
LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations

1992

Review: Lamentations

Homer Heater

Liberty University, hheater@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [History of Religions of Eastern Origins Commons](#), [History of Religions of Western Origin Commons](#), [Other Religion Commons](#), and [the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Heater, Homer, "Review: Lamentations" (1992). *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 306.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lts_fac_pubs/306

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

On the whole, Barnes's results are not greatly different from Thiele's, though in certain details he breaks new ground. His hypothesis rests, however, on highly questionable methodology, one demanding far more credulity than what he attributes to Thiele. First he assumes that the synchronisms between the reigns of the kings of Israel and those of Judah "are most likely the result of later Dtr [Deuteronomic] editing" (p. 140). Having disposed of them as secondary, he no longer sees a need to take the data as serious or accurate history and thus as reflecting genuine coregencies. Second, Barnes is open to corruption of the figures in the text and thus to harmonizing emendations when such serve his purpose (p. 147). Third, he dismisses other problems with a wave of the hand, referring, for example, to "the impossibly high regnal total of 52 [years] for Azariah" (p. 148). Such a fast and loose method obviously allows one to accommodate the biblical data to any system one chooses to bring to the text.

The work is not without merit, however. In addition to a valuable review of the problem, Barnes offers important insights such as the fact that the grand total of the years of reign of the kings from David through the 37th year of Jehoiachin in exile (minus one year for each king because of antedating accession years) is 480, exactly the same as the 480 years between the Exodus and the commencement of the construction of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:1). In actual fact, coregencies would reduce that total to about 450 years, but it might now be time to reopen the question as to whether the 480 years of 1 Kings 6:1 are an exact figure. That is, it may (or even must) be basically an accurate figure but perhaps not to the very year. This would not in any case affect the question of the date of the Exodus.

Eugene H. Merrill

Nations under God: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Kings. By Gene Rice. International Theological Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990. 213 pp. Paper, \$10.95.

This well-written commentary with its helpful insights stresses the theological lessons the writer of Kings wanted the readers to learn. Each section of commentary concludes with practical "theological reflections." Rice tends to view the text of 1 Kings from the perspective of the oppressed in society, but he does not project this viewpoint where it does not fit the text. His bibliography is full, and his commentary reflects knowledge of the literature on 1 Kings. Only a few times does he overlook a crucial fact such as God's revelation to David before Solomon was born that Solomon would succeed him on the throne (1 Chron. 22:8-9). Rice also believes that there was no distinction between priests and Levites in Israel until after the Babylonian Exile (p. 61). Statements such as this seem to indicate that the author has accepted some of the conclusions of higher criticism. Nevertheless the total contribution of this volume outweighs this and other deficiencies.

Rice is professor of Old Testament literature and language at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington, DC.

Thomas L. Constable

Lamentations. By Iain Provan. The New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991. 142 pp. \$14.95.

In his introductory material on Lamentations Provan's philosophy about approaches to the study of the Bible is evident. He dashes cold water on com-

mentators whose approach to the Old Testament relies heavily on speculation. He argues that either a single author of Lamentations or an edited work of material by several authors could be supported (furthermore, he says, even Jeremiah's authorship cannot be denied or defended). Regarding provenance, Lamentations could have been written in Palestine or any other place. Since lament language is stereotypical and hyperbolic, there is no way to know with certainty the historical background of the book (and even if one could, Provan says he would not want it to affect his interpretation). Even the phrase "Judah has gone into exile" (1:3) does not necessarily refer to the 587 B.C. exile, since "Judah" is used hyperbolically, i.e., *all* Judah did not go into exile. But is this not being too subtle? Even hyperbolic language is rooted in reality. The "destruction language" of the prophets, which uses hyperbole, nonetheless refers to destruction. Therefore "Judah has gone into exile" means at least "some of Judah" or even "much of Judah" has gone into exile, and this must refer to 587 B.C.

Provan's historical skepticism seems overdrawn. For example the statement that one cannot know any more about Jeremiah from Jeremiah 39–44 than he can about Jesus from the Gospels (pp. 18–19) seems extreme. The Book of Lamentations could have been written anywhere between the sixth and second centuries. However, the lower date seems extreme in light of the presence of Lamentations fragments at Qumran. Provan is skeptical as to whether enough is known about Hebrew poetry to deal with the text on the basis of meter or line length. He justly takes issue with most of the recent conclusions about the theology of the book, particularly that it includes a theology of hope. He concludes that reproach plays a greater role than confession of sin, and doubt is more evident than faith. I agree with the latter statement more than the former, but he is closer to the mark than most. Also he presents a healthy conservatism regarding the Hebrew text itself, rejecting speculative emendations that are not supported by external evidence, arguing plausibly that a "difficult text which is attested" is to be preferred to a "readily comprehensible one which is not."

