

BOOK REVIEWS

Alexander, T. Desmond. *Exodus*. ApOTC 2. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017. xx + 764 pp. Hardcover. USD 45.00.

Thomas Desmond Alexander is the Director of Postgraduate Studies and a senior lecturer in biblical studies at Union Theological College in Belfast, Ireland. His expertise in the areas of the Pentateuch and biblical theology is well-articulated in the number of books and articles that he has authored and co-edited. Alexander's most recent undertaking in the Pentateuch is his *Exodus* commentary in the Apollos Old Testament commentary series. It complemented his previous work on this same book in the Teach the Text commentary series. The latter provides guidance on teaching the book of Exodus, while the former focuses on the exhaustive explanation of the text in its original language. This current work displays Alexander's habitual close reading of the Scriptures. It also portrays his knowledge in matters related to the study of the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern literature. Hence, Alexander is well-versed and acquainted with the challenges confronting any major endeavor on the book of Exodus.

This *Exodus* commentary gives precedence in communicating the "theological significance" of the book of Exodus to pastors, teachers, and students of the Bible (ix). Contextual interpretation of Exodus through its immediate "literary context" (4), as well as through the larger "context of the Old Testament story that runs from Genesis to Kings" (6), makes this goal achievable. Hence, Alexander advances this study from the discourse-oriented approach, accentuating the significance of the final form of the text (xi) to "honor the genius of the one who gave the book of Exodus its definite form" (16). In such fashion, this commentary follows the like of the commentaries of "Jacob (1992), Houtman (1993; 1996; 2000), and Dohmen (2004; 2015)" (ibid). The author also operates in a position that "the book of Exodus carries an authority that is of divine origin, being more than simply the product of a human author" (xi). These presuppositions, final form, and divine derivation of the book, lead to the appreciation of the book as a congruent and cohesive piece of literature with a divinely-given purpose.

Alexander's Exodus commentary contains two major sections, (a) Introduction, and (b) Text and Commentary, which is followed by the Bibliography, an index of Scriptural references, an index of authors, and an index of subjects. The introductory section is divided into eleven sub-sections: first, "The Exodus Story;" second, "The Literary Context of Exodus;" third, "Exodus and the Rest of the Old Testament;" fourth, "Exodus and the New Testament;" fifth, "The Structure of Exodus;" sixth, "Authorship and Date of Composition;" seventh, "Source-oriented and Discourse-oriented Approaches;" eighth, "Exodus and History;" ninth, "The Route of the Exodus;" tenth, "The Text of Exodus;" and finally, "Translating Exodus." Alexander discusses these sub-sections concisely, yet informatively, in thirty-two pages. The reader gets acquainted with related issues concerning the interpretation of Exodus from the beginning, preparing one to encounter

the much-detailed and penetrating exegetical analysis of the original text within 642 pages.

The most significant sub-sections that I believe give credibility to this commentary are the selected sources, history, and the approach. These are expected from any commentary that seeks to be faithful to the original language of the text. Alexander's selection of sources is commendable. He prioritizes the Masoretic Text above the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts as his primary source for the original language of Exodus (30). However, throughout the commentary, the author frequently makes references, not only to these two above, but also to other sources, such as the Targum Jonathan, Targum Onqelos, Peshitta, Vulgate, and others. The bibliography of fifty-eight pages shows that the author also draws from selected secondary sources. However, the Masoretic Text remains the primary source of inspiration.

It's evident that priority is given to the history of the book of Exodus in the author's dialogue with archaeologists and their findings, which support the reality of the exodus and aim to determine its dating. Here, the author provides possibilities with scriptural and archaeological evidences for the reader's decision. Alexander opted for the fifteenth century dating, rather than the thirteenth century date that most modern commentators believe (16–30). This stance indicates the author's firm stance on the importance of the literary context for interpretation.

From the outset, Alexander gives priority to the final form of the text. He chooses to use the discourse-oriented approach rather than the source-oriented method (11–16). Hence, the literary context becomes “the controlling factor in determining the meaning of the text” (15). In this approach, the author, rather than accepting the Mosaic authorship as traditionally believed, refers to the author of the book as an “individual responsible for shaping the MT of Exodus as we now know it” (14). Here, the author speculates about the possibility of multiple authors sharing the same storyline, but their materials were put together and redrafted by this particular individual. One may ask if Alexander's notion reflects the critics' source argument that he seems to refute.

The Commentary's main and largest section is formatted accordingly to fulfill the purpose. In the first part, the author analyses the original text by providing a new translation with textual notes, then discusses the literary form, structure, and the background of the passage, and the detailed comments on various elements of the exegetical examination. In the second and final part, he identifies the development of messages in the passage throughout the entire Scriptures and discusses their relevance to the church today.

Alexander's dealing with the first sub-section of this central part of the commentary is praiseworthy. Like other commentators, he first lays aside already existing English versions of the Bible. He provides new translations to enable “the reader to recognize the use of specific words, the repetition of words and phrases and the presence of other stylistic or structural devices” (32). These nuances of the Hebrew text are often misconstrued in most

modern translations of Scriptures, which critics often point out, thus devaluing the coherencies of Exodus.

