

## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*

by Peter H Davids

**Pillar New Testament Commentary Series**

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A goal for a new commentary series is to accomplish it within a relatively short period of time. The Pillar series, edited by DA Carson, has now reached more than half the distance to completion, and seems to have succeeded in this respect. The ambitious purpose for the series is “to combine profound scholarship with pastoral sensitivity”, and interacting with the most important historical exegetical debates and at the same time emphasising the contemporary relevance of the Bible. We have to ask to what extent this goal is fulfilled in the present commentary.

The author of the commentary on *Jude* and *2 Peter*, Peter H Davids, is Professor of Biblical Theology at St Stephens’s University, New Brunswick. He is a scholar who in his scholarly writing has concentrated almost exclusively on certain New Testament (NT) books. Davids has specialized in the (non-Johannine) Catholic Epistles, and he has previously contributed with commentaries on both *James* (NIGTC, 1982) and *1 Peter* (NICNT, 1990) and as editor of the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Development*, 1997.

Davids is often really enthusiastic in his approach to *Jude*, which is frequently treated with ‘benign neglect’ and to *2 Peter*, the ‘ugly stepchild’ of the NT. Davids states that their voices counterbalance *Paul* and they are “so fascinating and make a significant contribution to NT” (p. 1). They represent churches which perceive themselves as a Jewish Jesus movement, as the true renewed Judaism (p. 3). They communicate, however, to a gentile environment, particularly *2 Peter*, but also *Jude*.

Davids shares the common scholarly opinion that *2 Peter* uses and is dependent upon *Jude*, and accordingly he starts with the letter of *Jude* (introduction, p. 7-32, followed by commentary, p. 33-117) and then proceeds to *2 Peter* (introduction, p. 121-58, followed by commentary, p. 159-318). In the introductions he is in dialogue with particularly Richard Bauckham, and like Bauckham Davids favours traditional authorship. Judas, son of Josephus, a younger brother of Jesus wrote *Jude*. Even the case of *2 Peter* he believes – contrary to Bauckham – that the evidences do not lead to a secure verdict on authorship: “In the end we have to conclude that the salutation claims that this letter was written by Simon

Peter and that we by the nature of the case cannot know from historical investigation whether this is in some sense actual or is a pseudepigraphical attribution” (p. 49).

These statements can easily give the commentary the label ‘conservative’ and prevent some from reading more. They will then overlook a well informed book, which gives students and pastors new insights into the two letters through a well balanced exegesis.

He developed his basic approach to the text in his dissertation (*Themes in the Epistle of James*, 1974), and the strength of Davids’ commentary is his exegetical remarks, his thematic analysis and the illuminating of the Jewish background for certain themes (i.e. the Baalam-tradition, p. 66-68, 241ff, 251-53). The thematic approach makes it easier to emphasise “the contemporary relevance of the Bible”, which is one of the goals for the commentary. He illuminates themes like God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, suffering, deliverance, eschatology, both in the introduction and in his exegesis.

In his introductory remarks, Davids is often vague. Concerning provenance and dating, he prefers pre-70 Palestine, concedes, however, that a date later in the first century is also possible. A more consistent argumentation for the first position would have opened up the space for reconstructing early Jewish Christianity, which also had required more comparative material.

In terms of provenance and dating of 2 Peter, he assumes – following J Neyrey – that 2 Peter was written to Gentiles probably in the vicinity of Greece or Asia Minor who had been influenced by ‘Epicurean’ teaching. Davids lack, however, the consistency Neyrey has in his argumentation.

Davids is also vague in his analysis of the genre. He follows to a large extent D. Watson in his rhetorical analysis (from 1988) of Jude and 2 Peter, and like Watson, he sees them as ‘deliberative speeches’. But both in relation to the genre ‘letter’ and for 2 Peter in relation to the genre of ‘Testament’, ‘Farewell-speech’ (Bauckham’s suggestions), there is a lack of consistency in Davids’ book.

The goal for the Pillar series is seeking “above all to make clear the text of Scripture as we have it” (viii). Davids delivers indeed a profound exegesis, but I in many cases struck by the fact that he pays relative little attention to the text as such. He does not reflect that *Novum Testamentum Graecum. Editio critica maior* (since 2000) has given the research of the Catholic Epistles a solid foundation for the textual analysis. He uses Charles Landon’s work too little (*A Text-Critical Study of the Epistle of Jude*, 1996) and the two extensive Swedish studies (Carl Axel Albin, *Judasbrevet*. 1962, (900 pages) and Tommy Wasserman, *The Epistle of Jude: Its Text and Transmission*, 2006) were for different reasons inaccessible for him. Not only textual problems, also grammatical features (i.e. to Jude 13.20 or 2 Pet 1, 1-7; 1,18-21; 2,11.20) should be more thoroughly treated when the commentary “make clear the text of Scripture as we have it”. It is also a blunder to base the commentary on the NIV translation, which even less than King James is “the text of Scripture”. Davids makes many good comments to the NIV translation, but it would be much better to read his own translation. One should not underestimate the importance of such scholarly work for future Bible translations.

Davids comes up short concerning the dialogue with present scholarship. Not only in the bibliography, but in the commentary as a whole are many important studies missing, i.e. R Heiligenthal (*Zwischen Henoch und Paulus. Studien zu theologiegeschichtlichen Ort des Judasbriefes*, 1992), H Paulsen (*Der zweite Petrusbrief und der Judasbrief*, 1992); TJ Kraus (*Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes*, 2001). The most recent contributions of Jörg Frey and the reviews of P Müller (*ThR*,65, 1998, 267-89 and

*ThR* 68, 2001, 310-37) should also have been reflected. The introductory discussion would benefited from reading i.e. MJ Gilmour: (*The Significance of Parallels between 2 Peter and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2002) or HJ Riedl (*Anamnese und Apostolizität. Der Zweite Petrusbrief und das theologische Problem neutestamentlicher Pseudepigraphie*, 2005). The present literature to these small letters of the New Testament is indeed difficult to overlook. However, the goal of the commentary was to interact with the most important historical exegetical debates, and the lack of dialogue with some groundbreaking studies, shows that this has happened in Davids' commentary.

Davids treats the two letters too much as theology developed in a Jewish context. The broader Hellenistic background is not displayed. The dialogue with T Fornberg (*An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, 1977); KR Lyle, Jr (*Ethical Admonition in the Epistle of Jude*. 1998) and A Gerdmar (*Rethinking the Judaism-Hellenism Dichotomy. A Historiographical Case Study of Second Peter and Jude*, 2001) could open up the broader perspective.

In spite of the critical comments, Davids' commentary is a valuable contribution, giving students and pastors a valuable tool for reading texts, which should be more often texts for sermons than they are in the churches today.