The last page of the introduction reflects the factors that impel Provan as a commentator. His concept of what a commentary should be is commendable. For want of a better term, one might call it "Socratic." The commentary "should not be read as if it contained 'the meaning' of the text, but rather as a catalyst for the reader's own imaginative interaction with it" (p. 29). If readers of commentaries, particularly those on a lay level, could grasp this sound reasoning, they would come closer to learning the meaning of the text.

Two decisions he has made about his interpretation of the text, however, need to be examined. The first reflects what has come to be known as cononical criticism and the second, a related one, is literary criticism. Overall, both approaches have been salutary to the study of the Old Testament. At the same time, it is troubling when the text is removed from any historical context. Even when the specific historical context cannot be settled (as, e.g., the Book of Job), and one looks for a "suprahistorical" message, it still has original meaning only in light of at least a general theological/historical setting. Before the believer can apply the teaching of a verse or a book to himself, the original, historical setting must be determined. Otherwise the Scriptures can be interpreted in a "willy-nilly" fashion with no controls at all.

Provan's second decision is to interpret the Book of Lamentations as a literary whole. This is laudable, for whether it had one or several authors or whether it is a complete, original composition or a compilation of existing material, the form the book takes in the Bible is the form with which readers must grapple. Form criticism has its place in the study of the text's history, but as an end in itself, it is sterile and leaves the reader without an impelling message.

Provan treats the alphabetic issues in Lamentations rather superficially

(perhaps because so much has been written with so few solid results). Provan could have done much more with the alphabetic structures in the commentary section, but he scarcely refers to them.

In his commentary on the text of Lamentations, Provan gives an overview of each chapter and then comments on the details of each verse. The commentary section is weighted with a vast amount of detailed lexical and textual discussion. This is most helpful, but a commentary should deal more with the overall meaning of the text.

Homer Heater, Jr.

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel: An Exposition of Daniel 9:24-27. By James F. and Marjorie B. Mathenys. Brevard, NC: Jay and Associates Publishers, 1990. 133 pp. Paper, \$6.95.

This is the third in the series of studies on the Book of Daniel by the Mathenys. The first two are *Come Reign over Us* and *Gold, Silver, Brass, Iron: Rethinking the Kingdoms of Daniel 2*. Subsequent studies in this series are planned.

This volume builds on the first two, in which the following points were presented that differ from usual dispensational, premillennial interpretation: (1) "There will be no 'revival' of the Roman Empire," (2) "instead of one state of Israel there will be two," and (3) "the Beast (Antichrist) will come from the northern state of Israel, not from a 'revived' Roman Empire" (p. 5).

The Mathenys say the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:25 begin with "the first decree of Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. . . . to Ezra, the priest and scribe, so that he might institute reform in Jerusalem" (p. 59). As a result the 483 years of the "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" (v. 26) are completed with the beginning of Jesus' ministry marked by His baptism. Jesus' public ministry, climaxed by His crucifixion, occupies the first three and one-half years of the 70th week.

At this point, according to the Mathenys, Israel's clock stopped ticking and will not begin again until after the Church Age (including a time of transition identified as Israel's grace period), which began at Pentecost and will end with the Rapture of the church, followed by another period of transition identified as the Gentiles' grace period. The second half of Israel's 70th week is the "time of Jacob's distress" (Jer. 30:7) or the Great Tribulation, which will end with the Second Coming of Christ to establish His messianic millennial kingdom.

The major problem with this view is that it breaks Daniel's 70th week for Israel into two parts separated by the intercalation of the Church Age that has now continued for two millennia. Though the 70th week is marked by the breaking of the covenant in the middle of the week, the week itself moves continuously from its beginning with the confirming of the covenant (Dan. 9:27) to its conclusion without any intercalation. The intercalation of the Church Age is much more appropriate between the 69 weeks—punctuated by the cutting off of Messiah (Dan. 9:26)—and the 70th week.

John A. Witmer

Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary. By David Allan Hubbard. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989. 245 pp. Paper, \$9.95.

The high standard of readable and practical scholarship set by the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries is ably maintained in this excellent contribution to that series. But Hubbard's practicality is not at the expense of close and