

Blenkinsopp, Joseph, ed. *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 19. New York: Doubleday, 2000. 524 pp. Cloth. \$50.00.

Joseph Blenkinsopp has been at the University of Notre Dame since 1970, where he is the John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies. He is a seasoned scholar, known for such works as *The Pentateuch*, vol. 5 in the Anchor Bible Reference Library; *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Westminster, 1983); and *The Pentateuch* (SCM, 1992).

This commentary is the first of three volumes on the book of Isaiah in the Anchor Bible series. It begins with a translation of the Hebrew text (1-70), which the author divides into pericopes and presents in their distinctive styles of either poetry or prose. He later claims, however, that this distinction is somewhat artificial "since it is often impossible to distinguish between rhythmic prose and prosodically irregular verse" (78). Each new section of the translation is clearly demarcated by bold, capitalized letters, with references in parentheses. On a few occasions he amalgamates passages on the same topic. An example of this is seen when he brings together 10:1-4 and 5:8-24 as "A Series of Woes" (11-12).

In the "Introduction" (73-111), Blenkinsopp indicates "that Isaiah's authorship of the sayings is weakly attested" (73) and the book may be a compilation from the Second Temple period, the editorial process having been completed around 150 B.C.E. (84). He allows, however, for "a significant eighth-century-B.C.E. Isaiah substratum" (74) as observed in "a degree of consistency of language, subject matter, and theme throughout Isa 1-39" (*ibid.*). Despite numerous *hapax legomena* and textual problems, the MT can be trusted, he maintains, especially in light of comparisons with the LXX and texts from Qumran. Indeed, "Next to Psalms and Deuteronomy, Isaiah is the best represented text from Qumran, with at least twenty-one copies" (76).

While specific classifications of genre occur in the book, Blenkinsopp proposes the term "*recitative*" to describe those long discourses which are usually presented as poetry. This term allows for "variations in rhythmic regularity and cadence" (79-80) in the public pronouncements of the prophet.

According to Blenkinsopp, scholarship cannot be absolute in dating the Isaiah texts (86), and while parts of the book may even exhibit striking differences (89), as a whole it has profoundly influenced the NT, particularly the Gospels. Consequently, the identity, beliefs, and practices of Christianity have been deeply affected by the reading and interpretation of Isaiah (95-98).

In sketching the historical context of the book (98-105), Blenkinsopp generally follows the Albright system. He concludes his introductory remarks by featuring such aspects of Isaianic theology as the sovereignty of God, morality and ethical behavior, justice and righteousness, and the remnant (105-111).

The bibliography (115-167), though extensive, is not exhaustive. It is divided into several distinct categories: texts and versions, commentaries (in chronological order), Isa 1-12, 13-27, 28-35, and 36-39.

The bulk of the commentary deals with "Translation, Notes and Comments" (169-489). This is divided into four distinct sections: Isa 1-12, 13-27, 28-35, and 36-39 (as reflected even in the bibliography). Blenkinsopp had earlier contended that much of the material "could not have been authored by Isaiah ben Amoz whose

name is on the title page" (82). In fact, all of chapters 1-39 are "a collection of compilations . . . each with its own history," showing diversity in "style, content, origin and date" (*ibid.*). His approach to each section is identical: a general introduction to the section, bibliographic references for each pericope (though only the last names are given), translation of the pericope (rendered exactly as that which occupies the first seventy pages of the commentary), notes on the translation, and, finally, commentary on the pericope.

Several notable characteristics may be readily observed in this section. There is an emphasis on linguistics, especially with exact translation and comparison with the textual witnesses, such as the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and 1QIsa. Blenkinsopp deals with the connections between Isaiah and other prophetic literature. For example, Blenkinsopp demonstrates the harmony of thought between Isaiah and Amos regarding the ostentatious display of ill-gotten wealth gleaned from the oppression of the poor (201). There is valuable stress on interconnected themes in Isa 1-39, e.g., the themes of Zion (191) and of divine holiness, both of which seem to be woven throughout the book. Blenkinsopp believes that the latter theme, as expressed in the title "Holy One of Israel," certainly "confers a certain impression of unity on the book" (225). Each pericope is discussed as a whole, with attention occasionally drawn to specific verses. Finally, Blenkinsopp engages in dynamic dialogue with other scholars and recognizes dialogue between Isaiah and the rest of the Bible.

There are certain weaknesses in this volume. It is surprising that in discussing Isaianic theology, Blenkinsopp is virtually silent on such significant issues as judgment, salvation, and eschatology. It is true that there are the ominous tones of punitive action (e.g., 2:6-22; 10:15-19; 21:1-10), but there is also the call for repentance and the assurance of forgiveness and salvation (30:19-26; 32:15-20). Judgment and salvation are two sides of the same coin, and these factors should be included in the discussion of Isaianic theology as a matter of course. The translation (1-70) seems to be topically arranged, which may be rather confusing in some places, especially for the target audience of the series, namely, "the general reader with no special formal training in biblical studies" (ii). This problem is evident in the following arrangement: 5:1-7; 10:1-4 and 5:8-24; 9:7-20 + 5:25; 5:26-30; then 6:1-13. The author is not clear as to the reasons for such a disjointed arrangement. He should have been more careful in following his own advice "to resist the temptation . . . to impose more order on the book than was ever intended" (211-12). While the divisions of chapters 1-39 are useful, Blenkinsopp is not convincing in his reasons why each is a distinct section. He argues that while the first section (chaps. 1-12) "gives the impression of having been planned as a distinct unit, it is also connected thematically and linguistically with other parts of the book" (171), but these connections are not clearly defined. Finally, the author loses clarity by failing to focus attention on the structure of the text, which enables the interpreter to determine the direction of the biblical book, to see how the parts fit into the whole, and to understand how the plot flows from one point to another. Nevertheless, this is a useful commentary that makes a significant contribution to Isaiah studies.

The commentary closes with three useful indices: subject (491-500), biblical and other ancient references (501-522), and key Hebrew terms (523-524).

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