an audience in terms and ways that they can recognise and respond to.

In Philemon 'Paul is pushing for liberation' (28) of the slave Onesimus, but he is more careful in the other two letters, written to people he knew less well. There he 'adopts various ameliorating tactics to deal with slave-master relationships' (34). The Colossian heresy is chiefly an esoteric Jewish philosophy (110). And the famous 'armour of God' passage at the end of Ephesians evokes the thought of a commander addressing his troops on the eve of battle (346f).

Witherington's writings have ranged wide, and he surely has not time to dig as deep as more specialist authors do. Yet I find that he continues to unearth fresh and worthwhile insights. There are scripture and modern author indices, and an annotated bibliography.

John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge

Maurice Casey has worked for over thirty years on the Son of Man and related issues, particularly on the Aramaic background of the gospels and on their christology. So he is able to draw together a very great deal of learning, argument and conviction

into *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007; Library of NT Studies 343; pp xiv+359; hb; ISBN 978-0567030696).

In three chapters, over more than a hundred pages, Casey surveys research and opens up some general and background issues. Then chapters 4-9 discuss sayings that he judges authentic, and chapters 9-12 those that he doesn't. None in John are authentic, for example, nor many of the synoptic words that concern future eschatology, nor some of the passion predictions. Exegesis of scripture and an increasingly high christology led the early church to develop these as part of their gospel traditions.

For Casey, much work on this topic has been blighted by ignorance of Aramaic, by inattention to the cultural background of some of these sayings, and by the belief that there was a quasi-christological *Son of Man Concept* in early Judaism. There was no such thing, he argues, and neither Daniel nor Enoch carries any evidence for it. Rather the expression 'son of man', in authentic sayings of Jesus, often has both a general and a specific connotation, setting the speaker's present experience within a wider framework of human capacity or circumstance. So Mark 2.10, for example, is 'a general statement which refers especially to the speaker ... Jesus' power was at least potentially available to other human beings. At the same time it was a real reference to himself in particular ...' (167).

The arguments are necessarily complex and technical, but Casey signposts and summarises his work in helpful ways. While his conclusions will hardly command all-round assent, his desire that more scholars learn Aramaic is salutary. This should enable those who disagree with Casey to discuss his arguments in detail, and bring us all nearer to the roots of the oral gospel traditions.

John Proctor, Westminster College, Cambridge

Grove Biblical Series —————

This month's Grove booklet (B52) is *Inspiring Women* by Ruth Perrin, a fascinating study looking at how we might make more of the minor characters in the biblical text that preachers often overlook but listeners often find so valuable.

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