

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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Isaiah

(*New International Biblical Commentary 13*)

John Goldingay

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson & Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001, x + 397 pp., pb, ISBN (Hendrickson) 1-56563-223-0, ISBN (Paternoster) 0-85364-734-8.

SUMMARY

A well-written commentary combines judicious use of scholarship with theological reflection on the text. Each part of the book is read in the light of the whole and its significance for believers today is never lost sight of. It would make an excellent addition to the library of anyone concerned with understanding and appropriately applying the book of Isaiah today.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ein sehr lesbarer Kommentar, der die wissenschaftliche Forschung sorgfältig verarbeitet, ohne sich in Spekulationen oder unnötigen Details zu verlieren. Der Autor behält besonders die theologische Bedeutung des Textes im Auge, wobei die einzelnen Abschnitte stets als Teil des Gesamtbuches ausgelegt werden. Der Kommentar ist sowohl für Leser geeignet, die sonst kaum Bibelkommentare lesen, als auch für solche, die bereits mit mancher Literatur zu Jesaja vertraut, aber an einer weiteren Perspektive interessiert sind.

RESUMÉ

Voici un commentaire très bien écrit, qui combine technicité et réflexion théologique sur le texte. Chacune des parties du livre est interprétée à la lumière de l'ensemble. L'application au croyant d'aujourd'hui n'est pas négligée. Un bon outil pour l'interprétation du livre d'Ésaïe aujourd'hui.

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There are already a few recent one-volume commentaries (e.g., A. Motyer, B. Webb, B. Childs) and popular two volume commentaries (e.g., W. Brueggemann, C. Seitz & P. Hanson) on the book of Isaiah to choose from but most of them have shortcomings limiting their usefulness for believers looking to understand and appropriately apply this book today. The volume reviewed here is characterised by a number of valuable strengths: (a) Goldingay interprets each part of the book in the light of the whole, (b) he uses up-to-date scholarship judiciously and with a sense of proportion, concentrating on the important and the illuminating, (c) he grapples seriously with the theology of the passages and its implication for us as New Covenant believers, and (d) the volume comes at a very acceptable price.

Goldingay opens 32 pp. of introduction by stressing the importance of vision and speech in the book, before

introducing us to the four human voices in the book, a way of making critical scholarship useful for reading Isaiah. There is Yahweh's ambassador, the prophet Isaiah, with whom the whole book is linked in some way, the disciple who speaks about the prophet in the third person (e.g., in 37:2; 38:1) and is responsible for the introductions in the book, the poet who speaks into a situation 150 years after Isaiah's days, and the preacher whose voice is heard in the last part of the book (chs. 56–66). Goldingay is neither concerned with speculating about the number of people involved in the production of the book nor with reconstructing the process by which the book came into being. Rather, he wants readers to listen to the dialogue of voices heard in the book, as different situations within the history of the Judean community are addressed. Yet in what sense is the book of Isaiah one book? Goldingay identifies an overarching structure, re-use of earlier material later in the book, a common concern with "Judah and Jerusalem", the distinctive description of God as "the Holy One of Israel", the unity evident in how the dialogue between the voices in the book unfolds, and a common concern with what is "right". A worthwhile discussion of the characteristics of communication by "spoken word" and "written word" is followed by an exploration of the theology of the book which focuses on the portrayal of God, Israel, and the world in Isaiah and on spirituality. The latter identifies five priorities for God's people: "trust and hope rather than fear and anxiety", "justice and not merely worship", "faithfulness rather than worship by means of images", "awe rather than confidence", "insight rather than stupidity, self-deception, or blindness". There is of course also an introduction to text, language and historical context of the book. The conclusion looks at the NT lenses through which Isaiah can be read, an important section which maybe could have been more expansive. All in all, the introduction alone is a fine piece of work which presumes minimum prior knowledge and thus will make this commentary accessible even for readers using a biblical commentary for the first time. Yet its fresh approach ensures that it remains interesting even for seasoned users of the genre.

