

White discovers an important lesson: we often learn more from patterns and functions of leadership that are different from our own than from those that are parallel. I highly recommend serious study of this volume to both seminary students and those involved in church ministry.

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RUSSELL STAPLES

Wiarda, Timothy. *Interpreting Gospel Narratives: Scenes, People, and Theology*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010. 245 pp. Paper, \$24.99.

Deciphering clearly the intended point or points of a biblical narrative is a special challenge for anyone who reads the Bible, scholar and layperson alike. This is the challenge that Timothy Wiarda seeks to address in his book, *Interpreting Gospel Narrative*. Wiarda does not attempt a full introduction to narrative exegesis; rather he selects several main issues that he considers to “bear particularly rich exegetical fruit” and deals with them thoroughly. The detail with which he presents and illustrates his case makes the book somewhat heavy reading for the nonacademic whom he seeks to include in his audience. However, this is also a real strength, for anyone who reads the book thoughtfully should complete it with a much clearer idea of appropriate methods, and likely hazards, of Gospels narrative interpretation.

Chapter 1 addresses the Gospels’ interest in individual characters. Wiarda identifies four main ways in which the Gospels present characters, from the single-episode glimpse of a character to a character that develops and changes over the course of a Gospel. Wiarda works through examples of each and demonstrates how to identify what the author intends to be gained from each type of characterization. He also addresses the challenge of how to handle gaps in characterization.

Chapter 2 explores the dynamics that link story and theology. The impact of a story is argued to be achieved both by drawing readers into the story and by stating as precisely as possible the theological themes of the story. Wiarda seeks to demonstrate that careful attention to the story’s plot, characterization, emphases, and ideological point of view “leads quite naturally” to “legitimate pastoral/theological conclusions” (59). Recognizing the Gospel writers’ goal of describing historical events faithfully is seen as an important part of a balanced analysis of a story’s theology.

In Chapter 3, Wiarda examines symbolism, allegory, and theological wordplay, as well as OT and intra-Gospel allusions. Though admitting (sometimes apparently rather grudgingly) that these connections have their place, he insists that surface-level exegesis must come first and guide any symbolic or allusive interpretation. In Chapter 4, Wiarda comes back to individual figures in the Gospels, arguing for their value and pointing out

how such attention can actually complement the Gospels' witness regarding Christology and salvation history.

Chapter 5 explores ways in which the Gospel writers put narrative units together into larger patterns. These include thematically grouped episodes, narrative analogies of pattern or motif, and special patterns such as chiasmic structures. Wiarda cautions against isolating literary units from their surroundings, as well as against allowing overall interpretive grids to exert too great an influence on the interpretation of an individual story.

Wiarda's final chapter seeks to demonstrate, from John 15:26-27, the importance of careful attention to the apostles' testimony, as well as trust in the Holy Spirit to work within our individual human hearts as we hear and seek to understand this testimony. He finds basis in his interpretation to demonstrate the erroneous nature of relying solely on the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture, of looking only to human efforts, and also of championing a theological interpretation of Scripture that does not concern itself with the discovery of the intended testimony of the apostles.

In its focus on the principles Wiarda is setting forth, this overview of the book may be somewhat misleading. In an actual reading of the book, the principles are much less evident than appears here, for they are mixed in with his extensive examples from the text and must be hunted out and organized to be used in any systematic way. Wiarda is to be much applauded for his careful attention to basic and often forgotten wisdom for dealing with Gospel narrative. He takes the witness of the text of Scripture seriously and gives excellent advice about how to understand it most accurately. What would have made his work more practically useful is more careful attention to formatting to highlight the key principles and/or the formulation of an overview table or chart at the beginning or end of the book that lists these principles in a form that the Gospel exegete can hold in mind as he or she approaches the Gospel text. Nevertheless, it is a book I have chosen to use with my advanced exegesis students as I applaud the attempt to help pastors and all Christians understand better how to deal with Gospel narrative.

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Woods, Julie Irene. *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 149. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011. xvi + 355 pp. Paper, \$41.00.

Jeremiah 48 contains God's oracle of judgment against the nation of Moab. At first glance, this chapter would seem to hold little relevance to a Christian living in the twenty-first century C.E. Julie Irene Woods's book, *Jeremiah 48 as Christian Scripture*, attempts to show how this passage can be instructive and practical to such a reader.