

Book Reviews

Beers, V. Gilbert, **The Early Reader's Bible** (Sisters, OR: Questar Publishers, Inc., 1991, 527 pp, cloth, \$15.99) reviewed by Joanne Lovik.

The Early Reader's Bible is exactly that -- a Bible for young readers. V. Gilbert Beers has rewritten Bible stories from Genesis through Philemon, using a list of 250 basic words so that the young reader may read the Bible for himself. Each story is interestingly written with words from standard early-reader lists used in public and private schools. New words are introduced into the stories and are reviewed at the end of each entry. Many of these new words are actually biblical names and locations enabling the reader to become familiar with them. Thought-provoking questions and activities are listed following each story, reinforcing biblical values from the story just read. Biblical references are given also. The index is especially helpful with a story listing which shows reference, moral, and spiritual lessons taught. Also included is a basic word list and a new word list.

The numerous bright, lively illustrations included in the book are done in the cartoon manner common to many children's books. This might be a drawback to some. Otherwise, this is an excellent book for young readers up to third grade, for use in personal Bible reading, participation in family devotions or in class settings.

Elwell, Walter A. and Toon, Peter, eds., **The Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991, 569 pp, cloth, \$19.95) reviewed by Clint Banz.

Here is a reference tool designed to meet the ever increasing need for more succinct answers to complicated questions-quickly!

The *Concise Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* is essentially the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, (also published by Baker, 1984), "reedited, reorganized, and updated," (preface, v). Over 160 scholars writing from an evangelical perspective have contributed articles. In comparison to other biblical reference tools, this work stresses the theological dimension of a given topic. Although it is significantly abridged (about 1,000 of the original 1,200, entries with the remaining articles significantly shortened), the excellent scholarship of the original articles is apparent. The entries provide cross-referencing and are signed; however, they include no bibliographies. The result is a reference book slightly larger than one-fourth the original size. This tool is recommended for layman and church libraries. For the student or pastor I would suggest you dig a little deeper into your pocket and purchase the original *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. The convenience of any abridgement has its drawbacks.

Garrett, Duane A., **Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991, 273 pp, paper, \$13.95) reviewed by Charles E. McLain.

In his preface to *Rethinking Genesis* Garrett points out that conservative scholars over the last one hundred years have been battling a "near monolithic critical consensus" arising from the Documentary Hypothesis. Many conservative arguments have been picked up by "modern scholars who cannot in any sense be called conservative [and who] are now using those same arguments as they jettison the orthodoxy of higher criticism" (8). However, before victory is claimed, the result has not been a swing to a more conservative direction, but in Garrett's estimate a swing in *every* direction. Actually a new round of critical entrenchment is taking place requiring new and fresh conservative study and rebuttal. In his book Garrett addresses "the issues of the origin and intention of Genesis . . . from an evangelical perspective" (8).

His aim is to use the first three chapters to establish a foundation. In these chapters his intent is to demonstrate that the Documentary Hypothesis is no longer valid in any sense. Likewise the attempt to discover lengthy streams of oral traditions behind Genesis is futile and hopeless. Also he attempts to show that "an early date for Genesis

and indeed Mosaic authorship are reasonable working 'hypotheses' for a new look at Genesis" (8). In chapters 4 through 9 (which he sees as "the heart of this study") he attempts to ascertain both the structure and sources behind the structure. Chapters 10 through 12 contain his conclusions. He also endeavors to make this book "more accessible to the nonspecialist" (9).

Garrett has produced a very readable and understandable contribution to the study of Genesis. His review of the higher critical handling of Genesis in chapters one through three is to be commended. Chapters one and two contain a well-developed, clear summary of leading critical scholars, their views, and their methodologies. In chapter three Garrett deals with "Mosaic Authorship and Historical Reliability." Here he surveys some critical theories of history and demonstrates their weaknesses and inadequacies. He further surveys the historicity of the text from ancient Near Eastern texts, archeological evidence, and comparative studies. His position is that "it is not irrational to conclude that Moses is the person primarily responsible for the writing of the Pentateuch" (51). At the same time Garrett recognizes that "Moses was not alive during any part of the history of the Genesis narrative . . . even the latest portions of the Genesis narrative are asserted to have taken place some four hundred years before Moses, this is a significant complication" (84). He also points out that "no analogy exists in the Bible . . . for historical narrative having its source in direct revelation" (85). Thus having shown that the foundation laid by the Documentary Hypothesis has completely crumbled and that questions still exist concerning the process by which Genesis came into existence, Garrett sets the stage for his reconstruction of how Genesis came into being.

In chapters four through nine, Garrett deals with the structure and sources of Genesis. This attempt focuses on the genre identification of material in Genesis as compared to similar ancient Near Eastern literary examples. In his reconstruction he posits a four-stage development: "the initial recollection and transmission; the reduction of these stories to writing and the pre-Mosaic redaction of the unstructured oral sources into complex literary units; the Mosaic redaction; and the post-Mosaic redaction(s)" (91). Although he posits an oral stage in the transmission of the narrative histories, unlike form critics he does not see this as a prolonged process.

