

Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets

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The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets completes IVP's highly regarded Black Dictionary reference series, totaling eight titles (the first volume in the series to be revised was released in October 2013). Those familiar with the series will not be surprised to see that this installment continues the high standard begun with earlier releases. The series covers both the Old and New Testaments, and the *DOTP* treats the major and minor prophets, Lamentations, and Daniel.

DOTP is comprised of 113 separate articles, authored by a wide range of Christian and Jewish scholars. While the publisher is often noted for representing evangelical scholarship, the editors attempted here to "portray a broad picture of contemporary scholarship on the Prophets" (ix). This ultimately is a strength of *DOTP* as it reflects the multifarious approaches current among scholars today. For instance, in "Isaiah: Book of," H. G. M. Williamson gives a reasonable (not dogmatic) defense for multiple author composition, while Douglas Stuart ("Jonah: Book of") offers "ample evidence to support the historicity of [Jonah]" (460).

As expected, each of the prophetic books receives treatment in a separate article. However, the major prophets also receive a second article on reception history ("History of Interpretation"). Additionally, the minor prophets are treated collectively in two similarly styled articles (as "Book of the Twelve"). There are also a number of articles on interpretive approaches, such as "Canonical Criticism," "Feminist Interpretation," "Intertextuality/Innerbiblical Interpretation," "Rhetorical Criticism," etc. Articles also address major recurring themes in the prophets, such as "Angels, Messengers, Heavenly Beings," "Covenant," "Day of the Lord," "Justice, Righteousness," and "Warfare and Divine Warfare."

The scope of articles that have broad interest to Old Testament studies is narrowed to the intersection of the topic with the prophetic books. For instance, Brad E. Kelle's 26-page article "Israelite History" devotes less than one page to a subsection called "Assyria, Israel and Judah Prior to the Mid-Eighth Century BC." Likewise, in his article "Afterlife," Philip S. Johnston focuses exclusively on the themes of the afterlife found in the prophetic literature.

The most striking omission from *DOTP* is a separate article on Assyria. (Bill T. Arnold's article, "Babylon," spans eight pages.) Given Assyria's prominent role in the destruction of Samaria and the royal dynasties of the Northern Kingdom, as well as the attention given to Assyria by the eighth-century prophets, this is surprising. The subject is instead covered loosely in a seven-page subsection within Kelle's article, "Israelite History."

The article "Habakkuk" by J. K. Bruckner is representative of the treatment given to most of the prophetic books. The book is discussed in its final canonical form, and only brief mention is made that "most scholars take the combination of genres as evidence of an uncertain redaction history by the author and/or editors" (295). Bruckner's discussion of genres in Habakkuk is surprisingly balanced. Instead of choosing between two exclusive options as most scholars tend, he reads 1:1-4 and 1:12-17 as a "lament used in a dialogical complaint" (295). This interpretation directs the reader away from the tendency of some to view the book as a product of the wisdom tradition. The article does not attempt to outline major viewpoints on issues of interpretive dispute, as often is the case in similar encyclopedic books. For example, the view is taken that the "wicked" in 1:4 is a reference to Jehoiakim (and company), with no discussion of the alternative theories that the text may indicate the Assyrians or the Babylonians. The article concludes with a brief, yet balanced look at the New Testament appropriation of Habakkuk 2:4b ("the righteous will live by his faith") in Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Similar to the discussion of other prophetic books in *DOTP*, Bruckner's article maintains balanced focus on the biblical text (with copious cross references) with little attention to divergent scholarly claims. He concludes with a helpful bibliography containing the major commentaries and monographs produced in the last half-century.

“Rhetorical Criticism,” by Joel D. Barker (whose doctoral work under Boda was a rhetorical reading of Joel), serves as a very useful introduction to the methodology with an informed discussion of the history of the discipline. Although a wide variety of approaches to the prophetic literature has fallen under the rubric of rhetorical criticism, Barker demonstrates sensitivity to the current direction of scholarship, noting that it “provides a well-suited approach to consider the ways in which the prophets attempted to persuade their audiences” (677). He gives a brief discussion of Muilenburg’s seminal address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 1968 and the impact he had on rhetorical criticism. However, he rightly notes that Muilenburg’s approach “bears a strong resemblance to aesthetic or stylistic analysis as it focuses on the text’s use of literary devices as an end in itself” (678). More attention is given to the developments by scholars such as Wilhelm Wuellner and Yehoshua Gitay, who both sought to reestablish a more classical understanding of rhetoric as a means of persuasion. Barker does a great service to those new to rhetorical criticism by suggesting a methodology adapted from George Kennedy’s work on rhetoric in the New Testament. The essay concludes with a consideration of newer methodologies, such as speech-act theory, “interested” methodologies (i.e., ideological criticism), and discourse analysis.

The article “Covenant” by Tiberius Rata provides an illustration of the treatment given to an ancient Near Eastern cultural practice by *DOTP*. Rata works from the premise that covenant is an early development within Israel’s history (fifteenth century BCE). After a very brief discussion of covenants in general, the article is organized around the bearing of four covenants on the prophetic literature: 1) the Abrahamic covenant, 2) the Mosaic covenant, 3) the Davidic covenant, and 4) the new covenant (three of these sections are divided into subsections on the Major Prophets and Minor Prophets). The longest discussion, not surprisingly, concerns the Mosaic covenant. Rata demonstrates how the prophets often operated by criticizing the people for breaking the stipulations of the covenant “by referring back to the Ten Commandments” (100). The ensuing analysis systematically moves through allusions to the Decalogue within the prophetic literature (e.g., idolatry, Sabbath, bloodshed, adultery, stealing, and lying). A minor subsection is given to short treatment of the priestly covenant. The section on the new covenant discusses not only the text in Jeremiah 31, but also other allusions as found in Isaiah and Ezekiel. Although he makes reference to it, it is unfortunate that Rata does not devote some attention exclusively to the Hittite suzerainty treaties of the second millennium. The stipulations are certainly important to understanding the prophetic literature, but so too are the historical prologue, witnesses, and sanctions (blessings and curses are treated separately in an article by Robin Routledge).

Aside from the minor criticisms mentioned above, *DOTP* is a remarkable resource for its single-minded focus on the prophetic literature. It is refreshing to see diverse perspectives represented among the contributors, and the quality of the articles is consistently high. This important resource should quickly become a necessary reference tool for all engaged in research in the prophetic literature, from undergraduate to graduate level. Theological libraries with a program in biblical literature will find this volume to be a useful addition to their collection.

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