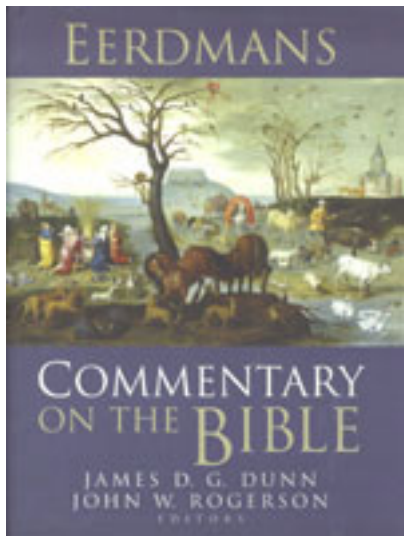


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Dunn, James D. G., and John Rogerson, eds.

Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible

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This one-volume commentary to all biblical books (including the so-called Apocrypha and *I Enoch*) is intended for a broad public and aims at presenting the results of modern scholarship in a nontechnical and accessible language. It is indeed a fine idea to offer commentaries to all biblical books in one volume, and the editors are to be congratulated for this difficult work. Nevertheless, such commentaries on the Bible exist already, some of them being of very good quality, such as the Catholic *New Jerome Bible Commentary* (1990) or the *Harper Collins Bible Commentary* (2000), a compendium by SBL members. The Eerdmans commentary differs from those first of all by its selection of scholars, several of whom hold very different positions. This reflects in one sense the variety of scholarship, but it also makes it very difficult for a lay reader to find any coherence when reading the commentaries of the different books. According to the editors, the commentary “draws on and encapsulates the best of modern and international scholarship” (ix); in this reviewer’s view, this is unfortunately not always the case.

The volume opens with general introductions: J. W. Rogerson offers a short but clear history of Israel’s religion from monarchical times down to the Hellenistic times. J. A. Goldingay summarizes the main features of premodern, modern, and postmodern approaches to the Old Testament, arguing in particular that “studying scripture in a modern way is extremely important because we need to distance ourselves from Scripture” (19). D. A. Appler and J. Bidmead offer a (very) short introduction to Syro-

Palestinian and biblical Archeology. This very important topic would have deserved more space and more details (e.g., the bibliography mentions neither E. Stern nor I. Finkelstein). The introductory article to the Pentateuch is, in my view, disappointing. New paradigms of pentateuchal research are not clearly presented; at the beginning of the third millennium, one should no longer present the Documentary Hypothesis in its Wellhausenian form as “the soundest insights of scholars who have worked and are now working in the field” (27). The chapter on Genesis, written by G. J. Wenham, is also quite puzzling. Dealing with the question of the author, Wenham apparently wants to please everybody: “If Moses was as significant as biblical tradition paints him, we may credit him with the first draft of the book. On the other hand, we may suppose that it was composed by some unknown in the period of David and Solomon.... Other may prefer to posit a postexilic author” (36). Surprisingly, when commenting on the different sections of the book, Wenham indicates for each its attribution to one or more of the supposed sources of the Pentateuch. This is quite confusing, since he previously dismissed this theory in his introduction as being unhelpful. The commentary on Exodus by W. D. Johnstone is much more coherent. Johnstone presents the book as an exilic and postexilic combination of two major editions (72), a model that is adopted by a large part of contemporary European scholarship. W. J. Houston presents Leviticus as a postexilic book that contains the works of the Priestly school and the writers of the so-called “Holiness school” (103). The commentary of Numbers by P. J. Budd is based on his idea that the earliest layer is the work of a Yahwist working under Hezekiah and that the book was completed “by about 500 B.C.” (128). Present research (Achenbach, Dozeman, Otto) points to a much later time for the redaction of most parts of the books. Nevertheless, Budd’s commentary is quite readable. J. W. Rogerson offers a brief but well-informed commentary on Deuteronomy. He adheres to the traditional hypothesis of the book’s northern origin; Deuteronomy would then have been reworked under Josiah as a vassal treaty between Yahweh and Judah. During the exile, the book was edited to serve as an introduction to the books of Joshua to Kings. The lines on page 154 are the only introduction to the so-called Deuteronomistic History. Given the importance of this theory, one wonders why there is no chapter dealing with it. The book of Joshua is presented by K. L. Younger Jr., an eminent specialist of Near Eastern conquest accounts. Unfortunately, Younger remains very discrete on the historical setting of the book and its theological options. P. D. Guest, who is in charge of Judges, admits that it is difficult to reconstruct a historical period of the “judges.” Consequently, he focuses on the “story world of the text” (190), considering the book as “portraying Israel hopelessly losing its way” (206). Against the traditional idea that the book was part of the exilic Deuteronomistic History, Guest considers the possibility that the book was written in order to warn its readers not to mingle with the “people of the land.”

