

BOOK REVIEW

Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003). xlviii + 1636 pp. Hdbk. US\$80.00.

Keener's commentary on John attempts to place John's Gospel within its literary and cultural setting. It is incredibly thorough in its interaction with Greek, Roman and Jewish literature and distinguishes itself by its breadth of connections with Hellenistic culture.

The commentary commences with a very comprehensive survey of the important background information to the Gospel of John. Keener begins with a discussion of the genre of the Gospel and different historical considerations inherent to John. This includes an outline of the different genres of the ancient world and their relationship to the Gospels and an evaluation of the historicity of ancient works. The next section expounds the use of discourses in the fourth Gospel, including oral tradition and the nature of speech-writing in the ancient world. Following this, Keener gives a lengthy delineation of the issues regarding the authorship of the fourth Gospel, and provides a comparison between the Gospel and other Johannine literature, discussing the various similarities and differences. Part Four of the introduction places John within its social context, discussing the different arguments for Gentile influence on the Gospel. Part Five continues this idea, however, it discusses the various Jewish influences, both local and from the Diaspora. In the sixth section of the introduction, Keener develops the revelatory motifs that are found in John's Gospel: knowledge, vision and signs. Keener explains how these themes are important for the theological development of John as well as how they functioned within the ancient world. The last section of the introduction expounds the different theological themes that John develops in his Gospel. These themes include Christology, realized eschatology, love, faith, life, and the world. Strangely missing in this section, however, is

the development of the theme of truth. Overall, this introduction does a marvelous job of placing the Gospel of John firmly within the Greco-Roman literary culture and context.

In his commentary, Keener divides his chapters by the different breaks in the text. Each section begins with a brief overview, and a discussion placing the passage within the larger context of John's Gospel. This provides a succinct introduction to the passage that is accessible and informative.

After this discussion, Keener attempts to place the passage within a related Hellenistic setting. Keener often compares the passage to different ancient genres, such as martyr stories and miracle accounts, in order to place John within or outside of traditional ancient literary genres. This is helpful because it informs the reader of where John stands in relationship to Hellenistic culture. This is often paired with an evaluation of the authenticity of the passage. This is not to say that Keener attempts to state whether or not something actually happened, but to determine if there is historical precedent for the setting and events within Hellenistic literature and culture.

In addition to this, Keener does good work dialoguing with Jewish culture and rabbinic literature. He attempts to ascertain if there is any connection between this passage and the Old Testament and if there are any parallels in the LXX and the rest of the New Testament.

One of the other strengths of this commentary is Keener's inquiry into the relationship between the Synoptics and John. Keener does not state that John is reliant on the Synoptics; however, he does believe that there is a core historical tradition that both the Synoptics and John are attempting to recount. With this mindset, Keener evaluates different passages to assess John's relationship to the Synoptics and to discern if there is a common core tradition.

Occasionally there is a particular theme, topic or issue that Keener wishes to discuss in depth. In these instances, Keener investigates the theme from a variety of angles, usually Greek, Jewish, Roman and the larger Hellenistic perspective. This provides great insight into a passage and fills his latter comment and evaluation with greater substance. In addition, walking through these different perspectives greatly helps the reader to apprehend the ancient mindset and facilitates one's understanding of ancient culture. It is this immersion within the different cultures that is a real strength of Keener's commentary.

It is not possible to interact thoroughly with every aspect of a book, however, there is one particular area that is lacking in this one: there is little work with the actual Greek language. There are a number of problematic places in the Greek of John's Gospel, including some important text-critical issues that warrant exegetical or grammatical discussion. Unfortunately, these are often left undiscussed.

On the other hand, the clear strength of this commentary is Keener's relentless interaction with the Greek, Roman and Jewish milieus from which the Gospel of John emerges. Within this commentary, Keener makes over 20,000 extra-biblical references, and the thoroughness with which he compares the Gospel to the ancient world is, in my experience, unparalleled. It is this thoroughness that makes this a great commentary. Included is a mammoth 166-page bibliography. This is obviously helpful for anyone wishing to find sources regarding John's Gospel.

In conclusion, Keener's commentary on John is impressive. He is incredibly thorough and does an excellent job at placing the Gospel of John within its literary and historical context. Overall, this commentary needs to be consulted by Johannine scholars if they wish to understand how the Gospel of John interacts with and relates to its Hellenistic milieu.

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