

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

10-2007

### **Book review of Exploring Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon: A Devotional Commentary by George R. Knight**

Jiri Moskala

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

---

war was at its height, is evidenced by the fact that he prefers to identify the king in Daniel 11:36 with the atheistic French Revolution and the king of the North in verse 40 with a worldwide atheistic government rather than with the papacy; though he is careful to point out that “we cannot be dogmatic on certain details of these prophecies” (p. 166).

His commentary on Daniel follows, by and large, the interpretation of U. Smith and the Adventist Bible Commentary. The ten horns are ten Germanic tribes and the little horn comes out of one of the four horns in Daniel 8:9 (pp. 52, 106). Most Adventist interpreters today recognize that the little horn comes out of one of the four winds; and the number 10 is best taken as a round number (e.g. Gen 31:7; Num 14:22; 1 Sam 1:8; etc.) indicating that the one Roman Empire was destroyed by many Germanic tribes (12-15 all together). The “latter days” are interpreted as the end of the ages (p. 131) though the Hebrew expression is simply an idiom for the future which could be the time of the conquest of Canaan (Gen 49:1), the days of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (Deut 49:1), or the age of the Messiah (Hos 3:5).

The commentary on Revelation again follows the Adventist historicist interpretation found in U. Smith and others. The seven churches (Rev 2-3) and the seven seals represent seven periods in church history, the throne-room vision in chapters 4 and 5 refers to the investigative judgment, and the seven trumpets unfold “history from the military aspect” (p. 263) with the Visigoths, the Vandals, the Huns, and Odoacer’s removal of the last Roman Emperor covering the first four trumpets. While the interpretation of the seven churches and the seven seals has remained basically the same, the throne-room vision in chapters 4 and 5 is now seen by many Adventists as the inauguration of Christ’s ministry rather than the investigative judgment, and the trumpets in Revelation 8 and 9 are interpreted more along spiritual lines rather than military ones. Thus the first four trumpets are seen as judgments on Israel (A.D. 70), Rome (A.D. 476), and the church (in the form of increasing apostasy).

Revelation 12 is an important chapter for Seventh-day Adventists, particularly verse 17. Anderson, in his one page commentary on the text, majors, unfortunately, on the commandments of God; the “testimony of Jesus” or the “spirit of prophecy” is mentioned only in passing, although he frequently cites from the writings of Ellen White.

“The earth helped the woman” is seen as a reference to archaeology (p. 294) rather than to America as a safe haven for those persecuted in the Old World. However, archaeology did not blossom until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, long after the close of the 1260 years during which the woman (the church) was persecuted. Another item to be taken *cum grano salis* is Anderson’s claim that *Vicarius Filii Dei* “Vicar of the Son of God” is one of the pope’s official titles (p. 306). While this title has been used at various times, his official title is *Vicarius Christi*

(Vicar of Christ).

Some of Anderson’s translations of the names of the seven churches are also questionable, e.g., the name Smyrna is not synonymous with myrrh (p. 200). While “sweet smelling” would certainly fit the church in the second century, the reality is that the etymology of Smyrna is unknown. The same is true of Thyatira which Anderson translates as “sacrifice of contrition” (p. 208).

A misprint or mistake is the name *Bab-ril* as “gate of God” (p. 325). Babylon in Akkadian (Babylonian) was *bab-ili* (sg.) or *bab-ilani* (pl). One other mistake is the absence of references for some of the quotations used (e.g., pp. 119, 309, 311, 314, 344, etc.).

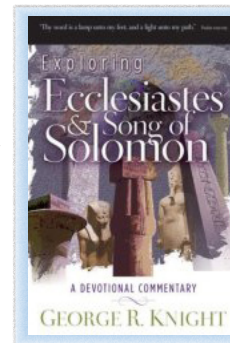
The preface by H. M. S. Richards and the introduction by R. A. Anderson are both from the earlier book on Daniel. The editor, for some reason, left out the preface and the introduction to the book of Revelation. Nevertheless, all in all, this volume is a useful introduction to the historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, highlighting the historical background of the prophecies. Its readability and the helpful lay-out with its many subheadings make this book attractive to Adventists and non-Adventists.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

George R. Knight, *Exploring Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon: A Devotional Commentary*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006. 234 pages. US\$16.99.

