

Biblical Studies Bulletin

Edited by Richard S Briggs—Published Quarterly—Read Religiously—Disposed of Reluctantly—Free to Grove Biblical Subscribers

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News —————

The latest archaeological findings from the Holy Land have concerned a 'Jesus-era' burial shroud, found in a long-sealed tomb near the Old City of Jerusalem (reported mid-December). Since this tomb had been sealed shut, it turned out to be the first of over a 1000 excavated tombs to contain a shroud which could be dated to the time of Jesus. Some reports suggested the tomb had been sealed because the corpse was leprous. Part of the headline on this occasion was that the shroud was very different from the controversial Turin Shroud, and added further weight to the claim that the Turin Shroud had nothing to do with Jesus. The *National Geographic* website carried a lengthy analysis of the whole story, and related issues.

66 Chapters/66 Books —————

We have had some animated editorial correspondence in Grove-world (in other words: one person sent an email) about the possible significance of the fact that the book of Isaiah has 66 chapters. Does this relate to the 66 books of the Bible? A quick trawl of internet sites revealed that there is no shortage of theories about how the biblical books can be illuminated by being matched up to the chapters of Isaiah. Most of these theories tell us more about the creative minds of those doing the matching rather than the content of Isaiah and the Bible. And if one goes too far then you are left looking for significance in, for example, the 53rd book of the Bible (2 Thessalonians) to match the suffering servant passage—this seems a bit of a stretch really.

Nevertheless, it is really quite striking that the chapters of Isaiah divide 1–39 in relation to the concerns of the 8th century Isaiah of Jerusalem, and 40–66 looking to

newer times, while the OT contains 39 books and the NT has books numbers 40 to 66.

Well, we were unable to come to any significant conclusions about this in time to include a note in this month's Grove book. But the question must be: did Archbishop Stephen Langton, in dividing the biblical texts into chapters some time in the 13th century, perceive any kind of significance in this split? Do we even know how many books of the Bible there would have been in the Vulgate (Latin) Bible that Langton would have been using? Or is it all just a coincidence?

In the absence of any conclusions from us, we thought it might be worth flagging this up to BSB readers to see whether any of you know anything about this, or have come across any serious reflection on it? Let us know...

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

Comments on Commentaries

After 14 years and 55 issues, we have now commented on commentaries on everything, beginning with Jonah way back in issue 1, and ending here with the minor prophets, in a rather nice inclusio... We hope to continue to update this resource in coming years.

The Minor Prophets

The twelve 'minor prophets' consist of an intriguing mix of prophetic books, often obscure in setting and message, but with many gems, and with Jonah thrown in as the joker in the pack. This review focuses on recent commentaries that cover them all in one or two volumes. But first we should note the availability online of older classics, particularly Calvin, Matthew Henry and Edward Pusey. Their detailed comment outweighs many recent volumes that need to treat all twelve in brief compass.

These include the lively **Peter Craigie's** *Daily Study Bible* (2 vols, 1984, 1985) and the evocative treatment, especially by William Brown, in the *Westminster Bible Companion* (*Hosea, Joel, Amos* by **Bruce Birch**, 1996 and *Obadiah through Malachi* by **William Brown**, 1997). The Jewish commentator **Marvin Sweeney** (*Berit Olam*; 2 vols, 2000) gets the prize for the largest recent one-man commentary on everything, although its orientation is restricted largely to literary and historical matters.

Generally two or more authors divide the work in half, though often not with the same quality or quantity. In the outstanding *Interpretation* series we find good theological treatments by **James Limburg** (1988) and **Elizabeth Achtemeier** (1986). For the *New International Biblical Commentary* we have the dependable **Elizabeth Achtemeier** again (1996), and the set has just been completed by the indefatigable **John Goldingay** and **Pamela Scalise** (2009). In the Abingdon *AbOTC* series **Daniel Simundson** (2005) tackles the first six rather prosaically, but **Julia O'Brien** (2004) provides insightful exegesis and fine theological analysis for the rest. In the *Word* series **Douglas Stuart** (1987; new edition on the way) has written a thoughtful commentary on the first six, which makes **Ralph Smith's** other volume (1984) look rather thin. If detailed work on the Hebrew text is desired, then the volume by **Keil** in the old Keil-Delitzsch series should not be ignored (reprinted paperback 2007). Comment on both the Hebrew and English text by different authors distinguishes the three volumes edited by **Thomas McComiskey** (Baker Books *Exegetical and Expository Commentary* series, orig 1992, 1993, 1998 but 2009 sees a massive one volume edition). One author each also characterizes the *New Interpreter's Bible* (NIB) Vol 7 (1996), with helpful contributions on both

exegesis and broader thematic reflection (Daniel is also included in NIB7).

For preaching I would be inclined to turn first to Limburg and O'Brien or Achtemeier, then NIB. For more detail on words and verses I would turn to Stuart and McComiskey, although they are then beginning to compete with more specialized commentaries.

Philip Jenson, Ridley Hall, Cambridge

(Ed: Philip has not had space to consider all the commentary series which work their way through the minor prophets in several volumes, so he has not been able to mention the rather excellent *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (LHBOTS 496; London: T&T Clark, 2008), by one P Jenson).

Isaiah—An Update

Isaiah featured in 'Comments on Commentaries' in a survey by Jo Bailey Wells in BSB 6 back in December 1997. This month's Grove book, *Reading Isaiah*, includes some updated recommendations, including works that are not just commentaries, and we incorporate some of those suggestions here for an update (and for web-based readers in the future, who should of course buy B55 anyway...).

