

BOOK REVIEWS

ERRATA : Due to a regrettable oversight, the review of *A Basic Introduction to the Old Testament* by Prof JC Malan was excluded from *SCRIPTURA* 9. Because this review forms a unity with Prof Malan's evaluation of the companion volume on the New Testament and Anderson's *The Living World of the Old Testament*, all three reviews are printed together in this issue. Our sincere apologies to the reviewer for the inconvenience caused by this oversight.

Robert C Walton (ed), *A Basic Introduction to the Old Testament*
 London, 1980. SCM SBN: 334 00071 8
 (First published as parts One and Three of
A Source Book of the Bible for Teachers,
 edited by Robert C Walton, SCM, 1970)
 17x20 cm, 216 pp, 16 illustrations. R8.40

In this recent edition, and its companion volume on the New Testament, three parts of the well-known and useful *Source Book of the Bible for Teachers* have been attractively reissued. Both of the new publications start with the same two general chapters on the nature of the Bible and the way contemporary scholars approach it. These are followed, in the two volumes respectively, by 14 chapters on the Old and 11 on the New Testament. In both volumes the lists for further reading have been updated. The majority of the books referred to have been published since 1970, and the lists comprise a representative selection of contemporary material in the various fields of Old and New Testament study.

The objective with this pair of books is "to present enough information to make the reader feel at home in the way modern scholars understand the Bible and to provide a basis for exploring the results of their work further without losing sight of the main contours of the landscape". My impression is that this objective has been attained very effectively. The pages are filled with information, presented in an intelligent sequence and arrangement, and structured in language of stimulating readability. Important insights are conveyed, mostly in thought-provoking ways. Several aspects are covered: the writing process (from oral beginnings to final editing), the relevant background (including Near Eastern geography and ways of life), the events and their significance (from creation to the days of patriarchs, Moses, Joshua, judges, united and divided kingdoms, exile, return, hellenization and revolt), types of literature (narratives, psalms, prophecy, wisdom) and aspects of worship (places, seasons, leaders, sacrifices). Still, the discussions are so well planned and captioned that the reader should easily be able to find his bearings and become familiar with orientating perspectives on the Old Testament panorama.

Some of the significant emphases may briefly be listed as follows. The whole approach is clearly aimed at understanding (as distinguished from proving). The explanations of the then ways of thinking, believing, living and writing are hence very valuable. So also are the comments on the different degrees of faith with which men and women, and especially leaders and prophets, responded to the events of their past and present. Insight is given into the beginnings and development of their remarkable faith in Yahweh as the God who had acted on their behalf, and would continue to do so. The theological messages of the various sections and sub-sections of the Old Testament are duly emphasized. The accent on understanding is not limited, however, to the issues of faith. It also functions when events (like the gradual conquest of the country or the period of the exile), persons (like Moses or David) and relationships (like those with other cultures and powers) are discussed.

The lay-out of the book is, to my mind, quite satisfactory. The table of contents, indicating the 16 chapters and their 178 sections, makes easy reference possible, and the double column pages facilitate rapid reading. When eleven authors have been dealing with a series of topics, one expects an interesting amount of variety. This is the case, but at the same time enough coherence (with a few, minor exceptions) is provided by the related approaches and styles of the contributors, and even, where possible, by the comparable design of chapters. In several cases, for instance, the following sequence has been employed in a chapter: the nature of the biblical (and, where applicable, non-biblical) traditions/sources, the relevant archaeological evidence (or other background data), and the meaning of the biblical sections concerned. Throughout the book a chronological design has been used, but this scheme has been ingeniously interspersed with sections on literary origins, genres and aspects. Full-page, and even a few double-page illustrations (fairly well chosen I would say) brighten the beginnings of the chapters. The book is sturdily bound (so much so that during a first reading it is reluctant to open flat on one's table) and provided with an attractive, colourful cover.

It is rather difficult to suggest improvements, but nevertheless I would venture the following few comments.

