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Review: Review of Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah in NAC

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along with the absence of penitential elements and the preservation of the communal laments, seem to have convinced the author that the seven communal laments are to be dated early and understood as having had a ritual usage comparable to that of the *balag/eršemma* texts. The latter came to be used in a regular fashion to appease the gods for unknown offenses.

Certainly the correspondences found between the *balag/eršemma* laments and the communal laments of the Psalter encourage further study. However, as Bouzard himself states, "the evidence remains circumstantial, and at present the question of Israel's specific borrowing cannot be demonstrated with absolute certainty" (p. 201). Yet he concludes his work by suggesting "it is unreasonable to suppose that Israel could have composed communal laments that correspond in so many ways with the *balag/eršemma* texts apart from . . . influence by them" (p. 211).

In conclusion, while Bouzard has presented some reasonable evidences to suggest a dependency between the *balag/eršemma* laments and the communal laments of the Psalter, his concluding statements (quoted above) highlight the inherent weaknesses of his methodology. Although there are significant correspondences between the two sets of literature, the conclusion reached concerning dependency are far from concrete and at times even unconvincing.

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Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah. By Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey. NAC 20. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999, 528 pp., $29.99.

Some years ago, I remember reading a comment by a well-known scholar who was reviewing a volume in a commentary series. The commentary series was both denominational and confessional, and the reviewer sadly noted that it had fallen between two stools. In his mind, it possessed neither the robust, energetic textual exposition expected of evangelical scholarship, nor the stimulating interaction with critical scholarship demanded of a more technical series. Happily, the same cannot be said of this volume in the NAC.

On the title page, the NAC claims to provide an exegetical and theological exposition of Holy Scripture. This statement acknowledges not only the theological unity of each book but places it in the context of the whole Bible and in the setting of the church. The goal is to build up the body of Christ. The series is unapologetically confessional, but clearly strives to be conversant with current textual and critical issues in the wider scholarly community. Introductory issues come first and then a structurally based verse-by-verse interpretation of each book follows from the NIV, although the authors are free to differ with the NIV when they desire. The volume transliterates the Hebrew in the body of the text, but uses the Hebrew characters in the extended footnote discussions. Although the Hebrew student will find the transliterations fascinating for revealing qualities resident in the text, such as assonance and paranomasia, most lay readers will miss the points being made, despite the transliterations.

Kenneth Barker of NIV translation fame writes on the book of Micah. In his introduction, he deals with the historical background, authorship and unity, date, literary analysis, purpose, themes, message, and theological teachings. Then follows a verse-by-verse interpretation based on the book's structural outline. Barker accepts Micah's authorship for both the commonly accepted chaps. 1–3 and the often-disputed chaps. 4–7, but he allows that Micah, his disciple or a later editor may have arranged Micah's oracles, somewhere between 700 and 608 BC. Following Willis, Childs, and

others, Barker embraces a three-part cycle of alternating judgment and salvation sections (p. 33) for the underlying structure of the book. The principle of progressive fulfillment is seen as the key to interpreting Micah's prophecies, and Barker opts for a dispensational understanding of Israel and the nations. For example, the prophecy in Mic 4:1–5 of the exaltation of the Lord's temple *har* progresses from fulfillment in Christ's first coming to his literal reign in a millennial kingdom (pp. 86–87).

Micah 6:1–8 provides a good paradigm for how each section is exegeted. Barker accepts the form-critical consensus that the section is a divine covenant lawsuit (*rîb*), with witnesses called (vv. 1–2), the prosecution's case presented (vv. 3–5), the defendant's response (vv. 6–7), and Yahweh's rebuttal (v. 8) defining his desire to see his people keep the covenant—by doing covenant-justice, mercy, and walking humbly with God, not just by participating in sacrifice. The section moves to the present day with brief application for today's believers, to wit, that worship must be coupled with faithful living and God's past faithfulness demands present loyalty.

Waylon Bailey authors the treatments of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. Like Barker on Micah on introductory issues, he follows the same basic NAC pattern for each book. Not a "hymn of hate," Nahum was originally a work of literature (a *sēper*), circulated to encourage a young Josiah and to comfort Judah (p. 139) with the message that God is a warrior who judges evil (p. 152). The strength of Assyria and the weakness of Israel date the book before 627 BC. After a fine exploration of structural questions, Bailey opts for an outline agreeing with the chapter divisions in the English text (chap. 1 uses hymnic and oracular language for God's character, chap. 2 uses oracular and battle language to announce the Lord's judgment on Nineveh, chap. 3 uses the language of lament to pronounce death on Assyria [p. 151]). On the partial acrostic of Nahum, Bailey explores a number of options, concluding that it was originally that way and remaining agnostic as to why. His summary application of the book cautions that God has the only right to vengeance and that the believer may have to experience evil and wait patiently for the Lord to exercise his right, trusting in his justice.

