

"Israel Served the Lord": The Book of Joshua as Paradoxical Portrait of Faithful Israel (ND Reading the Scriptures)

Rachel M. Billings

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Two themes have dominated scholarly interpretation of the book of Joshua within the past century: the literary "discovery" of the Deuteronomistic History and the archaeological detection of evidence related to Israel's occupation of Canaan. In this newest volume in the series Reading the Scriptures, Rachel M. Billings addresses the fragmentation often brought about by these developments and offers a more holistic reading of Joshua, which joins theological sophistication with an emphasis on its meaning and purpose as a literary work.

Through a hermeneutical and literary lens, Billings analyzes the story of Rahab and Achan, the stories of the Gibeonites and the Transjordanian altar, and the theme of the completeness of Israel's taking of the land of Canaan. She argues that the way in which the book of Joshua presents these materials reminds Israel of the dynamic nature of its identity as YHWH's people—an identity that demands a continued response of obedience parallel to YHWH's ever-unfolding work on Israel's behalf. The book of Joshua portrays Israel's obedience as not merely an unattainable ideal or a thing of the past, but a living reality that unfolds when YHWH's people acknowledge His claim upon them and strive to serve Him.

"Rachel M. Billings rejects both historicist and ironic readings of the text. In her hands Joshua becomes instead a powerful statement of a theological ideal, an ideal that is self-critical as well as aspirational. Her reading represents one of the best examples I have seen of what can be called 'canonical' interpretation: a literarily sensitive reading of the received form of the text in relation to its canonical context, its historical 'depth dimension' and its theological subject matter." —**Stephen B. Chapman, Duke Divinity School**



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