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Book Reviews

A METHOD OF PRAYER Freedom in the Face of God

Matthew Henry

Christian Focus Publications Ltd: Fearn, Rosshire, Scotland, 2006 304pp

£7.99pb ISBN: 1 87592 391X/0 90673 1569

First a confession: one of the parishes that I serve was the birthplace and childhood home of Matthew Henry. Therefore, I am biased. But this is really one of the most helpful books on prayer I have come across and we are all in the debt of Ligon Duncan, of Jackson, Mississippi, for editing it.

The great strength of Henry's work is that it teaches to pray for what Scripture teaches us to pray for, in the language that Scripture uses. Chapters 1–5 and 7 are the heart of the book, in which Henry takes us through the 'parts' of prayer: adoration, confession, petition and supplication (i.e. prayer for ourselves), thanksgiving, intercession (prayer for others), and 'conclusion'. Each chapter is divided and subdivided into a list of what we should pray for. Under each sub-heading, Henry then gives some sample prayers, all of which are paraphrases of Scripture (in the Authorized Version). So to use Henry's 'method' is to meditate on Scripture and let it shape our thoughts, desires and requests. There is nothing mechanical about this: it is a method that leads to freedom.

One has the sense of looking over Matthew Henry's shoulder as he is writing his great Commentary, and regularly breaking off to pray over what he has studied. Chapter 8 is an extended paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, showing how it can be used not only as a 'form' of prayer, but as a 'model or pattern of prayer'. Henry also gives two chapters of sample prayers one for 'particular occasions' and 'short forms of prayer for the use of those who may not be able to collect for themselves out of the foregoing materials'. Some of these are for children, and last for two pages; others for use by families are even longer! Clearly, (and what an indictment of us), these cannot be used as they stand, but they should be an inspiration for us to write our own. The book then has three of Henry's sermons on how to begin, spend, and end the day with God.

Ligon Duncan has then added three excellent appendices. The first is a summary of the book, giving Henry's section headings without the actual prayers. As one can get lost in the structure of points and sub-points, this is

invaluable. Then there is Duncan's summary of 'Some Principles for Public Prayer' by Samuel Miller. Finally—and here we strike gold—Duncan gives his own modernized and updated version of the outline. This could easily be copied, and kept in a Bible as a quick reference to guide prayer times.

This is not a book to be hurried! If you use it, your prayer times will certainly be longer, but also richer. A couple of centuries ago, it was common for Non-Conformist ministers to use Henry's prayers verbatim in corporate worship. Whilst the language is now too dated for this, ministers will still find it a good spur and inspiration. Put Churchman down and go and buy this book.

STEPHEN WALTON

Marbury

A HISTORY OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION Vol. 1

The Ancient Period

A. J. Hauser and D. F. Watson (eds.)

Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003 536pp £32.95 hb ISBN: 0-8028-4273-9

This substantial volume opens an ambitious multi-volume history of biblical interpretation, Jewish and Christian, through the ages. Some of the other volumes are also now in print.

The opening volume is the work of many contributors, and comprises a general introduction and fifteen other chapters devoted to special topics. There are distinguished essays by Esther Menn on inner-biblical exegesis in the Old Testament, by Peter Borgen on Philo, by Martin MacNamara on the targums, and by Dennis Brown on Jerome and the Vulgate. The essay by Leonard Greenspoon on the Septuagint is very miscellaneous, but contains a certain amount of useful information. Some of the other essays are adequate rather than distinguished. An essay on the Peshitta and Syriac exegesis is a conspicuous omission.

The least satisfactory essays are those that deal with the canon. Harry Gamble on the New Testament canon at least looks at evidence and considers other views, but he opts for the perverse theory that the Muratorian Fragment dates only from the fourth century, thus distorting the history of his topic. While, on the Old Testament canon, Philip Davies gives a misleading account of the evidence from Qumran, and James Sanders writes an essay, based almost

entirely on speculation, in which he argues that the canon of the Law and the canon of the Prophets were both closed within the fifth century BC, but the canon of the Hagiographa not until the second century AD! If there were no evidence on the matter, such speculation might be merely implausible, but as things are, it is quite impossible.

