

willing to be stimulated and challenged in their study of the riches of this apocalypse about Jesus Christ.

Berrien Springs, Michigan

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Barth, Markus, and Helmut Blanke. *The Letter to Philemon*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xviii + 561 pp. Hardcover, \$40.00.

In only its second volume, the Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series (ECC) distinguishes itself from other standard commentary sets with the publication of an exceptional commentary that deals exclusively with one of the smallest books in the NT, Philemon. Instead of being examined as an addendum to a volume on Colossians or another NT book, Philemon stands alone. The commentary is the result of the lifelong research of Markus Barth (son of the noted Lutheran theologian Karl Barth) and completed posthumously by his former student Helmut Blanke. It bears the typical marks of distinguished scholarship that we expect from Markus Barth.

Well organized and lucidly written, the work is divided into three sections. The first section (102 pp.) furnishes background to Philemon, with a comprehensive examination of one of the most scandalous forms of human existence in the ancient world, the life of a slave. This section, which is one of the key strengths of the book, includes such topics as "The Slave's Daily Life and Legal Position," "Fugitive Slaves," "Slave Revolts and Wars," "Manumission," and "Old Testament and Later Jewish Traditions." One of the most interesting discussions here is the examination of letters by Pliny the Younger, which include his intervention for a fugitive freedman analogous to Paul's intervention for Philemon.

The second section (137 pp.) deals with the literary, biographical, and contextual issues connected with Philemon. While the commentary's approach to the typical introductory material is conventional and covers only about twenty-five pages, the intriguing part of this section is the authors' discussion of what is "known" and "unknown" about each of the *dramatis personae*—Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. What response did Paul want from his letter—immediate manumission, eventual manumission, a reform of slavery, or transfer of custody of Onesimus to himself? Other questions deal with the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. Was the latter a house-born slave, and if so, was Philemon his physical father? Why did Onesimus flee? While the authors acknowledge that the "abundance of things unknown dwarfs the fairly certain information" (149), their detailed discussion provides a good introduction to the interesting and difficult questions that one must consider when examining Paul's letter to Philemon.

The final section is the commentary proper. Each portion commences with the author's own translation of a passage, followed by discussion of pertinent elements of the text. While the commentary covers the full range of interpretative issues associated with Philemon, its strength does not lie in new or unconventional exegesis, but in the high level of detail with which it treats the text. Examples of this can be seen in the discussion of textual variants which are often superficially addressed or ignored in other commentaries (e.g., Phlm 6, 11), as well as interaction with the Vulgate. In addition, there are twenty-three interpretive asides

sprinkled throughout the commentary, which deal with topics that require more detailed elucidation—e.g., “Does Paul Ask for Manumission?” (412-415). While the author periodically makes comments that are based on the structure of the original text, all citations of Greek or Hebrew wording are transliterated.

While the initial two volumes published in the new ECC series (1 & 2 Timothy and Philemon) were published in the same year, there are some conspicuous differences in the layout and appearance of the two works. While both commentaries sport similarly designed dust jackets, the actual covers of the books themselves are of starkly different colors. The series boasts a fresh translation of the text; but while in the 1-2 Timothy volume the entire translation was placed at the beginning, the Philemon volume has the translation interspersed throughout the commentary. Similar lack of standardization also applies to the locations and designations of the bibliography and indices as well as to the layout of the commentary proper. While such differences are trifles in terms of substance, their conspicuous nature makes one wonder if the two volumes really constitute a series, or just merely two independent commentaries that were given similar dust jackets.

Regarding accuracy, the reference at the end of the first paragraph on page 87 mistakenly refers to “pp. 34-36,” but should read “pp. 49-53.” The word “pluperfects” is spelled incorrectly on page 364. On the same page, the reference to “sec. III.B., 18-23” should read “sec. III.B., 18-22.”

In the final analysis, this work is well done and finally allows Philemon to be considered as an independent book in its own right and as worthy of detailed examination. It is also a highly informative source for examining the sensitive and difficult issues associated with Philemon. For these reasons, including the fact that this volume contains probably the single best compilation of social background information on slavery in the ancient world in relation to Paul’s letter to Philemon, it should find its place on the bookshelves of professors, students, pastors, and studious laity.

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Bienkowski, Piotr, and Alan Millard, eds. *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. 352 pp. Hardcover, \$49.95.

The editors of the *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* are both at the University of Liverpool. Piotr Bienkowski is Curator of Egyptian and Near Eastern Antiquities, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, and Honorary Research Fellow. Alan Millard is Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages.

The *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East* is a one-volume reference work, with entries written by experts in a variety of fields, covering major aspects of the history, culture, and language of the Ancient Near East. The coverage of chronological periods ranges from the Lower Paleolithic to the Persian conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C. Entries deal with a broad spectrum of topics, including people, places, chronology, geography, institutions, religion, poetry, economy,