

BOOK REVIEWS

Arnold, T. Bill. *Encountering the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 234 pp. Hardcover, \$24.99.

The strength of the church and the vitality of the individual Christian life are directly related to the role Scripture plays in them, says Walter A. Elwell, the general editor of the two series of biblical textbooks currently published by Baker Book House. The Encountering Biblical Studies series provides textbooks for undergraduate-level courses on the books of the Bible, while another series titled Engaging Biblical Studies consists of graduate level textbooks for introduction to theology. Both series attempt to reflect the finest in evangelical scholarship today, while at the same time they aim to present the material in a way in which today's students can understand (13).

Bill Arnold, professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Asbury Theological Seminary, is the author of this volume on the book of Genesis. The book consists of five parts, the first dealing with chaps. 1-11, the second with the life of Abraham, the third with Jacob, the fourth with Joseph, and the last with the introductory issues such as authorship, date, unity, etc. This arrangement is commendable since Arnold consistently lets the Bible speak for itself first, and only after that he deals with various scholarly opinions on Genesis. The chapters are arranged with the same philosophy in mind. The teaching of the Bible comes first and is followed by extrabiblical evidence. Chapters 1 and 2 present the Genesis creation story. Chapter 3, titled "What's Wrong with This Picture?" deals with Israel's neighbors and their teachings about origins. Chapter 5 relates the call of Abraham, and chap. 6 is on the history and geography of the Ancient Near East in Abraham's time.

The book is reader-friendly and is designed with features, illustrations, and factual sidebars relevant to contemporary student concerns. Outlines, study questions, a glossary, up-to-date endnotes, a bibliography, and two indexes make this volume an attractive textbook on Genesis. The author skillfully ties the text of Genesis to related biblical passages from both testaments.

Since this series is based on a clearly defined evangelical point of view with the firm conviction that the Bible is absolutely true and never misleads us, some readers will find it rather surprising that the author does not offer a clear statement on whether the days of creation were literal (24-hour) days or not. Arnold prefers to conclude, "The important lesson from Genesis 1 is that he [God] did in fact create it" (23). One may ask why the seven days are mentioned as time periods in Gen 1, in the first place. On the question of the possible mention of the Trinity in Gen 1:26, the answer is somewhat clearer (28), and Gen 3:15 was rightly called *protoevangelium* by the early church (39). The intermarriages between the sons of God and daughters of men, before the great flood, can be viewed as mixing of the faithful lineage of Seth with worldly daughters (58).

Throughout this book there are useful insights on Genesis. It will be a good textbook for upper-level undergraduate students.

Berrien Springs, MI 49103

ZDRAVKO STEFANOVIC

Aune, David. *Revelation 1-5*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52. Dallas: Word Books, 1997. 600 pp. Hardback, \$32.99.

_____. *Revelation 6-16*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B. Ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Ralph P. Martin. Dallas: Word Books, 1998. 500 pp. Hardback, \$32.99.

_____. *Revelation 17-22*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52C. Dallas: Word Books, 1998. 592 pp. Hardback, \$32.99.

The publication of David Aune's Word Biblical Commentary on *Revelation* is a long-awaited event, eighteen years in the making. It is literally a monument to the kind of patient, detailed, rigorous, and thorough research that fewer and fewer biblical scholars take time for anymore. Aune has provided a work of reference quality that I believe will be of major significance, not only in our generation, but for many generations to come.

The commentary fills a huge gap in recent study of the book of Revelation. In particular, Aune provides a wealth of detailed information about the Greco-Roman environment of the Apocalypse, an area that has been relatively neglected in recent years. This information is presented in detailed comments and excursuses scattered throughout the three volumes. Word studies and discussions of the Greco-Roman setting for the ideas, events, and geographical references in the book of Revelation range widely through the primary and secondary literature and the archaeological evidence as well. Since most readers of Revelation are far more familiar with the biblical texts than with the environment of the first Christian century, Aune's commentary will be a treasured resource for pastors and lay students of the Bible who want a deeper understanding of the original setting for the visions described in the book.

On pp. 104-105, for example, a long paragraph compares Jesus, the key-bearer of Rev 1:18, with a Hellenistic goddess called Hekate, who was very popular in first-century Asia Minor. Based on more than fifty pages of unpublished research (presented as a paper to the Society of Biblical Literature more than ten years ago), Aune notes that Hekate was thought to possess the keys to the gates of Hades. She was considered both the source and ruler of heaven, earth, and Hades, and the agent by which they come to their end. She was called the beginning and the end, the eternal one, the key-bearer, and the mistress of the cosmos. The description of Jesus in Rev 1:13-18, therefore, was deliberately intended to evoke parallels to a popular concept in the minds of ancient readers.

On pp. 617-619, Aune presents in another long paragraph an outstanding summary of the archaeological evidence for the street layout of first-century Jerusalem (with reference to Rev 11:8). The single summary paragraph is grounded on twenty-six separate references to eleven different archaeological publications as well as the fruits of personal discussion with at least one key player. Anyone