

OFFPRINT FROM

Jewish Bible Theology
Perspectives and Case Studies

edited by

ISAAC KALIMI

Winona Lake, Indiana

EISENBRAUNS

2012

© 2012 by Eisenbrauns Inc.
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.

www.eisenbrauns.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jewish Bible theology : perspectives and case studies / edited by Isaac Kalimi.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 978-1-57506-231-0 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Bible. O.T.—Theology. 2. Bible. O.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 3. God—Biblical teaching. 4. Judaism—Doctrines. I. Kalimi, Isaac.

BS1192.5.A1J478 2012

296.3—dc23

2011051244

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ©™

Contents

List of Contributors	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Contemporary Jewish Bible Theology: An Overview	1
<i>Isaac Kalimi</i>	

Part 1

Jewish Bible Theology

Jewish Theologies of Scripture	13
<i>Frederick E. Greenspahn</i>	
Constructing the Past: The Recent History of Jewish Biblical Theology	31
<i>Ehud Ben Zvi</i>	

Part 2

Case Studies

Fighting Forms of Idolatry: The Meaning of an Image of Moses in Jewish Theology	53
<i>Asa Kasber</i>	
Jewish Conceptions of the Human Factor in Biblical Prophecy	63
<i>Moshe Greenberg, z"l</i>	
Biblical Destinies: Conditional Promises	79
<i>Uriel Simon</i>	
God and Human Rights in a Secular Society: A Biblical-Talmudic Perspective	89
<i>David Novak</i>	
The Biblical Attitude toward Human Toil	101
<i>Amos Frisch</i>	
New Testament and Rabbinic Views of Election	119
<i>Joel Kaminsky</i>	

Amalek and Amalekut: A Homiletic Lesson	147
<i>Zev Garber</i>	
Foundations for a Jewish Theology of the Hebrew Bible:	
Prophets in Dialogue	161
<i>Marvin A. Sweeney</i>	
Psalms and Jewish Biblical Theology	187
<i>Marc Zvi Brettler</i>	
Psalms 1 and the Canonical Shaping of Jewish Scripture	199
<i>Benjamin D. Sommer</i>	
Reflections on Job's Theology	223
<i>Moshe Greenberg, z"l</i>	
Fear of Annihilation and Eternal Covenant: The Book of Esther	
in Judaism and Jewish Theology	231
<i>Isaac Kalimi</i>	
The Book of Daniel: The Strange End of Biblical Theology	249
<i>Peter J. Haas</i>	
Index of Authors	263
Index of Scripture	270

Constructing the Past: The Recent History of Jewish Biblical Theology

EHUD BEN ZVI

“There is no Jewish theology of the Old Testament” (1986).¹ “Jewish scholars instinctively shrink back at the very mention of ‘theology’ in the context of biblical studies” (1987).² “‘Theology’ was something that simply did not exist for Tanak scholarship—neither the subject matter nor the term” (1987).³ “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology” (1987, 1993).⁴ “Jewish biblical theology is just an emerging enterprise”

1. M. Tsevat, “Theology of the Old Testament: A Jewish View,” *HBT* 8 (1986) 33–50 (quoting pp. 33–34). It is worth noting that Tsevat is using “Old Testament” here not in a theological sense that would have precluded by definition a Jewish theological approach but rather as a *terminus technicus*. In fact, Tsevat clearly used *Old Testament* in this article for what many scholars today would call “Hebrew Bible,” and, as such, it refers to a text that at least potentially renders itself as a source for Jewish theology. Note, for instance, that Tsevat uses the term *Old Testament* when he explains his understanding of the meaning of the term *Torah* in the well-known characterization of the deity as the one who עולם נטע וחי אמת וחי בתוכנו. There, Tsevat states, “I understand Torah here in the broad sense as comprising the twenty-four books of the Old Testament” (*ibid.*, 43). The controversy among Jewish scholars about the propriety of the term *Old Testament* as a *terminus technicus* has no direct bearing on the arguments advanced in this essay and stands beyond its scope.

2. M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Tanak Theology: The Religion of the Old Testament and the Place of Jewish Biblical Theology,” in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller Jr., P. D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 617–44 (quoting p. 618); for an earlier Hebrew version of the essay, see *Tarbiz* 50 (1980–81) 37–64.

3. Goshen-Gottstein, “Tanak Theology,” 621.

4. This is the title of an essay by J. D. Levenson, who—on the surface, ironically—is one of the Jewish biblical theologians of this generation; cf. I. Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy: Studies in Scriptures in the Shadow of Internal and External Controversies* (Jewish and Christian Heritage 2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002) 122. The essay was published first in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. J. Neusner, B. A. Levine, and E. S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 281–307, and, slightly revised, in J. D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 33–61. References to that essay in this essay will be to the revised edition.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

(1997).⁵ “Why Jews Should Be Interested in Biblical Theology” (1997).⁶ “At one time, not too long ago, writing about ‘Jewish biblical theology’ would have been considered unthinkable” (2000).⁷ “Very few Jews have been engaged in the field of biblical theology until relatively recent times” (2000).⁸ This collection of titles and introductory statements reflects a particular and highly interesting scholarly consensus, according to which Jews have not been involved in biblical theology. To be sure, there was not a consensus that this state of affairs was praiseworthy. On the contrary, most if not all of the scholars cited above wished for, called for, or were actively involved in changing the mentioned state of affairs. Partially because of their work and that of others with interest in Jewish biblical theology, the consensus began to include a second element: a substantial shift is taking place in the present, and as a result Jewish biblical theology is finally flourishing or beginning to flourish.⁹ Thus, the consensus includes not only a characterization of the past, at least in the main, as devoid of Jewish biblical theol-

5. M. Z. Brettler, “Biblical History and Jewish Biblical Theology,” *JR* 77 (1997) 563–83, esp. p. 563.

6. M. A. Sweeney, “Why Jews Should Be Interested in Biblical Theology,” *CCAR Journal* 44 (1997) 67–75.

7. T. Frymer-Kensky, “The Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. A. O. Bellis and J. S. Kaminsky; Symposium 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) 109–12 (quoting p. 109).

8. M. A. Sweeney, “The Emerging Field of Jewish Biblical Theology,” in *Academic Approaches to Teaching Jewish Studies* (ed. Z. Garber; Landham, MD: University Press of America, 2000) 83–105, esp. p. 83.

