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“Bible: Hermeneutics.”

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passages (thus showing himself a typically Jewish exegete), he consistently sheds light on much larger questions. Thus his classic study of capital punishment in biblical and Mesopotamian law codes reveals central values of biblical thinking that were developed more fully in rabbinic literature. Other essays cover biblical notions of faith, prayer, and idealism; the tensions between nationalism and universalism in the Bible and postbiblical tradition; and the relationships among rabbinic, medieval, and modern interpretations of the Bible. It is indicative that this rich contribution to Jewish biblical theology emerges from a collection of essays that does not intend to be one.

BENJAMIN D. SOMMER

See also Bible: Criticism; Bible: Hermeneutics; Bible: Introductions; Bible: Law; Bible: Medieval Exegesis; Bible: Reference Tools; Bible: Translations

Bible: Hermeneutics

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Hermeneutics denotes the formulation and application of specific principles of interpretation, and hermeneutical approaches to the study of the Hebrew Bible are nearly as numerous as

are interpreters. What is more, the field of hermeneutics continues to grow by leaps and bounds. In fact, although one can locate with relative ease works on the Hebrew Bible that adopt or betray one or another hermeneutic, general surveys on principles of biblical exegesis have appeared with relative frequency only in recent times. Hermeneutics as a subject of inquiry is a colossal topic, and it has undergone especially immense changes in the postmodern age. Postmodern methodologies have entered the world of biblical scholarship only slowly and not without controversy. Nevertheless, postmodern hermeneutical approaches are widely recognized to have brought a great deal of insight into biblical scholarship. The following attempts to represent the gamut of interpretive strategies, from ancient to modern, as well as works that couple a critical and historically contextual self-awareness with an even-handed treatment of their subject.

ALTER and KERMODE bring together more than 20 internationally known scholars for a penetrating and exhaustive look at the literary aspects of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. The treatment of the New Testament along with the Hebrew Bible is both uncommon and enormously important, providing further impetus for comparative work. The encyclopedic format of the book makes it a handy reference for the general reader, and its keenly perceptive insights and broad scope make it also useful to the specialist. The guide will particularly benefit those who have some knowledge of the paths of biblical scholarship, but the uninitiated reader, religious or not, has much to gain as well. The book turns away from the general atomizing tendencies that have directed biblical scholarship for more than a century, and it is representative of a developing current of scholarship that makes a holistic approach to the text central to initial inquiry.

BARTON's eminently readable work outlines the major interpretive strategies that have shaped the study of the Hebrew Bible in the last century, and it offers discussions of the strategies' wider implications. Beginning with the literary critical approach, Barton moves on to form criticism, redaction criticism, the canonical approach, structuralist criticism, and then to the more recent postmodern critical approaches such as reader-response criticism and deconstruction. Barton supplements his discussions both with select bibliographies and with demonstrations of how each interpretive method can be applied to the Book of Ecclesiastes. Thus, Barton's work serves as an excellent "hands-on" primer.

BRENNER and FONTAINE's collection serves as an introduction to the ten-volume series edited by Brenner. This text does not focus on single books of the Bible. Instead, it examines "the structural and systemic issues of method that are largely glossed over or merely implied in most non-feminist works on the Bible." Thus, this work combines broad theoretical essays on feminist approaches to literature and non-feminist works relevant to feminist methodology. As the editors note, their volume embraces two concurrent trends emerging in biblical scholarship: feminist critical consciousness and literary theory. Brenner and Fontaine seek to engage, to excite, and to provoke student readers. Their goal, which is successfully realized, is to cause readers to evaluate critically the biases and methodologies with which they approach the Bible. While a few of the essays contain some Hebrew, most are

BARR (1980) offers an entirely different approach to Old Testament theology and presents a useful polemic. Against much English-language biblical theology of the 1950s and 1960s, Barr argues that the theology of the Bible does not rest on the history underlying the stories but in the stories themselves. Historiography in the modern sense is not really present in the Old Testament; even to the extent that parts of Scripture depict events that actually occurred, the recounting of those events in Scripture is more oriented toward the future than the past. Thus biblical theologians would do better to be concerned with close readings of biblical texts than with defending the historical accuracy of biblical texts. Barr also addresses the question of the Bible's authority from a point of view that is neither fundamentalist nor relativist. Among other topics he addresses are the perils of politicized theologies (e.g., liberation theology) and the nature of "biblical" fundamentalism. These essays reflect his well-founded skepticism toward canonical approaches to Scripture and biblical theology.

