

Abbreviations: ANE: Ancient Near East(ern); BM: British Museum; BST: The Bible Speaks Today; CFP: Christian Focus Publications; EP: Evangelical Press; EVV: English Versions (of the Bible); IVP: Inter-Varsity Press; MSS. manuscripts, NICOT: New International Commentary on the Old Testament; NT: New Testament; OT: Old Testament; TOTC: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; WCS: Welwyn Commentary Series.

Prior to 1980, it was not easy to find a single work from an evangelical perspective on many books of the Old Testament (works in the TOTC series and early NICOT commentaries excepting). The situation is now very different: there may be four or five readily-available commentaries on a given passage, ranging in character from the scholarly and technical to the pastorally applied, which makes a third edition (2003) of **Tremper Longman's *Old Testament Commentary Survey***¹ most welcome. There has also been a deepening interaction with the OT from a traditional evangelical approach which often looked for little beyond messianic predictions. There is now appreciation of the many more levels on which the OT speaks to the Christian and regard for the distinctive features of the first three quarters of the Bible. While there are now far greater resources at our disposal for study of the OT, there is also a greater spectrum of opinions and approaches to the OT within evangelicalism, on issues such as the six-day creation of Genesis, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the single authorship of Isaiah, or a fifth-century date for Daniel.

Hebrew Language

A second edition of **John Dobson's *Learn Biblical Hebrew*** was issued in 2005². This comes with an audio CD, a valuable addition for those seeking to learn the language by themselves. The publicity makes much of Dobson's use of recent theories of learning in his approach and the book comes with hearty endorsements from Bible College students who have found the book helpful in overcoming their difficulties in language learning. The emphasis is on

user-friendliness and memorability: those looking for a rigorous, systematic approach will be frustrated by this book, as will those who want a reference grammar (neither of which it claims to be). Dobson wants us to learn the grammar through the language, not vice versa. His analysis of verb forms in Hebrew narrative (pp. 229 ff) is particularly clear and practically helpful for exposition, as is his treatment of poetry (pp. 279 ff). At the other end of the spectrum is **Sue Groom's *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew***, 2003³. This is a book for those who already have a good working knowledge of Hebrew and wish to read more widely about textual, linguistic and interpretative issues. It will also appeal to those with no Hebrew (all of which is translated into English in this book) but who are interested in biblical hermeneutics.

Old Testament Archaeology and History

Kenneth Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 2003 (4) is a magnum opus, the distillation of a lifetime's study by an evangelical scholar world renowned for his robust and passionate defence of the historicity of the OT. Those who have heard Professor Kitchen lecture on this subject will need little persuasion to buy the book. His engaging enthusiasm is palpable, even in print, as is his frustration and impatience with the shoddy thinking and ideological preconceptions underlying many of liberalism's attacks on the Bible's historicity. This book is more than a gripping read, however: the depth of research and systematic presentation of material will make it a reference work for those with any interest in OT history and archaeology.

On a more popular level is **Peter Masters' *Heritage of Evidence in the British Museum***, 2004⁵. Many will be familiar with the articles by Dr. Masters on this subject which have appeared more than once in *The Sword and Trowel*. His material has been revised and updated in the light of changing displays in the British Museum, and is presented in an attractively illustrated and inexpensive paperback book. Like *Through the British Museum*, by

Brian Edwards and Clive Anderson, 2001⁶, this book could serve as a pocket guide to the BM's collection of biblical material as well as providing historical evidence for Bible study and apologetic use.

It is one thing to argue for the historicity of OT texts on the basis of archaeology. It is another thing to handle those texts correctly in the light of their historical context. Both issues are addressed in a stimulating collection of essays edited by David M. Howard and Michael A. Grisanti, *Giving the Sense: Understanding and using OT historical texts*, 2003⁷. The book is billed as 'cutting edge essays by OT scholars' and it does not disappoint. As with all collections of essays (this collection is a *festschrift* for Eugene C. Merrill), one must accept some variation in approach, and the brevity of the essay format (although the latter might commend itself to the busy reader). The book progresses from general theoretical issues about how to approach OT history, through a consideration of how archaeology bears upon key periods of that history, to some specific questions such as the date of the Exodus and the seemingly implausibly high numbers found in some OT narratives. There are also studies of particular OT narratives from a literary viewpoint. If this seems overly scholarly, it should be noted that the final section of the book comprises helpful and practical essays on preaching from OT historical texts, helpful for any Christian interested in expounding the OT.

