

Gary A. Anderson and Joel S. Kaminsky (eds.)

The Call of Abraham: Essays on the Election of Israel in Honor of Jon D. Levenson.

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A Festschrift honoring Professor Jon D. Levenson's sixty-fifth birthday, this volume is an excellent and satisfying tribute to its honoree and his research. Editors Gary A. Anderson and Joel S. Kaminsky solicited essays on "the theological meaning of Israel's election" (p. 1), a theme that pulses through Levenson's scholarship. The editors divide the essays into three parts: five on the Hebrew Bible, eight on the reception of the Hebrew Bible, and two on theology.

Most articles fall into three categories: expansions on Levenson's 1993 masterwork, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*; treatments of Israel's election; and contributions towards Jewish-Christian dialogue. This review will discuss each essay beginning with four perceived standouts, though every contribution deserves extended consideration.

Richard J. Clifford argues trenchantly that given the Priestly source's chronological consistency, readers should find no trace of Israel and its unique institutions in P's creation story. However, Genesis 1 does indeed contain "covert references to several defining features of Israel, viz., the Sabbath, the temple, the dietary laws, and the conquest" (p. 7). When God establishes a six-plus-one-day paradigm, for example, God establishes a rhythm that Israel will observe and imitate. P shows Israel's origin – its election – written into creation and existing from "in the beginning."

With scholarship, clarity, and interreligious sensitivity that equal Levenson's, co-editor Kaminsky asks, "Can Election Be Forfeited?" The Torah declares that disobedience does not cancel God's favor, while the Prophets contain rare episodes where individuals and families lose or forfeit special status through sinning. Or, only a remnant continues the promise. New Testament passages argue that Gentile followers of Jesus can replace disaffected Jews.

James Kugel, writing on evil's persistence after Noah's flood, considers ancient biblical interpretation – an anachronistic concept. Rejecting the perceived slow process by which biblical texts moved from malleable to fixed, Kugel proposes a continuum between texts altered by editorial insertion and texts changed by the composition of ancient commentaries. He takes Gen. 6:1–4 as a case study, tracing five layers of alteration from insertion of the original narrative in order to explain the "heroes of old," through interpretation of the narrative as justification for the flood, and continuing into 1 *Enoch*, *Jubilees*, and Kugel's "Jubilees Interpolator." A postscript provides a judicious and ele-

gant summary of the ancient conception of Scripture that allowed for such textual manipulation.

In a courageous examination of post-Vatican II doctrine and theology, Bruce D. Marshall addresses two seemingly irreconcilable Catholic beliefs: Christ and his Church's mission are universal, and God's covenant with Israel cannot be countermanded. Possibly, as Aquinas argues, God "wills the election" of Abraham's flesh but no longer "the practice of Judaism" (p. 338). An eschatological approach supposes that God's purpose will become known in the end. Marshall submits that messianic hunger connects Jews and Christians, and that "Christians must see Jewish anticipation of the one to whom the Law and the prophets bear witness as aimed, in reality, at no one other than Christ Jesus" (p. 344). This reviewer felt profound disappointment at the proposed solution, though such a conclusion may be necessary given Marshall's belief that the two statements must – do – fit together. He achieves his noble goal of elucidating the theological problem, which "will help us send fewer mixed messages to our Jewish sisters and brothers" (p. 347).

R.W.L. Moberly and W. Randall Garr humbly position their research as logical continuations of *Death and Resurrection*. Moberly analogizes the disturbing Deuteronomic requirement that the Israelites "ban" all native Canaanites to Levenson's study of child sacrifice, arguing that *ḥērem* had become non-militaristic and metaphorical for "unqualified allegiance to YHWH" (p. 76); *ḥērem* is the "prime vehicle for articulating the implications of choice/election" (p. 79). This proposal explains the apparent contradiction between the consensus conclusions that *ḥērem* was a real Israelite practice that was never actually realized in Israel. Garr discusses technically the important statement that Abram "believed in the LORD" (Gen. 15:6). Since the verb used does not express a constant state, and because *he'ēmîn bē-* involves an individual's will, Abraham's faith "is a conversion experience" (p. 39).

Others apply Levenson's methods to new texts: Kathryn Schifferdecker submits that Job and ultimately Israel follow the "beloved sons" model in Genesis, chosen by God and suffering accordingly but ultimately renewed and restored. Anderson argues convincingly that Tobit, influenced by Job, also follows the Akedah paradigm. Matthias Henze studiously examines Israel's chosen status in 1 *Enoch*, 4 *Ezra*, 2 *Baruch*, and other pseudepigraphic texts. Kevin Madigan treats non- and postcanonical references to the Akedah, including in 1 *Clement* and Origen's *Homilies on Genesis*.

On the theme of election, Greg Schmidt Goering examines Sirach and concludes that the sage "grounds election in primordial determinism" (p. 164), drawn from creation theology that sees God first allocate wisdom to all humans and then give an additional measure to a righteous, elect few. Brooks

Schramm explores Genesis 25 in relation to Luther's hatred of the Jewish claim to be God's chosen. Beginning with Calvin's view that Israel's election depends on the Jewish people's decision, Leora Batnitzky marshals Maimonides, Rosenzweig, Wyschogrod, and even Yehezkel Kaufmann to propose that a God who chooses to create and elect might require humans who can affect his choosing.

Marc Hirshman contributes a short essay on rabbinic interpretation of Isa. 56:6–7, a declaration that Gentiles may sacrifice and pray at the Temple. Mark Reasoner argues that Paul's declaration that "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 9–11) involves the restoration of its territory Israel and Judah.

The editors asked contributors to emulate Levenson's "clear and concise style" (p. 1), hoping that the volume would be useful to scholars, students, and lay readers. On this front, they are entirely successful. Clifford employs metaphors: "If one may borrow from computer language, P's references to Israel are 'locked' in the disk of Gen 1 and are accessible only to those possessing the required code" (p. 8). Anderson helpfully summarizes his source texts, providing background to novices and highlighting important elements for scholars. Kugel infuses his writing with wit ("So this is *Jubilees'* 'Ten Percent Solution' to the problem of evil" [p. 226]), making his essay a joy to read. As academic essays are increasingly read online or separated from the context of their original publication, *The Call of Abraham* is a reminder of the rewards possible in reading a carefully curated and thoughtfully arranged edited volume.

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