

*John's Letters: An Exegetical Guide for Preaching and Teaching.* By Herbert W. Bateman IV and Aaron C. Peer. Big Greek Idea Series. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018, 441 pp., \$36.99.

Herbert Bateman has taught the NT for over three decades at various schools in and outside the United States and has authored or edited more than twenty books and academic articles. Bateman is also the founder of *Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies*, an internet resource center geared toward teaching different levels of Bible study. Bateman's co-author and former student, Aaron Peer, previously taught Greek and NT at Grace College in Winona Lake, IN, and currently serves as the pastor of Charter Oak Church in Churubusco, IN. *John's Letters: An Exegetical Guide for Teaching and Preaching* marks the fourth collaborative effort Peer has shared with Bateman.

As the title for the series makes clear, the goal for the book is to help readers discover the "big Greek idea" (or main exegetical point) of John's epistles. Every chapter is formulated around a three-pronged structure. The first prong breaks down each unit of Johannine thought into its main idea from the Greek text followed by a brief structural overview and a concise exegetical outline of the passage. The second prong consists of a clausal outline of the examined passage tracing the author's logic, with both the NA<sup>28</sup> Greek text and an English translation supplied along with corresponding key textual markers. The third prong is the actual exegetical commentary for each verse with a specific focus on semantic and syntactical considerations in each clause. Additionally, every section contains pertinent "nuggets" of set-apart commentary that provide relevant grammatical, lexical, syntactical, and theological insights helping to explain the Greek text at a deeper level.

Bateman, who serves as both co-author of the book and editor of Kregel's new line, describes the book's design as part of a "like series" (p. 12). The nomenclature calls attention to the book's three unique features that make it stand out among the proliferation of exegetical guides; that is, it acts *like* a grammatical commentary, *like* an English interlinear, and *like* an expositional commentary all rolled into one. By collating these separate elements into a single book, the work is geared toward relieving the busy pastor, the swamped professor, and the overwhelmed student of Greek—all of whom comprise the book's target audience. The book's ten-point step-by-step explanation of the clausal outlines for every Johannine passage is especially germane to the three targeted reader types (pp. 28–32).

The book's structure underscores the importance of John's thought, specifically through his use of 232 independent and 281 dependent clauses. The emphasis on clausal outlines and structures, according to the authors, "make it possible for pastors to visualize the relationship clauses have to one another in order to trace John's flow of thought and ultimately his big idea" (p. 27). Though a question may arise as to why they chose not to mention certain Johannine idiomatic *semantics* (e.g. his dominant use of present active indicatives), the authors explain they chose to highlight his unique *syntax*, specifically the apostle's distinctive usage of dependent and independent Greek clauses (p. 54). That said, vocabulary unique to John is

briefly treated (pp. 57–59) with various “semantical nuggets” interspersed throughout.

The work closes with the authors’ own English translation for each of John’s letters (pp. 412–21), a sampling of 29 different rhetorical devices and figures used by John (pp. 422–27), and a convenient index of the entire book’s various grammatical, syntactical, semantical, lexical, theological, and text-critical “nuggets,” as well as brief commentary placements (pp. 433–41).

From beginning to end, *John’s Letters* maintains its goal of underscoring the main idea of each passage in John’s three epistles, doing so by a special focus on clause and syntax. The emphasis at the clausal level provides a much-welcomed contribution to the field of Johannine studies, setting itself apart from Bible software programs and commentaries—the latter generally being restricted to English glosses, translations, or mere parsing capabilities. Because of the book’s visual layout of Johannine clauses amplified by commentary on syntax, any difficulties normally hidden in John’s flow of thought are exposed and explained. To this, there is no doubt that John structures his letters by an idiomatic use of clauses, an important Johannine register the authors do well in evaluating throughout the book (e.g., pp. 32–40). For these reasons, this work on John’s letters is immediately distinct from other notable Johannine Greek studies (e.g. Martin M. Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* [Baylor Handbook on the Greek NT; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004]; Murray Harris, *John* [EGGNT; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015]).