- 1 When introducing or reaffirming "critical" views or hypothetical reconstructions, a greater degree of modesty and restraint may perhaps be wise. A mere adverb like "probably"

may sometimes be enough to remind readers that our theories about the origins of traditions and documents cannot be definitely proved.

2 Although the search for meaning is clearly mentioned, I would suggest an even stronger emphasis on it, both when the "critical" approach is initially explained and at appropriate points in the implementation thereof. For readers who are shocked by some "results" and reconstructions, as well as for those who have become blasé after overindulgence in "critical" proceedings, it may be wholesome to remember that our constant aim should be to get as closely and as honestly as possible to the meanings of the messages communicated then and now.

3 In a book which is supposed to be "particularly useful in studying or revising for examinations" I would expect to find a few charts, diagrams and maps. I would imagine that such material may be of relevance not only to teachers, but also to students, clergy and other readers.

4 For the interested reader who would like to know at least something about the context of an author, it would have been convenient if a phrase or sentence about each contributor had been given.

5 The limited number of printing errors I have come across I have mentioned in a letter to the editor of *Scriptura*.

J C Malan

Robert C Walton (ed) 1980 *A Basic Introduction to the New Testament*. London: SCM. SBN: 334 00073 4
(First published as parts One and Four of *A Source Book of the Bible for Teachers*, edited by Robert C Walton, SCM, 1970)
17x20 cm, 237 pp, 13 illustrations. R8.40

The first one and a half paragraphs of my comments on the companion volume apply to this volume as well. The aspects covered in the 11 chapters on the New Testament are the following: Jewish religious life and ways of thinking, Roman administration, the first three Gospels (the way they were written, and the message conveyed by each), miracles, the ministry and the message of Jesus, Paul (his world and his thought), the Gospel according to John, the early church (Acts, life in the early church, literature from the growing church).

In the case of this volume I would list the following as important emphases. The initial position of the chapter on Jewish religious life in the 1st century stresses the importance of understanding their attitudes towards temple, Torah and synagogue, and also their groupings and sects. The next chapter enables the reader to envisage the Roman scene (especially the roles of the Roman administrators) and the futile Jewish uprisings against Roman supremacy. Then, before the Gospels and their messages are discussed, there is a brief chapter on "accepted Ideas in First-Century Palestine". The sequence of the following chapters emphasizes the importance of some clear thinking about the Gospels (only the first three, however) and miracles before surveying the ministry of Jesus. And only then does one reach the substantial (longest in the book) chapter on the message of Jesus. In Paul's case a similar arrangement is used: thinking and believing in the Graeco-Roman world, the life and ministry of Paul, the thought of Paul. John's purpose and thought are emphasized against the background of his Gospel, and in the light of its structure. In the final chapter various accents about the early church (Acts, events depicted in Acts 1-11, life in the early church, pastoral and catholic letters, Hebrews and Revelation) are grouped together. An interesting insight into the diversity of early Christianity is provided by this whole chapter, and especially by some of its data and quotations.

My comments on the lay-out and coherence of this volume (with, in this case, its 13 chapters, 185 sections, 8 authors) are almost the same as in the case of the companion volume. Obviously, however, chronological design has not been necessary here, while the various chapters could reveal a greater amount of independence.

As positive criticism I would offer the same suggestions (as in the case of the companion volume), with special emphasis on the first two. With regard to my second comment, about the emphasis on meaning, I must add that I was slightly disappointed with the number of loose ends in the crucial chapter on the message of Jesus. I agreed with what is said (on p 135) about "a new way of life and a new kind of religion" which Jesus proclaimed, and about its negative side ("to reject the policy of preserving national identity by strict obedience to the Law"). When I then read that the question about the "positive message" may be answered by examining five elements of Jesus' message, I eagerly looked forward to what was to follow. On the next 18 pages I then found a very interesting variety, but no attempt to give the reader a single page insight into the salient features of the "positive message".

On the whole, however, I can strongly recommend this pair of basic introductions. They may certainly guide "students, clergy and other interested readers" towards a better understanding of the Old and the New Testament, and motivate their readers to keep on exploring the meaning revealed through the books of the Bible.