Biblical and Theological Studies

Peter Enns', *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the problem of the Old Testament*, 2005⁸ is written with a clarity which expertly steers the non-specialist reader through involved areas of debate and with an honesty which demands a serious and respectful response. Enns suggests a way forward from the old liberal/conservative controversy, rejecting the false dichotomy of whether the Old Testament is a collection of ANE writings or the word of God. He addresses the question of how it can be *both*: for him, the Bible is the

word of God; the question is *how* it is the word of God. He addresses three challenges to a simplistic conservative view of Scripture:

- i. the discovery of ANE texts which bear striking similarities to some passages in the OT questions the *uniqueness* of the OT.
- ii. there are apparently different viewpoints represented within the OT, raising questions about its *integrity*.
- iii. the sometimes surprising use made of the OT in the NT raises questions about its *interpretation*.

Enns does not merely raise thorny (and, to some, perhaps embarrassing) questions. He suggests an answer in his incarnational model for OT interpretation. This means regarding the way in which the Word of God was enfleshed in Jesus Christ as a paradigm for the way it is communicated in the OT. Just as the Word of God became an authentic first-century Jewish man, mediating eternal truth through contemporary language and culture, so God speaks through the language, culture and milieu of the ANE in the OT. Enns argues further that the NT writers saw the whole of the OT fulfilled in Christ: his life was not simply foretold in individual predictive prophecies; the whole sweep of Israel's history, the questions raised by it, and the central themes of OT theology are answered in him. The apostles' use of the OT, therefore, is neither cavalier nor shallow, but rich and deep. This may prove to be more than a fascinating, insightful and provocative book. It may open a debate about the OT within evangelicalism. It is not the final word in that debate. It leaves questions unanswered, most especially the question of the historicity of Genesis 2 and 3. If the author of Genesis exploited (and critiqued) contemporary ANE mythological explanations for the origin of the universe (Gen 1), to what extent is this true also of the Eden narratives? On this question hangs our view of man, the fallen nature, and our need of salvation in Christ (Rom 5). We need to see how Enns's incarnational model applies to those critical chapters before we can assess it fully. My fear is that this book will not be received with the necessary circumspection, and

controversy surrounding it may simply divide the evangelical camp into those for whom 'evangelical' necessarily means a classical, pre-modern view of how the Bible is Scripture, and those who are open to the possibility that the Bible itself may redefine our understanding of what Scripture is.

Some of the issues dealt with by Peter Enns are also discussed in **Tremper Longman's** *How to Read Genesis*, 2005⁹. The similarities and crucial differences between Genesis and ANE literature are considered in the first part of the book. Then follows a section-by-section guide to Genesis. There are some fascinating insights, such as Longman's recapitulation of Fokkelman's analysis of the Babel story (pp. 119 ff), but the modest compass of the book means that it seldom goes beyond the level of an overview or introduction. As an overview, it is extremely effective, however, and Longman concludes with ten pages on 'Reading Genesis as Christians'.

A far more exhaustive book is **Palmer Robertson's** survey of the OT prophetic movement, *The Christ of the prophets*, 2004¹⁰. As well as covering the ground from Moses to Malachi thoroughly, there are also welcome and apt tangents of contemporary application. This book provides the kind of overview which most Christians will never hear from the pulpit or Bible study (where the focus is on an individual book, prophet or passage). It is the sort of overview which every preacher needs to have in mind, and this book should be of particular value to ministers and preachers who have not had the opportunity of a course of study on the prophetic movement. Like Kitchen (* above), Robertson has little time for the liberal challenges to the evangelical view of the OT and deals with them robustly and combatively. There is also no doubt that this is a *Christian* book, written from a new covenant perspective. The mark of a great teacher is to make profound and complex issues seem simple and obvious. Robertson does this, although his very thoroughness would make the book heavy-going for a recreational or devotional reader.

