

## Review of the **REVISED NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE**

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**Revised New Jerusalem Bible Study Edition** (ISBN 9780232533620) pp. 2416.

This study edition differs significantly from previous study editions in the JB tradition. In its physical presentation, the RNJB is roughly A5, resulting in a "squat" book, running to 2,400 pages. The reduction in size is a significant change and the notes are in the smallest print imaginable. It is bulky but more portable than the New Jerusalem Bible Study Edition. It retains the JB tradition of placing the verse numbers in the inside margin, while using the outside margin for cross references. The cross references themselves are sharply reduced. The advantage of such a reduction is greater clarity regarding the key cross references. The disadvantage is the consequent loss of richness. The footnotes are also greatly reduced. This is true across the entire text, giving rise to two questions in the mind of this reviewer: is it really a study bible? for whom it is intended? What makes this edition into a true study bible is the resources at the back. These include: the *Index to the Notes* (12 pages, saving a good deal of repetition in the text), the *Chronological Table* (10 pages; the Hasmonean period is barely indicated); the *Index of Persons* (10 pages); and, finally, Maps with a good *Index* (8 pages). (In deference to Jewish tradition, the tetragrammaton is now rendered as LORD throughout.)

But who is the intended reader? The sheer reduction of the notes would suggest someone at the beginning of becoming familiar with the Bible. Consistent with that image of the intended reader, the introductions to the books are quite short but written very engagingly, with an absence of technical details and a sense that the editor is "speaking" to the reader. The Psalms receive special treatment. First of all, the translation is the Revised Grail Psalms (available on-line already). This is probably a good choice because the JB versions of the Psalms never really took off. As if to compensate for the lack of originality here, the editor has provided brief, though again very engaging, introductions to each one of the Psalms, perhaps an echo of his own monastic experience. With all that in mind, if you are buying this edition, my suggestion would be to keep your previous study edition because of the far greater wealth of information at all levels. This is not a disparagement of the editor's work—just a recognition of a change of intended readership.

How does the RNJB Study Edition stand in relation to the major study bibles on offer? In my opinion, the *HarperCollins Study Bible* (NRSV) remains unbeatable, chiefly on account of the excellent footnotes. The most recent edition of the *Oxford Annotated Bible* (NRSV; fifth edition, fully revised and expanded) is highly recommendable, as indeed is the second edition of the Jewish Study Bible (Jewish Publication Society translation with excellent critical notes). A relative newcomer to the field is the *New English Translation Full Notes Edition*. This enterprising translation (without the Deuterocanonical books) is actually a fully annotated *translation*. The NET editors really want you

to see what the words mean and why they translated the Hebrew or the Greek in particular ways. For the reader without the biblical languages, the NET Full Notes edition is something of a find. Finally, the second edition of the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* is also a candidate (NRSV), even if limited to the Christian books.

It is good to have alternatives to the threatened hegemony of the NRSV, which for all its modernity, is still very beholden to the King James tradition. Perhaps, the RNJB study edition would be good to put in the hands of a beginner. Very soon, however, the reader who progresses in understanding will require something more. That something more is to be found in the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, where the footnotes alone could be the equivalent of a course in Bible study. To be clear, I am disappointed in the study aspect of this study Bible.

How does the translation differ from previous editions? This is the point where the reviewer's stamina is stretched. As far as I can see, the move from the dynamic equivalent approach of the first Jerusalem Bible continues with a tendency to a more literal accuracy. An example would be Exodus 1:8: "a new king who had never heard of Joseph" now reads "a new king...who did not know Joseph." The ambiguity of the original in Job 42:6, so important for the understanding of the whole book, is lost in the NJB, which furnishes an object for the verb. But the RNJB "I recant", without object, is hardly more satisfactory. The rather marvellous "spare me the din of your chanting" (Amos 5:23) is retained in both. The original JB offered a self-indulgent translation of John 1:13 ("was born" instead of "were born"). This was corrected in the NJB, but with a footnote saying "there are strong arguments for reading the verb in the singular." This is weakened further here to "there are also arguments etc." With respect, there aren't good arguments in favour: the lack of *any* Greek MS with the singular is surely decisive. Finally, the influence of later doctrine is also evident in the translation of Matthew 1:25 ("when" v. "until"). By way of compensation, the mistake in the JB lectionary version at Isaiah 7:14 has been rectified (it translates Emmanuel for Hebrew speakers!).

How to translate Paul is a particular interest of my own, especially in light of the New Perspective. Romans 3:21-26 is a "neuralgic" text, along with Galatians 2:15-21. Only the NET and Tom Wright have the courage to translate "pistis christou" as "faithfulness of Christ", yielding a consistent and theologically rich interpretation. The translation in the RNJB is, for me, disappointing in two respects. Firstly, there is no indication in the notes that another translation is at least possible. Secondly, to translate *hilastērion* as redemption, and not as mercy seat, deprives the reader of a significant metaphor. To be fair, the footnote attached tends towards the New Perspective but the editor did not carry it through. Once again, the notes in the *NJB Study Edition* are much richer and more helpful.

Finally, does it work as a translation for public reading? In the JB, the single sentence of Romans 1:1-7 is broken down into five sentences, making the task of the reader much easier. The RNJB restores the whole text to one sentence (with slight changes such as

gospel instead of good news). By way of balance, this review was finished on the feast of the Epiphany. Isaiah 60:1-6 reads better in the NJB and the RNJB, as does Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6. Matthew 2:1-12 is better in both NJB and RJNB. If anything, the newer version is more accurate in vocabulary and more energetic in sentence structure. Would it be a good version for the liturgy? Given the sheer familiarity with the phrases and poetry of the JB and given the real need to get away from the JB, with its often misleading use of dynamic equivalence, it would be a good idea to stay within a *tradition*. So, finally, I would recommend this version for the liturgy, especially as it is consistent and at the same time less intrusive in its use of inclusive language (contrast Matthew 18:15 in the NRSV and the RNJB).