
Old Testament Literature: An Update

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The excellent series of Tyndale Old Testament commentaries is rapidly reaching completion following the recent addition of four new volumes. With them, the consistently high standard of conservative exposition is maintained.

Joyce Baldwin¹ has a gift for understanding Old Testament narrative (as her 'The Message of Genesis 12-50' and 'Esther', both IVP, demonstrate). This is reflected in the introductory essays to her volume on 1 AND 2 SAMUEL. However, such insights are tantalisingly few in the exposition. The result is that the reader will welcome her thoroughly conservative exposition but will probably look to D F Payne's 'Daily Study Bible' (St Andrews Press) or the more scholarly '1 and 2 Samuel' of R P Gordon (Paternoster) for insights into how to teach the books.

David Baker's material on NAHUM, HABBAKUK, ZEPHANIAH² and OBADIAH³ is readable, concise and conservative. It lacks specific application but, after his exposition, it lies very close to the surface of the text! The analyses of Desmond Alexander and Bruce Waltke are equally valuable.³ Alexander argues that Jonah is didactic *history* and is, thus, a welcome voice in the midst of the scepticism found even in conservative circles today. His thorough introductory material is followed by an equally valuable exposition of the text. Waltke on MICAH is a gem!³ An adequate introduction is accompanied by exposition and regular application: for example, he compares Lachish and Hollywood! This feature is especially welcome in a series not noted for such material.

Hubbard on JOEL AND AMOS⁴ is a high class exegesis of these two prophets. His approach is similar to that of Baker: exposition which, though without application, leaves the reader in little doubt as to the significance of these books for today.

All in all, IVP have done the student and Bible teacher proud with the addition of these volumes. We look forward to the rest...not least the forthcoming volume by Hubbard on Hosea.

Richard Brooks has contributed a volume to the Welwyn Commentary Series on LAMENTATIONS.⁵ The overall presentation is uneven. The latter chapters are thoroughly expounded and applied, usually with relevant practical headings (the underlying sermon outlines shine through!) Earlier the material is more piecemeal and thorough explanation of the text is interspersed with the occasional application and a practical summary at the end of the chapter. The style is somewhat clumsy and quaint in places and there is some hermeneutical shallowness and idiosyncratic application. However, this is offset by the evangelistic and practical thrust of the overall presentation. As a practical exposition it ranks highly. The preacher will probably want to supplement it with W C Kaiser: A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering (Moody Press).

Michael Bentley has written a volume in the same series on Haggai and Zechariah **BUILDING FOR GOD'S GLORY**.⁶ He offers an excellent, simple, forthright exposition which gets to the heart of the message of the two books and effectively and consistently applies it to the modern reader. This material bears the evident marks of having been preached and is the better for it! The exposition of the later chapters of Zechariah is especially sensible. Reading this book should take the fear away from preaching prophetic books relevantly.

A new series of Old Testament commentaries, entitled 'The Communicator's Commentary' has been started by Word. The first two volumes on **DEUTERONOMY** (by John C Maxwell) and **JOB** (by David L McKenna) are of the highest standard. The aim of the series is to bridge the gap between standard commentary and sermon by getting scholar-preachers to provide lucid, well-illustrated and well-structured material which shows how the Word of God speaks today. It is based upon a conviction that 'Biblical preaching is the secret of growing churches' (editor's preface). Maxwell⁷ is excellent, especially in the more narrative portions of Deuteronomy. His material betrays a scholarly understanding of the issues and a thoroughly conservative view of the Bible. Supplemented by Craigie (NIOTC, Eerdmans) which offers more exegesis, the preacher and student is well-served on Deuteronomy. Can **JOB** be preached? Perhaps not unless a more schematic or 'overview' approach is adopted. However, McKenna⁸ has shown that there is ample material in Job for study and practical reflection. It lends itself, especially, to devotional reading and meditation. Highly recommended.

