

Book Review

Prophetic Problems, with Alternate Solutions. By Clarence E. Mason, Jr. Chicago: Moody Press, 1973. Pp. 251 and Scripture index. \$4.95. By J. Barton Payne, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

Among the conflicting claims of today's prophetic interpreters, the need is obvious for a volume that fulfills the promise held out in the above title: of bringing into focus major problem areas and of weighing, with judiciousness, the merits of major alternative approaches to them. After almost half a century as Professor of Bible Exposition at the Philadelphia College of Bible, Dr. Mason is certainly qualified. His opening admonition, "Never be afraid to change," and his testimony about "many changed positions from what I was taught" (p. 8), encourage further optimism. His subsequent insights—for example, on the importance of distinguishing fulfilled prophecies from those yet to be fulfilled (p. 204), on the indistinguishability of *the kingdom of heaven* and *the kingdom of God* (103) and of *they day of Christ, of God, and of the Lord* (p. 147), and on Revelation 1-11's reiteration in chapters 12-22 (233)—all suggest an awareness of Biblical options that could benefit the entire evangelical community.

But such potential remains unrealized. For though "the writer is a great believer in free discussion [this must be] among those of the premillennial dispensational viewpoint" (143). Dogmatic affirmations, without a hint of alternative possibilities, begin with such broad matters as insistence upon double fulfillment (the "virgin" in Isa. 7:14 is both Isaiah's first wife and Mary the mother of Jesus, p. 50), millennialism (12), the postponed kingdom (89) with a parenthesis church unforeseen in the OT (79, 97, 210), and an end-time 70th week of Daniel (= the tribulation, 135, 150, 179). They continue on down to such specific claims as these: that the sermon on the mount is not to the church but to millennial Jews (90, 92), that *the times of the Gentiles* begin with Nebuchadnezzar (16, 166), and that *the beast out of the sea* of Rev. 13:1-10 must mean "the revived Roman empire of the west" (170, 185, 218). All "non-dispensationalists" are automatically equated with those who deny the earthly kingdom and hold only to a spiritual rule (127). Even within the family of C. I. Scofield, Mason's goal is not so much to present alternative solutions as to promote his own predilections: thus, to equate Egypt with *the king of the south* in Dan. 11:40 is "a colossal mistake" (220); the "new Jerusalem coming down from heaven" in Rev. 21:2 (post-judgment) cannot be the "holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven" in v. 10 (millennial, 238; the latter never does finish its descent but remains suspended "like a gigantic chandelier,"

243); and his real burden is to demonstrate that the *little horn* of Dan. 7 (and 2) is not the same antichrist as the *willful king* of Dan. 11:26-40a, 44-45, or that of Dan. 8(!).

Though half of the 14 chapters are reprints from Dr. Mason's earlier articles (from 1960 to 1971), there still appear faulty arguments from Hebrew (an ungrammatical construct, 15), from Greek (improper inferences from *male*, 161), from archaeology (his claim that iron weapons were first forged by the Romans, 168), and from history (his assertions that Meshech and Tubal are two chief cities, i.e., Moscow and Tobolsk, 193—Mason does not even mention the Mushki and Tabali tribes of Ezekiel's own era—or that Gomer means Central Europe, especially East Germany). As Charles Ryrie suggests in his foreword, "Not all scholars agree on every detail...."

What Do You Think of Jesus? By David Scaer. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973. 114 pp. Cost unlisted. Reviewed by Gordon R. Lewis, Professor of Systematic Theology, Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, Denver, Colorado.

Where is a freshly written, relevant book showing thoughtful people who Jesus was? David Scaer has provided an answer to that repeated question in a paperback that will help many Christians and non-Christians.

Although *What Do You Think of Jesus?* is written by a systematic theologian (from Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois), the book is not a typical doctrinal study. It is more a work in biblical theology drawn extensively from New Testament materials. But it is not another brief life of Christ. Far more than short books on the life of Christ, Scaer develops the meaning of selected events in Jesus' life. The theological significance is presented in a very easygoing, tactful way. The author effectively illustrates situations in Christ's life with allusions to life today.