The Law and the Prophets

Four welcome new additions to IVP's BST series of commentaries have appeared in the last two years (11, 12, 13, 14). **Motyer's** *The Message of Exodus*, 2005¹¹ began life as sermons and Bible studies in a local church and for that reason its contemporary and christological application is strong. Motyer's scholarship is also in evidence: he is especially good on Exodus's place within the sweep of Scripture as a whole. His trademark emphasis on structural analysis (familiar to us from his commentary on Isaiah, IVP, 1993) makes this a difficult book to dip into (try, for example, to find his comment on 34:6-7). It is better *read* rather than *consulted*. **Derek Tidball** meets head-on the difficulties many have with *Leviticus* in his work, subtitled 'Free to be holy', 2005¹². He argues persuasively and enthusiastically for a positive view of the teaching of Leviticus, whilst also showing how vitally it underpins the Christian Gospel. This book calls for Leviticus to be brought out of the closet and preached. I have a minor quibble with **Mary Evans** on *1 and 2 Samuel*, 2004¹³: the subtitle, 'Personalities, potential, politics and power' may describe the *content* of the books of Samuel, but it is not the '*message* of Samuel'. Evans rightly says that the 'author's interests and concerns... provide a firm control' in our interpretation of individual stories within the book (p.17). She identifies four overarching themes in Samuel (pp.20-22), but the *message* could be drawn out still more clearly, in the way that Motyer (pp.20-23) and Webb (pp.32-43) do for Exodus and Zechariah. This is not to dismiss Evans's clear, reliable and thoughtful analysis of 1 and 2 Samuel. The 'Questions to Ponder' at the end of each chapter mean that this commentary might also function as a Bible Study book or daily reading aid. For me, the pick of the recent BST commentaries is **Barry Webb** on *Zechariah*, 2004¹⁴. Webb handles this often enigmatic book with great perspicacity and verve, steering the reader through the density of Zechariah's symbolism and expertly handling the Messianic aspects of chapters 9-14. His final section, dealing with the NT perspective on

chapters 12-14 combines careful exegesis with Christian fervour.

Three works on Isaiah deserve mention. **Allan Harman's** CFP commentary, 2005 ⁴⁵ hardly needs any further endorsement than the comments on the cover from Grogan, Currid and Motyer, the last of whom states 'His work has made me wish wholeheartedly that I could start all over again'. This is praise indeed, but it is entirely merited. It is a considerable achievement to produce a one-volume commentary on Isaiah which feels comprehensive, profound and yet accessible. Harman also never loses sight of how the NT writers (and Jesus himself) interpreted Isaiah and that provides his hermeneutical horizon, not just the exile and restoration in the 6th century BC. Motyer also praises Harman's 'robust' and 'unanswerable' defence of the unity of Isaiah. In this regard, it is appropriate to note the paperback reprint of **Hugh Williamson's** 1994 academic work *The Book called Isaiah* ⁴⁶. Williamson, an avowed evangelical, accepts the historical-critical methodology, defending it against the more recent emphasis on analysis of books of the Bible in their final, canonical form. He therefore accepts the triple authorship of Isaiah, but argues for a major role of the exilic 'Deutero-Isaiah' in editing the work of the original eighth-century prophet. Williamson argues that this second Isaiah saw the oracles of 'Proto-Isaiah' coming to fulfilment in his own time, and that he consciously built upon those oracles in his own. Williamson therefore draws out the many points of contact between chapters 1-39 and 40-55 effectively and persuasively. Other evangelicals will see evidence of single authorship in this thematic unity, rather than of sympathetic editing by a later author. They will also find his methodology and acceptance of multiple authorship troubling. A refreshing antidote to points of scholarly controversy might be found in **D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones's** sermons on Isaiah 40, *The All-Sufficient God*, 2005 ⁴⁷

Psalms and Proverbs

A number of works by evangelicals on the Psalms have come out in the last couple of years. Before considering them, it is worth noting the reprinting in paperback of **Sigmund Mowinckel's** *The Psalms in Israel's Worship* ⁴⁸, first published in English translation, 1962), a seminal work in the study of Psalms, which still exerts its influence today. The new publication also includes a 14-page introductory essay by James Crenshaw.

Interpreting the Psalms edited by **Johnston and Firth**, 2005 ⁴⁹ is a fine collection of Psalms studies. After essays dealing with the current state of Psalms scholarship and the ANE background to the Psalms, the others are grouped in sections dealing with key themes in the psalms (distress, praise, king, cult, etc.), modes of communication within the psalms (teaching, ethics, body-idioms, torah-meditation) and the interpretation of the psalms by the Essenes, NT writers and in the Targums. None of the essays will be read without profit. The chapter by Gerald Wilson on the final composition of the psalter is particularly stimulating. He shows how certain key psalms are placed to establish the structure of the collection and how this structure provides a framework for understanding the book and the individual psalms (having read this essay, Psalm 73 will take on a much deeper and fuller meaning!). Gerald Wilson is also the author of the NIV Application Commentary on the Psalms (vol 1: 2002), the second volume of which we await with interest.

