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*The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible*

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

I didn't know exactly what to expect when I first heard about *The Eerdmans Companion to the Bible*. My first instinct was to imagine it along the lines of the volumes in the Cambridge Companions or Oxford Handbooks series, i.e., having lengthy articles about the Bible from various specialists in the field. That's not really what *The Eerdmans Companion* is though, but that's okay, it doesn't have to be.

This volume does contain numerous articles from more than 50 scholars of the Old and New Testaments but they're far from lengthy. Summary as they may be, many of them are extremely helpful. For example, T. Desmond Alexander offers two back-to-back articles on "The Calendar of Israel's Worship" (132-34) and "The Tabernacle" (135-36) that are terse but informative. Alexander not only explains the background and theology of these subjects from the OT, but he briefly highlights their NT significance as well. These are a fine example of how to do Biblical theology in a limited space. Rikki E. Watts' article on "Miracles" (546-47) is another shining example of Biblical theology in action as he puts to use his work on the exodus theme in the NT.

Perhaps the most useful articles appear in the introductory section entitled "Welcome to the Bible" (3-70). Here the reader is treated to a number of articles discussing what exactly the Bible is, the nature of Scripture, the Biblical canon, the transmission of the Bible, hermeneutics, Biblical languages, English translations, the Bible as literature, archeology, agriculture, and other

useful information on the weights, measures, and money referenced in the Bible as well as the measuring of time. The importance of such background information cannot be stressed enough. Armed with such information the modern reader is equipped to understand things that ancient readers simply took for granted.

But the articles are really the supplemental material in this volume. The meat of it is the running commentary on the entire Bible by Connie Gundry Tappy. Tappy is an interesting choice here. To my knowledge she has not written a commentary on any individual book of the Bible. Her education consists of bachelor's in religious studies from Westmont College and a master's in theological studies from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, which suggests that she's equipped for the task, but one wonders why she'd start with so large an undertaking. Needless to say, from the portions I've read, Tappy has some valuable insights, but one cannot be surprised that as a matter of course she fails to go in depth on any individual book or topic. Such are the limitations of single volume commentaries.

Tappy reflects a clear Protestant interpretive bent, which again, is not surprising given that *The Eerdmans Companion* is touted as being "marked by a broad evangelical perspective" (see back cover). So there's nothing shocking when we arrive at her comments on the Last Supper in Mark 14:12-25 and read that the bread merely represents Jesus' body and the blood simply symbolizes his blood (554). Likewise, when discussing the Bread of Life discourse, Tappy tells us that Jesus is speaking metaphorically when he refers to eating his flesh and drinking his blood and that not only the Jewish leaders, but also Jesus' followers found his symbolism shocking (589).

The back matter of this volume contains a number of useful helps such as a "Glossary of Terms" (751-52); a "Who's Who in the Bible" list (753-760); a list of important "Nations and Peoples" (761-63); and my personal favorite, a "Gazetteer of Places" (764-71). All of this follows a section on "The Bible and the Church" that contains "The Guide for Christian Faith" (741-45) by Charles J. Scalise and "The Guide for Christian Living" (746-50) by Christine D. Pohl. These articles highlight the importance of application and they cement that this companion is more than a mere reference tool. Subject and Scripture/Ancient Source indices complete this hefty volume.

If there's one drawback to *The Eerdmans Companion* past the necessary brevity of the commentary, it's the use of black and white photos throughout, which aren't aesthetically offensive, but would have been so much better in color. But if this is my biggest complaint, and based upon my limited reading it is at the moment, then I think it goes without saying that this is

an extremely helpful volume. Perfect for the student who wants more than a vague familiarity with the Bible, but doesn't want to (or can't) invest the time or money (in either schooling or building an extensive reference library) in becoming a specialist.