

Review

Bruce K. Waltke and Ivan D. V. De Silva. *Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. Pp. 528, Paperback, \$38.00, ISBN 9780802875037.

By Paul S. Evans, PhD

This commentary is a condensed version of Bruce Waltke’s magisterial two-volume commentary on Proverbs in the prestigious NICOT series (Proverbs 1–15 [Eerdmans, 2004]; Proverbs 16–31 [Eerdmans, 2005]). Waltke has teamed up with one of his former students, Ivan D. V. De Silva, to write this version and while obviously not as thorough as the two NICOT volumes, this shorter commentary, at 472 pages, is far from short and includes an extensive introduction of 62 pages. This version of the commentary is more accessible for those without Hebrew and without the need for the minute details provided in the larger volumes. Still the volume has enough technical details to perhaps put off an average Sunday school teacher. Updates from the original commentary include not only the inclusion of more recent scholarly references, but the use of more gender inclusive language in the translations.

The commentary is unambiguously evangelical and provides many applications and theological asides that are always welcome for those engaged in sermon preparation. The introduction is explicitly theological, organizing itself partially around categories from systematic theology (“theology proper (God), anthropology, and soteriology” 21). A section of the introduction many readers will be interested in compares Proverbs with the person and teaching Jesus and discusses Woman Wisdom as a type of Christ (57-62).

The authors argue for the unity of the book of Proverbs and that it mostly came from Solomon. Those proverbs ascribed to him are his work, and the other collections, like the Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17) are thought to be “adopted and adapted by Solomon,” while other sections were “appended” by Solomon (19). This, of course, goes against scholarly consensus that holds Proverbs comprises various collections from different authors in different time periods. Waltke and De Silva propose a royal court setting (19-20) as an alternative to common scholarly suggestions of the “folk setting” or the “school setting,” for the origins of the proverbs, though this would not satisfy most scholars who view Proverbs as being completed in the Persian period when there was no king in Judah (i.e., Yehud). However, Waltke and De Silva make their case well and point to indications in the text to support their position.

The commentary provides its own translation of Proverbs. After the translation, each section is introduced, with the structure and main themes

addressed, followed by verse-by-verse comments. While unlike the larger commentary, Waltke's arrangement of proverbs into clusters is not as apparent or explicit, the commentary draws on Waltke's insights regarding the clustering of proverbs and his approach of interpreting individual proverbs in light of the larger context of such clusters. Despite the seemingly randomness of some proverbs, individual proverbs are meant to be interpreted in their literary context. Waltke and De Silva make a good case for purposeful structures to each cluster of proverbs, even when the organization of proverbs seems on the surface to be random or haphazard in appearance. Their attention to patterns and structure are often helpful in underscoring important themes in the text (e.g., 177).

The volume offers a good hermeneutical approach to Proverbs. Regarding whether "Proverbs promise too much?" (41) since they seem to promise prosperity for the wise but not for fools (which is not always the case in real life), the authors suggest that Proverbs are "mostly validated by experience" (43) though there are exceptions and they require faith in God. The authors assert that some proverbs (e.g., promising punishment of the wicked) will only be true in the afterlife (e.g., 126). While I agree with their conclusions theologically, it is difficult to argue that the book itself had a fully developed Christian view of life after death which this volume seems to imply, as at times the authors seem to read later Christian theology into the text (e.g., 42, 322, 336).

In interpreting seemingly contradictory (or conflicting) proverbs, the authors emphasize the situational use of individual proverbs. They write "A proverb is always true, but it may not be true for a given situation" (18). Proper interpretation must take into account each situation to avoid misusing or misinterpreting proverbs. The approach offered is sensible and quite balanced, noting that at times some proverbs must "be held in tension" (206) with other proverbs. The truth of one proverb is often balanced by the truth of another (cf. the discussion on correcting a mocker on p. 170).

A unique aspect of the volume is the authors' decision to translate the Tetragrammaton, YHWH as "I Am" throughout the commentary, both in their translation of Proverbs and their own prose. While sympathetic with the reverent hesitancy to pronounce the name Yahweh (besides the speculative nature of the provided vowels), this seems to be an odd choice. "I Am" in Hebrew is something of a pun on the name YHWH but it is not the name itself. Although the translation choice is idiosyncratic, it does emphasize that the name is the covenant name of God, perhaps more clearly than the time-honored translation of "the LORD."

There is a wealth of knowledge in this commentary, as one would expect from a wisdom literature expert like Waltke. The commentary would be a wonderful addition to a pastor's library or that of a Bible study leader. It is accessible and would greatly aid in their interpretation of Proverbs and be an excellent resource. The

volume has helpful indices of authors, subjects, and scriptures which will enable its readers to quickly find help in interpreting a particular proverb or passage. I hope that more such volumes are published which make great detailed and erudite commentaries more manageable (and affordable) for pastors and lay audiences.

Paul S. Evans is Associate Professor of Old Testament at McMaster Divinity College and in his teaching and research emphasizes the theological significance of the Old Testament and the value of its application for the Church today. Paul was raised in British Columbia, a pastor's son, and acquired a passion for the Bible early in life. Before teaching at the university level, he previously served in pastoral ministry in both Alberta and Ontario and continues to be enthusiastic about the Church and its mission. Paul frequently preaches in local churches in Hamilton and the Greater Toronto Area. Currently, Paul is writing a two-volume commentary on 1-2 Chronicles for The New International Commentary on the Old Testament series published by Eerdmans.

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