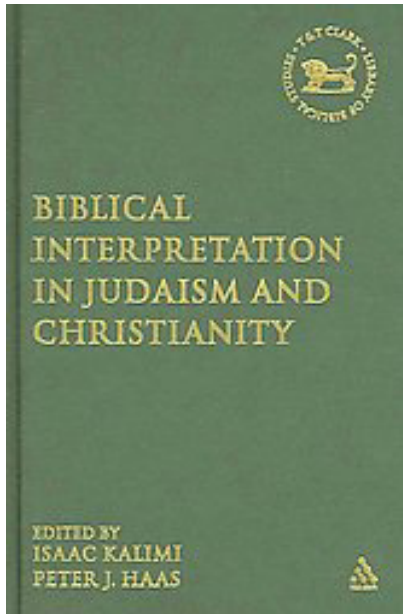


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Isaac Kalimi and Peter Haas have assembled and edited a collection of papers that grew out of the Sixteenth Annual Midwest Jewish Studies Colloquium sponsored by the Samuel Rosenthal Center for Judaic Studies at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio) in May of 2004, a colloquium occasioned in part by the publication of a significant book by Kalimi. The editors have put together an impressive volume that treats readers to learned studies that address important topics with depth and erudition.

Following Kalimi's introduction, "The Colorful Interpretation of the Bible: An Introductory Essay" (1–10), the studies fall under three headings. Under the first heading, "Classical and Medieval Jewish Biblical Interpretation," appear papers by Kalimi, "Targumic and Midrashic Exegesis in Contradiction to the *Peshat* of Biblical Text" (13–32); Rimon Kasher, "The Palestinian Targums to Genesis 4:8—A New Approach to an Old Controversy" (33–43); Bernard Grossfeld, "Reuben's Deed (Genesis 35:22) in Jewish Exegesis: What Happened There?" (44–51); Rivka Kern Ulmer, "Visions of Egypt in Midrash: 'Pharaoh's Birthday' and the 'Nile Festival' Text" (52–78); Alan Cooper, "On the Typology of Jewish Psalms Interpretation" (79–90); Herbert Bassler, "Kabbalistic Teaching in the Commentary of Job by Moses Nahmanides (Ramban)" (91–105); and

Steven Fine, “The United Colors of the Menorah: Some Byzantine and Medieval Perspectives on the Biblical Lampstand” (106–13).

Under the heading “Biblical Interpretation, Judaism, and Christianity,” the second grouping of papers include Lawrence Schiffman, “Biblical Exegesis in the Passion Narratives and the Dead Sea Scrolls” (117–30); Harold Ellens, “Exegesis of Second Temple Texts in a Fourth Gospel Son of Man Logion” (131–49); and John Townsend, “Christianity in Rabbinic Literature” (150–59).

Under the heading “Modern Biblical Study and Jewish Interpretation, Translation, and Theology,” the third grouping of papers include Alan Levenson, “The Rise of Modern Jewish Bible Studies: Preliminary Reflections” (163–78); Frederick Greenspahn, “Why Jews Translate the Bible” (179–95); Tirzah Meacham, “A Review of Isaac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*” (196–210); Kalimi, “Jewish Theological and Exegetical Approaches to the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Tirzah Meacham” (211–19); Francis Landy, “The Temple in the *Aqedah* (Genesis 22)” (220–37); and Ehud Ben Zvi, “Revisiting ‘Boiling in Fire’ in 2 Chronicles 35:13 and Related Passover Questions: Text, Exegetical Needs and Concerns, and General Implications” (238–50).

These studies, written by widely recognized and respected veterans, are rich in content and insight. This collection constitutes a veritable feast of ancient biblical interpretation and comparative midrash. I offer brief comments on a few of the studies.

I begin with two studies included in the first section of the book. Kalimi’s opening essay probes the purpose behind rabbinic interpretation. He shows that even homiletical midrash is often concerned with serious matters pertaining to law and ethics. Some of this midrash actually contradicts the plain meaning (*peshat*) of the text, often to mitigate the severity of biblical law. Kalimi’s study offers much-needed nuance to discussion of the difference between halakic and haggadic exegesis. Kalimi’s point is underscored in Grossfeld’s fascinating study of rabbinic interpretation of Gen 49:4, where the dying patriarch rebukes his son Reuben for his intimacy with Bilhah (Gen 35:22). Exploiting an ambiguity in the Hebrew text, Rabbi Berechiah (see Gen. Rab. 98.4 [on Gen 49:4]) suggests that Reuben switched the beds of Jacob’s concubines but did not actually have relations with Bilhah. Berechiah’s creative exegesis is quite different from rabbinic exegesis of this passage (as seen in b. Sab. 55b). Fine offers a fascinating study of the menorah in rabbinic literature.

In the second section, Schiffman compares biblical interpretation in the New Testament Gospel passion narratives and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Schiffman notes an important difference in these respective traditions. Whereas the authors of the Scrolls believe

prophetic meaning is hidden in Scripture and can be unpacked only through a gifted personage such as the Teacher of Righteousness, the Gospel writers believe that the prophecies of Scripture speak clearly of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Of course, the Evangelist—and probably Jesus himself—believed that the true meaning of some of these prophecies eluded those who did not have eyes that could see or ears that could hear. Ellens examines the function of the “Son of Man” sayings in the Fourth Gospel. He concludes rightly that this sobriquet reflects Jewish Scripture, such as Gen 22, Ezekiel, Dan 7–9, and 1 En. 37–71. Ellens thinks the function of Scripture in the Fourth Gospel is comparable to its function in the *pesharim*. I think he is for the most part correct here, but I take exception to his suggestion that the Son of Man sayings are late interpolations. I suspect that this material is ancient and was present in the earliest stages of the Johannine literature.

In the third section Levenson interacts with Jacob Neusner’s idea that Jewish distinctives in biblical interpretation invariably leave an identifiable mark. Demurring at points with Neusner, Levenson agrees that in most cases there are discernible tendencies. Landy investigates the *Aqedah*, the story of the binding of Isaac (Gen 22), and the tradition that this incident took place on what would become the Temple Mount of Jerusalem. Ben Zvi probes the meaning of “boiling in fire” in 2 Chr 35:13. He finds in this passage an expression of the Chronicler’s distinctive understanding of the Passover.

The editors and contributors are to be congratulated for the production of such a fine volume. Indexes of references and names are provided.