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NLT Study Bible

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Initial Reaction

My initial reaction is that it is both heavy and beautiful. I don't know the exact weight of this Bible but it's quite thick at 2486 pages. I haven't gotten into the text yet, but from a cursory glance here's what I've seen so far:

- Beautiful thick glossy dust jacket, with a matching hardcover underneath.
- Parallel texts are noted at the beginning of sections (e.g., the parallel pericopae between Kings and Chronicles or Matthew, Mark, and Luke).
- The study notes are in a triple column format so as not to blend in with the main text which is in a two column format.
- There are "Person Profiles" interspersed throughout the text, e.g., Balaam (288); Ezra the Scribe (800).
- The words of Jesus are in red lettering. I know this bothers some people but I don't know why.
- There are color maps in the back and black and white maps scattered throughout.
- A Bible reading plan (although I'm not sure if this is meant to be a plan to read through the Bible in a year). (2209-13)
- A nice dictionary and index for Hebrew and Greek word studies. (2215-26)
- A delightfully long and detailed subject index. (2227-68)

- Another delightfully long dictionary/concordance. (2369-86)
- Extremely thin paper which allows for some bleed-through.
- And the most amusing feature, a single page (front and back) for taking notes at the back of the Bible.

Introduction Features (1-6)

The NLTSB has many features that make it worthy to be used as a main study Bible. In this section I want to give the NLTSB descriptions of some of the features that figure into the Book Introductions and then my assessment of these features.

BOOK INTRODUCTIONS
Each book introduction helps readers understand that book as its original readers first understood it in their world. The book introduction discusses the book's setting, gives a summary of its literary structure, discusses historical issues such as authorship and date of writing, and explains the meaning and message of the book for its readers.

OVERVIEW
The overview helps readers to find out quickly what this book of the Bible is about and why it is important. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the book and its contents and purpose.

SETTING
What is the story behind each book of the Bible? What was the need for each book in its setting? Every book of the Bible was written by flesh-and-blood people living in a particular time and place in history. They faced real challenges and difficulties. They wrote to other real flesh-and-blood people living at their own time in history. They wrote to address specific problems in their world, to help their readers understand God's mind regarding the issues and problems that they faced. The world of the Bible is very different from our world today, but people are the same everywhere. If we understand the setting in which each book of the Bible was written, we will be in a much better position to understand what problems it addressed, what actions it was promoting, and what message it communicates.

MAP
The book introductions include maps of the setting to show where the events in each book of the Bible took place and how the places mentioned in that book fit into the world. Each map includes a caption that describes the map and how it relates to the book's setting. Along with a caption, most of these maps include a short index of places mentioned in the book.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS
Genesis is the book of beginnings—of the universe and of humanity, of sin and its catastrophic effects, and of God's plan to restore blessing to the world through his chosen people. God began his plan when he called Abraham and made a covenant with him. Genesis traces God's promised blessing from generation to generation, to the time of bondage and the need for redemption from Egypt. It lays the foundation for God's subsequent revelation, and most other books of the Bible draw on its contents. Genesis is a source of instruction, comfort, and edification.

SETTING
When Genesis was written, the children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had recently been released from bondage and gained through the desert to enter the land of Israel. There, God had established the covenant relationship with them and had given them the law through Moses. Israel was now poised to enter the Promised Land and receive the inheritance that God had promised Abraham.

WHILE content is largely Genesis that is a very young pagan idea and custom that is different from the Bible. They were influenced by false concepts of God, the world, and human nature (e.g., that God is a man and was subject to human culture that is common and natural to the land. Perhaps they had forgotten the great promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps they had concluded that the promises would never be fulfilled. Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as a covenantal people, and they needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as a covenantal people, and they needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as a covenantal people, and they needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly.

MAP
The map shows the land of Israel and the surrounding regions. It includes a list of places mentioned in the book of Genesis, such as Ur, Haran, Sodom, and Gomorrah. The map is a small inset map showing the location of the events in the book of Genesis.

FEATURES GUIDE

SUMMARY
What is the structure and flow of ideas in each book of the Bible? The summary provides just that—a brief summary of the contents of the book. If the book is narrative, the summary tells its story. If the book is a letter, the summary explains its contents and the flow of its reasoning. If the book is an anthology, the summary describes the structure and contents of the collection. If we have in mind the flow of the book, we can better understand each individual passage.

