

In spite of a few weaknesses, the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* will undoubtedly become an authoritative expression of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. Although this book does not intend to answer all theological questions, it is nonetheless a remarkable achievement that has been long overdue. No theological work of this magnitude has ever been produced by this denomination. By filling a large void, it benefits both the denomination and the wider Christian community. I concur with the editor, who says that "this volume is sent forth . . . in the hope that it will be of use in Adventist and non-Adventist homes, classrooms, and libraries, as well as in pastoral offices as a handy and valued reference tool for information on various aspects of Adventist understanding and practice" (xi).

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Barker, Margaret. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000. xii + 447 pp. Paperback, \$29.95.

Margaret Barker, Old Testament scholar and former president of the Society for Old Testament Study, has written a provocative commentary on Revelation that pulls together and culminates a number of her previously developed views (e.g., *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* [London: SPCK, 1987]; *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* [London: SPCK, 1991]; *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992]; *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995]; and *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996]). She states, in fact, that "all of my publications have been leading in this direction, and their conclusions form the foundation for this book" (xiii).

Although the book contains twenty-two chapters, these do not correspond to Revelation's twenty-two chapters. The first three chapters contain the key conclusions mentioned in the books above, here grouped into three foundational themes (Jesus, the temple, and the priests of Israel), undergirding the rest of her commentary. In the fourth chapter, Barker sets forth her views on the development of Revelation as a literary product. The remaining chapters do not attempt a verse-by-verse commentary; instead, she discusses broad theological themes within the overall sequence of chapters in Revelation, and thus there is some repetition of material throughout the book. An excursus on the Parousia and its relation to Christian liturgy follows the commentary proper. It is followed by less than five pages of endnotes (although some lengthy footnotes, enclosed within parentheses, masquerade as text; cf. 116-117, 189-190, 2652-66, and 324). A succinct discussion of primary sources and two helpful indices (persons, places, and subjects; and biblical and ancient texts) round out the work.

Barker derives her reading of Revelation by comparing it to primary sources of the Second Temple period—in particular, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, and Josephus. But she also sifts through apocryphal, apostolic and postapostolic, gnostic, medieval, rabbinic, kabbalistic, and merkavah texts to contextualize her overall interpretation and to trace trajectories from it. Her career

work is to attempt a reconstruction of Israel's ancient religion, which was destroyed by Hezekiah, Josiah, and the Deuteronomists (cf. 15-17, 34-38). She sees Revelation's last chapters envisioning the restoration of the ancient temple cult earlier preserved in Enochic writings (301).

To Barker, the core of Revelation is a series of temple oracles "collected and preserved by John the beloved disciple and his brothers the prophets, the greatest of whom had been Jesus himself" (xi). Unfortunately, the people did not accept Jesus' testimony (Rev 1:1) of what he had seen and heard in heaven (cf. John 3:32). Nevertheless, these prophetic oracles, which were used to interpret current events, "inspired the war against Rome with their conviction that the LORD would return to his city" (xi-xii) to make the final atonement as the Great High Priest. After collecting these apocalyptic Hebrew oracles and escaping Jerusalem, John—who had received his own vision of the Lord's return as recorded in Rev 10—began to reinterpret Jesus' sayings and to teach that the Lord would return to his people in the Eucharist.

Barker thus attempts to shed new light on the origins of Christianity as well as on the development of the Christian liturgy. Strongly emphasizing the Jewish background to Revelation, largely on the basis of the illumination of Second Temple Judaism by the Dead Sea Scrolls, she argues positions opposed to the contemporary exegetical consensus on a number of issues involved in the interpretation of Revelation (cf. xi-xiii). For example, Barker believes Revelation is not a late text from Asia Minor, but rather the *earliest* material in the NT. Favoring internal over external evidence, she believes that Revelation refers to contemporary events in and around Jerusalem during 68-70 C.E. rather than during the reign of Domitian during the 90s.

In her preface, Barker states that ideally she "should like to have written a much longer work, engaging in debate with others who work in this field, but the realities of time and publishing make this impossible"; instead, what she offers is "my reading of the Book of Revelation" (xiii). This is the reason for such a paucity of endnotes for a commentary of this size. It is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is an advantage because one's reading is not slowed down by valuable but lengthy notes (cf. her *The Risen Lord*). It is a disadvantage, however, in that one cannot easily associate or dissociate her views from those of other scholars.

Barker's key OT text to her cultic understanding of Revelation is the description of Solomon's accession to the Israelite throne in 1 Chr 29:20-23, a passage that she has emphasized in previous works. This demonstrates to her that Solomon literally ruled from the Lord's throne in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (121), a confusing conclusion in light of her statements elsewhere that only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place (21, 28, 45-46). She goes further: "When Solomon was enthroned as king *he became the LORD*" (378, emphasis hers; cf. 37-38, 384); thus, he was worshiped as the Lord. She sees this text not only as key to the apotheosis of the Lamb in Rev 5 but as "*the most important piece of evidence in the Hebrew Scriptures for understanding the Book of Revelation*" (121, original emphasis).

