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## Review of Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*

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## REVIEW

Duane L. Christensen. *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*

(WBC 63; Nashville: Thomas Nelson. 2002). Pp. li + 464-915. \$34.99.

This commentary, which covers Deut 21: 10-34:12, is the second volume of Duane Christensen's massive work on Deuteronomy (the revised first volume. WBC 6A, encompasses 1:1-21:9) in the WBC series. The series is written from an evangelical Christian perspective, and each volume follows the same format, presenting an exposition of the text in the original language (Hebrew or Greek). Each volume contains an original translation by the author, with explicating notes and commentary.

Christensen has structured his entire two-volume commentary according to the eleven traditional lectionary readings of Jewish liturgical practice. This second volume begins with Reading 6 (Deut 21:10-25:29) and concludes with Reading 11 (33:1-34:12). Each reading receives a title, which is C.'s own, followed by a general bibliography and an introduction. The reading is then divided into subsections, each of which is also followed by a bibliography. The translation and prosodic analysis for the subsection come next, accompanied by a set of philological notes. A discussion entitled "Form/Structure/Setting" deals with the major scholarly issues of form literary, and historical criticism. The "Comment" delves into the meaning of the pericope, mainly by word studies of the original Hebrew. Finally, the subsection concludes with an "Explanation," which is more expository and theological in tone and is written from a distinctly Christian perspective, with frequent references to Jesus and the NT. The book also contains a general introduction, in which C. lays out his methodology. Two bibliographies are included: the first the "Commentary Bibliography" (pp. xxx-xxxvii), begins with the Church Fathers and early Jewish commentators and ends with commentaries published in 1999; the second, the "General Bibliography" (pp. xxxviii-li), which is more topical, collects works from 1805 to the present. This structure is meant to enable a wide variety of users, from serious professional scholars to clergy to interested laity, to gain access with relative ease to the parts of the commentary in which they are interested. An example of a helpful feature in this commentary is the use of different fonts to distinguish the Hebrew second masculine singular and second masculine plural endings in English translation,

The book displays the tremendous depth of C.'s knowledge and careful study of the Book of Deuteronomy. However, he has a particular perspective on Deuteronomy with which not all will agree. C. believes that the laws

of Deuteronomy are primary and are used to shape the narrative elsewhere in the Pentateuch. In fact, he argues that the primary sacred text behind the laws is the Ten Commandments, which are then expanded in midrashic fashion into the laws of Deuteronomy 12-25; and he contends, finally, that these laws are expanded in narrative form through the history found in Genesis-2 Kings (p. xiv). That this is a difficult position to sustain can be demonstrated by the example of Deut 24:16, which forbids the punishment of family members for the wrongdoing of an individual. There are numerous examples in the biblical narrative where this is precisely what happens (e.g., Joshua 7, where Achan's family is stoned to death with him for his theft). C. acknowledges but does not satisfactorily explain the contradiction (p. 592).

One of C.'s main goals is to find structural unity in each of the readings, and indeed in Deuteronomy as a whole, through a series of concentric constructions that recur from the micro to the macro level. Thus, according to C., each subsection has a concentric structure (e.g., A B x B' A'), so that meaning is discovered in the structure as well as in the individual laws. I found many of these constructions to be strained; for example, I was not convinced by C.'s argument that the passage that begins with the law concerning a woman captured in war (21:10-14) forms an inclusion with the command to remember the Amalekite aggression (25:17-19) and that the central part of this structure is five laws on social ethics (23:16-26). However, C. makes a valiant attempt to argue for structural unity within the law codes of Deuteronomy.

Another puzzling aspect of the commentary is C.'s reliance on the theory of C. L. Labuschagne concerning the use of hidden sacred numbers, or numerology, in the text of the Hebrew Bible (*Numerical Secrets of the Bible: Rediscovering the Bible Codes* [North Richland, TX: BIBAL, 2000]). Although I have not read this book myself, searches for such hidden codes in the Bible rarely stand up to scholarly scrutiny, and I would urge caution when approaching this aspect of C.'s commentary.

On the whole, however, C. has done a marvelous job distilling the vast field of Deuteronomical research into a usable commentary. This volume, along with its companion, is an important new addition to any collection of commentaries on Deuteronomy.

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