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Review: Joel: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary

David Pettus
Liberty University, dpettus@liberty.edu

Hanson is especially adept at pointing out the significant philosophical questions ("where is God?," "will God keep silent?") that the text addresses. It appears that Hanson is driven by a sincere pastoral concern which he sensitively applies to the twentieth century. For example, the words of Isaiah 42 are applied to modern regimes where people looking to God's redemptive power "can become powerful agents in the transformation of human communities and nature alike" (p. 52) or a lengthy recounting of the alcoholism of baseball pitcher Jeff Musselmann as an illustration of the teaching of 54:1–17. Such applications help to demonstrate exactly how Hanson's interpretation works itself out in contemporary life. Disagreement with Hanson's assertions may draw the reader back to the text to clarify its meaning.

Taken together, Hanson and Seitz have produced a thoughtful reflection upon and engagement with the text and its application to 20th-century life. This reflection, though beset by the baggage of traditional historical critical assumptions, merits a close reading. I find it difficult to conclude that they have reached the lofty goal of recovering "the theological coherence available to precritical readers," but they have made several steps in the right direction.

Neil O. Skjoldal
Trinity International University, Miami, FL

Joel. By James L. Crenshaw. AB 24C. New York: Doubleday, 1995, xiv + 251 pp., $32.50.

The publication of another commentary on the little book of Joel is always cause for rejoicing, particularly when a scholar of the caliber of James L. Crenshaw is the author and it happens to be in the distinguished Anchor Bible (AB) series.

In the AB format, Crenshaw provides a contemporary translation of the Hebrew text, an overview of the book, discusses introductory issues, and then proceeds with notes and comments on each outlined portion of the text. In a short review, one can only touch on a few of these matters. On the book's exact historical setting, Crenshaw remains agnostic (p. 28), but he accepts the majority consensus that the book is postexilic. The order of the Twelve in the MT and LXX is inconclusive, but the internal evidence favors a date in perhaps the fifth century (p. 23). He notes the reference to the captivity and deportation in 3:2, 3 (MT 4:2, 3); the omission of references to the classical enemies, Assyria and Babylonia (p. 24); oft cited postexilic Hebrew words such as *haššelaḥ* and *sôp* (p. 26); the quotations from presumed earlier authoritative biblical texts/traditions (pp. 27–28), and the theocratic form of the community (p. 28) among other things.

Crenshaw does an admirable job of presenting the history of the structural schemes proposed by various scholars and notes that the trend of scholarship is to recognize the structural unity of the book, with 3:3–8 (MT 4:4–8) seen as a later addition by some. After exploring the stylistic and rhetorical features of the book, which he notes is rich in simile and metaphor, the author deals with religious views of the book. Crenshaw takes modern commentators to task for assuming the guilt of the Jerusalemite faith community in their interpretations when the book does not even mention the reason for the locust plague and drought (pp. 40, 146). Turning to the day of Yahweh, Crenshaw believes "that the prophet interpreted a natural catastrophe in Judah, a severe infestation of locusts and a severe drought, in terms of the dreaded day of YHWH's visitation in wrath, only to transfer this divine manifestation to foreign nations after the Jewish community turned to YHWH and became fortunate recipients of divine compassion" (p. 50).

In his fresh translation of the Hebrew text into modern English idiom, Crenshaw says he has "tried to navigate in treacherous waters, steering between the Scylla of literalism and the Charybdis of paraphrase." In some cases, he has done an admirable job; in others, methinks he runs aground. The translation of 1:15b as *ûkešōd mišadday* "like destruction from the Destroyer" transfers the alliteration in the Hebrew text and steers confidently between the shoals. Likewise, the rendering of *lebāb* as "mind" and "inner disposition" in 2:12, 13 captures the meaning and contrast with a mere ritualistic tearing of clothing. However, the translation of *rûḥî* ("my Spirit") in 2:28 (MT 3:1) as "my vital force" runs aground on the shores of Charybdis and conjures up visions of *Star Wars* and the *Return of the Jedi.* While the semantic range of *rûaḥ* may encompass such a rendering, it is by no means clear that the prophet saw the endowment of Yahweh's Spirit in this way (cf. Ps 51:11; Isa 48:16 for alternative OT views). Crenshaw's translation likewise hides the trinitarian possibilities present in full canonical context and the focus on the personal presence of Yahweh that lie in the semantic range of the original Hebrew. Here it would have been better if Crehshaw had stayed with the "surface meaning of the text," as he calls it (p. 52).

On the famous *hammôreh liṣdāqâ* in 2:23, Crenshaw opts for "the early rain in its season" based upon Schmid's research into the Egyptian and ancient Near Eastern philosophical background of *ṣedeq* as "order" in the structure of the universe (p. 155) and Joel's failure to interpret the text if he really meant to render it as "teacher of righteousness."

Crenshaw has given us an excellent technical commentary, reasonably priced, that shows great erudition and learning. For the scholar, researcher and graduate student, it is a fine addition to one's library, on a par with Wolff's in the Hermeneia series. It has a thorough bibliography, except for the strange absence of Douglas Stuart's commentary on Joel in *Hosea-Jonah* in the Word series. However, the pastor and lay reader should look elsewhere for robust, readable commentary and exegesis for sermon preparation and teaching Sunday School. The book's highly technical nature extends beyond the notes into the comments section on each pericope, and one is amazed that the AB claims it is aimed at the general reader with little or no formal training in Biblical studies.

David D. Pettus
The Criswell College, Dallas, TX

Of Methods, Monarchs, and Meanings: A Sociorhetorical Approach to Exegesis. By Gina Hens-Piazza. Studies in Old Testament Interpretation 3. Macon: Mercer University, 1996, x + 199 pp., $30.00. *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation.* By Vernon K. Robbins. Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996, x + 148 pp., $15.00 paper.

Two of the most prominent approaches to Biblical interpretation to arise in the last 20 years use methods and insights drawn from the fields of social science and rhetorical criticism. Two recent publications offer models for integrated approaches to *sociorhetorical* interpretation. In *Of Methods, Monarchs, and Meanings*, Gina Hens-Piazza surveys the methods of rhetorical criticism and social-science criticism used in Biblical studies before proposing a collaborative method. Hens-Piazza distinguishes between a rhetorical method centered on classical canons of oratory, exemplified by the approach of George Kennedy (*New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 1984) and the approach of James Muilenburg (*A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric*, 1953) that examines rhetoric as compositional artistry.