



Cabal, Ted, ed.

The Apologetics Study Bible

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Obviously it would take much too long to read an entire study Bible along with notes and articles, so I have skimmed this volume, and will review what I have seen according to five categories:

1. Aesthetics
2. Translation
3. Articles
4. Notes
5. Overall Impression

1. Aesthetics

My initial impression upon receiving *The Apologetics Study Bible* was that it was a very attractive Bible. The black, silver, and gray colors are pleasing to the eye, and the picture of Rodin's *Le Penseur* seemed an appropriate choice for the cover. The dust jacket is quite thick, comparable to oak tag, and the actual book cover is identical underneath, so in the event that the dust jacket is damaged or discarded, none of the aesthetic appeal will go with it. It's also a very dense Bible, and fairly heavy. This certainly wouldn't be the first choice for your every day, carry-along Bible.

Upon looking through the inside I discovered that all of the book introductions have decorative backgrounds as do the articles. Scattered throughout are various "twisted scripture" notes that

are intermingled with the main text, so these are also marked out by decorative backgrounds. The main text is a standard two-column format, with two sets of footnotes. The first set is lettered notes, which appears in a single column above the numbered notes, which retains the double-column format. The words of Christ are in black which many people prefer (I'm apathetic either way), and the size of the text is quite readable (as I have fairly poor eyesight). I'm not sure exactly what size it is, but I'd guess 10 or 11 point. And I must mention the black ribbon-marker as well. In my opinion, a Bible isn't a Bible without a ribbon-marker.

2. Translation

The translation of choice for this Bible is the Holman Christian Standard Bible[®] (HCSB) which is completely new to me. The textual base for this translation is the NA27/UBS4 and the BHS5, but they state that “[a]t times, however, the translators have followed an alternative manuscript tradition, disagreeing with the editors of these texts about the original reading.” (xvii)

Their translation philosophy is neither formal equivalence nor dynamic equivalence, but rather what they have termed “optimal equivalence,” which is explained as:

[A] translation philosophy [which] recognizes that form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed (for example, nouns to verbs or third person “they” to second person “you”) unless comprehension demands it. The primary goal of translation is to convey the sense of the original with as much clarity as the original text and the translation language permit. Optimal equivalence appreciates the goals of formal equivalence but also recognizes its limitations. (xviii-xix)

I always turn to John's Prologue in any translation to gauge how well I like it. My only complaint with the HCSB translation is the choice of “The One and Only Son” over and against “only begotten God” (NASB) or “God the One and Only” (NIV) in reference to Jesus. I'm in agreement with the UBS4 committee (Allen Wikgren excepted) that *μονογενής θεός* is preferable to *μονογενής υἱός*. From the other passages I read (Gen. 1; Ps. 23; John 6) I have no serious problems.

3. Articles

The articles in this Bible range from half-a-page to three pages in length. Obviously I couldn't read every article (125 in all) in a Bible of this size, and produce a review in a timely manner, but those I did read were valuable to varying degrees. For example, Bruce Ware's article “How Can the Bible Affirm Both Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom” seemed out of place in a Bible that was produced to answer questions. He says:

We cannot understand fully how how both are true together, but that they must work together is demanded by Scripture's clear teaching. (1054)

That doesn't provide any actual answer though, it's merely an assertion. He concludes the article by saying:

Not every question is here answered, but we see that we must affirm both the sovereign rulership of God and the genuineness of our moral responsibility. Both are joined together in Scripture, and what Scripture has joined together, let no man separate. (1055)

Obviously we can't expect every question related to the issue of God's sovereignty and human freedom to be answered in such a short article, but some attempt would have been nice. William Lane Craig on the other hand, offers an article of the same title, addressing the same issue, but actually attempts to answer the question by appealing to Molinism (the doctrine of God's middle knowledge) (1850-1851).

