
Recent Helps to the Study of the Old Testament

Commentaries:

A useful study on the first eleven chapters of **Genesis** is that by C.C. Cochrane.¹ The book emphasises the theology of these early chapters of the Bible: a needful corrective amid the plethora of titles occupied with the attempt to harmonise the early narratives of Scripture with the facts of scientific discovery. At the same time, however, Cochrane shows leanings toward neo-orthodoxy and its unhelpful and un-Scriptural polarisation of theology and history. This feature, increasingly found in evangelical literature today, vitiates an otherwise useful study.

Baker Book House continue to produce some excellent titles. Worthy of mention is the work on **Proverbs** by R.L. Alden.² The subtitle of this volume describes its purpose: "A commentary on an ancient book of timeless advice". A verse by verse exposition is given which provides the basis for Haddon Robinson's suggestion in the foreward that it could be used for devotional study over a period of one month (there being 31 chapters in Proverbs). At points the application is superficial and Alden makes no consistent or concerted attempt to set the teaching of the book in a Christological context. Nevertheless, the preacher on the Proverbs will probably want to use this contribution to supplement the works of Kidner³, Bridges⁴ and McKane⁵

The best overall commentary to appear recently also comes from the same "stable": W.C. Kaiser's volume on the prophet **Malachi**.⁶ For some time Kaiser has emphasised in his writings that "exegesis has not finished its task when it has told us what the text meant to the ... past; it must continue to work to the point of saying how these exegetically derived **meanings** yield legitimate **principles** that can be **applied** to contemporary listeners in a summons for action and response" (p.9, his emphases). He notes also that such work must "also be simultaneously appropriate for use by the layreader as well as the pastor/scholar" (ad. loc.). Thus, Kaiser's commentary is intended as both that and a prototype or model for such principles.⁷ On both these counts Kaiser scores very highly indeed. Thus, in Appendix A (pages 111-145) he sets out those scholarly procedures which lie behind sound exposition: contextual, syntactical, verbal, theological and homiletical analysis. This is then related in the body of the book (pages 11-109) to an exposition of Malachi which emphasises the unchanging character of the revelation of God given through the prophet and the application of those principles to today. A final appendix (B) reproduces in more permanent form Kaiser's essay on "The usefulness of Biblical Commentaries for Preaching and Bible Study" which

originally appeared in Christianity Today in 1981. He first sets out the characteristics of a good commentary and then goes through several of the arguments which are often used against the use of them. He mentions: the argument which "asserts that the Holy Spirit is the only one who can truly expound to our souls the real meaning of any text"; the assertion "that Scripture is already intelligible to those who possess faith" and the objection that "commentaries are unnecessary since the Word of God has its own compelling power". Finally, he concludes by setting out the defects of modern commentaries and the proper use of good ones.

As a commentary on Malachi this book should be used alongside Baldwin⁸ and the older T.V. Moore⁹ but as an introduction to the proper exposition of the Old Testament prophets it should be a **must** and used together with J.A. Motyer's "Day of the Lion"¹⁰. Thus used the preacher will both enrich his ministry and ensure his messages are truly biblical.

Kaiser would without doubt approve of D. Lane's "**The Cloud and the Silver Lining**".¹¹ This is a quite excellent, simple exposition of **Ezekiel** which is written in such a way as will appeal to the preacher and ordinary reader alike. Adopting the sort of methodology set out by Kaiser, Lane shows the underlying principles of God's revelation to Ezekiel and then indicates how they apply equally relevantly today. For the use of proper hermeneutical techniques and simplicity of expression this volume comes right out of the top drawer!

I.V.P. have been busy of late and produced two new commentaries in the Old Testament Series of Tyndale Commentaries. The first is by G. Lloyd Carr on the **Song of Solomon**¹² which is reviewed later in this section by the Rev. Hywel Jones.

The other title is the volume on **Esther** written by Joyce Baldwin.¹³ Unlike most of the volumes in the series this book can almost be read right through with profit. It is written in a lively style and provides a thorough, expanded paraphrase of the text. In addition, Baldwin shows a considerable sensitivity to the character of Hebrew narrative literature and with a careful literary analysis of the book is able to emphasise its main thrusts. In view of the various points made above it would have improved the volume if a more trenchant commitment to inerrancy were included and if more emphasis had been placed (as in the Ecclesiastes volume in the same series¹⁴) on application. However, despite these shortcomings the volume is a welcome and worthy addition to a series which has consistently maintained a high standard of faithful scholarship in the Old Testament.

R.E.O. White's **A Christian Handbook to the Psalms**¹⁵ provides a "layman" with a brief analysis of each psalm, drawing out the essential features and then applying them to the Christian believer. White seeks to emphasise the historical and pre-Christian context of the Psalms and the consequences of this for Christian interpretation. This is a proper and often neglected pursuit. However, his grasp of salvation

history seems at points defective: he has little grasp of the unfolding typological relationships in biblical revelation and has a tendency to oppose Old Testament and New Testament faith too radically. For all this, however, the volume is very useful in providing a birds-eye view of the Psalter.

