

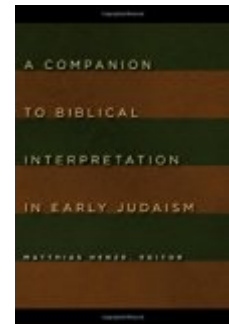


Matthias Henze, ed. *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012. 584 pp. \$29.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8028-0388-7.

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## A Useful Survey of Early Jewish Biblical Interpretation

*A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism*, edited by Matthias Henze, seeks to provide “a systematic introduction to biblical interpretation in the Jewish literature of antiquity” (p. ix). The *Companion* includes eighteen essays, under eight headings: “Introduction,” “The Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” “Rewritten Bible,” “The Qumran Literature,” “Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments,” “Wisdom Literature,” “Hellenistic Judaism,” and “Biblical Interpretation in Antiquity.” A short bibliography is conveniently provided at the end of each essay, as well as a cumulative bibliography and indices at the end of the book.

In the introduction, James Kugel situates “the beginnings of biblical interpretation” in the aftermath of Cyrus’s famous edict (ca. 538 BCE). Of particular significance is the great moment when the Judeans attended a lengthy public reading of “the book of the law of Moses” (Neh. 8:1-8), for, as Kugel points out, this public reading is accompanied by a public *explanation* of the text” (p. 9). Kugel also identifies “four assumptions” shared on the part of the early Jewish biblical exegetes: that the Bible is a cryptic document, is a great book of lessons, is perfectly consistent and free of error or internal contradiction, and derives from God. As a concrete example to illustrate how these four assumptions play out, Kugel highlights Enoch, and shows how some early interpreters handled the Pentateuch’s reticence about him.

Part 2 begins with Yair Zakovitch’s “Inner-biblical Interpretation.” He starts with a discussion of “the im-

precision of the distinction between inner-biblical and extrabiblical interpretation” (p. 29). The central thesis of the essay is twofold: first, that “extrabiblical texts” serve as “repositories of ancient traditions.” These “repositories” can help us get at the “roots of inner-biblical exegesis.” Second, “the gap between inner-biblical and extrabiblical interpretation is a misconception” (p. 61). It is therefore rather difficult to separate biblical literature from extrabiblical literature. In the second half of the essay, Zakovitch catalogues a number of inner-biblical phenomena, including modes of interpretation, lexical interpretation, analogy, name etymologies, chronologies, genealogical lists, etc. He also surveys, in broad fashion, the growth of the (Jewish) biblical canon as we have it today, with a view to “the exegetical implications resulting from the gradual canonization of the Hebrew Bible.” In his consideration of “other canons” and “the effect they have on the interpretation of their constituent writings,” Zakovitch briefly discusses what he calls “the canon” at Qumran (p. 33). However, the discussion about the “canon” at Qumran is limited only to the book of Jubilees, and the etiology Jubilees gives for Yom Kippur (Jub. 34:18-19). Unfortunately, the short treatment of the “canon” at Qumran is surpassed in brevity only by what is said about the “canon” of the Septuagint and then “the Christian [canon].” Indeed, only a brief word about Sirach figures into the discussion on the Septuagint, and “the Christian one” receives three quick sentences about Abraham, as he is mentioned in Hebrews 11:19.

Martin Rösel (“Translators as Interpreters: Scriptural

Interpretation in the Septuagint”) adopts a rough system for classifying examples of interpretation in the Septuagint. These include: cases in which the translators “refused to interpret their text and thus created a version that called for an interpretation on the side of the readers.” In such cases, the translators obviously avoided interpreting the text in order to offer their own interpretation. In other instances, “the interpretations are the result of linguistic problems.” Finally, there are cases where “the translators were actively attempting to improve their text, to enhance it, or to give it a specific interpretation” (p. 75). This third category receives more attention than the others. The texts examined are Numbers 8:9, Genesis 11:3, Numbers 27:17, Genesis 2:2,3, Genesis 4:7, and Exodus 15:13.

