

Genesis: A Pentecostal Commentary. By Brian Neil Peterson. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2022. 517 pp.

Genesis (A Pentecostal Commentary) is the eighth volume in the Pentecostal Commentary series, with the initial volume released in January 2007. This series' development has been slow, likely due to a transition in publishing houses. However, the release of the seventh and eighth volumes in 2022 may indicate the pace of this series is increasing. The series intends to appeal to lay and scholarly readers by blending first-rate scholarship with an approachable writing style that incorporates footnotes sparingly and reduces the technical academic aspects of the writing. The series aims to reach a Pentecostal audience using a popular writing style relevant to pastors, students, and laypeople in the tradition—a challenging but worthy goal.

The preface acknowledges that Pentecostalism can be misunderstood and eclectic. The editors specify that the commentary uses the five-fold gospel to highlight the uniqueness of the tradition: Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Holy Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and Coming King. Each element is vital but not unique to that tradition. With this clear Christological emphasis, writers of the Old Testament commentaries in the series are presented with the creative challenge of engaging this personality of Pentecostalism with the Hebrew tradition. In keeping with Pentecostal “ethos and spirituality,” commentary writers have been asked to pray and follow the Spirit’s leading as part of the writing process while also challenging readers with the “literary equivalent to an altar call” in the commentary’s reflection and application sections (xiii).

Author Brian Peterson (Ph.D. Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto), Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Lee University (Cleveland, TN), is suited for this hefty task, having lectured and written on Genesis while also engaging the Pentecostal community. Peterson’s introduction outlines his approach and pertinent background considerations. He covers Genesis’ title, date, audience, genre, compositional unity, themes, theological emphasis, chronology, and contested areas such as authorship and composition. This material encompasses twenty-seven pages and includes questions regarding Genesis’ teaching on the Holy Spirit, which are answered throughout the commentary. Peterson employs a forward-looking methodology, drawing parallels between Genesis and the New Testament, such as identifying Noah and Joseph as Christological figures and connecting the Spirit in Genesis 1:2 with the Spirit in Acts 2:2. Here, it would be helpful to understand what criteria the author uses to identify parallels, allusions, or echoes between testaments.

Peterson navigates the introductory content of this Genesis volume concisely, fairly, and usefully in a manner that engages both the academic and lay audience. The exception is the final section titled “Excursus,” which discusses the Pharaoh’s identity during the

time of Joseph. The section comprises over 10% of the introductory space, yet the author does not explain why this discussion is important. After this section, the introduction ends abruptly.

Peterson brilliantly navigates through each narrative chapter by chapter in the commentary section, creating a striking balance of pertinent scholarly material communicated in an impressively readable format. He references contrasting perspectives, including the “gap theory,” which is limited mainly to more fundamentalist circles prompted by the *Scofield Study Bible*. Peterson also discusses the Enuma Elish of Babylonian creation mythology. Walking between the scholarly and ecclesial worlds is a serious task.

Peterson’s section on Sodom and Gomorrah demonstrates the thoroughness with which he writes for both lay and scholarly readers. Peterson relates the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative’s application with today’s “culture wars.” He alerts readers to Genesis’ relevance concerning homosexuality, gender identification, gender relations, and issues of creation versus evolution. He acknowledges the significant divide in viewpoints on these issues, even among Pentecostals. Peterson frames these issues from a conservative position. He states, “It is clear that many self-proclaimed, Spirit-filled believers struggle with the effects of acculturation,” which “serves as a reminder that the Enemy often quenches the work of the Spirit in our lives little by little through acculturation until we are faced with the devastating reality of coming judgment unless we repent” (182). These issues, however, are allocated appropriate but minimal space, avoiding turning the work into a mechanism operating within the “culture war.” Peterson wisely focuses on developing a theological worldview from the text that enables readers to create their own spirituality and decide for themselves about God’s will in these matters. This not only steers the publication from venturing into space beyond the scope of intention but also avoids restricting the contemporary conversation to the author’s viewpoint alone, enabling the commentary to remain relevant to a broader audience.

The Genesis commentary’s engagement with Pentecostal sources and the five-fold gospel Pentecostal perspective is limited because of the juxtaposition of the content from Genesis with resources from a Pentecostal perspective. Some narrative offers only limited potential for the desired application. However, in other portions, Peterson gives needful attention that caters to the reader’s devotional life while providing a limited but helpful homiletical aid to preachers.

This publication accomplishes its goal of being a hybrid commentary that blends serious scholarship with devotional space. The Genesis volume is suitable for the intended audience of Pentecostal students, pastors, and educated lay persons who are looking for readability and inspiration. Although initially intended for retail at an affordable price, the commentary likely prices itself out of bounds for many laypeople and pastors. Meanwhile, the limited scholarly dialogue and footnotes potentially restrict the engagement of

academic readers. However, Peterson includes an impressive bibliography and indexes a high volume of New Testament scriptural references, which is a credit to the broader intention of bridging the devotional and Pentecostal contexts. This commentary is a worthwhile addition to the Pentecostal scholarly body. Those within the tradition should celebrate Brill's commitment to this series.

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