

RESENSI BUKU

Richter, Sandra L. *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2008; 263pp.

In *The Epic of Eden*, Sandra Richter encourages Christians to tackle the Old Testament because she contends that understanding the Bible, including the Old Testament, which is the epic of redemption, is every believer's objective. The book is an interesting and creative attempt to assist readers in the task of organizing the Old Testament materials by providing structure for these ancient materials after coping with the great barriers of linguistic, cultural and historical gaps between the original and present contexts. In nine chapters and a Frequently Asked Question section, Richter outlines major ideas and issues in the redemption narrative in the Old Testament in order to break "the great barrier" and "the dysfunctional closet syndrome" in the readers' mind regarding unorganized data about the Old Testament.

In the first three chapters, Richter introduces the readers with some biblical terms and ideas related to the concept of redemption (chapter 1) and the concept of covenant in the Old Testament (chapter 3). She also presents outlines of the Old Testament stories and puts those stories in their particular historical and cultural contexts (chapter 2). As a continuation of her explanation in chapter two, Richter dedicates five chapters (chapters 4-8) to elucidate five major characters, i.e., Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, in which the chronology of the Old Testament text has been intentionally organized in the covenantal framework (p. 91). In chapters 4 and 5, employing the threefold people-place-presence covenantal framework, Richter concludes that God's original intent in Eden and God's final intent in the New Jerusalem is the same: "God's people dwelling in God's place with full access to his presence" (p. 118; cf. P. 129). She also traces the iconography of Eden (cherubim, trees and rivers) throughout redemption's history (p. 119) which culminates in the New Jerusalem, where everything that went wrong in the Garden of Eden has been made right through the works of Christ (p. 134).

Further, Richter elaborates the covenantal significance of the other four figures in the history of redemption in chapters 6-8

chronologically. According to Richter in chapter 6, the flood narrative in Genesis is a de-creation and re-creation story that must be “seen as an act of God that rescued humanity from themselves and offered our corrupt race a second chance” (p. 154). In Genesis 6-9, God lays the groundwork for his relationship with the fallen humanity in Noah’s covenant (pp. 149, 154). In the Abrahamic covenant, God begins identifying a place (the land of Canaan), people (Abraham’s offspring) and the presence (Yahweh as Abraham’s reward). In chapter 7, Richter contends that God’s redemptive acts continue to the next level in the Mosaic covenant. She believes that in the Mosaic covenant, God established theocratic system with Israel and called these Abraham’s offsprings people of God. On their journey to Canaan, the abode of God, the tabernacle became the symbol of the presence of God which led them through (p. 188). Richter argues in chapter 8 that the threefold aspect of Mosaic covenant remains unchanged and continues in the Davidic covenant, but it adds “the typological figure who will play such a major role in the fulfillment of the promised new covenant: a king for God’s kingdom, a shepherd for his people” (p. 207). Finally, Richter invites her readers to acknowledge Jesus as the culmination of all covenantal relationships between God and humanity throughout the Bible. Seen from this perspective, the Church become the people of God through the person of Jesus, the ultimate covenant mediator between God and humanity. The abode of God is the future New Jerusalem, and the presence of God (the Holy Spirit) dwells in every believer.

In assisting Old Testament readers to overcome “the great barrier” and organize their “dysfunctional closet,” two important points can be made. First, and most important point, Richter employs the same covenantal framework “people-place-presence” consistently for most of the chapters in the book. She makes a compelling case in using of this covenantal framework in reading and understanding the redemptive history of the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. The covenantal framework “people-place-presence” provides a clear structure for the Bible readers to organize their knowledge of the Old Testament and even of the New Testament. Secondly, she makes use of the comparative study that parallels the biblical texts and cultures with their contemporary ancient texts and cultures in the presentation of the Old Testament materials. By putting the text in its historical context and worldview, Richter helps readers to grasp theological issues in some problematic stories, for instance the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2 and the flood narrative in Genesis 6-9. In my view, when she explains about the sociological and historical settings of the Old Testament stories, she has

adequately dealt with the “great barrier” of understanding the Old Testament.

The book is excellent in presenting the material in a straightforward and attractive way. There are, however, some concerns which need to be addressed here. First, it is quite surprising that in her book, Richter does not adequately elaborate the prophetic, poetic and wisdom literatures in the redemptive history, given that those materials constitute the largest portion of the Old Testament and are confusing to many readers. Secondly, Richter’s view that the concept of covenant (even the idea of the suzerain/vassal treaty) can be found in Genesis 1 is highly questionable. Regarding this issue, I agree with Bill T. Arnold, who contends “the idea of *covenant* is first introduced in the flood story (Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17)” (cf. Bill T. Arnold, *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Cambridge University Press, 2014: 81). Richter’s idea would be interesting if elaborated, but she has to prove that she is not reading her theological standpoint into the text. Finally, a concern involves the last part of this book, the Frequently Asked Question. It is surprising that in addressing the place of the modern day Israel in the covenantal framework, Richter discusses several passages in the New Testament, but not Romans 9-11, which, in my view, is one of the most important passages on this issue. Furthermore, I wonder what she would say concerning the themes of violence (even genocidal language) of the Old Testament in the covenantal framework and redemptive history of the people of God. What role do these themes play in the new covenant believer’s life?

The Epic of Eden is an excellent work and an easy-to-read book. As an introductory book, Richter has successfully achieved her goal by presenting informative cultural and historical backgrounds to overcome “the great barrier” and providing structure for the readers to organize their Old Testament knowledge. Her threefold “people-place-presence” covenantal framework is effective in assisting readers to grasp the Old Testament materials in regard with the covenantal and redemptive history.

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