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BOOK REVIEW

Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds. *Numbers–Ruth*. EBC 2. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 1360 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310234944.

With the publication of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Revised Edition (EBC)*, covering the books of Numbers to Ruth, the revision of the much-valued original commentary series, first published in 1976 under Frank Gaebelin’s direction, comes to completion. Those familiar with the original EBC will notice a close kinship in format between the first and second generations of this commentary, for “this revision continues the EBC’s exalted purpose and stands on the shoulders of the expositors of the first edition, but seeks to maintain the usefulness of the commentary by interacting with new discoveries and academic discussions” (p. 7). Consequently, both editions include an Introduction to each biblical book, a section highlighting the NIV translation of each pericope, an expository Commentary on the pericope, transliteration of words from the original languages, a Notes section that covers the meaning and significance of key words or issues in a passage, a brief Bibliography, and an Outline of the book. However, the revised EBC sports an updated layout that makes interaction much easier, as well as features such as an Overview section that introduces key issues, themes, and ideas in the passages under examination, as well as the occasional Reflection section that expands upon key ideas or interpretive challenges in that passage. The second generation of the EBC also evidences both continuity and a fresh approach through the choice of commentators. For example, in the volume here under review, Ronald Allen revises his original work on Numbers, but Michael Grisanti (Deuteronomy), H el ene Dallaire (Joshua), Mark Boda (Judges), and George Schwab (Ruth) each

take up the mantle from first edition commentators to offer fresh perspectives.

Ronald Allen's examination of the Book of Numbers begins with an Introduction updating the same topics as the first edition. Allen's stance on the authorship of the book of Numbers remains largely the same as his earlier position. He holds to a nuanced approach to authorship, positing Mosaic authorship for most of the material in Numbers, but also allowing for the possibility of later, inspired additions. Thus, Allen notes the challenges posed by Num 12:3 ("Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth"—would the most humble man on the face of the earth praise his own humility?), but then, following C. Rogers, (*JETS* 29 [1986] 257–63) Allen proposes a possible alternative translation that might ameliorate these challenges: that Moses was the most *miserable* man on the face of the earth. Elsewhere, however, he admits that Num 12:3, along with passages like Num 15:32–36 and Numbers 22–25, may be (inspired) post-Mosaic additions, preferring not to over- or understate the case.

Allen also spends considerable time addressing the question of the large numbers of the exodus group in Numbers, outlining various proposals before putting forward his own solution. Allen essentially posits that the numbers are rhetorical, exaggerated by a factor of ten. For support, he points to Num 3:43, which notes the results of the census of firstborn males one month and older as 22,273, the only non-rounded number in this section of the book. However, Allen admits that this number is likely a combination of the census of 22,000 Levites (a rounded number) and the specific number of 273 additional individuals in need of redemption beyond the Levites serving in place of Israel's firstborn (3:46), illustrating the challenges of Allen's solution. Allen's proposal that numbers have been enlarged by a factor of ten remains an educated hunch with little more direct support than a demonstrated possibility.

Michael Grisanti's Introduction to the book of Deuteronomy is somewhat brief (nine pages, excluding a six page outline of the book) but covers many typical introductory topics in a succinct and helpful manner. The inclusion of a theological

introduction for Deuteronomy is significant, for it lays out key features of the book useful to preachers and teachers (the primary audience for the EBC), placing the book within the flow of redemptive history. This feature is typical for each of the commentators in this volume, though the theological features of the book of Ruth are interwoven with other topics in Schwab's Introduction. Grisanti helpfully observes that, while the structure of Deuteronomy has often been compared with ancient Near Eastern (ANE) treaty or covenant forms for the purposes of dating the book's composition, the book is actually a sermon patterned on treaty forms, and so we should not expect a slavish adherence to such forms. Grisanti writes briefly about the form of the Ten Commandments and their relationship to the rest of the laws in Deuteronomy; however, a helpful addition could be a brief discussion summarizing the nature of Deuteronomic law and its applicability to the modern world, particularly in light of the key role that the covenant stipulations play in Deuteronomy and the EBC's focus on helping pastors and teachers explicate the significance of biblical texts.

The book of Joshua presents several thorny challenges for modern biblical interpreters, a situation that is reflected, in part, in the expanded length of the Introduction to Joshua in the revised EBC (thirty-five pages versus eleven pages in the original EBC). Thus, Dallaire's work takes into account the spate of material published on biblical warfare since the events of 9/11 in relation to the language of Israel's annihilation of the Canaanites in the book of Joshua. She helpfully points to the dangers of ignoring or spiritualizing the battles of Joshua, noting that "the need to reconcile the God of love and the difficult texts of the Old Testament is now urgent. Failure to do so will continue to propagate an erroneous view of God's love, mercy, grace, and true *šālôm* ('wholeness, completeness')" (p. 844).

