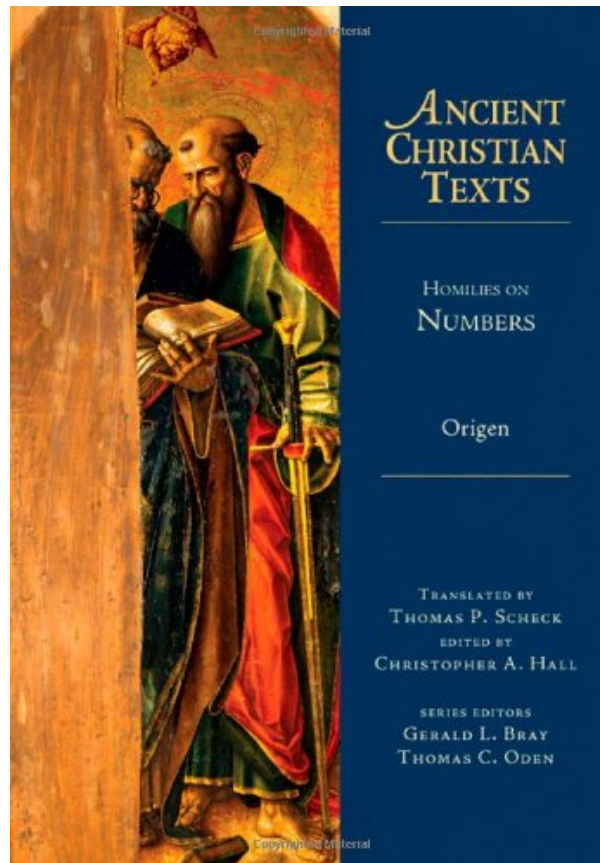
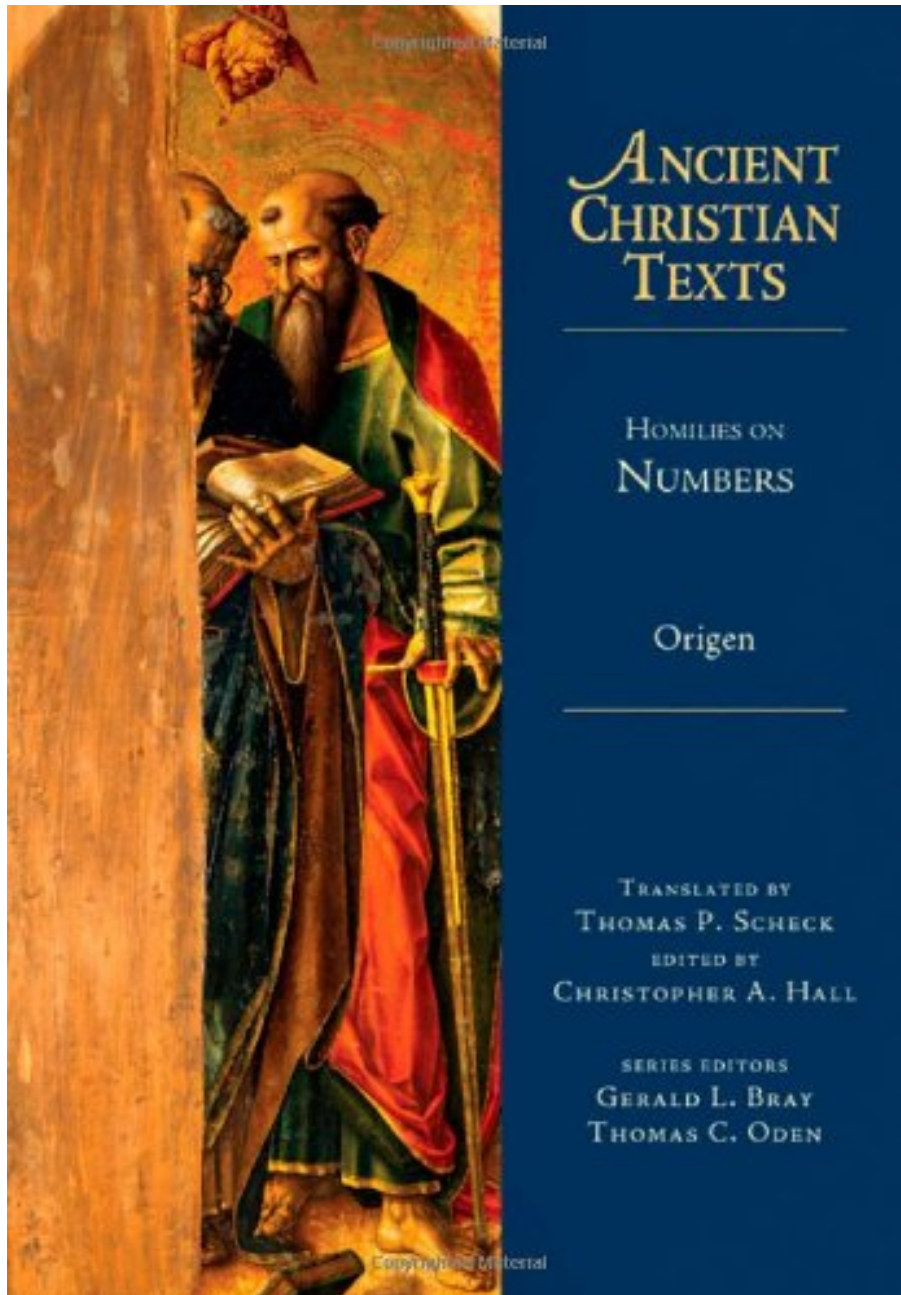