BARR (1993) displays the author's constructive side, with a genuine command of both theological discourse and biblical studies (many biblical theologians have little expertise in the former and willfully forget much of the latter). Barr argues that biblical theology need not be opposed to natural theology—the idea that humans have a natural awareness of God or a capacity for such awareness—regardless of any special time-bound revelation that comes from the Bible or the Christian Church. On the contrary, some biblical texts themselves express a type of natural theology. Barr finds evidence of natural theology in various New Testament texts, in intertestamental Jewish texts such as the Wisdom of Solomon, in psalms (especially those concerned with nature or wisdom), in Proverbs and Job, in prophecy, and (less convincingly) in biblical law. Barr's argument is a polemic against the great Protestant theologian Karl Barth, who maintained that biblical revelation is incompatible with natural theology. This book is as much about Barth as it is about the Bible, which is entirely appropriate for an avowedly theological undertaking. This work does not claim to eschew concerns of Christian theology; instead, it does not limit itself to describing ancient ideas but addresses modern philosophical issues; it treats texts from the New Testament along with those from the Old. Yet this book is one of the few biblical theologies that is not in some way offensive to Jewish readers, and its insights into ancient Hebrew texts are just as promising for the construction of modern Jewish thought as they are for Christian theology. The book also includes a lengthy discussion of the Torah's commandment of genocide against Canaanites; Barr's treatment is honest and probing, though inconclusive.

These fairly representative examples suggest the questions: can there be a Jewish or non-Christian biblical theology? Should there be one? Why isn't there one? LEVENSON (1993) addresses these issues with uncommon clarity and élan, especially in the essay "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology." Levenson shows that Jews' aversion to the field does not result solely from the tendency of biblical theologians to denigrate postbiblical Judaism (as in the case of Eichrodt) or to ignore its existence (as does von Rad). For Jews, at least since the rabbinic period, religious discourse involves debate, novel interpretations appended to older ones, and multivocal-

ity. The structural unity or "center" that biblical theologians have tended to seek interests Jews less than it interests certain Christians. Jews traditionally read the Bible as a collection of distinct though interconnected utterances, and thus Jewish interpretations of the Bible contain piecemeal analyses rather than extended syntheses. Finally, for many modern Jews, the Bible is of mainly historical interest, and thus the timeless quality of theological approaches is not appealing.

Clearly, a Jewish biblical theology would look quite different from a Christian one, but this does not mean that it can never exist. KAUFMANN's history of Israelite religion might be thought of as a sort of descriptive theology. By emphasizing a central biblical idea (monotheism and the rejection of mythology), its growth, and its permutations, Kaufmann presents a work in some ways comparable to those of Eichrodt and von Rad (on Kaufmann's relationship to biblical theology, see Greenberg). An explicit attempt appears in LEVENSON (1985), who outlines a theologically sensitive description of biblical beliefs (note the plural) from a Jewish vantage point. He focuses on two covenant ideologies in the Hebrew Bible: Sinai covenant entails law and mitzvot; Zion covenant entails divine promise. These ideas are not mutually exclusive, although they are often in conflict with one another. They work together in the Hebrew Bible, as in later Judaism (which upholds the one in halakhah and the other in messianism). Texts that reflect Sinai covenant often mention and indeed are grounded in the covenant of promise. For Levenson, a Jewish biblical theology should be open to biblical texts as they stand (not only as viewed by rabbinic exegetes), to historical study of ancient Near Eastern backgrounds, and to the legacy of classical Jewish Bible commentary. The last element is rarely evident in Levenson's book, but this readable and erudite volume represents an important first step.

GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN criticizes the affectations of biblical theology, which is far closer to dogmatic theology than it admits. The rubrics used to describe biblical thought owe more to Christian theology than to the emphases of the ancient Hebrew documents at hand. A theology (or "structural phenomenology") that reflects the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) itself would afford more attention to God's self-revelation and withdrawal, to peoplehood (as opposed to the individual's relation to God), and to the land. Goshen-Gottstein specifies these themes because, as he points out, they are mentioned repeatedly in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, the influence of later Jewish thought (Kabbalah, Zionism) is manifest in his list. In this sense his model is a specifically Jewish one. Nonetheless, he insists that Tanakh theology should not merely attempt to interpret in light of Jewish sources. The field of Tanakh theology belongs not only to Jewish Studies but also to biblical studies. A specifically Jewish perspective will help all scholars notice what they had neglected, just as the Christian field of Old Testament theology has made genuine contributions to the study of Hebrew Scripture in spite of its tendentious nature.