ROGER BECKWITH
Oxford

THE WATER AND THE WINE

A Contribution to the debate on children and Holy Communion

Roger Beckwith and Andrew Daunton-Fear

London: The Latimer Trust, 2005 77pp £4.50pb ISBN: 0 946307 547

The issue of infant communion is controversial amongst Anglican Evangelicals. Although it would be a great sadness if in any way this caused a breakdown in fellowship, nonetheless the issue merits serious debate. In a recent article in *Churchman*, Matthew Mason argued for the admission of children to the Lord's Supper. His article was in part an answer to Roger Beckwith and Andrew Daunton-Fear's Latimer Study which has not as yet been reviewed and deserves careful study. Dr. Beckwith and Dr. Daunton-Fear argue closely for maintaining the traditional Anglican pattern of baptism—confirmation and reception of Communion. The 'parish-communion' movement which has been so disastrous in so many ways—not least to the inevitable devaluation of the sermon—has added to the pressure of admitting young children to the Lord's Table.

We are given a detailed study of the Old Testament background, and the distinction is made, and this was new to the reviewer, between the Passover of Egypt, which is what is celebrated in Jewish homes today, and the Passover of the Generations, which is what our Lord celebrated when instituting the Lord's Supper. The Passover of the Generations was a pilgrim feast celebrated by adults in Jerusalem. In instituting the Christian Passover meal, the Holy Communion, Jesus gave a significant indication for who it was intended by making the wine for the first time one of the instituted elements.

So it was intended for those who were of an age to drink wine, namely adults. Elsewhere Jesus gives a grave warning against causing little ones to stumble,

and He would probably have regarded giving alcohol to children as falling within the scope of this warning.

The New Testament evidence is also examined in depth. Here it is argued that baptism and confirmation must be seen as going together. Confirmation, as such, is clearly not mentioned in the New Testament, but baptism is generally associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and is for those who have repented and put their faith in Jesus. Infants lacked this and although they were baptised their initiation was incomplete. To receive the body and blood of Christ worthily in Communion one needs to be old enough to discern the significance of the bread and the wine, and also to understand the gospel that is proclaimed in the Lord's Supper. It makes sense then that this should follow a sincere profession of faith in Christ, reception of God's Spirit, as full outward initiation into the Church.

The Patristic writers—authors such as Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen and Cyprian—are all scrutinised, and although they do not carry the weight of the New Testament, they can be a helpful clue as to how the early church understood the New Testament practice. The same can be said of the sixteenth century Reformers, and notably our own Book of Common Prayer.

Significantly the rite of Adult Baptism precedes the rite of Infant Baptism, but the right of infants to be baptised is maintained on the basis of the substitute declaration of faith by the parents and godparents. This is a temporary arrangement and confirmation of this temporary arrangement is deferred until the candidate has reached the age of discretion and has exercised faith and repentance. Until, therefore, his/her baptism is completed it would be premature to admit him/her to the Lord's Supper.

The case for the traditional practice is cogently argued and compellingly so, with the possible exception of the little implication at the end of the study that episcopal confirmation has to be the order of the day. Why not the minister of the church who presumably knows the candidates, and does not have to be prompted with little cards with their names on!

JONATHAN FLETCHER
Wimbledon

THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Essays in Mutual Illumination

George J. Brooke

London: SPCK, 2005 xxii + 314pp £20.00pb ISBN: 0-281-05710-9

George Brooke is the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at Manchester University. In this volume he draws together sixteen of his papers, previously published elsewhere, in a revised and updated form, and adds a thoughtful introduction.

Much has been written about the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament, and Professor Brooke's approach is refreshingly moderate and realistic. He recognises that there is no direct interdependence, and that there are decided differences as well as marked similarities. He explains this by the fact that both bodies of literature had their origin in Palestine, in a roughly contemporary Jewish milieu, which ensured that, though they were produced by two distinct schools of thought, they still had much in common.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, for those who study them, are a re-education in the whole field of biblical history and biblical literature. Despite this, study of the Scrolls is still a minority concern and, with the degree of specialization that is customary in modern academic work, few who study them are also expert in New Testament studies.

