

BOOK REVIEW

Henze, Matthias (ed.), *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). xv + 568 pp. Pbk. \$50 USD.

This edited volume offers eighteen fresh essays covering the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible as reflected in different ancient translations of the Tanakh and various non-canonical writings. Although interest in the hermeneutical sensibilities of pre-rabbinic Judaism is a current scholarly trend, this is the first collection exclusively devoted to covering their different incarnations in assorted compositions. The book itself is divided into eight parts and includes an extensive bibliography. Henze clarifies the precise goals for this compilation in the preface, noting that this book distinguishes itself from the other introductory works available by seeking to be a 'systematic introduction to biblical interpretation in the Jewish literature of antiquity' (pp. viii-ix), this being from the third century BCE to the second century CE. Henze notes that the decision to organize the essays by books covered, as opposed to chronological or hermeneutical categories, stemmed from the fact that in many cases, chronology is difficult to determine for these writings, and the use of interpretive categories requires forcing modern scholarly constructs on ancient writings, which often bridge more than one of these groupings.

Part 1 consists of a single chapter, James L. Kugel's 'The Beginnings of Biblical Interpretation'. Kugel emphasizes the importance of the legal materials of the Torah for the returnees from the Babylonian exile, as these people desired to be obedient and avoid future punishment. He helpfully provides four basic assumptions that he states can be considered typical of all ancient interpreters: (1) 'The Bible is a fundamentally cryptic document'; (2) 'The Bible is a great book of lessons'; (3) 'The Bible is perfectly consistent and free of error or internal contradiction'; (4) 'Every word of Scripture comes from God' (p. 14). Kugel finishes this article with a brief survey of how ancient sources handled the end of Enoch's life and a small section discussing

the tendency of these interpreters to join small ‘motifs’ derived from different verses.

Part 2 has three chapters and deals with interpretive activity found within the Hebrew Bible itself. Yair Zakovitch addresses ‘Inner-biblical Interpretation’ by first stressing the ‘fluid boundaries’ of the canon itself as well as its books during the biblical period; these variations can be considered to represent differing interpretive traditions. After noting that exegesis began when oral traditions were first written down, Zakovitch lists and provides examples of thirteen different ways the Hebrew Bible interprets itself: lexical interpretation, juxtaposition, analogy, the filling of gaps, resolving contradictions, the identification of anonymous figures, name etymologies, the interpretation of chronologies and chronologies as interpretation, genealogical lists as exegesis, the incorporation of poetry into narrative, the interpretation of narrative in poetry, poetry creating prose, and allegory.

Martin Rösel’s essay on the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint begins by stating that any examination of the LXX as an interpretive work needs to be guided by the consideration of five specific questions. He states scholars must ask if mapping these interpretive acts is possible, if different levels of interpretation can be distinguished, if types of interpretation in the Septuagint are discernible, if variances exist in how different Old Testament books are translated, and if any general factors can be deduced regarding how the LXX translates the Hebrew Bible. Rösel registers his dissatisfaction with the interlineality paradigm advocated by Albert Pieterma, as he believes the Septuagint was intended to be a stand-alone literary work. He closes with categories and examples of types of interpretation found in the Septuagint: no interpretation, linguistic decoding and interpretation, improvements of the text, identifications and actualizations, and corrections, expansions and explanations.

Edward M. Cook supplies a chapter covering ‘The Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Targums’. He begins by acknowledging that while the Targums are largely from the rabbinic period, they contain much earlier material. Cook argues against the popular theory that Jews were primarily speaking Aramaic by the post-exilic period and instead posits that the use of Aramaic translations alongside the revered Hebrew texts allowed for greater fluidity and interpretive license. Thus, the Targums ‘are both less and more than translations of the Bible’ (p. 95). After listing the extant Targums and summarizing what is

known of their provenance, Cook provides categories and examples of types of interpretation found in the Targums: resolving figurative speech, anthropomorphisms, ‘guesswork’ with obscure words, adding detail, harmonization, avoidance of disrespect, geographic contemporization, halakic contemporization and historical contemporization.