Habakkuk's ministry revolved around the fall of Nineveh and the rise of Babylon in the last quarter of the seventh century BC. Bailey is unsure whether Habakkuk was a member of a pro-Babylonian party or a cult prophet. He rejects form-critical markers as the decisive key leading to the book's two-part outline and sees a tripartite division based on literary markers in the book's present form instead. Jehoiakim's time (609–598 BC) is Bailey's best proposal for the date of the book. The book is a unity, as shown by the brilliant use of a variety of literary devices in the work that point to an original written work. Bailey's masterful discussion of the literary features of the book is quite thorough and includes helpful tables on the "Structure of the Twelve," "Selected Redaction Theories," "Rhetorical Features," and "Habakkuk as a Lament." In sum, Habakkuk is a book for people of faith, living in the interim, when the revealed promises of God have not yet been fulfilled, and asking why. In his exegesis of Hab 2:4, Bailey zeroes in on God's cryptic answer to the prophet's question of why God punished his own people with a pagan nation more wicked than they: "God promised to spare a remnant based solely on their faithfulness to God" (p. 278). In the interim, when understanding of God's ways is lacking, the righteous remnant must live by faith. In spite of God's judgment through the cruel Babylonians, the righteous will live by faithfulness or steadfastness or loyalty to God in that interim, regardless of the circumstances. In this key verse, I found myself wishing for more from Bailey, perhaps even an excursus, but to no avail.

Zephaniah may have descended from King Hezekiah (1:1 and the unusual fourth generation), and delivered his message in the bleak days before Josiah's reform (prior to 626 BC). Bailey accepts a traditional tripartite outline for the book (1:1–2:3; 2:4–15; 3:1–20). There follows a fine discussion of the current state of scholarship on

Zephaniah, namely its role in the unified meaning of the Book of the Twelve, which Bailey rightly believes must be preceded by work on the literary structure and meaning of each book in the Twelve.

A perusal of the selected bibliography and person index reveals that a broad range of critical scholarship was consulted and cited, although earlier works such as Calvin's were not listed. The person index reveals Bailey's fondness for the question of the meaning of the Book of the Twelve, but the same interest cannot be found in Barker's superb analysis of Micah. The commentary's authors have provided us a fine, well-balanced volume that will serve the scholar, pastor, and serious student exegete or lay teacher. This volume should occupy a useful place in the exegesis of these not-so-"minor" prophets for all who seek to understand their profound message for our day.

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Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey. By Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, 448 pp., $44.99; *Readings From the First-Century World: Primary Sources for New Testament Study.* Edited by Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998, 223 pp., n.p.

A new generation of Biblical-studies textbooks is beginning to appear. On the leading edge of these "new-millennium" books are the volumes in the Encountering Biblical Studies series, under the indefatigable editorial oversight of Walter A. Elwell. Not only are these volumes "reader-friendly" with first-rate graphics, pictures, typesetting, and arrangement, several also feature CD-ROMs. The latter addition signals a new day in publishing. It is hard to imagine any successful survey text hereafter without something comparable, and almost certainly, something better. The age of computer technology, for better and for worse, has changed the way the Bible is being studied.

Elwell and Yarbrough bring together commendable experience and expertise. *Encountering the New Testament* is organized into four main parts: "Jesus and the Gospels," "Acts and the Earliest Church," "Paul and his Epistles," and "General Epistles and Apocalypse." These four main parts are divided into 24 chapters, each of which is introduced by an outline and concluded by review questions, study questions, and basic bibliography for further reading. Each chapter also features attractive sidebars, boxes, and graphics conveying special information, key terms, leading themes, charts, illustrations, maps, diagrams, pictures, and more. One can only use superlatives to describe the packaging and layout of the text.

A helpful preface by the publisher, a word to the professor, and a word to the prospective student state forthrightly what this textbook is and is not. At the end of the book is a nearly 12-page glossary with definitions that are generally fuller than one finds in introductory texts. Besides the answers to the review questions, the appendix contains nearly 11 pages of notes from the 24 chapters. This is followed by subject, Scripture, and name indexes, the latter including both ancient and modern writers and figures who are mentioned in the textbook. In addition, an Instructor's Resource Manual, containing suggestions for use, objective test questions, lecture outlines, among other helpful items, may also be purchased to supplement the main textbook. One can think of little that could have enhanced its usefulness. In short, this survey of the NT establishes a new benchmark.

The viewpoint, of course, is staunchly evangelical. The introductory chapter establishes this stance by discussing the issues of revelation, inspiration, canonicity, and