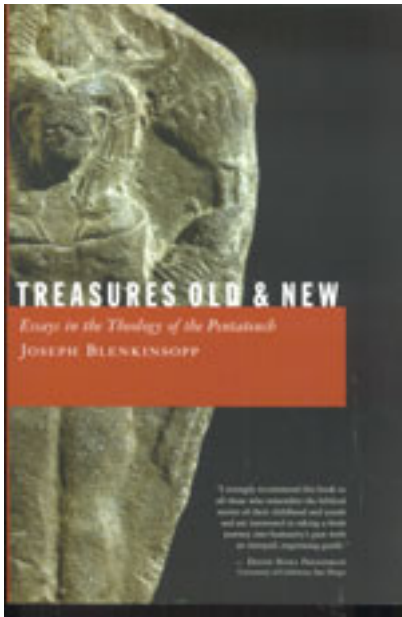


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**Blenkinsopp, Joseph**

*Treasuries Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch*

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The volume brings together twelve essays on the theology of the Pentateuch. Many of the essays have been published elsewhere. The canonization of the Pentateuch and its theological significance have been topics of interest to Blenkinsopp for many years, yet nearly every contribution has also been refashioned for the present volume. Blenkinsopp focuses, in particular, on the interweaving of the political-social and the religious function of the Pentateuch during the formative periods of the exile and the postexile, when the literature was acquiring canonical status

The opening chapter, “Memory, Tradition, and the Construction of the Past in Ancient Israel,” sets the tone for the volume. Blenkinsopp explores how the experience of the exile shaped the collective memory of ancient Israel, finding its way into a wide range of literature in the Hebrew Bible. He traces the themes of suffering and survival in a variety of literary genres. The Deuteronomistic History provides an explanation for the fall of Jerusalem and a resource for ethnic survival. The Passover combines the recollection of the past with a new beginning. And the exodus comes to prominence as an origin myth of survival. The essay moves easily between an interpretation of the literature, social and psychological theories on memory, and Blenkinsopp’s own life experience. The

interweaving of theory and story underscores the power of social memory as a condition of survival.

A number of essays continue the theological reflection on the themes of memory, identity, and suffering in the wake of the experience of the exile. The essay “Gilgamesh and Adam: Wisdom through Experience in Gilgamesh and in the Bible Story of the Man, the Woman, and the Snake” explores a series of shared themes in the two works, including the exploration of new worlds, self-discovery, and a quest for wisdom, which is only obtainable through suffering and experience. “Structure, Theme, and Motif in the Succession History (2 Samuel 11–20; 1 Kings 1–2) and the History of Human Origins (Genesis 1–11)” shifts the point of comparison of Gen 1–11 from Gilgamesh to the Succession History, but the formative role of the exile, as an experience of suffering and social death, continues to provide the background for interpretation. Genesis 1–11 and the Succession Narrative share a theological anthropology of human experience, according to Blenkinsopp. Both works explore the themes of beauty and wisdom in the *Urmensch*, the tendency of the human to transgress boundaries, the danger of the femme fatale, the sentence of death that is not carried out, and the hidden role of God in narratives, which are characterized by psychological realism. The essay “Biographical Patterns in Biblical Narrative: Folklore and Paradigm in the Jacob Story” narrows the reflection on memory and the lingering experience of exile to the genre of biographical literature. The story of Jacob is commentary on the sixth and fifth centuries, according to Blenkinsopp. The individual life of the hero, Jacob, provides a paradigm for the historical destiny of the people Israel. The elements of Jacob’s story, including his birth, naming, strife between brothers, the experience with dangerous waters, and personal transformation double as a paradigm of the historical destiny of the people. The result is a new narrative genre, in which the personal life-history of Jacob becomes infused with a kind of political allegory. “The Judge of All the Earth (Genesis 18:22–33)” shifts in focus from the relationship of suffering and wisdom or suffering and the creation of an archetypical hero to the problem of suffering and justice. The problem of suffering looms behind the dialogue between Abraham and God over the fate of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The divine decision to destroy an entire city requires further clarity on the nature of divine justice, according to Blenkinsopp. The need to provide further commentary on problematic texts is continued into the tradition of rabbinic haggadah, where unresolved problems in the text provide the springboard for further writing.

The theology of the Pentateuch is never removed from its social and political implications for Jews of the Second Temple period or for contemporary readers. “Sacrifice and Social Maintenance in Ancient Israel” explores how the pentateuchal literature on sacrifice reinforces aspects of social structure and male hierarchy. The study begins with Deuteronomy, exploring the prominence of male participation in the

legislation on sacrifice, as a form of social power and allegiance. Blenkinsopp traces the lingering effects of patrilineal descent in agnate groups in Deuteronomy to the contemporary ritual practices of circumcision in Judaism and the Eucharist in Christianity. “Deuteronomy and the Politics of Postmortem Existence” describes the social implications of the tension in Deuteronomy between kinship and state allegiance surrounding the cult of the dead. “YHVH and Other Deities: Conflict and Accommodation in the Religion of Israel” traces the tension between a syncretistic and a more exclusive form of Yahwism in the emergence of Israelite monotheism from the sixth to the fourth centuries of the Person rule. Blenkinsopp concludes that the origin traditions of ancient Israel in Second Temple Judaism are far more complex than the exclusive Yahwism that has come to dominate the present form of the text. One would have liked Blenkinsopp to spell out more clearly the political and religious implications of the distinctions between universalism, nationalism, and monotheism for the current reader of the Pentateuch, especially in light of the confusion of these views of religion in contemporary political life. “Creation, the Body, and Care for the Damaged World” is directed to the recent claims that the Hebrew Bible is anthropocentric, if not antireational in perspective and, thus, a contributing factor to the ecological crisis that inflicts western culture. Blenkinsopp qualifies the criticism by exploring the ethic of limitation in Jewish laws of clean and unclean, as a positive framework for guiding the interaction of humans with creation. The ritual laws focus on corporeality, in the human body and in ecology, They underscore the need for human restraint in the use of land, with the goal of “mending the damaged world” (*tiqqun ha’olam*).

The unique status and function of canonical literature also informs many of the essays. “What Happened at Sinai? Structure and Meaning in the Sinai-Horeb Narrative (Exodus 19–34)” explores the religious function of law in the exilic writing of the D and P authors. This essay comes the closest of any in the volume in presenting an overall design to the formation of the Pentateuch, in which differing views of covenant, law, disobedience, and forgiveness are woven together in light of the experience of the exile. “‘We Pay No Heed to Heavenly Voices’: The ‘End of Prophecy’ and the Formation of the Canon.” extends the reflection on canonical literature. Blenkinsopp traces the redefinition of prophecy in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and the Deuteronomistic History with the rise of canonical literature.

The essays reflect the life-long research of one of our leading contemporary interpreters. The writing is nontechnical, reflective, and broad in scope, yet rich with insight.

The style of the essays makes the insights of Blenkinsopp open to readers on many different levels, allowing for their use in courses on the pentateuchal literature and theology. But the essays also contains many innovative readings and thus will enrich any

investigation into the central themes of pentateuchal theology, the theological influence of the exile, and the social formation of Second Temple Judaism in the Persian period.