

## Reviews

**Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, Xxii + 662 pages, notes, black and white plates and indexes, US\$30 ISBN 0802849601.**

Reviewed by Lindsay Wilson

This is a landmark book from a leading evangelical scholar. Kenneth Kitchen is Emeritus Professor of Egyptology at the University of Liverpool, but has written extensively not only in the area of Egyptology, but also about the ANE background to the events of the Bible. In the preface he indicates that the genesis of the book came from the encouragement by Howard Marshall for him to produce an Old Testament volume parallel to F.F. Bruce's *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?* The end product is, however, a much more substantial work than its NT equivalent. There are 100 pages of endnotes, which shows the depth of serious scholarship which underlies this book. These endnotes are followed by 50 black and white figures which shed further light on the issues. There are also 37 tables throughout the work. The book finishes with subject and scripture indexes but no author index.

One of the interesting features of his approach is that he works generally backwards through history. He starts with the external and internal evidence of the divided Hebrew kingdom, and then the exile and return. After dealing with these better-documented eras, he then considers the time of Saul, David and Solomon (under the heading 'The Empire Strikes Back'); the settlement and conquest; the Exodus and wilderness wanderings; the patriarchal period; an excursus on prophets and prophecy; and finally Genesis 1-11. There is an extended conclusion of 50 pages, in which he critically assesses minimalists like Thompson and Lemche, the compromise position of Dever ("much solid rock" but "also sinking sand"), and deconstructionist and some sociological approaches. Against the encroaches of the 'minimalists', Kitchen has taken a firm stand.

In relation to the divided kingdom, he explores how the biblical accounts list foreign kings, how foreign and local sources refer to Hebrew kings, and then various matters dealing with chronology (e.g. different calendars and regnal years). There follows an extensive evaluation of this data with the aim of presenting a 'balance sheet'. At that point of history (930-580BC) where the biblical records are most subject to corroboration or dispute by other written records and artefacts, Kitchen points out that there is compelling case for accuracy and reliability. He concludes that "the basic presentation of almost 350 years of the story of the Hebrew twin kingdoms comes out under factual examination as a highly reliable one, with mention of own and foreign rulers who were real, in the right order, at the right date, and sharing a common history that usually dovetails

together well, when both Hebrew and external sources are available." (64). Less space is devoted to the period of exile and return (600-400BC), but there are again close matches in historical detail and chronology.

Chapter 4 is an interesting discussion of the united monarchy, and is increasingly relevant as a number of 'minimalist' scholars question the historicity of David and Solomon. Kitchen extensively examines the external sources, explains why there were fewer during this period, and argues that the extant archaeological evidence shows "much realistic agreement" between the biblical texts and various sources (inscriptions, topography, the sites of Hazor, Gezer and Megiddo, and cultural references). This may not persuade all (there is less than a page on the Tel Dan inscription), but the chapter is full of fair consideration of the various challenges to the biblical text.

His chapter on conquest and settlement is similarly incisive, based on a reading of Joshua (which is quite common today) that it describes wars of conquest not occupation. At this point it is worth noticing that Kitchen's argued case for the historical worth of the biblical records is based on a 13th century (or late date) for the exodus from Egypt. Those looking to support an earlier date for the exodus will need to look elsewhere.

On the paucity of Egyptian evidence for the exodus, Kitchen cites the setting of the East delta, from which very little has survived; the reuse of stone blocks in later periods; and the unwillingness of the Pharaohs to describe defeats on temple walls. There are judicious comments on the *yam suph* ('sea of reeds', or lakes) the large numbers ('*eleph* can mean 'leader', most clearly in 1 Kings 20:30, or 'thousand'), the route followed and the location of Sinai. At this point he is broadening beyond the issue of historicity in order to explain the text, but the end product is that the account is coherent when better understood. These are followed by a discussion of the tabernacle, the ANE treaty forms, and a brief argument for a 13th century date for the exodus. Kitchen concludes that, while much of the exodus account cannot be corroborated by external sources, there are good reasons for this shortage of evidence, and a reasonable amount of other support. The exodus and Sinai events are thus not proven, but in harmony with the attested realities of the period and place.

The patriarchal period is not covered chronologically, but rather by considering a number of themes and especially religious and cultural practices. The Joseph period is used as a test case, and Kitchen is able to use his Egyptological expertise to argue for the authenticity of many incidental details such as names, titles, dream interpretation and Semites in Egypt. The assumption here is if the Joseph is historically authentic when so little is based on these unimportant references, then there are good grounds for trusting it as an accurate text.