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Review

Presented in clear, accessible English, this translation of Origen's commentary on the Book of Numbers is organized according to the Biblical text so both can be read side-by-side as Origen himself intended. (Reference & Research Book News, February 2010)

About the Author

Origen was an early Christian scholar, theologian, and one of the most distinguished of the early fathers of the Christian Church.

Thomas P. Scheck (PhD, University of Iowa) is associate professor of theology at Ave Maria University in Ave Maria, Florida. He is the author of *Origen and the History of Justification* and *Erasmus's Life of Origen*. He is also the translator in the *Fathers of the Church* series of *Origen: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 volumes) and *St. Jerome: Commentary on Matthew*. Recently Scheck published new translations of *St. Jerome's Commentaries on Isaiah and Ezekiel* in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series.

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Origen of Alexandria (185-254), one of the most prolific authors of antiquity and arguably the most important and influential pre-Nicene Christian theologian, was a man of deep learning and holiness of life. Regrettably, many of his works are no longer extant, in part due to the condemnation of his ideas by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. The condemnation, however, took little account of his historical circumstances and the tentative nature of his speculations. The anathemas were more likely directed toward sixth-century Origenist views than to the views of Origen himself, though clearly he expounded some views that would be judged unacceptable today. Origen's numerous homilies provide the oldest surviving corpus of Christian sermons and shaped exegesis for succeeding centuries. With Jerome he was one of the early church's great critical and literal exegetes. Devoutly he sought to develop a spiritual exegesis of the Old Testament grounded in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Homilies on Numbers presented here offer a splendid example of his spiritual interpretation of Old Testament texts. He asks, What foreshadowing, what warning, what instruction, what encouragement, reproof, correction or exhortation, do we find in the narratives of Numbers for our benefit as Christians? Here, based on Baehren's critical Latin text, is the first English edition of these homilies, ably translated with explanatory notes by Thomas P. Scheck.

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4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Master at revealing the hidden insights of scripture

By Amazon Customer

AMAZING. Origen just gets it in a way that few others ever have. The insight he has is unbelievable... definitely meat for the soul. My only advice would be not to use his works as commentary along with the book of the Bible you are reading. Trying to read Origen along with a systematic study will just slow you down and make you frustrated because he is constantly digressing. For example, there are 60 pages (the pages of this hardback book are large too, not like normal paperback pages). about Balaam alone, much of which are Origen expounding and even digressing from the original point. This expounding is the very essence of the beauty of his work, but can be really frustrating when you are trying to get through the book of Numbers in your Bible but can't go any further than chapter 24 because you are still trying to get through Origen's corresponding pages on Balaam. There is so much meat on every page that you dare not skip ahead and miss out! Reading Origen takes time and focus...it is not a quick or easy read but it is WELL WORTH THE TIME AND EFFORT. Even reading just a few pages at a time is a better use of your time than reading multiple books on the same topic written by lesser minds. Origen feeds the soul in a way that is hard to find anywhere else. He is a master at revealing the Spirit of the Word. I highly recommend any of his homilies to hungry souls who have found that the works of lesser minds simply don't provide the nourishment they crave.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Provides useful commentaries on a generally skipped over Biblical book