The format of the commentary is the same as in other volumes of the series with section-by-section comment followed by additional notes, offering more detail relating to controversial issues. Some noteworthy decisions are to treat 2:1 as the conclusion of the first section, with 1:1 being understood as the introduction to this section only rather than to the whole book (Goldingay recognises that the chapter as a whole introduces both Isaiah's ministry and the book); to relate 7:15 not to moral discernment but to "the much earlier moment when a child has opinions about food" (p. 68); to inter-

pret the names in 9:6 as descriptive of God rather than the king; and to read 52:13-53:12 as a coronation oracle based on a vision. Where necessary, Goldingay gently points out the shortcomings of the NIV on which the series is based, not only defending more accurate renderings but also pointing out in what ways some of the questionable decisions of the NIV translators may distort our perception of God (e.g., in his discussion on pp. 363-64 of whether to capitalise "Holy Spirit"). As a good commentator, he not only narrows down exegetical options but also, where appropriate, extends the options, allowing for different readings. There are of course details to disagree with but in my view none are of major consequence. It may be that Goldingay shows greater concern for modern sensitivities than theological tradition but he does not adjust the text to either; he tries to shield the text from uncharitable misreadings without blunting its edge. It still leaves work to be done for the theologian and preacher but as an entrée into the text, the commentary leaves little to be desired. It offers more detail than Webb and more theological reflection than Motyer and would be a good buy for all who want help in reading through Isaiah. The preacher needs to supplement this with a more extensive commentary like that by J. N. Oswalt – even an excellent commentary cannot adequately cover a major biblical book like Isaiah in 400 pages.

Thomas Renz, London, England

The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible.

Leo G. Perdue (ed.)

Oxford: Blackwell, 2002 £80 hb,

ISBN 0-631-21071-7

SUMMARY

A book which aims to fill a gap but does not succeed. Its strength is in the discussion of the historicity of the biblical accounts of Ancient Israel and some insight into differing methodologies and ideologies of approaches to the Hebrew Bible. It is neither comprehensive nor detailed enough.

RESUMÉ

Ce livre vise à combler un manque mais passe à côté de son objectif. Son point fort réside dans le traitement de la question de l'historicité des récits bibliques de l'Israël ancien, ainsi que dans un apport éclairant concernant différentes méthodologies et idéologies qui orientent les approches de l'Ancien Testament. Mais il n'est ni suffisamment complet, ni suffisamment détaillé.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Buch versucht, eine Lücke zu füllen, schafft dies aber nicht ganz. Die Stärken liegen in der Diskussion der Historizität der biblischen Berichte über das alte Israel, sowie in einigen Einsichten zu Methodologien

und Ideologien beim Herangehen an die hebräische Bibel. Das Buch ist weder umfassend noch detailliert genug.

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This is a fairly disappointing (and expensive) book. It is neither detailed nor comprehensive enough. 'Flash-points of controversy' would have been a more fitting title. Much attention is given to archaeology and the question of *what was Israel?*, but only the last quarter actually focuses on the books of the Hebrew bible and then the coverage is too short to be useful—John J Collins on Apocalyptic is an exception, but most are nothing more than sketches and musings. The same has to be said about the section on Old Testament theology, so really the book's strength is to be found in its first four sections: 'The Hebrew Bible in Modern Study', 'Israelite and Early Jewish History', 'Archaeology of Israel and Early Judaism' (both contributions by William Dever) and 'The Religious and Social World of Ancient Israel and Early Judaism' (sometimes the criteria for these divisions seem arbitrary—why is the essay on the archaeology of Solomon's temple not in the Archaeology section? Possibly because, as we shall see, it acts as a kind of more conservative response to the trends represented by Carroll and Hoppe, and to an extent, Meyer.)

On the question of the historicity of the settlement period up to the establishment of the monarchy: negatively, the history of Israel's conquest and settlement is neither moral nor significant enough to be reported by other nations. The ruins of Ai and Jericho are earlier than the sackings by the Israelites in Joshua. Nor is Alt's nomadic theory (nomads settling into agriculture at a later stage of development) borne out by archaeology and anthropology. Yet, on the positive side, there is some amount of historical attestation such as to the names of characters and towns in Joshua-Judges. 'Tribes' can be understood as 'chiefdoms'. The general disruption in the region in c13BCE is alluded to at Judg 5:8; the highlands were vacant before Israel filled them. The Egyptian mentioning of Israel as a political unit (Merneptah stele, c 1210 BCE). Also, Egyptians tended to keep quiet about their losses. The question about evidence is—is the bottle half full or half empty? On which side lies 'the burden of proof'?

It is interesting to compare styles of integrating biblical 'truth' with archaeological 'truth'. Hoppe in his essay sticks close to the bible, paraphrasing and summarizing it without leaning on archaeology, but accepting that what the bible describes after the period of the United Monarchy is credible. For Carroll, the Hebrew bible is dominated by theme of displacement and exile and attendant ideologies. So, quite apart from any interest in telling us how it was 'the story of the Bible then reads as propaganda for their claims and position as a kind of citizens-temple community.' (109) For Carroll, this story, when deconstructed shows up just how permanent an experience the diaspora was for the majority