

BOOK REVIEWS

Alden, Robert. *Job*. New American Commentary, vol. 11. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993. 464 pp. \$27.99.

Robert Alden's *Job* in the New American Commentary series continues the series' unapologetic affirmation of biblical inerrancy and authority. Alden, professor of OT at Denver Seminary, argues for Job's "theological unity" and provides for laypersons a "practical, applicable exposition" of its truths. *Job* portrays a personal, intimate, and caring God, whose power assures the fulfillment of the divine will whether on earth or in heaven. Further, Alden finds in Job's experience comfort for others who suffer as he did. Alden's fundamental faith in the goodness of the God of the book helps explain his merely passing reference to the work of scholars such as J. B. Curtis, whose cynicism on that account certainly surpasses even the sophisticated skepticism of James Crenshaw, who was entirely excluded from the commentary's reference. On interpretation, Alden's "best advice" to students of the first divine speech is to mentally transfer to the era and locus of the book, and "be poetic as you read" (370). The poetry of his work still astonishes by its intellectual power, artistic mastery, emotional range, and social relevance after millennia of scrutiny and appreciation.

As to Job's history, Alden locates the story in a patriarchal setting while eschewing dogmatism on the date of composition. His faith in Job's infallibility precludes his criticizing it from a post-Enlightenment scientific standpoint. He defends the author's right to speak in prescientific terms (370, on chap. 38:6). His treatment discusses the geographical location of the drama and the geographical origins of Job's friends. He argues that Job's friends are mouthpieces for theological/philosophical argumentation, rather than historically actual characters. He prefers to see them as "three of" Job's friends who actually came, whatever the significance of the numbers three and seven in the prologue. His attitude toward these numbers suggests a discontinuity between faith in biblical infallibility and a hermeneutic of biblical literalism. Philologically, Alden wisely disconnects the name Job from the term "enemy" [אויב/אויב].

Alden's unhappiness with the versions produces paradox. The JB, he pronounces, is reliable but often takes "unwarranted liberties with the text" (33). The NIV, his preferred version, is seen as "a compromise between reliability and readability" (34). The NASB's "wooden Hebraic-sounding" phrases make it unacceptable (32). And the inquiring layman for whom he writes will surely ask "why?" of Alden's unqualified declaration that the LXX is about four hundred lines shorter than the MT (32). One sentence more would have served better than an obscure footnote to remove the mysterious "why?" by explaining that the Greek translator, perhaps because of the difficulty of the Hebrew of Job, left some lines untranslated.

While Alden invites to poetic reading he offers precious little exposition on the benefits of such reading beyond the labeling of metaphors or the isolation of archetypes. Alden's total effort to communicate poetic discovery occurs in the formulaic/programmatic line "verse x is a perfect chiasmus" (94, n. 35, on chap. 5:13; 111 on chap. 7:14, 15; 136, on chap. 10:6; 146, on chap. 11:14; 180, on chap. 15:33—where he identifies "a perfectly matched pair of parallel lines"; etc.). One such identification, on 24:13-17 (249, n. 61) shows how Alden clearly recognizes the point of the passage but fails to demonstrate the significance of the poetic technique. He notes the interplay (in 24:13-17) of terms for light and darkness, and how this provides commentary on the nature of the criminal mentality. He might have exposed the conspicuous feature of this unit as being the enshrouding of the wicked in the darkness of their own schemes through the inclusio designed with the verb נכר (hiphil). The poet opens the pericope with the wicked's rejection of the way of light and closes it with their embrace of the ways of darkness—"They do not appreciate [לֹא־הִכִּירוּ] the ways of light (v. 13), for they chum up [כִּי־יִכִּיר] with the terrors of darkness" (v. 17). Furthermore, at the epicenter of this unit of interplay on light and darkness [6 cola preceding, 6 following], employing an inner envelope structure, the poet reflects on the paradox of light being equal to darkness. Cola a, b, of v. 15, encompassed with the term [עֵינַי—eye], highlights the irony of the eye of the adulterer watching for the dusk while thinking 'no eye sees me.' As 15c ironically concludes: "he puts on something to hide his face." In the end the author explicitly confirms his purpose of emphasizing the contradiction between the attitude of the schemers and light, declaring, "To them, morning is darkness"—בִּקְרָ לְמוֹ צִלְמוֹת (v. 17a).

Both the devil and Satan make trouble in Alden's commentary. The devil is the Hebrew printer's devil, (who gives שׁוֹךְ for "hedge," which should be שׁוֹךְ [55, n. 19]; כְּשָׂדִים for "Chaldeans," which should be כְּשָׂדִים [60, n. 31]; and יַעַר for "meet," which should be יַעַר [69, n. 57]). Satan is God's cabinet scoundrel (53, on chap. 1:6), an unargued, unsupported affirmation, certainly finding no basis in the text cited (1 Kgs 22:20-23). The citation of 1 Cor 5:5 (56, n. 21) somewhat resembles the comment on Job 1:6 (53) about the composition of God's cabinet. According to Alden, God's retinue includes both good and not-so-good members. It is a strange suggestion for one who finds in *Job* a God of supreme goodness and absolute power. But then, Alden may well be twice mistaken. For the *Job* prologue offers a Satan who is *sui generis* in the OT, the only manifestation of this character which includes a dialogue of confrontation with the Deity who must yield before the adversary's shrewd challenge, thus making room for the drama of the book. These interpretations notwithstanding, Alden's work provides a useful contribution to the literature and theology of *Job*.