

David Schnasa Jacobsen. *Mark*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 233 pages. \$22.

David Schnasa Jacobsen's *Mark* commentary is part of Fortress' Biblical Preaching Commentary series that successfully marries the goals of two different genres: traditional preaching commentaries that highlight themes of the particular books of the bible and lectionary resources that offer exegetical and homiletical insights. To preachers who ask whether this particular book, as part of the series, meets its goals, I respond with a resounding, "Yes!"

The structure and layout of the commentary are very amenable to the lifestyle of busy preachers. The introduction succinctly features exegetical information in academic rubrics found in many biblical commentaries such as author, place of Mark in the Gospel tradition, historical background, sources, provenance, and genre. This format is informative without being overwhelming. The book chapters represent different stages in Jesus' ministry such as "The Gospel's Promising Beginnings in Galilee (1:16–3:6)," "The Rocky Way—The Word of Promise and The Disciples Misunderstanding (6:6b–8:26)," and "An Apocalyptic Farewell Address (13:1–37)."

Other features of the commentary are brief introductions to each of the chapters that inform the readers of what to expect in Mark's narrative and *commentary within the commentary* (my characterization). *Commentary within the commentary* are text boxes that provide the readers with additional exegetical information relevant to the pericope being studied. For example in the chapter "Teaching and More Misunderstanding on The Way (9:14–10:52)," Jacobsen inserts boxes explaining Mark's use of the term *Gehenna* and Jewish beliefs and practices as it relates to divorce. Other rhetorical strategies featured include Mark's use of the term *immediately* to introduce a sense of urgency and Mark's continual use of the term *kai* to begin sentences. Though the information contained in the boxes is exegetical, it is presented in a very informal, narrative style.

One of the major strengths of this commentary is the identification and continuous highlighting of key themes and patterns that make Mark's gospel unique. For example, in the introduction, Jacobsen informs readers that Mark's narrative uses rhetorical patterns such as doublets (repeated stories) and intercalation (two stories told sequentially that mutually interpret each other). An example of intercalation is found in 6:6b–13 when Jesus sent the disciples out and 6:30 when they return. In between these pericope, John the Baptist is beheaded. Jacobsen contends that this structure (combined with Jesus' rejection in his home town in 6:1–6a) highlights the perils of discipleship.

One of the factors that Jacobsen highlights is the *apocalyptic mode* in which Mark writes his narrative. For example, in 1:21–28, Jesus demonstrates his authority over an unclean spirit that possessed a man in the synagogue by commanding the spirit to come out of him. Jacobsen contends that by performing the exorcism, Jesus is fighting an apocalyptic battle against forces that hold humanity, and the earth, in a form of slavery. However, Jesus wins the battle. Throughout the commentary, Jacobsen characterizes Jesus' healing as *reign-of-God ministry* that is tied to human need.

Throughout the commentary, Jacobsen strongly advises preachers to avoid anti-Semitism and the temptation to re-inscribe "ancient hatreds" as it relates to characterizing all Jews based on the actions of a few. In his very detailed commentary on the passion narrative in 14:1–15:47 (which includes analysis of the plot structure, narrative rhetoric, setting, and characters), Jacobsen contends that preachers may be able to avoid wholesale characterizations of Jews by

sharing the complexity of the roles of Jewish leaders in society and politics within their Roman context.

From the beginning to the end, Jacobsen offers suggestions of homiletical approaches that honor the biblical context. For example, in 3:20-35 when Jesus claimed that those who do the will of God are his brother, sister, and mother, Jacobsen posits that Mark is offering preachers an opportunity to reconceptualize family by discussing God's kingdom purposes at work in the lives of all of God's people. He advises preachers to treat the story of Bartimaeus (8:22-26) like a call story that invites further conversation about the difficulty of following Jesus.

My gentle critique of this volume is about the *commentary within the commentary*. Since the entire book provides readers with Jacobsen's very helpful and well-informed thoughts and opinions, providing exegetical information without additional commentary would allow readers to experience a nice change in approach and give them unencumbered access to exegetical material. Notwithstanding, this commentary is helpful for all preachers, but especially those who do not have the resources to purchase multiple volumes of biblical commentaries and other exegetical resources but want to develop biblically sound sermons.

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