Books like this are therefore uncommon and important. Specially interesting to many readers will be chapter 8, showing the place of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah in eschatological expectation at Qumran, and chapters 12 to 16, presenting parallels between Qumran literature and specific passages of the New Testament.

When Professor Brooke was beginning his career, the reviewer clashed with him in print over an ill-founded conjecture of his which misled one or two eminent people. It is a pleasure for the reviewer to have this opportunity, twenty-three years later, to say how judicious his later writings have been.

ROGER BECKWITH
Oxford

DOMINION AND DYNASTY**A biblical theology of the Hebrew Bible****Stephen G. Dempster**

Leicester: IVP Apollos, 2003 267pp. £12.99pb ISBN 0-85111-783-X

This volume is the fifteenth in the series *New Studies in Biblical Theology*. The reviewer found it not only an interesting but an exciting book, and, having read it once, looks forward to reading it a second time.

The author attributes the modern preoccupation with the diversity of Scripture, even to the exclusion of its unity, to the ‘progressive secularization of biblical studies’. The many individual human authors are studied, but the single divine author is ignored. Against this tendency the author resolutely sets his face, and endeavours to understand the different parts of the Old Testament not only in themselves, but especially in relation to each other. Thus, he holds that the Song of Songs must be interpreted in the context of the biblical teaching on marriage, not as idolising sex, and Job in the context of the biblical teaching on the providence of God, not as promoting scepticism. This is because the divine author, who stands behind the human authors, is consistent with himself.

Dempster is helped in this approach by having clear views about the canon. He holds that the canon was closed before the time of Jesus, and consisted of three sections, the Law, the Prophets and the Hagiographa, with the books counted as twenty-four, and arranged in the traditional order recorded in the Talmud, as beginning with Genesis and ending with Chronicles (not to be confused with the order followed in printed Hebrew Bibles). In the light of this, he sees each section of the canon as containing a narrative component, covering three successive periods of history, and also a component of a different literary kind, first law, then oracles, and finally lyrics and wisdom-literature. Since Jesus knew the three sections of the Old Testament canon (Luke 24:44), and knew them as recording the martyrdoms of prophets, from Abel, early in Genesis, to Zechariah, late in Chronicles (Luke 11:50-1), this conclusion seems very sound.

The author sees a single story-line as running through the Old Testament narratives, interspersed by commentary, which is provided especially by the collections of oracles and of lyrics and wisdom-literature. It is refreshing to read a book which takes the whole of the Old Testament (including Daniel) at

its face value, allowing one to see how much more convincing and impressive it is when thus treated. He notes verbal and especially theological links between the various parts of the Old Testament. Among other things, he points out how the Prophets begin and end by emphasising the importance of the Law of Moses (Josh. 1:7-8; Mal. 4:4), and how the Hagiographa end by summing up the whole of biblical history, from Adam to the return out of exile (1 Chron. 1: 1; 2 Chron. 36:22-23).

By way of criticism, one might object to the stress on the ‘middle’ of the canon (it has no real middle-point—only a middle section); and also to the rather negative attitude taken to the Christian rearrangement of the Old Testament books, which began very early, had partial Jewish antecedents, and was apparently motivated by a harmless desire for simplicity and intelligibility. But praise, not criticism, is what this book mainly deserves, and with that I must end.

ROGER BECKWITH
Oxford

THE MISSION OF GOD

Christopher J. H. Wright

Nottingham: IVP, 2006 581pp £21.99hb ISBN: 978-1-84474-152-6

The book’s subtitle—‘Unlocking the Bible’s grand narrative’—immediately introduces us to the author’s thesis that ‘our ultimate starting point and finishing point in our biblical theology of mission must be the mission of God’ (p. 416), which he argues well, and thoroughly. In fifteen chapters, with the book split into four parts—‘The Bible and Mission’, ‘The God of Mission’, ‘The People of Mission’, and ‘The Arena of Mission’—he establishes that the way to interpret the message of the Bible is to understand it as an account of God’s mission to his creation.

