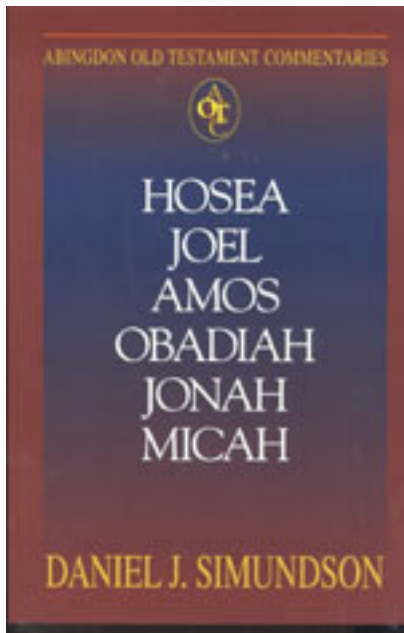


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The present work is one of the latest commentaries in the new series of commentaries by Abingdon. The publishers should be praised both for the caliber of scholars (e.g., Steven McKenzie, Walter Brueggemann, Donald Gowan) whom they have selected as well as the decision to bring the books out in paperback. Decisions such as these will ensure that excellent information will be readily available and accessible to clergy, students, and laity for the foreseeable future.

Simundson is well suited to produce a commentary of this scope and magnitude. He is currently professor emeritus of Old Testament at Luther Seminary. His Ph.D., "The Language and Structure of the Court Narrative," was taken at Harvard. The author has written extensively in the field of lament in the Hebrew Bible, authoring works such as *The Message of Job*, *Where Is God in My Praying?* and *Where Is God in My Suffering?*

This series is geared for either the professional clergy or upper-level college or university student. Introductory issues are dealt with first: Key Issues; Literary Genre, Structure, and Character of the Writing; Occasion and Situational Context; and Theological and Ethical Significance. The individual commentary on the different books follows the critical introductions. Simundson at times divides the commentary into different headings

(e.g., Hosea is divided into three broad headings: Marriage, Rejection, and Reconciliation; A Collection of Oracles Ending in Hope; and The Concluding Collection of Oracles Ending in Hope); however, Joel is simply listed, and no headings are given for the book. As one would expect, the commentary differs widely in the length of material presented for each book. For instance, Hosea has the most commentary, at 108 pages, whereas Obadiah is represented by eight pages. This should not dissuade the reader, for this commentary is designed to provide compact yet precise presentation of subject material.

Central to the presentation of the commentary is the idea of literary analysis. Patrick Miller, the general editor, notes that “the *literary analysis* serves to introduce the passage with particular attention to identification of the genre of speech or literature and the structure or outline of the literary unit under discussion” (viii, emphasis original). A cursory reading though the commentary reveals that this analysis transitions nicely into the exegetical application.

Recent scholarship is not unanimous on either the final form or the purpose of the Twelve. However, one thing can be adduced in this area: the theological unanimity with which the Twelve speaks to Israel, Judah, or both nations. Simundson does a very good job of surveying the theological ideas of the prophets under consideration and presenting their message in a very coherent fashion.

Theologically, the author sums up Hosea’s theological and ethical significance in six major points. Simundson argues that, while Hosea provides a great boon for those wanting to explore the understanding of the divine-human relationship, it must be done so carefully. This caveat is given due to the sexual abuse and feminist concerns of today’s society. Closely related to the divine-human relationship is the exploration of God’s feelings. The author notes that “God is capable of emotional responses to the behavior of human beings” (7). A close reading of Hosea reveals that his love is such that he cannot let Israel go. The author extrapolates from this idea the prophet’s own struggle personally with his family. So closely is the message woven in Hosea that one has a difficult time discerning who is actually speaking, God or the prophet (9). Issues of culture such as fertility worship and sexual symbols abound in Hosea. Simundson argues that these elements combine into a monolithic sin of idolatry.

Due to the scope of this commentary and the intended audience, critical matters are generally avoided. A reading of the commentary does reveal that the author is fully aware of technical issues, but it is to his credit that he gently steers readers through the exegetical minefield that can accompany more complex commentaries. For example, a two-page presentation and summary of Gomer is given for the reader. The author concludes, “Further, there is a high probability that Gomer was actually a cult prostitute,

one who was publicly known for her activity and whose profession embodied exactly the idolatrous practices condemned by God in Hosea's prophecies" (15).