9. See Brettler, “Biblical History,” 565–66, and his comment that “a revision of Levenson’s article in a decade’s time might have to be called “Why Jews *Were* Not Interested in Biblical Theology” (p. 565; emphasis original). Note the title of Frymer-Kensky’s essay cited in n. 7 above and her reference to “one time, not too long ago” (p. 109). Cf. the title of an essay by M. A. Sweeney published the same year, namely, “The Emerging Field of Jewish Biblical Theology” (n. 8 above), and the last quotation in the series of statements that opens this chapter. There is substantial evidence for much interest in Jewish biblical theology in recent years, as the very publication of this volume suggests. There are numerous articles published by Jews on matters of biblical theology/ies in recent years. See also I. Kalimi, “Religionsgeschichte Israels oder Theologie des Alten Testaments? Das Jüdische Interesse an der Biblischen Theologie,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 10 (1995) 45–68; and recently in idem, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 107–34; Bellis and Kaminsky, eds., *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Symposium 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). Incidentally, one may notice also that the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures section of the Society of Biblical Literature is presently co-chaired by S. Tamar Kamionkowski, who is a major figure in the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (Kamionkowski remains in the steering committee of the section; its present co-chairs are Esther J. Hamori and Julia M. O’Brien). Paraphrasing Brettler, one may say that studies to be published in the second half of this decade will probably bear titles such as “The Flourishing of Jewish Biblical Theology” or introductory sentences such as “Numerous studies in Jewish Biblical Theology have been published recently,” or “The recent explosion in interest on Jewish Biblical Theology,” or the like. (This essay was completed in early 2007. Since then, even more works on Jewish Bibli-



ogy but also a sense of an ongoing and substantial shift that is currently developing and has no precedent. An important observation concerning this consensus: all the citations cover a relatively short period of time. It seems that the question whether or not Jews were active in biblical theology had no important hold, if any, within the discourse of Jewish biblical scholars in, for instance, the three previous decades (that is, from the early 50s to the early 80s).

This essay focuses not on Jewish biblical theology / biblical Jewish theology but on the social phenomenon of the creation of the mentioned consensus within a short period of time, on now-common social memories about Jewish biblical theology / biblical Jewish theology.¹⁰ The development of any widespread agreement among a circle of scholars is always worth exploring, at least from the perspective of intellectual historians. The fact that the consensus opinion developed quickly within little more than a decade is in itself remarkable. However, this is not the only “odd” feature that draws attention. As all of us are well aware, consensus among “biblicists” is a very rare commodity. Moreover, in this case, it is achieved in a particular subdiscipline, namely, biblical theology. Given that there is a general lack of consensus among most scholars working in this field about its very nature,¹¹ the mentioned consensus is not only remarkable

cal Theology have been published. To mention just one, Marvin A. Sweeney, *Reading the Hebrew Bible after the Shoah: Engaging Holocaust Theology* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg / Fortress, 2008].)

10. I have to admit that, contrary to the development I mentioned, I am not interested in biblical theology per se, unless it is understood as a disciplinary area that deals with the ancient world views reflected in and shaped by the books that eventually became included in the Hebrew Bible. These matters are part and parcel of the study of the (intellectual) history of ancient Israel. Being a historian, however, I cannot but have some interest in constructions of the past and social memories beyond those of that period and that society. Thus, the constructions of the past and social memories that shaped and are reflected in the mentioned consensus draw my attention and, hence, have given rise to this essay.

11. To illustrate, there is no general consensus on questions as central as:

1. Does “Old Testament” theology involve the critical study of ancient world views reflected in the Hebrew Bible, or does it involve the study of what the text means (or should mean) in the present time for any particular group (which at times is defined in opposition to other ideologically construed groups, for example, “oppressors” vs. “oppressed”) or for a group ideologically and rhetorically construed as (representing/embodying) “all humanity”?
2. Must/may its practitioners consciously (and emphatically?) bring to bear, in a substantive way, their faith or existential/ideological assumptions or must/may they not?
3. Should/may biblical theology consciously involve the type of “engaged scholarship” that sets aims outside those ever contemplated by the biblical text in its original setting or not? (Some would claim that such use is really an abuse of the text; others would counter that this sort of use of the text is required for its “liberating” powers to effect change in society.)



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

but perhaps even somewhat astonishing. Thus, this chapter explores how and why a diverse group of Jewish “biblicists” reached the mentioned widespread agreement, and, in particular, I would focus on the ways in which the construction of the past (and the social memory that it creates) shaped and reflected in this consensus is related to particular social and ideological contingencies.

To begin with, as in almost any other case of a general agreement among a group of academics, this is based on sets of data or information. However, as in any construction of the past or present, data by themselves carry no significance. To be significant, they must be placed in the context of an interpretive framework(s) or (meta)narrative(s).¹² Of course, these explanatory frameworks/(meta)narratives, by necessity, tend to emphasize certain data and deemphasize or “erase” (that is, ignore or downplay) other

-
4. Should/may the term *theology* in “biblical theology” be understood as pointing to concepts about the deity or address matters of general world views or ideologies, which may or may not include references to the deity? And if the former is preferred, which concept/s of “deity” should be operative? Whose concepts of deity should/would be adopted, those of the original readership or those of the biblical theologians and their readers?
 5. Must Christian Old Testament theologies deal with the text of the Hebrew Bible as if the New Testament does not exist, and Jewish biblical theologies as if the rabbinic tradition of interpretation never existed? Are references to traditional interpretations by the Church Fathers, Luther, or Calvin, on the one hand, and to traditional Jewish commentators (e.g., Saadia Gaon, Rashi, ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban) not kosher for these endeavors?
 6. Should/may one speak of (Christian/Jewish/ancient Israelite) biblical theology or of biblical theologies?

These examples can be easily multiplied. One may mention, in addition, there exists, at least on the theoretical level, the question which text should be used for developing a biblical theology. To be sure, there is a clear tendency to use the MT as the base text, even if one may understand why some Christian scholars would consider using the LXX. I am not aware, however, of recent attempts by Catholic scholars to use the Vulgate as their base text or of Jewish scholars to use the Targum for similar purposes, despite the obvious historical importance that these versions had as the conveyors of the meaning of the Bible and, accordingly, as the operative text of the Bible for many ancient audiences (note, further, b. Ber. 8a, and later relevant *balacha*). But what about texts reconstructed by text critics, source critics, or redactional critics? Should/may they serve as the base text for Christian/Jewish biblical theologies? Needless to say, particular scholars may have advanced normative responses to many or most of these questions, but as any overview of the field would show, these responses have not been greeted with uniform acceptance.

12. Similar processes are at work in the writing of history, both contemporary and ancient. See, for instance, L. Hölscher, “The New Annalistic: A Sketch of a Theory of History,” *History and Theory* 36 (1997) 317–35; R. Martin, “Progress in Historical Studies”; and my “Malleability and Its Limits: Sennacherib’s Campaign Against Judah as a Case Study,” in “*Bird in a Cage*”: *The Invasion of Sennacherib in 701 BCE* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; JSOTSup 363; European Seminar in Historical Methodology 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press and Continuum, 2003) 73–105.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

data.¹³ The consensus discussed here is based on data on which scholars agree. These data are certainly not devoid of (historical/external) referentiality. For instance, at the very outset of his essay “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology,” Levenson refers to his failure to find a Jewish equivalent of “Walter Eichrodt’s *Theology of the Old Testament* or Gerhard von Rad’s *Old Testament Theology*.”¹⁴ He was undoubtedly correct that there is no Jewish equivalent to these volumes. Not surprisingly, references to this observation of Levenson appear in later works.¹⁵ In fact, though there is no need to stop at these two classic works of the genre, one might argue that there is no real Jewish equivalent to any of the full-length volumes entitled *Old Testament Theology* that are known among academic “biblicists.”¹⁶