Since the Eerdmans commentary follows the traditional Christian arrangement of the Bible, Ruth is dealt with after Judges (G. West). One of the best commentaries is found on the pages written by G. Auld on Samuel. Auld presents his theory about a common source for Samuel-Kings and Chronicles and considers the books of Samuel as a “greatly enlarged introduction to the stories of the houses of David and Yahweh” (213), composed not earlier than the sixth century B.C.E. R. Tomes’s well-written commentary on Kings adopts a more traditional historical-critical view, considering the books as the conclusion of an exilic Deuteronomistic History (246–47). Both Tomes and R. J. Coggins on Chronicles adhere to the usual view that Kings is the main source for Chronicles; Coggins defines Chronicles as “a rereading ... of the books of Samuel and Kings, regarded as primary sources of Chronicles” (283), probably written during the fourth century B.C.E. Ezra and Nehemiah are commented on by L. G. Grabbe, who suggests for both books “a composition some time during the Ptolemaic period” (314). This is probably a more convincing option than the traditional setting in the Persian period. The book of Esther was written, according to S. W. Crawford, during the late fourth or early third centuries B.C.E. (329; there should have been a reference to the commentary of Esther Greek by J. Jarick). K. J. Dell’s commentary on Job helpfully underlines the literary and theological complexity of this book, in her opinion a postexilic work dealing with theodicy, suffering and reward, the limits of human understanding, and the like (336-8). The Psalms are presented by W. S. Prinsloo, who underlines the “growing interest in understanding the Psalter as a literary whole” (364). In his commentary, however, this interest is hardly evident. Thus, he does not comment on the psalms in their canonical order but prefers to gather all the psalms he considers to be individual laments (the page number of the title on 366 should read “366–73” instead of “356–63”). In the bibliography, Prinsloo indicates many titles in Dutch, which may not be very helpful for a larger English-speaking audience. The well-balanced and cautious commentary on Proverbs is due to R. E. Clements. J. Jarick offers an interesting presentation of Ecclesiastes (with a commentary organized in three sections: “thesis,” “antithesis,” “synthesis”), which he regards as “an enigma.” One may agree with that statement, but certainly not with his idea that this book could have been written anytime between 1000 and 100 B.C.E. (472). The language and ideology of the book no doubt suggest a setting during the Hellenistic period. Song of Songs is, according to J. W. Rogerson, “a collection of poems or fragments of poems” and should be understood as “a countertext to ... Genesis 3.”

P. R. Redditt provides an introduction to prophetic literature, which still focuses on the prophetic person; unfortunately, nothing is said about the formation of the prophetic books. M. Barker’s commentary on Isaiah also offers a very “biographic” interpretation of Isa 1–39; she considers Deutero-Isaiah a “disciple” of the eighth-century prophet (524), while “Trito-Isaiah” would be another person who “used the oracles of Deutero-

Isaiah as the basis for his polemic” (536). On the whole, there seems to be little awareness of present research on this book. The commentary on Jeremiah by A. R. P. Diamond uses fashionable titles but insists rightly on the fact that “we have immediate access in Jeremiah only to a literary figure” (547)—in fact, to *different* literary figures, given the important differences between the Hebrew and Greek Jeremiah. The book of Lamentations is presented by D. J. A. Clines as “a work of art” (617); Clines is more interested in theology than in questions of setting and authors. J. A. Goldingday wrote the commentary on Ezekiel. Contrary to Diamond, who is well aware of the redactional complexity of prophetic books, Goldingday apparently considers the whole book as having been written by Ezekiel himself. I. Provan’s commentary on Daniel discusses above all the Christian reception of this book; Provan informs his readers in passing that “some continue to argue that the whole book is an early exilic composition” (665). This will probably be well received by evangelical readers, but it can hardly be said to correspond to the state of the scholarly discussion. The Book of the Twelve is commented by five different authors (Hosea: G. I. Emmerson; Joel, Obadiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah: A. Gelston; Amos, Malachi: M. D. Carroll; Jonah: D. Gunn; Micah, Nahum, Haggai, Zechariah: J. W. Rogerson). Unfortunately, this diversity leaves no room for raising issues about the composition of the Twelve as one book, a central topic in present scholarship. The reviewer was also astonished about the lack of any information about the setting of the story of Jonah.

The following apocryphal books are commented on: Tobit (by L. Grabbe, who locates the book in the third century B.C.E. [736]); Judith (by G. West, arguing “that the book should be located within the theological discussions of the later part of the second century BC” [748]); Greek Esther (by J. Jarick); the Wisdom of Solomon (by A. P. Hayman, who gives a very sound interpretation and shows that the book “was probably written about thirty years either side of the turn of the era” [763]); Sirach (by J. Snaith); Baruch (by J. J. Schmitt, who shows the book’s concern about Jewish identity during the second century B.C.E.), Additions to Daniel (by J. W. Rogerson); 1 and 2 Maccabees (by J. R. Bartlett, a well-informed presentation); 1 Esdras (by H. G. M. Williamson, who suggests that this book should be considered as an early form of a “rewritten Bible” [851]), Prayer of Manasseh (by P. R. Davies, who reminds us that this book from the first or second century B.C.E. was “never truly regarded as part of the Christian Bible” [859]), Ps 151 (by A. Salvesen), 3 Maccabees (by P. S. Alexander, a very instructive commentary on a difficult book, which, following Alexander, considers three distinct audiences: the Jews and non-Jews in Egypt, as well as the Jews in Jerusalem [866]), 2 Esdras (by J. J. Schmitt), and 4 Maccabees (by D. A. de Silva, who locates the book from the first century in Asia Minor [888]).