It is fitting to note first **Jo Bailey Wells'** own little commentary (People's Bible Commentary, 2006), which pulls off the remarkable feat of offering a wise devotional commentary in daily readings. For a manageable overview of the whole book see also **John Goldingay's** NIBCOT volume (2001). With one eye on preaching and using the text today, there is always **Walter Brueggemann's** Westminster Bible Companion (2 vols; 1997) as long as the preacher remembers that Isaiah probably didn't have American foreign policy in mind in the first instance. The excellent New Interpreter's Bible series is strong on Isaiah, in volume 6 (2001), with **G M Tucker** on chs 1–39, and **C R Seitz** on chs 40–66.

More heavyweight treatments in recent years include **Brevard Childs'** 'canonical' treatment (OTL; 2001), and a 3-volume Anchor Bible commentary from **Joseph Blenkinsopp** (2000-03), though neither of these will be first ports of call for the preacher. The long-running ICC series is slowly turning out what looks like a 7-volume production on Isaiah (!), with **H G M Williamson** on chs 1–5 (2006) being excellent but working in immense detail, and **John Goldingay** and **David Payne** in 2 vols on chs 40–55 (2005-06). Preachers may nevertheless benefit from this latter production by reading the edited (but still lengthy) highlights in **John Goldingay's** 'literary-theological' *The Message of Isaiah 40–55* (T&T Clark, 2005).

Finally, a note on the interest in the history of interpretation of Isaiah. Readers are now well-served in this area, with two mighty volumes in IVP's Ancient Christian Commentary Series (ed **Steven McKinion**, 2004, on chs 1–39; and ed **Mark Elliott**, 2007, on chs 40–66), a large-format volume in The Church's Bible series (ed **Robert Louis Wilken**, 2007), and a book by **Childs** again entitled *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Eerdmans, 2004).

For preaching I would recommend the NIB commentaries in vol 6 of that excellent series, by Tucker and Seitz, while Brueggemann and Goldingay are always trusted companions for those wanting to bring the OT alive in the pulpit.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

BSB's Comments on Commentaries—The Index

Cut out and keep this handy guide in a Bible near you, so that whenever you are about to start planning that next sermon series you know where to turn.

Old Testament

Genesis	11	March 99
Exodus	15	March 00
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New Testament

Matthew 4 June 97—*update in* 33 Sept 04
Mark 9 Sept 98—*update in* 37 Sept 05
Luke 6 Dec 97
John 11 March 99

Acts 12 June 99

Romans 3 March 97
1 Corinthians 8 June 98
2 Corinthians 7 March 98
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Philippians 5 Sept 97
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1 & 2 Thessalonians 15 March 00
1 & 2 Timothy & Titus 19 March 01
Philemon 10 Dec 98

Hebrews 41 Sept 06
James 16 June 00
1 Peter 21 Sept 01
2 Peter & Jude 30 Dec 03
1, 2 & 3 John 47 March 08

Revelation 1 Sept 96—*update in* 14 Dec 99

New Commentary Series (40 June 06)

Books which review commentaries! (51 March 09)

Book Review

Susan Gillingham, *Psalms Through the Centuries: Volume One* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp xv + 382, hb, ISBN 978 0 631 21855 5; £60)

This has been on my review shelf for far too long, but what a fascinating (and lengthy!) volume it is. Beautifully produced, with several illustrations, and packing large amounts of small text on each page, Gillingham effectively walks us through a history of biblical interpretation in its ecclesial/Jewish/social contexts with a focal point of the Psalter. Five key areas of reception are tracked: exposition, instruction, liturgy, translation, and aesthetic representation; and the book operates in six broad chronological areas, from the Psalter itself and reception in the NT and early church, right through to the 20th/21st centuries. The changing emphases, and in particular the ways in which Jewish and Christian traditions have differed, are laid out clearly, and there is a startling mass of examples patiently catalogued and described. No-one could read this book without learning a vast amount. Personal highlights: watching Aquinas work on Ps 8; seeing the selection of the 7 penitential psalms, the basis for which Gillingham describes as 'unclear'; seeing illustrations from stained glass windows (eg Chagall); or looking at the issues in and impact of different translations. The final chapter includes a whirlwind survey of critical studies and devotional works. The whole is intended as a prelude to a second volume, a 'reception commentary' on the 150 individual Psalms. The book, like most in these series, is excellent on coverage but thin on evaluation (indeed there is hardly any at all), and one hopes that volume 2 might remedy this a little. But in the meantime one may hope that a paperback edition might appear soon to make it more affordable.

Richard S Briggs, Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham

Grove Biblical Series

This month's Grove booklet (B55) is by none other than the BSB editor himself, Richard Briggs: *Reading Isaiah: A Beginner's Guide*. It looks at a range of issues through studying particular texts, focusing on history, literary characteristics, and theological questions; and reflects on how one might preach Isaiah today.

Individual titles in the Biblical Series are available direct from Grove Books at **£3.95** each. Annual subscription (4 books) costs **£11.00, a saving of 30%**. Call, fax, email sales@grovebooks.co.uk or visit www.grovebooks.co.uk to order.

Contributions to BSB should be sent to: Richard Briggs (Editor—*Biblical Studies Bulletin*) at Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham DH1 3RJ (or via email to: richard.briggs@durham.ac.uk). Unsolicited material is welcome, but it cannot be returned.

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