This observation, however, raises a number of substantial issues. To begin with, Levenson tells us that he realized the relevant gap in biblical research conducted by Jews after a Christian colleague asked his help in

13. That the latter process has taken place here is not only expected but in fact quite conspicuous, because statements such as that Jews are/were not, until recently, interested in biblical theology or theology in general, as is often the case, raise some difficulties not only concerning the far-away past (for example, medieval times) but also the chronologically closer past (for example, the large corpus of works that deal with matters of biblical theology written by liberal Jews or from liberal Judaic approaches in the second half of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th). See Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 107–34, esp. pp. 118–23. Moreover, depending on one’s definition of “biblical theology,” one may consider also the relevance of matters such as the centrality of the Bible in Israeli secular religion till recently and still for many (see, for instance, A. Shapira, “The Bible and Israeli Identity,” *AJSRev* 28 [2004] 11–42 and bibliography) and its impact in national education in Israel, or theological reflections on the Bible from orthodox Jewish groups such as those involved in the series *דעת מקרא* (Mosad Harav Kook) and Artscroll. On these matters, see pp. 41–50 below. It is worth stressing that both Goshen-Gottstein and Levenson (in the articles mentioned above) are well aware of the difficulties that claims such as these raise and attempt to address at least some of them, through arguments that either minimize their value or reject their relevance to the matter under discussion, by means of particular definitions of biblical theology; cf. Frymer-Kensky, “Emergence of Jewish Biblical Theologies,” 109. Possible reasons for these processes are discussed toward the end of this chapter.

14. Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 33. He is referring, of course, to W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967; originally published in German: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* [3 vols.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1933–39]); and G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols.; London: SCM, 1975; originally published in German: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* [Munich: Walter Kaiser, 1957, 1960]).

15. Brettler, “Biblical History and Jewish Biblical Theology,” 564.

16. E.g., W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology: A Fresh Approach* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1978); J. L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976); H. D. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995); C. Westerman, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982; first German edition: *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978]); W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978; first German edition: *Grundriß der alttestamentlichen Theologie* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer] 1972). A possible exception concerns D. Neumark, *Philosophy of the Bible* (Cincinnati: Ark, 1918).



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

creating a more evenhanded bibliography for an elementary “introduction to the Old Testament theology” course for both divinity school and liberal arts students. This colleague, in turn, was drawn to the necessity of balancing the bibliography at the request of a Jew in that course.¹⁷ In other words, the question’s origin and the impetus to address it were deeply involved in Jewish-Christian interaction both at the level of introductory liberal arts and divinity school students and at the level of scholars. Levenson’s awareness of the lack of Jewish research in the area was not a necessary corollary of Levenson’s previous research, which is a contribution to biblical theology,¹⁸ nor was it in his mind when he was first asked to suggest a volume to add to his colleague’s bibliography. Significantly, when asked to suggest a volume, Levenson framed the question in terms of a book written by a Jew that could be equivalent to Eichrodt’s or von Rad’s volume. In other words, he framed the question in terms of not only Christian theologies of the Old Testament but of very particular theologies and of a particular scholarly genre, namely, the full-length, comprehensive “theology of the Old Testament.”¹⁹ Significantly, as he recognizes the lack of Jewish biblical theologies of this type, he begins to ask himself why this is the case. His explanation involves a number of different matters. For the present, it is worth stressing that, on the one hand, it clearly expresses anger about the unfair way in which Judaism was construed in some Christian biblical theologies,²⁰ but on the other it is clearly influenced by central elements of inner discourse among Christian biblical theologians.²¹ This example, which significantly relates to one of the prominent practitioners of Jewish biblical theology today, suggests that the entire question whether or not Jewish biblical theology exists or existed is a result of interaction between Christian scholars (and institutions) involved with Old Testament theology and Jewish biblical scholars. The negative response he gave to that question was contingent on the way in which the subject was framed, that is, in terms of a particular set of Christian biblical theologies assumed to be

17. Levenson, *Hebrew Bible*, 33. See also the additional anecdote he shares in pp. 33–34.

18. Levenson’s contributions to biblical theology include: *The Book of Job in Its Time and in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); *Theology of the Program of Restoration of Ezekiel 40–48* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 10; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976); *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985); *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (2nd ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

19. For a sharp critique of Levenson’s views, see Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 118–26.

20. Levenson generalizes as he moves from particular Christian biblical theologies in the past to references to Christian biblical theology.

21. A point stressed in J. Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999) 291–302.



representative of “Christian biblical theology” and of the scholarly literary genres in which this sort of scholarship may be communicated.²²

Among other scholars whose statements are cited at the beginning of this essay, one finds Tsevat, whose article originated in a lecture given in a conference held under the auspices of the theological department in Bern. Its very setting was Christian-initiated involvement with Jewish perspectives on biblical theology.²³

One may note that Sweeney opens his essay “Why Jews Should Be Interested in Biblical Theology” with an explicit reference to “the appointment of Jewish Bible scholars to full-time, tenured, or tenurable faculty positions in Christian theological schools,” to the “marked change in Christian higher education” that these appointments indicate, and then asserts:

The turn to Jews as a source for instruction reflects a fundamental shift in Christian attitudes towards Jews and indeed toward the theological interpretation of their own scriptures. This obviously indicates that Jews are now in a position to play a major role in the definition of Christian biblical theology. But it also has implications for Jews who are engaged in such teaching and research, and indeed for the Jewish community at large. In essence, it demonstrates the need for Jews to be concerned with biblical theology, both in terms of defining their relationship to Christianity and in terms of defining their theological identity for themselves (p. 67).

Notwithstanding all the differences between Sweeney and Levenson on matters of Jewish biblical theology, here too and most explicitly, the need

22. Obviously, references to the lack of Jewish works comparable to the full-length, comprehensive volumes on “Old Testament theology” such as those of von Rad or Eichrodt raise matters of genre. It is worth stressing that the majority of the Christian scholars involved in Old Testament theology did not produce such comprehensive volumes, nor are these volumes necessarily the most common way to advance and disseminate knowledge in this academic area. In fact, leaving aside projects titled “outline” or “elements,” one may argue that the first major work that qualifies as comparable to Eichrodt’s and von Rad’s volumes within the German-speaking world appeared only a generation later, namely, Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1991–92). Even within the English speaking world, the number of “biblical theologies” published from the 70s until the late 80s is not formidable, despite the large number of “biblicists” with academic education and Christian theological background. The very small number of Hebrew Bible/Jewish scholars in the past, the places in which most of them worked—certainly not departments of theology or religion or seminaries—the emphasis on Jewish education—including communal/religious education—that was common in the past, and their own education (mainly in philological or rabbinic matters) did not make them the best candidates to produce books in this particular scholarly genre. On these matters see already Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 123–24; and see also below.

