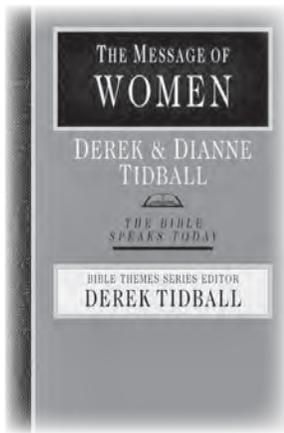


Book Review: *The Message of Women: Creation, Grace, and Gender*

By Derek and Dianne Tidball (InterVarsity, 2012)

REVIEWED BY WOODROW E. WALTON



As part of the “Bible Themes” series within the larger The Bible Speaks Today collection of Bible commentaries and themes, *The Message of Women* is an exposition rather than a detailed commentary. It explores the life of women in Old Testament times and in the life of Jesus and the subsequent life of the early church. Without actually saying what is suggested by the title of their work, Derek and Dianne Tidball find a message for the twenty-first century church. At the close of

chapter 12, the theme of which is “women in the encounters of Jesus,” the writers make the observation that “contrary to the culture in which [Jesus] lived, his actions demonstrate that women are in no way inferior to men” (171).

Early on in the book, either Derek or Dianne writes that their findings led them to “adopt an egalitarian perspective but not, we hope, in any naïve way” (26). It is evident from the manuscript itself that careful exegesis of important biblical citations lay behind their exposition and the position at which they arrived. The book betrays intimate knowledge of the biblical languages and the semantic range of each. Their footnotes cite the work of J. H. Ortwell, Philip Payne, Gordon Fee, Kenneth E. Bailey, and Ben Witherington, each of whom came to egalitarian conclusions based upon their own research. Bailey, especially, spent forty-some years in the Near East and has firsthand acquaintance with Near Eastern customs.

The Tidballs did acknowledge differing conclusions, citing as well individuals who did not see women in the Bible as equal to men in leadership. Rather than taking a defensive stance, the Tidballs relied upon textual analysis of cited Scriptures (e.g., on pp. 96 and 97 respecting the role of Deborah). Textual analysis

requires firsthand acquaintance with biblical linguistic structures, in which they exhibited mastery.

This reviewer is impressed by the thoroughness of the Tidballs’ study of women in both the Old Testament and the New. Their thoroughness is especially evident not only in their analysis of the teachings of Jesus, as explored in chapter 13, but also focusing on women who were disciples of him, as developed in chapter 14. This same thoroughness is evident in the treatment of the participation of women in the ongoing life of the early church from its beginning at Pentecost to its spread across the Mediterranean world (chs. 15–20). They covered every possible avenue of early Christian life, from the prayer life and worship of the early church to active ministry and leadership. The Tidballs did not end with those considerations, but also took up marital relationships and the care of widows.

The Message of Women: Creation, Grace, and Gender is highly recommended by this reviewer. The book’s heavy documentation of sources does not distract from its readability, as it is not filled with specialized terminology. Good scholarship is definitely there, but the book certainly is not “heavy reading.”

The Message of Women closes with the authors’ afterword and also a study guide, divided into twenty sections corresponding to the twenty chapters making up the whole of the book. The study guide is much more invested in the area of application than in the thematic study of different chapters. This distances the book even further from being strictly a commentary. Chapter 14, which deals with women as disciples of Jesus, has two questions in its matching study which ask, “What particular images of discipleship do the women of Luke 8:1–3 reflect?” (185–89) and “What is the evidence that suggests women were involved as preachers at the time of Jesus?” (189–90).

A format as here described makes *The Message of Women* ideal for college and seminary students as well as congregations. It would be helpful as well for the pastor who uses the matching The Bible Speaks Today commentaries. The study guides, as constructed, only strengthen a statement that the Tidballs make on page 42 of their book: “. . . the creation accounts start with a picture of equality, unity and mutuality. The compass has been set for the journey ahead.” That is how it ends. After all, it was Mary Magdalene who announced Jesus’s resurrection to the disciples: “I have seen the Lord!” (John 20:18).

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