Part 3, ‘Rewritten Bible’, begins with Jacques van Ruiten’s essay on the treatment of Abram in *Jub.* 11.14–12.15. Although the essay as a whole is oriented around this test case, Ruiten begins with a heavily footnoted introduction to the nature, structure and theology of *Jubilees* as a whole. Throughout, charts comparing the texts of parallel portions of Genesis and *Jubilees* are shown, allowing the reader to see the source materials being compared. At the end of the detailed comparison, Ruiten concludes that while the author of *Jubilees* was faithful to the text of Genesis, most of his deviations seem to be intended to eliminate ‘tensions and inconsistencies’ (p. 153) in the story.

Moshe J. Bernstein’s chapter ‘The *Genesis Apocryphon*’ looks at the handling of Genesis 5–15 in the *Genesis Apocryphon*. After noting its three-part structure, possible relationship with *1 (Ethiopic) Enoch* and *Jubilees*, composite nature and difficult dating, Bernstein sets out his taxonomy of different ways the *Apocryphon* handles the Bible. In terms of large-scale structure, Bernstein focuses on ‘rearrangement and omission’. One of the examples he offers is how the story of Noah (‘the saviour of mankind’) is placed *after* the story of the Watchers, ‘to highlight Noah even more strongly than in the biblical story’ (p. 166). Under the heading ‘microstructure’ he observes the use of such literary techniques as apparent translation of the underlying Hebrew text and the employment of textual echoes from elsewhere in the Torah. In a similar vein, Howard Jacobson’s essay examining Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* explores the different ways it creatively expands the biblical text, with an emphasis upon the role of analogous biblical texts providing inspiration for additions.

Part 4, ‘Qumran Literature,’ contains three chapters. Shani Tzoref examines the use of the Hebrew Bible in the *Community Rule*, one of several texts outlining regulations for the *Yahad* community. Here four categories of decreasing explicitness are employed to organize types of ways the biblical text is referenced, from ‘explicit citation’ to ‘implicit reworking of biblical language’ (p. 206). Of particular interest is the latter category. Tzoref’s chief example of ‘implicit exegetical paraphrase’ is a comparison between the priestly blessing of Num. 6.24–26

and a series of structurally similar curses found in 1QS 2.5-9. Tzoref's argument here (and throughout) likely could have been strengthened if she had incorporated linguistically quantifiable criteria other than lexical parallels. In her conclusion, she notes the weakness of exclusive dependence upon lexical parallels but does not develop this further (p. 231).

George Brooke's chapter, 'Prophetic Interpretation in the *Pesharim*', works throughout with a twofold definition of what constitutes 'prophetic interpretation': both the examination of the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible, and the interpretive work itself having a prophetic component. Brooke finds that the Qumran community saw themselves as continuing prophetic activity, that they used a variety of techniques to expand and supplement prophetic writings and that the use of unfulfilled prophecies is significant for understanding the future hopes of the Qumran community.

Sarah Tanzer contributes an essay, 'Biblical Interpretation in the *Hodayot*', covering the use (if not explicit interpretation) of Scripture in these psalm-like poems from Qumran. While saturated with biblical language, the compositions are uneven and diverse, rendering it difficult to draw large-scale conclusions. Noting that the use of the *Hodayot* for textual criticism of the Hebrew Psalter has not been fruitful, Tanzer approvingly summarizes recent studies that argue these imitations of Scripture were useful in the formation of 'sectarian identity'.

Part 5, 'Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments', begins with Matthias Henze's chapter, 'The Use of Scripture in the Book of Daniel'. Henze spends the majority of this essay working through select examples of Old Testament allusions in Daniel (some may object to his second-century BCE dating of the final form of the text), and ending with some short methodological reflections. After an interesting critique of Fishbane's treatment of Daniel, Henze notes two questions that he believes should guide future research concerning inner-biblical interpretation: (1) 'the general question of how to best approach the material before us' (p. 303), or more specifically, the question of whether it is preferable to have categories of types of interpretation or a general diachronic framework of changes in interpretive practice over time, and (2) the extent to which editors/redactors 'interpreted' or shaped the material they worked with (p. 304).