*Exploring Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon* is the fourth volume in the Exploring Series but the first Old Testament easy-to-use devotional commentary in that series which is especially addressed to church members. This publication contains an interpretation of two biblical books: Ecclesiastes (143 pages) and Song of Solomon (89 pages). It is an excellent combination, because it is important to connect intimate and passionate love with wisdom, as divine insights are needed to appropriately conduct oneself in the sphere of human sexuality.

The commentary is well organized and neatly structured; chapters are clearly subdivided, and main issues covered. Principle thoughts are highlighted. Each biblical book is interpreted according to sections which usually do not correspond to the chapters as found in Scripture. The book of Ecclesiastes has 20 sections which are divided into three major parts: meaninglessness introduced (1:1–3); meaninglessness demonstrated and advice given (1:4–12:7); and meaninglessness transcended (12:8–14). The book of Song of Songs is divided into ten sections with four principal parts: preliminary matters (1:1); moving toward intimacy (1:2–3:5); marriage day (3:6–5:1); and aftermath (5:2–8:14). Each biblical book in this exposition



has an introduction, main body, and conclusion.

Ecclesiastes resonates with a search for the meaning of life in a postmodern world. It is also an “Adventist” book, because only in Ecclesiastes and in the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14:6–13 are found closely tied together crucial “Adventist” themes such as creation, fearing God, keeping His commandments, eschatology, giving glory to God through a right lifestyle, and divine judgment.

*Exploring Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon* is not an original commentary, and it is not built on a new original translation. Knight consulted many outstanding biblical commentaries on both biblical books and skillfully included their jewels in his exposition. His contribution is in choosing the best and putting them into his existential perspective. His interpretation of tensions and paradoxes in the biblical material of Ecclesiastes is profound.

Knight’s exposition of Song of Songs presents a well-balanced and respectful perspective on human intimacy and marriage. He rightly associates passionate sexual love with married heterosexual couples and makes it clear that this kind of intimacy belongs only in marriage. At the center of the Song of Solomon is the wedding ceremony which includes the imagery of the first night spent together in love. Virginity is praised by the husband. Within the boundaries of marriage, passion of sexual intimacy is not something sinful, shameful, or degrading, but beautiful and commendable, because it is a joyful celebration of the Creator’s gift of love to humans which needs to be lived according to the creation order. Emotional sexuality is good and belongs to a healthy and happy marital life. The true attitude toward sexuality must be informed by biblical ideals.

In the conclusion of the book, Knight provides a three-ingredient formula for a happy marital life: (passionate) desire for each other; plus commitment (faithfulness); plus (unselfish, self-sacrificing) love; and he rightly stresses the indispensable role of community in building a healthy

marriage and its social dimensions.

There are some points which should have been included in this publication. Knight should have explained more clearly why he thinks that the identification of the author of these two biblical books does not affect his exposition. It is this reviewer’s conviction that the author would gain tremendous insights, if he would identify Solomon as the author and intertwine his life’s contradictory experience into their historical background. Knight’s commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes should elaborate more on the theme of creation and “the fear of God” motif with which the book culminates. Lacking is an elaboration on the eschatological and cosmic motif present in chapter 12:1–7 (see, for example, C. L. Seow’s commentary on Ecclesiastes). Consultation of Jacques Ellul’s publication *Reason for Being: A Meditation on Ecclesiastes* would have helped the author to underline those passages which deal with the vertical dimension and point to eternal values. Word statistics need to be slightly adjusted, because the key word *hebel* meaning “vapor,” “vanity,” “breath,” or “meaningless” occurs in Ecclesiastes 38 times (not 30 times); and this term is employed in the Old Testament 73 times and not 64 as is stated on page 20.

Apart from these suggested improvements, the volume is a very valuable publication and serious students of the Bible can gain excellent insights from it. It is not using theological jargon and is not technical. Knight has a masterful ability to simplify theological issues, expand them, and drive crucial points home in a fine readable form. This is why his devotional commentary is reader-friendly and easy to follow and yet has a sense for details. It is helpful for all who would like to acquire a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and experience passionate love in their marriages according to God’s ideal.

Jiří Moskala, Andrews University

**BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE**

**GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS®**

12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Website: [www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org](http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org); phone: 301-680-6790

fax: 301-680-6788; e-mail: [biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org](mailto:biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org)

Editor: Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min.

Production Manager: Marlene Bacchus

*ADVENTIST® and SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST® are the registered trademarks of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®.*