After seeking to establish the foundation for this hermeneutic in Part 1 (chs. 1 and 2), he proceeds in Part 2 (chs. 3–5) to present the biblical material on the God who has made himself known both to Israel, and in Jesus Christ, and his opposition to all idolatry. In Part 3, he looks at the call of God’s people, particularly focusing on God’s election of Abraham (ch. 6) and then Israel through to the church (ch. 7), ‘God’s Model of Redemption’ in the Exodus (ch.

8) and then ‘God’s Model of Restoration’ in the Jubilee (ch. 9). Chapter 11, ‘The Life of God’s Missional People’, challenges believers to live as those who have been rescued, preventing the book from being an academic treatise removed from daily life.

Part 4 covers ‘Mission and God’s earth’ (ch. 12), what it means to be human (ch. 13), whilst the final two chapters (chs. 14 and 15) examine the relationship between God and the nations, first in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament. No doubt some will disagree with Chris Wright’s definition of ‘mission’ and his integration of the ‘spiritual’ and ‘social’ aspects into God’s single mission (e.g. pp. 270ff). But in chapter 15, ‘Mission and God’s Earth’, he has provided the most coherent biblical argument for Christian involvement in environmental care I have yet to read, setting it within God’s purpose for the whole of his creation.

One extremely helpful aspect of the book is the way that Wright handles Scripture reverently as God’s Word, and treating Old and New Testaments as a unity whilst recognising the particular genres and emphases of individual biblical books. His concern for good exegesis, rather than proof-texting, means that we are examining the text of the Bible again and again, and gaining a grasp of the Bible’s teaching from start to finish, each time being taken to the New Testament and fulfilment in Christ. He is particularly concerned to demonstrate that mission is not a New Testament phenomenon, but that right from Genesis 12, God’s purpose in calling Abraham and Israel was for the blessing of the nations, and ultimately the renewal of the whole creation.

There are good indexes to subjects and biblical references at the end, and the book is full of cross-references to other works, showing how Chris Wright’s thought interacts with other writers. At times, however, this means there are fairly extensive footnotes, which I found distracting. Though not complicated, it is not for the faint-hearted because it is quite lengthy—but it is well worth working through slowly, providing so much food for thought. The particular chapter to strike a chord for me was chapter 5, ‘The Living God Confronts Idolatry’ in which he describes the futility of idolatry and its harm to humanity—which can be so readily applied in various pastoral situations today. His clear statements on the uniqueness of Christ (ch. 4) and the authority of Scripture (pp. 384-5) are refreshingly clear in today’s confused theological culture.

Hopefully this will become a valuable textbook for those studying mission, as well as those actually involved in cross-cultural mission—but it deserves a much wider readership. It has made this reader study the Scriptures more carefully on the lookout for pointers to a ‘missional perspective’, especially when reading the Old Testament. Despite its length, it may be worth another read already.

NEIL WATKINSON
Maidenhead

EXPERIENCING THE SPIRIT: NEW TESTAMENT ESSENTIALS FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

Graham Beynon

Leicester: IVP, 2006 155pp £6.99pb ISBN: 978-1-84474-150-2

The Holy Spirit is essential to the life of every believer and yet many in the Church today continue to misunderstand him. In this book on experiencing the Spirit, Graham Beynon restates the fundamental teaching of the New Testament on the work of the Spirit in a fresh and informative way. Beynon argues that experiencing the Spirit is the ‘normal Christian life’: he helps us to become Christians, to grow as Christians and to serve others. This contribution should help to guard believers from ill-informed controversies and encourage us all to acknowledge the Spirit’s work in our lives.

The strength of this book is its clear focus. The title describes the limited scope of this work which allows the author to concentrate on the key points. Beynon has not attempted to produce a comprehensive summary of all that there is to say on the subject of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Instead, he offers a description of the work of the Holy Spirit by explaining ten key passages in the New Testament. The contents of the individual chapters are summarised and brought together in a useful chapter at the end of the book.

Beynon has aimed this book at every Christian and as a preacher he writes in an engaging manner. The chapters in this work began life as sermons and so are very readable. Each passage is explained insightfully and the main points are summarised as helpful headings. There is some excellent illustrative material with many of the examples coming from everyday life. The passages

are applied to the lives of Christians in a thoughtful and practical way that leaves the reader not only better informed about the work Spirit, but thanking God for their experience of him.

