
Book Reviews

Signs and Seals of the Covenant

C.G. Kirkby

£4.00 post free from 'Anworth',
Rectory Hill, Amersham HP6 5HB
193pp

This work first considers the place of baptism within God's covenant of grace, before briefly giving some account of its practice in Christian history. The doctrine of the Church is related to the covenant of grace, and its unity and continuity insisted on. There follows a study of circumcision and baptism, which leads into the topic of Infant Baptism and the Mode of Baptism. Two chapters are then devoted to the doctrine and practice of 'Reformed' Baptists.

This book is commended as a valuable presentation of the biblical arguments for the baptism of believers *and their children*. It is however rather weak in its study of Hebrew and Greek words and apparently restricted in the works consulted. The style is at times repetitious and occasionally there are unnecessary digressions.

The author aims to encourage the biblical practice of Christian baptism as enhancing true scriptural unity. Though the reviewer is wholly in sympathy with such an end, expectation of success is low. However, if those who reject covenant baptism do study the book carefully, it may induce greater respect for those who maintain it.

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1 and 2 Samuel

Robert P. Gordon

Paternoster Press, 1986
375pp (paperback), £12.95

This volume is a useful addition to the literature on Samuel. Its primary purpose is to offer a detailed explanation of the text. As such Gordon is less concerned to uncover formal structures than Klein and makes no attempt to make an application of the book. Paradoxically, however, the author offers a stimulating essay on 'David and Christ' in which he argues that the typological relationship between the two is far more one of contrast than comparison. He says, "However, even when all the good has been put down to David's account it is still a very flawed human being, as dependent upon divine mercy as any other, and ostensibly more than most, who fills the pages of Samuel. If on the other hand, the Hebrew phrase traditionally rendered "a man after his (i.e. God's) own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) actually means "a man of God's own choice" ... then the emphasis is put where it properly belongs — not on any exalted likeness of David to Yahweh, but on the sovereign will of Yahweh who chose David as the instrument of his purpose. Our attention is then more firmly fixed on "the God of David" (2 Ch. 34:3) (p.49). Gordon is an evangelical, though not committed to inerrancy. This has a twofold consequence. On the one hand we are delighted to read, 'While it is true that resurrection is not a central dogma in the Old Testament, there is more chance of establishing its true

place in Israelite thinking if such texts as this (2:6) are not silenced by scholarly presupposition before they have had the opportunity to speak' (p.80). Similarly, he offers a far more critical analysis of many of the traditional theories concerning composition (giving the book a real value for students). On the other hand p.80 also contains a statement that Hebrew cosmology 'represented the world as supported by pillars'. This is an unnecessary concession. It could be better said that the Old Testament is willing to use the mythological language of Canaan without necessarily endorsing it as factually true. This would not then prejudice the question of whether the Old Testament has a pre-scientific cosmology.

Gordon's book will be a welcome supplement to the older work by Driver on exegesis. For theology it will need supplementing with Hertzberg (SCM OT Library, 1964) and/or Klein (1 Samuel, Word Books, 1983). The ordinary reader will, however, probably be content with Payne (Daily Study Bible, St. Andrew Press, 1982).

The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1—39

*(New International Commentary of
the Old Testament)*

*John N. Oswalt
Eerdmans, 1986
746pp, £26.60*

A new NICOT commentary is always anticipated with some excitement since the series has done much to help the preacher and student to understand the message of the Old Testament. The present volume aroused still greater interest in the reviewer since there has been a need for an

evangelical commentary on the prophet Isaiah which inter-reacts with the most recent scholarship. Moreover, when it was discovered that the author teaches at Trinity, Deerfield (the home of so many excellent evangelical scholars) a treat was expected to be in store. This hope was amply fulfilled! Oswalt majors his introductory comments on setting forth the unifying themes of the prophet's message. This, and some powerful supporting arguments, enables him gently but firmly to argue that the entire Book of Isaiah is an anthology of the Isaiah of Jerusalem's utterances. One finds it difficult to believe that anyone in their right senses could come to any different conclusions. Here is considerable help for the theological student.

The exposition is clear and scholarly. It shows theological sensitivity and points up the significance of the prophet's message. Oswalt's explanation of the meaning of 7:14 is also very helpful. He concludes, 'Ahaz's sign must be rooted in its own time and have significance for that time, but it must also extend beyond ... into a much more universal mode if its radical truth is to be more than a vain hope. For such a twofold purpose *ALMA* is admirably suited' (p.211).

The volume is expensive but is surely the first purchase a preacher must make before tackling Isaiah.

*To acquire knowledge for its
own value is vanity; to have it
to edify others is charity; those
who desire it so that they may
be edified — this is wisdom.*

Bernard of Clairvaux