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Book Review: Reading Hosea-Micah

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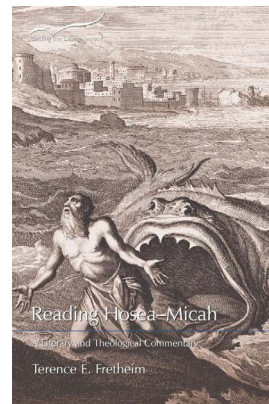
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Terence E. Fretheim. *Reading Hosea–Micah: A Literary and Theological Commentary*. Reading the Old Testament. Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013. xv + 224 pp. \$22.00.

Terence Fretheim is Elva B. Lovell Professor of Old Testament Emeritus at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. His previous publications on the so-called Minor Prophets include *The Message of Jonah: A Theological Commentary*. The *Reading the Old Testament* series is intended to present “cutting-edge research in [a form] accessible’ to a wide audience ranging from specialists in the field to educated laypeople” (p. 1). Fretheim’s commentary is thus not a technical analysis of the Hebrew text but an exposition of the “thought units” of the text’s final form.



Fretheim states in his introduction that he is aware of the ancient tradition that counts Hosea–Malachi as a single book (the Book of the Twelve). He is also aware of attempts in modern scholarship to explain the internal evidence for the composition of the Twelve. Nevertheless, Fretheim focuses on the individuality of the first six books of the Twelve. He does not give a defense of this approach, nor does he argue against (or interact with) more recent research into the making of the Book of the Twelve.

Commentary for each of the six books (Hosea–Micah) features concise introductory material designed to address special issues related to the particular book at hand. The commentary itself is not word-by-word or even verse-by-verse but section-by-section exegesis, giving attention to smaller details as needed. The author does not provide an annotated translation of the texts. In fact, it is often not clear what translation or what text (e.g., Masoretic Text, Septuagint, etc.) the author is following and why. Naturally the longer books, Hosea and Amos, receive the lion’s share of discussion.

Fretheim deals briefly in his introduction to Joel with what is one of the most prominent themes in the Book of the Twelve, namely, the Day of the LORD—which, out of the books he treats, surfaces in Joel, Amos, and Obadiah. According to Fretheim, “The phrase refers not to a single day but to several different days (past, imminent, or future) on which God is active in a decisive way for or against Israel and/or foreign nations” (p. 90). Fretheim does not entertain other views on this subject. This has the advantage of concision, but the disadvantage is the loss of a broader frame of reference for the reader.

Fretheim’s treatment of Jonah takes the standard critical approach that denies the book its historicity. He finds many details unbelievable such as the size of the city of Nineveh and the story of the fish. He does not interact with conservative explanations of these details, nor does he explore the option that the author intended the book to be read as an historical narrative whether or not the reader thinks it actually happened. Fretheim extends his view of the book’s exaggeration to include its presentation of God: “Indeed, might the book of Jonah be saying that, in and through the exaggerations, in spite of what readers may think (or hope for!), their God is *not* such a manipulative, all-controlling deity?” (p. 172). Of course, this presupposes that the reader shares Fretheim’s understanding of God as manipulative in the book.

Students and pastors (and perhaps a more general readership) will find Fretheim’s commentary to be a sure-footed, well-written, and accessible guide at many points. But the claim that this volume constitutes “cutting-edge research” for specialists is highly questionable. Much of what is of value in this book appears in other commentaries on these books. Discussion of the early versions and the history of interpretation from antiquity to the present is notably absent. Fretheim’s “Works Cited” section features

only twenty authors apart from his own name. Thus, while the commentary is generally helpful and edifying, the author apparently does not intend to make an original contribution to scholarship.

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Brian N. Peterson. *Ezekiel in Context: Ezekiel's Message Understood in Its Historical Setting of Covenant Curses and Ancient Near Eastern Mythological Motifs*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 182. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012. xviii + 416 pp. Paper. \$48.00.

This book is a revision of Peterson's PhD thesis, completed at the University of Toronto. He takes a literary approach focussing on the final form of the text, yet without neglecting the ancient Near Eastern context of the prophet. His central thesis is that the visions and extended metaphors in the book of Ezekiel underscore its message; the "peaks" of the book are structured around covenant curse and renewal. His argument in the book begins with an introductory chapter, followed by four chapters examining the "peaks" of the book. A final chapter containing conclusions and implications is followed by an appendix, "Ezekiel and Apocalyptic," a bibliography, and a Scripture index.

The lengthy introductory chapter (93 pp.) outlines the methodology and literary technique Peterson employs. He details five methodological approaches: (1) historical; (2) cross-textual and motif analysis; (3) motif/metaphor blending; (4) rhetorical/literary; and (5) theological. Peterson sides with the "scholarly consensus" of a sixth-century Babylonian provenance for the book and its author (p. 16). It is argued that "there is a strong probability, if not certainty, that Ezekiel was reeducated in some fashion," in the Babylonian culture, or at least the language (p. 23). While some Babylonian influence is inevitable, I wonder what the extent of this influence was, given that the prophet was resettled along with the other deportees as a community in a specific location (Ezek 1:1). Peterson is on firmer ground when he argues that one of the underlying motifs in the text derives from Deut 28 and Lev 26 (p. 42). He also argues that ANE treaties were influential. One fresh idea in this book is the rhetorical structure of Ezekiel (p. 89). Peterson proposes five "peaks" in the book, corresponding to the major visions and extended metaphors:

1. vision 1 (Ezek 1–3)
2. vision 2 (chs. 8–11)
3. extended metaphors (chs. 16, 23)
4. vision 3 (37:1–14)
5. vision 4 (chs. 40–48)

The methodology in this introductory chapter is applied in the four subsequent chapters, which examine the "peaks" of the structure.

Chapter Two covers the first two "peaks." The first vision sets the tone for the rest of the book by highlighting the character of Yahweh. He will come to punish those who have broken his covenant. The second vision describes the curse of temple abandonment, "the first and perhaps greatest treaty curse" (p. 171). Chapter Three, "The Awesome Deity's Judgement," outlines the sins committed by Israel and

