

Benjamin I. Simpson. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Guide for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020. 412 pages. \$36.99 (hardcover).

As part of the *Big Greek Idea Series*, the given volume on Ephesians provides scholars and clergy with a valuable resource for in-depth preparation. “Every volume of this series has a threefold audience in mind: the busy pastor, the overworked professor of an academic institution, and the student with demanding Greek professors” (10). The book’s usefulness lies in its ability to serve as an exegetical tool specifically within the context of the Pauline and pseudo-Pauline Epistles, beyond Ephesians. Simpson provides readers with a great appreciation for attentiveness for the role of linguistic and grammatical criticism through an emphasis in examining semantics and syntax of an ancient language. An intermediate proficiency level in Greek would help the reader. Therefore, the primary audience does not include lay readers. The book does not intend to function as a typical single volume commentary laced with implicit theological biases. Rather, the author focuses on critical issues that arise when analyzing the grammar and style of each passage to attain a grasp of Paul’s intended rhetorical effect. Simpson does not aim to provide his personal interpretation of any text but seeks to raise questions that derive from translation challenges.

Simpson wrote the volume while serving as faculty at a seminary where Master-level students have the requirement of passing language proficiency exams during the middle year(s). Therein lies evidence that the author aims to produce a commentary that helps students improve their translation skills. Throughout the book, Simpson inserts various sections entitled text-critical, semantical, theological, syntactical, and lexical nuggets to assist readers in grasping the connotation of words and expressions from the perspective of original audiences. Despite a small but growing number of scholars who have doubts that Paul actually wrote Ephesians, Simpson does not question Paul’s authorship.

An astute reader should take caution in avoiding a narrow view of any part of the book’s clausal outlines, devoid of the greater context. Attention to the context redirects the reader to Paul’s situation while in prison, a call to unity in Christ that transcends ethnicity and other comparable identity markers, and a call for a distinct Christian community while under the conditions of a contrary culture and under the rule of an antagonistic empire. “The letter of Ephesians is Paul’s call for this new community without ethnic distinction to live differently in a hostile world in light of the radical change that God accomplished in their lives” (39). Simpson embraces a spiritualized perspective of the letter of Ephesians with the theological theme that Christ’s death cancels prior enmities between two groups. However, there lies no mention that on a broader scale intergroup peace and reconciliation has failed to come into fruition.

Except for the book’s introduction, each chapter begins with a primer entitled “Big Greek Idea” followed by an extensive section called “Structural Overview.” Both sections combined provide the reader with an overview of Paul’s instructions for first century believers, the significance of how the passage’s organization provides ethical implications, and an account of God’s present and future actions. The book can provide a reader with fresh inspiration to further study Paul as a moral theologian through the lens of Biblical Greek. Alongside the Greek, Simpson provides a near literal English translation throughout the given volume. For preachers and teachers who refer to commentaries, Simpson’s volume provides a valuable preparational tool under the condition that one consults a variety of other like sources with respect to their unique purposes and theological biases.

The book's greatest strength rests in the idea that it uses advanced linguistic scholarship to refute flawed interpretations of commonly decontextualized proof-texted passages such as the "the household codes," which have consequentially evoked a theological mandate for an unjust social order. It would have helped if the author placed an emphasis on the degree in which customs and mores of the Roman Empire influence the letter. Further, this book can inform lay Christian educators in the U.S. who may have historically and frequently used the passages from Ephesians in the absence of the two themes that Simpson raises, which include God's creation of a new people from two rival groups and the concept of victory in Christ. The book's main shortcoming lies in the absence of existential applicability for modern readers, especially marginal members of society. To the author's defense, Simpson remained consistent in adhering to the primary focus of the book as a useful exegetical resource.

Michael D. Royster, Prairie View A&M University