

Nevertheless, Ross's work is an up-to-date Psalms commentary in the historical/grammatical/form-critical tradition, and that is a most welcome thing. His multi-volume commentary on the book of Psalms constitutes a robust evangelical contribution and will be of great help to the Hebrew-trained student, pastor, and teacher.

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*Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms.* By Daniel Michael Nehrbass. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013, 214 pp., \$25.00.

This book is an exercise in practical theology and application; what makes it interesting is that the passages the author has chosen are the famous (or infamous!) imprecatory psalms. Nehrbass first introduces his study by stating his goals: "This book will offer an updated and comprehensive history of interpretation of the imprecatory psalms, a practical theology, and an extensive application for preaching and for anger therapy" (p. 2). He believes these difficult passages "have relevant contemporary value for preaching and practical life" (p. 3) and that that value is "best expressed in an interpretation . . . which assumes the worshiper is voicing his dependence upon God, rather than taking matters into his own hands" (pp. 3–4). He assumes that "all Scripture" is useful, that progressive revelation plays a role in our interpretation but should not be used to "undo" previous revelation, and that Jesus' teachings and life interpret all other parts of Scripture. All this means that Nehrbass has a job to do—to show how these difficult psalms make positive contributions to life and faith in the church today.

Nehrbass divides his study up into three parts: (1) Part I: Interpretation; (2) Part II: Theology; and (3) Part III: Application. In Part I, he first offers a helpful 40-page review of thirteen different approaches to the "imprecatory psalms," in which he summarizes and evaluates each approach, noting both advantages and problems. In summary, here are the thirteen approaches: (1) allegorical approach (the enemy is abstract); (2) allegorical-historical (the curses are stock expressions based on divine warrior imagery from the ANE); (3) historical-inspired (the curses are inspired but wrong); (4) historical non-inspired (the curses are historically conditioned, not inspired by God, and wrong); (5) sociological-historical (the curses were acceptable in their original social context); (6) catharsis/poetic form (the curses are expressions of natural human emotion, in poetry, not teaching); (7) pre-NT dispensation (the curses were acceptable under that dispensation but not now; Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount has replaced cursing); (8) quotation hypothesis (the curses are quotations of enemies); (9) spells (the curses are remnants of ancient magical practices); (10) prophetic (the curses are divinely sanctioned oracles of judgment); (11) messianic (the curses are prayers to be uttered by the coming messiah, Jesus); (12) covenantal theory (the curses are requests for God to keep his covenantal promises); and (13) dependence theory (the curses are expressions of dependence on God for justice). This final approach is the one Nehrbass

endorses. In chapter 3, “Interpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms through the Eyes of Victims,” Nehrbass writes, “The therapeutic and theological value of the imprecatory psalms . . . is that we identify with the oppressed and the victims of violence” (p. 54). He argues that the imprecatory psalms give hope for the hopeless, power for the powerless, validation for the invalidated, victory for the vanquished, and prayers for the prayer-less. In an interesting discussion of David Augsburger’s work on forgiveness, he notes that “hatred is a necessary facet of a reconciling attitude” (p. 67). Further, “to refuse to hate means that we remain in denial, and cannot move toward reconciliation” (p. 67).

In Part II, Nehrbass discusses theological issues. In chapter 4, “Tension in the Canon,” he attempts to begin dealing with the tension between the curses in Psalms and the teaching of Jesus. Throughout his work, Nehrbass faithfully embraces two ideas: (1) the psalms endorse cursing; and (2) Jesus tells his followers to love their enemies. This creates the tension. He suggests “mystery” (we do not have to solve every problem in Scripture), “literary form” (genre), the different purposes of the Sermon on the Mount and the curses, the idea that biblical authors can present a variety of ways of dealing with a situation, and finally the differences in context, all as steps involved in solving the tension.

In chapter 5, “A Theology of God in the Imprecatory Psalms,” Nehrbass argues that the curses in the Psalms are consistent with OT covenant promises, imprecatory prophecy, the warnings of Scripture, NT imprecation, and, with some qualifications, a biblical doctrine of God.

