

[MJTM 14 (2012–2013)]

BOOK REVIEW

Daniel I. Block. *Deuteronomy*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. 880 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310210481.

The goal of this commentary series is to provide a resource that will assist in the vital task of bringing an ancient message into a modern context. This resource is to enable a process of moving from original meaning to contemporary significance. Each commentary in the series consists of three sections: original meaning, bridging contexts, and contemporary significance. Block summarizes his commentary as having three purposes: it must help the readers understand the text, it must integrate the theological message of the text with the teachings of Scripture, and it must provide guidance, particularly for pastors and teachers, on the relevance of biblical texts for today (p. 15).

The commentary is a distillation of extensive research, much of which must be found elsewhere. A complementary volume produced by the author is *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflection on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Cascade, 2012). The NIV commentary is an exegetical work that includes theological reflection on each section, which is applied to contemporary life of the Christian and the church. It is an integrated whole, though many aspects of Deuteronomistic research are not addressed.

In keeping with the purpose of the series, critical discussion is kept to a minimum. There is mention of the theory of Wellhausen, in which Deuteronomy is regarded as a seventh-century production intended to facilitate centralization in Judah; the theory of Noth, who regarded Deuteronomy as a theological prologue to the Deuteronomistic history (Joshua to Kings) is limited to one footnote (p. 28). The same is true for the extensive work

of Weinfeld, who views Deuteronomy as a profound monument to the theological revolution of Josianic circles.

Block briefly presents his own concept of Deuteronomy being the voice of Moses. He regards the *terminus a quo* of the composition as the time of Joshua after the crossing of the Jordan, and the *terminus ad quem* as the ninth century, prior to the time of Elijah and Elisha, after which the style of preaching changed dramatically. Rather than a production as a response to the exile, Block thinks that Deuteronomy as we have it came about under the auspices of David, and was probably the document by which David charged Solomon to govern the kingdom (p. 33). The prophet who produced the composition stood in the Mosaic tradition. His teaching provides the theological base for virtually the entire Scriptures, and was the paradigm for much of its literary style.

In structure, the book of Deuteronomy may be viewed in various ways. It is a narrative with theologically embedded speeches. At another level, the first two speeches have been arranged in the distinct form of the Hittite suzerainty treaties. At a third level, however, the book of Deuteronomy presents itself as a series of addresses of Moses to Israel immediately prior to their entrance into the land of Canaan and just prior to his own decease (pp. 35–36). The role of Moses here, however, is not that of a lawgiver but a pastor.

The outline of Deuteronomy (pp. 43–48) follows the form of the three speeches of Moses (1:6–4:43; 4:44–29:1; 29:2–30:20) and the book concludes with the death of Moses (31:1–34:12). Within this outline, ch. 27 is regarded as a later insertion into the structure (pp. 623–24). This chapter has a resemblance to the royal land grant described in boundary stone inscriptions (*naru*). The present structure of 26:16–28:68 may be understood in relation to 11:26–32; the elements of blessing and curse, ceremony and appeal to obedience are found in each of these sections, though in reverse order, as 26:16–19 begins with the theme of obedience.

The strength of the commentary is in the research underlying the exposition of each section. Footnotes are copious and diverse, but are especially informative in providing background

information to an early iron-age context. For example, in reference to the golden calf, mention is made to the Egyptian bull Apis, sacred and emblematic of the god Ptah, or El, the chief Canaanite deity of Ugaritic literature (p. 250). The commentary itself does not deal with exegetical detail, but it is evident that this has been sought in preparation for writing. Occasionally this is reflected in the author's own translation, as in the appeal to the witness of heaven and earth in the emphatic emphasis of 30:19: "The life and death I have put before you; the blessing and the curse" (p. 711). Biblical contexts include reference to the New Testament, such as the Apostle Paul's use of Deuteronomy 13:11–14 in Rom 10:6b–8. Contemporary significance sections at times are drawn from the author's own pastoral experience.

The book of Deuteronomy is broken down into relatively small units for exposition and theological development, frequently more than one to a chapter. The development of the book is provided in detail, with many charts and diagrams to facilitate understanding. It has a lengthy Scripture index, indicative of the copious references in the commentary (pp. 819–58), indexes of ancient literature and ancient Jewish sources, a selected subject index, and an author index. The select bibliography (pp. 49–53) is inclusive of seminal works on Deuteronomy.

This commentary has a wealth of resources for the book of Deuteronomy, with much pedagogic material for the pastor or teacher. It adds significantly to the depth of the series, which is one of the most useful resources for current competent exegesis and exposition. It can be very useful in providing the relevant and significant information of a passage without requiring familiarity with all the details of scholarly research. Pastors, educators, and church leaders will find this among the best of their resources due to its informative content made available efficiently.

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