

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical & Post-Biblical Antiquity*, vol. 1: *A–Da*. Edited by Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014, xxxvi + 400 pp., \$24.95 paper.

Edwin Yamauchi serves as Professor Emeritus of History at Miami University. He authored *Persia and the Bible* (Baker, 1990) and *Greece and Babylon: Early Contacts between the Aegean and the Near East* (Baker, 1967). Marvin Wilson is the Harold J. Ockenga Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College. He wrote *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith* (Eerdmans, 1989) and its sequel, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Eerdmans, 2014).

Thirty-three scholars contribute to the dictionary. Following the list of Abbreviations, the authors provide an overview of the pertinent “Periods, Ages, and Dates” and an Introduction to the series. Volume 1, the first of a projected three-volume set, contains thirty-nine articles ranging from “Abortion” to “Dance.” The entries address subjects seldom included in Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries—subjects such as domestic life, laws, cultic practices, and technology. Each entry, approximately five to twenty pages in length, develops the topic according to six subheadings: the OT, the NT, the Near Eastern world, the Greco-Roman world, the Jewish world, and the Christian world. The articles conclude with a bibliography of topic-specific resources. More general resources appear in the back of the volume in the seven-page Select Bibliography comprised exclusively of books. The back matter also displays seven Figures (photos or sketches) that depict various aspects of ancient culture. Unfortunately, the lack of indexes diminishes the dictionary’s value as a stand-alone reference work.

The contributors often draw attention to background information that illumines the Scriptures. For instance, Paul’s shipwreck in Acts 27:14–44 transpired in October, a dangerous time to sail on the eastern Mediterranean (p. 191). The essay on “Clothing” elucidates the charge of 1 Peter 1:13 to “gird up loins of your mind” (p. 325). The discussion of “Ceramics and Pottery” expounds the onomatopoeic term *קַקַק* (Jer 19:1, 10), a “jar” that produced a gurgling noise when liquid was poured out of it (p. 273).

An assortment of fascinating facts lures the reader from one entry to the next. For example, men in antiquity lived only forty years on average, and mothers only thirty years, according to the entry on “Childbirth & Children” (p. 280). Moreover, a “Roman delicacy was fattened rodents known as dormice,” and sometimes they were “glazed with honey and covered with poppy seed” (p. 232). The “Aqueducts & Water Supply” essay reports that “The earliest aqueduct in the Near East was the 35-mile canal built by Menua (809–786 BC) at Urartu in eastern Turkey, which is still in use today” (p. 68). By reading the treatise on “Baths and Bathing,” one

learns that “A temple of Sahure (5th Dyn.) at Saqqara had a drainage system using copper pipes which extended 400 m. into a valley” (p. 148).

At times the writers espouse debatable interpretations. Some contributors imply a minimum age of the earth. Yamauchi, developing the work of the late R. K. Harrison, dates a red dot in the El Castillo Cave to 40,000 BC (p. 91). Wilson assigns the Late Paleolithic Era to 40,000–10,000 BC (p. 199). Keith Schoville dates a cave painting to 50,000 BC in his entry on “Dance” (p. 374). Furthermore, Yamauchi and Harrison contend that the “three days’ journey” of Jonah 3:3 functions as “a literary expression for a large city” (p. 291).

On occasion, the contributors conceal their own view when discussing a debated topic. In the tractate on “Census,” Yamauchi and Harrison fail to take a position on the issue of large numbers of the HB (p. 263). In addition, their entry on “Clothing” does not resolve the question of whether Joseph’s garment was multi-colored (p. 323). The article on “Astrology” by Lester Ness never specifies the identity of the Christmas star in Matthew 2:2–10 (p. 101).

This work is more up to date than the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols., Doubleday, 1992) and broader in scope than the books by Victor Matthews (*The Cultural Word of the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Manners and Customs*, 4th ed., Baker Academic, 2015) and Philip King and Lawrence Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*, Westminster John Knox, 2001). Scholars and ministers can garner useful information from this dictionary for Bible study and sermon preparation.

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*Reading and Understanding the Bible.* By Ben Witherington III. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, 278 pp., \$29.95 paper.

In the field of books on scriptural interpretation, Ben Witherington III has recently added his contribution. His previous works have been recognized for their scholarly work and he is well recognized in the field of NT studies for his efforts. Yet, what makes this book a somewhat unique contribution to its field is the fact that it is targeted at helping new readers of the Bible to begin reading it properly (p. 3) Or, to put it another way, it is to be used as a “GPS” to help the reader navigate the difficulties of the Bible. (p. xxii)

Witherington seeks to do this by splitting his book into two separate parts that can roughly be seen as theory and practice. He has chosen to break them into the imagery of surveying the map and unearthing the treasure. One of the unique features of this book is that it begins by seeking to provide an overarching picture of what the Scriptures say, calling the student to seek to read the Scriptures analytically. He argues that beginning with theory and working toward the text appears to be backwards and it would be most helpful if one allows the text to decide the subject matter (p. 6). He then moves the reader through genre-related subjects such as literary features, historical matters, and theological issues to finish out the first part of the work.