Barker's apotheosistic interpretation of 1 Chronicles, however, cannot be sustained. Barker has overlooked the theocratic emphasis of the chronicler, clearly seen by comparing 1 Chr 17:14 with 2 Sam 7:16, 2 Chr 1:11 with 1 Kgs 3:11, and 2 Chr 9:8 with 1 Kgs 10:9 (cf. 1 Kgs 2:12; 1 Chr 28:5-6; 2 Chr 13:4-8). The

chronicler has changed his sources to emphasize the sovereignty and rule of God—rather than the Davidic king—over Israel. He sees the throne and kingdom of Israel as God's, and thus to "sit on God's throne" refers not to sitting on the throne in the Most Holy Place, but rather ruling Israel as God's chosen king.

Barker's interpretation of the appearance of the mighty angel of Rev 10 as the personal "return" of Jesus to John, prompting his need to "give further teaching that the return of the LORD would not be literally as the prophecies had predicted" (180; see also 181-82), is unconvincing. This particular interpretation is a key transition, however, to her understanding that Jesus would return in the Eucharist. She argues this latter position on the basis that "Come, Lord Jesus" in Rev 22:20 is a version of "Maranatha," later linked to a Eucharistic prayer in *Did.* 10 (373). Because this fervent prayer and other fragmentary assurances of the Lord's return are at the end of the book (Rev 22:7, 12, 20), she concludes that the promise of Jesus' literal return was no longer central and was being reinterpreted to mean that Jesus would return in the Eucharist (372-88). But the use of the *Didache* as the primary key to understanding this phrase in Revelation is problematic.

In many places Barker's work is clearly speculative, a fact she recognizes in several places (cf. 62, 286, 378, 387). The use of "could," "may," "possible," "likely," "probably," and similar terms underscores the tentativeness of her hypotheses. It is nevertheless surprising to see her conjecture that Jesus' childhood visit with the temple teachers (Luke 2:46-47) might have been his first contact with temple mystics (10) morph into a fact later in the book (129). Apparently, this particularly "tempting" (10) interpretation of Jesus' childhood experience was too great for her to resist.

Barker's multiple use of the word "must" in arguing some positions is equally mystifying in light of the recognizably conjectural nature of her work. One gains interpretive credibility through forceful arguments rather than verbal insistence. Thus, the repeated use of strenuous assertions (e.g., the false prophet of Rev 16:13 "*must have been Josephus*" [237; original emphasis]) raises more questions than it demonstrates fact. The same concern applies to her claim that John "must have been a priest" because his description of the heavenly temple was inspired by the Jerusalem temple, and only priests were permitted to enter it (260).

Barker does not feel compelled, however, to consistently use such insistent language in order to present her conjectures in factual language. For example, she asserts that "Jezebel, the false prophetess in Thyatira, was Lydia, whom Paul had met in Philippi" (100; cf. 62). Yet, the only facts identifying both Lydia and "Jezebel" are that they are both women and both associated with Thyatira—slim evidence indeed. Nevertheless, this radical identification coincides with her belief that it was none other than the apostle Paul who was the false prophet Balaam (Rev 2:14), whose teachings constituted the "deep things of Satan" (Rev 2:24), and against whom Jesus warned the seven churches (99-102; 107).

We should remember that Barker explicitly wrote this book as *her* reading of Revelation. Thus, her boldly asserted notions should be seen as her understanding of the text, in spite of the way they are presented. In her previous work, *The Risen Lord* (xii), she agreed with J. H. Charlesworth that interpretive positions are not infallible, that interpreters work not with certainties, but relative probabilities,

and that reticence to put forward one's position is not necessarily a virtue. If this is true, Barker is to be commended for being daring enough to share her personal understanding of Revelation—even if it is frequently inconclusive, conjectural, filled with gaps, and/or simply open to criticism. Even so, her piling up of hypotheses and conjectures makes me wish that her work looked more like a fortress than the proverbial “house of cards.”

I was baffled by some of the ways in which Barker uses sources and ancient texts. Why did she use Swete's out-of-date text of Revelation as her critical Greek text (389)? Why is her translation of 1 Chr 29:20 (37-38), so key to her interpretation, not the same as that given on page 140? Why does she rely on Codex Bezae's nearly singular reading of Acts 18:25 in her discussion of Apollos (96)? In what convincing way do the Old Latin translations of Matt 3:15 in Codex Vercellensis and Codex Sangermanensis provide “evidence” (127) for a fire appearing on the Jordan at Jesus' baptism? How conclusive is the fifth-century Freer manuscript of Mark 16:14 in providing “evidence” of what Jesus taught (349-50)? And even if Eusebius's second-hand information from Hegesippus (that James the Righteous used to enter the Most Holy Place to pray for the forgiveness of the people) “is almost certainly accurate” (10), how accurate and trustworthy is Hegesippus himself?

