

A REVIEW ARTICLE

**COMMENTING
ON COMMENTARIES
ON THE BOOK OF MALACHI**

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Other than the need for an occasional message on stewardship, the book of Malachi has received little attention. Such neglect has unintentionally relegated the book to a secondary status. Consequently, it is seldom that one thinks of Malachi when considering the OT prophets. This neglect is due in part to its location in the English Bible and to its question and answer style which may not seem as appealing as the typical prophetic style of proclamation. One only needs to look at the average theological library or to remember the last message from Malachi that was not on stewardship to see this neglect exists. It is hoped that this article will encourage and assist the readers in their study and preaching of Malachi.

The best overall commentary is the recent work by W. C. Kaiser, Jr. entitled *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love*. His purpose is not to do an exegesis based on sound hermeneutical principles alone but to bridge the gap between the then and now. His book is thus an excellent balance between the technical and the practical. His combination of both the descriptive element with the normative element has produced a commentary that rises above the mere informative level. Kaiser includes two appendixes which not only add important supportive material but also help to maintain clarity and flow throughout his exposition of the text. The first appendix deals with contextual, syntactical, verbal, theological and homiletical analysis. His second appendix on the usefulness of commentaries for Bible study and preaching serves not only as an excellent standard for evaluating other commentaries but also for evaluating Kaiser's book on Malachi. His commentary is conservative in stance and easy to understand. His introduction is very good. His balance of the practical and theological with the exegetical and technical, may in large measure be a prototype of a new breed of commentaries. God's unchanging

love and man's response to it are at the heart of the Covenant relationship between God and his people.

The outstanding example of the technical-textual commentary of the OT is the series by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. Their commentary is the standard in the field of OT commentaries and a classic in its own right. Though dated, it still serves as the primary measure by which all other works are judged. Keil's volume on *The Twelve Minor Prophets* is conservative in scope and serves as a scholarly foundation upon which any in-depth study of Malachi is to be made.

The best of the scholarly-evangelical commentaries is the newly released volume in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* by P. A. Verhoef. He maintains a conservative perspective with sufficient support for his views in the introductory matters as well as his exegetical material. Structural analysis undergirds his entire exposition. A second contribution to this perspective worthy of consideration is J. Baldwin's work in *The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. Though her structural divisions of Malachi are the same as those used by Verhoef, she does not incorporate the principles of structural analysis throughout her verse by verse exposition as he.

The best representation of the critical commentaries is J. M. P. Smith's work on Malachi in *The International Critical Commentary*. Its emphasis on the technical and descriptive, however, taxes the soul of its spiritual vitality. Typical of this theological persuasion is the view that Malachi is not a personal name but serves only as a title. Also common to the critical perspective is the interpretation of Mal 4:4-6 not as a profound conclusion to the book but as the product of a later editor. R. Dentan's and W. Sperry's commentary on Malachi in *The Interpreter's Bible* and R. Smith's exposition in the *Word Biblical Commentary* are additional Scholarly examples of this perspective.

The most useful of the practical-general commentaries is H. Wolf's study of Malachi in the *Everyman's Bible Commentary*. It is conservative, non-technical and easy to understand. As with the other contributions in this series, the layman, the pastor and the introductory Bible student are the primary readers for whom this book is written. Other conservative commentaries that are clear and practical are R. Alden's contribution to *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, R. Bailey's exposition called *God's Questions and Answers*, T. Bennett's presentation in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, C. Feinberg's *The Minor Prophets*, W. Greathouse's study in the *Beacon Bible Commentary*, H. Hailey's book entitled *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* and T. Laetsch's work on the minor prophets in the *Bible Commentary*. A practical but liberal commentary is *Malachi: A Study Guide Commentary* authored by C. Isbell. Another of the same perspective is R. Mason's presentation in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible*.

Of the devotional-homiletical type of commentaries, the one by J. McGee is sufficient to serve as a recent example. Other works of this category but much older would be by W. Deane, J. Exell, A MacClaren, G. Campbell Morgan and J. Wolfendale. When mindful of the limitations of this group of commentaries, one is then able to benefit from such works.

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