23. The English version of Tsevat’s paper was presented orally in a meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and was followed by a response by Bernhard W. Anderson. The mentioned interaction is reflected in the published version of the paper in *HBT* (“Theology of the Old Testament”), in which Anderson’s comments follow those of Tsevat.



for awareness among Jews in the academic world of the need for Jewish theology/ies is directly related to the interaction between Christian and Jewish scholars, their students, and their traditions. Here, the impetus for working in this field is not only new and unparalleled but also directly associated with a marked shift in Christian theologies and institutional policies in North America. Significantly, according to Sweeney, this shift, among others, now allows Jewish concerns to influence the field of Christian biblical theology, and this sort of opportunity (and responsibility) is to be taken.²⁴

Brettler²⁵ raises another issue. He is interested in the question of how the lack of historicity in biblical texts may affect biblical theology. He discusses possible approaches for Jewish biblical theologians²⁶ but raises the question of whether “there needs to be fundamental differences between Jewish and non-Jewish biblical theology.” His examples suggest that this is not necessary the case, for he finds that, when confronting the matter that is the theme of his essay, namely, the lack of historicity and the “gain in meaning,” as well as in a few other issues, there are no uniquely Jewish positions.²⁷

24. “Jewish biblical theology provides a means to assert that Judaism is not simply a prelude to the advent of Christianity that will ultimately be absorbed as Jews come to recognize Jesus as God’s messiah, but that Judaism constitutes a distinctive, continuing, and legitimate theological reality that must be accepted and engaged as such in Christian theology,” Sweeney, “Emerging Field,” 85–86. One may compare in some ways the basic gist of Sweeney’s position—including his references to instances of Christian misunderstandings and misappropriations of Judaism or Jewish texts—with that of Reform Jews in late 19th-century Germany who, against a background of theological hostility—unlike what exists today—tried to convince Jews and non-Jews alike that Judaism is not a wooden or dead leftover to be eventually removed by history but a legitimate theological reality, which reflected (in their opinion), even better than Christianity, the prophetic spirit of Scripture and the ethical monotheism that they considered to be at its core. Moreover, some of them attempted to influence Christian (biblical) theology not only through their readings of the Tanak but also by constructing a very Jewish Jesus. Their efforts to remove common Christian misunderstandings and misappropriations of Judaism(s) in their time were, however, not successful, at least for the most part. This is easily explainable given the discursive and theological context within which they lived. Their efforts to create new forms of Jewish self-identity, nevertheless, were successful, even if not to the extent they expected, and led to the development of Reform Judaism. On Geiger’s Jesus and its role in his defense of Judaism against common mischaracterization in his day, see S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

25. See Brettler, “Biblical History and Jewish Biblical Theology.”

26. This includes using traditional/rabbinic approaches in untraditional/unrabbinic ways, which raises the issue of the relationship between traditional Jewish and contemporary critical approaches to the Hebrew Bible. Compare and contrast this with Tsevat’s “judaizing” or “positive” theological approach, which is one of the two he advances in “Theology of the Old Testament.”

27. Incidentally, I think that at times his construction of “the other” is based on a misunderstanding of the positions of some of the people referred to in the article. For instance,



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

To be sure, any survey of the field of (biblical) theology would suggest that there are large areas in which no (substantially) unique Jewish positions exist. For instance, biblical scholars/theologians who approach the biblical text from a perspective informed not only by their Jewish or Christian commitments but also by their ideological or existential commitment to gender issues or a particular set of gender issues may find much common ground. In these cases, far more often than not, the main dividing line is not between Jewish and non-Jewish biblical scholars/theologians but among biblical scholars/theologians with different world views.²⁸ Similar considerations hold for scholars/theologians with ideological or existential commitments to social, political, or environmental positions. In all these cases, there is not only a strong sense of interaction between Christian and Jewish scholars but also a sense of commonality within the field of biblical theology.

The preceding observations suggest that the recent developments in the field of Jewish biblical theology that include an awareness of a perceived lack in that area among Jews in academic biblical studies cannot be explained only by internal developments within Judaism or Jewish scholarship.²⁹ Sociological, institutional, and ideological shifts developed quickly within the last decades, even if they reflected a long process of change in Christian views about Judaism. These shifts have led to the spread of new forms of scholarly interaction between Christian and Jewish “biblicists.” This interaction has posed some challenges and opportunities for Jewish scholars interested in theological matters. These challenges and opportunities have contributed to the development of interest and of different approaches to the question of Jewish biblical theology/ies among many Jewish biblical scholars.³⁰ Some of them adopted approaches that either have led, or are conducive to the development of areas within the field that are not exclusively Jewish or Christian but shared. In other cases, recent efforts have led to the development of a hyper-area of biblical theological

see his reference to Davies and Thompson as writers who work within the mode of “a time for tearing down, and a time for tearing down.” In fact, both are good examples of “historicity lost is compensated for by meaning gained—a time for tearing down and a time for building up.” See Brettler, “Biblical History,” 582. If this is taken into account, his argument would reinforce the already-existing tendency to show that there are no uniquely Jewish positions in these matters.

28. E.g., those at times labeled “progressive,” “socially conservative,” or the like.

29. Of course, the substantial increase of tenured and tenurable positions held by Jews in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament played a role in the development (see Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 134), but it is more a consequence of the general change than its originator.

30. One must keep in mind that there are also many Jewish scholars of the Hebrew Bible who do not have much or any interest in theology, just like their many non-Jewish (mainly Christian and secular-humanistic) counterparts.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

discourse in which Christian and Jewish biblical theologies enter into dialogue and shed light on each other. In general, Jews who were involved in these developments—most likely in a way unbeknownst to them—responded as one may expect from a minority group that interacts with challenges posed by new approaches, ideas, and interpretive frameworks held by a majority group: they appropriated some of these approaches, ideas, and frameworks and adapted them to their own ideological discourses.³¹ They used these hybrid forms not only to interact with the majority and their discourses but also to express their own constructions of self-identity and boundaries, within the inner group and vis à vis others.³²

The mentioned developments in biblical theology had additional, important implications, as noted by Sweeney. Because of their status among religious communities, biblical texts as interpreted by these communities have traditionally served to assign legitimacy to particular world views (social influence and power to those who uphold them) and, in today's world of multiple communities for whom the Bible may "state" many different things, to negotiate legitimacy, social influence, and power among contending, contemporary world views and their adherents. The development of the "hybrid" cultural forms mentioned above, along with their constructions of self-identity and boundaries by necessity play a role in this process of negotiation.