The next essay, 'How to Make Sense of Pseudonymous Attribution: The Cases of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*', is co-authored by Hindy Najman,

Itamar Manoff and Eva Mroczek. It revolves around three key questions: (1) ‘Why are these texts attributed to ideal figures in the past?’ (2) ‘Why do they turn to traditions specifically about the figures Ezra and Baruch?’ (3) ‘What effect does this sort of attribution have on the earlier and contemporaneous literary tradition from which these texts draw?’ (p. 308). Perhaps the most notable point developed in this chapter is the contention that, ‘pseudonymous attribution is a literary device that engages, elaborates on, and reinterprets a tradition’ (p. 326). Najman et al. do an excellent job of showing how Baruch and Ezra were made relevant for new audiences.

Robert Kugler’s chapter covering the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* focuses mainly on summarizing the contents of this work and providing a history of scholarly research. While he ably defends against the charge that as a Christian work *Testaments* cannot be used for understanding Jewish interpretive practices, the section developing specific interpretive examples is disappointingly short.

Part 6, ‘Wisdom Literature’, has two chapters. Benjamin Wright III addresses ‘Biblical Interpretation in the Book of Ben Sira’. He notes three complications related to defining ‘biblical interpretation’ in Ben Sira: (1) the dependence upon the Hebrew Bible but also oral traditions of sages; (2) the intention of Ben Sira to ‘construct a world for his students to inhabit’ (p. 367); (3) his need to present his interpretations as being authoritative. Wright also provides a brief survey of recent Ben Sira scholarship and some specific interpretive examples.

Peter Enns contributes a chapter on ‘Biblical Interpretation in the Wisdom of Solomon’. Enns notes the multiplicity of ways Pseudo-Solomon uses the Bible and spends most of the chapter working through specific examples of general interpretive trends in Wisdom 10–19. Pseudo-Solomon views Scripture as a source of wisdom, one that provides a history of God’s faithfulness that should inspire hope for the future.

Part 7, ‘Hellenistic Judaism’, consists of two chapters. Gregory Sterling looks at the interpretive practices of Philo of Alexandria, whose varied works concentrated overwhelmingly on the book of Genesis. Sterling argues this is due to Philo’s love of the patriarchs: ‘he wrote to demonstrate how humans can cultivate lives of virtue in their ascent to God’ (p. 433).

Zuleika Rodgers writes about ‘Josephus’s Biblical Interpretation’. Rodgers uses most of the chapter to develop an analysis of the text

(scope and structure, sources and narrative technique) and context (literary and historical) of the *Jewish Antiquities*; she states a knowledge of this context is crucial for making sense of the variegated ways Josephus uses the Bible.

Part 8, 'Biblical Interpretation in Antiquity', has only one chapter, 'Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation from Qumran to the Rabbis', by Aaron Shemesh. Shemesh thoughtfully explores the various kinds of interpretation found at Qumran (with a special focus on halakah). He also looks at the development of the creation of commentaries on the Bible from Qumran to the rabbinic literature. He groups his examples into the broad categories of 'explicit interpretations' and 'implicit interpretations'.

One feature that makes this collection slightly uneven is the fact that some chapters are much narrower in scope than others. All the essays stand well on their own, but readers may find it jarring to transition from an essay giving an overview of a book as a whole, to an essay devoted to analyzing a small subsection of a book. One may well question if conclusions drawn from a small cross-section of a given composition are applicable to the whole of the work, just as one may find an essay purporting to give a comprehensive picture of the interpretive practices in a given book disappointingly shallow. A second drawback is the unavoidably subjective nature of some of the interpretive categories employed by many of the authors in this volume. Some of the examples, while thought-provoking, could arguably be understood in ways other than the category supplied by the author. Although this is to be expected when dealing with (sometimes deliberately obscure!) ancient texts, it should at least be noted that a fair amount of 'interpretation' has to take place from the modern scholar's end.

In conclusion, *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* is a valuable contribution. All of the chapters are not only enlightening but also well stocked with bibliographic references for the interested reader looking for more information on a particular topic. Virtually anyone with an interest in biblical studies should find it fascinating and worthwhile.

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