

Bryan E. Beyer. *Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and Theological Survey*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell and Eugene H. Merrill. Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007. 303 pp. \$24.99.

Beyer is professor of Old Testament at Columbia International University Seminary and School of Missions in Columbia, South Carolina, where he has taught since 1985. He coauthored with Bill T. Arnold two other books in the Encountering Biblical Studies series: *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (1999) and *Readings from the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study* (2002).

Of the twenty-two chapters in *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, chs. 2-19 are devoted to sequential exposition from Isa 1:1 to 66:24. The opening chapter explores who Isaiah is and five themes in his prophecy: remnant, God's sovereignty, servant, the Holy One of Israel, and Messiah. The last three chapters survey Isaiah's relationship to the OT (i.e., Isaiah's use of antecedent OT revelation and the use of Isaiah in subsequent OT revelation), the NT (i.e., direct fulfillment, secondary fulfillment or application, and allusions), and the great commission.

Encountering the Book of Isaiah has a few limitations, which are not necessarily weaknesses given the book's purpose. Like other books in the series, it is an entry level volume especially useful for college students. The subtitle is a bit misleading because it is more like a short commentary, an expanded version of the sorts of comments one would find in a detailed study Bible. It is not sufficient as the primary text for a seminary course because it is a "survey" rather than a detailed exposition. Nor does it blaze a trail for fresh contributions to Isaiah. As a result, experts in Isaiah studies may regard the book's outline as atomistic, its exposition lacking penetration, its approach lacking thorough canonical integration, and its historical analysis too brief.

But strengths include skillful summary of one of the longest, most daunting books in the Bible. Conservative and not overly critical, Beyer clearly and evenhandedly lays out interpretational options for debated passages, sometimes frustrating the reader by not taking a position (e.g., on Isa 7:14; pp. 73-77) but usually defending traditional conservative views. For example, Beyer defends single authorship (pp. 154-59) and identifies the servant in Isaiah 53 as Jesus, giving primacy to the canonical sense of the OT and NT (pp. 209-12). Beyer makes Isaiah's message understandable for newcomers, and his handbook serves as a ready reference to serve those looking for a refresher on this major prophetic OT book.

The series format increases the volume's usefulness; it is equipped with chapter outlines (including an expanded table of contents), chapter objectives, key terms (e.g., *'almah*, co-regency, day of the Lord, *hesed*, Targum, theophoric, Via Maris) that are bolded throughout the text and defined in a concise glossary, study questions, a useful bibliography for further reading, visual aids, and sidebars on significant ethical and theological issues (e.g., "the prophets and social justice," "filled full" prophecies—the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament," "Why are the Poor Especially on God's Heart?" "New Testament Citations of the Book of Isaiah"). Beyer edifies readers by frequently applying Isaiah for Christians today, adding a devotional warmth that is normally absent in technical, academic Isaiah studies. Perhaps the highest compliment of Beyer's volume comes from John N. Oswalt, author of the NIVAC volume

and two outstanding NICOT volumes on Isaiah: "This is the best general handbook to Isaiah that is currently available."

Andrew David Naselli
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Mikeal C. Parsons. *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007. 230 pp. \$19.95.

Mikeal C. Parsons, Professor and Chair of Religion at Baylor University, offers an intriguing study of Luke and his work in a companion volume to a four-part series on the Gospels. Parsons takes the three roles of the book's title, storyteller, interpreter, and evangelist, as his structure for the book. He does not attempt to be exhaustive but rather suggestive, opting for paths less traveled rather than the well-worn highways. The book is not a commentary, monograph, or introduction to Luke-Acts but rather a "series of forays" into Luke from three angles (as storyteller, as interpreter, as evangelist) (p. xi). In the storyteller section Parsons forgoes narrative criticism in favor of rhetorical criticism through comparison with Hellenistic contemporaries of Luke (p. xi). Chapter two takes this path in a general manner by comparing Luke primarily to Aelius Theon's *progymnasmata*, while ch. 3 focuses especially on the prologue to Luke (1:1-4). As an interpreter, Luke is investigated in terms of his "treatment of traditional materials and social conventions" (p. xii). Three chapters explain traditions that are, respectively, pagan (friendship and physiognomy), Jewish (the place of Jerusalem in Jewish thought and Acts's use of Isaiah 53), and Christian (the contribution of the "L" parables to the journey narrative and the Paul of Acts compared to Paul of the letters). As evangelist, Luke focuses on Jesus, whom Parsons accordingly explores as "light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of Israel" (Luke 2:32) through examination of the conversion of Cornelius (p. xii).

To begin his work, Parsons traces traditions regarding Luke as a historical figure since these details will influence how Luke is understood as a storyteller, interpreter, and evangelist. Walking through Luke-Acts' early reception and interpretation, Parsons seems to accept the traditions which claim that Luke was a Gentile, interested in Judaism, and a close companion of early Christians, though certainly not an apostle because of his self-description in the Gospel's prologue (Luke 1:1-4). Luke's background supplies grounds for investigating the author from the vantage points of pagan, Jewish, and Christian traditions.

Probably the most suggestive and fresh of Parsons's forays are those found in the storyteller section. He explores connections which can be made between good rhetorical writing exemplified in the *progymnasmata* (rhetorical exercises for schoolboys) and Luke-Acts (pp. 17-18). Literary study of Luke's works have flourished in the last century with a persistent criticism that an ancient work should not be compared to modern works of literature. Parsons averts this criticism by describing ancient literary practice (*progymnasmata*) and subsequently comparing Luke to his contemporaries. Readers might wish for more substantiation of the connection since Parsons does not firmly argue for Luke's Gentile origins. Theon had three marks of good rhetorical writing: clarity, concision, and plausibility (p. 22). Theon suggests many ways for rhetoricians to express brevity (limit synonyms; use simple rather than compound words; use word-length rather than phrase-length descriptions of actions; focus on the main point rather than all the