

Book Review

The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament

Sandra L. Richter

(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008) 259 pages with notes and glossary

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Sandra Richter's excellent survey of the Old Testament organizes the message for the Christian by helping readers connect with the Old Testament and use it effectively. She compares her work to organizing a "dysfunctional closet" in the understanding of the reader (17-20). Richter accomplishes her goal, although she could have done it with less detail. The details she includes throughout the book are enlightening and help raise the knowledge level of the reader. However, as an "entry" into the Old Testament, those technical terms and cultural background details could put off some seekers who have little academic background.

For the serious students just needing a streamlined presentation of the essentials of the Old Testament contents and message, this book would make an excellent survey. Richter includes helpful timeframe charts, maps, and other figures. The book is very well written, with brief essays on important concepts throughout. The end notes and glossary are informative and helpful. Richter is very knowledgeable about Old Testament issues and major subjects of ancient Near Eastern background. She even presents a view of Genesis 6 I had never heard. She writes with a very good narrative style, which is appealing for postmoderns who want and need to grasp the story and message of the Old Testament as God's

Word. Her book also serves as a basic Old Testament theology book. Her statement of the Bible's objective gives a good taste of her approach: "to tell the epic tale of God's ongoing quest to ransom his creation" (15).

Richter's theological approach seems to be basically covenantal but not in a dogmatic form. After presenting God's original intent for humanity in Eden—and Adam and Eve's destructive choice—she organizes the Old Testament around God's steps of restoring humanity to Eden through His covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and finally, the New Covenant in Christ. This works very well, though I do not fully relate to her view of different covenantal administrations. I agree with most everything else she says and found confirmation throughout the book for much of what I have been teaching, even several of the exact phrases I use. I was especially impressed that she asserts that the Bible writers "did not write this amazing book in some haphazard fashion" (69). Her emphasis on the presence of God is another very significant contribution. Her Wesleyan (and, I believe, biblical) emphasis on human choice is refreshing.

The one brief area where she seemed to diverge a bit from the general view of the Assemblies of God is the relationship of the current nation of Israel to the Old Testament

promises. I agree with her about ancient Israel being God's theocracy on earth and about the United States not being "sponsored" by God (231). However, she seems to say national Israel no longer has a part in the plan of God; I disagree with that concept.

I highly recommend this book. I believe it will accomplish its purpose and make the Old Testament understandable and usable as it clarifies how the Old Testament presents God's salvation message for the world, from its context.