

In closing, I would recommend this volume as being a helpful tool for persons already sufficiently initiated into church history to be able to use it effectively—persons who can recognize and appreciate its values (and there are many), but who also are sufficiently grounded in the discipline to be able to differentiate between fact and non-fact.

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Watts, John D. W. *Isaiah 34-66*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 25. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987. xxxiii + 386 pp. \$24.95.

This volume represents the continuation and completion of Watts's unusual two-volume commentary on Isaiah. In scope and format it follows the pattern of the English-language Hermeneia series and the German-language *Biblischer Kommentar* series. Indeed, Watts acknowledges his debt to Wildberger's Isaiah commentary in the BK series (*Isaiah 1-33*, p. xi). The treatment of each text unit opens with a bibliography. Then follows a new translation with extensive textual notes. The form, structure, and setting are discussed, comments on individual verses follow, and an explanation of the theology or message of the passage concludes the treatment. Where necessary, this pattern is interrupted by excursions on individual problems. The bibliographies are extensive and up-to-date; the form, structure, setting, and comments are clearly set out and repeatedly offer helpful insights; and the explanations consist of brief summations of the importance attached to the passages under study.

The unusual aspect of Watts's work is associated with his understanding of the composition of the entire prophetic book. In distinction from both critical scholarship, which proceeds from the assumption of a three-part authorship of the Isaiah prophecy, and conservative scholarship, which assumes a single author (namely the eighth-century prophet Isaiah), Watts views the entire book from the perspective of a fifth-century writer (ca. 435 B.C.) to whom the entire Isaiah prophecy or "vision" is attributed. Thus, Watts is only marginally interested in the person and ministry of the eighth-century prophet named Isaiah and in the earlier history of the Isaiah prophecies. The focus throughout is upon the "vision" of Isaiah, meaning the particular understanding of God's plan for Israel which the proposed fifth-century writer applied to ten generations of Israelites living between the eighth and fifth centuries B.C. Central to that vision is the concept that from the eighth century forward God no longer views national Israel, Jerusalem, and its kingship as the arena of his activity on earth. Rather, the empires of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia, now provide that arena, and Israel must fit into it by occupying a role of servitude in relation to the nations of the world (*Isaiah 1-33*, pp. xxxi-xxxii).

With this perspective in mind, Watts divides the entire book of Isaiah into twelve sections or "acts," the first of which forms an introduction (Isa 1-6) and the last a conclusion (Isa 62-66). Each act is divided into scenes constituting the text units around which the commentary is organized. In the view of Watts, the entire book of Isaiah may well have been intended for dramatic performance, and indeed the translation is provided with suggested speakers as in a play or libretto. But more importantly, the acts of the vision correspond to segments in Israel's history marked off by the kings or leaders in Jerusalem from Uzziah to Nehemiah. The second volume of the commentary, *Isaiah 34-66*, includes acts six through twelve, covering the period from king Jehoiakim to Nehemiah, and the age to come (act 12).

This perspective on the text produces some unusual interpretations. For example, Isa 52:13-53:12, the well-known suffering-servant passage, is assigned to act ten, describing the period of Zerubbabel, Darius, and Xerxes. The servant, distinguished from the sufferer here, is identified as king Darius (Isa 52:13), who had been invited to Jerusalem to investigate the death of an innocent sufferer, possibly Zerubbabel (Isa 52:14). The theological application of the suffering borne by Zerubbabel to Jesus Christ was subsequently made by the NT, but it corresponds with the vision of Isaiah, namely that God uses innocent death to achieve his goals (p. 233). This understanding of Isaiah's vision for the generation experiencing the death of Zerubbabel, followed by Darius' support of the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem, is attributed to the fifth-century writer of the book of Isaiah. Understood this way, prophecy reviews God's future for a past generation of Jerusalemites.

The many contributions of this commentary expressed in its bibliographies, translation, literary analyses, comments, and explanations will greatly benefit students of the Bible, both pastors and theologians. But the unusual perspective upon the text (a fifth-century application of the Isaiah vision in twelve acts to ten succeeding generations of Israelites) is not likely to gain wide acceptance and may indeed become an obstacle to some readers. The final form of the text represents an appropriate and even refreshing perspective from which to write a commentary. However, the division of the book into twelve acts, each interpreted from a narrowly defined historical context, may well pose an imposition upon the text—as though the prophetic vision is somehow held hostage by the events of 300 years of history.