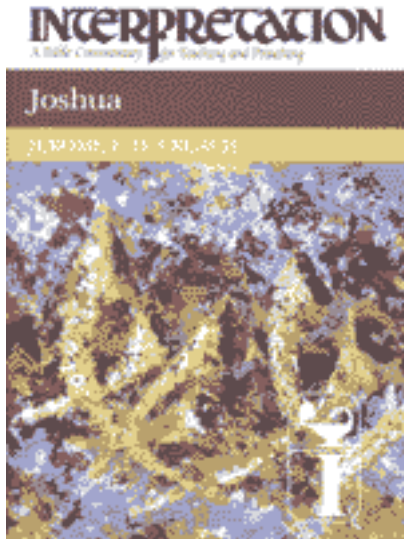


RBL 07/2004



**Creach, Jerome F. D.**

*Joshua*

Interpretation: A Bible commentary for Teaching and Preaching

Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003. Pp. xiv + 135. Hardcover. \$22.95. ISBN 0804231060.

Ed Noort  
University of Groningen  
Groningen, The Netherlands 9606 RP

The biblical book of Joshua is not the easiest one to comment on. The scholarly debate has to deal with the text of Joshua between the Masoretic and the Greek versions, with the literary structure of the book as a whole and its canonical place, with its relation to the Pentateuch on the one hand and the Former Prophets on the other, and with the reworking of the texts in different Deuteronomistic and Priestly contexts. The community of faith has to deal with the problems of the image of God relating to the possession of the land, war, ban, and extermination, not at least in view of a bloody history of reception in a (Christian) context. From Marcion until now the question of the validity of the biblical book in an ecclesiastical context has been under discussion.

The well-known series Interpretation, edited by James L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller, and Paul J. Achtemeier, attempts to present neither pure historical-critical commentaries nor exclusively homiletical aids for preaching. Interpretation seeks to go the difficult third way of integrating historical and theological analysis. In this way the parameters are set. The presupposed translation is NRSV, and there is no verse-to-verse exegesis but rather expository essays on the textual units. The author of the Joshua volume, Jerome F. D. Creach, teaches Old Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and tackles the

problems mentioned above in 135 pages.<sup>1</sup> He addresses those who teach and preach in the community of faith.

The volume includes a general introduction with sound remarks on the problem of history, on the theological context of Deuteronomy and Joshua, on authorship and audience, and on the problem of violence (1–18). Most attention goes out to Josh 1–12 (19–96), while Josh 13–22 is treated in fourteen pages (99–112), half of them discussing Josh 22 (106–12). Finally, an analysis of Josh 23–24 can be found on pages 113–130. A bibliography for further study and a list of literature cited completes the volume. Creach presents to the reader both items from the scholarly debate as well as theological questions raised by the book. He mentions form-, redactional-, and literary-critical problems and the solutions brought up by scholars, though in most cases he leaves it at that. With regard to the intentions of the commentary, the author wants to escape the unfruitful historicist dilemmas by understanding the stories of the events *as stories*.

His real concerns are the theological questions, and here he is not only an informer but a guide. Reading Joshua in a Christian context may seduce the commentator to make an easy jump from the Old to the New Testament. A strong point of this commentary of is that Creach refuses to do so. Of course, he discusses the theme of the “rest” in Heb 3:7–4:11 (30), but he understands the promise of rest mainly in its Old Testament context and makes that clear with a reference to Reynolds Price’s novel *The Promise of Rest*. In the same way the author avoids a cheap solution to the problem of violence. Creach stresses the fact that in Joshua war is God’s war. Whereas Num 33:52 states that Israel itself will drive out the inhabitants of the land, in Josh 13:6 it is YHWH doing this. Rightly Creach argues that the question about historical “facts” is not the most important point here but the presupposed view of the book of Joshua that God himself “enters human history and there showed his Lordship” even on this field. The author follows Susan Niditch in her view on the ban in its twofold function: (1) sacrifice (because YHWH gives victory, the spoil belongs to him); and (2) justice (Israel should not be seduced; the concern for purity). Theologically Creach neither rejects the Joshua narratives nor reads the ban stories against the backdrop of Jesus’ teachings but looks for the self-critical features of the text itself. In the case of the ban he finds those self-critical signals in stories where the ban is not executed (Rahab, Gibeonites). Joshua 11:9 even suggests that there was a possibility for peace with the Canaanites! Further, Creach uses arguments to relativize a black-white opinion. Joshua must be judged by its own terms, and that could call modern assumptions into question. The Mendenhall-Gottwald thesis about the revolutionary origins of ancient Israel returns when the author argues that there is no conquest of the

---

<sup>1</sup> This need not to be a disadvantage. The epoch-making commentary of Martin Noth (1939, 1953<sup>2</sup>) had only 151 pages and reigned the field for forty years! The title, however, is missing in this bibliography.

land to possess the land per se. The real aim of the settlement is to establish a just society along the lines of Deuteronomy. Israel never was a political and military superpower. Most times it was victimized. The language of Joshua presents an Israel that was more powerful than it ever was in reality. It is a way of dealing with a history of occupation and war.

How did the book of Joshua grow? The editorial history is only touched in general. There is a small flirtation with the classical Hexateuch theory, explaining that segments of the book perhaps came from Yahwistic and Priestly circles. Probably there was a first collection of materials about the conquest of Benjaminite territory and Gilgal (Josh 2–11), which were later incorporated into the Deuteronomistic History. In practical terms the author owes a good deal to F. M. Cross and R. Nelson and their block model of a double Deuteronomistic redaction. Especially the similarity between the figures of Joshua and king Josiah (640-609 B.C.E.) is stressed. Additions came from the time during and shortly after the exile. The authority of Joshua as a royal figure is tempered by Priestly additions where the priest Eleazar comes aboard. Another type of addition can be found in the connection between keeping the Mosaic law and the (in)complete acquisition of the land (R. Smend Jr.), a competing redactional model. For Creach the extensive links between Joshua and Deuteronomy are especially important. Joshua demonstrates that Torah must be (re)interpreted, showing the dynamic character of Scripture.

From a text-critical perspective, the author's statement that the Masoretic Text is "the best witness to the original words of the book of Joshua" should be explained. At the other side he warns the reader that the "LXX contains a better reading than MT in many places." What this practically means remains unclear.

The commentary is empathic, learned, and well-informed. Sometimes I wished I could hear something more of Creach's own opinion about hot items in the exegetical debate. This is compensated, however, by his thoughtful reflections about the theological problems of the book.