An historical walk through the various prophets and periods of prophecy fills chapter 8. This seems a bit like

an afterthought, and this material could well have been incorporated in earlier chapters. The various problems of Genesis 1-11 are then considered under the assumption that this is prehistory or protohistory, with a number of literary and other parallels in the ancient world.

He argues that the proper factual backdrop to the reading of the OT texts is that of the entire ANE geographical and historical setting. In terms of the divided monarchy and the exile and return (where the evidence is fullest), there is a high level of support for the reliability of the OT accounts. Indeed, even the earlier material seems to fit well in its putative date and setting. Wherever evidence is there, it is supportive rather than dismissive of the reliability of the OT documents. (500)

A reservation which I have about this valuable book is that sometimes the way in which he is dismissive of the views of others may cause readers to react, and not hear the legitimate criticisms he is putting forward. This is how he refers to some of the ideas he disagrees with (drawn largely from his conclusion): “Utter poppycock in practice.” (p.471); “this tiny example of (anti)academic lunacy will suffice.” (p.471); “Rubbish on both counts.” (p.473); “a ‘con-nonsense-us’” (p.372) “a dead duck and of no relevance” (p.476); “blatantly untrue, in fact the exact opposite of the truth.” (p.481); “an entirely irresponsible misstatement of the real facts and still needs to be publicly withdrawn in print.” (p.481); “a shabby way to treat important firsthand evidence” (p.482); “the Tel Dan stela most unkindly brushed this silly, asinine myth aside” (p.483); “unsubstantiated guesswork out of somebody’s head.” (p.492). There is some room to be a little more gracious, though no less firm in pursuing truth!

Kitchen is aware that not all readers will find his views to their taste. He notes, for example, that the title of the book would yield the acronym OROT, and comments “my critics are free to repunctuate this as O! ROT!—if they so please!” He is clearly a polemicist! I first met Ken Kitchen in the kitchen (how ironic) of Tyndale House, Cambridge, as we were both there for an Old Testament Study Group. He was erudite, a little idiosyncratic, but absolutely passionate about his subject and utterly convinced of his own views. The book is just like the person, and this makes it engaging, stimulating and a little quirky.

This is an important book, but who is it for? It is so detailed and, at times, technical that it becomes a reference book for scholars and students. It would be great if Ken could use his undoubted learning to produce a shorter and more popular volume.

Lindsay Wilson  
Ridley College

**Gavin Betts, *Teach yourself new testament greek*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2004, 278 pages, paperback A\$44:95, ISBN 0340870842.**

Reviewed by Alexander Hopkins

Gavin Betts was Associate Professor of Classical Studies at Monash University. He is author of the Latin volume of the Teach Yourself series, co-author with Alan Henry of the Ancient Greek volume, and has also translated modern Greek writings into English.

This volume starts with introductory material including advice on how to use the book and a glossary of grammatical terms; then come 21 teaching units, followed by appendices, a key to the Greek reading exercises, a list of principal parts of verbs, a vocabulary section, and index. The font face used, both for the English and Greek is clear and the size adequate. Throughout the book I detected only one typographic error, in either English or Greek, a missing full stop on page one.

This is a book which I will recommend as a clearly-written, concise, and accurate introduction to New Testament Greek. But I want to start with some cautions, which have less to do with the book’s contents than the way the book may be used. Let me draw on my own experience as a student and teacher of NT Greek.

About thirty years ago I sat, perplexed, in a university tutorial room. Why was my Greek professor frowning quizzically at me? As gently as possible, he explained that my English to Greek translation of the practice sentences was barely comprehensible. I had studied the chapter on the ‘accusative of respect’ intensely and worked that construction into almost all of my sentences. But no! I had misunderstood the book’s intention. What my professor unknowingly taught me that day was how necessary it is to have a teacher to correct our misunderstandings of the text book.

I note secondly that the book concerns itself specifically with *New Testament* Greek, rather than *koine* Greek. Its audience is likely to be drawn significantly from those wanting to understand the New Testament Scriptures because of a faith commitment. This was and remains my own motive for learning the language. It is frustrating to hear persons from public platforms bolstering arguments or interpretations with references to the Greek that are *nearly* accurate, based on as much understanding as they glean from commentaries. But what really induced annoyance was hearing Greek slaughtered by a speaker who smugly told his audience that he knew Greek – he was ... *self-taught*.

In endorsing this particular volume, then, I urge that its users show the Socratic wisdom of knowing more than others by knowing how little they know. But let’s turn