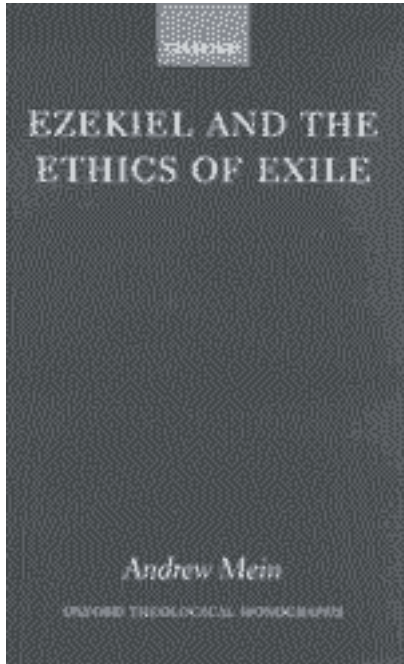


RBL 02/2003



Mein, Andrew

Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile

Oxford Theological Monographs

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Pp. xii + 298. Cloth. \$72.00. ISBN 0198299923.

Volkmar Premstaller
Kaplanei Kronburg
A-6511 Zams, Austria

This book is the published version of the author's doctoral thesis at Oxford University, which was supervised by John Barton. Mein's approach to the ethics of Ezekiel is descriptive, as he understands the prophet's moral ideas as a response to the experience of exile. The book is largely the work of Ezekiel himself and his exilic editors. The text itself is the most important resource for ethics and has to be examined accordingly.

Thus Mein investigates the world of politics, in which foreign policy forms the dominant concern, and outlines, for instance, the criticism of political decisions being taken in Jerusalem (Ezek 17) and the condemnation of the alliance between Egypt and Judah in the days of Zedekiah (Ezek 23). Judah's relation with its foreign neighbors became a constant root of YHWH's anger. Mein looks also at the social injustice practiced in Jerusalem and Judah.

A next major issue is cult and ritual. Ezekiel criticizes the existence of the *bamot*, royal sanctuaries outside Jerusalem (see Ezek 16; 20:27–29), and child sacrifice (20:27–29) and attacks the various forms of idolatry inside the temple of Jerusalem (ch. 8). In this way the prophet mirrors the two concerns of the Josianic reformation: the total removal of idolatry and the invention of a centralized worship. In addition, the long description of

the new sacrificial system in Ezek 43–46 could also be understood as a removal of impurity and thus as providing stability and a focal point for resistance in the exilic community.

The prophet also condemns all impurity caused by severe crimes. On the other hand, he honors the Sabbath as a Jewish identity marker. Several times he uses blood as a metaphor for the sins of the people, most often the sins of social injustice (see, e.g., Ezek 16). In 14:1–11 and 18:1–32 he scales down sin and virtue to a more domestic and individual level—again as a strategy for survival in the circumstances of exile. Thus the whole book is concerned with exhortation as well as with an explanation for the ongoing disaster of exile. The matter of salvation or restoration is left very much in the hands of God: it will be totally the work of YHWH himself. Nevertheless, such shared, future hope also strengthens the community's spirit.

Mein's examination of Ezekiel provides an interesting insight into the life of the Judean community in Babylonia from shortly after the first deportation in 597 B.C.E. His explanations are clear, deliberate, and conclusive. Unfortunately, he never mentions Ezekiel's oracles against the nations (Ezek 25–32; 35; 38–39), which might contribute an additional interesting glimpse into the prophet's mind regarding foreign politics. A consideration of the ways in which at least the book of Jeremiah supports Ezekiel's picture of the exile, politics, cult, and moral life would have added an interesting perspective. These remarks, however, are meant as an encouragement for further investigation by Mein or other biblical scholars.