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BOOK REVIEW

James McKeown. *Ruth*. THOTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 152 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-8028-6385-0. US\$22.00.

The Two Horizons Commentary series aims to bridge the gap between biblical studies and systematic theology. As such, this commentary is divided into two sections of equal length: (1) an introduction and paragraph-by-paragraph exegesis of the biblical text, and (2) theological reflections. This is followed by a bibliography, an index of authors, and an index of Scripture and other ancient writings, but there is no subject index. Different commentators in this series conduct their theological reflections according to their interests and expertise. In this volume, McKeown's approach is primarily a "canonical reading," interpreting texts in relation to other texts in Scripture. Since McKeown started this commentary after completing the Genesis volume in this series, many of the links he finds are with Genesis. Reading through the exegesis section, it seems that there is a reference to Genesis on every second or third page, although most of these are insightful, and on the whole do not feel forced.

In the first section, McKeown points out that there are many ambiguities in the events of the book of Ruth. Additionally, the motivations of the characters are often unclear. In what follows, I will mention a couple of McKeown's interpretations of these ambiguities. In Ruth 1, in light of the narrator's evaluation of Er's actions (Gen 37:7), McKeown suggests that the deaths of Elimelech and his sons are not due to the judgment of God. Regarding Ruth's "return" to Bethlehem, McKeown suggests that it might hint at a spiritual return, that is, repentance. In Ruth 2, McKeown interprets verse 7 as Ruth working in Boaz's field for the whole day, but resting in the workers' shelter when Boaz arrives. "Gleaning among the sheaves" may be an attempt of the

foreman to gain special privileges for Ruth. McKeown's preferred referent for the one "whose kindness has not forsaken the living and the dead" is YHWH, not Boaz. In Ruth 3, the actions of Ruth and Boaz are considered to be above reproach. McKeown understands Ruth's request as not only requesting marriage but also asking for the redemption of Naomi's land. In Ruth 4, McKeown opts for the *Ketib* reading rather than the *Qere* for verse 5: "On the day you buy the land ... I acquire [Ruth]." The redeemer mentioned in 4:14 is identified as Boaz, not Obed (cf. 4:15). One might not agree with all of McKeown's interpretations of these ambiguities, but his discussion of different understandings shows that at least he has considered other possible readings.

The second section of the commentary contains two parts: "theological horizons" and "theological issues, themes, and approaches." The first part mainly discusses the book of Ruth's inner-biblical links to Genesis, Deuteronomy, Judges, and Samuel. Many insights are gained from placing Ruth in dialogue with these books, but the discussion focuses on the Christian canon. In McKeown's discussion of the books immediately surrounding Ruth, the discussion of Ruth and Judges is helpful, but the links he posits between Ruth and Samuel seem tenuous at times, especially the allusions to Ruth in the account of Abigail and David (1 Sam 25). Further theological insights could have been gleaned from placing Ruth next to Proverbs and Psalms, the juxtaposition that is found in some Hebrew canonical orders. This part of the commentary also includes a discussion of the marriage of Ruth and Boaz. McKeown argues that the marriage is an act of redemption rather than a levirate marriage. Considering the seven possible allusions to the levirate custom in Ruth (1:11–13; 2:20; 3:9–13; 4:7–8, 9–10, 11–12, 16–17) might have swayed his thinking. This part of the commentary concludes with a discussion of the characters in Ruth, although Obed is a surprising omission.

The second part of the theological reflections discusses themes and issues in Ruth. The topics covered include creation, providence, guidance, the hiddenness of God, land, Moab, redemption, and universalism. McKeown helpfully sets these

themes within the broader context of the Old Testament, and to a lesser extent, the New Testament. This is understandable given the focus of the commentary, but further explanation of the implications of Jesus and the New Testament for specific themes would have been beneficial for Christian readers. For example, in the discussion on land, an indication of how land and inheritance are transformed by Christ would have rounded out the discussion (e.g., Matt 5:5; Col 1:10–14; Heb 4:1–11; 1 Pet 1:3–5). The theological reflections conclude with a consideration of feminist approaches to *Ruth*, and the book's contribution to understanding God's mission.

Overall, this is a well-balanced commentary. It walks the line between interpretation and theology without straying too far to one side or the other. The exegesis does not get bogged down in fine details and scholarly discussions. The theological reflections section draws upon a broad range of positions without getting sidetracked, and the discussion always returns to the biblical text. This balance and the intimate interaction with Genesis are the distinguishing features of this commentary. This volume hits its target, and will be appreciated by students, pastors, and other Christian leaders who are interested in the theological interpretation of Scripture.

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