Crying out for Justice, by **John Day**, 2005 ²⁰ is a 200-page study of the problematic 'imprecatory psalms' which contain curses and cries for vengeance. The book's subtitle, 'What the Psalms teach us about mercy and vengeance in an age of terrorism' suggests that there are compelling reasons today to think again about these psalms, although it is more the increasing hostility towards Christian faith in the post-Christian West and persecution in other parts of the world which Day has in view than terrorism specifically. Should Christians always

'turn the other cheek' when faced by systematic oppression by societies and cultures? The contemporary situation provides piquancy to this book but it does not drive it. It is first and foremost a balanced and convincing treatment of imprecation in the psalms. Day begins by showing the inadequacy of previous explanations of these psalms: that they are expressions of rage that a believer may feel, but ought not to; that they reflect OT mentality, now superseded in Christ; that the words are really only appropriate for Christ to utter on the cross. Instead he argues that these psalms are rooted in God's law, covenant and character, that their theology is also found in the NT, and that if there were 'times to curse' in OT days, there are still today. Having dealt with these general issues, Day examines in detail the three most extreme and typical imprecatory psalms, 58, 137 and 109 before examining NT examples of imprecation. This is an excellent book which does not apologise for these psalms, but provides a credible understanding of them. It restores the imprecatory psalms to the psalter and judiciously shows how they might have relevance for the 21st century Christian.

Bruce Waltke's massive, two-volume work on Proverbs for the NICOT series, 2004-5 ²¹ and **Gary Brady's** *Heavenly wisdom* in the Welwyn series, 2003 ²², are both substantial works in terms of size as well as depth of insight, although those insights reflect the differing aims of their respective series.

Waltke's work – the distillation of 25 years study of Proverbs – will surely establish itself as the scholarly work on Proverbs, for its expert interaction with the scholarly literature and painstaking treatment of each verse from the Hebrew. For all its massive erudition, however, Waltke's book is written from a concern for our age, in which folly is alive and well and in which biblical wisdom is needed more than ever. His introductory section (I, pp. 1-170) considers the questions of authorship, composition, structure, and literary forms within the book. The greatest part of the introduction, however, is devoted to the theology of Proverbs and this

concludes with a section on 'christology' (pp. 126 ff) which addresses how Proverbs ought (and ought not) to be viewed from a new-covenant perspective. In particular, he exposes the inadequate foundations of the popular view that Prov 8 refers to Christ (the NT does not say this), whilst asserting that Wisdom there can be legitimately regarded as an OT type of Christ. Brady (pp. 203 ff) expounds Prov 8 as the wisdom that is found in Christ, but also stops short of identifying Wisdom with the person of Christ. Such a nuanced position is surely right. Brady's book lacks the introduction of Waltke's, but it is cleverly and perceptively structured as a consideration of the 'grammar' of wisdom (Prov 1:1-9:18) and its 'vocabulary' (Prov. 10 onwards). Brady writes with great richness, casting his net wide to draw in apt parallels and illustrations from many areas of life. Like the authors of Proverbs itself, he is interested in everything. Both detailed exegesis and richness of exposition are necessary, but I suspect that most Christians, with limited time, shelf-space and funds, will opt for Gary Brady's *Heavenly Wisdom* to place alongside their battered copy of Kidner (TOTC, 1964). At the same time, they will be glad to be near a library where a copy of Waltke can be consulted. Proverbs is not an easy book to understand or expound (nor, I suspect, is it an easy book on which to write a commentary!). Let us hope that these two excellent expository tools mean that the spiritual and practical wisdom of Proverbs enjoys an airing from pulpits, in Bible studies and application in the lives of God's people. Let us hope, more generally, that the recent deeper evangelical engagement with the OT leads to a renewed confidence in, and desire to preach from the Scriptures which Jesus and his apostles knew and expounded.

Reviewer's top five titles: Kitchen ⁴; Enns' ⁷; Webb ¹³; Harman ¹⁴; Johnston & Firth¹⁸.