Form criticism of the Old Testament has long had a bad press among evangelicals and not without reason since much that has passed under the name has been bad indeed. However, in itself, form criticism is a valid and necessary part of Bible study which we all engage in, although we are not always conscious that we are doing so! The series in which the volume on **1 Kings** by B.O. Long writes¹⁶ is intended to bring together the results of the last 70 years' study in this field.

Long's work still includes some gratuitous assumptions of critical orthodoxy, for example, stories depicting supernatural events are dubbed "legend". Though strictly the word is applied to a recognisable literary form yet it remains unfortunate that the label carries with it an implicit criticism of the historical reliability of the material. This feature, so prominent in form criticism, is to be deplored.

However, essentially concerned with the final canonical form of the Books of the Kings, Long's study helpfully highlights the character of the text and the techniques and emphases which the biblical writer brought to his work. His introductory essay goes a very long way to establishing the folly of postulating multiple recensions of Old

Testament narrative books and exposes some of the unfounded pre-suppositions of many literary and form critics. He argues that the proper literary context is ancient parataxis: a composition built upon the collation of various individual items which are placed with clarity of purpose in a literary plan.

In the main part of the book, which deals with the biblical text, Long uses form critical techniques in such a way as to highlight the work of the author and to emphasise his redactional work to draw attention to the theological intention of the writer of the biblical material.

The volume is not a full-scale commentary. It is also prohibitively expensive (£18.50 for a paperback with glued not stitched pages). This means that few of the readers of this journal will regard purchase of it as good stewardship. However, it is to be hoped that evangelical studies and commentaries will in future build upon the foundations laid by Long: if they do, we shall all be greatly indebted to him.

Ethics

For many evangelical believers the most crucial issue in their relationship with the Old Testament Law is the status of Sunday and how it should be observed. Without wishing to minimise the issue it needs, however, to be pointed out that several other questions of an ultimately vital practical nature have begun to be raised again over the last few years. The areas of debate include:

The adequacy of the threefold division of the Law and of identifying Moral Law with the Ten Commandments.

The relationship of the Law to the believer. Is the Moral Law the means of sanctification? Can a believer be rightly said to be under the Law at all? What does Paul mean when he speaks of our being 'in-lawed' to Christ?

The relevance of the Law to the unbelieving world. Is there a basis in the Law for addressing society on matters of personal morality, politics, economics, etc.

These questions, which mark the emergence of a more vibrant evangelical theological community, have re-aroused interest in a discipline long overgrown with neglect: Old Testament Ethics. The reason for this is that it has been quite properly observed that the starting point of the Christian's ethical pursuit must lie in what was the structure and content of Old Testament ethics. Thus, after eighty years in which no attempt at an introductory volume on the subject has been attempted in English, two books have recently appeared almost simultaneously. Setting out two complementary approaches they do not directly answer all the issues detailed above, but they do provide a basis upon which any answers should be built.

One book, *Living as the People of God*,¹⁷ by C.J.H. Wright was reviewed in *Foundations* Issue 13. The volume of Kaiser is more by way of a reference work, especially devoted to evangelical apologetics.¹⁸ This justifies the somewhat pedestrian approach which is adopted, Kaiser emphasises that Old Testament ethics were personal, internal, eschatological and universal, that is, they applied to the individual, emphasising personal responsibility

and accountability and judged not simply the outward action but also the disposition of the heart. Moreover, they enshrined principles valid for all men while, at the same time, looking forward to fulfilment in Christ. The book argues that Old Testament ethics were deontological, that is, they were a transcript of the divine character, this feature providing the wholeness, consistency and harmony which characterise Old Testament morality. There are, of course, limitations in Old Testament ethics but, says Kaiser, these have been greatly exaggerated. Rather, Old Testament ethics are the foundation upon which all Christian morality must be built since a Christian ethic must be a biblical one. This fact necessitates the discovery of legitimate principles of interpretation, a task which Kaiser seeks to initiate. Not the least important is his observation (so often missed by evangelicals) that the Law was given to a people who were already redeemed and was provided not as a basis for works-salvation but as a standard for redeemed life.

After a summary of the main moral texts of the Old Testament, Kaiser proceeds to detail the content of Old Testament ethics using the Ten Commandments as the basis upon which all subsequent moral instruction was based. This analysis is somewhat synthetic as is Kaiser's suggestion that holiness is the integrating core of Old Testament ethics: at least as prominent a feature in the Old Testament is the love of God. Kaiser is primarily descriptive but he does sometimes attempt to make a Christian application. This is, perhaps, the weakest point of the book since he is inclined

to be superficial and to reflect a position too close to that of the Chalcedon movement. A more rigorous analysis of the structure and character of the Law (such as is offered by Wright) would have been helpful. Nevertheless, there is much exegesis and exposition in this section of the book which is worth its weight in gold: a conclusion which is especially applicable to the major subsection entitled, "The Moral Difficulties of the Old Testament".

