



Annual Book Review 2009

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It is time for my annual pre-summer book review and suggested reading list. I am surprised this year with how *little* I actually got read. It is not that I didn't set high goals. I did, but as I now ready this review to be printed I am a little disappointed with the number of books I read. One of the benefits of tracking your reading is that you can put your nose to the grind stone and determine to do better in the future. Lord willing, I will.

The summer months are on us and I trust that they will bring opportunity to imbibe deeply in some good books! So if you are looking for some good ideas, I offer the following from my own list of completed readings from the last year.

Theology

Daniel's Prophecy of the 70 Weeks

(BMH Books, 73 pgs) by Alva J. McClain is a short exegetical treatment of Daniel 9:24-27. McClain does an excellent job of dealing with the chronological challenges raised in understanding the magnificent prophecy from a premillennial perspective showing the shortcomings of other interpretive schools of thought. After reading **The Greatness of the Kingdom** by McClain a couple years ago, I purposed to purchase anything written by McClain I could.

A Tale of Two Sons by John MacArthur

(Thomas Nelson, 210 pgs) was a book that made it to the top of my "to read" list as soon as it was released. It is an incredibly engaging and thorough treatment of the Prodigal Son story of Luke 15. Drawn from MacArthur's sermons on the same text, the book makes the parable of the prodigal son come alive. You will be amazed at how understanding the history, culture, and religion of Jesus' day unlocks the scandal of that familiar tale. Included in the back is a very helpful appendix on interpreting parables.

The Problem of Life with God by Tommy Nelson (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 212 pgs) is a readable and entertaining devotional commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes (one of my favorite in the Old Testament). Nelson shows how Solomon wrestled through the big issues in life in trying to live with a Perfect God in an imperfect world. It is a light and enjoyable read.

The Mischief of Sin by Thomas Watson (Soli Deo Gloria Publishers, 162 pgs) was a thought provoking read, though not the best thing I have read by Watson. It is a short book and not necessarily a deep theological treatment of the subject of sin. Watson deals mostly with hideous affects of sin upon us including our bondage to sin and the penalty of sin.

Current Issues/Events

Although **Epicenter: Why the Current Rumbblings in the Middle East will Change Your Future** (Tyndale: 301 pgs) by Joel Rosenberg may fit under the "Theology" section (because of the eschatology) I have included it under the "Current Events" section since Rosenberg shows how the stage is being set in today's world for the War with Gog and Magog prophesied in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Rosenberg arranges his understanding of the details of Ezekiel's prophecy around 10 future headlines we would expect to see as the stage is set. A fascinating read!

Apologetics

Is The New Testament Reliable? A Look At The Historical Evidence by Paul Barnett (Intervarsity Press, 173 pgs) looks at the New Testament as a historical document to see if it holds up the scrutiny from the perspective of historical analysis. Barnett does not address the subjects of inspiration or inerrancy. It is an easy read and a simple introduction to the subject, geared to the skeptical reader who wants to know, "Does the New Testament give reliable historical information concerning Jesus and the early Christians?"

Preaching and Teaching

Between Two Worlds by John Stott (W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 340 pgs) is a classic text on expository preaching and sparked my thinking which culminated in the series of articles on Biblical preaching I recently wrote.¹ Stott comes from an Anglican background so there are occasional liberal ideas (like women pastors) that come to the surface. However, Stott offers a great

¹ This series of articles is archived on our church website at www.kootenaichurch.org.

defense of expository preaching and a thorough explanation of the process of sermon preparation. Only read this if you are given the duty of teaching or preaching on a regular basis and only after you have read a couple other better books like **Rediscovering Expository Preaching** by John MacArthur.

Biographical

The Crusader: Ronald Reagan and the Fall of Communism by Paul Kengor (Regan, 396 pgs) is one of the most thorough treatments of Reagan's quest to defeat communism that I have found. Kengor does a good job of demonstrating that the fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union was not an accident, but was intentional on Reagan's part - an intention he had even before he pursued the Governorship of California! Of particular interest was the amount of recently unclassified documents that Kengor referenced and quoted including NSDDs (National Security Decision Directives) which give a behind the scenes look at what Reagan was doing to defeat the USSR. A **fascinating** read for those who enjoy Cold War history.

