

Ezekiel: A Commentary. By Paul M. Joyce. New York: T & T Clark International, 2007. Pp. xi + 307.

The present commentary by Paul Joyce builds upon numerous articles the author has written on the book of Ezekiel, in addition to his monograph *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (1989). Published in the Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies series (formerly JSOTS), the commentary is necessarily limited in size, with sixty pages devoted to introductory material and less than two hundred to the commentary proper. On the nature of the volume, Joyce writes in the preface that his intention is not to address every critical issue in the book, but rather “to make a distinctive contribution to the interpretation and understanding of the book of Ezekiel, particularly in terms of its theology” (vii). When assessed according to this goal, Joyce’s commentary certainly succeeds.

The introduction offers an exceptional orientation to the book and the critical and interpretive issues associated with it. Topics discussed include Ezekiel’s historical context, the structure of the book, and its place in the canon. In addition, Joyce offers a concise yet comprehensive summary of the approaches to the textual criticism of the book and an essay on theological themes, which, among other things, summarizes his work on repentance and individual responsibility. Particularly noteworthy is a review of the book of Ezekiel in later traditions, including apocalypticism, the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, and Merkabah mysticism. In what follows attention will be given to areas that exhibit Joyce’s distinct approach to the book.

In his discussion of unity, authorship, and redaction (7-16), Joyce reiterates his view found in the 1989 monograph and proposes a mediating position between the radical redactional approaches inaugurated by Hölscher (1924) and the holistic approach advocated by Greenberg (1983). In his assessment of the former, he criticizes the validity of criteria that have traditionally been used to show redactional layers in the book (for example, deuteronomistic affinities, repetition, and, in principle, hopeful conclusions to oracles of judgment) and also the assuredness with which many scholars have propounded their theories. On the other hand, the holistic approach of the Greenberg school also fails because it “too easily slides from a healthy agnosticism about editorial layers into an implicit assumption of authorship by the prophet himself” (15).

Instead, Joyce seeks to take seriously the presence of redactional activity while avoiding overly optimistic textual stratifications. Though he appeals to an Ezekielian school and its coherence with the prophet, Joyce does so to show that the book is “particularly resistant to any straightforward division between primary and secondary material” (12). Thus, whereas Zimmerli, for example, proposed stratifications despite the coherence between primary and secondary material (see, for example, 3:25-5:4a), Joyce remains much more cautious. Though he is open to a substantial role for secondary hands in assembling the final form of the book (see 42, 110), he explicitly asserts secondary material in only a few instances (16:59-63; 28:25-26; 39:21-29) and cites others as possibilities (for example, 17:22-24 and 20:40-44). Thus, in actuality,

Joyce remains closer to the Greenberg school, sharing their lack of confidence in complex reconstructions, yet he is sensitive to redactional activity when warranted by a broad range of evidence. His overall approach represents a healthy directive for future Ezekiel studies.

A further unique contribution is Joyce's discussion of Ezekiel's use of earlier traditions (33-41). He first surveys possible allusions to traditions such as creation, the flood, the patriarchs, and the exodus (being careful to distinguish an awareness of traditions from literary dependence) and discusses Ezekiel's relationship to the eighth-century Israelite prophets and Jeremiah. Joyce then moves on to Ezekiel's affinities with the priestly and deuteronomistic traditions, and affirms the determinative value of the priestly tradition on the prophet himself and his book. This is well known and has recently been highlighted by Michael A. Lyons, who argues for Ezekiel's literary dependence on the Holiness Code (*Biblica* 88 [2007], 245-50). Far less considered is Ezekiel's relationship to the deuteronomistic tradition. Against the *Literarkritik* of Hölscher, Hermann, and Liwak which relegate anything that sounds deuteronomistic to a later hand, Joyce rightly notes that Ezekiel himself, whether in Jerusalem or Babylonian exile, would have been influenced by deuteronomistic theology and style and that no evidence exists to think otherwise. Though the deuteronomistic influence may be "relatively muted" compared to the priestly character of the book, Ezekiel does adopt deuteronomistic language and concepts (see Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile and the Torah* [2002]). In the case of 11:19-20 and 36:26-27, for example, which are commonly attributed to Jeremianic influence, Joyce argues for a more direct deuteronomistic influence, concluding that Ezekiel's expression of the promise of renewal owes much to the deuteronomistic movement.

The commentary proper uses the NRSV as its starting point, though Joyce interacts with the Hebrew and Greek texts, adopting a different translation or underlying text at times. As stated above, he deals with only the most important critical problems in the book, and thus this work is not as thorough as the commentaries of Zimmerli and Block. Even so, Joyce's comments, though concise, are full of interpretive insights, and the student and scholar alike would do well to consult this volume along with the larger commentaries. Perhaps its greatest strength is Joyce's judicious evaluations of the secondary literature. Indeed, this volume serves as a helpful guide to the various articles and books relevant to each passage. An added bonus is an up-to-date bibliography with many recent and forthcoming publications. My only criticism of this volume is that for a few passages I wished for more discussion. While Joyce goes into great detail about the substance *ḥāšmal* ("amber") in the vision of the divine glory in Chapter One, there is strikingly little comment on, for example, 20:25, where Yahweh gives the Israelites "statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live." Nevertheless, Joyce has produced a fine commentary that will prove to be an important contribution to Ezekiel scholarship.

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