



Falk, Daniel K.

The Parabiblical Texts: Strategies for Extending the Scriptures among the Dead Sea Scrolls

Companion to the Qumran Scrolls 8; Library of Second Temple Studies 63

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The Parabiblical Texts is an insightful and successful volume that will prove useful to anyone with an interest in early Jewish compositions that resemble, but are not, biblical texts. Such material “extends” the scriptures; that is, they enlarge the corpus of texts from this period that can be considered “scriptural” (1). The author uses the term *extending* “deliberately to remain non-committal with regard to whether these texts were intended as or functioned as supplementary or complementary to Scripture” (2). The volume addresses important issues such as the status of the Torah in the late Second Temple period, and Falk reviews them with clarity and precision.

The title of the volume does not adequately convey its content. The book is not a survey of the entire range of parabiblical writings but rather an investigation into three texts that are representative of the corpus as a whole: Genesis Apocryphon; 4QReworked Pentateuch; and 4QCommentary on Genesis A–D. The book is valuable as a study of the interpretation of Genesis in early Jewish texts.

The volume comprises five chapters: an introduction, a chapter on each of the texts mentioned above, and a conclusion. The introduction situates the examination of these three compositions within a discussion of parabiblical literature in early Judaism (1–25). Falk stresses that the pluriform nature of the biblical text in this period makes it difficult

to distinguish between “biblical” and “parabiblical” texts. This makes it problematic to speak of “rewritten Bible” as a clearly distinguishable genre of early Jewish literature (13). Falk uses the term “rewritten Scripture” to refer to an “activity” of interpretation and reworking rather than a specific genre (17). Texts from this period revere “a recognizable body of authoritative Scripture” that is in continuity with what became the Hebrew Bible, but Second Temple Judaism does not uphold a canon in the sense that one is revered today (19).

The second chapter, by far the largest, is devoted to the Genesis Apocryphon (26–106), a very interesting Aramaic document that retells Gen 5:18–15:5 (29). Parts of the composition are in very poor material condition, and in several places Falk proposes his own readings (e.g., 36, 87). The preserved remains of the work comprise a Noah cycle and an Abraham cycle (30). The Genesis Apocryphon presents “a scriptural text in a new narrative that seamlessly incorporates interpretation, clarification, harmonization, and supplementary traditions” (41). Perhaps the Genesis Apocryphon’s most well-known expansion of Genesis is in columns 19 and 20, which praise Sarah’s beauty when she is in Egypt. There are numerous other differences when compared to Genesis, such as the presentation of Noah as a recipient of revelation (77). The author convincingly shows that Genesis Apocryphon has numerous exegetical details in common with the book of Jubilees and suggests that the latter may be a source for the former (76). Both compositions, for example, rework the story of Noah’s drunkenness in Gen 9:20–27 to show that Noah observes legal commandments regarding the cultivation of fruit trees and that his drinking is in conjunction with the observation of a festival (71). The text’s exegesis also at times attempts to explain issues that go beyond Jubilees. For example, 1QapGen 12:10–11 is explicit that Arpachshad is the firstborn son of Shem, whereas this is not the case in Jubilees (or Genesis itself) (52–53).

Chapter 3 (107–19) is on 4QReworked Pentateuch (4Q158, 4Q364–367). These manuscripts should not be regarded as from the same composition (109). They contain a “fairly straightforward presentation of its scriptural source with some modifications” (119). The text of the source is similar to the Samaritan Pentateuch. For example, both 4Q158 and the Samaritan Pentateuch present a version of Exod 20 that incorporates material from Deut 5 and 18 (111–14). The author leaves open the question of whether or not 4QReworked Pentateuch should be considered a new edition of the Torah (119). Chapter 4 (120–39) is on 4QCommentary on Genesis A–D (4Q252–254a). 4Q252, the best preserved of the manuscripts, suggests that the work is a commentary on a selection of texts from Gen 6 to 49 (121). Some passages tend to “rewrite” scripture. For example, 4Q252 includes chronological details in its narration of the flood that are not in Genesis. In other portions of the composition there is a clear separation between the biblical text and commentary on it (once the text uses the פֶּשֶׁר marker familiar from the pesharim;

see 124). The base text of 4QCommGen seems to be close to the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Septuagint (125). Among the significant interpretations of Genesis evident in the work is that the figure of 120 years in Gen 6:3 does not refer to the maximum lifespan of a person but the period of time until God brings judgment through the flood (129). A sectarian provenance is suggested by phrases such as “men of the Yaḥad” (121).

The conclusion argues that each of the three texts covered represents a different approach to “extending” scriptures (140). Falk understands the Jewish parabiblical texts in the context of the production and interpretation of texts in the Hellenistic age. The “parascriptural writings” of the Dead Sea Scrolls are consistent with a broader Zeitgeist of the era that fosters texts that, among other features, place an “emphasis on antiquity” (150).

The book’s discussion of parabiblical literature is useful, but the preference of the term “rewritten Scripture” over “rewritten Bible” seems a bit strained, as the author seems to recognize (17). I am not sure if the canonical baggage he is wisely trying to avoid is actually circumvented with the adoption of “scriptural” language. Nevertheless, *The Parabiblical Texts* is a beneficial and informative volume that makes a valid contribution to the field, particularly with regard to the Genesis Apocryphon.