At the end of each prophetic section one finds a brief theological and ethical analysis. For instance, after the commentary on Hosea Simundson explores five key ideas. He examines the struggle with God in both a positive and a negative light. Likewise, he notes that the congregant needs to learn lessons from both Israel's and the church's past. A short excursus is given on Yahweh's participation in horrible events—in essence, a defense of theodicy. The discussion on theodicy gives way to a perusal of God's anger: a description of God's passion. Lastly, the author explores the synergy between divine forgiveness and human confession.

Joel is handled concisely but fully by the author. Simundson quickly notes the purpose and setting for Hebrew apocalyptic and how it relates to the line of classical prophecy. Theologically and ethically he notes that Joel provides guidance on responding to natural disasters such as plagues, earthquakes, floods, or famine. He also notes the importance of the Day of Yahweh for the Israelites. This apocalyptic concept gives way to "hope" in the form of God's grace to his people.

The book of Amos opens with discussion on four key introductory points. As would be expected, the author details the uniqueness of Amos as one of the first "writing" prophets. The special relationship between Israel and Yahweh is cogently set in Amos's context. Likewise, the question of Amos's vocation is discussed briefly, along with what credentials were actually needed for one to be a prophet.

In attempting to ascertain a theology of Amos, Simundson does an excellent job of summing up a powerful book. He argues that God is present and cares what people actually do; in essence, praxis leads either to sin or to sanctification. This idea leads into a discussion of sin having consequences—both upon the actor and often those being acted upon. One is often tempted to neglect the poor or disenfranchised in society, but the author argues that the theology in Amos does not allow its readers this luxury. Related to how one treats the poor and disadvantaged is the notion that God is a God of justice.

Examining the theology of Amos in a way that encourages praxis, Simundson notes that often one encounters a "famine of the Word" (236). This thought leads one to conclude that a chosen people (e.g., Israel) evidences special responsibility among the nations. Hope, for the author, is the last word of God in Amos.

Obadiah presents the exegete with a problem in that it is an extremely short book but packed with theological information. Briefly, Simundson notes that the fact that human

pride is a perennial problem is clearly illustrated in Obadiah. This pride becomes a problem when it develops into a thirst for vengeance to be taken on one's enemies. Simundson assures his readers that God is indeed a God of justice, noting, "The good news of Obadiah is that God is just. Evil will be stopped and perpetrators of wrong will be punished" (251).

The critical problems surrounding Jonah are legion, yet Simundson handles them all with skill. He explores the issue of parable versus history in the greater meta-narrative of Jonah. Noting the stylistic differences of the greater narrative, he deftly guides the reader through a definitive classification of Jonah's genre. Closely related to the type of genre is the question of audience for which the narrative was written.

God is noted as Creator in the theological-ethical praxis section. Thus he is free to act as he will with humans or his creation. Simundson notes, "God can and will do what God wants to do whether or not those actions fit human conceptions of the way God is supposed to act" (284). However, this absolute freedom by God is often presented in Jonah with a tempering of mercy or grace. This grace is best seen in Jonah with God's concern for both the "Insider" and "Outsider" (285).

The question of "permanence" is explored in relation to God's promises of protection and security as presented in Micah. Simundson notes, "Jerusalem, the temple, and the Davidic king were all give to the people as symbols of God's everlasting presence among them and a sign of God's ongoing protection. Would God ever break those promises going all the way back to King David, no matter how rebellious and disobedient the people have become?" (289).

Rebellion leads the prophet Micah to play a role not unlike that of Jeremiah. Simundson paints the picture of Micah as one who is skilled in the art and use of the lament. Three principal uses are given for Micah's use of the lament: (1) it could be used as a strict literary device for a legal pronouncement of doom; (2) it could be used to convey actual feelings of lament by the prophet himself; and (3) it is often used to illustrate the grief of God as he relates to his rebellious people (345). Simundson meticulously points out that humanity cannot earn or merit God's special favor. Because God has already acted to redeem humanity, "this means that acts of justice and love are expected. It means that one can never discount dependence on God. One is to walk 'humbly' with God, knowing the path is too perilous to attempt it alone" (346).

A short three-page bibliography is included at the end of the commentary. As would be expected, the works listed are general in nature and intended to propel the interested student into a deeper understanding of the aforementioned prophetic books. A noncritical

commentary of this nature should not be expected to have multiple indices or extended bibliography. What one is presented with in this commentary is solid, nuanced, theological exegesis. The critical reflection has been carried out by a well-known scholar and presented for the student's perusal. I highly recommend this commentary to interested laity or the undergraduate student.