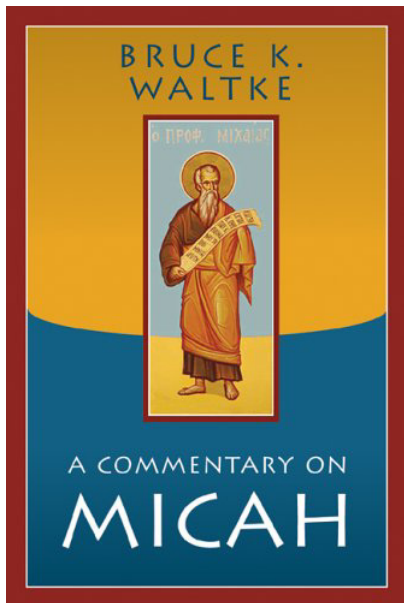


RBL 02/2008



Waltke, Bruce K.

A Commentary on Micah

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. Pp. xviii + 490.
Hardcover. \$32.00. ISBN 0802849334.

Tiberius Rata
Grace Theological Seminary
Warsaw, Indiana

Waltke's commentary on Micah is the one of the most comprehensive and in-depth works on the subject; it rivals the volume published in the Anchor Bible commentary series. Waltke's work is much more conservative, employing a grammatico-historical method. The author seeks to determine the "book's historical context, its text, the meaning of every word and their syntactical relationship, its figures of speech, its rhetorical techniques, and its literary forms" (x).

The book is divided in two major parts: introduction and commentary. In the introduction, Waltke discusses preliminary but foundational issues such as historical background, date and authorship, form and structure, and text. Waltke points out that Micah is not identified by his family, as are other prophets, but rather by his place of origin, Moresheth Gath. Since the text is silent regarding other details about Micah, Waltke does not speculate further. The historical background of the book is comprehensively covered. The author sets the stage well by identifying moral corruption from within and the rising Neo-Assyrian Empire from without as the two volatile forces that paint the background of Micah's ministry and message. The use of primary sources throughout the book is an asset and gives the author added credibility. Waltke's conservative approach is evident when he affirms that he does not place "the canon of

historical criticism above the biblical canon to determine what actually happened in Israel's history" (8). He also rejects the historiographical hypothesis *vaticinia ex eventu* (proclamation after the event), claiming that if that were true, "the Holy Bible is stained with a serious moral stain of deception, at the worst, or of obfuscation, at the least" (9). Waltke suggests that the grammar of Micah is preexilic and that it does not display any features of postexilic Hebrew. He identifies twenty-one independent oracles that make up the book and that were edited by the prophet or his disciples. These oracles include epiphany, lament song, funeral lament, reproach, lawsuit, prayer, praise, and proclamation of salvation, among others. The elements of vocabulary, grammar and syntax, thematic development, recurrence of motifs, and patterns of structure show a certain degree of coherence in the book. As far as the text is concerned, Waltke recognizes differences between the MT and the LXX. He reaches the conclusion that the *Vorlage* of the Greek translator(s) was not identical with the consonantal text of the MT. In his treatment of 1:8–16, he sets out four principles of textual criticism pertinent to this passage, but it seems that this is his *modus operandi* throughout the commentary: (1) the MT is to be preferred over the LXX; (2) the text of the MT is relatively well preserved; (3) no a priori restraint that each binary verset must contain a pun may be placed upon the text; and (4) the MT, the traditional text, should be emended only where necessary (64).

The commentary section of the book is divided into three parts: translation, exegesis, and exposition. Waltke prefers a more literal translation, although he makes a most unconventional choice that could provoke questions. Instead of using YHWH for the divine name, he chooses to translate the Tetragrammaton as "I AM." While he does so consistently throughout the book, he never gives a rationale, theological or linguistic, for doing so. The exegesis contains detailed historical information based on both primary and secondary sources, as well as philological analysis. Form-critical analysis led Waltke to detect about twenty-one distinct oracles, while rhetoric analysis led him to conclude that these are divided into three cycles of judgment oracles followed by salvation oracles: (1) the first cycle (1:2–2:13); (2) the second cycle (3:1–4; 5:14); and (3) the third cycle (6:1–7:20).

The syntactic and semantic analyses are systematic: the author takes each clause and analyzes it thoroughly. The syntactic analysis details not only how the words are grouped together to form clauses, sentences, phrases, and paragraphs but also how these words are used in different translations such as Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac. When analyzing what "the Moreshite" means in conjunction with Micah's name in 1:1, the author makes important uses of Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions. Waltke does not avoid the tough text-critical issues either, but he deals with them in detail. For example, since the expression "Hear, O peoples, all of you" (1:2) does not appear in the original of 1 Kgs 22:28, he recognizes that the words might have been put in the mouth of

Micah of Imlah (1 Kgs 22:28) by a scribe who mistook the two Micahs (45). Waltke does a superb job in his semantic analysis, where he sees both the intratextual connection and the intertextual reference. This can be seen in his treatment of the *hapax legomenon* וּמוֹצְאָתָיו (“and his origins”) in 5:1. He correctly traces it to its verbal root but also makes the connection with Isa 11:1 and 2 Sam 7:12 (272–73). Waltke’s integrity is evident when he admits that the meaning of some words/expressions is not known. Commenting on the exclamation of אֵלַי לֵי (“Woe is me!”), he is not afraid to admit that the exact meaning of the expression is unknown (415).

The exposition part of the commentary is a theological incursion into the text based on the exegesis of the text. Waltke lays down a few rules for interpreting prophecies that deal with Israel: (1) the prophecies about Israel’s golden future find fulfillment in Christ and his church; (2) prophets represent the new age under the symbols; (3) the normal meaning of Old Testament worship had in view the eternal heavenly realities behind the symbols; (4) Christ’s first coming and the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost did away with the otiose symbols; (5) the prophets used hyperbole to show the exceeding greatness of the future; and (6) there is a temporal thickness to these prophecies (206–7). Waltke’s Reformed theology can be seen clearly in how he interprets Micah’s prophecies and how he applies it to the church today. In interpreting the prophecy of restoration in 7:11–14, the author affirms that “the prophecy finds fulfillment in the church of Christ, composed of all nations (see Rom 4:16–17), which come to the heavenly Zion, the ‘true’ Zion, represented symbolically by the earthly city (Heb 12:22)” (455). The necessary correlations to the New Testament are not forced, and they distinguish between Christ’s first and second comings.

The commentary is not for the weak of heart. Waltke makes the bridge between the ancient text and the contemporary situation, and he does so without compromising his conservative stance. In his exposition of 1:8–16 he writes, “As Lachish introduced trust in military hardware, so modern cities like Hollywood promote adultery, and like Reno or Las Vegas give impetus to easy divorce and gambling, and like San Francisco give status to homosexuals” (90). The commentary is not for the weak of Hebrew either. It is a valuable resource for those with a considerable knowledge of Hebrew, since one must understand concepts such as jussive, hiphil, and synecdoche. Readers with no knowledge of Hebrew could benefit from the commentary by reading the exposition part, but they would not profit from the in-depth, eye-opening analysis of the original language. The commentary could be especially challenging to those of dispensational bent, since Waltke makes it clear the Bible does not teach a future national restoration of Israel. He affirms that “Romans 11 teaches the restoration of Israel to the kingdom, not of the kingdom to Israel” (206).