Few could challenge the central importance of the question around which the book centers—the question asked by Jesus Himself—"But who do you think I am?" Scaer shows how we can answer that question today and skillfully defends the historical reliability of the gospels. The gospels, he points out, were written for the explicit purpose of helping us answer this very question: What do you think of Jesus?

After discussing the beginnings of Christ's life and defending his virgin conception, Scaer devotes a major chapter to the basic categories of biblical thought—Jesus and the wrath of God. God's wrath (otherwise known as hell), he explains, is the overarching reality and so men need a substitute. "Man by his own depravity and perverseness is so alienated from God that he is incapable of meeting God's requirements for him.... Jesus had explicitly told his disciples there is nothing that a man can give to

regain his life. This would have to be an action initiated and completed by God. He would provide the substitution. His name—Jesus.... Jesus is the 'stand-in' for each man individually and for all mankind collectively." Christ offered the "blood restitution" and the violent death required by the vengeful taking of life as indicated by the shedding of his blood. Smitten and afflicted by God, Jesus was separated from the Father as damned and condemned, but not from the sustaining presence of God. The Trinity was not divided in its eternal unity. Who then died on the cross? The conclusion, not of a Jew but a Gentile stands, "Without a doubt, this Jesus was the Son of God."

Christ is presented, not only as the atoning priest, but the king of kings, greater than Saul, David or Solomon. Furthermore, Christ was a prophet greater than Moses or Jonah. Above all, Christ's words, deeds and life were certified by His predicted resurrection from the dead. The book could well have included an epilogue calling upon the reader to give his considered judgment as to who Jesus was.

Unfortunately the book departs from its central purpose to make some unnecessary debatable points. In Scaer's portrayal, Jesus apparently did not call men to a radical discipleship of self-denial, but simply told men that they now belong to God through what He did at the cross. In my judgment Jesus considered conversion an urgent necessity for fallen men in this life. Decision determined eternal destiny. God's kingdom, Scaer says, is at present "found no place except inside the church *walls* where the gospel is preached and his sacraments administered" (*italics mine*). Furthermore, he imagines belief in a future universal millennium is somehow inconsistent with the present state of humility appropriate for those in the kingdom. He fails to see that a millennialist anticipates, not another nationalistic kingdom, but a universal rule of holy love on this earth. The ruler will be the King of Kings in preson, not another presumptuous sinner.

These debatable points are not central to the book's thesis and need not detract from its value as a very usable defense of the deity of Christ and His substitutionary atonement.

The Bible Through Stamps. By Ord Matek. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1974. Pp. 230, including a stamp catalogue number index and a subject index. \$7.00. Reviewed by Ronald B. Allen, Assistant Professor of Old Testament Language and Exegesis, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Ore.

For some readers the words "stamp collecting" may evoke boyish memories of 10¢ come-ons in comic books followed by a barrage of approvals; to others the works may bespeak greedy fortune-hunters looking for freak printing errors or rarities. However, stamp collecting (called philately when "serious") has been found by many to be an

intensely satisfying hobby that reopens and enlarges one's curiosity concerning history, geography and peoples in a manner few other hobbies seem to do.

It may come as a surprise to some Bible scholars to learn that a considerable number of stamps have been issued by many countries which depict themes from the pages of the Bible. A number of these, but not all, include the exceptionally well-designed postal issues of Israel. Browsing through, and then reading, Ord Matek's lovely volume may open a fresh, new world of enjoyment and enrichment for the biblical scholar.

The text of the book is quite readable and the illustrations of the stamps are superior. The book is not without flaws, however. The "Bible" for the author is just the Old Testament; hence, postal issues depicting New Testament passages are omitted. The writer also has drunk deeply the draught of higher criticism, as is reflected in numerous comments he makes regarding the events the stamps illustrate. Further, not all collectors will be pleased that the writer has included some dubious "black-blot" issues from such sand-dune republics as the so-called "Arabian State of Upper Yafa."

Despite these criticisms, the book is recommended—but with this caution: the contents may be dangerous to your health. The reviewer is suffering from terminal philately.