By Stuart Dunn

If you have ever tried to read the Bible in a year, you know what a daunting task it can be. There are many different methods people recommend for doing so. Some say to just read ten minutes a day, and it will be super easy. Others tell you to read one Old Testament chapter, one New Testament chapter, and one book from Psalms. And still others say to read four or five chapters a day. No matter what route you go, as soon as you hit the books of Leviticus and Numbers, it's like hitting a brick wall. All those laws and all those numbers can really wear you down. Even now that I know their significance, they still cause dread in me when I approach them. Therefore, when I learned that Origen wrote a series of homilies on Numbers, I knew I had to give it a read.

Published by InterVarsity Press, Homilies on Numbers is part of the Ancient Christian Texts series. It contains 28 homilies by Origen, a man I believe has gotten a bum rap, and is widely regarded as one of the most influential and prolific writers before the Council of Nicaea. The book begins with an introduction by the translator, which gives a brief biography of Origen; speaks of Origen's exegetical method and surviving works; and tells us about Rufinus of Aquileia, the man responsible for translating Origen from Greek to Latin. The actual text then begins with an introduction by Rufinus and then dives into commentaries starting of course with Numbers 1.

The first few chapters of Numbers talk about the census that is taking place. In this book, we learn that only certain people are to be counted. Women aren't counted. Slaves aren't counted. The Levites aren't counted. The role of the Levites and their priestly office is then discussed at length. Some of the most interesting sections of Numbers to me dealt with the Israelites' time in the desert, Aaron and Miriam's jealousy of Moses, and the scouting of the Promised Land. Unfortunately in these homilies, Numbers 5 through 10 are missing. However, the most interesting story in Numbers and one of the most interesting in the whole Bible has to do with Balaam and his talking donkey. I believe Origen would agree wholeheartedly with this assessment as he devoted numerous pages and homilies to this very subject.

Overall, I found this book to be very edifying. It isn't really a book that you use for a Bible reading plan as I spoke of above. Instead, I recommend taking some time, reading a chapter of Numbers and then seeing what Origen said about that particular chapter. Remember, this is a book of homilies, not a verse by verse commentary. You will be provided with a broad, but enlightening view of what the chapter or passage means, but it won't be dissected word-by-word or even verse-by-verse. So if you are looking for a better understanding of one of the toughest books to read in the Bible, don't look to modern authors, but turn instead to antiquity and see what one of the greatest minds of the Church had to say on the subject.

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Be warned that there are virtually no useful insights on the Book of Numbers in these homilies

By B. Marold

This is a new translation of a Latin translation, from the Greek, of one of the few long works by Origen which has survived. I will not deign to review Origen himself, except to say that this work exemplifies many of the ideas for which he is famous, such as the three layered methods of understanding scripture and his Platonic idealism. Be warned that there are virtually no useful insights on the Book of Numbers in these homilies. Origen simply uses passages in Numbers to go off and touch almost every other book in the bible.

I believe the translation is well done; however that's just a seat of the pants impression, since I do not know Latin and I don't have the Latin text. The star of this book is the notes, references to places Origen is quoting in the Bible, and the list of references in the back. This shows the extent to which Origen was committed to giving equal weight to Old and New Testaments.

The only weak point in the editorial apparatus is the index, which is selective in what words it reports. Thankfully, it reports all proper names, so we can see that Origen reports on Marcion seven times, but there is no entry for how many times Origen uses the notion of the well.

If you are studying Origen or the pre-Nicene fathers in general, this is a valuable resource.

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