

Isaac Kalimi, *Early Jewish Exegesis and Theological Controversy: Studies in Scripture in the Shadow of Internal and External Conflicts*.

(Jewish and Christian Heritage Series 2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2002). Cloth. ISBN 90-232-3713-7. \$47

Reviewed by Francis Landy

University of Alberta

This is a collection of seven somewhat disparate essays by Isaac Kalimi, who has worked for many years on Chronicles, but whose research interests cover the spectrum of Jewish folklore, Midrash, of which Chronicles is an early example, and issues of Jewish and Christian interpretation. The essays are highly readable, extremely erudite, and always have a sharp and distinctive point. Two are on the Akedah; one concerns the topos of biblical heroes who were born circumcised; two are on aspects of the Joseph story; and two are on the relationship of theology to biblical studies, including a review-article on a book by Rolf Knierim. Earlier versions of the articles have been previously published in various languages.

There is inevitably some overlap between the essays, which reflects Kalimi's abiding preoccupations and exegetical curiosity. For instance, both articles on the Akedah concern the identity of the mountain on which the offering took place. In the first, "The Land/Mount Moriah, and the Site of the Jerusalem Temple in Biblical Historical Writing" (pp. 9–32), Kalimi argues that the identification of the sacrificial site with the Jerusalem Temple in 2 Chron 3:1 is part of the Chronistic attempt to magnify the sanctity of the Temple despite its inferiority in the Second Temple period, and in the face of its detractors. In the second, "The Affiliation of Abraham and the Aqedah with Zion/Gerizim in Jewish and Samaritan Sources" (pp. 33–59), he contends that it participates in the polemic against the Samaritan claim to the Israelite heritage, since the Samaritans too believed that Mt. Moriah was Mt. Gerizim.

Kalimi's argumentation is thorough, wide-ranging, and impressionistic. His technique is to collect evidence from a variety of sources, to construct a history, and then to propose a single circumstantial explanation. In the first article, he suggests that the linkage of the narrative with the Temple emanates from the First Temple period, as shown by the insertion of Gen 22:14b into the text. The Deuteronomists, however, were not concerned with the precise location of the Temple, since it was too well known. Only the Chronicler specified it as Mt. Moriah, thereby turning the "land" of Gen 22:2 into a "mountain." Similarly, in the second article, he draws on an impressive number of sources which associate the Aqedah with the Temple worship, including a fresco at Dura Europos and the Targumim, and matches them with an equally impressive series from Samaritan sources.

The third article concerns the list of thirteen men who were born circumcised, first found in the *Avot de Rabbi Natan*, in a section which Kalimi considers to be quite old. He traces the motif back to Jubilees, according to which the angels are naturally circumcised. In later texts, the list is corrupted, though the idea has a long exegetical history. Kalimi situates it in the context of debates about the value of circumcision, first in the Maccabean crisis, and second in the aftermath of Hadrianic persecution and the Christian rejection of circumcision as necessary for the covenant community.

The fourth and fifth essays explore details of the Midrashic treatment of Joseph. What was the evil report that Joseph brought about his brothers? How does Jewish tradition evaluate it? What happened between Joseph and Potiphar's wife? How long was he imprisoned? When was he released? Kalimi finds that in contrast to early sources, later rabbinic texts unanimously condemn Joseph's slander, directly or indirectly. Furthermore, they attribute catastrophes such as the destruction of the First Temple to slander. As with the motif of natural circumcision, Kalimi thinks that the abhorrence of slander arises out of the trauma of Roman persecution and in particular the rivalry of Judaism and Christianity. Similarly, the prayer against the minim, the heretics, in the Amidah, said to be introduced by Samuel the Small around 100 C.E, is introduced by an execration against informers, which is more elaborate in variant versions than in the standard text.

"Joseph Between Potiphar and His Wife" (pp. 88–103) contrasts those midrashim which stress Joseph's miraculous deliverance from temptation, even to the point of asserting that he was only foiled by impotence, with those that insist on his virtue throughout. A problem then arose about the justification of Joseph's imprisonment. Some sources regard it as poetic justice for Joseph's slander of his brothers, while others hold that it was a divine strategem for ensuring that Joseph would be available to interpret Pharaoh's dreams.

The last two essays deal with the more general issue of the relationship of biblical studies to theology, and Jewish to Christian interpretation. This is a well-worn path, to which Kalimi adds little except bibliographic paving. He argues for the separate value of theology and biblical studies, conceived of as an objective and historical discipline. He recognizes the importance of the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in the context of the Christian tradition, as long as it is not anti-semitic or triumphalist. He does, however, contrast the Hebrew Bible with the New Testament, in that, in Kalimi's view, the latter is focused exclusively on the figure of Christ, while the former represents much greater theological diversity.

There is much to discuss in these essays. Kalimi is an energetic, thoughtful, and challenging scholar. A problem throughout the collection, however, is that there is a gap between the evidence and the explanation. It is by no means obvious to me that the Chronicler's identification of the site of the Akedah with the Temple is motivated by a desire to insist on its significance despite its destitution. Many other explanations could be adduced, including the Chronicler's midrashic tendency to make connections between distant events and personages, and the centrality of the Temple in his thought, in the absence

of the political and sacred institutions which are in the foreground of much of the so-called Deuteronomic History. Moreover, he overlooks literary evidence, such as the parallel between the narrative in 2 Sam 24 and the Aqedah. He does not take sufficiently into account the ambivalence towards Jerusalem and the Temple in the DH.

These are but quibbles, however, for what is a fine collection by a scholar who represents one of the most interesting traditions in Israeli biblical scholarship.