of the Bible. It is a resource that will not just sit on the shelf; it is likely to be read and reread for interest and reference for a lifetime.

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***Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories*. By Steve Mason. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. 443 pages. Softcover, $34.95.**

Steve Mason, Professor of History and Canada Research Chair in Greco-Roman Cultural Interaction at York University in Toronto, is an authority when it comes to Titus Flavius Josephus. He is the author of *Flavius Josephus on the Pharisees*, *Josephus and the New Testament*, and serves as the general editor of the twelve-volume series Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary. His most recent work, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories,* consists of a collection of two papers (chs. 1, 9) and nine previous publications (chs. 2–8, 10–11) arranged into three parts: Part One, Josephus: Interpretation and History (5–137); Part Two, Josephus and Judea (139–279); and Part Three, Christian Origins (281–373). Together they form a unified work that addresses the relationship between reading first century narratives and reconstructing past history. The book concludes with a detailed bibliography (375–408) and three indexes: Modern Authors, Ancient Persons and Places, and Ancient Sources (409–43). There is, however, no subject index.

Part One begins with four chapters that deal with Josephus's narratives. In chapter 1, "Josephus as Authority for First-Century Judea" (7–43), Mason addresses "a fundamental problem in the use of Josephus's writings for studying Roman Judea, namely, his status as an *authority*" (7), and thereby concludes "the content of Josephus's narratives makes clear their limitations as mirrors of episodes in Judean history" (42). For him they are "artistic narratives and not manuals of factual nuggets that may simply be appropriated as historical facts" (2).

Chapters 2–4 serve to develop his approach. In chapter 2, "Of Audience and Meaning: Reading Josephus's Judean War in the Context of a Flavian Audience" (45–67), Mason addresses questions of audience, because knowing Josephus's Roman audience "matters for interpretation" (46). Mason demonstrates that Josephus does not "spell everything out, since . . . he relies upon prior audience knowledge and values," and as a result "we become alive to the possibilities of irony" (67). Thus in chapter 3, "Figured Speech and Irony in T. Flavius Josephus" (69–102), Mason shows how all of Josephus's works shared in the language games of figures of speech and irony current in Flavian Rome. Thus Josephus, as an author, tends to distance himself from the compositions he creates. Mason concludes in chapter 4 with "Contradiction or Counterpoint? Josephus and Historical Method," whereby "with some trepidation" (103–37) he challenges literary or narrative approaches that attempt to extract historical facts from Josephus's writings. Yet his aim is "to bring the burgeoning literary study of Josephus into direct engagement with the ongoing historical use of his writings" (134). For Mason "the abundant evidence of Josephus's narratives invites us to test them against various historical backgrounds" (137).

Part Two continues with four chapters that focus attention on first understanding that *Ioudaioi* \ *Iudaeus*, when used in the Greco-Roman literary world, was regarded as an ethnic designation that encompassed more than *just* a religious belief system. Thus Mason concludes chapter 5, "Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism:

Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," by saying that "the *Ioudaioi* remained what they always had been: Judeans," and that "the Greco-Roman world knew no category of religion, no –*isms* denoting religious allegiance, and no Judaism" (184). Naturally, the consequences of this are important for Christianity in that "the *Ioudaioi* were understood not as a 'licensed religion' (*religio licita*) but as an *ethnos*, the followers of Jesus faced formidable problems explaining exactly what they were, and increasingly so as they distanced themselves from, and were disavowed by, the well-known ethnos" (184). He then moves to survey the Judean cultural landscape presented in Josephus's writings in order to demonstrate why Josephus is not to be used as an author of history.

