

BOOK REVIEWS

Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 346 pp.

Craig Blomberg is professor of NT at Denver Seminary and the author of several books, including *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity, 1987), which took a more general and topical approach than the present work. This work is both a commentary on John's Gospel as well as a detailed critique of its historicity.

Blomberg divides the work into two parts: first, an introduction to the Fourth Gospel and to the method he will use in assessing its historicity; second, the in-depth commentary which forms the basis for his critique. In the introduction, Blomberg creates a climate favorable to John's historical trustworthiness by arguing persuasively for John the son of Zebedee as the author. Writing in the late 80s or the 90s, this John wrote as an independent witness to the words and works of Jesus as one who was familiar with the Synoptic accounts and intentionally deviated from them, on the one hand, and interlocked with them, on the other. Blomberg argues that John had unique purposes because he was writing from a unique perspective, that of the second generation, who lived some distance from the original events. He then establishes his methodology for defending the historicity of the Gospel passage by passage in the commentary. His first principle for establishing historicity is what he calls "the burden of proof," namely, that "a historian who has been found trustworthy where he or she can be tested should be given the benefit of the doubt in cases where no tests are available" (63). His second principle is called "the criteria of authenticity." This involves either multiple attestation or singly attested material that coheres with passages authenticated by the double similarity and dissimilarity criterion (64), which recognizes that, although Jesus clearly taught and acted in distinctive ways, He should not be expected to have differed entirely from His Jewish background or to have been completely misunderstood by His followers.

In his commentary, Blomberg asks two questions of each passage studied: (1) What positive evidence via the criteria of authenticity is there that the actions or words of the characters in John's narratives are indeed historical? (2) Is there anything in the text that is implausible within the historical context to which it is

attributed? In the latter, the general historical trustworthiness of the Synoptics is assumed (66). Blomberg is very rigorous in asking these questions in each passage under study, right down to the small details. The result is a compelling argument for the historical reliability of John's Gospel, even if one chooses to differ with him in matters of exegesis or theology here and there.

This is truly a seminal work which deserves broad attention in the field of NT studies. Its rigor and depth should merit a serious response from critical scholarship, which has been notoriously skeptical of the historical reliability of this Gospel. Students and teachers of Johannine studies in particular cannot afford to be ignorant of this work and its challenging conclusions.

Those who read this work, however, need to be intelligent about the issues in Gospel criticism, for Blomberg does not explain things for neophytes. He assumes that the reader has knowledge of the critical issues and addresses them directly, without explanation. If the reader is unfamiliar with these issues, he or she may be left "wandering in the wilderness." In other words, this is a commentary for the well informed, not for the average layperson. It is also not a homiletical commentary by any means. It does not address the usual issues for which one normally selects a commentary, to exposit the meaning of the text and make application. Everything serves the primary purpose of the work, to establish the historical reliability of the Gospel against criticism that would place its reliability in doubt. For that purpose, I highly recommend this volume.

Edwin Reynolds

Broyles, Craig C., ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 272 pp.

Craig Broyles is associate professor of religious studies at Trinity Western University. This work is a compilation of nine essays on exegesis by leading scholars in the field. The first essay, by Broyles himself, "Interpreting the Old Testament: Principles and Steps" (13-62), briefly examines the nature of the Bible. He believes that the "means we use to interpret an object depend on its nature and function" (13). He then surveys eight steps that are vital in the exegetical process. He does exegesis of Isa 41:21-29 to illustrate each step.

David W. Baker deals with the "Language and Text of the Old Testament" (63-83). In clear and simple language he accomplishes his objective of exploring the implications of Hebrew and Aramaic as the languages God used to reveal Himself since language is the vehicle with which "people express their worldview" (65). Baker insists that it is necessary to determine exactly the meaning of the original text before translating it into modern languages. He then discusses principles for doing textual criticism (69-77), followed by several examples which illustrates these principles (77-83).