Edward Cook’s “The Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Targums,” completes part 2 with a most helpful overview of the extant Targums. As Cook explains, “After a certain point, Jewish interpreters had to incorporate their exegetical or interpretive insights into learned works or else shunt them into the Targums, which were the only outlet for ‘rewriting’ large portions of Bible text” (pp. 94-95). Consequently, the Targums are “both less and more” than translations of the Bible. “Less, because a translation is meant to be a kind of substitute of the original text.... The Targums never became ‘the Bible’ for Aramaic-speaking Jews.... But this also liberates the Targums to be *more* than just translations.... The coexistence of the Targum with the Hebrew original enabled the Targum to add to its literal renderings various amplifications and expansions” (p. 95). Cook explains how the various Targums resolve figurative speech, deal with anthropomorphisms, explain obscure words, add detail, harmonize discrepancies, and avoid the appearance of disrespect (on the part of biblical expressions) for the patriarchs. In the final section of the essay, Cook gives a couple examples of how the Targums “attempt to bring the text into conformity with the synagogue’s cultural, geographical, and historical milieu” (p. 110). While Geza Vermes is wont to use the term “applied exegesis,” Cook prefers “contemporization” in reference to this circumstance. The essay concludes with a word about such geographic contemporization, halakic contemporization, and historical contemporization in the Targums.

Part 3 opens with Jacques van Ruiten’s “Biblical Interpretation in the Book of *Jubilees*: The Case of the Early Abram.” The essay concentrates on the life of Abram from his birth until his departure from Ur, as told in *Jubilees* 11:14-12:15. Van Ruiten offers a general comparison between, and analysis of, the pericopes in Genesis

11:26-31 and *Jubilees* 11:14-12:15. “The author of *Jubilees* was a careful reader of Genesis” and he “tried to reproduce the story of Genesis as faithfully as possible, though without the tensions and inconsistencies that are in the biblical story” (p. 153).

In the first half of his essay, “The *Genesis Apocryphon*: Compositional and Interpretive Perspectives” Moshe J. Bernstein introduces the structure, genre, and provenance of the *Genesis Apocryphon*, as well as its relationship with other Second Temple literature. The second half of the essay moves from the “macrostructure” (i.e., how the *Apocryphon* handles the larger elements of the structure of the biblical story) to the “microstructure” (i.e., how smaller exegetical and stylistic units out of the *Apocryphon* are built). Bernstein cautions readers that “we must always keep in mind that we are reading and thinking about [texts belonging to the genre of ‘rewritten Bible’] very differently from the way that the ancient reader (or listener) did. The ancient reader read (or heard) a narrative that he may or may not have been able to compare with its biblical original as he read it” (p. 175). Bernstein therefore offers a caveat that, “despite the wealth of the interpretations to be found in [the *Genesis Apocryphon*], we should remember not to treat it only as a commentary in narrative form, but also as the literary artifact that it was undoubtedly intended to be” (p. 176).

Howard Jacobson brings part 3 to a close with an essay dealing with biblical interpretation in Pseudo-Philo (“Biblical Interpretation in Pseudo-Philo’s *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*”). According to Jacobson, “L.A.B.’s major creative narrative-exegetical technique is governed by analogy—or at least by what he saw as analogous narratives.” Jacobson furnishes several examples of how L.A.B. “routinely contains themes, language, and elements of plot that are not present in the source biblical narrative, but which he has taken from ‘analogous’ biblical contexts” (p. 181). L.A.B. also “expands” biblical characters (e.g., Dinah marries Job and has many children by him); “clears up” difficulties and ambiguities; and embellishes biblical narratives. Jacobson concludes the essay with a brief survey of L.A.B. scholarship, from Johannes Sichardt’s 1527 *editio princeps* to some recent trends in L.A.B. scholarship.

