

BOOK REVIEWS

A Commentary on Judges and Ruth, by Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013. 697 pp. \$39.99.

Robert B. Chisholm, Senior Professor of Old Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, provides a fine contribution to the emerging Kregel Exegetical Library Series. Writing “with pastors and teachers in mind,” Chisholm aims to offer “accurate, relevant exposition of the Bible” by means of “a literary-theological method that is sensitive to the author’s literary strategies and...the text’s theological message” (14–15). In these goals Chisholm largely succeeds. Those familiar with Chisholm’s other writings will not be disappointed; he combines his customarily clear writing style and careful approach to difficult texts with a thorough knowledge of the pertinent literature.

The commentary features Chisholm’s own translation of the books, based closely upon the work he prepared for the *NET Bible* (many of the notes are also a condensed version of the *NET Bible* notes). He incorporates textual linguistics by structuring his translations in a phrase-by-phrase fashion according to the three main components of biblical Hebrew narrative: (1) mainline (*wayyiqtol*) clauses, (2) offline clauses (e.g., disjunctive, *weqatal*, negated perfect, or asyndetic perfect clauses) (marked in boldface type), and (3) dialogue (marked in italics) (81–86). Exegetes trained in discourse linguistics are apt to find this arrangement pleasing; others with a more traditional syntactical background may find it distracting at points. For each major unit the translation is followed by several successive sections: (1) an outline of the passage, (2) a detailed explanation of the text’s literary structure (focusing principally upon textual boundaries, transitions, and summaries), (3) an exposition of the passage (where most of the exegetical work is presented), and (4) a text-to-sermon overview entitled “message and application” in which he seeks to develop the thematic emphases, exegetical ideas, theological principles, and homiletical trajectories latent within the passage. Chisholm exhibits a conservative approach to the Hebrew text, as his expositions mainly follow the MT, although in a few places he prefers the LXX (e.g., 383, n. 28) or emends the text (e.g., 646, n. 21). There are fewer technical comments on the Hebrew text than one might find in other commentaries, but this appears to reflect the aim and orientation of this particular series.

As might be expected, Chisholm’s treatment of Judges constitutes the lion’s share of the commentary (545 pp.). He views the book as chronicling a recidivist stage in Israel’s history, in which “the covenant community disintegrated morally and socially as it assimilated Canaanite culture and beliefs” (17), a precursor and foil to the monarchical phase

occupying Samuel–Kings. The thematic emphases of the book include a concern for Yahweh’s reputation in light of Israel’s failure, a warning against the dangers of assimilation, and a rationale for the critical need of competent, godly leadership (58–62). Dismissing proposals for a chiasmic structure to the book (which he considers “imposed” [27]), he outlines the book straightforwardly as follows: (1) prologue with two subunits (1:1–2:5; 2:6–3:6); (2) Othniel (3:7–11); (3) Ehud (3:12–31); (4) Deborah and Barak (4:1–5:31); (5) Gideon (6:1–10:5); (6) Jephthah (10:6–12:15); (7) Samson (13:1–16:31); and (8) epilogue with two subunits (17:1–19:1a; 19:1b–21:25).

Chisholm appears willing to take a more generally positive and sympathetic view of several of the characters and events in Judges, as compared with other commentators who are more consistently critical and disparaging (e.g., Klein, Block, Olson, McCann, Matthews, Wong). Thus, for example, Chisholm views the opening of the book, with the Israelites’ initial question about who should go up to fight (1:1), Judah’s alliance with Simeon (1:3), and Judah’s campaign against Adoni-Bezek (1:4–7), in a positive vein as a “natural” outcome in that Judah is “ready for battle and not hesitant in any way” (120–21) (cf. Matthews’s view that the “sense of leaderlessness” sets the tone for the rest of the book, that the alliance demonstrates a “violation of divine instructions,” and that the savage treatment of Adoni-Bezek mirrors ANE methods [*Judges & Ruth*, 38–39]). Chisholm suggests that Gideon’s request for a sign is possibly motivated by the Spirit (278, n. 94) and deems it an act of faith (281) (although elsewhere he depicts it as regressive [285]), and he assesses Gideon’s battle cry “For the Lord and for Gideon” (7:18, 20) as indicative of Gideon’s allegiance to Yahweh in that Gideon is “the Lord’s instrument of war” (285) (cf. McCann [67–68], Block [282], and Olson [803], who view this instead as an act of self-assertion by Gideon foreshadowing his questionable political and religious aspirations which become evident in the latter stages of the narrative).

On a few other notable interpretive issues, Chisholm downplays the large numbers consistently cited in Judges as likely a reference to “military contingents” rather than “1,000s” (e.g., 178, n. 16), views Jephthah as having actually offered his daughter as a burnt sacrifice (355–58), understands Samson’s Nazirite status as possibly pertaining only to the cutting of his hair rather than abstinence from fermented beverages or contact with a corpse (395–96), and interprets the mention of the exile of the land in 18:30 as a reference to the exile of the northern kingdom by a redactor working sometime after 734–721 BC (462, n. 82).

Chisholm views Ruth as a welcome transition from the downward spiral of Judges and the canonical link to the “worthy wife” motif of Proverbs (549–50). He divides the book into four “acts” preceded by a prologue and concluded by a genealogical epilogue. The thematic emphases of the book include God’s concern for needy people, providential provision through human agency, divine remuneration of those who are allegiant to their ordained relationships, and the nature of sacrificial love that will culminate in a “messianic trajectory” (562–67). As with Judges,

he tends to adopt a more positive approach to characters and events in Ruth. Thus, the move of Elimelech and his family to Moab, the marriage of his sons to Moabite women, and their subsequent deaths are not to be viewed negatively as entailing divine judgment (*contra* Block) but are incidental details in the story (594–99).

This commentary will serve well pastors and teachers with a general or even limited knowledge of biblical Hebrew. Chisholm is often insightful and perceptive. His homiletical trajectories are both a strength and weakness to the commentary: his applications tend to be moralistic rather than canonical or biblical-theological in outlook. His sermon ideas may stimulate one's thinking but perhaps will be of limited value in developing sermons. On the whole, I commend this work to those who plan to preach or teach in Judges or Ruth.

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Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoeberger. Nashville: B&H, 2015. xiii + 242 pp. \$24.99.

The question “For whom did Jesus die?” has a robust tradition of point and counterpoint in theological discourse since the late Reformation. Perhaps the most significant treatise on the Calvinistic side is John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death Christ* that put forward the classic argument for a “limited” atonement.” Those more inclined toward an Arminian understanding on the extent of the atonement have their champions, from John Wesley's sermon “Free Grace” (1739) to Roger Olson's *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (IVP, 2006). At times the debate has been rigorous and the stakes, seemingly, high. No less a figure as Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), robust “five-point Calvinist” that he was, was accused by contemporary James Wells (1803–1872) of failing to appreciate the implications of holding to a limited atonement. If the atonement was limited, the lost could not be invited to accept the Gospel since it was not *intended* for them. Calvinists and Arminians have debated with each other and with everyone in between the nature and extent of Christ death.

Seldom has a debate of this intensity been held in such a civil way as is presented in the recent volume under consideration. Andrew Naselli and Mark Snoeberger have brought together three contemporary scholars to argue their respective views under one cover—Carl Trueman, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary; Grant Osborne, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and John Hammett, John Leadley Dagg Chair of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. The classic polar-opposite sides of this debate are “definite atonement” held by Trueman and “universally sufficient atonement” held by Osborne. Arguing a mediating position is Hammett, who defends “multiple-