

Explore the Book

reviewed by Desmond Ford

Explore the Book, six volumes in one, J. Sidlow Baxter, reprinted by Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1st edition in 1960, 1,800 pages. Available by mail order from Nuggets of Wisdom, 13130 Lincoln Way, Auburn, CA 95603, \$25.96 including postage (CA residents add \$1.44 sales tax).

I noticed the other day in a Christian bookshop that the six volume modern classic **Explore the Book** by J. Sidlow Baxter is now available in one binding. Sell your shirt and buy it!

Years ago, when one of my students was called to foreign mission service I bought his set — with sadness for his loss and joy at my gain. For over twenty years my favorite mode of Bible study had been the book-by-book approach. So in addition to close study of a book of the Bible itself, I was used to reading the appropriate chapters on that book from G. Campbell Morgan's **Analyzed Bible**, A.M. Hodgkin's **Christ in All the Scriptures**, Robert Lee's **The Outlined Bible**, Joseph Angus's **Bible Handbook**, G. Scroggie's **Know Your Bible** and A.T. Pierson's **Keys to the Word**. By the time I was through these and more I had a rich feast before me, and one that could be shared from pulpit or podium.

May I recommend all these volumes to you, but particularly the first for it is more detailed and readily available from any Christian bookstore. Why read such a book? First of all, because mere proof-text Bible reading is the worst method there is. "A text without a context is a pretext." Instead of "rightfully dividing the Word of truth" as Paul admonishes, we end up frightfully dividing it. And that's how many a heresy got started.

Look around you — metaphorically, I mean — at the doctrinal world. Do you see any Shibboleths of doctrine which, like an inverted pyramid, rest upon one basic text wrested? How easy to forget that "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every

word be established." God has told us that in the first major section of Scripture, again in the heart of his work, and yet once more towards the close (Deut 17:6; Mt 8:16; 2 Cor 13:1). Christ responded to Satan's misuse of the Word by saying "It is written again...." We must know all God has said on a topic, not just a fragment. So try Bible study, book for book, for each book has a special message.

We all know about the seven cardinal colors of the rainbow but there is an even more glorious rainbow of promise, and it has sixty-six cardinal colors of truth. Look for them, feed upon them, use them in hand-to-hand conflict with evil.

You will discover that there is one book all about beginnings, another all about endings. There is one book on love from the Old Testament viewpoint and another even smaller on the same topic from the New Testament. There is a special book about the mystery of suffering, another on songs for public worship, another on the necessity of obedience to law, another on the problem of failure in our Christian pilgrimage, another on hope for hopeless times, another on the blessings of repentance, another on Christian assurance. And we haven't even mentioned the four books on the greatest life ever lived, the one on the establishment of the Christian church and the first of foreign missions, the classic on justification by faith, and so on. Exciting? Yes indeed!

Now, back to Baxter.

Baxter's **Explore the Book** has been described as "an exploration of the Bible in the form of a basic and broadly interpretative course of studies, from Genesis to Revelation...a progressive, systematic study from a soundly evangelical standpoint." The Times literary supplement wrote concerning Baxter's work: "Here is a direct descendent of the great folio commentaries of the seventeenth century, but in style

and approach adapted to the twentieth century reader; based on Bible lectures delivered at Edinburgh, the commentaries retain something of a conversational style."

Of course, Baxter's not right on everything. You may decide he has some ideas about the future that do not agree with yours, or that he emphasizes some aspect of Christian experience to a degree that you feel is out of proportion. What of that? Books are like shops — you are not there to buy everything, just **some** things. I **know**, for I've written twelve of them, and I don't buy every jot or tittle even in those — though I did when I wrote them. "Many run to and fro and knowledge is increased." To learn is to unlearn. You do that when you read, when you write, and as you wrestle with life's enigmas. So don't give up on Baxter because you don't always agree with him.

The Evangelical Quarterly, then edited by F.F. Bruce, had this to say: "Throughout the volumes we discern a complete confidence in the inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Holy Scripture which means that the studies may be recommended to any young believer with the assurance that nothing in these pages undermines the foundations of reliance upon God's Word." □