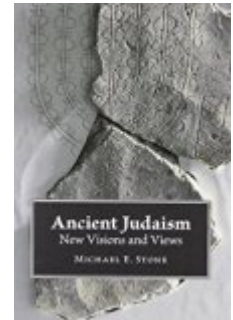


Michael E. Stone. *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011. xiv + 242 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8028-6636-3.



Reviewed by Jonathan Kaplan

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

Michael E. Stone, professor emeritus of comparative religion and Armenian studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has produced an impressive oeuvre that ranges the breadth of scholarship on Second Temple Judaism. His studies of pseudepigraphic works, the transmission of Second Temple literature in Armenian, *4 Ezra*, the literature related to Adam and Eve, and many other subjects serve as essential reference points for scholars undertaking research in these fields. In *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*, Stone does not provide a synthetic treatment of Second Temple Judaism. In much the same way as he did in his earlier volume, *Scriptures, Sects and Visions: A Profile of Judaism from Ezra to the Jewish Revolts* (1980), Stone offers his appraisal of the state of the question on seven related topics. He seeks to present his understanding of the present debates in these areas as well as his unique perspective on the direction further research should take. As such, the essays in this volume leave the reader with many important questions to ponder about ancient Judaism.

In chapter 1, “Our Perception of Origins: New Perspectives on the Context of Christian Origins,” Stone explores essential methodological problems faced by the historian of Second Temple Judaism. He cautions scholars and students to be conscious of the fact that a substantial portion of the textual corpus of antiquity was “filtered,” “selected,” and preserved by later orthodoxies in Judaism and Christianity (p. 11). This awareness is essential for Stone in inhibiting a tendency among scholars to overemphasize those aspects of Second Temple Judaism that were important for later Judaism and Christianity, such as messianism. This consciousness should also lead the scholar of Second Temple Judaism to turn his or her attention to the diverse material and textual evidence from the period in order “to present as balanced and true picture of what was going on as he/she can through a nuanced reading of the ... data” (p. 29).

Stone turns in chapter 2, “Adam and Enoch and the State of the World,” to examine how the traditions surrounding the figures of Adam and Enoch were used to account for the state of the

world in Second Temple Judaism. The account associated with Adam and Eve attributes the current state of the world to their disobedience and has largely been mediated through the New Testament (e.g., Rom 5). The Enochic account, which ascribes it to the fall of the Watchers, was less known to the modern world, albeit not unknown, until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The bulk of the chapter focuses on exploring what the Enochic account contributes to our understanding of ancient Judaism.

In chapter 3, “Apocalyptic Historiography,” Stone details a number of issues related to the theme of the chapter: periodization (seventy years), pattern (four kingdoms motif), and typological numbers. He then turns from these treatments of historiographical structuring techniques to explore broader critical issues such as the origins of Jewish eschatology, the connection between Jewish apocalypses and ideas arising from Deuteronomic thought, and finally, a series of related discussions about the typological ordering of history. Stone sees a direct link between the development of eschatology and Deuteronomic thought: “The eschaton would resolve the issue of theodicy that had been sharpened by the developments of the Deuteronomic ideology on the one hand and by the actual course of historical events which led to its failing on the other” (p. 83). Arguably, the idealized, archetypal reading of history so characteristic of apocalyptic thought already has, as Stone notes, precursors in earlier Jewish literature such as Jeremiah’s seventy-year prediction of the Babylonian exile (Jer 29:10). However, the notions of eschatological vindication and the typological schematization of history found in Jewish apocalypses also, perhaps, have an important precursor in Deuteronomic thought (see for instance Deut 32:1–43).