The other major series of commentaries produced by Word continues to grow apace. Thirteen (!) new volumes in the 'Word Bible Commentary' have reached the reviewer.

Wenham's volume on **GENESIS 1-15** is now available.⁹ He argues that chapters 1-11 are proto-history designed as a polemic against the prevailing religious and philosophical views in the ancient near east. While his unwillingness to discuss detailed issues of historicity will not satisfy all his readers, the way he unpacks the theology of the early chapters in the light of his basic thesis is very effective. Particularly valuable is his essay on recent research in Genesis: a model of its kind. He notes that modern scholarship has collapsed E into J and that there is an increasing tendency to see P as prior to rather than consequent to J. He notes, too, the fact that there is an increasing willingness to credit the accuracy of J against a second millennial context. He hints that J need not be post-Mosaic. Such critical scholarly and conservative work is welcome (but sadly, see below, too rarely found in this series). Typically, Wenham seeks to indicate the hermeneutical principles which enable the text to speak to us today (though perhaps less so than some of his earlier work). The scholarly preacher will welcome this volume though wish to supplement it with other more expository studies.

The commentary on **EXODUS** by Durham¹⁰ is a massive, detailed theological analysis based around the central theme of Yahweh as present and in the midst of his people. The structure is similar to other volumes in the series and includes the author's own translation, notes, a consideration of form, structure and setting,

commentary and explanation. All these volumes *claim* to be the best in evangelical critical scholarship. However, most show a greater willingness to adopt the 'assured results of modern criticism' and go to such lengths in the use of form and source criticism as to leave the reviewer anxious that the baby has not been thrown out with the bathwater. Most seem to adopt the approach to scripture pioneered by B S Childs which drives a wedge between history/accuracy and theology and to emphasise the latter at the expense of the former. This is true of Durham who can happily speak about J E D P etc. Despite this, his approach is only moderately critical and the book is a treasure trove of valuable insights as to the message of Exodus. It will undoubtedly be the standard work for many years to come.

2 SAMUEL by A A Anderson¹¹ offers a conservative, thorough and clear explanation of the message of the book, though lacking detailed application. More detailed than R P Gordon (1 & 2 Samuel, Paternoster) it provides a thorough supplement. D F Payne (Daily Study Bible) is still the best survey and application of the message of the book.

J Goldingay on DANIEL is a curate's egg typical of both the strengths and weaknesses of this series. There is almost total capitulation to modern liberal criticism of Daniel and the *conservative view is dismissed* as involving a mistaken interpretation of the genre of the book. This over-confident and cavalier approach is highly disappointing. Nevertheless, his exegesis and application is valuable and it is likely that the volume will become a standard for some time to come. What a pity, then, that it fails entirely to present a conservative viewpoint or even interact with it adequately.

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References

1. J G Baldwin, 1 AND 2 SAMUEL, IVP, 299 pp, (paperback) £6.25
2. D W Baker, NAHUM, HABAKKUK AND ZEPHANIAH, IVP, 121 pp, (paperback) £3.75
3. D W Baker, T.D Alexander and B K Waltke, OBADIAH, JONAH AND MICAH, IVP, 207 pp, (paperback) £5.50
4. D A Hubbard, JOEL AND AMOS, IVP, 245 pp, (paperback) £5.95
5. R Brooks, GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS, Evangelical Press, 157 pp, (paperback) £4.95
6. M Bentley, BUILDING FOR GOD'S GLORY, Evangelical Press, 229 pp, (paperback) £5.95
7. J C Maxwell, DEUTERONOMY, Word, 351 pp, £14.95
8. D L McKenna, JOB, Word, 331 pp, £14.95
9. G J Wenham, GENESIS 1-15, Word, 353 pp, £18.95
10. J I Durham, EXODUS, Word, 516 pp, £19.95
11. A A Anderson, 2 SAMUEL, Word, 301 pp, £17.95
12. J E Goldingay, DANIEL, Word, 351 pp, £20.95