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BOOK REVIEW

MALACHI (HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT)

Snyman S.D. (Fanie), *Malachi (Historical commentary on the Old Testament)*, (Leuven / Paris / Bristol, Ct: Peeters), 2015

Fanie Snyman, from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, is one of the best known researchers in the field of Old Testament prophecy. He published articles on Jeremiah and on some of the so-called Minor Prophets, viz. Amos, Obadiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. The bulk of his studies in this area, however, explore Malachi. The number may not be complete, but I counted seven essays on nearly every pericope of the short book. The list begins with a study on “Antitheses in Malachi 1:2-5”, which appeared in the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1986), and ends with a paper on “Malachi 4:4-6 (Heb. 3:22-24) as a point of convergence in the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible”, published in 2012 in *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. Obviously, his articles covered the entire text of the book.

Thus, the commentary on Malachi in the renowned *Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* series is the fruit of decades of studies on the book. Whoever had the duty or the privilege to work on Malachi, as I had when writing his own commentary in *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (2011), is aware of the difficulties this book offers. Difficulties begin with the first line. What does the first word, *maśśāʾ*, mean? Fanie Snyman’s commentary offers two possible translations: “A prophetic announcement/message”. How is it related to the next two words: “word of Yahweh”? The commentary mentions three possible relationships. And what is

the meaning of “Malachi” in the superscription? Is it a proper name, the name of the prophet? Or a pseudonym, literally meaning “my messenger”? Or is it both? We are still in verse 1, counting just seven words in Hebrew!

One of the main problems of Malachi is its form. It is unique within the Hebrew Bible. But how could it be named? Fanie Snyman decides not to focus on one of the proposals made in the history of research: “The point of view adopted here is that no single description of a particular genre would capture the genre(s) used in the book. It is argued that the book made use of a number of genres, blended them together so that the end result is a mixture of genres (*Mischgattungen*) in each of the six units” (9f).

There is a general consensus that the book of Malachi can be divided into six units – plus the superscription in 1:1 and a conclusion in 3:22-24 (Engl. 4:4-6). As noted in the above quotation, Fanie Snyman shares this consensus – with one exception. Generally, the units are identified as 1:2-5/1:6-2:9/2:10-16/2:17-3:5/3:6-12/3:13-21. In this journal’s 2011 volume, Fanie argued that, in one case, the separation should not be between 3:5 and 3:6, but between 3:7A and 3:7B. The proposal is rather new and has not yet been accepted by others. This, however, does not mean anything about its validity. Future discussions will have to take this into account.

It is nearly impossible to comment on a commentary without repeating the entire book. I will simply highlight three points, which I appreciate most. First, the commentary abounds in respect towards the text. Contrasts and antitheses are not taken as a pretext to split the text up into a multitude of layers and redactions, but are taken seriously as a literary device employed by the book. Secondly, Fanie Snyman is very cautious in his judgements and decisions. He rather presents different possibilities than utter one-sided positions. Thirdly, the author always treats others in a very fair manner. He presents their opinions as objectively as possible, especially when he does not agree.

This commentary is a new and very useful tool for the study on the often-underestimated last book of the Old Testament prophets.