Needless to say, there is absolutely nothing sinister about this set of processes involving "hybrid" forms. Quite the opposite: it represents a set of social and cultural processes (that is, hybridity) that very often led to enrichment of Jewish life and thought³³ and that enriched the lives of Jews

31. One of the most obvious and poignant cases concerns the subject study in this field, namely, a "Hebrew Bible/Tanakh," that is, a comprehensive, well-structured text that begins with Genesis and ends with Chronicles. According to many practitioners of Jewish biblical theology, this comprehensive text is supposed to be approached, at least to a very large extent, as a work by itself, without much or any (?) interference of later, rabbinic sources or late Second Temple texts for that matter. But significantly, the work is in itself a product of the early rabbinic or at the very earliest the late Second Temple period and, if one takes into account the order of the Writings, even later. In other words, the proposed conceptualization of a meaningfully and Jewish-structured "Hebrew Bible" to be studied as a text by itself does not reflect historical concerns or traditional Jewish/rabbinic theological concerns. It is rather a contemporary Jewish response and counter-balance to the concept of the Protestant Old Testament. As such, it is an excellent case of hybridity at work. For works on the Judaic character of the story from Genesis to Chronicles, see M. A. Sweeney, "Tanakh versus Old Testament: Concerning the Foundation for a Jewish Theology of the Bible," in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. H. T. C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 353–72; idem, "Emerging Field."

32. See *ibid.*, 85–86.

33. One may note, among many other examples, the influence of Arabic philosophy in Medieval Jewish thought and of Hellenistic cultural patterns in the development of rabbinic thought. Turning to biblical matters, the many results of interactions such as these include



and members of the majority group through cross-fertilization and shared work.

The novelty of the situation facing many Jewish biblical scholars and its contingent character—including the association of present Jewish biblical theology with the mentioned interactions with contemporary Christian biblical scholars—has contributed much to the shaping of the mentioned consensus among many of them. Certainly, the element of newness, perceived at both the ideological and existential/personal level, played a role in the formation of a sharp sense of dramatic change and discontinuity, namely, before there was neither “Jewish biblical theology” (or, as often stated, not even Jewish “theology”) nor even an awareness that there was such a thing, but now the situation is vastly different as Jewish biblical theology / biblical Jewish theology flourishes. Moreover, because the circumstances that initiated and nourished this process did not obtain before, the (new) Jewish biblical theology / biblical Jewish theology that has been developing now could not have existed in earlier times. This (often-implied) way of thinking contributed much to the construction of the mentioned social memory that emphasizes discontinuity that shapes and is reflected in the consensus.

Although the considerations advanced above contributed much to the construction of a social memory in which there was no Jewish biblical theology before the present,³⁴ other important factors were also at play. As it will be shown below, the social memory reflected in the consensus deemphasizes or “erases” (that is, ignores or downplays) a relatively large corpus of data. This process can take place only if the community that bears this consensus is able to consider the relevant data “erasable.” Why would this be the case? And which of the data were turned invisible, as it were?

Surely, there were and are Jewish theologies. Certainly, Jewish theologians and their systems of thought (that is, theologies) existed in medieval times.³⁵ Perhaps more important in terms of direct relevance to the consensus, it is a well-established historical fact that engagement with matters of Jewish theology/ies flourished during the first half of the 20th

matters as diverse as the development of the vocalized Masoretic Text and the transformation of a national deity into a universal one who is the king of the kings. It may be noted that, from an overtly Jewish theological perspective, M. M. Kaplan wrote, “[n]o policy could be more detrimental to Jewish survival than one which would reject a true idea, a beautiful form or a just law on the ground that it did not originate among Jews” (M. M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* [New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1962; first published, 1937] 351).

34. Or not even now, according to a few. The matter is one of definition rather than of presence or absence of relevant works.

35. Thus, for example, Saadia, Maimonides, and Yehuda Halevi; see in detail Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 119–21.



century.³⁶ Further, it cannot be maintained that Jews in America—most of the bearers of the mentioned consensus are Americans—refused to use the term *theology*,³⁷ despite the recent widespread agreement about the absence of its use among Jews. When Frymer-Kensky writes that “it was a truism that Jews don’t do theology” and “theology was narrowly understood as the study of God, and writing about God was not considered a Jewish activity,”³⁸ she correctly identifies a “fact” agreed on by many Jews today, but, as she knows and insinuates, this is a “fact” that defies a massive number of data.³⁹ As such, this counter-historical “agreed fact” represents a primary example of a social memory in which some data are marginalized or erased. In many ways, the case of the consensus about the lack of Jewish theology provides a good parallel for the consensus about the lack of Jewish biblical theology / biblical Jewish theology.

There is no dispute that there exists a very long history of texts that address theological issues raised by texts in the Hebrew Bible.⁴⁰ The process of developing texts such as these began already within the corpus of texts that eventually became the Hebrew Bible (for example, Chronicles⁴¹ Jonah, which provides keys for interpreting prophetic literature), and, at times, it takes place within the same book (for example, Isaiah). This pro-

36. Names such as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emil G. Hirsch, Kaufmann Kohler, Mordecai M. Kaplan, and Abraham J. Heschel immediately come to mind.

37. Note the name “Jewish Theological Seminary.” See, for instance, Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: Ktav, 1968; first published in 1918); and multiple references to “Jewish theology,” in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (1901–6). See also S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961; first published as *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, [New York: Macmillan, 1909]). From later periods, note the title in J. Neusner’s *Understanding Jewish Theology: From Talmudic to Modern Times* (New York: Ktav, 1973) or Jacob B. Agus’s *Jewish Quest: Essays on Basic Concepts of Jewish Theology* (New York: Ktav, 1983). One may note that M. M. Kaplan, despite his attacks on those who equated Judaism with theology (or religion), never had problems using the term *theology* or its derivatives. Of course, the term was used also outside America, for instance by Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1973).

38. Frymer-Kensky, “Emergence,” 109.

39. It is also not true that Jews did not write about concepts of the deity. See, for instance, the explicit title of M. M. Kaplan’s book *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion* and his characterization of God; Heschel’s well-known discussions of the character and pathos of God; and Harold M. Schulweis, *Evil and the Morality of God* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1984), which is a study about the attributes of God.

40. For a summary of many of its highlights see the relevant essays in A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

41. For this point, see Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy*, 120. Also see idem, *An Ancient Israelite Historian: Studies in the Chronicler, His Time, Place and Writing* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 46; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2005) 19–39, esp. pp. 27–39. Kalimi claims that, although the book of Chronicles contains some theological elements, the book *as a whole* is not a theology but mainly a historiography. From my viewpoint, the Chronicler is both at the same time. The Chronicler would have probably not understood a strong dichotomy between “historian” and “theologian.”



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:

Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

cess continued, though in different ways, through the late Second Temple period (in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek), and beyond. It is certainly present in the New Testament (which may be considered a repository of “sectarian” Jewish texts), and at an even later time involved midrashic, rabbinic literature and Targumic texts. It was certainly present during the medieval period⁴² and clearly continued into the post-medieval period. There is no doubt that Spinoza addressed biblical theological matters, and so did Mendelssohn and the “biurists” (that is, the “exegetes/commentators”) who adopted his interpretive principles.