Part 4 begins with Shani Tzoref’s “The Use of Scripture in the *Community Rule*.” After a brief introduction to the texts that comprise the *Rule*, Tzoref examines a handful of cases where scripture is cited in “explicit” fashion. The essay also examines cases where scripture is employed by way of verbal allusion, “revised citation,”

idioms (“free use”), and implicit exegetical paraphrase. Tzoref highlights that Deuteronomy is the most significant source for the *Rule*, and that “the author of the *Community Rule* rereads his biblical source texts to accommodate his own message, but he does not wreak havoc on the original sense of the text in its biblical context” (p. 230).

In “Prophetic Interpretation in the *Pesharim*,” by “prophetic,” George J. Brooke refers both to *content* and to *method of interpretation*. Examples are given of explicit and implicit interpretations of the lives and writings of the prophets. Those who saw themselves as the heirs of the prophets also identified with them. “The literary data from the Qumran caves is best understood predominantly as a continuation of earlier prophetic activity; prophecy did not cease in the early postexilic period” (p. 252).

Sarah J. Tanzer contributes “Biblical Interpretation in the *Hodayot*” to the collection. Formal relationships between the *Hodayot* and biblical Psalms are identified. Tanzer also surveys some scholarship dealing with text-critical issues in the *Hodayot*, and shows how uses of scripture in the *Hodayot* have been variously classified.

Part 5 treats apocalyptic literature and testaments. In “The Use of Scripture in the Book of Daniel,” Henze seeks to “convey a sense of the extent to which the authors of Daniel invoke, paraphrase, rework, and otherwise make use of Israel’s sacred writings” (p. 280). The texts selected from Daniel for this purpose are chapters 2, 7, 8, and 10-12. In addition to this, Henze also addresses methodological considerations about Daniel’s use of scripture.

Hindy Najman, accompanied by Itamar Manoff and Eva Mroczek, contributes a piece dealing with “pseudonymous attribution,” using 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch as case studies. The essay (“How to Make Sense of Pseudonymous Attribution”) offers answers for a number of key questions: “Why are these texts attributed to ideal figures of the past? ... What effect does this sort of attribution have on the earlier and contemporaneous literary tradition from which these texts draw?” (p. 308). It is often the case that ancient pseudepigraphy is examined through the lens of modern notions of authorship. Najman proposes an alternative—“to consider the notion of *a discourse tied to a founder*: a practice of ascribing texts to an ideal figure, in order not only to authorize the texts in question but also to restore the figure’s authentic teachings” (p. 326).

Robert Kugler, in “*The Testaments of the Twelve Patri-*

*archs: A Not-So-Ambiguous Witness to Early Jewish interpretive Practices*,” comments on the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The first section of the essay represents a somewhat distilled version of Kugler’s earlier *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (2001). Kugler discusses the *Testaments*’ contents, genre, main themes, and research history. He writes that “the *Testaments* share with many other Jewish and Christian works one obvious overarching interpretive strategy: capitalizing on the emerging authority of the Hebrew Scriptures by invoking key figures in them to make fresh claims regarding the nature of being human in relationship with Israel’s God” (p. 355).

The two essays in part 6 focus on wisdom literature. In his piece, Benjamin G. Wright III surveys aspects of biblical interpretation in the book of Ben Sira. “Ben Sira had pedagogical goals, and he filtered [‘biblical’] traditions through a sapiential lens that pulled them into the orbit of his instruction” (p. 385). In this way, “the goal of Ben Sira’s instruction is not to exegete Scripture ... but to proffer Wisdom” (p. 367). Peter Enns, in “Pseudo-Solomon and His Scripture: Biblical Interpretation in the Wisdom of Solomon,” briefly discusses “the presence of the Hebrew Bible” in the Wisdom of Solomon. His focus here is on Wisdom 1:16-2:11, with a view to addressing the question of whether Pseudo-Solomon attempts to counter Qoheleth’s skepticism concerning death. As Enns would have it, “Pseudo-Solomon’s reflections resound with strong echoes of Qoheleth’s complaints, and indeed seem geared toward countering Qoheleth’s pessimism” (p. 393). Most of the essay, however, considers a handful of “Second Temple Interpretative Traditions” in Wisdom 10-19. Enns surveys how Pseudo-Solomon presents biblical characters, as well as a few examples that “sketch the broader context within which to view the interpretive activity seen in the Wisdom of Solomon” (p. 408). Pseudo-Solomon represents a “vital link” in key developments taking place in Second Temple Judaism, particularly as a shift in understanding the nature of wisdom itself. “Whereas the sages of the Hebrew Bible were concerned with observing patterns in the created order as the basis for godly conduct ... Pseudo-Solomon [was] concerned with observing the nature of God’s activity by exegeting the Book: the sage’s focus of attention now includes Scripture” (p. 410).

