

Blackwell, Ben C., John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston, eds. *Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019. 208 pp. Softcover. USD 21.99.

*Reading Revelation in Context* is the third volume in the Reading in Context series by Zondervan Academic following *Reading Romans in Context* (2015) and *Reading Mark in Context* (2018). The editors of all three volumes are PhD graduates from Durham University whose work revolves around the Second Temple Jewish literature. Goodrich teaches at Moody Bible Institute whereas both Blackwell and Maston are associate professors at Houston Baptist University. This current volume follows its predecessors and presents thematic similarities between various passages in John's Apocalypse and the contemporaneous Jewish sources. The driving purpose behind the book is to offer an interpretive option in the studies of Revelation. Authors note the scholarly overemphasis of the sociopolitical milieu of the Greco-Roman world in the understanding of Revelation (26), while extra-biblical Jewish backgrounds remain largely neglected. Thus, *Reading Revelation in Context* provides a unique opportunity to establish relationships between the Jewish apocalyptic texts of the Second Temple period and the book of Revelation.

The book features twenty essays by prominent scholars of the New Testament and early Judaism. The list of articles systematically follows the text of the Apocalypse which makes it easy to navigate. Each chapter is about seven pages long and follows the standard pattern: (a) a brief introduction into the Revelation passage under study, (b) a discourse into the comparative writing from the Second Temple Jewish texts, and (c) the analysis of the Apocalypse's passage in light of the Jewish comparative text (28). The comparison includes not only parallels but also contrasts illuminating the unique differences of John's Apocalypse from the common Jewish apocalyptic thought. Each chapter conveniently concludes with the list of materials for further research from primary and secondary sources. The readers will also appreciate the glossary of key terms as well as the author, subject, and passage indexes at the end of the book. Another reader-oriented feature of this volume is a succinct historical overview of the Second Temple period and a survey of various types of early Jewish literature. By doing this overview the editors laid the solid background in which the Jewish apocalypticism should be read and understood.

Evaluating the collection of essays as a whole is not always an easy or even a fair task. No wholistic approach would give justice to individual researches. Nevertheless, it would be appropriate to note that all essays focus on thematic or conceptual connections between the Apocalypse and its Jewish background. Apart from Elizabeth E. Shively's verbal, thematic, and structural parallels (161) and Ronald Herm's (73–79) thematic and verbal correlations, the majority of the arguments are on thematic similarities

between passages. Based on Jon Paulien's criteria for measuring the strength of allusions ("Elusive Allusions: The Problematic Use of the Old Testament in Revelation," *BR* 33 [1988]: 37–53), thematic connections present only a possible background or could be classified as "echoes" or ideas "in the air." In other words, it would be more appropriate to conclude that John drew concepts from the pool of Jewish apocalyptic thought rather than had precise sources in mind.

For instance, Ian Paul's discussion on martyrdom in Rev 6 and 2 Maccabees (66–72) portrays general Jewish views on faithfulness to God, patient endurance, and anticipated reward. It would be far-reaching to insist that John had 2 Maccabees in mind while writing Rev 6 or that 2 Maccabees provides answers regarding the slain souls under the altar in Rev 6:9–11. In the same way, Mark D. Matthew (45–51) and Cynthia Long Westfall (146–152) provide general Jewish attitudes on riches, power, wealth, injustice, and oppression. Similar attitudes could be found in the Hebrew Bible, Greco-Roman culture, and early Christian teachings. Although chosen Second Temple texts provide a possible background alternative, they do not always offer strong enough evidence for removing all other sources from consideration. Also, many thematic connections brought significant differences. To mention a few, Garrick V. Allen states that "the relationship between 4 Ezra and Revelation 11 is not direct, as their many differences indicate" (106). Similarly, Edith M. Humphrey comparing Babylon in Rev 17 with Aseneth from *Joseph and Aseneth* states, "We cannot claim that John intended a contrast between his villainous woman and Aseneth" (138). Humphrey is right in her assessment that both works depict common Jewish outlooks on humility, purity, corruption, and arrogance. The use of symbolic women in ancient writings was employed far and wide, as the author notes (142–143). Even though the contrast given fascinates imagination, one needs to admit that these female figures are not necessarily linked nor provide interpretive clues for each other. Instead, they appeal to the common ancient imagery of a feminine figure (virtuous or wicked) personifying a group.

The allocated length of essays, at times, felt like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it presented topics in a laconic manner which many will appreciate. On the other hand, it did not allow contributors to dig deeper, expand the topic, and fully develop their ideas. The essays seem like only the starting point of any particular study and not its end. The sources at the end of each chapter, then, become significant for those who choose to explore the topic further. The editors's attempt to provide the non-biblical Jewish background for every chapter in Revelation is noteworthy. The reader might ask, though, if every vision in Revelation indeed springs from other Jewish apocalyptic writing. The book could improve if the number of essays was reduced to those with the strongest connections and the contributors got more space to develop their views.

The book seems to be neutral to modern hermeneutical approaches to Revelation (preterist, futurist, historicist, and idealist). Only once it warns against hasty interpretations which the historicist and the futurist schools had at times (21). Consequently, a few statements favoring the preterist and the idealist views were mentioned by the contributors (120–121). In general, the chosen methodology safeguards against reckless interpretations by aiming to establish John's intentions in communicating his visions. The book masterfully evaluates the Apocalypse through the prism of the Second Temple Jewish literature allowing readers to see firsthand how it is similar to and yet different from its contemporaneous writings. The editors are to be commended for compiling a nontechnical introductory resource on the connections between John's Apocalypse and other Jewish writings. Readers not familiar with the larger Jewish corpus of Second Temple literature will certainly be intrigued by the similarities with the Bible and hopefully will be interested in studying these ancient texts.

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Cartledge, Mark J., Sarah L. B. Dunlop, Heather Buckingham, and Sophie Bremner. *Megachurches and Social Engagement: Public Theology in Practice*. Leiden: Brill, 2019. xiv + 391 pp. Paperback. USD 80.00.

The British Arts and Humanities Research Council funded this research project that later became a book. Mark J. Cartledge was the principal investigator (practical theology and Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies) and later book project leader. All empirical data was collected by Sophie Bremner (anthropology) and Sarah L. B. Dunlop (practical theology) joined by Heather Buckingham (sociology and social policy) to work on the impact side of the project. Cartledge and his associates have developed this project using empirical data gathered by Bremner, and Dunlop. The sociological impact of the theme is contributed by Buckingham. It should be noted that some of the content of this book has been published in theological journals. Even though there is an increase of megachurch material being published, this is the first book on megachurches from the United Kingdom and it is particularly interesting in its explanation of their contribution to wider society and social engagement.

The first part presents a theoretical context for the study of the megachurch phenomenon in different parts of the world and then in Europe and the United Kingdom, focusing on Evangelicalism and Charismatic Renewal in the Church of England, and African Pentecostalism in Britain. This is followed by an introduction to public theology, social theory, and megachurch practice of social engagement, which undergirds this work methodologically. The second part of the book also has two chapters presenting two empirical case studies.