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BOOK REVIEW

Gary S. Shogren. *1–2 Thessalonians*. ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. xxi + 520 pp. Hbk. ISBN 0310243963.

The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series (ZECNT) focuses on an audience of pastors and lay teachers who may have a basic understanding of Greek. While the series does not seek to diminish any exegetical profit from the text, it seeks to identify the implicational and practical value for the interpreter, particularly within the North American setting. To achieve this goal, each commentary in the series has seven components for each section of the biblical text: 1) literary context, 2) main idea, 3) translation and graphical layout, 4) structure, or flow of thought, 5) a suggested exegetical outline, 6) an explanation of the text, and 7) theology in application. Gary Shogren, uniquely positioned as a North American who has lived and ministered in Costa Rica since 1998, contributes this commentary on 1–2 Thessalonians in the series. He adheres to the series' convention appropriately.

Generally speaking, the commentary is written in a style that is accessible to both the layperson and academician, without diminishing the scholastic value of the commentary. Shogren writes in an engaging manner, in a way that contemporizes first-century activities in modern language, and this accomplishes one of the major goals of the commentary series. He also provides some useful background material to help understand the context of the two letters, including the Greco-Roman culture in the city of Thessalonica. There is, finally, an extended discussion of a major textual variant in 1 Thess 2:7 regarding the difference between ἤπιοι and νήπιοι. Shogren's discussion is extensive, and he utilizes the procedures used by the majority of scholars in New Testament textual criticism. Readers may or may not agree

with his conclusion in the matter, but his layout of the evidences, both external and internal, is helpful enough for a reader to make their own judgment when going through that passage.

In view of the positive aspects of the commentary, I want to identify three areas of critique. First is regarding the prominence of analysis of the English over the Greek text. There are some instances in which exegesis is based upon English rather than Greek; and even though the commentary is for those with a basic understanding of Greek, any New Testament commentary should have as its basis the original language. One common example is the sub-section on structure and flow of thought in each section of the text. This sub-section includes a chart that is reminiscent of the sentence diagramming that occurs in many Greek exegesis classes. However, it seems to me that this type of exercise seems to be based upon the English sentence structure rather than the Greek. One might initially see no problem with this, since the commentary series does not purport to be an academic commentary on the Greek text, but I think that it is necessary, even in an applicational commentary, to do the exegesis or exposition based on the original language. Meanings of sentences, clauses, and even phrases and paragraphs, may be left partly undiscovered through translation, so it seems best that exegesis is done in the original language. There is some merit to outlining the structure and flow of thought to a particular passage—and even locating it within the broader discourse—but perhaps it may be more profitable to do this with the Greek text.

Second is the assumption that Paul's letters were reflective of Greek rhetoric, which is a highly debated topic. For example, regarding the literary context of 1 Thess 1:1–10, Shogren simply identifies the thanksgiving section as an *exordium*, which in ancient rhetoric is an introductory-type section whereby the speaker seeks to build trust and compliance between the speaker and audience. The problem that needs to be addressed, however, is whether the classification of Paul's letters as *rhetoric* per se is justified and on what grounds. To be fair, Shogren does not fully utilize rhetorical categories to analyze 1 and 2 Thessalonians (he seems to do so only in this section), so one wonders what the purpose of using this terminology would be, if it is a term used in

categories for ancient rhetoric. It seems best not to allude to such a category, since, I believe, Paul's letters were not strictly rhetorical, oral performances that required years of training.

A final critique relates again to the Greek exegesis in the commentary. I realize the commentary makes no claim to be a technical commentary on the Greek text, but I still think that all commentaries, regardless of their target audience and goal, should have conclusions based on the Greek text. With that in view, it appears that the Greek analysis is relegated to issues of simple translation instead of meaning. For instance, regarding 1 Thess 2:16d, Shogren writes: "The verb 'came' or 'has come' is aorist. A textual variant in B D and the Majority Text has the perfect form; nevertheless, the meanings of the tenses would overlap in this sort of context, and the translation 'has come' is suitable either way" (115). Although the next few paragraphs extend the discussion to identifying the possible interpretations of ἐφθασεν, including what the tense possibly conveys, it is simply a list of what previous commentators have stated, and an explanation of the above-quoted statement is not given. Many questions remain, however: is the original reading the aorist tense-form or perfect tense-form, and what are the various evidences for them? Why is the meaning the same, or overlapping, if they are two different tense-forms? For a commentary targeted at a beginning-level Greek student, the statement leaves more questions than answers. Shogren simply concludes after a brief survey of possibilities that the fourth option is probably correct based on parallel usages in Matt 12:28, Luke 11:20, and Rom 1:18, with no further justification. Those who do not want to simply adhere to commentators' conclusions may find his reasons wanting.

Having identified some areas of critique, I can still point out some helpful resources the commentary provides, namely its goal of identifying practical applications that result from an exposition of the text. For those who need help bridging the gap between ancient and modern worlds and applying the meaning of the ancient text to the contemporary climate, this commentary, as well as the series, is a useful tool. Shogren in particular, having the benefit of living in two different modern cultures,

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successfully takes up the challenge of applying biblical truths to modern life.

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