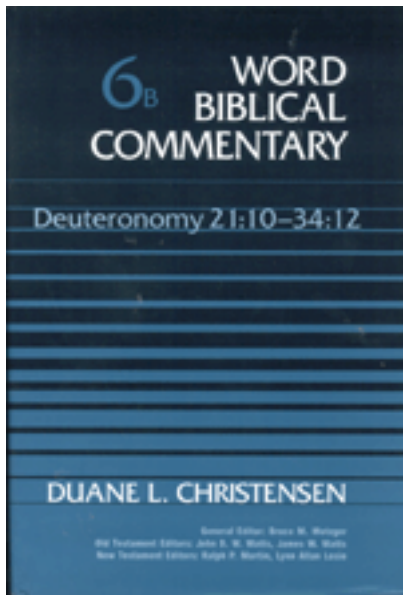


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**Christensen, Duane L.**

*Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*

Word Biblical Commentary 6B

Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002. Pp. li + 551 (pp. 446–915). Cloth. \$34.99. ISBN 0849910323.

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This is the last part of a monumental commentary that started in 1991 with a volume on Deut 1–11. In a second edition, this first volume was later enlarged to a commentary on Deut 1:1–21:9. Thus, owners of the 1991 volume are obliged to buy a copy of the second, revised edition as well in order to have the full commentary.

The methodology adopted in the last part of this commentary is the same as for Deut 1:1–21:9. The book is divided in eleven parts, in accordance with the synagogue's traditional cycle of reading of the Torah; Deut 21:10–34:12 corresponds to readings six through eleven. Special attention is given to the metrical and literary structures of the last book of the Torah. According to Christensen, one pattern in particular can be found consistently throughout Deuteronomy, a chiasm with a structural center (a-b-x-b'-a'), which may contain five or seven ("menorah pattern") parts. Christensen also depends heavily on C. J. Labuschagne's method of counting the words of a pericope in order to find some hidden structures. However, Christensen never really discusses Labuschagne's approach but merely resumes the latter's main results. As for the *Numeruswechsel*, Christensen also regards this phenomenon as a stylistic device

that indicates in most cases the boundaries of prosodic units within a book. This suggestion, however, does not seem to me very convincing, especially since changes from second-person singular to second-person plural and vice versa are not dispatched in a regular way throughout the book.

As to the law code, Christensen accepts Kaufman's and Braulik's theory according to which the structure of the code should be understood as a midrashic interpretation of the Ten Commandments. A similar idea is also adopted to analyze the relationship between law and narrative. Thus, Christensen makes the interesting suggestion that the laws are primary and that the narratives should be understood as midrashic applications of the legal texts (xiv).

This is certainly a useful commentary for students and teachers who mainly work with a synchronic approach, even if the comprehensive bibliography also includes other approaches. Christensen indicates almost all commentaries on Deuteronomy from the church fathers and early Jewish commentators up to 1999, as well as the main monographs and collected essays with special interest for Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, some of Christensen's assertions may be questioned. The ubiquity of the chiasmic structure seems sometimes quite doubtful. Quite often the structure established is based upon a few words, while very long verses are ignored (as, for instance, in Deut 34:1–12 [866], a chapter for which Christensen suggests at least eight different chiasms). The main problem of Labuschagne's word-counting approach is that it is always based on the Masoretic Text (as figuring in the Leningrad Codex). Christensen is well aware of text-critical issues but he tends to privilege the MT, arguing that the latter is supported by prosodic analysis. That, of course, is a circular argument.

Christensen's claim that most of the pentateuchal narratives should be understood as midrashic readings of the law codes is very interesting and would have required more development. However, to the astonishment of the reader, Christensen's comment about Deut 24:8–9 apparently suggests that the story of Miriam's leprosy in Num 12 was already known to the author of this law (576–77); on this point, Christensen does not seem to be entirely coherent with his own presuppositions. As for the theory of the decalogical structure of the Deuteronomistic law code, Christensen does not discuss recent challenges to this idea (e.g., Rüttersworden).

Since we cannot analyze all the chapters on which Christensen comments, we will restrict ourselves to some remarks on his treatment of the last chapter of Deuteronomy (and of the Pentateuch). Christensen offers a good bibliography

and a good translation with text-critical remarks (in my opinion the problem of the Samaritan text in 34:2 is not really discussed). He offers long comments on the structure and a fine reading of each verse. Astonishingly, however, he does not focus at all on 34:4, where God quotes the promise of the land given to the patriarchs. This quotation refers to Gen 12:7 and looks like an attempt to frame the Torah by the theme of the promise. Even a synchronic reading should not neglect such a central issue. Regarding the important 34:10, Christensen convincingly points to Num 12:8, which emphasizes Moses' incomparability. He rejects the idea that 34:10 is in conflict with 18:18 and considers these verses as forming an inclusion that anticipates the relationship between the Torah and the Former Prophets. This is an interesting suggestion, but in my view it is difficult to deny that Deut 18:18 and 34:10 present two different conceptions of Moses, which should be distinguished on a diachronic plan. Finally, little is said about the interpretation of Deut 34 as a *double* conclusion: not only of the book of Deuteronomy but also of the Pentateuch.

Christensen's commentary is a helpful tool for every student of Deuteronomy. However, those who are interested in historical and diachronic problems should complete Christensen's work with other studies.