To be sure, it may be argued that all these instances do not involve critical studies of the text, and as such they should not be included under definitions of (academic/critical) Jewish biblical theology.⁴³ On similar grounds, or because of their dependence on traditional Jewish texts other than the Tanak, one may argue for the exclusion from the field of (academic/critical) Jewish biblical theology of works dealing with theological issues in the Tanak written by either rabbis in *haredi* communities⁴⁴ or by many Jewish orthodox thinkers.⁴⁵ One may also argue that the use of the Tanak as the “Holy Scriptures of Zionism” in Israeli life (until recently) and the methods of biblical interpretation that made this use possible should be excluded from consideration within this field, because they deal with texts and ideology rather than concepts of the deity and, perhaps, because

42. Significantly, in the medieval period there were debates over whether a reading of the Torah may contradict actual *halacha* and whether the text should be studied on its own. See, for instance, the (implied) position of Rashbam on these issues,

ידעו ויבינו יודעי שכל כי לא באתי לפרש הלכות אעפ”י שהם העיקר . . . ואני לפרש פשוטן של
מקראות באתי

(Rashbam, note on Exod 21:1)

which may be translated as “those with wisdom should know and understand that I did not come to explain halakot, even if they are of primary importance . . . instead I came to explain Scriptures within their own internal context [פשוטן של מקראות]”

כי לא אאריך אלא במקומות שיש לפרש פשוטי מקראות

(Rashbam, note on Lev 1:1)

This may be translated as “I will not expand [because Rashi, his grandfather, already did so] except in places that Scriptures need to be explained within their own internal context.”

43. It is worth noting that the case against including Spinoza on these grounds is weak. To be sure, others may exclude either Spinoza or Spinoza’s work on the grounds that he/it is not fully Jewish, but this is a different matter altogether, which, needless to say, raises the question of boundaries of/in Jewishness.

44. For example, the commentaries in the Artscroll series. The term *haredi* is at times translated in English as “ultra-orthodox.” This translation is problematic because it ignores—and, to some extent, rejects—the self-understanding of the group.

45. For example, the works of Nechama Leibowitz, with a more American perspective; see in particular the many relevant contributions and books reviewed in *Tradition* (e.g., E. Shkop, “Rivka: The Enigma Behind the Veil,” *Tradition* 36/3 [2002] 46–59).



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

they are more *derash* than *peshat*.⁴⁶ On the same grounds, one may argue for the exclusion of theological reflections that develop in a form akin to modern midrash of biblical texts.⁴⁷ On similar grounds (and perhaps also on the basis that their authors are not academic “biblicists” working within the historical mode), one may claim for the exclusion of the type of works gathered in the volume *Congregation*.⁴⁸ All these potential arguments belong to the discursive domain of decisions about boundaries and so involve questions such as which studies qualify for the scholarly/ideological domain of Jewish biblical theology/ies?⁴⁹ Why? Who is enforcing the boundaries and what is at stake on these disciplinary boundaries? These questions deserve an in-depth discussion that cannot be carried out in this essay. For the argument advanced here, it suffices to state that the mentioned consensus involves a very large and diversified corpus of works dealing with the biblical texts and their meanings and significance for Jewish communities as outside the realm of Jewish biblical theology. Significantly, all these decisions are comparable and, in fact, parallel to those taken by most practitioners in the academic field of Christian biblical theology. The latter scholars would normally exclude comparable works from the academic field. Given that the field of Jewish biblical theology is deeply intertwined from the outset with that of Christian biblical theology, the presence of comparable disciplinary boundaries is only to be expected. But this being so, exceptions are particularly noteworthy and demand explanation.

Perhaps the most salient of these exceptions involves works by liberal/reform Jews—both in the 19th and 20th centuries in Germany and in America—who dealt with critical texts to the best of their understanding and as their theological messages would allow.⁵⁰ It is obvious that the

46. On these matters, see U. Simon, “The Bible in Israeli Life,” in *The Jewish Study Bible* (ed. A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 1990–2000.

47. Including, but not restricted to, recent feminist retelling or counter-telling of biblical narratives. Of course, some of these new midrashim have brought about much debate and criticism from other Jewish theologians; see, for example, J. D. Levenson, “Abusing Abraham: Traditions, Religious Histories, and Modern Misinterpretations,” *Judaism* 47 (1998) 259–77. It is worth stressing that there are often Jewish interpreters on both sides of these debates. See Levenson on Abraham: “The Conversion of Abraham to Judaism, Christianity and Islam,” in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. H. Najman and J. H. Newman; Supplements to the Journal of the Study of Judaism 83; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 3–40.

48. See *Congregation: Contemporary Writers Read the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

49. Of course, questions such as these often raise additional questions. For instance, should the work of nonhistorically oriented/trained “biblicists” be included from or excluded of the field? Is there a difference between biblical Jewish theologies and Jewish biblical theologies?

50. This survey does not include cases in which biblical texts were used as a kind of (marginal) proof-text for a particular Jewish theology, as is in the case, for instance, in Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism* (New York: Ungar, 1972; first published as *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* [Leipzig: Fock, 1919]).



consensus opinion and the consensus memory of the discipline of Jewish biblical theology do not include these works. In fact, they claim that only now are Jews dealing or beginning to deal with biblical theology.⁵¹

A complete discussion of these works is well beyond the scope of this essay. A brief survey pointing to a variety of illustrative works written at different times, for different addresses, against diverse circumstances and in various genres suffices to make the point. Comparable to those in use in Christian biblical theology, A. Geiger would have been considered a biblical theologian.⁵² He certainly dealt with the text critically and advanced theological positions on the basis of his understanding of the text.⁵³ These positions included, among other things, a lionization of “ethical monotheism,” a lionization of the prophets, a negative approach to cult and ritual including the sacrificial system (which was considered transitory and not permanent), the claim that the Jews as a people shaped Judaism (including the Bible),⁵⁴ and the emphasis on the national religious genius of the Jewish people. It is the latter stance that led him to stress his contention that the Jews, because of that genius, were able to develop ethical monotheism, out of nothing, as it were.⁵⁵

51. It is worth stressing that dealing with biblical theology does not require the publications of full-length, comprehensive volumes on the theology of the Bible. The first refers to work in a particular field of studies; the other refers to a particular scholarly (and literary) genre.

52. Of course, A. Geiger would not have been considered *only* a biblical theologian but *also* a biblical theologian. If Wellhausen was a biblical theologian, among other things, then Geiger was also a biblical theologian, among other things.

53. He did so in interaction with Protestant biblical theology and Protestant theologies of his time. This interaction involved Geiger’s acceptance of many of its main thrusts and rejection of negative constructions of Judaism and often of Jews that were common among these theologies and theologians (for example, J. G. Eichorn, J. D. Michaelis).