Chapters 6–8 focus attention on the Pharisees and Essenes as features of the "Judean cultural landscape" and ultimately describe the *literary* role they play in Josephus's literature (3). On the one hand in chapter 6, "Pharisees in the Narratives of Josephus" (185–215), Mason demonstrates that Josephus portrays the Pharisees "as an occasional aggravation to the elite" (213) and essentially "has a general interest in ignoring them (even in *Antiquities*), only occasionally exposing them as examples of the demagogic type that he and his audiences deplore" (215). On the other hand in chapter 7, "The Philosophy of Josephus's Pharisees" (217–38), Mason fulfills three tasks: provides a contextual reading of Josephus's Pharisees *as philosophical school*, investigates the larger uses of philosophy in Josephus's works, and examines the philosophical school passages in *War* (2.119–66), *Antiquities* (13.171–73, 18.12–22) and *Life* (10–11). In the end, Josephus's portraits of the Pharisees are merely digressions in his overall literary point. Thus, "Josephus's handling of the three Judean philosophical schools," according to Mason, "should make us wary about using his descriptions of the Pharisees in these sketches for historical purposes" (238).

In chapter 7, "The Essenes of Josephus's Judean War: From Story to History" (239–79), Mason reveals how the Essenes are "an integral part" of the story line in the *War* and "that understanding the way in which *War* uses the Essenes lays new obstacles before the Qumran-Essene hypothesis" (241). Essentially, *War* is about describing the character of the Judean ethnos, and Josephus "presents the Essenes as embodying the virtues of the entire nation" and having greater character than even the Spartans (260). In the end, Mason argues that advances in Josephus studies (like the one presented here) warrant a re-evaluation of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis, because Josephus appears to be opposed to much of what the Scrolls appear to represent when it comes to their identity with the Essene sect.

Part Three concludes the work with three chapters whereby Mason first applies his understanding of the "crucial term" *euangelion* (chs. 9–10) in canonical and non-canonical works, and then applies his methods for examining Josephus's literary presentation of the Pharisees and Sadducees to the presentation in Luke-Acts (ch. 11). On the one hand in chapter 9, "Paul's Announcement (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον): 'Good News' and Its Detractors in Earliest Christianity" (283–302), Mason argues that "Paul's letters show him proclaiming The Announcement as his personal mandate" (301) that differed from the other apostles and that "Paul's Announcement was evidently offensive, or at least seriously deficient, for it undercut much of Jesus' own teaching and practice as his disciples understood it" (302). Only later does *euangelion* gain a more harmonized understanding of "good news." On the other hand in chapter 10, "'For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel' (Rom 1:16): The Gospel and the First Readers of Romans" (303–28), Mason addresses the audience of the Book of Romans and "the pecularities of Paul's *euangelion*-language in the letter" (301,

327). He concludes that the audience is not a mixed audience made up of both Jew and Gentile because of the so few references to Gentiles in Romans (1:5–6; 1:13; 11:13; chs. 14–15). Thus the audience is solely a Jewish one to whom "Paul is unwilling to connect full-blooded Judean Christianity—of the kind that would maintain a traditional Judean regimen in spite of the death and resurrection of Jesus—with his *euangelion*" (325). Ultimately Paul's use of *euangelion*-language is unique to him and his Gentile mission and thereby "not as meaningful to non-Pauline Christians" (328).

In chapter 11, "Chief Priests, Sadducees, Pharisees, and Sanhedrin in Luke-Acts and Josephus" (329–73), Mason contends, "the hallmark of our time is a profound historical agnosticism" (329), which he appears to counter by focusing on "the new concern," namely that historical "evidence only has meaning in context, as part of someone's story. If we do not know what it means in context, we cannot use it for historical purposes" (330). Thus, Mason looks at the literary function of the chief priests, Sadducees, and Pharisees as employed by Luke (Luke-Acts) and Josephus (*War*, *Antiquities*, *Life*, and *Against Apion*) in their respective literary context *before* suggesting any reconstruction of history. In some respects, their portraits are similar. Both present the chief priests as "the traditional Judean aristocracy, who had supreme control of nation affairs from their base in Jerusalem"; the Sadducees have "a tiny base in the aristocracy," deny life after death, and reject special traditions of the Pharisees; and, the Pharisees occupy a middle ground between the chief priests and the common people, maintain precision in obeying the law and evidencing great piety, and maintained a minority in Jerusalem's council (327–73). In other respects, they differ. For instance, unlike Luke, Josephus is "an enthusiastic spokesman for the Judean aristocracy," and he views "the common people with a combination of pity and contempt because they are vulnerable to whatever self-appointed leaders come along" (372). Ultimately, Mason's concern revolves around how to glean from narratives information for an accurate "historical reconstruction."