Chapters 10 through 12 contain his conclusions concerning the authorship and composition of Genesis. Some of his deductions are

open to question and dispute; such as his identification of the seven days of Genesis one not as actual lengths of time (that is, not 24 hour days of creation) but as days of divine revelation (193), his somewhat recurrent use of the "can only be" argument (215, 217, etc.), and his claim that the apocalyptic nature of Ezekiel's language cannot be taken literally of a future millennial temple (228). In the end, Garrett understands Moses as the "author" of Genesis. By "author" Garrett indicates he means Moses functioned as original author of some portions and editor of other portions. He states, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 is in fact a direct revelation to Moses, and I see no reason to doubt that he not only wrote that text but also edited the sources behind Genesis 2:4ff. into the present form" (197). He places the time of the writing during the period of the exodus (237).

In a two-page appendix Garrett speaks to the question of inspiration. Though exceedingly brief, he is to be commended for at least addressing the issue. So many authors who approach the subjects of historical, literary, hermeneutical questions are unwilling to address the subject of how their topic relates to the question of inspiration because of its theological nature. Although one might disagree with his conclusions, one cannot fault him for his endeavor. Garrett specifically relates inspiration to a three stage process of formation from sources to the present text. In the first stage materials were gathered into sources. At this point Garrett claims that "a minimal view would be that at least part of what they compiled was true and trustworthy . . ." while "on the other hand, many of the original compilers of the sources themselves were surely as inspired as the great writers who followed them" (240). One is led to ask just how broad this view of inspiration goes. If inspiration simply refers to the compilation of material which contains "true and trustworthy" data, does it continue today? Did it pre-date Abraham? What fields, if any, is it limited to? To history? To mathematics? To religion? What peoples, if any, was it limited to? To the Israelites? To the Egyptians? To the Canaanites?

During the second stage the source materials were collected and "the great, original authors such as Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John or Paul" were "able to separate the wheat from the chaff and use only the valid material" (240). In the third and final stage the great author's work(s) was revised; though specifically in Genesis this was "for the most part limited to revising vocabulary" (240).

Garrett's lack of uniformity in referring to Moses as author, writer, redactor, great author leaves a sense of uncertainty as to his

meaning at times. However, after all is said and done, Garrett concludes that "Moses is no less the 'author' of Genesis on the grounds that he used sources or that what came from his hand has undergone revision. Genesis is still 'the First Book of Moses'" (241).

Though (or perhaps because) his book raises questions about what it means that Moses wrote Genesis; it is recommended for students who not only desire to better understand the process by which Bible authors composed their books but also for those who wish to defend Mosaic authorship in a scholarly world still ruled by critical methods.

Gerstner, John H., *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991, cloth, \$15.99) reviewed by Ken R. Pulliam.

For the last decade or so the debate between dispensationalists and covenant theologians has been carried on in an irenic tone. That has ceased with the publication of *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* by John Gerstner. Gerstner argues that dispensationalism presents "another gospel." He concludes his book by saying, "My plea to all dispensationalists is this—show me the fundamental error in what I teach or admit your fundamental error. We cannot both be right. One of us is wrong—seriously wrong. If you are wrong (in your doctrine, as I here charge), you are preaching nothing less than a false gospel. This calls for genuine repentance and fruits worthy of it before the Lord Jesus Christ whom we both profess to love and serve" (p. 263). In his appendix, he says: ". . . Dispensationalism does not require genuine faith in Jesus Christ for salvation" (p. 272). If these charges are true, then dispensationalism is a very serious heresy.

Gerstner's reasoning is as follows:

Calvinism is equal to orthodoxy,
Dispensationalism is not equal to Calvinism,
thus Dispensationalism is not equal to orthodoxy.

Gerstner spends chapter after chapter detailing how many dispensationalists are not strict Calvinists. He then concludes that dispensationalism is not orthodox. The problems here are manifold: First, who decided that Calvinism is equal to orthodoxy? Calvinism

is a system of theology (as is also dispensationalism), and all systems of theology are man-made and fallible. We should not test one system against another but rather we should test the system against the Word of God itself. Gerstner's book is very weak in exegesis. Virtually no interaction with the biblical text (except some proof-texting) takes place.

Secondly, there are various degrees of Calvinism, Gerstner argues that unless one accepts all five points, he is not a Calvinist but an Arminian. This is overly simplistic.

Thirdly, Gerstner fails to show the necessary link between dispensationalism and inconsistent Calvinism (or Arminianism). Certainly, there were Arminians (16th century) around before there were Dispensationalists (19th century), and there are Arminians today who are not dispensational. Contrariwise, there are strict Calvinists who are dispensational. Gerstner even acknowledges Donald Barnhouse (pp. 60-61), Alan MacRae (p. 60), John MacArthur (p. 253) and others as examples of Calvinistic dispensationalists. Why doesn't he recognize that this destroys his argument (is it coincidence that he omits their names in the index)? If one can be a Calvinistic dispensationalist as these men are, then obviously dispensationalism and Calvinism are not mutually exclusive. One could not speak about a Calvinistic-Arminian or a legalistic-antinomian but one can speak of a Calvinistic-dispensationalist (or an Arminian-dispensationalist).