Dallaire's comments include several helpful features, such as charts, which visually synthesize large amounts of material, and frequent references to ANE parallels, which illuminate events or descriptions within their ancient context; unfortunately, however, maps outlining tribal boundaries or illustrating topographical features described in the text are not included in the revised

EBC. Dallaire also provides brief summaries of the range of interpretive options when explaining a difficult passage or topic, though on occasion, the reader is left to ponder the relative merits of each viewpoint or which perspective reflects Dallaire's own preference, as when discussing the various understandings of the description of the sun and moon standing still in Joshua 10:12–14. An evaluation of interpretive options may be particularly useful for lay people using the EBC. There are also a few occasions when the EBC's concern for concise overview and commentary may leave the expositor wanting more information. For example, Dallaire notes biblical and ANE parallels to Joshua's encounter with the commander of the army of the Lord before the battle of Jericho in Josh 5:13–15. However, the purpose of the encounter and its literary role within the book of Joshua remain unexplored.

Mark Boda's commentary makes several very helpful observations about the book of Judges that are often overlooked. While the book of Joshua's focus rests upon the united tribes of Israel, Boda notes how Judges focuses much more on local families and clans. "It is this emphasis upon the family that will drive most of the plots and provide insight into success and failure" (p. 1053). This helps to explain the focus upon kinship relationships throughout the book (e.g., 1:13–14; 3:9; 4:17; 6:15; 8:19, 30–31; 9:1–3; 10:4; 11:1, 34–40; 13:2; 17:1–5; 19:1–2; 21:1, 19–23). In the book of Judges, broken family relationships frequently impact larger kinship units, culminating in the almost complete breakdown of kinship relationships at all levels of Israelite society in Judges 19–21.

With many other commentators, Boda traces two key themes in Judges that thread their way through Israel's downward spiral of increasing faithlessness to Yahweh: kingship and assimilation of Canaanite religious and social practices. Boda rightly notes that these are not competing but complementary themes, although the theme of assimilation is frequently inferred rather than explicitly stated in Judges. Boda traces Israel's progressive deterioration throughout the central portion of the book (Judg 3:7—16:31), noting how each deliverer narrative furthers this theme. Boda suggests that the six brief stories of the "minor

judges” form a counterpoint to the six extended “major judge” narratives in the book, providing ideal models of the judges, although they are ultimately overshadowed by the longer, more negative deliverer narratives. However, there are indications that put into question Boda’s proposal that the minor judges serve as ideal judges. Boda himself notes that the first of the six minor judges, Shamgar, should be evaluated negatively. Additionally, I would note that the following references to the five other minor judges (10:1–5; 12:8–15) appear in the section of the book emphasizing the increasing assimilation of Canaanite ways. The marriage of Ibzan’s sixty children to families “outside” his clan (12:9) counters Israel’s preference for endogamy (marriage inside one’s clan; cf. Judg 14:3), and Abdon’s seventy children (12:14) parallel Gideon’s seventy children (8:30) that are a mark of Gideon’s kingly pretensions despite his ostensive rejection of kingly rule (8:22–23) (see Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*. NAC, 1999, p. 303). Thus, the proposal that the minor judges serve as positive role models requires further explanation in light of these possible negative features.

George Schwab’s Introduction to the book of Ruth recognizes the various historical settings in which the narrative of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz found particular purchase, tracing the book’s development from the monarchic period through to the post-exilic era. He also notes the challenges of reading the book in correlation with the biblical redeemer (Lev 25:25–28) and levirate laws (Deut 25:5–10; Num 27:8–11). Schwab also provides a very informative chart summarizing the assorted ways in which expositors have outlined the structure of the book before providing his own, chiastic outline. Schwab’s effort to draw theological connections between the book of Ruth and the New Testament are also helpful (e.g., pp. 1313, 1331, 1334, 1336, and 1348); however, when discussing the connection between redemption and restoring one’s “name,” he notes the importance of, and elements related to, one’s name, but does not precisely define what an Old Testament understanding of one’s name entailed.

The Revised Edition of the EBC admirably fulfills its goal of updating the original commentary series, providing a concise and

erudite exposition of the Scriptures that will serve as a very valuable addition to the library of every Bible student and pastor. The commentaries in the Revised EBC volume on Numbers–Ruth are written by evangelical expositors who provide an excellent resource that is sensitive to both the subtle nuances of Hebrew syntax and the broad theological implications in a given text. I gladly recommend this volume of the revised EBC.

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