



Smith, Bryan W. and Phillip A. Brown, II, eds.

A Reader's Hebrew Bible

Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. Pp. xxviii + 1652.
Leather. \$49.99. ISBN 9780310269748.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
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When I initially received this Bible I was immediately impressed with the aesthetic quality of it. This began with the box (a sturdy, glossy box with a window to show the Bible inside) and continued with the cover, Zondervan's trademark Italian Duo-Tone (leather?). I've never encountered this type of cover before, and I can only describe it as being as pliable as bonded leather, with a suede-like texture. The color is a beautiful dark tan, with silver writing on the cover and spine. The pages have silver edges as well. Also included is a goldish-tan ribbon marker.

The book order follows the standard canonical order of the Hebrew Bible and the text that the *Reader's Hebrew Bible (RHB)* utilized was the "version 4.4 of the Westminster Leningrad Codex as found in BibleWorks 7.0." (xii) The editors note that this is virtually identical to the BHS and BHQ texts, with a few minor differences noted in Appendix B (1651-52). The Hebrew font is fairly large and easy on the eyes. I'm not sure of the actual point size, but it's larger than the Hebrew in my copies of the NJPS Tanakh or Stone Edition Tanach, which is a plus. One thing that I did not care for was the large gaps in the text as seen in the picture below.

1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: 2 וְהָאָרֶץ
הָיְתָה תֵהוֹם וְכוֹסֵף וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת
עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אֹר וַיְהי־אֹר: 4 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: 5 וַיִּקְרָא
אֱלֹהִים לְאֹר יוֹם וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ לַיְלָה וַיְהי־עֶרֶב וַיְהי־בֹקֶר יוֹם
אֶחָד: 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי רְקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהי מְבַדֵּל בֵּין
מַיִם לְמַיִם: 7 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ וַיִּבְרָא בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֶשֶׁר
מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֶשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרְקִיעַ וַיְהי־כֵן: 8 וַיִּקְרָא

I don't know if this was intentional or unavoidable due to the typesetting. I much preferred the layout of the poetic sections. In these sections, each verse begins on a new line which results in a much cleaner look. Although I've heard some complaints about

page bleed-through, I didn't find it to be at all distracting or burdensome when reading through various sections of the *RHB*. And due to the already fairly large size, I will have to disagree with reviewers who have called for thicker paper even if it means a larger Bible.

Of course, all Hebrew words that occur 100 times or less have been footnoted, as well as all Aramaic words that occur 25 times or less. All Hebrew (and no Aramaic) words that occur more than 100 times have been included in the glossary (1644-50). These figures do not include proper nouns. All Hebrew proper nouns that occur 100 times or less and all Aramaic proper nouns that occur 25 times or less have been screened in gray. I'm undecided on how much I like this feature. At present, I like the functionality of it, but I'm not so crazy on the actual look of it.

The footnoted glosses come mainly from *HALOT* and *BDB*, although at times when the editors felt these references were insufficient or inadequate, they consulted William L. Holladay's *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* as well as *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (vols. 1-5), edited by D.J.A. Clines. If the same sense of a gloss occurs more than once on a page, then the footnote number remains the same for each gloss. From what I understand, this is an improvement over the *Reader's Greek New Testament* (which I have not had the pleasure of examining). The *Kethib* (i.e., what is "written") and *Qere* (i.e., what should be "read") readings are marked with a superscripted ^K and ^Q accordingly, the *Kethib* without vowel pointing the *Qere* with.

Now onto functionality: My Hebrew is severely limited, and I found myself working through sections of Genesis with much more ease than if I had one of my other diglot texts, or a straight Hebrew text and a lexicon. Granted, I'm still not reading with complete comprehension, but the footnoted glosses are an immense help. I'm actually excited about getting back into learning Hebrew from the two days that I've spent thumbing through the *RHB*! In the introduction, the editors state their purpose saying: "*A Reader's Hebrew Bible (RHB) is designed to facilitate the regular reading of the Scriptures in Hebrew and Aramaic.*" (p. xii) I think that this volume will succeed in doing so for the vast majority of those who pick up a copy. But they also warn: "*Although RHB seeks to facilitate reading by providing glosses, it cannot serve as a replacement for the standard lexica. Reading the text--even in its original languages--is not the same as exegetical study.*" (xvii-xviii) I think that this is a very appropriate statement, and one I'm glad they had the sense to make.

I believe that *RHB* accomplishes what it set out to do, which is make reading the Hebrew Bible much easier, and even appealing. I would anticipate that some people would have a problem with there being no critical apparatus, but to critique on such grounds would be a waste of time. It's meant to be a companion to the BHS or BHQ, not a replacement for them. I do see some room for improvement on the sole basis of the typesetting that I mentioned above. Other than this, I think this Bible is perfect but I'm holding out hope that subsequent volumes will be just a little bit better with the formatting.