

Levine, Baruch. *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible, vol. 4a. New York: Doubleday, 1993. 528 pp. \$40.00.

Numbers 1-20 by Baruch Levine is the most recent translation, introduction, and commentary on the biblical book of Numbers. Levine is well known for his publications in biblical and comparative studies, especially in the area of Israelite cult. Other books by Levine are *In the Presence of the Lord* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974) and *Leviticus* (The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989).

The present volume begins with Levine's translation of Num 1-20, a text which consists of Israelite narratives and laws set in the period of wilderness wandering. The translation flows well in idiomatic English and precisely reflects the interpretive conclusions reached in the commentary portion of the volume.

Following the translation, an introduction to the book of Numbers deals with topics such as the names and content of the book, texts, translations, and prior commentaries, and above all, source criticism: the literary nature and historical context of the book and its sources. As a believer in the commonly accepted "JEDP" form of the documentary hypothesis, Levine continues the tradition of critical commentaries such as that of G. B. Gray (*Numbers*, International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903]). Levine insists on the importance of "identifying significantly different perceptions of the wilderness experience" (49) by reconstructing phases of literary development in which originally separate sources (JE = 9th-8th-century B.C. Jahwist—Judean source + Elohist—northern Israelite source, including a possible "Transjordanian archive," and P = exilic/postexilic priestly source) were brought together into the book of Numbers as we know it. The implications of this approach, especially the late dating of "P," for the historicity of the Israelite sanctuary and its services are clear: "the historicity of the Tabernacle traditions is highly questionable to start with" (172).

As Levine is aware, the source-critical approach, which requires the student of a biblical book "to disassemble and reassemble its sources in a chronological sequence" (49), has been challenged recently by J. Milgrom (*Numbers*, The JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989]). While Milgrom holds that some literary growth of the text is likely and at times discernible, he eschews diachronic theories which "virtually ignore the present text except as a base from which to probe into its origins," preferring to assume "that the preserved text is an organic unit" (Milgrom, xii). Furthermore, while Milgrom allows for the existence of a discrete priestly source ("P"), he argues for a preexilic date for the composition of this material (*Leviticus 1-16*, The Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 1991], pp. 3-13).

In the commentary portion of *Numbers 1-20*, Levine makes impressive use of linguistic, archaeological, geographical, and comparative textual data to illuminate the biblical text. He presents simple, convincing solutions to several notable exegetical problems. For example, in Num 18:19 he renders *berît melah' ôlām* (lit. "eternal covenant of salt") as "the permanent rule [requiring

use] of salt," interpreting the terminology in light of Lev 2:13, which requires the salting of sacrifices (449).

Levine labels a number of ritual activities, e.g. the ordeal of the suspected adulteress prescribed in Num 5:11-31, as "magical" (205, 208; cp. 422, 471, 490). However, nowhere in this volume does he define "magical." Such a definition would help the reader and would facilitate scholarly discussion as to whether or not the designation is appropriate in these and other instances. If "magic" is a kind of ritual dynamic, and if dynamics of a given ritual should be understood within its (the ritual's) ritual culture (including the conceptual system of that culture), it follows that comparative conclusions must proceed cautiously. For example: The fact that there are certain similarities between the ordeal of the suspected adulteress and activities outlined in the Assyrian *Maqlû* series, usually regarded as magical (208), does not by itself require the conclusion that the Israelite ritual is also magical.

The commentary is generally rich in precise detail and clarity. An exception could be pointed out in the discussion of Num 5:15, where Levine refers to "the Deuteronomic interpretation that the only basis for divorce was adultery or serious sexual misconduct (Deut 24:1)" (193). It is true that the basis for divorce in Deut 24:1 is a kind of sexual misconduct, perhaps "indecent exposure," but according to Deut 22:22, adultery results in death, not divorce.

Among the most important problems discussed in the commentary are those which concern Israelite history. Levine's approach to some of these is to answer a given question in a late historical context and then to regard the Numbers text which deals with the same issue as a late priestly invention intended to support the priestly agenda by retrojection into the wilderness period. For example, when did the internal stratification of the tribe of Levi occur? Interpreting Ezek 44:9-14 in light of 2 Kgs 23:8-9, Levine concludes that "the Levites of whom Numbers speaks in detail, as a group distinct from priests and subservient to them, ultimately owe their existence to the edicts of Josiah, subsequently endorsed in Ezek 44:9-14" (289). So Num 8, describing the dedication of the Levites during the wilderness period, is viewed as reflecting the near-exilic reorganization of the Judean priesthood. This kind of reconstruction is based upon the questionable assumption that the historicity of the cultic portions of Numbers is not to be taken seriously.

Levine may be commended for an outstanding contribution to the study of Numbers. Much of this work will undoubtedly stand the test of time, but hypothetical historical reconstructions are only as solid as the theories upon which they are based, no matter how carefully such theories are applied.

Andrews University

ROY GANE

Mack, Burton L. *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*. San Francisco: Harper, 1993. 275 pp. \$22.00.

This book advances the following thesis: Distinguishable within Q are three strands, Q1, Q2, and Q3. Each of these strands corresponds to a different