In chapter 4, “Visions and Pseudepigraphy,” Stone returns to a topic he first took up in an essay published in 1974,[1] wherein he argued “that a kernel of actual visionary activity or analogous

religious experience lay behind” their presentation in Second Temple Jewish apocalypses (p. 90). He returns to the discussion in this volume because he feels that the treatment of religious experience is generally not given much currency in modern biblical study or the study of apocalyptic literature. He next turns to explore, as an example, how accounting for religious experience addresses the issue of the coherence of *4 Ezra* and specifically the fourth vision, a topic he addressed in more detail in his *Hermentia* series volume on *4 Ezra*. [2] He then examines the implications of his argument concerning religious experience and pseudepigraphic apocalypses for our understanding of the nature of pseudepigraphy. In his analysis, the pseudepigraphic apocalypses represent a literary union of authoritative experience derived from “the transmundane realm” and the authoritative “weight of the written, ancient Israelite tradition” seen in both the evocation of earlier literature and the use of an exemplary figure from this earlier tradition (p. 119).

In chapter 5, “Bible and Apocrypha,” Stone attends to a number of issues related to the Bible and canon in order to describe his current positions on these issues and how they have changed since earlier treatments of them. He reiterates his caution from the first chapter against imposing the constraints of later Jewish and Christian orthodoxies upon the discussion regarding the use of the categories of Bible and canon in relation to literature from the Second Temple period. After reviewing a substantial body of evidence, Stone first concludes “that the use of the terms canon and Bible in the Second Temple period is inappropriate” (p. 149). Throughout the chapter, he adopts instead the increasingly prevalent term, “authoritative writings,” to describe the status of particular texts in Second Temple society. Second, he cautions against viewing the prevailing perspective of the community associated with Qumran regarding authority, inspiration, and biblical status as indicative of the whole of Jewish society in the Second Temple period. Rather, he contends

that discussions of the status of textual authority in Jewish antiquity should be undertaken with more perspicuity and sensitivity to the complexity and diversity of ancient Judaism.

In chapter 6, “Multiform Transmission and Authorship,” Stone turns to the methodological question of how we describe the transmission and relationship of texts within what he terms “textual clusters,” or “multiple versions of the same textual material” (p. 151). In his discussion of three representative examples (the Adam literature, including the *Life of Adam and Eve*, the Esdras and Sedrach literature, and the fragmentary Elijah literature), he attempts to “escape from the Procrustean bed of conventional stemmatics” that plague traditional discussion of textual transmission (p. 169). This chapter does not ultimately resolve the issues he raises, but in this regard, he achieves his aim of highlighting a problem deserving of further critical consideration.

In the final chapter of the volume, “The Transmission of Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha,” Stone returns to an issue related to the topic of chapter 1. In chapter 1, he challenged scholars of Second Temple Judaism to be attentive to the impact of later orthodoxies in Judaism and Christianity and their processes of textual filtering, selection, and preservation on our perception of the literature of the Second Temple period. In this chapter, he explores how one recovers Second Temple material from later texts that have filtered, selected, and recontextualized this material. He explores examples of this diverse phenomenon through quotations of Ben Sira in rabbinic literature, the fragment of a Hebrew apocalyptic scroll cited in *b. Sanh.* 97b, and a citation from *Jubilees* found in *The Book of Asaph the Physician*. The main thrust of this chapter is not to chart a precise methodology for this type of research but rather to attenuate scholars to the possibilities of such research and the attendant methodological issues.

In the final analysis, Stone achieves what he set out to do in this volume. He neither offers a cohesive analysis of ancient Judaism nor settles the thorny methodological questions he raises. Each of these seven chapters presents the lines of the present debate and Stone’s unique perspective on the direction further research should take. It is worth noting that the study of ancient Judaism has already moved in the direction of research he outlines in many of the chapters (note, for instance, the prevalence in wider scholarly discourse of the term “authoritative texts,” which he uses in chapter 5). His treatments in chapters 4, 6, and 7 are highly suggestive, however, for further research in the field. In particular, his discussions of textual transmission impinge upon methodological questions that are given far too brief consideration in the study of ancient Judaism. The volume perhaps best serves as a companion for scholars pursuing research in these topics and as a conversation partner for consideration of research methods. In this regard, a number of the essays would be helpful as reading assignments in graduate seminars. The legacy of this volume will then be in the new visions and views of ancient Judaism it helps to engender in the next generation of scholars.

Notes

[1]. Michael E. Stone, “Apocalyptic—Vision or Hallucination,” *Milla wa-Milla* 14 (1974): 47–56.

[2]. Ibid., *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible Series (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).

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