

Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005. 192pp. \$13.00.

Tremper Longman is a well-known evangelical scholar who taught at Westminster Theological Seminary and is now Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College. He has written several commentaries and co-authored both an introduction to the OT and a history of Israel, as well as having written *How to Read* books on Proverbs and Psalms, not to mention his writings on reading the Bible as literature.

*How to Read Genesis* consists of five parts. Part 1, on reading Genesis with a strategy, lays out four hermeneutical principles dealing with (1) the book's literary nature, (2) its historical background, (3) its theological teaching, and (4) the reader's own culture and society. Part 2 deals with Genesis as literature and introduces the debate over the book's authorship and the purported sources used in its composition. This is followed by a discussion of the book's genre, structure, and style. Part 3 compares Genesis with other ancient Near Eastern literature: the creation account with Enuma Elish, the flood story with the Gilgamesh Epic, and accounts of Abraham with accounts from Nuzi. Longman judiciously draws attention to both similarities and differences between the Bible and the literature with which it is contemporary, and readers are alerted to the significance this material has for understanding the date of the biblical material and the world-view it reflects. Part 4 is a summarizing overview divided into three parts: Genesis 1-11, 12-36, and 37-50. Part 5 concludes the volume with a discussion of how Christians should read Genesis.

Perhaps the greatest service this volume renders is that it pulls back the shades and allows readers a glimpse at the agreed upon results of today's evangelical scholarship. The author is a respected scholar who ably presents this summary of widely accepted conclusions. The book is written in an informal, at times chatty style, aimed as it is at students and non-scholars. In this regard, the book attempts to redirect popular thinking away from wrong questions that some modern readers bring to Genesis—questions Genesis was not written to address. This has its merits, but there is the possibility that lay people are at points directed away from the wrong questions they ask to the wrong questions scholars ask. There is value in knowing the history of scholarly discussion, but lay readers of Shakespeare or Homer can be served better fare than discussions of scholarly theories that the bards did not, in fact, sing the songs attributed to them.

The topics treated in this book are dealt with in a fully informed manner. One might wish for more focus on the actual themes of Genesis, and perhaps more thorough interaction with the storyline of the Pentateuch would be beneficial, as can be found in T. Desmond Alexander's *From Paradise to the Promised Land* or John Sailhamer's *The Pentateuch as Narrative*. But what Longman does he does well.

The book closes with a final interpretive principle: "After reading Genesis as if we are part of the original audience, we should then read the book in the full knowledge of the redemptive history that follows, particularly the death and resurrection of Christ. In this the New Testament authors' use of the Genesis material should shape our thinking" (175). This is presented as a two step process: first read the book as its original audience might have, then read it under the guidance of the authors of the NT. Taking into account the fact that the Messiah's death and resurrection was a surprise, is it possible to collapse these two steps into one? In other words, granting that the cross caught everyone off-guard, and allowing also for the fact that the word "messiah" only became a technical term much later, might the authors of the NT nevertheless steer us toward an eschatological messianic hope that Genesis was intended to foster in its original audience?

Wise use can be made of helpfully brief introductions such as this one. The danger in books like this is that interpretive possibilities can be limited by extra-biblical considerations. This is not to say that Longman's book will cause readers to approach Genesis on scholarly terms rather than its own, but it is to recognize that students and scholars do fall into that error. Let us go to those taught by Jesus, let us read and re-read the texts themselves, and let us pray to the divine author that we might learn, with Tremper Longman's help, *How to Read Genesis*.

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