The final section of the book is given over to a discussion of the New Testament application of Old Testament laws. Kaiser, quite properly, argues that believers are not finished with the Law but, rather, only the obedience of faith can show the real purpose of the Law and allow a full appreciation of Old Testament ethics. Wright makes a similar point but it is one which neither book tackles at any depth. This is a real pity since a distortion of Pauline emphases has become so axiomatic in most evangelical circles that the Law as a whole is largely neglected. An extended exposé is really required to emphasise the importance of these two studies.

All Pastors and many others should read, mark and learn as they consult these two vitally important books. Go out and sell your shirt for them today!

Biblical Introduction

Carl E. Armerding has recently produced a most useful outline study of the way evangelicals should respond to modern methods of biblical criticism.¹⁹ By argument and example he shows how literary form and textual

criticism may and should be used, although discussing structural criticism he quite rightly concludes that it is a theological dead-end.

The work is fair and balanced, providing a reliable guide in a minefield. However, the review finds it unfortunate that Armerding argues that his 'Evangelical' position is to be distinguished between 'Traditional Conservatives' and 'Rational Criticism'. Such a division suggests an abandonment of a high view of Scripture and that the author is on the 'slippery slope' to liberalism — something true of many 'so-called' evangelicals. However, Armerding does not seem to have rejected the witness of the Scripture to itself and consequently the reviewer fails to discern a basic difference between Armerding and men such as Archer, Young and Wiseman whom he labels 'traditional conservatives'. The only difference (and it is not one of great substance) is that he stands with those who have a less defensive stance in which there are those who are more willing to use the results of modern criticism where they are not inconsistent with biblical faith. But this scarcely deserves a new label and drives an unnecessary wedge between "brethren"!

Biblical Hebrew

Several recent grammars have appeared which have sought to teach Hebrew by means of the inductive method, that is, moving from text to grammar and not vice versa. The most comprehensive is that by La Sor.²⁰ The volume by Sawyer²¹ is excellent for class use. Perhaps the most valuable for the beginner,

especially if he or she is studying alone is the two volume work of Mansoor.²² Volume 1 introduces grammar and the second book provides a series of reading lessons in the Book of Genesis which are intended to increase the student's competence.

References

1. C.C. Cochrane, THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO GENESIS, Eerdmans, 88pp., £4.40.
2. R.L. Alden, PROVERBS, Baker Book House, 222pp., £12.95.
3. F.D. Kidner, PROVERBS, I.V.P., 192pp., £3.95.
4. C. Bridges, PROVERBS, Banner of Truth, 640pp., £6.95.
5. W. McKane, PROVERBS, S.C.M., 670pp., £15.00.
6. W.C. Kaiser, MALACHI, Baker Book House, 171pp., £6.95.
7. W.C. Kaiser, TOWARD AN EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY, Baker Book House, 268pp., £11.95.
8. J.G. Baldwin, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH AND MALACHI, I.V.P., 253pp., £4.95.
9. T.V. Moore, HAGGAI, ZECHARIAH AND MALACHI, Banner of Truth, 180pp., £6.25.
10. J.A. Motyer, THE DAY OF THE LION, I.V.P., 208pp., £3.75.
11. D. Lane, THE CLOUD AND THE SILVER LINING, Evangelical Press, 151pp., £1.95.
12. G. Lloyd Carr, THE SONG OF SOLOMON, I.V.P., 175pp., £4.75 (hd), £3.95 (pbk).
13. J.G. Baldwin, ESTHER, I.V.P., 126pp., £3.75 (hd), £2.95 (pbk).
14. M.A. Eaton, see review in *Foundations* 12.
15. R.E.O. White, A CHRISTIAN HANDBOOK TO THE PSALMS, Paternoster Press/Eerdmans, 220pp., £6.95.
16. B.O. Long, 1 KINGS (Vol. IX OF THE FORMS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE, edited by R. Knierim and G. Tucker), Eerdmans, 265pp., £18.60.
17. C.J.H. Wright: see review in *Foundations* 13.
18. W.C. Kaiser, TOWARDS OLD TESTAMENT ETHICS, Zondervan, 345pp., £13.95.
19. C.E. Armerding, THE OLD TESTAMENT AND CRITICISM, Eerdmans, 134pp., £5.65.
20. W. La Sor, HANDBOOK OF BIBLICAL HEBREW, 2 volumes, Eerdmans, 195 and 284pp., £10.60 for 2.
21. J.F.A. Sawyer, A MODERN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW, Oriel Press (Routledge and Kegan Paul), 216pp., £5.50.
22. M. Mansoor, BIBLICAL HEBREW, 2 volumes, Baker Book House, 249 and 178pp., £12.95 for 2.

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Labour mightily for a healing spirit. Away with all discriminating names whatever that may hinder the applying of balm to heal your wounds ... Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous.

Thomas Brooks