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Review of Introducing the Old Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message

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Introducing the Old Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message. By Tremper Longman III. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012, 192 pp., \$14.99, paperback.

Tremper Longman III (Ph.D. Yale University) is currently Robert Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies and Chair of the Religious Studies Department at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA, after many years teaching Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He is well known as the author of a number of commentaries and popular books (frequently with Dan Allender), as well as from serving as Old Testament editor of the *Expositor's Bible*

Commentary revision series. The current volume is an abridgment of the second edition of (the late) Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 2006).

Since it is an abridgement (i.e. slightly over one-third as long as the original 528-page volume), there are relatively few volumes with which it can be compared. Millard Erickson's theology was effectively abridged by Baker Books as *Introducing Christian Doctrine*. The most immediate comparison is with D.A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Zondervan, 2010), two years earlier than Longman's abridgement. Given that both abridgements are Zondervan publications, it is likely that Carson and Moo paved the way for Longman's volume.

In regard to content, *Introducing the Old Testament* has chapters on every book in the Old Testament, except that 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah are each handled together, though no rationale is presented for doing so, except for one sentence at the beginning of “The Book of Ezra–Nehemiah” (p. 76). In addition, there are two other amazingly brief chapters, each only *two* pages long: (1) “Thinking about the Study of the Old Testament” (pp. 9–10); and (2) “Excursus on Theological History” (pp. 84–85). Finally, Longman's slender book is crowned by a “Scripture Index” (pp. 189–92).

According to Longman, each chapter on a biblical book answers four questions, though not always in the following order. (1) Content: What is the book about? (2) Authorship and Date: Who wrote the book and when? (3) Genre: What is the style of literature of the book? (4) Connections: How does the book anticipate the gospel? In addition, each chapter contains Longman's suggestions on “Recommended Resources” (i.e. suggested further reading), and all the chapters except “Thinking about the Study of the Old Testament” and the “Excursus on Theological History” include “Questions for Review and Discussion.”

There are four strengths that are evident to this reviewer in Longman's short volume. First, as would be hoped for in an abridgement for a popular audience, Longman's writing is, for the most part, quite readable. (On the Zondervan web site, the abridgment of Carson and Moo was done by Carson's research associate, but there is no indication that anyone other than Longman had a part in what was retained from the second edition of *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, what was left out, or the style of the writing. Given Longman's popular books with Allender, this is not particularly surprising.) Second, it is a remarkable achievement for a biblical scholar of Longman's pedigree and acumen to be able to compress the discussions of several books (e.g. Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Malachi) to *three* pages each. Third, the “Questions for Review and Discussion” at the end of each chapter on a biblical book are a very helpful feature for learning purposes. Fourth, interestingly, even though the format is that of a short, highly readable—and understandable—introduction to the Old Testament,

Longman takes a serious run at explaining some highly complicated scholarly issues, such as the Documentary Hypothesis (pp. 14–17) and the possibility of a “second (or third) Isaiah” (pp. 120–121).

On the other side of the ledger, in this reviewer’s opinion *Introducing the Old Testament* exhibits the following weaknesses. (1) The theological analysis in the discussion of Genesis 1–11 (p. 12) and the set-up of the neat outline of Exodus (p. 20) early in the book lead the reader to expect more of the same throughout the book, but neither feature is ever repeated. (2) There is only one chart in the entire book—in the discussion of Ezekiel on p. 137—which, in a popular book, is a strange scarcity—or oversight. (3) Given that Longman wrote the NICOT volume on the Song of Songs, it is exceedingly odd that he summarizes its eight chapters of content in *one paragraph* (p. 112). (4) Given the organizing of the chapters on Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah in line with the set-up of the Hebrew Bible, it is at least inconsistent that there is no mention whatsoever of “the Book of the Twelve.” (5) Even more inconsistent is the observation that Longman lists *11* “Recommended Resources” for Psalms and *seven* for Ruth, but *only* one each for Joel, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Malachi. (6) Longman’s commendable attempt to explain the Documentary Hypothesis and the possibility that Isaiah had two or three different authors is not matched by solidly evangelical discussions and conclusions but, instead, by considerable hesitation to label either view as outside the pale of consistent evangelical belief.

In the end, the present reviewer cannot in good conscience offer an enthusiastic recommendation for *Introducing the Old Testament*. Though it is very well-written for the target audience of “laypersons as well as church leaders” (stated on the back cover), *Introducing the Old Testament* will prove disturbing, if not also outright confusing, to many readers—both laypersons and pastors alike—in solidly evangelical churches. Though it is certainly worth observing that Longman—and/or the editors at Zondervan—showed a great measure of wisdom in leaving out any mention of Longman’s highly controversial theistic evolution view—which shared view with former colleagues Peter Enns and Bruce Waltke, among others, almost brought down Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia some years back—the writer and editors, sadly, did not exercise anything close to the same kind of discretion in regard to Longman’s far less than whole-hearted critiques of the decidedly liberal Documentary Hypothesis and the possibility of a Deutero- or Trito-Isaiah. To this reviewer, in spite of his impressive long-term body of work in evangelical circles, these troubling aspects of *Introducing the Old Testament* still lead to the question of where Longman currently fits on the evangelical spectrum, if at all.

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