

FRANK-LOTHAR HOSSFELD and ERICH ZENGER, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101–150* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). Pp. xxii + 712. \$69.

Recent studies have gone beyond the exposition of individual psalms to map out the structure of the entire book and to determine the relationship of smaller units to the complete Psalter. In *Psalms 3*, Hossfeld and Zenger have explored the composition of large units, the Great Hallel (Psalms 113–118) and the Pilgrim Psalter (120–134), without overlooking lesser entities, namely, 104–106, 138–145, and 146–150. They have always asked: How did the individual psalms in 101–150 take shape? In answering this question, they have also concentrated on theological content. Two themes run through their commentary like a crimson thread: poetics and the interplay of anthropology and theology. The author of the exegesis of each psalm is listed at the end and consistency of viewpoint is maintained throughout.

Each exposition consists of the following steps: (1) a translation with extensive textual notes, (2) a description of the structural plan of the psalm, (3) the exposition proper, (4) important variants in the LXX, (5) NT citations or allusions to the psalm, (6) use at Qumran and in rabbinic Judaism when relevant, and (7) theological significance. Naturally, this format involves repetition, which is magnified by the expansive style of H./Z. Unfortunately, only the most dedicated reader will persevere to the end of this commentary. Perhaps, however, it was not meant to be read from beginning to end but to be consulted on particular psalms of interest—hence the repetition.

The book is richly illustrated, with both iconography and textual data. The pictures

clarify specific linguistic expressions and make daily life in the ancient Near East real for modern readers (farmers plowing, sowing, and reaping; parents traveling with a small child on the shoulders of the father and an infant nursing at its mother's breast; ornate war steeds; musicians with various instruments; archers; snares; and so much more). Ancient Near Eastern data frequently illumine the discussion (Psalms 104 and the Great Hymn to Aton, 139 and Mesopotamian Tablets of Destiny, 138 and the polytheism of the Diaspora).

Zenger provides an excursus on the Passover Hallel and the composition of the Pilgrim Psalter. Appropriately, the introduction sketches the origin of Psalms 101–150 (two triads, 101–103 and 104–106; 107–136 [the Davidic trilogy, 108–110; the twin psalms, 111–112; the Passover Hallel, 113–118; the torah psalm, 119; the Pilgrim Psalter, 120–134; a second set of twin psalms, 135–136]; the fifth Davidic Psalter, 138–145; and the finale, 146–150). The last redaction is said to have taken place in the second century, with much earlier material being composed by Korahite temple singers in the fourth century.

A prominent feature of the commentary is the extensive treatment of intertextuality. H./Z. frequently discuss the similarities in syntax and grammar between successive psalms and those placed at some remove. They also stress the multiple ways in which the compositions use language from other canonical texts, especially Exodus, Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and so on. Historical events, especially servitude in Babylon and the return to Zion, naturally brought to mind the many resemblances to the original exodus from Egypt, resulting in the rehearsal of ancient history as the background of new divine action. The Egyptian Hallel and allusions to Yhwh's solicitude in the wilderness appeal to hallowed memory. The composer of Psalm 114 brings together motifs from Psalm 29 and Isaiah 40–55, making dramatic changes to fit the new social context.

The central theological concern of the psalms under discussion involves the poor, who are being instructed in praising Yhwh. Accordingly, pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem sing the praises of the "creator of heaven and earth" and "the one who is from now and forevermore." Besides these epithets, linguistic peculiarities set the Pilgrim Psalter apart, especially the relative *-š* (*šě-*) and the rhetorical device known as anadiplosis rather than synonymous or antithetic parallelism. H./Z. even suppose that short versions may have been written on parchment and sold in Jerusalem to pilgrims. The authors of these psalms, according to H./Z., were priests.

Numerology and dramaturgy play a huge role in the approach by H./Z., coming together nicely in Psalm 119. Here are some of Z.'s observations. Of the eight nouns in each strophe designating torah, four are feminine and four are masculine. All eight nouns appear only in strophes 6, 8, 10, 11, and 17, with torah never in the plural. *Bērit* ("covenant") is absent because it is a communal expression. The dramatic center is Psalms 81–88 and 89–96, a "truly mystical experience." The psalm is a little library for a book culture, a sanctuary of the soul. The first psalm, of late redaction, is Psalm 119 in miniature.

Alert to modern trends, H./Z. address difficult issues such as divine violence and feminism. Not surprisingly, given Z.'s earlier book, *A God of Vengeance: Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), cursing psalms such as 109, 137, and 139 are called justice psalms issuing "from the victims of history," with violence placed in divine hands. In Z.'s view, at least one psalm, 131, derives from a woman or is spoken by a woman, and feminine traits in the deity permeate Psalm 123.

There is so much wealth in this commentary that I hesitate to offer any criticism. In the spirit of Jeremiah 12, however, let me concede that H./Z. are right, while raising some

objections. My greatest discontent stems from the broad definition of wisdom and chiasm with which they work. Far too frequently, they invoke wisdom theology and cite pentateuchal and prophetic texts as evidence (Exod 34:6-7, the mercy formula; Deuteronomy; Isaiah 40-55), and they identify chiastic structures on the basis of virtually any semantic feature. Almost equally problematic, at least for me, is the apparent confidence with which H./Z. separate redactional verses from individual psalms according to their reconstruction of social realities in postexilic Yehud. I also think a common linguistic stock offers a better explanation for many intercanonical similarities of expression than literary dependence. Occasionally, H./Z. make claims for which insufficient evidence exists: for instance, Joel quotes Psalm 126; Psalm 111 is a torah psalm even though the noun is missing; Psalm 112 is a priestly sermon text or wisdom instruction for schools; a theology of the poor is a post-exilic phenomenon (p. 131); and Psalm 121 constitutes internal dialogue the way Qoheleth argues with himself. Finally, the translation of the Hebrew poetry may be faithful to the ancient idiom but it does not strike me as "putting words to God's music." Despite these criticisms, everyone who wishes to learn more about Psalms 101-150 (and the additional 151 in the LXX) will do well to study this commentary. In my view, it has no equal.

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