OUTLINE
Each book includes an outline with up to three levels of headings. In the introduction, we provide the first level of the outline to give the reader an overview. The full outline is embedded in the NLT text as running headings. These book outlines follow the literary structure of the book—how the authors themselves thought about the organization and flow of ideas.

TIMELINE
A timeline can be found in the margin of nearly all book introductions. The timelines show when the events in each book of the Bible took place and what was going on at the time. We can refer to the timeline while reading the setting and summary for the book, and again while reading the book, to help clarify and reinforce how the events fit into the flow of history.

The NLTSB describes the Book Introductions saying:

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We now turn our attention to each feature.

OVERVIEW

The overview helps readers to find out quickly what this book of the Bible is about and why it is important. It gives a thumbnail sketch of the book and its contents and purpose.

Assessment: Of the 20 random overviews I surveyed I have to say that they are accurately described in the NLTSB summary. They're short paragraphs that give a succinct statement of what you're about to get into. I'd compare them to the book overviews that appear in many editions of the KJV, but they're unlike what the NIV *Archeological Study Bible* and the HCSB *Apologetics Study Bible* provide in their chapter introductions. These study bibles don't have the terse descriptions of books that the NLTSB does, although they are comparable with some other features.

SETTING

What is the story behind each book of the Bible? What was the need for each book in its setting? Every book of the Bible was written by flesh-and-blood people living in a particular time and place in history. They faced real challenges and difficulties. They wrote to other real flesh-and-blood people living at their own time in history. They wrote to address specific problems in their world, to help their readers understand God's mind regarding the issues and problems that they faced. The world of the Bible is very different from our world today, but people are the same everywhere. If we understand the setting in which each book of the Bible was written, we will be in a much better position to understand what problems it addressed, what actions it was prompting, and what message it communicates.

Assessment: The information given under the setting headings is great. This is exactly the type of background information that the reader should come to the text knowing. For example, the NLTSB prepares the reader to study the book of Ezra by supplying them with a short summary of the Babylonian destruction of the temple, their captivity of the Jews, the Persian takeover of Babylon, God's promises of restoration, Israel's disobedience in intermarriage with foreigners, etc. This is all extremely helpful in understanding what is going on in Ezra and why it's going on.

MAP

The book introductions include maps of the setting to show where the events in each book of the Bible took place and how the places mentioned in that book fit into the world. Each map includes a caption that describes the map and how it relates to the book's setting. Along with a caption, most of these maps include a short index of places mentioned in the book.

Assessment: The maps are nice although not my favorite feature. They vary in size depending on the geographical locale that is most prominent in the book in question. They all contain legends and scales, and are somewhat detailed. All of the maps in the chapter introductions are black and white which I don't really mind since it fits the overall look of the Bible. There are however some full color maps in the back of the Bible.

SUMMARY

What is the structure and flow of ideas in each book of the Bible? The summary provides just that—a brief summary of the contents of the book. If the book is narrative, the summary tells its story. If the book is a letter, the summary explains its contents and the flow of its reasoning. If the book is an anthology, the summary describes the structure and contents of the collection. If we have in mind the flow of the book, we can better understand each individual passage.

Assessment: The above description is on point. That's exactly what the summaries do. Think of a more detailed version of the overview that includes scripture references and dates. If geography features big in a certain book (e.g., Mark or Acts) then the summary takes note of it and offers an outline of the places along with the important events that took place there. The summary in the book of Acts is extremely short because its theme is extremely simple. They say: *"The apostles and other people of God were filled with the Spirit and empowered to carry out the Great Commission to all people. Acts highlights the ministries of Peter (chs 1-12) and Paul (chs 13-28)."* (1821)

TIMELINE

A timeline can be found in the margin of nearly all book introductions. The timelines show when the events in each book of the Bible took place and what was going on at the time. We can refer to the timeline while reading the setting and summary for the book, and again while reading the book, to help clarify and reinforce how the events fit into the flow of history.

Assessment: One of my favorite features, hands down! This was something that I really appreciated about the NIVASB and I'm glad to see it in the NLTSB. Because the canonical order of the books is not the chronological order of the books, it's easy at times to get mixed up with times and dates. These timelines take care of that. Thank God for timelines!