While GREENBERG does not describe his collection as a biblical theology, his essays present profoundly learned descriptions of biblical teachings and their relationship to Jewish tradition in a manner sensitive to contemporary concerns. As Greenberg examines narrow issues or elucidates specific

accessible to lay readers. The work achieves the editors' aim of "maximizing and championing *difference*."

BRENNER explores biblical books and narratives from a feminist perspective. The series has ten volumes: Song of Songs; Genesis; Ruth; Judges; Samuel and Kings; Exodus to Deuteronomy; Esther, Judith, and Susanna; the Latter Prophets; Wisdom Literature; and references to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. Each work contains several essays by scholars who represent a balanced variety of methodologies. While the works do contain some Hebrew, primarily to elucidate periodic philological issues, the series is readable and enlightening.

EXUM and CLINES collect a number of diverse essays by renowned scholars representing the most recent and adventurous theoretical approaches to the biblical text, which the editors place under the rubric "The New Literary Criticism." The editors seek to distance the methodologies found in the book from the older literary-critical school that foregrounded the reconstruction of biblical history. In this work, it is the textuality of biblical literature that takes center stage; therefore, the perspective might be considered poststructuralist. The essays embrace a wide range of interpretive strategies and include intertextuality, reader-response criticism, deconstruction, psychoanalytic criticism, materialist and political criticism, ideological criticism, and feminist approaches. The entire biblical corpus is covered, from legal injunctions and narratives in the Torah to the Prophets and Writings. The collection demonstrates the impact of postmodern approaches on the biblical text and suggests multicontextual approaches to Scripture.

MULDER's collection of scholarly essays provides the most comprehensive survey of the early history of biblical interpretation. The work offers uniformly as much depth as it does breadth. It opens with a discussion of writing in ancient Israel and early Judaism in which all contextual aspects are examined (e.g., the alphabet and scripts, literacy and the centrality of the book in early Judaism, scrolls and codices, the development of the Hebrew canon, and the transmission of the biblical text from the pre-Masoretic period to recent printed editions). The chapters that follow discuss reading the Bible in the ancient synagogue, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch, Jewish Aramaic translations, the Peshitta, Latin translations, the interpretation of Scripture at Qumran, the use of scripture in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the works of Philo, and the translation technique of Josephus. Other chapters are devoted to authority and exegesis in rabbinic literature, the Samaritan tradition, Gnostic literature, the New Testament, and the church fathers. In addition, this work contains a cumulative bibliography and an index of sources, making it an invaluable (and large) resource. Mulder's collection will benefit especially students who have some acquaintance with the subjects examined.

FISHBANE demonstrates the presence of exegetical practices and trends within the Bible, thus shedding light on the hermeneutics (and their ideologues) that influenced the composition of the Hebrew Bible and its eventual canonization. Fishbane explores the role of biblical law as a factor in the emergence of exegesis, and he provides ample detailed evidence for legal exegesis of various kinds in the Bible, such as

verbatim exegesis, periphrastic exegesis, and pseudo-citations in historical sources. The major part of his work is divided into four sections that discuss different types of exegesis found in the Bible: scribal comments and corrections, legal exegesis, aggadic exegesis, and mantological exegesis. The unit on aggadic exegesis considers the law as found in the prophets, as well as narratives, liturgical and theological formulae, and various typologies. The unit on mantological, or prophetic, exegesis is especially useful to biblical scholars because it successfully places the exegetical traditions of biblical Israel and early Jewish commentators in historical context by comparing the strategies of these early interpreters with modes of interpretation found elsewhere in the ancient Near East, especially in Mesopotamia. This achievement also has the effect of highlighting the unique and important contributions of Israelite genius.

SCHOTTROFF, SCHROER, and WACKER offer an excellent outline of feminist exegesis, with each author taking a section of the book to discuss a different aspect of feminist interpretation. Wacker discusses the historical, hermeneutical, and methodological foundations of feminist exegesis. She first adopts a historical perspective and then distinguishes various approaches and categories of feminist exegesis before discussing the question of canon. Schroer authors a feminist reconstruction of the history of Israel. Her approach is first diachronic and then synchronic, allowing for a full exploration of the following topics: "Who is Eve?"; female sexuality; women and violence; access of women to the cultic sphere; and goddesses in ancient Israel. Schottroff contributes a feminist reconstruction of the history of early Christianity. Together, these authors provide a thorough historical and methodological context for current feminist engagement of the Bible.

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