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*Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible.* By Jon D. Levenson. Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985. Pp. xi + 227.

In the introduction to this volume, Jon Levenson states "that the endeavor known as 'Old Testament theology' has been, as its name suggests, an almost exclusively Gentile affair." Not even the major exception of Y. Kaufman affects the truth of this claim.

In the world of modern biblical scholarship, where Jewish-Christian exchange has been fruitful, this should not *a priori* be prob-

lematic. But when one considers that writers such as G. von Rad, W. Eichrodt, and E. Jacob have consistently misunderstood the Hebrew Bible, there is need for correction. It is not that the approach of these authors has been necessarily Christological, for generally they have not viewed biblical characters as prefiguring Jesus nor have they seen biblical prophecy as fulfilled in Jesus. But to the extent that they have read

the "Old Testament" through the eyes of the New, Christian systematizers of biblical thought have not allowed Israelite theology to express itself naturally as an entity all its own.

The two best instances of this are summed up in the title of this book, *Sinai and Zion*, representing the Torah and the Temple. From Paul to Wellhausen and on to contemporary Christian writers, the former is still seen as a burden; and beginning with Jesus (Matthew 24:1-2), the latter has been and still is seen as cursed and decadent. But clearly there is absolutely nothing in the Hebrew Bible itself which hints at these positions, not even in the prophets' occasionally vociferous outbursts against some aspects of the sacrificial cult.

Levenson discusses this situation in his prefatory remarks, but he does not dwell on it as the book progresses into its main sections devoted to the two mountain traditions. That is to say, the book is not an indictment of "Old Testament theology," and it does not engage in anti-Christian polemics. Levenson understands the aforementioned representative scholars' point of departure, and while he disagrees with their views, he does not level salvos at them. Instead, he proceeds independently, presenting biblical theology afresh, allowing the literature of ancient Israel to speak for itself and receive a fair hearing. Only occasionally does he turn aside from this task to comment on different approaches to the same material.

Levenson's independent course is to be commended, and the results of his study are most illuminating. The first part deals with the traditions centered on Sinai, issues such as covenant and law. The covenant, which at first glance might appear to be merely an abstraction, becomes concretized through the observance of the mitzvot. In Levenson's words: "The Mosaic Torah ... is a means of communion with a loving and personal God."

The second part focuses on Zion, specifically in its roles as cosmic mountain and sacred space. Although a superficial reading of the Bible might lead one to conclude that Zion was simply a historically important locale, Levenson uses these contexts to demonstrate its position as the center of the world, with both cosmological and eschatological implications.

These statements will not surprise anyone familiar with classical Jewish sources. What is new here is Levenson's demonstration that rather than being rabbinic inventions based on midrashic eisegesis, such ideas are found already in the Bible itself. Simple exegesis and prudent synthesis are sufficient for uncovering these important messages.

Many of the passages used to bolster Levenson's views are from the book of Psalms, and many of those quoted appear in the liturgy. While most Jews read the Psalms in a rote fashion, with little of the inquisitiveness brought to other classical texts, Levenson places many of them in their proper Sitz-

im-Leben and derives considerable theological insight from them. Accordingly, this volume could well serve many study groups and classes whose members wish to pursue a most important subject.

This book is beautifully written. The language is economical, and there is none of the difficult jargon which often encumbers theological writing. Pulpit rabbis

will certainly benefit from it, for numerous sermons will naturally spring from the ideas it raises. Those engaged in interfaith dialogue should be sure to read it and recommend it to their Christian counterparts. Interesting discussions are sure to arise.

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