While Gerstner's basic argument is fallacious, he does make some valid criticism of dispensationalism. For example, the implication given by many of the older dispensationalists of more than one way of salvation is a real problem (see pp. 149-169). While the extreme statements of Scofield (e.g., see his note on John 1:17) and Chafer (e.g., *Systematic Theology* VII, 209) are repudiated by most dispensationalists today, there is a deeper underlying problem. The very definition of a dispensation as given by dispensationalists may *imply* various ways of salvation. Gerstner says: "In spite of all the dispensational protestations to the contrary, dispensations (if they mean what their definition says) have to be testings for salvation. If persons met those tests, the presumably they would be acceptable to God" (p. 271). This criticism needs to be carefully considered by dispensationalists (and is by "progressive dispensationalists").

Gerstner also points out some of the serious difficulties with the idea of Christ offering a literal kingdom to the Jews in the first century (pp. 171-79). He does not recognize, however, that many

"progressive" dispensationalists no longer hold this view. Thus, it is not a necessary ingredient of dispensationalism.

He also deals extensively with the problems of the "Keswick" view of sanctification so prominent in dispensationalism (pp. 231-50). While there are many legitimate criticisms of this view of sanctification, there is no necessary link between it and dispensationalism. Just because many (most) dispensationalists have held this view, does not mean that dispensationalism demands one hold this view (As an example, this reviewer considers himself a dispensationalist and does not hold the "Keswick" view.).

Finally, Gerstner treats the "Lordship Controversy" (pp. 251-59). Once again, Gerstner makes some valid criticisms of the anti-Lordship view, but he does not establish the premise that to be dispensational is to be anti-Lordship. As a matter of fact, he even acknowledges that one of the strongest defenses of the Lordship view was written by a dispensationalist, John MacArthur (p. 253). This demonstrates that his premise, dispensationalism equals antinomianism, is invalid. Some antinomians may be dispensational but it is not necessary that all dispensationalists be antinomian.

All of the weaknesses of this book notwithstanding, Gerstner's book deserves a reading by dispensationalists. If it helps to refine dispensationalism into a more biblical system, then it is a helpful book. Discussion and debate is needed but it is hoped that it could be carried on in a more irenic spirit (Vern Poythress' *Understanding Dispensationalists* is a good example of the irenic tone that is needed).

Lutzer, Erwin W., *Coming to Grips With Your Sexual Past* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991, 43 pp, paper, \$2.95) reviewed by Larry R. Thornton.

Today there is an abundance of articles and books focusing on restructuring a person's past. Many of them are filled with psychological theory rather than biblical direction. This booklet explains the power of sexual sin, the development of sexual addictions and the doorway to sexual forgiveness and healing in light of biblical truth. The author stresses the impact of sexuality in our lives -- "our sexuality is the most sensitive aspect of our personality. We are fundamentally sexual beings with deep inner needs that we are tempted to meet even at great risk." God created men and women with the sexual desires as seen in Genesis 2. Lutzer writes, "...God

made the desire for physical intimacy so strong that there was no chance that Adam would look at Eve and walk away." It is clear that man is held accountable for his behavior and though the sex drive is powerful no person needs to think that sex is necessary for either happiness or fulfillment. Lutzer emphasizes two implications: 1) we must accept our sexual desires as from God and 2) we should positively affirm our sexuality.

The most interesting subject of the book to the reviewer was the treatment of sexuality and alien bonds. These occur when a man and women are united sexually without a covenant of marriage. The power of sexual bonding accounts for difficult-to-explain behavior such as homosexuality, a woman living with an abusive lover, the tendency to promiscuity, and the relapse to immorality. Lutzer points out that those who have had illicit bonds may find it difficult to form a meaningful permanent bond even within the security of a marriage covenant. There certainly is hope for victory over these problems by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Guidance is given in dealing with a sexual past through an exegetical study of Luke 7:36-50. This is the story where Simon, a Pharisee, held a feast for Christ and had an immoral woman come in to anoint Christ. Four steps are given to deal with past sexual problems. Once a person has received Christ and His forgiveness and has followed these four steps he/she will want to take five additional steps. The author's advice in these steps is biblical and scripturally documented.

The subject matter of this book is extremely pertinent in light of the sin problems in contemporary America. The author's treatment of the subject is biblical rather than psychological. The insights regarding alien bonding are helpful to pastors and lay counselors who are dealing with incest and sexual affair cases. The book's pocket size and length makes it extremely useful and handy to give to counselees to read as homework. This booklet is one in a series of *Salt and Light Pocket Guides*. The book is highly recommended to pastors and laymen who counsel.