

The NIV Application Commentary: Joshua

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The typical Bible student has choices galore when it comes to commentaries on the Bible: big ones, skinny ones; multi-volume sets and single-volume tomes; commentaries by men now dead for hundreds of years, and those by budding scholars. Some commentaries are geared to specific audiences: laymen, preachers, pastors, scholars, teachers. How is one to know which commentaries are best? Don't worry! There are whole books devoted to helping you choose the right commentary!

I think a good commentary should discuss the particulars of the Bible text at hand. It will answer the tough questions and will bring relevant historical information to bear. It will unfold the setting of the biblical book and in a sense transport you there. The best commentaries don't leave you there, however. They bring you back to our world equipped with truth from the text. They aim to apply the Biblical text to the questions of today. This is where the *NIV Application Commentaries* excel, in my estimation.

Joshua isn't my first sampling of the *NIV Application Commentary*. I have the 2nd Corinthians volume on my shelf (my collection of commentaries is a motley crew of mismatched rummage sale finds and a few gifts or purchases sprinkled in). But this is the first volume I've examined at length.

Robert Hubbard follows the *NIV Application Commentary* pattern well as he examines Joshua. The book of Joshua is broken down into fifteen or so passages. Each passage is then approached from three different angles in sections that are standard throughout the book and the commentary series. The "original meaning" section, gives a detailed analysis of the passage much like you would find in a typical critical commentary. Word meaning, syntactical relationships, parallels with other literature and other parts of the Bible are explored, etc. The "bridging contexts" section focuses more on themes that bridge the context of the original passage to today's concerns. It is in a sense a biblical theology section covering the biblical theological themes as found in the given passage. The "contemporary significance" section focuses in on just a few topics and situates them (often by means of illustrations) in the contemporary context in such a way as to make the text's true significance and meaning come alive.

Let me offer an example of how the three angles work in *Joshua*. In chapter 12, the "original meaning" section focuses on the listing of the defeated kings. Then "bridging contexts" hones in on Yahweh's sovereignty as a theme throughout Scripture. "Contemporary significance", then applies all of this to Christian's today by focusing on Christ's kingship. Hubbard includes a liturgical reading (suitable for church use) on the kingship of Christ that is very much in the spirit of the list of defeated kings in Joshua 12.

Before the book turns to the text of Joshua, a fairly in-depth introduction is provided. There Hubbard sets the stage by bringing up key questions modern readers have of Joshua (why all the killing?) and providing an excellent historical background of the book and major interpretive questions surrounding it (when and how was Joshua written?; does archeology prove the truth of Joshua's accounts?). I must admit, however, the commentary would have been better with just a few less prefaces. Before the introduction, one is asked to wade through a "series introduction" and a "general editor's preface (to Joshua in particular)", and finally the author gets to provide his preface. But this is just a minor quibble.

Throughout Joshua, Hubbard maintained a good balance of discussing scholarly issues and keeping the discussion open to lay readers. He wasn't afraid to be tentative in some of his own positions, as when discussing the question of archeological support for the destruction of Jericho, or in discussing the timing of the Exodus.

Hubbard did an excellent job of tracing themes within Joshua, as in comparing the Gibeonite situation with the Ai debacle. He also pointed out several connections with Joshua and the Pentateuch and other OT books (for instance comparing Ezekiel's description of the renewed land with Joshua's depiction of the as-yet-unconquered land). Most importantly, he doesn't hesitate to bring out connections between Joshua and NT thought. He gives an excellent comparison of Joshua's commission in chapter 1 and Christ's great commission to the church. Still, at times he doesn't find connections that could be made, as in his discussion of the *herem* problem. There he failed to mention obvious parallels with Saul and the command to wipe out the Amalekites and the Psalms that mention “dashing (the children of Israel's enemies) against the stones”. These parallels call into question his conclusion on the *herem* debate.

In discussing the book of Joshua, astute readers will wonder what Hubbard's take on the land question would be. I found his discussion of it to be in line with my covenantal perspective on the issue. He highlights how 11:23 declares officially that the land promise was fulfilled. He also intriguingly explains how Joshua's depictions of the land intentionally embellished and expanded the picture to be “huge and fabled”. He later quotes Hagner approvingly “Abraham 'knew that what God ultimately had in store for his people transcended security and prosperity in a parcel of real estate on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.” So Hubbard takes the view that the NT views the land typographically, yet he still holds a future for Israel is to be found in Rom. 11 and a future conversion to Christ.

I can't recommend this book enough. My estimation of the *NIV Application Commentary* series was enhanced through my study of this particular installment. I learned a lot about Joshua and appreciated how Hubbard navigates the careful reader through some fairly problematic issues all the while maintaining a deep evangelical commitment to an inerrantist, gospel-prizing approach to Scripture.

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