OUTLINE

Each book includes an outline with up to three levels of headings. In the introduction, we provide the first level of the outline to give the reader an

AUTHOR, DATE, AND OTHER HISTORICAL ISSUES

What do we know about who wrote this book and when it was written? What are the difficulties in determining the historical facts? Even though these issues might not be familiar ground, they are important. Understanding these things can help us appreciate the complexity of the Bible. Far from undermining confidence in Scripture, however, the issues discussed here give us a greater appreciation of how magnificent Scripture truly is. At the same time, we learn to be humble in how we interpret God's word.

Assessment: I like this feature because it seems pretty even-handed. For example, in the introduction to Genesis they note that both tradition and Scripture attribute authorship to Moses, while the prevailing critical view is that of the Documentary Hypothesis. For Job they acknowledge that we simply don't know who wrote it and while the setting is patriarchal it appears to have been written later. I was hoping to open up to Hebrews and see irrefutable proof that Paul really did write it, but alas, I was disappointed. They acknowledge that we don't know the author, but give brief mention to the reception history of Hebrews authorship, saying that certain Church Fathers in the East such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria believed Paul to have been the author, while others in the West didn't, noting that the majority of scholars today agree that Paul was not the author.

MEANING AND MESSAGE

What is the message of each book of the Bible? What is its significance now? Here's where the rubber meets the road. Everything in a book's introduction—setting, summary, author, date, genre—is intended to prepare us to understand what that book of the Bible has to say, its message and significance. Reading these paragraphs carefully and reflectively will give us the keys to understanding that book of the Bible.

Assessment: It's not that I don't like this feature, but I wish it were placed at the end of the books in an outro. My problem is that when reading the commentators' opinion on the meaning and message of the book before actually reading through the book, it tends to color your reading. Had this feature been included at the end of each book then the reader could see how much they agreed or disagreed with what the commentator had to say.

SECTION INTRODUCTIONS

For each major section of the Bible, the section introduction gives an overview of the books in that section and discusses issues that affect the interpretation of those books.

Assessment: This feature doesn't actually fall into the "book introductions" but rather comes before the major sections of the Bible (i.e., Pentateuch, Historical Books, Prophets, Gospels, Pauline Epistles, etc.) These introductions are good and pithy. For example, in the introduction to the Prophets they give a little information on the setting of the prophetic books, as well as describing the task and message of the prophets. They stress that: "*The messages of the prophets must be understood first of all on their own terms.*" (1102) But they don't leave it there; to that they add: "*It is also important to remember that the books of prophecy, like the rest of Scripture, have Christ as their central focus and theme (Luke 22:44-49)...We must read the prophets and hear their messages in light of all that God has done in Christ.*" (1102)

CHRONOLOGY ARTICLES

For each major period of biblical history, the chronology article provides a historical overview and discusses key issues regarding historical context. Each article includes a timeline of events during that period of history.

Assessment: This is another welcome feature. As I said in the last review, it's easy to get mixed up with the dates, and information like this makes it so much easier to keep things in perspective. But much like the section introductions, these articles don't technically fall within the "book introductions." In fact, I've counted only five such articles: 1) Abraham to Joshua (118-21), 2) Time of the Judges (414-5), 3) Israel's Monarchy (562-5), 4) Life of Jesus (1564-6), 5) Apostolic Age (1818-9).

EPIGRAPHS

Sometimes other authors say insightful things about a book of the Bible, or they make a poignant observation about something that a given book discusses. The editors have gathered some of the best quotations that they could find about each book and put them in the margins of the book introductions, to stimulate thinking and to stimulate meaningful interaction with each book of the Bible.

Assessment: I could have done without this feature. It's a nice thought, but there's nothing really detailed enough about these little statements in my mind to justify their inclusion.

FURTHER READING

Where can we learn more about each book of the Bible? The NLT Study Bible has plenty of resources for a lifetime journey of reading, studying, and discovering the riches of Scripture. Some readers, however, will want to go even further. At the end of each book introduction, the editors have recommended some of the resources that have helped them the most in studying and understanding that particular book of the Bible. They've chosen materials that are available in the

general market—no seminary required! Nearly all of these books are as close as a visit to a local or online Christian retailer.

