

Faithful God: An Exposition of the Book of Ruth. By Sinclair B. Ferguson. Darlington, England: Bryntirion, 2005, 157 pp., \$12.00, paper.

This book originates from a series of addresses delivered at the English-speaking Conference of the Evangelical Movement of Wales in Aberystwyth in August 1996 by Sinclair B. Ferguson, distinguished visiting professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. Especially due to the clarity of the interpretation of the text and message of the book of Ruth, this book is easy to read and understand for laypeople.

The major approach of this monograph is to interpret the book of Ruth from the perspective of covenant blessings. Ferguson finds God blessing those who experience his covenant, as he provides them with unexpected sets of blessings and leads them into reflecting his character. Therefore, Ferguson consistently argues that the book of Ruth should be understood from the viewpoint of the faithfulness of God in accordance with his covenantal providence. The author thus shows that there are “four different reflections” in the book of Ruth—that of various characters such as Naomi, Ruth, Boaz, and so forth, that of God himself, that of Jesus, and that of ourselves. Ferguson postulates that the readers of this biblical book should apply the outworking of God’s pattern—grace and providence—to contemporary life by gaining knowledge of how God shapes our lives in order to make us like Christ.

Ferguson says that chapter 1 consists of a narrative of a surprising conversion that describes the story of two persons coming back to the God of Israel. Naomi returns to Bethlehem in repentance from turning her back on God in the past, while Ruth demonstrates a wholehearted conversion to the God of Israel. It is noteworthy that what Ruth says to Naomi in 1:16–17 specifically turns out to be the language of covenant. Chapter 2 begins the presentation of the word *hesed*, a term expressing the covenantal love of God, illustrated in part by the deeds and character of both Ruth and Boaz. God initiates the blessings of his own *hesed* upon Ruth, who has come to participate in his covenant. For this purpose, God sends her a man full of *hesed*, Boaz, who allows her to glean barley in his field. Chapter 3 furthers the storyline, explains Ferguson, by describing Boaz as a mediator of God’s *hesed* for the two women, Naomi and Ruth. The rashness of Naomi, caused by her seeing a possibility that Boaz could be a redeemer, a *goel* for her family, eventually forces Ruth into the risky situation of going to Boaz’s field secretly at midnight. In response to this unwise plan of Naomi, Boaz listens to Ruth, expresses care for her, promises to do what he can for her family, and sends her back to Naomi with her hands full of newly harvested barley. This is not what either Naomi or Ruth has expected. Apparently, Boaz is showing Naomi that he has rejected her plan and is advising her to trust in God’s providence for her family. In chapter 4, Ferguson explains how Boaz attempts to act in order to obey the law of God, namely, to fulfill his responsibility as a possible redeemer of Naomi’s family. Boaz’s attitude is sharply contrasted to the other unnamed relative’s refusal to act as a redeemer after considering materialistic benefits and losses. Boaz is presented as a man of God through whom God’s blessings are provided for the two “empty” women who returned to God. Concerning the genealogy at the end of chapter 4, Ferguson explains that God’s *hesed*, given through the characters of the book of Ruth, eventually extends to both King David and the ultimate king, Jesus Christ.

It seems probable that this monograph is written with pastors and laypeople in mind. It effectively analyzes different levels of the narrative’s flow and lucidly explains its theological and practical implications. Readers would benefit in biblical/theological learning and spiritual growth. Another merit of this monograph consists in Ferguson’s coherent interpretation of the narrative from a particular perspective, that of the covenantal love of God, his *hesed*. Readers will see how this theme is developed throughout the book of Ruth and, more generally, how they can profitably read a book from a certain theological viewpoint.

Perhaps a couple of considerations might improve the monograph: first, some of the debatable opinions regarding important issues, such as the nature of the redeemer or the function of genealogy, are not dealt with in detail. To provide some background on these issues might help readers better understand the interpretative options available to them and thereby fully appreciate why Ferguson has made his particular choices from a covenantal perspective. Second, at least a general attempt to explain the relationship between the book of Ruth and the book of Proverbs would have provided another benefit to readers, given that these two biblical books are placed next to each other in the HB, where Ruth is preceded by Proverbs. As is widely known, in the last chapter of Proverbs the “noble woman” is portrayed. It seems that the location of this image at the end of Proverbs should be considered in relationship to the presentation of the character of Ruth. Literary links in this regard are found in Prov 31:10 and Ruth 3:11. Despite these suggestions, it should be acknowledged that this monograph is a well-written study of the book of Ruth with a consistent, constructive theological viewpoint, and deserves attention from all levels of serious readers of the book of Ruth.

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God’s Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith. By Steven J. Keillor. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007, 223 pp., \$18.00, paperback.

Steven J. Keillor (Ph.D., University of Minnesota) has authored a tremendously interesting book on divine judgment and history. He currently serves as an independent historian and adjunct professor at Bethel University (St.

Paul, MN), is a fellow of the MacLaurin Institute, and has published several scholarly books in American history and political biography, including *This Rebellious House: American History & The Truth of Christianity* (also from IVP). With a forward by noted historian Mark A. Noll, *God's Judgments* may prove to become a very popular book.

The main thrust of the book is simply that divine judgment can serve as an effective category for historical investigation. This is a rather unique approach to performing historical inquiry. While there are those who affirm God's sovereignty and look at history through this lens, often we look at it in a way that is divorced from God's sovereignty. Could looking at history, especially catastrophes, through the lens that these were divinely originated judgments have relevance on how we look at history?

