

BOOK REVIEW

The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings: The Schocken Bible Vol. 2. Translation, Introduction and Notes by Everett Fox. (New York: Schocken, 2014). Reviewed by David J. Zucker.

This work is the sequel to Fox's *The Five Books of Moses: The Schocken Bible Vol. 1*, published in 1995. As in the earlier volume, Fox's rendition of the Hebrew reflects his desire to translate the biblical texts by reflecting their aural quality. Therefore this is a book as much to be read aloud as it is a work to be studied. His translations reflect the rhythms of Hebrew speech. He seeks to bring out the underlying plays-on-words or puns that are part of the original text. As Fox explains, he "aims to highlight features of the Hebrew text that are not always visible or audible to Western audiences" (ix). There are some conscious changes from his rendition in *The Five Books of Moses*. He has reduced the number of hyphenated words and likewise cut down the number of words in brackets. In some cases Fox has simplified his translations, forgoing the more literal words such as for example "New-Moon" and simply replacing it with month.

The books of the Early Prophets (*Nevi'im rishonim*) – Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings constitute over one fifth of the Hebrew Bible. They progress chronologically. They stretch from the Israelite's settlement of Canaan (c. 1200 BCE) for six centuries to the conquest and devastation of the kingdom of Judah, along with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (586 BCE). As Fox explains in his introduction, these books "look at a long series of events, including wars, tribal rivalries, dramatic changes in leadership, and the intrusion of great empires, through the prism of a divine-human relationship" (xxi). Joshua records the conquest of the Land, but through the lens of a conditional gift from God. Judges presents examples of good and bad leader-

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ship, and links success to obedience to God's ways. Samuel offers portraits of the wonderfully talented, but ultimately human-flawed early monarchs of Israel. Kings downplays the human-based dynastic accomplishments in favor of a view that suggests fidelity to God is the main measure and condition for worldly success. Fox also notes that these books are written and possibly edited/re-edited over several centuries. One of their goals was the "concern over the casting and preservation of national identity" (xxv).

The introductory material also offers advice how to use this volume. It provides a general overview, and suggests an approximate biblical chronology. Each of the books features maps, and a helpful overview. At the end of the work there is a section that offers a list of recurring names in the Early Prophets, along with an explanation how to pronounce their names in Hebrew, how they are commonly translated in English and who or what they are. Place names are underlined. (Shimson [*shim-SHOHN*] [Samson]: . . . a judge, a hero of immense strength; Hatzor [*hah-TZOR*] [Hazor]: Major fortress city in northern Israel.) Each of the four books has a fine introduction. Here Fox offers a variety of details that might include the structure of the book itself, and its literary importance. There also are limited running commentary/explanatory notes at the bottom of most pages. Fox highlights important aspects of each book. For example, for Judges he notes that this is a diverse and curious collection of material. Among its themes are Israel's relationship with God, the fact that Israel cannot seem to survive without the institution of monarchy (although that will only be realized in the book of Samuel), and finally it shows the primacy of the tribe of Judah. Judges also "makes use of violence mainly to convey a series of religious and political messages" (128). In his introduction to Judges Fox also offers some thoughts on the fact that women play an enormous role in that book. They seem "to act as a moral barometer for the state of Israelite society" (132).

While in his introductions Fox usually refers to characters and places by their standard English translation (Joshua, Deborah, Jephthah), in the text itself he writes their names as they are pronounced in Hebrew (Yehoshua, Devora, Yiftah). Often Hebrew names are linked to events in the story. In

addition, using Hebrew forms introduces a “freshness to the reader’s experience” which is necessary when reading familiar material. For the term that refers to God’s sacred name, Fox uses the locution YHWH. In the introductory notes he mentions that the reader might choose to substitute such possibilities as “‘the Lord’ or ‘the Eternal’ . . . *Adonai*, or *Ha-Shem* (‘the Name’)” (xix).

This volume is filled with wonderful insights, and contains a wide range of sources in the bibliography. It has great value both as a study of these books, and as a contemporary attempt to capture the aural nuances of the Hebrew text.