Although Mason appears to swing the pendulum concerning the historical relevance of Josephus's works, *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* is an excellent reminder that his writings are *not* historical records. The texts cannot mean something today that they did not mean to Josephus or his Greco-Roman audience. They are narratives that make selective presentations of historical events to address real social issues of Josephus's Greco-Roman world, and that like the Greco-Roman historian, Josephus wrote artfully by employing figured speech and irony to present a perspective. Mason's efficacious mastery of ancient Greco-Roman sources and his methodological approach to interpreting narrative literature serve to enhance his ability to solidify this one truism: Not all of our historical questions about Judean history can be answered through the writings of Josephus, particularly when it comes to understanding the beliefs, practices, and roles of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Mason constantly appeals to the literary aims of Josephus. *War* addresses "the question of the Judean ethical character," because in Josephus's Greco-Roman world "behavior issues from one's innate character" (187–94). Thus, he describes and defends the character of the Judeans to explain the Jewish war with Rome. *Antiquities* is an anti-monarchal apologetic to point out that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely both in Rome and in Judea (90–92, 194–208). Thus, Josephus himself has no messianic expectation, though messianic hopes existed. *Life* is "a celebration of Josephus's character," "a cheerful and proud appendix

to *Antiquities*: 'about the author'" (120–22), who "does not number himself among the Pharasees" and thereby remains detached from any one group (208–13). Mason rightfully argues that historical reconstruction must take into consideration literary aims of the author *before* any historical reconstruction. Yet, Mason's suggestion that Paul's *euagelion* differs from that of the other apostles will attract reaction as will his perspective that Luke-Acts is a second century text. Nevertheless, there are numerous nuggets to be gleaned from his overall methodological approach to answering his fundamental question: What is the relationship between reading first century narratives and reconstructing past history?

In summation, Mason challenges clearly several categories, while presenting a well-founded methodological approach for interpreting narratives. *Josephus, Judea, and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* is an excellent unified collection of essays, but it is not for the novice reader. Even for those familiar with some of the non-critical and even the more modern critical usages of Josephus, it might help to read first Mason's earlier work *Josephus and the New Testament*, and then Per Bilde's *Flavius Josephus between Jerusalem and Rome: His Life, His Works, and Their Importance* (Sheffield, 1988).

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***1–3 John*. By Robert W. Yarbrough. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 434 pages. Hardcover, $39.99.**

Robert Yarbrough is Professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary. He is also one of the main editors for the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament to which he contributes this volume on 1–3 John. In his preface, Yarbrough provides six areas that would set his commentary apart from other recent commentaries on John's epistles. In my reading, two of the six areas have especially significant and beneficial effects on his commentary. First, he reads the epistles of John as works of John the apostle and eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. As a result, Yarbrough is attentive to connections between John's epistles and the teachings of Jesus, as well as connections to the Gospel of John (ix–x). Second, he uses a variety of interpreters, ancient and modern, to inform his study of John's epistles. His work therefore points us to insights from previous interpreters and gives a sense that he has not isolated himself in the midst of contemporary scholarship.

Yarbrough fails to note a third area that sets his commentary apart from others in the field. This third area is his engagement with biblical and systematic theology. Such engagement adds a helpful and welcome dimension to his treatment of John's teachings at certain points. For instance, John makes some confident assertions in 1 John 5:14–15 that might sound like Christians can expect to receive whatever they ask for when they pray. Yarbrough proceeds to interpret these verses with an eye on the immediate context and on relevant biblical teachings on prayer (300–03). A second example occurs with respect to 1 John 2:2. This verse speaks about Jesus as "the propitiation for our sins" and those of "the whole world" (71). Yarbrough notes that 1 John 2:2 is often quoted in the theological debate over the extent of the atonement. He goes on to provide brief comments that provide his perspective on the significance of 1 John 2:2 for this debate (80–81).