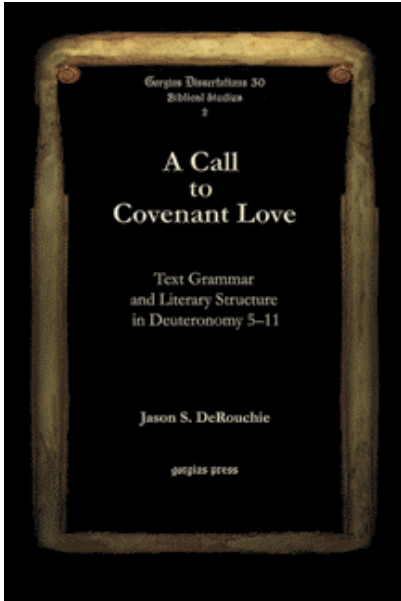


RBL 10/2009



DeRouchie, Jason S.

***A Call to Covenant Love: Text Grammar and
Literary Structure in Deuteronomy 5-11***

Gorgias Dissertations 30; Gorgias Dissertations, Biblical Studies 2

Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2007. Pp. xxv + 398.
Hardcover. \$132.00. ISBN 9781593336745.

Max Rogland
Erskine Theological Seminary
Columbia, South Carolina

This volume seeks to apply text-linguistic methodology to the study of Deut 5-11 in order to establish its flow of thought on a more objective basis than has typically been done in previous studies of this section of the book. Rather than focusing on “microsyntax” (grammatical relationships within individual clauses or sentences), the author is concerned with examining “macrosyntax,” that is, communicative features that “extend beyond the level of the clause or sentence to larger units of text” (2). Most often the literary structure of Deut 5-11 has been analyzed on an intuitive level or on the basis of stylistic features such as lexical or thematic repetition. While admitting that these approaches have indeed shed light on the literary artistry of Deut 5-11 (this volume in fact substantiates the results of such analyses in many ways), the author employs a more formally based approach to tracing the argument of this section, utilizing an approach that is in general agreement with that of a number of well-known text grammarians such as Longacre, Buth, Talstra, Niccacci, and so on. On the basis of his textlinguistic analysis of Deut 5-11, the author ultimately concludes that this section is both “coherent in its discussion and cohesive in its organization” (269).

Part 1 of the book consists of three chapters. After a discussion of terminology and issues of authorship, the introductory chapter presents a summary and survey of literary studies

on Deut 5–11. As a text-linguistic study, the author is concerned with the final form of the text, and he thus touches only in passing on source- and redaction-critical studies of Deuteronomy; the modern scholarly works most relevant to his approach begin with Lohfink's *Das Hauptgebot*, which paved the way for other studies focusing on the final form of Deut 5–11. Such studies, he argues, have been driven primarily by stylistic analysis and have given little attention to formal macrosyntactic features within the text's surface structure.

The second chapter explains the text-linguistic theoretical framework for the study and discusses the author's reasons for delimiting Deut 5–11 as a discrete textual unit. A fundamental assumption of the study is the author's view that textual wholes, rather than isolated words or sentences, are the primary and natural units of communication. It is for this reason that he opts for a text-linguistic approach focusing on the macrosyntactic roles of textual constituents, although he notes that ultimately both micro-syntax and macro-syntax work to clarify meaning and grammatical function. Additionally, in this chapter the author provides an argument that, *contra* scholars such as Christensen, Deuteronomy is for the most part to be classified as prose rather than poetry. Moreover, he argues that its "text type" (which he considers to be a parameter distinct from "genre"; see 31–32) is to be identified as "behavioral hortatory discourse."

Chapter 3 describes the database used for the study as well as the specific methodology utilized in the second part of the book. In this chapter the author discusses a host of linguistic issues such as the definition of "clauses" versus "sentences," the classification of different clause classes (he opts for a dichotomy of "non-copular" versus "copular" clauses in contrast to the more common opposition of "verbal" versus "nominal" clauses), issues pertaining to differentiating between subject and predicate in nominal clauses, and so on. It is an informative chapter, although its theoretical density undermines his earlier claim (25) that he is writing primarily to Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars rather than linguists; only someone with an avid interest in linguistics will have the patience to work through the material.

Part 2 of the volume consists of two chapters followed by a conclusion. Chapter 4 is the most substantial of all (95–216) and contains an examination of text grammar in Deut 5–11, moving from an analysis of form to semantic meaning and finally to discourse function. Four particular communicative constraints are examined that control the structural shape of biblical texts: text logic (which relates to clause connections such as the presence or absence of *waw* and the text blocks that result from these connections); foregrounding (which controls verb form and clause class, both of which demarcate the mainline of text structure within a unit); participant reference (i.e., the use or nonuse of explicit subjects); and lexical structuring (i.e., the use of lexical discourse markers).

The fifth chapter employs the text-linguistic principles distilled in the preceding chapter in order to develop a macrostructural and theological overview of Deut 5–11. While not a full exegetical commentary, it seeks to show in summary form how formal features in the surface structure of the text help to delineate the overall flow of thought. It is this chapter that will prove the most useful and stimulating for the exegete. To mention only one example, the discussion sheds some interesting light from a text-linguistic perspective on the role of the description of God as a “consuming fire” in Deut 9:1–11:32; rather than being merely a passing comment, the author argues that this textual subunit is structured around this description of Yahweh.

A concluding chapter summarizes the study itself and crystallizes its major contributions, specifically: (1) it provides evidence that the typical dichotomy of verbal versus nominal clauses is misdirected and that it would be more helpful to distinguish between copular and noncopular clauses; (2) it argues that *waw* “always links two structures of equal microsyntactic value and is used to join texts into cohesive units” (271); (3) it both confirms the benefits of, and identifies the limitations of, text-type analysis. The chapter also summarizes specific results of the study for the interpretation of Deuteronomy, such as the text-linguistic support it provides for the Lutheran/Catholic numbering of the Decalogue as opposed to the Jewish or Orthodox/Reformed numbering systems (this issue is discussed in detail in the fourth chapter, 127–32). The author concludes by suggesting avenues for further research. The conclusion is followed by several lengthy appendices containing the data for the study, a bibliography, and an index of authors (there is, regrettably, no index of Scripture references).

This reviewer is not convinced that text-linguistic methodology is necessarily more “objective” than other approaches to textual analysis, and the author’s repeated claims in this regard became somewhat grating. Nevertheless, the importance of attending to macrosyntactical connections between sentences for textual interpretation can hardly be denied. Moreover, most text-grammatical studies of the Old Testament have focused on historical narrative rather than law. In that light, this book helps to fill a notable gap in the literature. As mentioned above, the nonlinguist will find much of the material to be very hard going, but by making judicious use of the book’s conclusion and its penultimate chapter on literary structure and interpretation (ch. 5), one will be able to locate the particular textual discussions of greatest interest.