
Pro Rege

Volume 20 | Number 3

Article 8

March 1992

Understanding the Book of Amos: Basic Issues in Current Interpretations (Book Review)

Michael Williams
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Williams, Michael (1992) "Understanding the Book of Amos: Basic Issues in Current Interpretations (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 20: No. 3, 28.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol20/iss3/8

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

to say that if one genuinely wants to find doctrine, he or she need look no further than the drama. To come face to face with the message of Scripture, you need to hear the story! Whatever fails to relate

that story is unfaithful to Scripture's very intent. Sadly, in this most unfortunate work, the story, the drama of redemption dies the death of 35,000 proof texts.

Understanding the Book of Amos: Basic Issues in Current Interpretations, by Gerhard F. Hasel (Grand Rapids: Baker) 1991. 166 pages, paperback, \$10.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

Hasel contends that some forty percent of all biblical commentaries written since 1800 have been given over exclusively to, or have included treatments of, the book of Amos. Over sixty commentaries on Amos have been published since 1960. Hasel sets out to synthesize the findings, debates, and methodological trends of a vast Amos literature. Surveying and reviewing some 800 separate publications, most of which date from 1960 to the present, Hasel provides us with a window into a very important avenue of biblical and Old Testament theological research. The book of Amos is the earliest product of the writing prophets of the Old Testament. Thus Hasel declares that "our understanding of prophecy and how it functioned in biblical times is to a significant degree shaped by the oracles and invectives, the predictions and accusations, and the pleadings and calls to repentance provided by Amos" (11). In light of the importance of Amos in the biblical canon, the attendant weight that Amos studies have enjoyed in the last 200 years make those studies something of a "microcosm for the study of all the prophetic writings of the Old Testament."

Hasel reviews critical theories bearing upon the authorship of the book, the prophetic vocation, the background and purpose of Amos' prophecies, Amos' relationship to the covenant, the character of his oracles against the nations, and his use of social criticism and eschatology.

While the reader will not find a commentary on Amos here, he will be treated to a tour of the historical stages of biblical studies: from the source criticism of Julius Wellhausen to Hans Wolff's form criticism to traditio-historical criticism. Through it all, Hasel seeks to take note of the trends and paradigm shifts of critical biblical studies. The strength of the treatment is Hasel's observation that there "is no such thing as a purely objective or scientific study" (25). While noting that there are a plurality of methods in biblical study, Hasel suggests that the atomizing tendencies of redaction and form criticism are on the wane, and that the fundamental unity and integrity of the canonical shape of the book of Amos is reasserting itself in the 1980s. The recent work of such conservative scholars as David Hubbard, G.V. Smith, and D.K. Stuart stand as worthy contributions to the wealth of Amos studies. Yet even in circles where it was once held that there is little or nothing of the *ipsissima verba* of the farmer from Tekoa in the book of Amos, a more unitary reading of the book may be coming to the fore.

Inclusion of the most extensive bibliography ever compiled on Amos makes this book a must for both pastor and seminarian. While the appropriate reader of the book may be just this clientele, Hasel employs a minimum of technical terms and his style is highly readable, so the book can be enjoyed by a broader audience as well.