

## Interview with Gordon D. Fee

*How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (0310211182)

*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (0310246040)

**Gordon D. Fee** is professor of New Testament at Regent College.

**Zondervan: How is your second book, *How To Read the Bible Book by Book*, different than your first, *How To read the Bible for All Its Worth*?**

**GDF:** This book is a follow-up to the first, but it is different in every possible way. The first book was intended to help people remove what I call the tendency--because of the long history of the way scripture has been used in the Evangelical world--the tendency to flatten the text so that every word has the same kind of value, as it were, and you do that kind of "promise box" thing, where you take a text, any text, it doesn't matter what context it's in. So then the aim of that book was to help people find the richness of the word in the diversity of the kinds of literature that God has inspired, and that you cannot read psalms the same way you read arguments in the epistles. To do so is a great disservice to what God himself did when he gave us this Scripture. So that book was designed to help people make a considerable paradigm shift with regard to how they read the text.

The second book has a bit of a history to it with Zondervan. They were looking for a survey, and neither Doug nor I could get our heads around that, and through a series of circumstances this format arose. It just absolutely captured me with regard to how to help people read texts intelligently. The passion of the second book is to help people become good readers of the text. That is, it's not intended to be a study guide, but it's intended to be a reader's guide. People who want to read the Bible regularly but who need a sense of working their way (this is an awful analogy) working their way through the "maze" of the word. Even people who read the Bible in a year, three chapters a day, just do that but don't really always have a sense of where they're going or where the text is taking them. So this book is designed to take people by the hand--beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation, and taking it up anywhere in between that they wish--it is to help them read each biblical book on its own, but at the same time, having a sense of how it fits into the big picture of Scripture. So it's quite a different book, but it is predicated on the realities of the first book.

**Zondervan: Could you talk about some of the features of *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*?**

**GDF:** First of all, the opening chapter is crucial to the whole. That's my attempt to get people into the biblical story; that from Genesis to Revelation is a marvelous Story, capital 'S'-God's Story, not our story (it's our story only as we are brought into God's Story).

We have a very consistent format chapter by chapter, and it starts with a very brief introduction to what's going on in each biblical book: its content, authorship (if that's important), date, time period, whatever. It's the kind of stuff that would take up about 5, 10, or 15 pages in a survey, but we've condensed it into a less than a page in each case. Just data. And then there's a very brief section that gives an overview of what each biblical book is basically about. Sometimes these differ. Sometimes structure, sometimes what they do in terms of story, but it's just an overview of the whole.

Then the next two sections are the crucial ones:

There's a section called "Specific Advice for Reading [whatever book you're dealing with]:" what you need to know that is specific with regard to what's going on in this book. That's the section that really tries to help people see the glory of each individual unit or piece of Scripture.

The final section is entitled "A Walk Through [again, whatever book you're dealing with]," and here on the basis of the overview and the specific advice-my imagery is walking, and we're serving as guides-it takes the reader by the hand and says, "read this first section (that we've given, 1:1-2:4 or whatever it is, like in Genesis). Here's what you should see. Watch for this." It's not commentary. It's not an attempt to explain what's going on. It's an attempt to help people observe what the author is doing in this part of the material, and then we take them to the next section, and then the next section, and so on. So it's an attempt to help people see what they're reading. It doesn't function in the same way a study Bible does, because a study Bible puts notes at the bottom for difficult things in the text. We just can't resolve those problems in this book. What we're trying to do is help them to see the big picture and then some ways of doing the big picture in each of the biblical books.

**Zondervan: What level of expertise does a person need to use this book effectively?**

**GDF:** Now that's the one that makes me wince. I've brought a lifetime of expertise to the writing of this text, and it's very difficult for me to know when I'm moving beyond where people are. But I think there is a basic assumption in the book that most of the readers will have some prior knowledge of Scripture, and we designed with the idea that its first function will be for freshman classes in Christian colleges and universities that have a Bible survey class.

Especially on a secular campus where people will take a course like this and have no prior knowledge of Scripture. None. They don't even know how many things in the English language are the result of the King James Version of the Bible, just have no knowledge. I think they will tend to find this just a bit tough going. They in particular would have to read that first chapter in order to have a sense of what's happening. I've tried to keep them in mind, but very frankly, the vast majority of readers are going to be people with some prior acquaintance with Christian Scripture, and I think anybody who could handle freshman college level will be able to handle the book. If you're in Junior High, it might actually be a little tougher going.

**Zondervan: It obviously would be quite useful for someone who wants to be better at what they're doing.**

**GDF:** Absolutely. These are the people who have been reading the Bible all their lives and all of a sudden this little handbook has just opened the text up for them in ways that nothing else ever did.