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BOOK REVIEW

D. A. Carson, ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. xxxi + 2912 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 978-0310438335. \$49.99.

The *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* presents an entirely new study Bible to replace the previous *NIV Study Bible*. This new study Bible uses the most recent edition of the NIV (2011) and takes an entirely new focus on biblical theology (BT). What is meant by BT is “the ways in which many important themes work their way through Scripture and come to a focus in Jesus Christ” (v). D. A. Carson, the general editor, provides a more complete definition of BT as follows, “BT studies the theology of individual books (e.g., Isaiah, the Gospel of John), of select collections within the Bible (e.g., the Pentateuch, wisdom literature, the Gospels, Paul’s letters, John’s writings), and then traces out themes as they develop across time within the canon (e.g., the way in which the theme of the temple develops, in several directions, to fill out a ‘whole Bible’ theology of the temple)” (2633). Carson also provides four priorities for BT. First, the Bible is to be read progressively as a historically developing collection of documents. Second, readers ought to presuppose the Bible is coherent. Third, readers must work inductively from the text—from individual books and from themes that run through the Bible as a whole. Fourth, the reader should make theological connections within the entire Bible that the Bible itself authorizes.

This study Bible goes about presenting its version of biblical theology in at least three ways. First, many of the notes at the bottom of the pages discuss connections within biblical theology, e.g., the note on Jer 31:33 explaining how the promised New

Covenant is fulfilled in Christ. The second way biblical theology is unpacked is in the introductory articles to the books of the Bible themselves, usually under the “Theology” section. The third, and primary, way biblical theology comes forth is in the series of short introductory articles in the back of the study Bible that cover specific topics within biblical theology (an example being “The Glory of God,” by James M. Hamilton Jr.).

On a positive note, this study Bible presents itself with everything someone would expect from a contemporary study Bible. The contributors are current scholars. The pages are well-edited. The charts, graphs, and everything else in the Bible are well-presented. Plus, the study Bible comes with a digital code to use within certain Bible software apps. When compared to other study Bibles—and there is no shortage of them—this study Bible stands well with its competition.

On a critical note, this study Bible presents a methodologically underdeveloped and internally inconsistent view of BT. The view of biblical theology presented in this study Bible is that of Carson. Andrew David Naselli, previously a doctoral student under Carson, has explained Carson’s position more fully elsewhere (Andrew David Naselli, “D. A. Carson’s Theological Method.” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29 [2011] 245–74). Although there is an exposition of one definition of BT, there is no consideration of methodology. Even Naselli does not provide anything in the way of methodological development in his other publications. In his *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2017), there is a chapter on BT, but no explanation of methodology. This is contrast to every other chapter, in which he provides methodology in the form of steps. As a reader of this study Bible and this approach, I am left with more methodological questions than answers, such that I found myself repeatedly asking, “how?” after reading explanations in the study Bible. To be fair, I am not trying to ask more of the register of a study Bible than what ought to be expected. Nevertheless, the lack of methodological development comes as a disappointment because there has been a long-standing recognition of the need for clarity of criteria and procedures in this field (e.g., James

Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961). The root problem of this methodological silence seems to be a lack of a reflection regarding interpretive theory (hermeneutics) and a lack of consideration of how a language means and how to understand both the how and what of meaning from a more current approach to language study from modern linguistics. More explanation in subsequent editions would certainly be welcomed.

This version of BT is also internally inconsistent. When reviewing the list of scholars of who contributed to this volume, it is noticeable that the list includes people who have different perspectives on BT. For example, James M. Hamilton Jr., one of the contributors, defines BT as the “interpretive perspective of the biblical authors” (James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014). This definition is inconsistent with Carson’s definition because Hamilton, in this same publication released only one year before this study Bible, said that he believed that BT encompasses more than Carson’s definition. This difference makes the study Bible look internally inconsistent because the study Bible presents only one definitional perspective without representing the diversity that is present within the contributors of the study Bible itself.

This study Bible is best suited for students, pastors, and scholars who want something that presents them with a certain strand of conservative evangelical thinking on BT, and for those who want a translation that is gender-neutral. But if someone wants a study Bible that presents a more developed and widely represented understanding of and approach to BT, they will likely need to look elsewhere.

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