Assessment: Without a doubt my favorite feature of the introductions. I'm a bibliography junky, so any recommended reading for further study is much appreciated. There's between four to six works recommended for each book and obviously they're mostly commentaries on the book in question, which is understandable, although I think that in subsequent editions they might like to consider including monographs on dominant themes of the books. From the lists I surveyed the authors and works recommended tend toward conservative scholarship (e.g., in the Gospels we see Blomberg, Carson, Keener, Evans, Bock, Marshall, Bruce, etc.), which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Again, for the most part I have found the introductory features to be useful aids to study. I don't know if my suggestion to move the "meaning and message" feature to the end of each book in subsequent editions would be something that Tyndale House might consider, but I hope they would.

General Layout

In this section I'm going to offer a couple of comments on the general layout of the NLSTB. As I've been using the NLTSB over the last few days I've really come to appreciate the layout. If I had to choose a word or two to describe it then I'd say it's simple and straightforward. It's not flashy like the *NIV Archeological Study Bible*, which I love, but can sometimes get lost in all the colorful illustrations and charts. In my mind, the simple layout of the NLTSB is more conducive to actually working through the text.

Main Text Format

I know that many bloggers prefer a single column format for the main text, and I won't lie, those are nice (in fact the only Bible I ever read from cover to cover was a single column), but I'm so used to reading Bibles with double columns that I'm not bothered by it. I don't find it any harder to read than I would a single column. I'm not sure of the point size of the main text, I'd like to say it's about a 10, but I have no idea.

Cross-Reference Format

While I very much like the cross-reference *system*, which the introduction describes as "*relat(ing) the meaning of a whole verse or passage, so the cross-references are always applicable*" (A13) I

would prefer a center-column reference to inner-margin references, but that's a minor complaint.

Notes Format

The notes are in a three column format and look to be a point or two smaller than the main text (like I said, I don't know anything about point size). My eyesight has been fading over the years but the notes are still readable if I place the Bible on my lap and read while I'm sitting upright. Another benefit of the three-column notes with the two-column main text is that there's no worry of the text all blending together, as opposed to the *HCSB Apologetics Study Bible* which has two column for both the main text and notes (although on most pages there is another set of lettered notes in a single column). And the two are separated by a simple dotted line which keeps the look clean.

Person Profiles, Theme Notes, Illustrations, & Timelines

Wherever there's a person profile, theme note, illustration, or timeline, it is separated from the main text and study notes by dotted lines, and appears in a single-column format. You'd think that this might be obtrusive, but it's not, it actually works very well.

Words of Christ in Red

As I said, I have fairly poor eyesight but I haven't had a problem with the words of Christ being in red. I can understand though how people who are color blind or have worse eyesight than I do wouldn't appreciate this feature too much. I've also heard someone take issue with this feature recently calling it a serious theological error, but I think they do protest too much. Tyndale House might want to consider going all black lettering in subsequent editions of the NLT SB.

Hebrew & Greek Word Studies, Subject Index, Dictionary/Concordance

All of these features in the back of the book are in a simple three-column format like the study notes. I believe the text is the same size as the study notes as well.

All in all I like the format of the NLT SB. It's clean and simple. Nothing distracting within the pages (not even the maps) and each section is delineated to as not to run together. I think the two improvements that could be made are those mentioned above, i.e., switch to a center-column reference, and all black lettering.

Final Thoughts

After having used the NLT SB for the last week-and-a-half I can honestly say that this is the best study Bible I own. Granted, certain of the others were geared toward specific audiences and serves particular functions, but that's part of what I enjoy so much about this study Bible—it's very well rounded! In this post I'll just give my final thoughts on this superb product with regard to the NLT as a translation, and the quality of the study notes. See my other posts for my thoughts of various other features.

Translation

God knows that I'm no linguist; my Greek is dismal at best and my Hebrew is worse than that, but as a native English speaker/reader I can honestly say that there's no English translation of the Bible that I'd rather *read* than the NLT. Now I stand firm in my conviction that the KJV *sounds* the best when read *aloud*—I doubt that anyone can deny the wonderful prose and magisterial language of the KJV—but for devotional reading the NLT has now become my main translation, and I must confess that it sounds great when read aloud as well.

