

[MJTM 15 (2013–2014)]

BOOK REVIEW

Daniel I. Block. *Obadiah: The Kingship Belongs to YHWH. Hearing the Message of Scripture: A Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 128 pp. Hbk. ISBN: 9780310942405.

The business of commentary production has perhaps reached critical mass. The sheer volume of previous scholarly treatments of any number of minutiae requires study materials to become longer and longer every year, with more and more angles of engagement and modes of analysis expected of a given volume. Into this arena the series editors have wisely chosen to forge a path of careful elucidation that not only sticks to the text, but chiefly intends to expound the macro-structure and thought flow contained in the original languages. This fact alone should be received with rejoicing by the scholar, pastor, and layperson alike, for this approach is a necessary step to counteract the atomistic treatments that have long reigned in much exegesis and preaching.

Block has already published multiple full length commentaries on books found in various types of Old Testament literature. Thus, he is an ideal candidate for the writing of a condensed volume that seeks to serve the needs of those who are pastors and teachers (the intended audience according to the back cover). The series introduction succinctly lays out the main goals of the commentary. It seeks to uncover the key theological points of the book, the rhetorical strategy by which they are delivered, and how this message fits within the larger context of the Bible. Significantly, the importance of large scale structure is emphasized, in explicit contrast to individual words and phrases. This interest in the big picture is clear in the format of the commentary, which has sections covering the main idea, literary context, translation

and outline, structure and literary form, explanation of the text, and canonical and practical significance.

Regarding the body of the commentary, the first feature that requires observation and approbation is the translations. While many readers undoubtedly bypass the translation portion of a commentary and dive immediately into the exposition, Block's translations will command attention. Here each Hebrew clause is on its own line, with a careful system of indenting, indicating the structure of the passage as a whole. Furthermore, a large scale outline is placed off to the side, displaying the arrangement of the larger concepts conveyed by the text. The translations themselves are refreshingly faithful to the Hebrew, preserving not only features such as the *waw*-consecutive (often omitted by translators concerned about English style), and even idiomatic phrases and clumsy word order choices are brought out in the translations and wrestled with in the exposition rather than being suppressed. His interaction with secondary sources is adequate and illuminating throughout. Perhaps both unusual and encouraging for a commentary with a target audience of pastors and teachers is the significant discussion of Hebrew lexical and grammatical issues, managing to be both worthwhile for those who know Hebrew and not inaccessible for those who do not. The short section "Canonical and Practical Significance" at the end of the commentary competently tackles the unenviable task of unpacking the book's general significance, as Block shows how the small nation of Edom serves as a model for the nations, humanity as a whole, and ultimately is used to show that dominion belongs to YHWH. Block even goes so far as to trace this kingship function into the New Testament and draw some insightful christological connections.

There can be no doubt that any pastor or teacher would benefit from consulting this commentary. However, several areas in need of improvement can be noted. First, for a volume intending to engage in rhetorical analysis, not only is no definition of "rhetoric" provided, there is no visible engagement with the vast literature that comprises the multitude of different models of self-described "rhetorical" criticism of Scripture. Even the simple framework given in the book's introduction is not attributed

to any source, nor compared to any contrasting schools of thought. Second, there is a similarly significant body of literature relating to the discourse analysis of Hebrew. Predictably, different models exist that use different criteria and methods for classifying discourse types and delineating clausal hierarchy. Once again, none of this literature is cited, and throughout the commentary, many statements are made and assumed about how certain Hebrew forms indicate breaks, emphasis, etc. in the discourse, rather than argued for. Third, the complex allusions to other prophets that exist in *Obadiah* are often noted and illustrated (particularly its literary dependence on *Jeremiah*), but Block does not always draw out the meaning of this intertextual play; the reader expecting the sophistication that has been reached in discussions of the New Testament use of the Old Testament will be disappointed. Fourth, for a commentary that utilizes transliteration rather than the Hebrew text, some of the discussion of the Hebrew employs grammatical terms that will be unfamiliar to the non-specialist.

However, none of these criticisms detract from the immense value that not only this volume, but this series as a whole is likely to provide for those who seek to accurately teach and preach the message of the Old Testament. The volume is a worthwhile read for both preachers and teachers.

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