

BOOK REVIEWS

Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987. xcii + 441 pp. \$24.95.

Few ancient documents have been as thoroughly analyzed as the Gospel of John. Such major figures as Dodd, Bultmann, Barrett, Brown, Schnackenburg, and Haenchen have produced massive tomes to assist the reader in the book's interpretation. The production of yet another volume, however, is justified by the fact that the above tend to be heavy and detailed and usually deal with the literature of an earlier generation.

The Word Biblical Commentary series attempts to combine an evangelical commitment to Scripture and the gospel with serious scholarship of the highest order. The authors are distinguished and the bibliographies comprehensive. The series attempts to keep in mind the pastor as well as the scholar.

George R. Beasley-Murray is a British scholar who has taught for a number of years in the United States. He fits the mold of the Word series very well. For example, his respect for Scripture prevents him from emending texts if they can be understood as they stand (thus he sees no light in reversing chaps. 5 and 6). He is also unafraid to differ with earlier literature and carries a healthy skepticism for scholarly reconstructions (such as the Baptist movement and a supposed "signs gospel").

As a commentator on the Gospel of John, Beasley-Murray is remarkably restrained. He does not attempt to answer every possible question that arises out of the text. His commentary emphasizes the forest rather than the trees in John's Gospel. Beasley-Murray does the minimum with verse-by-verse commentary, preferring to draw out the key points of each verse or section. Each section is preceded by a summary of its structure and followed by a careful summary of the major theological themes. The commentary, therefore, is not tedious, as is often the case with Brown, since it avoids unnecessary digressions and points of detail. Its content is balanced, rich, and carefully considered. While it does not have the full detail of Brown or Schnackenburg, it is, in itself, sufficiently rewarding to satisfy most readers, while providing the kind of bibliography that more serious students of the gospel require.

The major weakness of this commentary lies in its treatment of the most recent literature. The bibliographies are solid from the 1950s through the 1970s, when the author was at the peak of his scholarly activity. And while Beasley-Murray shows awareness of the major commentaries produced in the first half of the 1980s, he rarely accounts for the journal

articles and monographs of the last seven years. Therefore, though the date of publication is 1987, the book in many ways has the value of a work published in 1980. While this is a strong update in comparison to Brown, it does not offer a significant advance over Haenchen or Schnackenburg. It is to be regretted that such a fine interpretation of the gospel does not list more of the hundreds of recent publications relevant to the study of John.

Although the bibliographic weakness is regrettable, it does not present a major barrier to the acceptance of Beasley-Murray's book as a major contribution to the history of the interpretation of the Gospel of John. Although it does not replace Brown or Schnackenburg, it offers an intriguing alternative to those who would prefer something less expensive and technical. Its scholarly richness and spiritual depth will certainly commend it to a broad constituency. It should receive a top rating among students, pastors, and evangelicals in general, while offering a thoughtful supplement to the massive volume of scholarly thought that has been expended on John's marvelous portrayal of the life of Christ.

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Brownlee, William H. *Ezekiel 1-19*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 28. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986. xlii + 384 pp. \$22.95.

We here review an unfinished commentary. W. H. Brownlee died while he was still working on Ezekiel 19. The editors are to be congratulated for publishing it and particularly for making the book a memorial. It is a well-deserved recognition of an excellent scholar.

The commentary follows the structural pattern of other volumes in the Word Biblical Commentary series. Every section includes a bibliography; a translation of the biblical text; textual notes; a discussion on form, structure, and setting; and comments. Brownlee's translation sacrifices beauty, but reflects his text-critical decisions. Although he makes an effort to follow the MT, he often introduces changes based on the LXX or other texts.

It is difficult to imagine that after W. Zimmerli's masterful work (*Ezekiel*, Hermenia [Philadelphia, 1979-1983]) and that of M. Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1-20*, AB [New York, 1983]), another commentary on Ezekiel could break new ground. Brownlee has done just that. On most of the basic issues he has something challenging to say.

According to Brownlee, the locale of the prophet is not Babylon or Jerusalem but Gilgal, Ezekiel's home town. He argues that the term *gôlâ* ("exiles") is an editorial modification of the original *hagilgâlâ* ("to/at Gilgal"), near Jericho. The change was introduced possibly during the time of Zerubbabel, when the book underwent a major revision. The