Devotional

A Method For Prayer: Freedom in the Face of God by Matthew Henry (Christian Heritage, 304) is written to help those who lead God's people in public prayer. Henry asserts that the best prayers, either public or private are those whose language is biblical and informed by truth. The book is basically an extensive outline of Biblical topics we should address in prayer. Using the language of Scripture as the language of prayer Henry gives a **thorough example of praying for those things that are in accordance with the will of God**. An extensive outline as well as a more condensed outline of Henry's material

is included in the back by editor J. Ligon Duncan III. I read the book very slowly over the course of several months in a devotional manner.

I read **The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment** by Jeremiah Burroughs (Banner of Truth Trust, 228 pgs) in preparation to preach on one verse, Philippians 4:11. Originally published in 1648 the book delivers the depth, scope, and thorough treatment of the subject that you would expect from a puritan writer of the 17 century. Burroughs describes contentment and how to attain it from every conceivable angle. It is a very practical read with plenty of illustrations to illuminate the teaching. Of all the puritan books I have read thus far, this was the easiest read.

Miscellaneous

You might think that **The Five Rituals of Wealth** by Todd Barnhart (Harper Business, 189 pgs) is written by a prosperity preacher. It is not. Most of the book has to do with investment strategies, savings, and understanding stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. It serves as a good primer for those who are interested in learning more about personal finances and investing for the future.

If you enjoy laughing at yourself and all the entrenched evangelical silliness in our churches, then you will love **A Field Guide To Evangelicals and Their Habitat** by Joel Kilpatrick, creator of LarkNews.com, (Harper-San Francisco, 170 pgs). With sarcasm and wit, the book pokes fun at things within modern American evangelicalism which are deserving of ridicule. On the other hand, there are times, when I found myself saying, "Hey! That is not a fair caricature of Christian belief and practice." All in all, a fun book that will make you laugh. Let's face it, some evangelical thinking is as goofy as it is unbiblical.

The Treasure Principle by Randy Alcorn (Multnomah Books, 120 pgs) was a quick read, even for me (I'm not a fast reader). A compact but powerful look at what the Bible says about joyful giving. This book will convict you, encourage you, motivate you and lift your eyes toward Heaven. I read it in preparation to preach through the fourth chapter of Philippians. This is an **excellent** book that will change your perspective on giving. For faithful givers the book will be a source of delight and joy. For those who are not faithful givers, this should light your fire! Give it a read.

It took me 40 days to read **The Love Dare** by Stephen and Alex Kendrick (B&H Publishing Group, 213 pgs) which was published in conjunction with the release of *Fireproof* the recent Christian movie starring Kirk Cameron. The book is designed and intended to be read thoughtfully and slowly over a 40 day period. Each day's reading concludes with a dare, something the reader is challenged to do for their spouse. It is a well written and well thought out book which I think will give you a Biblical perspective on your marriage covenant. It is a good read for either husbands or wives.

Audio Books

Ahhh, the blessings of modern technology! I should probably add to this annual review, the books I have had read to me, even if in an abridged format. Thanks to the digital age in which we live, the hours I have to spend snow blowing, working outside in the garden, or mowing the lawn can be redeemed and put to good use. On top of reading the above, I also listened to the following audio books.

The Last Jihad by Joel Rosenberg is the first in a series of novels written around "end-times" events. This series of novels is not heavy handed in end-times eschatology (though written from a pre-millennial, dispensational perspective) but read instead

like tightly written political suspense thrillers. This book is well written and gripping. The abridged version took about 4 hours of listening. With all the snow blowing that I had to do this last winter, I had it finished in only 2 days!

I read **Free to Choose: A Personal Statement** by Milton Friedman a couple years ago and reviewed that book in this column. I received the Audio book through the American Conservative University Podcast and listened to the 12.5 hour unabridged reading. **Free to Choose** is an explanation of the principles of free market capitalism from the economist who had a tremendous influence on Ronald Reagan. I thoroughly loved the book when I read it and enjoyed just as much the review via audio book.

The Last Days by Joel Rosenberg is the second in a series of novels written about end times events. See **The Last Jihad** above. I have found this series of novels to be an enjoyable diversion. I am looking forward to the next three audio books in this series.

All in all, I am a little disappointed with the number of books and pages that I digested in the last 12 months. It doesn't seem as rich and diverse as year's past. I am not at all sure where my year went or how 12 months slipped by with such a paltry selection of books read, but it will give me something to correct for next year.

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