

BOOK REVIEWS

1 & 2 Thessalonians (Word Biblical Commentary), Second Edition. by Seyoon Kim and F. F. Bruce. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023. 726 pp., cloth, \$59.99.

When HarperCollins (Zondervan's parent company) acquired Thomas Nelson Publishers in 2012, this reviewer had great expectations that the completion of the New Testament volumes in the Word Biblical Commentary series (Acts & 1 Corinthians) would be one of Zondervan's first priorities. Although still waiting for those two volumes to appear, at least Zondervan has announced that a 3-volume commentary on Acts by Steve Walton is forthcoming. Zondervan has also announced projected revisions of some of the volumes in the series. The issuing of revised or second editions was inaugurated when Nelson acquired Word Books (the originator of the series) in 1992.

The Word Biblical Commentary volume on 1 & 2 Thessalonians (1982) by F. F. Bruce (1910-1990) was the first commentary published in the series. The second edition by Seyoon Kim is the second updated volume in the New Testament to appear since Zondervan took over the series (the first was 2 Corinthians). Previously updated New Testament volumes were John and Philipians. Kim, a noted Pauline scholar, is senior professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is perhaps the best choice to update Bruce's inaugural Word Biblical Commentary volume because he received his Ph.D. at the University of Manchester under his "revered teacher" (p. 14), F. F. Bruce.

For those not familiar with the layout of the volumes in the Word Biblical Commentary series, each segment to receive comment (which could be as small as one verse) begins with an extensive bibliography followed by the author's translation and textual notes, and then three sections: form/structure/setting, comment, and explanation. Kim explained in his author's preface that he could not confine his work "just to updating Bruce's original commentary" because during the years since the publication of Bruce's commentary "the atmosphere of commentary writing has greatly changed, and there has been an explosion of commentaries and other literature on the Pauline studies" (pp. 14-15). He rewrote "most of the commentary," except for the translations and notes sections. In retrospect, Kim regretted that he did not "preserve more of Bruce's original" (p. 15) in the other three sections.

The main difference between the Bruce and Kim volumes is their size. Bruce's original volume, including the preliminary material, was approximately 275 pages. Kim's revision is a massive 726 pages. Thus, it is even larger than the massive volume on 1 & 2 Thessalonians by Jeffrey Weima in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. In addition to revising Bruce's commentary, Kim has written "several extended essays on some passages and themes" (p. 14) of 1 & 2 Thessalonians and collected them into a companion volume. Another difference from Bruce is the addition of an excursus on the "restraining thing" and the "restraining person" of the "lawless man" in the middle of 2 Thessalonians 2. Bruce's original excursus on the antichrist is "preserved with only a few minor adjustments" (p. 594).

Following his mentor Bruce, Kim holds Galatians, not 1 Thessalonians, to be Paul's first epistle. He dated 1 Thessalonians to approximately AD 50, and accepts the Pauline authorship of both Thessalonian letters. Kim sees "the implicit yet unmistakable presence of the Pauline doctrine of justification in 1 Thessalonians (and the even clearer presence of it in 2 Thessalonians!)", as well as the situation-conditioned nature of the focus in 1 Thessalonians on the futuristic aspect of the common Pauline eschatological scheme of 'already/not yet'" (pp. 14-15). He affirms "the essential unity and continuity of Pauline theology between 1 Thessalonians and his later letters" (p. 14).

Kim's 69-page introduction to 1 & 2 Thessalonians, which is outlined in detail along with his outline to the Thessalonian letters, is almost as thorough as has ever been written, and the same can be said for the commentary proper. However, the commentary suffers from the same fatal flaw as most other commentaries on 1 & 2 Thessalonians, a flaw that will be of great concern to readers of the *Journal of Dispensational Theology*. Kim's comments on the prophetic passages found throughout the Thessalonian letters are disappointing because he is not a dispensational premillennialist. He took all references to salvation as salvation from hell and all references to the wrath of God as God's wrath at the last judgment. Salvation is consummated at the last judgment, which takes place at the parousia of the Lord Jesus. He combined elements from Matthew 24—25 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Most disappointing is Kim's conclusion at the end of his explanation of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18: "We are not to take the words like 'clouds,' 'command,' 'the archangelic voice,' and 'trumpet call' literally but as metaphors employed to enhance the sense of the divine majesty and glory of the Lord" (p. 409).

The criticism is not just that Kim is *not* a dispensational premillennialist; he wrote as though such an entity does not exist. How

does one write a commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians and not discuss the relation of the coming of Christ to the millennium? How can one not mention the rapture, the tribulation, and the millennium as understood by dispensationalism, premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism?

Kim's brief references to baptism found throughout his commentary are disturbing. Although baptism is not mentioned in the biblical text of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, and the index only refers the reader to one page in the commentary (p. 311), Kim mentioned "baptism" or "baptismal" approximately twenty-five times. He closely connected baptism with faith, justification, sanctification, calling, consecration, the firstfruits of salvation, and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Aside from his disappointing comments on the prophetic passages, Kim was exhaustive and thorough in this massive commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians. Anyone doing serious study in these letters will want to consult it. However, the size of the commentary may be its undoing; it is sometimes difficult to ascertain just what Kim's take on a particular passage is.

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The Deconstruction of Christianity: What It Is, Why It's Destructive, and How to Respond by Alisa Childers and Tim Barnett. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2023. xv + 276 pp., paper, \$13.49.

The deconstruction of those once claiming to be Christians is trendy and rapidly increasing, although people have been doing so since New Testament times (see eight examples in 1 Timothy alone on p. 61). Those in the deconstruction camp often use the hashtags #deconstruction and/or #exvangelical (a term invented by Blake Chastain in 2016) (pp. 6, 30) and can be described more as an explosion than a movement. The authors believe many well-known former Christian celebrities have not only joined the explosion but are every bit as evangelistic in their attempts to persuade others as they were to proclaim the gospel in the past (pp. 14-15, 65, 71, 111, 192, 199).

By definition, deconstruction is "a postmodern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard" (p. 26); its