Though the book’s subtitle describes it as a guide for preachers and teachers, the reader will not find any sermon ideas or homiletical outlines. The communicator of John’s letters, however, will be assisted by the main exegetical point offered for each Johannine passage as well as by the various outlines (with accompanying English) tracing the apostle’s thought-flow and by the helpful syntactical and semantic commentary. Moreover, Bateman and Peer offer many set-off “nuggets,” insightful gems that will surely aid the preacher in developing a robust biblical exposition. In this matter, the book’s subtitle is to be understood by its modifier—it is an *exegetical* guide for preaching and teaching. If still left unsatisfied, the interested preacher would do well to consult Kregel’s *Kerux Commentaries* (currently in progress) where Bateman devotes considerable attention to the actual exposition of John’s letters yielding specific homiletical ideas.

Critiques for the work are relatively minor. For one, the book is bound as a larger textbook making it a bit cumbersome. Internally, the volume is aesthetically pleasing (following a repeated structure for each chapter), but the clausal outlines can be confusing at times with only some structural markers being emphasized in bold without reason (cf. p. 28). Additionally, prior knowledge of Greek is required at many points, limiting its readership. Exegetical categories such as “gnomic imperfect” (p. 64) are simply declared then followed with theological implications without explanation as to what or why. Moreover, some Johannine *hapax legomena* are either theologically glossed or simply left unexplained (e.g. ἡ ἀγγελία as “the gospel message” at 1 John 1:5; 3:11 [pp. 76, 78], or *χάρτης* at 2 John 12, which is given no attention when glosses like “papyrus” or “paper” are perfectly acceptable

[pp. 372–73]). Thus, without some previous knowledge of NT Greek, the reader can at times be left to the mercy of the author’s interpreted or neglected renderings.

To their credit, the authors attempt to ward off such potential criticism, disclosing their expectations for readers in the book’s preface. Indeed, the reader is assumed to possess a “minimal” capability in NT Greek (p. 13) and is further encouraged to “think critically” about any interpretive decisions the authors have made (p. 59). In this regard, the emphasis on the “like” features of the book serves as an important caveat, since it reminds readers that this work is not designed as a handbook for translation (both Bateman and Peer have published other works for that specific purpose) but rather as a guide to help revive one’s rusty knowledge of John’s Greek (p. 32). Consequently, readers with at least two years of Koine Greek under their belt will benefit the most from the book.

These critiques are certainly outweighed by the book’s positives. From embedding the “big Greek idea” into each section of the table of contents (making it a quick reference guide) to opening each chapter with the same exegetical layout focused on the syntax of the respective passage, the book serves as a helpful and user-friendly guide. In addition, it becomes a more familiar guide while working through its pages. Moreover, the brief overviews initiating each letter’s historical, literary, and theological dimensions make portions of the book accessible to just about any level. The work under review is the first one published in Kregel’s *Big Greek Idea Series* (the next one is expected to be on the epistle of James by William Varner), and it has certainly set the bar high. *John’s Letters: An Exegetical Guide for Preaching and Teaching* is a welcomed tool for those desiring a solid new resource for Johannine exegesis.

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*Jesus according to the New Testament.* By James D. G. Dunn. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019, xv + 211 pp., \$20.00 paper.

James D. G. Dunn, Lightfoot Professor Emeritus of Divinity at Durham University and one of the most respected and prolific NT scholars of the present time, has published many important commentaries, books, and essays on Christian origins. Utilizing his scholarly expertise, he has written a helpful and concise monograph that sheds light on the portrait of Jesus according to the testimonies of the NT, from Matthew to Revelation.

The book originally began with Dunn’s Canterbury lectures in 2015, where he gave three lectures: “Jesus according to Jesus,” “Jesus according to Matthew, Mark and Luke,” and, finally, “Jesus according to John.” These three lectures virtually became the first three chapters of the book, and Dunn decided to continue the sequence of the study in the order of the biblical canon in the rest of the chapters: Jesus according to Acts (chap. 4); according to Paul (chaps. 5 and 6); according to Hebrews (chap. 7); according to the Catholic Epistles (chap. 8); and, finally, according to the book of Revelation (chap. 9).