In chapter 6, “Human Nature in the Imprecatory Psalms,” Nehrbass lists fifteen theological propositions in the psalms about humanity. Humanity is: (1) with regard to God: known, loved, judged by God, in need of redemption, used as instruments for punishment of others, and are destined for eternal life; (2) with regard to oneself: frustrated in their quest for holiness, blind to their own faults, and experience angst; (3) in relation to others, humanity is organized in nations, polarized as either good or evil, exerts dominion, needs humility, and is capable of becoming oppressors; and (4) in general, human life is fleeting. This complex understanding of humanity gives a larger theological background and context for a therapeutic understanding of the imprecatory psalms. Chapter 7, “A Practical Theology of the Imprecatory Psalms,” is an attempt to apply Thomas Groome’s paradigm of doing practical theology to the problem of contemporary churches failing to discuss, teach on, and pray the imprecatory psalms.

In Part III, “Application,” chapter 8, “The Therapeutic Value of the Imprecatory Psalms,” Nehrbass offers several imperatives: (1) concern yourself with God’s reputation; (2) let God take care of your problem; (3) appeal to the things God cares about; (4) make your complaint clear; (5) pray for the plans of the wicked to be foiled; (6) take responsibility for your part; and (7) get passionate. He also discusses the therapeutic limits of catharsis and the case against and for anger.

In chapter 9, “Preaching the Imprecatory Psalms,” Nehrbass presents five brief sermons that illustrate most of the imperatives listed in his chapter 8. A conclusion (chap. 10) reviews his argument. The volume ends with an appendix containing Matthew 5 and a bibliography.

Nehrbass's work is helpful but it is far from the last word on the subject. He devotes almost no space to a discussion of the actual texts, which would seem necessary in a work of application. Also, it is not always clear how his chapters relate to each other or help make his argument. For example, the fifteen theological propositions about biblical anthropology from chapter 6 are never heard from again in subsequent chapters. How exactly did those propositions help make his case? Nevertheless, Nehrbass brings to the discussion of a difficult portion of Scripture a welcome understanding of victims of abuse and oppression, especially in parts of the world other than North America. Those of us living comfortably need to appreciate this. Also, he is to be commended for attempting to think through pastorally how one could appropriate curses against one's enemies. Nehrbass may not get everything right, but he has helped move forward the discussion of imprecatory psalms.

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*Obadiah: The Kingship Belongs to YHWH.* By Daniel I. Block. Hearing the Message of Scripture: A Commentary on the OT. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, 128 pp., \$19.99.

The Hearing the Message of Scripture series takes an ambitious aim: to "help serious students of the Bible to hear the message of Scripture as it was intended to be heard" (p. 9). The editors hold the conviction that today's pastors and teachers need to go beyond textual eisegesis and discover the "rhetorical agenda" of the biblical authors. So, the theology of each biblical book is distilled and the literary strategy employed by each inspired author is clarified. In addition, each commentary chapter includes the following format: "The Main Idea of the Passage"; "Literary Context"; "Translation and Outline"; "Structure and Literary Form"; "Explanation of the Text"; and "Canonical and Practical Significance."

This commentary on Obadiah, written by the renowned Wheaton Professor Daniel Block, is the first in the series to be published. For Block, the shortness of this prophetic book allows him to discover the prophet's profound theology of hope as well as his sophisticated literary style.

Block's lengthy introduction surveys options regarding the book's historical background and provides an insightful discussion of the prophet's audience. Obadiah's prophecies occurred just before Edom's demise in the sixth century BC. Block keenly understands the situation of the prophet's principal addressees—the Judeans from the "house of Jacob" (vv. 17–18) who remained in the land during the exile after the Babylonian destruction. These Judeans underwent severe depression, experienced "theological shock," and were being taunted by their Edomite neighbors. However, they understood YHWH's obligation to rescue them based on their covenantal history (Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic). Obadiah initially warns Edom of her own coming doom, but his basic message is to rekindle Judean hope