54. “Nor does Judaism claim to be the work of single individuals, but that of the whole people. It does not speak of the God of Moses or of the God of the Prophets, but of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of the God of the whole race, of the patriarchs who were equally gifted with that endowment, with that prophetic vision; it is the Revelation which lay dormant in the whole people, and was concentrated in individuals. . . . A thornbush produces no wine, a neglected people produces no prophets, such as the people of Judah gave to the world. It is true that the Historical books of the Bible mostly inveigh against the morals, the depravity of the people at the time of the Kings; they intend to prepare us for the devastation that came upon them as a punishment for their sinfulness. Yet that people must have possessed noble powers in great abundance; it must have had a native endowment, considering that it could produce, that it could rear such men” (A. Geiger, *Judaism and Its History* [New York: Thalmessinger & Cahn, 1866] 60–61; this text is free and available for download at: <http://books.google.com>. This translation is based on an early version of A. Geiger, *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte*, which in itself went through three editions. The most common printing of this book is the one published in Breslau, 1910 by Jacobson, which is also available for free online at <http://www.archive.org/details/dasjudentumundse00geiguoft>).

55. Cf. the conception of the beginning of monotheism in Israel developed later by Y. Kaufmann. Many of A. Geiger’s works are collected in his *Nachgelassene Schriften* (ed.



The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* was published in the U.S.A. from 1901 to 1906. E. G. Hirsch and K. Kohler were among the main authors on biblical texts. Although the Encyclopaedia attempted to be as scientific and objective as possible, there is no doubt that it conveyed strong theological messages in many of its entries⁵⁶ and that these messages fit very well with the biblical theologies of reform Judaism of the time, which in turn were grounded in their own perspective on the known results of biblical “higher criticism” of the time.⁵⁷ These entries attest to the existence of a relatively widespread interest and strongly held positions on biblical theological matters among (intellectual) reform Jews at the time. D. Neumark’s *Philosophy of the Bible*⁵⁸ represents a “high-end” academic expression of some of the biblical-theological discourses among reform Jews at the time.

L. Geiger; 5 vols.; Berlin: Gerschel, 1875–78). His *Judaism and Its History* was published in three editions in German and three in English.

56. See, for instance, “the facts now [at the time of “written prophecy”] first practically realized, that God’s government and interests were not merely national, but universal, that righteousness was not merely tribal or personal or racial, but international and worldwide. Neither before nor since have the ideas of God’s immediate rule and the urgency of His claims been so deeply felt by any body or class of men as in the centuries which witnessed the struggle waged by the prophets of Israel for the supremacy of Yhwh and the rule of justice and righteousness which was His will. The truth then uttered are contained in the writings of the Latter Prophets, They were not abstractions, but principles of the divine government and of the right, human, national life”; see E. G. Hirsch, J. F. McCurdy, and J. Jacobs, “Prophets and Prophecy,” *The Jewish Encyclopaedia. A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (12 vols., New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–6) 10:213–19, citation from p. 214a, under the subentry “Written Prophecy” written by J. F. McCurdy.

57. “The Pentateuch is not the work of one period. Pentateuchal legislation also is the slow accretion of centuries. The original content of Judaism does not consist in the Law and its institutions, but in the ethical monotheism of the prophets. Legalism is, according to this view, originally foreign to Judaism. It is an adaptation of observances found in all religions, and which therefore are not originally or specifically Jewish. The legalism of Ezra had the intention and the effect of separating Israel from the world” (K. Kohler, E. G. Hirsch, and D. Philipson, “Reform Judaism from the Point of View of the Reform Jews,” *Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–6) 10:347–59, citation from p. 350a, under subentry “Influence of Higher Criticism,” written by E. G. Hirsch. It is worth noting that the opposition of S. Schechter and others to “higher criticism” was in fact to “higher criticism” of the Torah, and it was deeply related to the weight they attached to the Pentateuch in their version of Judaism, which was far more traditional than that of their contemporary reform Jewish thinkers and rabbis. Cf. D. J. Fine, “Salomon Schechter and the Ambivalence of Jewish Wissenschaft,” *Judaism* 46 (1997) 3–24.

58. David Neumark was the chair of Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew Union College for many years. His approach to biblical theology is also evident and explicitly advanced in his discussion of the principles of Judaism; see D. Neumark, “The Principles of Judaism in Historical Outline,” *Essays in Jewish Philosophy* (ed. S. S. Cohon; Amsterdam: Philo, 1971) 101–44, esp. pp. 105–24, which serve as a kind of compendium of his Jewish biblical theology. The latter, as expected, was fully grounded in the “accepted” results of historical-critical studies of the Bible in his day. The same, of course, holds true for his work in *Philosophy of the Bible*.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

According to a yardstick comparable to the one in use among most Christian practitioners of biblical theology, it is difficult not to characterize A. J. Heschel as a person involved in biblical theology.⁵⁹ The same holds true for M. M. Kaplan. After all, he strongly maintained that Judaism/Jews should not continue to ascribe meanings to biblical texts that could not have been contemplated by their authors (a process he calls “transvaluation”) but rather that they “must enter imaginatively into the thought-world of its authors, and try to grasp what it meant to them in the light of their experience and world-outlook.”⁶⁰ Then, and only then, they should reevaluate the significance of these religious ideas for their own lives and adapt them in ways that are consistent with an “authentic” concept of the deity and so contribute to salvation.⁶¹

Jumping in time to 1962, S. D. Schwartzman and J. D. Spiro published an important volume, namely, *The Living Bible: A Topical Approach to the Jewish Scriptures*.⁶² The goal of the book was to provide (reform) Jewish educators and students with an accessible compendium of what *Jewish Scriptures* means. Of course, it was written at a “popular level.” The book includes the expected chapters “Who Wrote the Bible?” and “How the Bible Was Completed?” but also, and mainly, chapters that directly address theological issues entitled, such as “Who Is God?” “Does God Have a Favorite People?” “Are We Really Free?” “Why Is There Evil in the World?” and “Is Death the End?” The book expounds these topics in terms of a historically-critically understood Bible and with concern toward the significance of these biblical ideas for contemporary Jews. The text is a Jewish theology of the Hebrew Bible written at a “popular” level. It reflects and attests to a (then-)relatively widespread discourse on biblical Jewish theology among intellectuals in American reform Judaism; one that the authors and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations thought should be communicated to a larger readership. It also attests to the centrality of Jewish education and, indirectly, to the tendency toward works aimed at Jewish education in biblical studies conducted by Jews.⁶³

59. One may note that some have argued that Heschel’s theological approach to the Bible is, in part, a response to Spinoza’s. See S. D. Breslauer, “Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise* and A. J. Heschel’s *Theology of Biblical Language*,” *CCAR Journal* 24 (1977) 19–17. Note also the reference in the title of this work, published in 1977, to Heschel’s “theology of biblical language.”

60. Quotation from Kaplan, *Meaning of God*, 7.

61. On Kaplan’s own work with biblical texts, see M. M. Kaplan, “Isaiah 6:1–11,” *JBL* 45 (1926) 251–59.

62. S. D. Schwartzman and J. D. Spiro, *The Living Bible: A Topical Approach to the Jewish Scriptures* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1962). The “reading committee” that approved the text for publication included Harry M. Orlinsky.

