COLLINS BIBLE COMPANION

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Category: Reviews

Collins Bible Companion
The only book you need beside the Bible

Martin Manser (Editor)
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Â£25

Category:Â Bibles and Bible Guides
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If you are looking for an introductory guide to the Bible, you could do far worse than get hold of theÂ *Collins Bible Companion*. In a little over 700 pages, this colourful and well laid out book gives an excellent introduction to the themes and literature of the Bible. This isnâ€™t the place to turn if you want to get to grips with the complexities of Hebrew poetry or to sort out in your own mind whether you are for Wright or Piper on Romans; but for someone who is new to the Bible this is a great place to start.

There are five main sections:

1. The Bible in its Setting: Which covers why the Bible was written, its history, geography and cultural setting. This includes an interesting little section on inspiration, a flow chart on how to read a passage in context and some good discussion on Bible themes which are not part of our everyday life; such as sacrifice and covenants. There is nothing earth shattering or novel here, but it is good stuff and easy to read.

2. The Bible Book by Book: This section is self explanatory. Each book of the Bible gets a brief introduction looking at questions such as authorship, purpose and audience. I was surprised to note that the introduction to Isaiah leaves open the possibility that there was more than one author of the book. While I have no personal position on this question (Iâ€™m not qualified to even think about having a position), I prefer it when introductory books are not too dogmatic about contentious issues.

Up till this point, the content is not that different to any of the excellent study Bibles which are available on the market and if this was all that theÂ *Collins Companion* had to offer, I would not recommend it. However, the final three sections are rather different.

3. Bible Teaching This section examines some of the essential truths of Christianity, with a series of studies on subjects such as God, Salvation and the Church. Though they can be a little preachy, these studies are actually very good and would make really good material for individual or group Bible study.

4. Living the Christian Life: With the more theological groundwork laid in section three, there is now a series of studies on various aspects of Christian discipleship. Iâ€™m not convinced that this section

is as strong as the one before it, but the material is useful.

5. Bible Reference: This section kicks off with a brief introduction to the main characters and places in the Bible. This is followed by a section on what the Bible has to say about hot topics such as abortion debt and war. To my mind, it is rather platitudinous. Iâ€™m not convinced that you can say anything worthwhile about the complexity of the biblical teaching on war in a hundred words. Far better (to quote Westlife) to â€œsay nothing at allâ€ than give a false impression that biblical teaching is simplistic. The last part of the reference section is a plan for reading through the Bible in a year, which is a rather good thing.

Lots of good, well renowned people say good things about theÂ *Collins Companion* on the dust jacket; and the book deserves its plaudits. However, I do question whether this single big book is the best way to present the material in it. In reality, most people donâ€™t want to have to cart a large book around with them in addition to their Bible, but if you are going to follow the studies in theÂ *Companion* or the reading plan, thatâ€™s just what you will have to do. It might have made a far better series of paperback books than one big volume.

I have one big gripe about this book and that is on the cover. TheÂ *Collins Bible Companion* makes the claim that it is â€œthe only book you need beside the Bibleâ€ . I donâ€™t know what Collins were thinking when they came out with this silliness. This sort of over the top claim does no one any favours and makes the publishers look daft. This book can stand on its own merits and doesnâ€™t need this sort of hubris.

This post first appeared on the UK Christian Bookshops Directory.