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Book Review: Challenging Prophetic Metaphor

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These volumes on Isaiah provide the student of Scripture voluminous exegetical information. Goldingay and Payne give careful attention to key aspects of exegesis: rhetorical structure, meanings of words and phrases, key text critical variants, as well as the most important interpretive debates. They connect key concepts with other OT passages that make a similar point. They are abreast of modern as well as older biblical scholarship.

In spite of the set's many strengths, Goldingay's and Payne's conclusions about the authorship of the book do affect their interpretation in numerous places. While that is totally understandable, the reader must recognize when an interpretation significantly draws on the envisioned setting at least as much as the intrinsic date of the text. Even if there should not be a separate "servant songs" category (as Goldingay and Payne argue), I found their explanation of the identity of the servant somewhat convoluted and ambiguous. Also, they did not give much attention to passages that were problematic to their conclusion.

Regardless, these ICC volumes on Isaiah offer numerous insights into the meaning of Isaiah 40–55 and demand careful study by any student of the book of Isaiah. Unfortunately, the price tag for these volumes will discourage most students of Scripture from including them in their personal libraries.

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Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets. By Julia M. O'Brien. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008, xxii + 202 pp., \$24.95 paper.

The basic issue that Julia O'Brien addresses in *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor* is how the reader of the prophets should respond when the reader's ideology conflicts with the writer's. In other words, if one reads the text and discovers that he or she disagrees with the perspective of the author, is there still a possibility of salvaging the text and using it in theological conversation? O'Brien resolves this dilemma with the assumption that ideological criticism may, on the one hand, not allow the reader to embrace the teaching of the prophetic book, but on the other hand, may provide the catalyst for continuing evolution of one's ideological presuppositions. Ideological criticism offers "readers deeper insight into the cultural scripts that shape their own thinking and thus inform their responses to the text" (p. 60). Thus, as the prophets are read and the writers' faulty world view—particularly that of the outdated views of patriarchy—is encountered, the text forces the reader to look inward and discover where vestiges of these errors remain so that one's ideologies may continue to be honed. As a result, O'Brien attempts to walk a middle road between the conclusion of many feminists that the metaphors used by the prophets—e.g. God as husband, father, and warrior—taint the text to such an extent that it has little to no redeeming value and the conclusion of traditional OT scholarship that was unwilling to challenge the writers' ideologies. In challenging the latter conclusion, she states, "Perhaps abandoning the assumption that value goes hand in hand with assent will allow readers to find other forms of value in their engagement with the Prophetic Books" (p. 51). In challenging the former, she believes part of the answer is reading the text as literature and calls for "engaging [the Bible] as fully as we do other powerfully told stories, to read the Bible for all that it is worth" (p. 52). In other words, the modern reader sees and interprets life through the lens of literature even when there is no agreement with its teachings; we read with presuppositions dictated by our own and our culture's ideology.

Chapter 6, entitled “God as (Angry) Warrior,” gives an example of the author’s reasoning through these issues. After providing an extensive set of passages demonstrating the prophetic warrior motif, O’Brien shows how reading these acts of violence—acts that are personified as being poured out upon women—from the perspective of a feminist ideology leads to a rejection of the prophetic teaching. Whereas some embrace the teaching of books such as Nahum, a feminist certainly cannot because of its violence against women. However, the question remains as to whether she as the reader can find any redeeming value to this metaphor. In response to this, O’Brien concludes that the anger of God as portrayed in Nahum became an opportunity for her to explore how a modern understanding of anger “led me to clarify exactly what offends me about Nahum” (p. 121). Moreover, engagement of Nahum caused her to discover how the justice that is called for might benefit one group while bringing injustice upon another. Thus, her ideological criticism has not caused her to view justice from the biblical perspective, but rather to evaluate how her own concepts of justice may be inadvertently causing injustice to come upon another group. Reading Nahum has caused her to cry out with renewed fervor for “equal justice for all” (p. 123).

Although I will probably find little need for the book in my study, it did provide helpful insight into the mindset of those who approach Scripture in a manner quite different from my approach. For me, Scripture provides the basis for my faith and practice; for her, it is a work of literature upon which modern beliefs and practices carry on mutually-authoritative dialogue, for “the Bible can be engaged rather than simply obeyed” (p. xxi) and the text is “a resource for our lives, even when we cannot or will not submit to its claims” (p. xxii). For me, Scripture paints a picture of the real world to which I conform my views of reality, particularly of my relationship to the God who it presents as gracious and merciful and who provides salvation; for her, the OT presents the archaic practices driven by “problematic ideologies” that modern culture still struggles to overcome. Whereas I view Scripture as authoritative, she prefers not to speak in such terms, for “approaching the Bible in this way leads to theological dead ends and contributes to self-deception in interpretation” (p. 51). With such foundational differences in the way we read the text, I was not surprised by much of the content of the book. What baffled me as I read O’Brien’s interaction with Scripture was her purpose in doing so, for there seems to be little reason for her continued pursuit of reading the OT when the very fabric of its teaching—wisdom sourced in the fear of God—is rejected.

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Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek. By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 159 pp., \$16.99 paper.

Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek represents the third volume on verbal aspect that Constantine Campbell, lecturer in Greek and New Testament at Moore Theological College, has published since 2007. In this volume, Campbell brings together the findings from his two previous works, which build on a non-temporal understanding of Greek tenses, and packages them as an introductory textbook. After an opening chapter highlighting the exegetical significance of verbal aspect, the book is divided into two major sections. Part 1 deals with verbal aspect theory. Campbell begins by defining verbal aspect and explains how it differs from tense and *Aktionsart* (chap. 1). This is followed by a helpful, concise treatment of the history of verbal aspect (chap. 2), an introduction to perfective (chap. 3) and imperfective aspects (chap. 4), and a discussion