

Eddies of His Breath: Contemplations of the Word

Eric Ribbens

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Eddies of His Breath is a narrative Christian spiritual commentary that does a good job of highlighting the less considered characters of the Bible.

Eric Ribbens's inspirational scriptural commentary *Eddies of His Breath* seeks to make Hebrew Bible and New Testament stories come to life.

Inspired by Ribbens's attempts to place himself in the biblical stories and imagine what they would have felt like for those involved, the book collects brief stories and character studies based on biblical accounts. It pairs these stories and vignettes with a series of questions designed to encourage thought and exploration, not provide a "right" answer.

All but five of the over forty entries are written in a narrative style, making use of dialogue, description, and evocative sensory details. The best of these stories display a sensual quality, with hints of sexual overtones that are compelling in their representative humanity. Within them, Eve describes to her children how it felt to love Adam physically for the first time, nodding to their sheepishness: "God invented sex, did you know that?" This style helps to transform the Bible into a very human document, filled with people made of flesh and blood.

The text chooses to tell many of its stories from a woman's perspective. This approach makes the biblical stories fresh; it's interesting to imagine the Bible's patriarchs through the eyes of the women or other traditionally sidelined characters within their tales. Deborah speaks about being a mother, and later speaks with a voice "warm, huskily motherly" to Jael after she kills a man.

The book is organized in chronological fashion according to the books of the Bible. The Hebrew Bible section considers topics like creation, sorrow, anger, and love. The New Testament section looks at themes of forgiveness, healing, and the problem of pain. The two sections are of different qualities: the Hebrew Bible tales are stronger, their narrative strategy best indicating the range of the biblical text. The New Testament work is less engaging; its stories are less fleshed out and read as more generic and predictable, with a tendency to sermonize instead of exploring the material.

The included questions turn the book into a workbook. They are open ended and go beyond the presented stories: asking about themes, connecting stories to people's lives, and helping to add personal meaning to the biblical texts. They also highlight different ideas in the text, like God's care in Ruth's story. They make the material more useful, asking difficult and pointed questions about faith and its development.

Often heavy-handed in its Christian theological focus, the book finds original sin in the garden and the cross in Cain's mark. It stays within expected Christian theological grounds and does not treat its New Testament work with the same critical eye given to the earlier reflections. This makes for a strong start but an unsatisfying finish.

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