This book would be a useful starting point for any church leader thinking of giving a sermon series on the work of the Spirit or wanting an accessible book on this subject to recommend to their congregations. Equally, the inclusion of study questions at the end of each chapter means that it would be well suited for small groups to use. This is an excellent little book and deserves to be read as widely as possible.

ALISTAIR SEABROOK
Elton

AFRICA BIBLE COMMENTARY:

A One-Volume Commentary written by 70 African Scholars

Tokunboh Adeyemo (General Editor)

Grand Rapids: Zondervan & Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006 1616pp £23.99hb
ISBN: 978-0-31026473-6

The Africa Bible Commentary (ABC) is a publishing landmark because it is the first one-volume Bible commentary to be produced in Africa by African theologians to meet the needs of African pastors. There are two reasons why this is a hard book to review: the first is the question of what makes a Bible commentary ‘African’, and the second is the purely practical issue of how to review over 1600 pages and millions of words some time before the last copy is sold (at which point a review would lack purpose).

The issue of culture in biblical interpretation is clearly the more important one. The editors do not intend to bring a cultural agenda to the text: ‘the ABC does not speak of a Black Jesus. To do so would be a travesty of the Bible story and cheap scholarship’ (p. ix). Instead we might better see this commentary as being African in its scholarship, ownership and readership. All the writers are African scholars whose work should be every bit as rigorous and faithful as anyone else’s. But the point about ownership is that this is one among several vehicles by which the gifts God has given to the church in Africa can serve the African church. A visitor to a theological library in Africa will often notice how

many volumes are written by western scholars and therefore how (relatively) few by Africans. The ABC is a step towards enabling Africa's scholars to find their place in teaching Africa's Bible teachers.

The intended readers are African pastors, but of course if the commentary is faithful and clear enough then any pastor will benefit (more of this below), but the primary reader is African. This should not, and does not, change the exegesis if we expect the text to speak with its own voice, but it will subtly change how the text is heard and applied. To be sure, the continent is so broad that there can be no such creature as the 'average African pastor'. But on the other hand, anything pitched at this notional reader will still be much closer to real African pastors than a one volume commentary aimed at the 'average World pastor'. A further outcome is that non-African readers might also gain from reading work written by authors who wear different cultural spectacles to our own. Thus John Stott writes in his foreword: 'I intend to use [the ABC] myself to gain African insights into the Word of God' (p. vii).

The layout of ABC reflects these priorities. Each biblical book is introduced with a section on structure, pastoral purpose and main themes. This is not a critical commentary and issues are only raised if they are likely to be of immediate concern to the African pastor's work. The commentary gives a section-by-section explanation of the text, with applications relevant to the African context. A second feature of both the explanation and the applications is the use of African proverbs. I suppose these function for Africans in the way that illustrative stories and metaphors work for others and, like illustrations, they generally work well although one or two get in the way of the text. The third feature, now almost ubiquitous in large books, is the use of articles in text boxes. Longer articles introduce Scripture as the Interpreter of Culture and Tradition, the Pentateuch, the Wisdom Literature, the Prophets and Principles of Interpretation. A few dozen shorter articles cover subjects from poverty to favouritism, HIV/AIDS, refugees, war, politics and so on.

Overall, much of the commentary is workmanlike and helpful. I found the epistles, including Revelation, to be well handled, and other parts dipped into were fine. There were some lapses; I felt that the feeding of the five thousand in Luke is about more than the sharing of resources implied in the proverb 'you do not just walk past people building a hut, you stop and contribute by tying

a twig or two'. While the comments on Ruth were very empathetic to the plight of a refugee and a woman, the theme of the whole book was, in my view, obscured by this aspect. But these should be put in the context of many more solid comments on the text. Any assessment of the ABC should remember the stated aims: it is not to be a showcase for African scholarship so much as a workman's tool for serving the African church. This is not therefore the place for cutting-edge narrative analysis, nor indeed for up-to-the minute exegesis, but for accessible biblical commentary. If the church in Africa were to reflect the work of these African scholars in its bible-teaching ministry, then God's people across the continent will be well served indeed.