63. To be sure, this is in part due to the lack of enough academic positions open to Jews but also in part due to the importance given to Jewish education among Jewish intellectuals



In sum, a large corpus of works that deal with biblical theology was written by liberal Jews or from liberal Judaic approaches for well over a century, and significantly, much of it was written and communicated in America, where the consensus about the lack of interest in Jewish biblical theology before very recent times has chiefly developed. These works are either not mentioned or, if mentioned, marginalized in the mentioned construction of the history/memory of past Jewish biblical theology.⁶⁴ There cannot be any doubt that the existence of this corpus of works is not reflected in the consensus image about the emergence of biblical Jewish theology as something new and as something Jews did not do in the past. In fact, there is even a kind of “fact” agreed on among contemporary Jews that Jews did not deal with theology in the past. How can the “erasable” character of this corpus be explained?

To be sure, the mentioned constructions of the past, along with the drastic change that they imply or explicitly state regarding the last years, reflect the social and ideological changes that took place and play a role in this erasure, as mentioned above. In addition, matters of definition (and of the related boundaries they create) may be at work,⁶⁵ but the positions of Jewish biblical theologians tended as whole to reflect and adapt (contemporary) common boundaries of “biblical theology” and “theology” accepted in Christian discourses, which would not have precluded the inclusion of the mentioned corpora in the history of works on biblical-theological matters in the history of Jewish biblical theology that is implicitly communicated by the present consensus.

There seem to be several crucial factors that fed this process of memory shaping (and erasing), including: (a) implicit constructions of what is Judaic, (b) self- and/or community-produced lines of continuity and identification between present scholars and their ancestors/predecessors, and (c) sociological differences.

It is not unreasonable to assume that many present-day Jewish biblical theologians may harbor some reservations about the Judaic character of “classical” Reform Judaism. For instance, some of these biblical theologians might feel that a strong criticism of the cult and priests is a bit “un-Judaic,” or they might harbor concerns about the Judaic quality of a Judaism in which the “Law” is seen as peripheral at best, in which prophets and ethi-

of the first half of the 20th century and the decades that closely followed. Hirsch, Heschel, Kaplan, Leo Horn, and the like were, above all, Jewish educators.

64. Levenson is among the few who mention some of these works, but he excludes them from the field of “Jewish biblical theology” on a set of grounds that, if consistently applied, would exclude almost every Jewish work, from that field. See Levenson, “Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology.” By the same standards, Wellhausen’s work would have failed to qualify as relevant to or as an expression of biblical theology.

65. This is particularly true in the case of Levenson; see n. 63 above.



EISENBRAUNS

Offprint from:
Isaac Kalimi, ed.,
Jewish Bible Theology

© Copyright 2012 Eisenbrauns. All rights reserved.

cal monotheism are at the center and fully Jewish, whereas the Pentateuch shows “foreign” influences.

This type of consideration does not apply only “classical” Reform thought. For similar reasons, many of today’s Jewish biblical theologians might harbor reservations about the Judaic component of the secular (partially atheistic) Zionist religion/ideology that played a central role in the discourses of the Jewish civil society Israel till recently and that served as a/the main impetus for the development of biblical studies and archaeology there, as well as for the strong emphasis placed at that time on biblical literacy among Jewish educators and their students.⁶⁶

It seems reasonable also to assume that at an existential level many of today’s Jewish biblical theologians do not see themselves as standing in direct continuity with liberal Jewish scholars and thinkers of generations ago.⁶⁷ Because they do not identify themselves with these liberal predecessors, they see discontinuity in relation to the past.⁶⁸ The newness of their endeavor, as they perceive it, is in part due to the lack of personal and communal identification with these scholars. The former are not the latter, nor are their Jewish congregations/synagogues like those of the liberal rabbis of the past, and therefore memories of these past rabbis are not part of, or at least play no major role at an existential level in, contemporary theologians’ own (main) set of memories. Thus, they tend to be absent from the histories they construct.

This sense of lack of identification is secondarily strengthened by sociological and institutional differences. The social and ideological world in which Geiger, Hirsch, and Schechter grew up was vastly different from

66. On these matters, see U. Simon, “The Bible in Israeli Life.” An area that deserves further work is that of the ideological overlap between “biblical theologians” among reform Jews and several aspects of the ideological understanding of the Bible in secular Zionism in Israel. For instance, both emphasized “ethical monotheism,” and both tended strongly to support “socialist” positions, which they thought to be grounded in the biblical text, if properly understood. The matter stands, of course, beyond the scope of this paper. It is worth noting that the mentioned approach to the Bible and its world view was not the only approach present in Israel even at those times. On the one hand, there were always *haredi* interpreters; on the other, there were attempts to bring some elements of Christian biblical interpretation to bear on the development of a Jewish (Israeli) understanding of the world views present in the Tanak. See Z. Adar (ed.), *השקפת העולם של התנ"ך* (“*The World View of the Tanak*”; Tel Aviv: Massadah, 1965).

67. In fact, for better or worse, similar feelings are present among some reform rabbis today. These days, it is more likely that a reform rabbi would quote a Hasidic rabbi than Hirsch or Geiger in a sermon, and some neotraditionalist reform rabbis sharply criticize “classical” Reform Judaism. Needless to say, they do not feel a sense of transgenerational identity with Spinoza. Some secular philosophers in Israel, however, do.

68. These Jewish biblical theologians also do not identify with the secular Zionists in Israel—they certainly do not see themselves as disciples of Ben Gurion—or with *haredi* thinkers, for that matter.



that of present days, particularly in terms of the appraisal of Judaism and Jews among Christian theologians. In addition, most Jewish biblical theologians today live in a world in which the basic concepts about Judaism and the ways in which Judaism may continue to exist and flourish are not a heightened matter of debate among American Jews themselves.⁶⁹ A sense of precariousness of existence is certainly not a pervasive component of today's Jewish theological discourse, biblical or otherwise. Institutionally, many of the scholars involved in Jewish biblical theology hold teaching and research positions at departments of religious studies or Jewish studies at universities and colleges—some of them private, Christian universities—and a few at Christian seminaries. Their scholarly location, along with the literary genres in which they are able to write, given their occupation,⁷⁰ are not necessarily those of the majority of liberal Jewish thinkers of the past, many of whom were rabbis or saw themselves as Jewish educators working at Jewish institutions, who taught mainly or even only to Jews, to foster their Judaism. In other words, there is a drastic gap between the world of the previous generations of Jewish biblical theologians and the present generation and, accordingly, also between their discourses. This gap contributes to the latter generation's sense of estrangement from the former.

The erasure of liberal/reform Jewish biblical theological undertakings in the construction of the past discussed here is an excellent case of history writing (or social memory construction) in the making. It is worth exploring whether the considerations advanced here may apply to other cases of marginalization or partial (or full) erasure of groups and ideas, whether momentary or long-lasting, in the construction of Jewish histories and in the development of the socially accepted memories of the past. This issue, however, is beyond the scope of this contribution.

69. This is implicitly or explicitly assumed in the works of K. Kohler and M. M. Kaplan.

70. Matters of genre appear in references to the lack of Jewish works comparable to the full-length, comprehensive volumes on "Old Testament theology" such as those of von Rad and Eichrodt.

