

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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Geen verbond, geen genade. Analyse en evaluatie van het gebod om de Kanaänieten uit te roeien (Deuteronomium 7)

A. Versluis

Zoetermeer: Bockencentrum Academic, 2012; hb., 367 pp., € 29,90; ISBN 978-90-239-2106-6

SUMMARY

This PhD thesis in Dutch (with Summary in English) offers an excellent interpretation of the command to annihilate the Canaanites as found in Deuteronomy 7. The exegesis is followed by a discussion of the biblical and historical contexts, and a biblical-theological interpretation. The author does not explain the command away but says that its reach was limited in time.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Doktoraldissertation auf Holländisch (mit Zusammenfassung auf Englisch) bietet eine ausgezeichnete Interpretation des Gebotes, die Kanaanäer zu vertilgen, wie wir es in Deuteronomium 7 vorfinden. Der Exegese folgt eine Darstellung des biblischen und historischen Umfelds sowie eine biblisch-theologische Auslegung. Der Autor leugnet nicht diesen Befehl, doch er sagt, dass dessen Reichweite zeitlich begrenzt war.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse de doctorat en hollandais (accompagnée d'un résumé en anglais) considère le commandement d'exterminer les Cananéens en Deutéronome chapitre 7. Une excellente exégèse est suivie d'un examen du contexte biblique et du contexte historique, puis d'une approche de théologie biblique. L'auteur ne verse pas dans une interprétation qui évacuerait le commandement, mais considère que sa portée était limitée dans le temps.

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In recent years the question whether religion causes violence has been asked repeatedly by non-Christians and answered in the affirmative. Of course, (evangelical) Christians will say, 'No, it doesn't.' They will emphasize God's love shown in the life and death of Jesus Christ. However, the same Christians may struggle with parts of the Bible, in particular in the Old Testament, which seem to suggest that violence was an integral part of Israel's religion. Many have expressed their doubts and questions in this respect: is the Old Testament not a violent book and is the New Testament not completely different?

In order to answer this question, thorough exegesis of difficult texts and passages is needed and that is what Dr Arie Versluis has done in his study of Deuteronomy

7. The book *Geen verbond, geen genade* is his published PhD thesis – in true Dutch fashion only his initial is given on the cover. Translated into English the book's title is *No covenant, no mercy: An analysis and evaluation of the commandment to exterminate the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 7)*. At the end of the book there is a 4.5 page English Summary.

Versluis studied the commandment to exterminate the nations of Canaan as found in Deuteronomy 7:2: '...and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy.' (NIV) In great detail the author offers a plausible exegesis of this verse and the entire chapter. He concludes that the commandment implies the killing of the Canaanites and should not be interpreted as just removing them. The command does not apply to 'all nations' but is restricted to the Canaanites and only for a particular period, that is the time of entering the land. The reason given in Deuteronomy 7 for this radical measure is that they form a threat to Israel's identity: they would keep Israel from worshipping only the God who led them out of Egypt by tempting them to serve other gods. Hence only a radical removal of anything Canaanite can prevent Israel from losing its special position as the chosen people of God.

Besides, other reasons for the same course of action are given in texts such as Genesis 15:16, Deuteronomy 12:29-31 and 18:9-14, where the Canaanites are linked to terrible things such as child sacrifice and witchcraft. Their sin had reached 'its full measure' (Gen. 15:16, where the name 'Amorites' is a *pars pro toto* for the Canaanites). Versluis investigates the use of child sacrifice which in later times even took place in Israel. He concludes that it is highly probable that this was indeed practised in Canaan.

The thesis also explores ancient and modern interpretations of this difficult command and the way in which people have tried to modify it. Versluis cannot conclude anything else than that the order was given by God, albeit for a restricted period of time. He also pays ample attention to the biblical-theological context of the command, emphasizing Israel's election, which cannot be understood fully. (Why did God choose the people of Israel and no others?) He also points to the progressive revelation of God from the Old to the New Testament; since God's judgement became fully visible in the cross of his Son Jesus, things have changed. The final judgement is still to come and therefore no human beings are asked to perform judgement in the way Israel was once asked to do.