The subject of the two pieces in part 7 is Hellenistic Judaism. Gregory E. Sterling’s essay, “The Interpreter of Moses: Philo of Alexandria and the Biblical Text,” concerns Philo, our most important representative of Judeo-Hellenistic biblical exegesis and “the most prolific com-

mentator on Moses among Second Temple Jewish authors” (p. 415). Sterling provides a helpful survey of the use, extent, and text of Philo’s scriptures. The scope and layout of Zuleika Rodgers’s essay, “Josephus’s Biblical Interpretation,” is much like Sterling’s piece, but Rodgers gives more attention to the literary and historical contexts of Josephus’s writings.

The final essay, and the only contribution in part 8, is Aharon Shemesh’s “Biblical Exegesis and Interpretations from Qumran to the Rabbis.” The essay sets out to “elucidate the various types of Qumranic interpretation” and “to sketch the developmental process of the creation of commentaries on the Bible from Qumran to rabbinic literature” (p. 467). Shemesh discusses a few examples of explicit halakic dialectical give-and-take in the scrolls. “All of these examples, which lay out their interpretive logic, share one thing in common: they are found in polemical contexts” (p. 481).

Now, the particular selection of “specific books of late Second Temple Judaism” treated in this volume and the general organizational structure deserve comment (p. ix). Part 6 “Wisdom Literature” and part 7 “Hellenistic Judaism” get just two essays each, while three essays are allotted for parts 2, 3, 4, and 5, rendering the overall structure a bit lopsided. In an effort to achieve greater organizational balance, and in the spirit of offering a more “systematic introduction to biblical interpretation in the Jewish literature of antiquity,” one might reasonably expect the *Companion* to include (i.e., within parts 6 and 7) an additional essay or two dealing with biblical interpretation in a few other highly relevant Jewish texts, e.g., 4 Maccabees, or even the *Sentences* of Pseudo-Phocylides (p. ix). As an aside, with the exception of Kugler’s essay

on the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, there is next to nothing in the way of any discussion of Jewish exegesis vis à vis Messianism. In this regard, one might hope to find an essay dealing with biblical interpretation in, say, the Psalms of Solomon.

Henze acknowledges at the outset the difficulty of organizing the essays in a satisfactory way (i.e., according to types of biblical interpretation they represent? According to general chronology?). He decided, in the end, “to ask the contributors ... to write on specific books of late Second Temple Judaism and to examine the extent to which the kind of biblical interpretation the reader finds in them is characteristic of exegetical techniques found elsewhere” (pp. ix-x). Given this particular organizational approach, Rösel’s essay on the Septuagint should have been placed not in part 1, “Hebrew Bible/Old Testament,” but in part 7, “Hellenistic Judaism,” i.e., alongside the two essays on Philo and Josephus. For if it is true that, as Rösel puts it, “the Greek translation of the Bible reflects the earliest stages of the history of interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures,” and given the main focus of Rösel’s actual essay—“translators as interpreters”—this circumstance suggests that “Hellenistic Judaism” is clearly the more accurate frame within which to appreciate Rösel’s comments more fully (p. 87).

Even so, Henze’s *Companion* strikes a fine balance between breadth and depth. The *Companion* puts readers in contact with a variety of scholarly perspectives on a broad range of Jewish texts composed over the span of some five hundred years, roughly from the end of the biblical period to the Mishnah. Readers will readily appreciate the *Companion* as a most useful aid to the study of early Jewish biblical interpretation.

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