

they are. Ironically, it is the determination to be true to the text in its religious, political, and social context. Today, nothing is more relevant.

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Newsome, James D. *Greeks, Romans, Jews: Currents of Culture and Belief in the New Testament World*. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992. 496 pp. \$29.95

Newsome wrote this book for the benefit of his students. He hoped that his work "would not only deepen their perspectives on both Old and New Testaments," but also entice them to become well acquainted with the fascinating times and culture of the intertestamental period. He also intended his work to benefit "interested lay people who want to know more about the 'world of the Bible'" (xiii).

The book is divided into two parts, "The Hellenistic Period" and "The Roman Period." Of the 377 pages of text, 108 are devoted to history and 269 to cultural developments of the intertestamental period. This distribution shows quite clearly where the emphasis of the book lies. The notes contain both additional information about and bibliographical sources for the main events of the period, stretching from the times of Alexander the Great to those of Hadrian and the last Jewish attempt for independence under Bar Kokhba.

Newsome's main thrust seems to be that the historical milieu provides the reason for works written under those circumstances. In other words, the literary expression of thoughts and feelings is no more than reflection on the circumstances. Although this approach is reasonable, it might not necessarily hold when concepts of divine providence, revelation/inspiration, and prophecy, all deeply embedded in the "world of the Bible" and in the Jewish conception and interpretation of history, are taken into consideration.

For the author, there is no basic difference between the authority of the books of the Old Testament and those written during the intertestamental period. Moreover, in describing each of these, which Newsome does in a scholarly manner, he attempts to show how each of them could have influenced the New Testament writers—in his view, to a rather significant degree.

Newsome appears to work under the more or less outdated shadow of Julius Wellhausen and the historical-critical hermeneutical methodology, which is regrettable. Thus the victories of Alexander the Great were depicted by "some anonymous Jewish poet . . . in Zech 9:1-10"—vs. 9 being the description of the Macedonian conqueror "as a peacemaker sent from

God" (6). The book of Daniel was written during the Maccabean upheaval against the Seleucid rulers "for the purpose of giving encouragement to the traditionalist Jews in their fight against Antiochus and those members of the Jewish community" who were in favor of the Hellenization (77), the golden image of Daniel 3 was that of Zeus "that Antiochus ordered erected in the Jerusalem Temple," and "Antiochus himself is symbolized by Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4" (78). Further examples could be cited.

Evidencing Newsome's rather dim view of NT inspiration and the great indebtedness to the intertestament literature he believes to have been able to identify, some revealing comments are interspersed in the book. The biography of Jesus in the Gospels reflects Greek aretology (21). The account of Paul's shipwreck and subsequent adventures on Malta "is a biblical equivalent of the Hellenistic romance or travel tale" (17, 18). Plato's view of immortality is "a more satisfactory description of life after death than Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15:1-58)" for many Christians (24). "Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period" was the "rich mixture" from which the "early Christians drew the vocabulary and thought forms which they used to express their understanding of the nature of Jesus of Nazareth and the significance of his life and work" (240). "Much of the New Testament's language concerning Jesus the Messiah was drawn from the Similitudes [of Enoch]" (243).

In future editions, numerous misspellings or typographical errors should be corrected. While it is true that several books on the same subject have been written recently, which in itself shows a renewed interest in the events of the intertestamental period and the apostolic century, Newsome's *Greeks, Romans, Jews* stands among the best. The sections on the history of both the Hellenistic and the Roman Periods are second to none; his descriptions of Greek, Roman and Jew authors and their works is excellent. Newsome's problem, in my understanding, is in his interpretation of those writings and his insistence in attempting to show how much of the New Testament is derived. For those with a high view of the inspiration of the Bible, such a position is hard to accept. In summary, Newsome's *Greek, Romans, Jews* is an indispensable tool for the study of the intertestamental history and literature, and the backgrounds to the New Testament.

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