These books are followed by a brief introduction to pseudepigrapha by J. R. Mueller, as well as a quite detailed and informative commentary on *I Enoch* by D. C. Olson. D. C. Harlow contributes an article about “The Hebrew Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls.” There is a second piece about Qumran at the very end of the volume: “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament,” by D. C. Harlow. These articles are a quite unhappy compromise, since they are much too short and do not cover many important scrolls from Qumran. If one really wanted to inform the nonspecialist about the importance of Qumran, more space would have been necessary.

The last section, devoted to the books of the New Testament, opens with a general introduction by J. D. G. Gunn, followed by an article about hermeneutical problems (J. B. Green) and a fine introduction to the Gospels by C. M. Tuckett. The commentary on Matthew is written by A. J. Saldarini, who chooses to “stress the Gospel as a literary unity” (1001). Contrary to the foregoing introduction, Saldarini is not interested in questions of redactions and sources. C. A. Evans authored the commentary on the Gospel of Mark, whose genre he considers a biography and which he thinks to have been written in the middle 60s (1065). Luke is commented on by D. L. Balch, who provides only a very short introduction and relies heavily on A. Culpepper (1104). The Gospel of John is presented by J. M. C. Scott; he offers a gender-interested interpretation, focusing on the “Sophia background.” “In the Johannine Jesus we may see the fullness of God revealed, in both masculine and feminine dimensions” (1161). Interestingly, the editors did not choose the same commentator for the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The perspective of J. T. Squires, who is in charge of Acts, considers this work an apology intended for a Christian audience in a Hellenized society (1214–15). The commentaries on the New Testament letters are introduced by a general presentation of V. P. Furnish about “letters in the New Testament”; he gives a good introduction to the origins and purposes of letter writing, especially in the Greco-Roman world. Romans is commented on by J. Reumann, who provides a helpful overview of the recent discussion about the purpose and composition of Paul’s most important letter. S. Barton presents 1 Corinthians, which he considers a literary unity, written about 54–55 C.E. (1135–36). Second Corinthians is, according to J. Barclay, a “puzzling document” (1353); the text should be understood as a collection of three letters—chapters 8–9; 10–13; and 1–7—that were composed between 52 and 55. B. R. Gaventa comments on the letter to the Galatians (providing only a very short introduction). The commentary on Ephesians by I. H. Marshall is written in a quite evangelical perspective, maintaining against the majority view that the context of the letter “is well conceivable within the lifetime of Paul” (1386). A quite similar option is taken by M. D. Hooker on Colossians, arguing the other way round: “If ... Ephesians is *not* by Paul, then again Colossians is likely to be Pauline” (1404). The foregoing commentary on Philippians by C. A. Wanamaker stresses the

Greco-Roman context of a friendship letter (1395). R. K. Jewett presents 1 and 2 Thessalonians and considers against the majority view that Paul wrote the latter very shortly after his first letter. P. Perkins comments on the Pastoral Epistles, which provide important information about the situation of Christianity at the turn of the first century (1430). M. D. Hooker's presentation of the letter to Philemon shows how difficult it is to understand Paul's smallest letter. The commentary on Hebrews by A. C. Thiselton is rather apologetic. He claims that it is "virtually impossible to suggest a date for Hebrews" (1453), but he nevertheless thinks of an early date. The commentary of James by R. Bauckham adopts a similar position, since the author argues that this letter may "be of very early date" (1483). More critical are the commentaries of 1 Peter by G. N. Stanton and of 2 Peter by S. McKnight, who is also the commentator on Jude. J. Painter presents the three epistles of John and suggests that one understand them as reflecting a schism inside the Johannine community (1514). L. T. Stuckenbruck provides a helpful commentary on the book of Revelation, which he interprets in the context of "traditions which were developing in apocalyptic literature near the end of the first century" (1535). Finally, there are two articles about "New Testament Apocrypha" (R. E. Van Voorst) and the New Testament and Qumran (already mentioned). At the end, the reader finds a detailed subject index.

In sum, it is manifest that this work, unfortunately, lacks unity. There are very interesting contributions, but other authors do not seem to have kept up with present-day scholarship or advocate quite conservative views. It is therefore difficult for the nonspecialist to situate the different contributions, and the use of this one-volume commentary may produce some confusion. But if one chooses carefully, one may also make many good finds.