



**Hawk, L. Daniel**

*Joshua*

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The Berit Olam series offers commentaries that provide literary and theological readings of the books of the Hebrew Bible in their final forms. This contribution by L. Daniel Hawk interprets the Masoretic Text of Joshua as a structured and coherent whole, offering a balanced and generally persuasive example of close reading. Common sense takes precedence over methodological extremism, so that the reader has no trouble following Hawk's argument and agreeing that it is consistent and sound.

Joshua proves to be about Israel's ethnicity and the boundaries and markers that constitute that identity. Who is inside and who is outside the boundary of peoplehood? However, there are discontinuities between what text asserts about identity on the surface level and contradictory and dissolving elements that undercut the seemingly apparent answer to the identity question. This literary shape promotes a less obvious, but more profound image of Israel's identity. The narratives of Joshua might seem to promote an identity based on ethnic separation leading to the destruction of the alien outsider, uncontested possession of a God-given land, and proper worship in obedience to the commandments of Moses. However, the book of Joshua also invites the reader to test each of these identity markers and demonstrates that none clearly characterize the people of God. Read holistically and carefully, the text does not let these indications of ethnicity stand unequivocally, but undermines them with other elements and contrary viewpoints. In end a different sort of marker of identity emerges, focused especially in Joshua 24. Israel's true identity is as a people chosen by God, who have decided and are to decide to choose for the God who has chosen them.

Hawk's reading discovers chiasmic structures, lexical patterns, and common plots (notably between the stories of Rahab and Sodom and the destruction of Sodom and of Jericho). Helpful charts illustrate such patterns and parallels. Joshua is not read as an

isolated and detached text, but in association with the discourse of Moses in Deuteronomy, to which the book incessantly alludes. Hawk also places Joshua against the context of the whole of the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, even discerning a startling allusion to the Jubilee law of Leviticus in an element of the Jericho conquest procedure. The commentary makes reference to the Hebrew text in ways understandable to someone with only a cursory knowledge of the language, a procedure that helps overcome the obstacle to the close reading enterprise presented by the use of the NRSV. Because it is directed at a general audience, the commentary explains a good deal that might otherwise be taken for granted in a more specialized production. Hawk evidences that penchant for clever section headings often associated with the enterprise of literary interpretation: “Strangers in the Night” (Joshua 2), “Ai Spy” (Joshua 7-8), “Altar Egos” (Joshua 22).

Joshua can be a distressing book for modern people to read, reflecting as it does many of the most problematic aspects of recent history and current events. Hawk insists that Joshua must nevertheless be considered as “required reading” among us, both as a mirror to reflect the repellent features of our quest to define ethnic identity and as an inspiring witness to healthier possible options.