The chapter on the biblical-theological issues con-

tains some comments which I do not find helpful. On page 305 Versluis uses the word 'genocide' ('volkerenmoord') for the commandment to kill the Canaanites. This has the association of xenophobia, destroying people different from ourselves. However, elsewhere he rightly argues that it was not a matter of xenophobia; therefore I think it is better to omit the term genocide. On page 317 Versluis comments (translation mine): 'I cannot understand or explain how God, who in the Old and New Testament is pictured as a God full of love and mercy, commands to destroy complete nations without discernment, apparently without warning or possibility of salvation.' I wonder whether this is a correct description of Israel's entry into the land. After all, Rahab was saved; she indicates that she and all in the land had heard of what God had done for Israel and 'our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you...' (Jos 2:11) Besides, at the Tyndale Old Testament study group 2013, where these issues were discussed again, professor Kenneth Kitchen commented that people have focussed too much on 'large numbers of people being killed', whereas this only happened to a few military posts.

On the whole, however, Versluis offers an extensive and excellent contribution to a difficult issue. I hope his work will be translated into English or German so that many can benefit from this excellent doctoral thesis.

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The Lion has Roared: Theological Themes in the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament

H.G.L. Peels and S.D. Snyman (eds)

Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2012; 241 pp, pb,
\$ 25,20; ISBN 978-1-61097-659-6

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Buch bietet eine systematische Analyse eines jeden prophetischen Buchs im Alten Testament; es konzentriert sich dabei eher auf die Bücher als auf die Propheten selbst und widmet besondere Aufmerksamkeit ihren jeweiligen theologischen Anliegen. Hier handelt es sich um ein Gemeinschaftswerk mit sechzehn Autoren, welche die Hauptrichtung evangelikaler Theologie repräsentieren. Trotz der Vielzahl der Autoren weist der Band einen logischen Zusammenhang auf und eignet sich gut als Arbeitsbuch für Studenten im Grundstudium.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage contient une analyse systématique de chaque livre prophétique de l'Ancien Testament, en s'intéressant aux livres plutôt qu'aux prophètes eux-mêmes, et en considérant plus particulièrement l'apport théologique de chacun d'eux. Il est le fruit de la collaboration de seize auteurs représentant la ligne académique évangélique principale. Cette diversité d'auteurs ne nuit aucunement

à sa cohérence et il constitue un bon manuel pour des étudiants.

SUMMARY

The book offers a systematic analysis of each prophetic book in the Old Testament, focusing on the books rather than on the prophets themselves, and paying particular attention to their respective theological concerns. It is a collaborative work with sixteen contributors representing mainline evangelical scholarship, but in spite of its many authors it is coherent and it is well fit as a textbook for undergraduate students.

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Academia is currently witnessing a flood of publications on prophecy and prophetic literature in the Old Testament. Any new contribution should therefore be met with the critical question of what scholarly concerns and assumed purpose in academia this particular publication is supposed to have. The present book can defend its place in current Old Testament studies on two grounds, I think. First, because it has a theological focus, allowing the theological characteristics and concerns of each prophetic book in the Old Testament to be voiced and given constructive attention. Second, it is precisely because of this theological focus that it is suitable as a textbook for undergraduate studies of the Old Testament. Much of the literature that is currently available on the textbook market concentrates on historical and/or literary questions, to some extent shying away from theological questions.

The present book is a joint enterprise with as many as sixteen contributors. The editors and many of the others come from the Netherlands (Peels) and South Africa (Snyman), but there are also contributors from Belgium, France, Germany, South Korea and the USA. Most of them could probably be characterized as 'evangelical' but not in the fundamentalist sense of the word. In spite of the large number of authors, the book does not fall to pieces. The editors have managed to create a unified whole, where each chapter approaches its particular prophetic book in the same way: (i) the historical setting of the book, (ii) the content and structure of the book, (iii) the theology of the book (to which most of the space is devoted) and (iv) a select bibliography. The book has 18 chapters, that is an introductory chapter and then the expected 15 prophetic books (the three 'large' prophets and the 12 'small' ones) plus Daniel and then also Isaiah 40-66, which is treated as a separate book (cf. below).

A brief review can hardly do justice to all contributors and I will confine myself to one general issue, namely the relationship between prophet and prophetic book. It comes as no surprise that the book emphasizes the role of the prophetic book rather than the prophet. This concurs both with general trends in recent research on prophecy and prophetic literature, and with the kind of canonical approach that seems to be underlying here.