Second, in the discussion of forms and structures of various passages Alexander maintains open interaction with the critics. This inclusion of critics' opinions is not because of any value to the understanding the text, but to alert the "readers against the exaggerated claims of critics" (13). Thus, the instability of the Documentary Hypothesis Theory with its source-oriented approach is exposed. For example, the critics' reconstructions of events that constitute the narrative of Exodus 1–2 are shown to be based on hypothetical and illogical arguments (34–35). This may help students of the Bible to be aware and equipped to meet the challenges of critiques placed on the interpretation of Exodus. This will bring them to appreciate the text when understood in its proper context.

The third sub-section of this main section, "Comment," is perhaps the main strength of this commentary. Alexander vigorously engages in the exegetical analysis of the original text and gives extensive comments on the significance of the verses. He includes excursuses on, "The Strengthening of Pharaoh's Heart" (163–171) and "The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread" (216–222), which provide another significant feature of the exegetical part of this commentary. Issues that critics often use to question the loving character of God and the validity of the events of the exodus are treated extensively. Here, I believe Alexander should have included some more controversial topics, such as the plagues (Exod 7:8–11:10), angel of the Lord (Exod 3:2; 23:20–23), and several others. Nevertheless, these exclusions do not devalue the sound treatment of the topics within this section.

Alexander does not shy away from difficult passages in Exodus, but he utilizes the text itself to determine the meanings of these passages. For example, in the case of Pharaoh's hardening of his heart in chapters 7–11. Here, the author seems to allude to God as the one masterminding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which would have violated the king's freewill to decide. Alexander refers to three different Hebrew verbs that translate into "harden,"—verbs which are not clearly articulated in English translations (163). These verbs highlight the fact that "YHWH never overrides the free will of Pharaoh" but rather "YHWH's actions enable Pharaoh to be true to his conviction" (171). Hence, Alexander interprets that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart was caused by his own rebellious heart. Here the author does a good job in allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, rather than overlooking the verses, or pursuing outside sources for interpretation.

The final part of this main section shows the trajectory of the messages within various passages throughout the Old and New Testaments, a section entitled "Explanation." This section is imperative because it, not only gives evidence on the complementary nature of the two testaments, but brings home the relevance of Exodus's message to the modern audience.

One issue was the subjective nature of the selection of a few texts to highlight this growth of messages within the Scripture. Alexander applies them to today's context in a way that does not seem to do justice to what

the entirety of Scripture says about these messages or themes. For example, in Alexander's explanation of the seventh-day Sabbath of the Decalogue in the context of God's covenant, he states, "There is no reason to assume that the Sabbath obligation is binding upon those who are not under the Sinai covenant" (432). This statement seems to question, not only the role of the law in the context of the new covenant, but the eschatological nature of the Sabbath alluded to by the Old Testament prophets. I believe that the totality of Scripture must be consulted when these themes are discussed to ascertain their correct applications. Minute shortcomings such as this one still do not diminish the value that this section contributes to the purpose of the commentary.

In general, Alexander's recent contribution to the understanding of the book of Exodus is very appreciated. It is a work of high quality and a must-own commentary for every preacher, teacher, and student of the Bible who wants to remain faithful to the original text of God's Word in their theology.

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Bates, Matthew W. *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. xvi + 234 pp. Softcover. USD 24.99.

Matthew W. Bates teaches theology at Quincy University (Quincy, IL). He has previously written books on a variety of biblical and theological topics. In this book, Bates argues that the English word "faith" is of limited value when discussing eternal salvation in our present cultural climate. "Belief" is also inadequate, he says, because in contemporary idiom it suggests that we are saved merely by having the right facts squeezed into our brains (213). Another incomplete presentation of the gospel message implies that Christian discipleship is optional.

According to the author, "faith" and "belief" in Christian discourse today serve as overarching terms to describe what brings about eternal salvation. But the two concepts have lost the qualities of the original Greek term πίστις, qualities such as reliability, confidence, assurance, fidelity, faithfulness, commitment, and pledged loyalty. This has a misleading effect, so Bates proposes that English-speaking Christians should cease to speak of "salvation by faith" or of "faith in Jesus" when summarizing Christian salvation (3).

All too often, faith and works are pitted against one another as opposite paths to salvation. One that is successful (faith), and one that fails (works). The two are considered to be mutually exclusive paths to salvation. This distorts the gospel in the light of many biblical statements (cf. Jas 2:26). Bates claims that Jesus's answer to the rich young ruler, "You know the commandments" (Mark 10:19) is something of an embarrassment for the contemporary church.

Much of today's scholarship is committed to a hard faith/law antithesis. Πίστις, says Bates, is not the polar opposite of works; rather πίστις, as ongoing allegiance, is the fundamental framework into which works must fit as part of our salvation (109). In Matt 7:21–23, Jesus contrasts the person who