ED MOLL

Wembdon, Somerset

THE MESSAGE OF ACTS IN CODEX BEZAE

A Comparison with the Alexandrian Tradition:

Volume I Acts 1.1-5.42: Jerusalem

Josep Rius-Camps & Jenny Read-Heimerdinger

NY & London: T&T Clark, 2004 377pp £90.00hb ISBN: 0 8264 7000 9

THE MESSAGE OF ACTS IN CODEX BEZAE

A Comparison with the Alexandrian Tradition: Volume II

Josep Rius-Camps & Jenny Read-Heimerdinger

NY & London: T&T Clark 2006 400pp £70.00hb ISBN: 0 567 04012 7

That Bruce Metzger dedicated nearly a third of his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* to a discussion of the text of Acts is testimony to the complex and contested textual dynamics which constitute the fifth book of the New Testament canon. Behind our English (and Greek) texts lurks an unsettling landscape of alternative readings and, indeed, divergent manuscript traditions. Insofar as it is possible to speak of any kind of scholarly consensus concerning these cross-currents, the majority position since Westcott and Hort favours the 'Alexandrian' textual tradition (e.g. *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Vaticanus*) as offering the best reflection of the original form of Acts. This hypothesis has then typically generated a piecemeal approach to the pluralistic heritage of other manuscript traditions (often grouped together as 'Western' texts), typically casting them as

individual and secondary ‘variant’ readings. In the case of *Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis*, it has been suggested, we see the somewhat clumsy hand of a second-century, anti-Jewish editor.

The Catalan biblical scholar Josep Rius-Camps and Jenny Read-Heimdinger, lecturer in Greek at the University of Bangor, disagree with this scholarly projection and, in these first two of four projected volumes, they launch a sustained presentation of a radical alternative way of reading the textual dynamics of Acts. Their focus is upon one ‘Western’ text (a categorisation which the authors reject, I, pp. 9-10), *Codex Bezae*, and their project presents a synchronic appreciation of Bezae’s whole presentation of Acts rather than a ‘variant’-by-‘variant’ dissection of it. Bezae is, they claim, coherent, subtle, and worthy of such attention.

Quite wisely, the authors do not claim that Bezae grants us the autograph version of Acts but, rather boldly, they do contend that the Bezan text ‘predates that of the Alexandrian tradition and is closer to the language and thought of the third evangelist’ (I, p. 3). This, it is claimed, is ‘because it offers a more nuanced account of the beginnings of Christianity and because it displays a spectrum of theological understanding among the first disciples which it would make little sense to invent and insert into the text at a later date’ (I, p. 35). Regardless of one’s degree of acceptance of this overall claim, the authors’ approach is remarkably accessible to the reader. The Bezan text is examined against one ‘Alexandrian’ text, *Codex Vaticanus*, and every instance of variation is examined. Each volume takes the text section by section, and provides parallel English translations of Vaticanus and Bezae, a critical apparatus and a commentary.

The commentary holds to different priorities from those held by a conventional commentary, priorities reflective of its comparative aims. As such, it is unlikely to be the commentary which pastor-teachers will reach for first. Yet these volumes do offer insights and raise questions which deserve wider consideration, regardless of whether one decides that Bezae points to the primitive text or to early reception history. The most challenging aspect raised for me has been the authors’ contention that there was, within the pages of Acts, a ‘gradual conversion’ of the apostles and other early believers to ‘Jesus’ vision of things’, as revealed previously in Luke’s Gospel (I, p. 34). While

recounting this transformation, the authors propose, Bezan Luke/the narrator does not always agree with what characters proclaim and decide. Bezae's account of the selection of Matthias in Acts 1 provides an early instance of the authors' reading, which claims the pericope as a triumph for narrow Hebraic ways of thinking, over and against a more positive assessment of Diaspora Judaism within the life of the church, which later chapters of Acts develop (I, pp. 129-39).

The effect is, at times, unsettling. This is not necessarily to be resisted: at the very least the reader of these volumes finds his or her existing categories for understanding Acts being reassessed if not revised. Whether one is persuaded by the overall argument concerning the narrative's point of view, there is here a challenge to reconsider the narrative dynamic of realisation and resistance within the believers within Acts. This is a valuable contribution, especially for more conservative readers of the text who might flatten the narrative's shape and stifle its varying voices.

