Conrad, Edgar W.

Zechariah

Readings: A New Biblical Commentary


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Conrad will be known to readers from his earlier work on Isaiah. In this volume he continues his application of literary method to the reading of the prophets. He sees many parallels between Isaiah and the Book of the Twelve. Both mark the move from oral prophecy to written prophecy intended to be read aloud to a later generation. He notes the change from "prophet" who speaks in a time of God's distance to "messenger" after God has drawn near again by dwelling in his temple.

The author places himself in the current mode of literary interpretation of the Book of the Twelve. He understands Zechariah "as a character in the text" and the book of Zechariah as a part of a larger whole, the Book of the Twelve Prophets. After a brief review of the way Zechariah has been studied (pp. 12-16), Conrad outlines his strategies for reading a prophetic book (pp. 16-18). The overview is a very useful insight into the way a literary critic works and into a current view of the development from the spoken words of prophets to the writing of the word of God to be read aloud to the congregation.

Current views of the Book of the Twelve are summarized (pp. 18-22) and Zechariah is placed in that literary context (pp. 22-44). Both the Twelve and Isaiah use a technique of juxtaposing dated words from the Assyrian period opposite messages from the Persian period. Conrad (pp. 39-42) places Zechariah 1-8 in the frame of its immediate context: first, in relation to Haggai, and then, in relation to 9-11, 12-14, and to Malachi. Though Zechariah is not named in the latter, Conrad understands that Zechariah's is the voice that continues as God's messenger through all of them. He thinks the change from the designation of "prophet" to that of "messenger" is an important literary device to show
the difference between the reception of the word of God when he is absent from his temple and when he is present in it again.

Conrad thinks of the "The Twelve" as a "literary collage" by which he apparently means an intentionally grouped collection of literary works which share common interests and meanings. The bulk of the commentary appropriately presents a passage-by-passage treatment of the book. Each passage is seen in its relation to the whole of the Twelve. For instance, the use of "return" in 1:3 is treated by referring to Hos 14:1-2, Joel 2:12-13, and Mal 2:7. Important themes are singled out for special treatment, as the excursus on "Messengers in Zechariah" (pp. 59-62) with the interesting suggestion that the "messenger of the Lord" to Zechariah in 1:11,12 is Haggai, not the angel which most commentators suggest.

The commentary functions as an extended set of "program notes" for the reading of Zechariah. It introduces the reader to the world in which the book lives and helps to orient the reader to the literary techniques which gives life and meaning to the writing. The commentary series intends to present literary interpretations of the biblical books. This volume is a worthy addition to join the works of Landy on Hosea and Miscal on Isaiah.

The work is insightful, fresh, and very helpful. It may be recommended with enthusiasm.