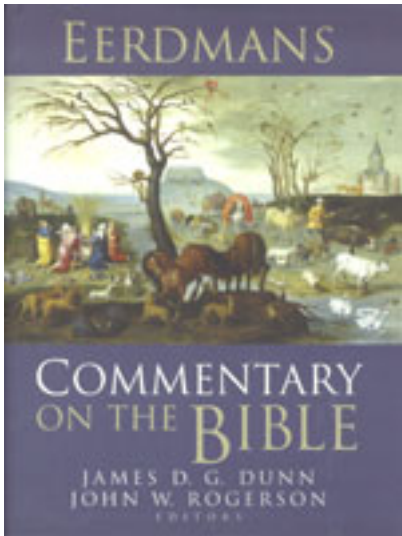


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**Dunn, James D. G., and John Rogerson, eds.**

***Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible***

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. xx + 1629.  
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Not being a big fan of single-volume Bible commentaries, I had some reluctance about reviewing this work, but as students were already beginning to cite the *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible (ECB)* on assignments, the opportunity was one I could not afford to pass up. I was pleasantly surprised. Working through the book generated favorable impressions for several reasons: the decision on what books to include; the engagement of critical issues; and the stylistic approach of the commentary.

First, the decision to include the Apocrypha and *I Enoch* recognizes that past decisions in the Christian church have led to significant differences in the officially recognized canons of the Christian faith. The *ECB* is thus able to make the claim of being “the only commentary to cover all the texts (including the Apocrypha and *I Enoch*) regarded by one or more Christian churches as canonical” (ix). As a teaching tool, the inclusion of these writings encourages genuine appreciation by and among these different faith traditions.

Second, engagement of critical issues related to the biblical books is not trivialized. While some authors go into greater detail than others about the critical issues of the book’s authorship, transmission, and dating before beginning the commentary, all do provide a straightforward description of the critical consensus on these issues, as well as widely recognized difficulties related to major scholarly opinions.

Third, the commentaries themselves are lucid, easy to follow, and generally provide excellent summary readings of the content, structural markers, and thematic development of a given passage. The units are also clearly marked in bold type, which will appeal to students.

In terms of the format, the commentary is divided into four sections: Old Testament; Old Testament Apocrypha; Pseudepigrapha, and New Testament. As one would expect from the title, one finds commentaries on each Old Testament and New Testament writing. However, the *EBC* also contains commentaries on the entire Old Testament Apocrypha and *I Enoch*.

In addition, the volume contains articles that introduce a range of topics that will be of considerable aid for serious students of the Bible. In the Old Testament section the following articles appear: "The History of the Tradition: Old Testament and Apocrypha," by John Rogerson; "Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern in Old Testament Study," by John Goldingay; "Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archeology," by Deborah A. Appler and Julye Bidmead; "The Pentateuch," by David Noel Freedman; and "Introduction to Prophetic Literature," by Paul L. Redditt. It is not always clear how the articles were selected. Why, for example, is there an introduction to the Pentateuch and prophetic literature but not to other meaningful sections of the canon (e.g., historical books, wisdom literature)? Or why is there an introduction to "the Pseudepigrapha" but not a general introduction to "the Apocrypha"? One can only presume these choices were made largely for reasons of space.

The New Testament section contains articles on: "The History of the Tradition: New Testament," by James D. G. Dunn; "Hermeneutical Approaches to the New Testament Tradition," by Joel B. Green; "Introduction to the Gospels," by Christopher M. Tuckett; "Letters in the New Testament," by Victor P. Furnish; "New Testament Apocrypha," by Robert E. Van Voorst; "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament," by Daniel C. Harlow.

A section on Pseudepigrapha contains an article on "Introduction to the Pseudepigrapha" by James R. Mueller, a commentary on *I Enoch* by Daniel C. Olson, and a rather oddly placed article on "The Hebrew Bible in the Dead Sea Scrolls" by Daniel C. Harlow. Finally, a forty-two-page index includes a well-conceived subject index, place names, and people (biblical figures as well as several modern scholars of note).

The sixty-seven contributors to this volume bring an international flavor to the task, and the contributors to the volume are largely persons working in the areas about which they write. However, the lack of continental European scholars and the under-representation

of women among the writers also makes an impression. The group is largely composed of scholars representing institutions in the British Isles and North America: England (28), the United States (23), Scotland (6), Canada (2), Ireland (1), Australia (2), South Africa (3), Guatemala (1), and Germany (1, a retired American). It is disappointing to have only nine women among the sixty-seven contributors. The array of approaches is apparent from even a cursory glance at the commentaries, with newer sociological and literary methods getting significant representation.

The format of the commentaries themselves begin with brief introductions to the book that summarize the critical consensus of the last century (explained in more detail with the larger writings) and then note the areas of contention that preoccupy recent scholarly discussions. These introductions do not skirt difficult issues behind pious language, but they treat those issues with enough sensitivity to make the commentary usable as a resource for a wide range of audiences (college classrooms as well as seminaries). These issues include the normal introductory issues of the date of the book, questions about authorship, and the book's structure; discussions of sources; and significant variations of text transmissions (e.g., three major variations of Jeremiah, dramatic differences in MT and LXX of Esther; and the longer and shorter endings of Mark). The New Testament authors appear to approach questions of authorship more cautiously in the epistles than in some of the other sections, but their presentation of evidence for both sides of the debate is usually fairly and clearly expressed. There is no polemical tone to these summaries.

The preface claims that the *EBC* will “bring out the interconnectedness with the rest of the text.” Most of the writers do this well, including the New Testament commentators, who give due attention to citations of Old Testament texts and traditions in a manner that is neither simplistic nor acerbic.

The bibliographies in the commentaries consistently cite secondary literature at least into the late 1990s, though some highlight recent literature more than others. However, the format of the bibliographies is more than a little confusing, since the editors allow the employment of different models. For example, sometimes the bibliography appears at the end of each pericope (e.g., Genesis and Matthew), though usually it appears at the end of the commentary. The Exodus bibliography is an annotated paragraph about the changing paradigm of Exodus studies that lists only four articles by the author of the Exodus commentary (nothing before 1990), and the Jeremiah bibliography is divided into a section for commentaries and another for monographs. The scope of the bibliographies also varies widely. The Leviticus and Luke commentaries provides extensive collections, listing dozens of resources, while a book as large and complex as Ezekiel contains less than a dozen sources.

Of course, the shortcomings of any single-volume Bible commentary cannot be ignored, specifically in the depth with which it can treat individual passages. These issues notwithstanding, however, the combination of critical introductions to the books, solid thematic treatments of the texts, a consistent emphasis on the position of the passage in the book, and relationships with other texts provides the volume with enough information that it could be used as a textbook for biblical introduction courses in seminaries. The price is quite reasonable given the extent of the material covered. Not only would it provide students with summaries of the state of introductory questions, but it would give students a start on their libraries by providing them with a resource for each biblical book (no matter how one delimits the Jewish and Christian canons).