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Gooder, Paula.
The Pentateuch: A Story of Beginnings

Continuum Biblical Studies Series

New York: Continuum, 2000. Pp. 122, Paperback, \$15.95, ISBN 0826451497.

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This is a brief introduction to the first five books of the Bible. Following a short chapter introducing the Pentateuch itself, chapter 2 leads the reader into the complex field of pentateuchal studies. While Gooder's ability to review this material in a terse fifteen pages is admirable, the value of such a dizzying tour of the history of critical scholarship in an introduction with about one hundred total pages of text is questionable. This raises the most significant question about this book: For whom is it written? I will return to this question after a summary of the remaining contents.

Of the remaining five chapters, two are devoted to the book of Genesis, following the standard division into Primeval Story (Gen 1-11) and Patriarchal Narratives (Gen 12-50). Gooder alternates between summaries of historical-critical analysis and more contemporary literary studies. Much attention is given to theories of composition, but it is presented in a frenzy of brief summaries of past scholarship. The two chapters on Genesis comprise 40 percent of the book and offer a tightly packed introduction to the first book of the Bible, but the choppy nature of the presentation distracts from any sense of purpose or structure in the book.

Chapter 5 introduces Exod 1-15. As this division indicates, what Gooder presents is a thematic analysis of the story of the exodus. The result is a fragmented collection of summary statements concerning topics such as the relationship of exodus and Sinai, the historical setting of the story, the characterization of Moses, and the significance of exodus for liberation theology.

The remainder of the Pentateuch is truly treated as just a remainder in two chapters on law (chap. 6) and wilderness (chap. 7). Together, these two chapters fill a total of only twenty-two pages. Again, the presentation is fragmentary, with brief discussions addressing theophany, covenant, law codes, the tabernacle, and the route of the wilderness wanderings. Sections summarizing the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and

Deuteronomy average little more than one page each. A discussion of “using the law as an interpretive framework for reading the Pentateuch” is welcome but consists only of a two-paragraph summary of the recent work of James W. Watts (*Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* [Biblical Seminar 9; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999]).

The intended purpose and audience of this work are unclear. It is too cursory to be useful as a textbook in a course on the Pentateuch at either the undergraduate or graduate level. It is too full of scholarly references to be readable and useful for a lay audience or an introductory Bible course. This lack of direction is evident in the broad claims made by the series editor at the front of the volume. The most valuable function this book might serve is as an annotated bibliographical guide to a thorough survey of scholarly literature in pentateuchal studies. The use of the term “story” in the subtitle would seem to point toward an approach more conscious of the narrative shape of the Pentateuch, but too much clutter in this study interrupts any effort to present the Pentateuch’s story.