J C Malan

Anderson, Bernhard W 1978³ *The Living World of the Old Testament*. London: Longman. ISBN 0-582-48597-5; 0-582-48598-3 pbk. (Published in the USA by Prentice Hall under the title *Understanding the Old Testament*. First editions published in 1957 (USA) and 1958 (Great Britain). In the 3rd edition some chapters have been "almost completely recast", while all the others have been revised.) 17,5 x 22.5 cm, xiv + 649 pp, 70 photographs, 17 maps, 10 chronological charts, as well as a comprehensive chronological chart, 12 key charts and tables.

For an illuminating understanding of the life-story of ancient Israel one has to enter imaginatively into the world in which their faith took shape. In a very effective way Prof Anderson (Old Testament Theology, Princeton Theological Seminary) guides his reader into this world, introducing him to twenty-one centuries of living and thinking, believing and communicating. The author has used the method of "interweaving the oft-separated elements of historical and archaeological research, literary criticism, and biblical theology". This may sound quite complicated, but he has succeeded in presenting a well-integrated explanation and discussion. If, here and there, the reader has to concentrate more intently, it is mainly due to the complexities of the historical drama itself (for example, where the northern and southern kingdoms, external powers, and prophets are all involved in a certain situation or period). Although the author deliberately sticks to the historical approach in spite of contemporary propaganda for other methods (like structuralism), he does include significant references to linguistic issues (such as word choice, sentence and pericope structure).

The method of blending the findings of several fields of Old Testament research into such an interpretative account is, to my mind, of very special value. To me the reading of this book

has catalysed a remarkable experience. I often felt transported into the ways of thinking and believing of the men and women of those ancient times. The method, wording and style of the book often caused me to sense the thrill of being *there*. In my imagination I participated in an event of covenant renewal. Or I envisaged the vacillation of a king confronted with a decision between apparent political opportunities and contradicting prophetic advice. For myself I have made a full-page list of the insights which interest me most - about the Exodus, the Sinai event and other events, about confessions of faith and relationships of faith, about outward appearances and inner convictions, to name only a few that can be briefly mentioned.

The six hundred pages of this volume are filled with a wealth of information and interpretation (while footnotes add still more interesting ideas that may be pursued). The eighteen chapters are arranged in three parts: The Covenant Community is Formed; Israel Becomes Like the Nations; The Covenant Community is Renewed. The chapters themselves have meaningful captions, like, for example: Covenant in the Wilderness; The Struggle Between Faith and Culture; The Rediscovery of Mosaic Torah. With numerous headings and sub-headings within the chapters, and a detailed subject index (as well as an author index), it is easy to find any particular section. The book is intended to be studied in conjunction with the Old Testament itself, and references are given in profusion (as well as biblical readings recommended at the beginning of each chapter). For further readings an up-to-date, topically arranged, annotated, "selected" bibliography is given, with no less than 415 titles!

Understanding of the living world of the various succeeding periods is facilitated by many photographs of good quality, each with several lines of accompanying information. Ten well-designed chronological charts are given at the appropriate positions in the text and at the end of the book these are combined into a comprehensive chart covering 5 pages. All the useful tables, diagrams and maps provide further valuable aid to the reader.

The volume is attractively and sturdily bound, and has a colourful and perspective-laden photograph of Mount Sinai on the front cover. The lay-out of the pages is well-planned, and with the interesting variety of units, illustrations, charts, tables and maps, it provides pleasant reading. For a book conveying so much in quantity and especially in quality the price is quite reasonable.

Although a reader may question some of the findings of historical and literary research, the author has a way of avoiding an offensive self-assurance. In various ways it seems as if he is reminding the reader that our reconstructions cannot be decisively proved. He does emphasize, however, how the (almost) generally accepted reconstruction of Israel's life-story and communication-story enables us to obtain most surprising glimpses into their ways of thinking and believing. And this can only contribute to our better understanding of the Old Testament - its diverse books and parts, and its total impact.

J C Malan