Over the last few weeks, before I received the NLT SB even, I have been engaged in reading five psalms and one proverb per day from the NLT. As I've mentioned before, this was a devotional regiment that I placed myself on quite some time ago and it has yielded wonderful results in my spiritual life. But it is this daily reading that has me convinced that the NLT is a great translation. Take a psalm (any psalm) and compare it to the alternatives. Let's take for example Psalm 36:1:

Sinners don't respect God; sin is all they think about. (CEV)

The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes. (KJV)

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes. (ESV)

An evil man is rebellious to the core. (NET)

The CEV and NET take a more dynamic route in their translation but it comes off as less of an actual translation than the ESV or KJV which take the more formal route. After pulling out my BDB Hebrew-English lexicon and consulting a couple of commentaries, I have concluded that the NLT strikes the right balance and reads better than them all:

Sin whispers to the wicked, deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all. (NLT)

So when the publishers say: “*The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts.*” (A31), I’m inclined to agree. But this spills over into little things such as the modernizing of things like currency, weights, and measures. Instead of reading about cubits we read about feet (e.g., 1Sam. 17:4); instead of reading about shekels we read about large silver coins (Mat. 17:27); instead of a hin it’s a gallon (e.g., Ezek. 46:7); rather than a hundred denarii it’s a few thousand dollars (e.g., Mat. 18:28); so on and so forth. These are the kinds of things that just make this translation a joy to read. I was also pleased to learn from my good friend Esteban Vázquez that all of the NLT translators had written at least a commentary on the books that they translated before this translation was produced. That speaks volumes!

Notes

If I had to describe the study notes in two words they’d be “concise” & “informative.” What I like so much about the notes is that they’re not theologically driven, although of course they mention matters of theology (it’s the Bible after all!). But what I mean is that these notes weren’t produced to bolster a certain theological system. I don’t come away angry because Calvinism is being read into a passage that has nothing to do with what Calvinists believe. There’s no major emphasis on Charismatic beliefs and practices because the notes don’t seek to legitimate the Charismatic experience. These notes for the most part are concerned with informing the reader how a given passage would have most likely been understood in its original context and how it fits in with a Christological reading of the text. So for example, the note on Isaiah 7:14 reads:

7:14 virgin (Hebrew *‘almah*): Or *young woman*. • This prophecy received its ultimate fulfillment in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt 1:18-24). Yet it is likely that it also had a partial fulfillment in Isaiah’s day, either with the birth of godly king Hezekiah, Ahaz’s son, or with the birth of one of Isaiah’s children. The similar sequence of verbs in 7:14 and 8:3 (**conceive . . . give birth . . . call**) and the link between Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz in 8:5-10 suggest that Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz were the same person; see note on 8:5-10. • The name **Immanuel** (**which means ‘God is with us’**) symbolized God’s presence and protection. God was with Judah during the attack by the alliance of Syria and Israel (734 BC) in the Assyrian crisis (701 BC), and throughout their prolonged existence until their fall in 586 BC. The kingdom of Israel fell during the time of Isaiah (722 BC). The assurance “I am with you” remained significant even in the

exilic and postexilic periods (41:10; 43:2, 5). The greatest assurance ultimately came in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God (Matt 1:23; see also Rev 12:5). (1119-20)

I think the translation would have been more consistent with the note had it said “young woman” but this is a translation that existed prior to the study notes so I can’t be too critical on those terms.

All in all this is a great tool, and that’s it. If you’re interested in a study Bible then this is the one to get. If you’re interested in a contemporary translation of the Bible in English then look no further than the NLT. I can’t speak highly enough of this Bible, but I do think that they could do a couple of things to improve it (well, at least the hardcover version of it). I’d suggest adding a ribbon marker in subsequent editions. One thing that annoyed me to no end was having to use a paper book mark. I’d also like to see more than one page for note taking in the back. It’s almost embarrassing to see that lone page back there at the end of a Bible that is so packed with information that it practically begs the reader to take notes. And as I said in an earlier review, I’d prefer a center column reference set-up. Other than these suggestions I think that the NLTSB is about as good as a study Bible can get. I recommend it to one and all.