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BOOK REVIEW

Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 799 pp. Hdbk. US\$49.99.

This book is an update of the authors' seminal introduction to the Old Testament. It is obviously the product of tremendous effort, with numerous illustrations, photos, charts and figures supplementing the authors' discussions. In approaching the task of Old Testament introduction, Hill and Walton's stated objective is not to simply summarize the content of the Old Testament but to provide context and reading strategies that deepen the reader's engagement.

The core of the book is the chapters that delve into the books that make up the Old Testament. The authors present them in the canonical order from Genesis to Malachi, divided into four major divisions (Pentateuch, Historical Books, Poetic Books, Prophets), each with an introductory chapter examining the broader issues affecting that section. For example, the chapter on Wisdom and Poetic literature does an admirable job of drawing in Egyptian and Mesopotamian parallels while emphasizing the uniqueness of the Old Testament in consistently bearing witness to a single deity. Especially useful are figures where the biblical passages are placed alongside their ANE parallels. Similarly, the chapter on the Historical Books orients the reader towards their perspective on history in which the events they portray are connected intimately to the keeping of the covenant between God and Israel.

The discussion of each book begins with a title page detailing key ideas, a purpose statement, a list of major themes, and a statement of how God's presence is articulated in the book. There is some overlap between "Key Ideas" and "Major

Themes,” e.g., one of Deuteronomy’s key ideas is “the importance of a central worship place,” while one of its major themes is “Central Sanctuary,” however, these title pages generally give the reader a good orientation to the discussion that follows. Then there is a book outline, followed by a consideration of authorship, providing a good summation of the different issues relating to authorship before usually adopting a conservative point of view, such as defending Mosaic influence in the Pentateuch and single authorship in Isaiah. Following this is a discussion of the “Background,” which casts the book against its socio-historical backdrop, occasionally drawing from extra-biblical material to provide broader perspective.

Next each book’s content is discussed. A section titled “Purpose and Message” provides a general orientation to the theological thrust of each book, articulating its understanding of God and his relationship with his covenant community. “Structure and Organization” divides each book into its constituent elements, discussing how they relate to the book’s purpose. “Major Themes” is an expansion of the list of themes from the title page, describing their importance in the book. These chapters end with a series of usually thought-provoking discussion questions that could be useful in the classroom, and a partially annotated bibliography for further reading.

At the beginning and end of this book are chapters devoted to issues affecting Old Testament interpretation generally. Chapters entitled “Approaching the Old Testament,” and the “Geography of the Old Testament” precede the discussion of Genesis. These chapters situate the Old Testament in its ANE context. Vivid satellite imagery and maps help to orient the reader spatially to Israel and its location in the ancient world. The “Approaching the Old Testament” chapter has a useful discussion of Hill and Walton’s concept of authority, arguing that if the Old Testament is God’s self-revelation, interpretive authority cannot rest solely on the reader; instead there is truth to which it bears witness. This is useful in establishing immediately that they view it as possible to use the Old Testament as a reliable vehicle to peer at “the world behind the text,” and to argue that it is possible to determine authorial intention, both human and divine.

The book concludes with three chapters grappling with broader biblical theological issues. “What We Have Learned” focuses primarily on the characteristics of God and mentions key passages. Towards the end of this chapter the authors consider the “false dichotomies” of “Judge vs. Savior” and “Law vs. Grace.” These sections are sparse, which is surprising given the significance of the issues, and would be enhanced by mention of passages that people use to build the dichotomies. The chapter entitled “Responding to God” highlights the centrality of worship and appropriate action in the face of God’s holiness while transitioning to a call for social justice today. Finally, Hill and Walton briefly consider the relationship between the testaments in “The Journey to Jesus.” While their treatment of this complex topic is necessarily spotty, they highlight some useful themes, such as faith and God’s relationship with humanity, that bridge the testaments. Their discussion of how the New Testament specifically uses the Old Testament is very basic and could use a mention of the challenges involved in understanding the various methods that the New Testament employs when referencing the Old Testament.

Overall, this is a highly detailed and creative text that is quite suited for introducing students to the depth and breadth of the Old Testament. Its length may be somewhat daunting for beginning seminary students; however the rewards it offers for those who commit to it are significant. The chapters devoted to issues of interpretation greatly enhance its usefulness. The chapters devoted to the individual books are generally thorough and well-developed. The “For Further Reading” sections do a good job of opening up the broader field of research. Hill and Walton succeed in not simply summarizing the content of the Old Testament; reading the Bible alongside this textbook is essential. They have produced a worthy invitation to the study of the Old Testament that deserves consideration for those involved in theological training.

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