

BOOK REVIEWS

Allison Jr, Dale. C. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013. xlix + 790 pp. Hardcover, \$130.00.

Professor Allison's treatment of the text of James is possibly the most extensive, exegetical, and theological treatment of this document in a century. The total work is just short of 800 pages. Counting pages does not tell the whole story. The selected bibliography takes up forty-nine pages of fine print. The footnotes, more often than not, take up more than half the page and are much smaller print than the main text. His introduction ends at p. 109! To say that this tome is extensive is an understatement. And yet he apologizes for contemporary contributions that he inadvertently overlooked, admitting that it is impossible to keep track of all the publications that appear each year (x).

The uniqueness of Allison's contribution to Jacobean studies is his argument for the date, setting, and composition of the epistle. He lays out the pros and cons for an early and late date, and contends that the gaping holes in our knowledge allow for a strong argument either way. He posits, and his entire commentary is built on this assumption, that James is a second-century pseudepigraphon composed in the literal diaspora. He argues that James's real audience is being addressed indirectly. James intends them to "overhear" what he is addressing to the fictional audience. The real audience is a second-century Jewish-Christian community who still attended the synagogue and "wished to maintain irenic relations with those who did not share their belief that Jesus was the Messiah" (43). The original intent of the letter was to persuade sympathetic readers that "the differences between James' version of Judaism and other forms was not so great" (44). Allison hypothesizes that the letter could be thus considered as an "Apology."

The position of the commentary is that James is pseudepigraphal like the intertestamental book of Enoch. Like Enoch, which was written in the second-century B.C.E. but purported to be written by Enoch who lived before the Flood of Gen 6, so James was written in the second-century C.E., with a Sitz im Leben of the incipient Christian church before there was a clear distinction between Jews and Christians. Allison makes a strong argument that the intent of the author of this pseudepigraphon was to facilitate the dialogue between the Jews and Christians in the second century who were unhappy with the theology of the emerging church as exemplified in the Pauline writings. Allison views James as relevant for the interreligious dialogue not only between Christians and Jews today, but even between Christians and Buddhists (108).

Although I am not convinced that the work is pseudepigraphal, I agree with Allison's proposal of the situation of the epistle as he perceives the author intended it to be. It is not set in the later Christian Gentile-dominated church with its fully developed christology and soteriology. The one place that poses a significant problem is in 2:1. In an excursus on pp. 382-384 (in very fine print) he makes a strong case for omitting the phrase "our Lord Jesus."

It is the one phrase that makes the epistle overtly Christian with a highly developed christology as found in the later writings of the first century and onwards. I have argued elsewhere, however, that if we would view the genitive as subjective (“faith of our Lord Jesus”) rather than objective (“faith in our Lord Jesus”), we would eliminate the christological-sociological quandary that is faced by those of us who see the epistle’s setting in as early a period as we are wont to view it.

The “History of Interpretation and Reception” at the beginning of each section is exhaustive and most helpful. Professor Allison is careful to include all the major works (including sermons of major church fathers). Readers will find this survey and summary most helpful. Of exceptional value is his survey and summary of the debate over the “faith-works” passage in 2:14-26. I must, however, fault Allison for failing to see this pericope in the context of the entire chapter as well of 1:27. Much more space is devoted to the question of its relation to Paul than to the passage’s social context. It is important to note that because James is seen as a pseudepigraphon, the author of the commentary dismisses any attempt to “divine the socio-economic circumstances of James and his readers” (668).

Allison’s dismissal of the social world and the socioeconomic question is a major weakness of the work. But I question how careful and thorough he has been in his research and presentation of the position of other interpreters of James. I found in numerous instances my position was misrepresented. For example, on p. 193, contra Allison’s reading of my position, the rich are persons within James’s community. James is not addressing members versus nonmembers. In order to comfort the suffering poor, he condemns the rich. Both are part of the community (a point Allison agrees with on p. 206). Even more serious is when he conveniently has me condemning all rich (p. 642), rather than pointing out that James, in James’ own setting, condemns all the rich whom he saw as oppressive. And finally, he totally and erroneously misquotes me on p. 644. In my work I argue (following L. A. Schokel) that the poor should be patient and not violently fight the rich, because God himself will resist them. Allison has me saying that the poor should resist the rich. I point out these examples, not to be defensive, but to raise the question as to how much care Allison has taken in working with his sources.

Despite the problems I have with positions of this work, no student of James worth his or her salt can ignore this massive and insightful work. It is a must-have in every New Testament scholar’s library.

Walla Walla University
College Place, Washington

PEDRITO MAYNARD-REID

Bergmann, Michael, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea, eds. *Divine Evil: The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011. 337 pp. Paperback, \$43.00.

“*Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*,” coedited by Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea, consists of a compilation