At times, however, the commentary over-extends its connections and risks becoming idiosyncratic, especially given the (stated) lack of interaction with other commentaries on Acts. For example, do Acts 1:13 and 10:9 indicate that upper rooms communicate a resistance to moving away from established religious authority and permanence (I, pp. 101-102, II, p. 249)? Equally, does Samaria's reception of the Word of God in Acts 8 parallel the parable of the soils in Luke 8:4-15 (II, pp. 142-3)—would readers make that kind of connection, and in all the dimensions identified by these authors? Similarly, I wonder whether the healing of the lame man in Acts 3 echoes the Genesis creation accounts to such a degree that it marks 'the beginning of a new act of divine creation, as fundamental in its nature as the first creation of the world' (I, p. 211). There are many other examples of this approach.

I do not wish to kill the overall thesis by a thousand small cuts nor overwhelm the valid insights of this commentary with a list of rhetorical questions, but these observations do raise cumulative questions about the likely value of these volumes for the pastor-teacher. I fear that, despite their informative and provocative insights, this series will remain of more interest to the academy than the church. I hope, however, that it does keep alive our realisation that there is more to the text of Acts than might immediately meet the eye. At this

level, at least, readers of *Churchman* will benefit from the insights afforded by these two volumes and those yet to appear within the series.

MATTHEW SLEEMAN

London

ANCIENT TEXTS FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES: A GUIDE TO THE BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Craig A. Evans

Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2005 xxxvi, 539pp \$34.95hb

ISBN: 1-56563-409-8

This 2005 revision and expansion of Professor Evans's 1992 *Noncanonical Writings and New Testament Interpretation* is 'an introduction to the diverse bodies of literatures that are in various ways cognate to biblical literature, especially the New Testament' and 'is a tool designed to encourage students to make better use of the various primary literatures that are cognate to the writings of the Bible'. It is expressly for people who can read the original ancient languages and confines itself to bringing their attention only to writings that give background on, and can contribute to, the interpretation of the New Testament, hence the cursory coverage of the church fathers, New Testament apocrypha and other later literature. Evans devotes 272 pages to Jewish literature but only 31 to post-New Testament Christian writings. Not only are the various components of the literature under study listed and briefly described, specific examples are 'offered to illustrate how they contribute to New Testament exegesis'.

The subjects discussed are the Old Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea scrolls, versions of Old Testament, Philo, Josephus, Targums, rabbinic literature, New Testament apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, early church fathers, Gnostic writings, (pagan) Greco-Roman authors, *Corpus Hermeticum*, Samaritan writings, papyri, inscriptions, coins, and ostraca. The book contains a detailed catalogue and discussion of all of the Dead Sea Scrolls and descriptions of the contents of the various printed editions of them.

There are other valuable lists of a host of ancient documents useful for the study of the New Testament. Evans indicates how to find published texts of

other original (extant) documents. He also explains the background, importance, and relevance to New Testament studies of the various writings treated, instead of assuming that readers have prior knowledge of them. Yet he does not become distracted in the mass of painstaking detail about these writings but constantly demonstrates how each can contribute to New Testament studies.

Indications that this book was directed to an audience of academics and other advanced scholars are Evans's practice of always giving the abbreviation for a document as it is to be cited in scholarly works, mentioning a scholarly difference in opinion, and indicating translations only rarely. However, this book will prove an invaluable reference tool to the beginner, even the advanced layperson, because of its many explanations and comments on the various individual writings and categories of writings, and Evans's explaining and elucidating the meanings of terms at the beginning of each discussion, even those familiar to long-time students in the field. Another quality of Evans's book is that it quotes or summarises the substance of a Bible passage or other ancient writing under discussion instead of obliging readers to put down his book to consult the Bible or other book. Sometimes Evans does mention that there is an English translation and, more rarely, that one has not yet been published. The bibliographies, both on the genre in general and on specific writings within it, provide an invaluable finding-guide for readers at any stage to pursue their study.

DAVID W. T. BRATTSTON
Nova Scotia, Canada