With the publication of *Ecclesiastes*, Baker has moved closer towards the completion of its Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms series edited by Temper Longman III. Only Job, to be written by the series editor, remains to be published and is expected in late 2011. This is a series was focused for clergy and, seminary although scholars and laymen could also greatly benefit from its pages (9).

Craig G. Bartholomew (PhD, University of Bristol) was tapped to write this volume. Currently he is professor of philosophy, religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario. He came to the project with a resume suited for the task. His PhD. work, published in *Reading Ecclesiastes: Old Testament Exegesis and Hermeneutical Theory*, focused on the historical interpretations of the book. This previous research provided a working knowledge of scholars, preachers and commentators from both Jewish and Christian traditions spanning the past centuries. He references these liberally in the volume. Bartholomew is also the founder-convener of the decade-long Scripture and Hermeneutics Project, as well as, coeditor of eight volumes which have proceeded from annual conferences with some of the top hermeneutical scholars in the world. Not only has this activity produced a careful exegete, who pays attention to details, but also an editor’s edge who cuts to the chase with clear and concise writing. Finally, by studying and publishing on present day postmodernism, Bartholomew has provided application to the present day from the book in the Bible which asks many of the same searching questions being asked anew this era.
This commentary begins with a long introductory section (82 pages) covering the usual topics of title, canonicity, history of interpretation, authorship, date, social setting, genre, structure, biblical context, (including the New Testament) and the overall message and structure of Ecclesiastes. The history of interpretation section provides an excellent overview of how readers from the Intertestamental period to the present decade have understood the meaning of the book. His treatment on the issue of authorship follows its development from the Targum and Origen to views of contemporary scholars. He provides internal evidence from statements made about Qohelet and external evidence from word use and idea concepts as he moves through this process of investigation. Bartholomew interacts with proposals of others before presenting to the conclusion regarded by most scholars today that the book was written by some unknown Jewish author in the late third century BCE. (46)

The entire introduction section is extraordinary in one great sense. As I was reading I got caught up in the text. Before I knew it I was three-fourths through the section. It flowed like a good history and not dry and uninviting as most introductions to biblical commentaries sitting on my shelves. The introduction section is worth the price of the book alone, but there is much more one receives for the investment.

Bartholomew divides the sections of the biblical text into three parts: the Frame Narrative of Prologue (1:1-11) the Qohelet’s Exploration of the Meaning of Life (1:12-12:7) which is divided into twenty-one different segments, and the Frame Narrative: Epilogue (12:8-14). Each of these sections and segments begin with Bartholomew’s own translation
including textual observations and comments concerning the original language placed in footnotes. Following the translation is the “Interpretation” where he provides a verse by verse clear discussion of the text. That is followed by “Theological Implications” where he brings the thoughts of the text to the present day and provides quotes from a variety of sources like Bart, John Paul II, Bonhoeffer, Nouwen and Gilkey to amplify the ideas.

Bartholomew follows the tension between the concepts of vanity and faith allowing that conflict to be crucial to understanding the wisdom provided by the sage Qoheleth, a man of insight into the world, and also the life of faith, as he reflects on observations and experiences while searching for meaning in life.

Bartholomew ends with a Postscript where he touches on postmodernism, psychology, spiritual formation and preaching. He provides a well of thoughts to consider as one looks at the wisdom of Qohelet who explains how to find meaning and joy in a world filled with vanity.

This is an excellent commentary which will enhance the library of pastors and theological students who are working through this unique book of the Bible.

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