In spite of the preceding concerns, I believe there are at least four major strengths to this work that set it apart from many other commentaries on Revelation. First, Barker has attempted to demonstrate that the NT teaching about Jesus originated with him and was not invented by his disciples (7). Second, she has underscored the importance of the temple cult for an overall understanding of Revelation. Third, she has highlighted the importance of the Day of Atonement and its rituals for understanding Revelation's theology. And finally, she has focused more clearly than any recent commentator on the importance of the high-priestly identity of Jesus Christ in Revelation. She believes that Revelation is “steeped in the imagery of high priesthood” (40-41). While her belief that the high priest was “the key figure in the book of Revelation” (35) is overstated in light of other explicit imagery (cf. the Lamb), her emphasis on the importance of such high-priestly imagery is valid. Moreover, she states that “*the picture of Jesus as the great high priest in all his roles and aspects appears throughout the New Testament and is the key to understanding all early Christian teaching about him*” (4, original emphasis), a bold assertion that I believe is on the right track. Again and again, Barker weaves these fascinating and welcome approaches into the loom of her work, and the result is that familiar passages in Revelation take on vivid color and finely detailed texture. These provocative emphases alone are worth the price of the book.

I hope editorial and printing errors will be corrected in future printings or editions. For example, on page 91, lines 7 and 13 are unintelligible as they currently stand. On line 31 of page 281 there are two successive “the”s. Also, her references to the gnostic tractate *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* should rather be *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (she uses both titles, 403-444).

While not written in a highly technical style, Barker's commentary is nevertheless theologically demanding. Despite my reservations about and disagreements with her methodology and many of her conclusions, I recommend this work both to scholars and others who wish to further explore the first-century Jewish background to Revelation and Jesus' portrayal there. I believe her work deserves an audience of readers

willing to be stimulated and challenged in their study of the riches of this apocalypse about Jesus Christ.

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Barth, Markus, and Helmut Blanke. *The Letter to Philemon*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. xviii + 561 pp. Hardcover, \$40.00.

In only its second volume, the Eerdmans Critical Commentary Series (ECC) distinguishes itself from other standard commentary sets with the publication of an exceptional commentary that deals exclusively with one of the smallest books in the NT, Philemon. Instead of being examined as an addendum to a volume on Colossians or another NT book, Philemon stands alone. The commentary is the result of the lifelong research of Markus Barth (son of the noted Lutheran theologian Karl Barth) and completed posthumously by his former student Helmut Blanke. It bears the typical marks of distinguished scholarship that we expect from Markus Barth.

Well organized and lucidly written, the work is divided into three sections. The first section (102 pp.) furnishes background to Philemon, with a comprehensive examination of one of the most scandalous forms of human existence in the ancient world, the life of a slave. This section, which is one of the key strengths of the book, includes such topics as "The Slave's Daily Life and Legal Position," "Fugitive Slaves," "Slave Revolts and Wars," "Manumission," and "Old Testament and Later Jewish Traditions." One of the most interesting discussions here is the examination of letters by Pliny the Younger, which include his intervention for a fugitive freedman analogous to Paul's intervention for Philemon.

The second section (137 pp.) deals with the literary, biographical, and contextual issues connected with Philemon. While the commentary's approach to the typical introductory material is conventional and covers only about twenty-five pages, the intriguing part of this section is the authors' discussion of what is "known" and "unknown" about each of the *dramatis personae*—Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. What response did Paul want from his letter—immediate manumission, eventual manumission, a reform of slavery, or transfer of custody of Onesimus to himself? Other questions deal with the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. Was the latter a house-born slave, and if so, was Philemon his physical father? Why did Onesimus flee? While the authors acknowledge that the "abundance of things unknown dwarfs the fairly certain information" (149), their detailed discussion provides a good introduction to the interesting and difficult questions that one must consider when examining Paul's letter to Philemon.

The final section is the commentary proper. Each portion commences with the author's own translation of a passage, followed by discussion of pertinent elements of the text. While the commentary covers the full range of interpretative issues associated with Philemon, its strength does not lie in new or unconventional exegesis, but in the high level of detail with which it treats the text. Examples of this can be seen in the discussion of textual variants which are often superficially addressed or ignored in other commentaries (e.g., Phlm 6, 11), as well as interaction with the Vulgate. In addition, there are twenty-three interpretive asides