Keillor begins by looking at a recent event still fresh in all our minds. With the sixth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America on September 11 passing recently, we all still live in a state of concern and worry about the next state of attack. Keillor asks the question that only some are willing to ask, Was 9/11 a message from God? And if so, what did it mean? He interestingly surveys leading publications about the meaning of the attacks, showing a vast disagreement on both secular and religious sides as to their meaning. Ultimately he says one cannot know for certain that 9/11 is direct judgment from God, but, since God works providentially in history, it is not incorrect to look at 9/11 from a position that it was God's judgment.

Keillor then begins to investigate the concept of our failure to understand God's judgments in history as we develop our worldview. He notes that the average worldview approach to issues like 9/11 does not accurately take into consideration a sovereign God, but an issue like 9/11 can only be explained through the lens of the sovereignty of God, and could be a result of God's judgment. In the next chapter he seeks to understand God's judgments starting in the Old Testament. Noting God's sovereignty, Keillor understands judgments to be from God, but all of them do not necessarily have to be judgments for specific sins, nor do the reasons for their occurrence need to be explained (p. 72). Looking at what the Old Testament says about God's judgments, he then moves to the New Testament to find if it renders God's judgments obsolete. On the contrary, he notes the New Testament never negates God's reasons for judgment in the Old Testament, and in fact the various discussions of judgment in the New Testament do not just apply to individuals; judgment can still occur against nations, since the New Testament is silent on the issue. Keillor then moves into a chapter looking at the coming, death, ascension, and coming again of the Son of Man. How does Christ help us to understand the judgments of God? Keillor helps us to understand that with Christ's coming He has inaugurated the final institution of His kingdom and he therefore will be coming back again to judge the nations. Therefore, Keillor's point is, God is still judging.

From this point, Keillor moves to more specific events in American history to determine if God is still judging the nations. His first event is the burning of Washington in 1814. With the keen insight of an able historian, Keillor traces the events leading up to, during, and after the burning of Washington. He notes the events that led Americans to decide to invade Canada in response to anger against the British. Not only does he look at the events, he looks at the intentions of leaders like Jefferson and Madison. He notes that they acted in some ways that were defiant of God. Neglecting to understand the people's views of war (which were a result of their evangelical faith in contrast to the deism of some of America's founders) they decided to go to war anyway, and as a result, sustained an embarrassing defeat by the British and the burning of the buildings of Washington. Was this an example of God's judgment on America? Keillor believes it could be, but it is hard to be conclusive. "Not all disasters like Bladensburg are judgments from God. And yet, the disaster's focus on the elites, its embarrassing nature and its relative exemption of ordinary Americans (except in Washington) does point toward divine judgment on them" (pp. 117-18).

From there, he turns to the Civil War and the very difficult question of whether the war was God's judgment on America for slavery. The War Between the States was a terrible tragedy in American history. Yet, what does one make of it? Was it a natural outflowing of the disagreements over slavery? Or was it God's judgment? Lincoln and others of the time thought it was God's judgment, and Keillor asks why we cannot view it this way any longer. In the first chapter on the issue, Keillor develops a history of events leading up to the Civil War so one can know the reasons behind why things happened. In the next chapter, he attempts to answer the question of the Civil War and divine judgment. He correctly notes that it was not simply slavery that was the cause of the war—it was much more complicated; yet, it became a defining focus, particularly as both sides attempted to understand the events of the war. Again, Keillor notes that Lincoln felt the war was a result of God's judgment on slavery, but that as a result, both sides could do good to each other and offer no malice to anyone (p. 153). God's judgment in the Civil War had the results he had intended: it united both warring factions together.

Keillor's understanding of divine judgment as an historical category is nothing new. In fact, it is quite old. It is today's historians who cannot begin to grasp the idea that divine judgment is a correct way to view some historical events. In the following chapter then, Keillor looks at why Lincoln's Biblical language on judgment seems so foreign to us today. Keillor does a fantastic job at analyzing current issues to explain why this sort of language is unheard of today. His attempt to analyze the modern issues from an historical perspective is fresh and welcome. Too many historians leave history where it is, in the past. They fail to bring it into the present and analyze what is going on in light of what has gone on before. On this then, Keillor's book is worth its price. All of us in the church of Jesus Christ must shake off our historical anemia and look to the past once again so we can begin to deal with the issues that are facing us in the here and now.

The next chapter is perhaps the most interesting in the book. Keillor looks at human genetic engineering in light of the historical category of divine judgment. We cannot sit idly by and assume that God is no longer judging. Things like

the re-engineering of humanity can only occur at a great cost, and this cost will most likely be God's judgment. God's judgment is not just a thing of the past, but an ever present reality of things to come. Finally, he looks at where we are today and what we are to do with the issues before us in light of God's judgment. Rightly, he notes, we as Christians are to present the fact of God's judgment. It is our responsibility in a democratic free society to warn of the coming judgment of God. Knowing the category of divine judgment can help us make political decisions and know where to stand on these kinds of issues. Ultimately, Keillor does conclude that September 11 does fit into the historical category of God's judgments. We must be prepared for further events that can rightly fit into this category. Not only are we to be prepared, but we should "call a spade a spade," we are to speak out and note when an event does fit into the category of divine judgment!

This book is truly a tour-de-force on God's judgments. It truly opened my eyes to many things I had not looked at clearly. God's judgment is a correct category from which to view history, the present, and the future. There was little within this book with which I disagreed or about which I wished there was more of a discussion. The book is excellent, and should be required reading by all Christians, especially by its leaders and those with political influence and persuasion. This is a clarion call to return to seeing the events of life through the lens of God's sovereignty. May it be truly the call of the church of Jesus Christ for years to come until Christ comes to finally judge!

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