I found some of the introductory articles to be overstated and lacking in substance. Lee Strobel's article "How Apologetics Changed My Life" is fine as far as testimonials go, but he never really sets out to prove any of his assertions, and some of his assertions are simply unconvincing, even to a believer such as myself. He says:

I found that Jesus alone, fulfilled ancient messianic prophecies against all mathematical odds. I concluded that the New Testament is rooted in eyewitness testimony and that it passes the tests that historians routinely use to determine reliability. I learned that the Bible has been passed down through the ages with remarkable fidelity. (xxvii)

But he doesn't even begin to defend these statements. Yes, Jesus fulfilled messianic prophecies (which consequently the next article outlines briefly), but the so-called "mathematical odds" argument is a contrived one. There's no doubt in my mind that Strobel is referring to Josh McDowell's statistical probabilities here, and statistics are only as good as the numbers used to calculate them. McDowell never proved these stats to my satisfaction. He's also vague in what he means by "rooted in eyewitness testimony" — does this mean that the books of the Bible were written by eyewitnesses? Does it mean they were written by those who knew eyewitnesses? He simply doesn't tell us. And likewise, the fidelity with which the text was transmitted is a fairly simple case to make, so why then, didn't Strobel make it?

I also found Phillip E. Johnson's article "Evolution: Fact or Fantasy?" to be below standard. In it he argues against evolution, but doesn't take into consideration theistic models of evolution. By

not factoring theistic evolution into the argument he makes misguided statements such as: “The only mechanism the evolutionists have is a combination of random variation and natural selection...” (8)

Ergen Caner’s article “Is Allah identical to the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ?” on the other hand was very well written and as succinct as can be. He rightly notes that:

Ultimately, this is not an issue of vocabulary; it is an issue of definition. The Allah of the Qur’an is described and defined in a way that clearly shows Muhammad was not presenting the same God. (1754)

He goes on to highlight the blatant contradictions between Islam’s and Christianity’s God. This is the kind of simple, yet informative article I was looking for in this study Bible.

Darrell Bock’s article “Is the New Testament Trustworthy?” was also concise (although nearly 4x longer than Caner’s) and very well written. I especially appreciated the fourth point he makes in the article which is that “[t]rustworthiness demands not exhaustive but adequate knowledge of the topic.” He continues and says:

Sources are selective even when they are accurate . . . When people call Scripture trustworthy, they are arguing that its testimony is not contrary to what happened and is sufficient to give us a meaningful understanding of God and his work for us (2 Tim 3:16-17). Speaking *accurately* is not the same as speaking *exhaustively*. (1453)

4. Notes

Like the articles, the notes are helpful to varying degrees, as is the case with any study Bible. What I did appreciate was that the notes for each book were handled by the scholar that wrote the introduction for that book. This makes it easier to give credit where credit is due, and to point blame in the right direction when disagreeing with what was noted.

This is a conservative study Bible that is annotated by conservative scholars, who all (to my knowledge) affirm the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy. But it was refreshing to observe in the notes that even when harmonizations are attempted, they are usually accompanied by a note that even if the proposed solution were not so, there would be no real harm done to the overall trustworthiness of Scripture. In other words, it’s not the strict inerrancy of fundamentalism that is argued for, but rather a more laid back evangelical view.

5. Overall Impression

My overall feeling about this Bible is that it is more helpful than harmful. From what I've read, I can see how many who are new to the faith could be strengthened in what they believe, and given good reason to keep believing it, after studying this Bible. However, I don't believe that this Bible is going to equip a believer to enter into debate with scholars of various cults. It would be more suitable for those home visits from your local Mormon or Jehovah's Witness, and even then I'd tread carefully. This Bible doesn't provide anything new in terms of evidence or arguments, but it does collate what already exists and presents it in a manner that's easy to understand. I believe that it is suited for conservative evangelicals, who are interested in being armed with a short and sweet answer for all who would question their faith.

Other nice features of *The Apologetics Study Bible* are the 10 page index, 61 page concordance, and 8 page annotated bibliography, which are all found in the back. There are also 8 pages of color charts and maps for a more visual approach to retaining the information explained in the notes and articles. I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in Christian apologetics, without any doubt that they'd find it useful, but with the caveat that they'd not likely convert their skeptical friends based on the information in this Bible alone. Such a task ultimately requires the work of God, but on the human level it requires time and continued interaction. Most converts are not made because of apologetic efforts; most are made because someone has shown them the love of Christ.