

Thou traveller unknown: the presence and absence of God in the Jacob narrative

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Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs;
Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003, pbk., xvi + 238pp.,
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SUMMARY

This is a book about the interpretation of the Jacob narrative, and it is somewhat unusual in combining historical and thematic approaches to this narrative. It focuses on the relationship between the history of the biblical text and the importance of the theme of God's presence and absence in the Jacob story. It concludes that this theme is central to the existing narrative and is present at all levels of the text. This is a stimulating and thoughtful piece of work which is certainly worthy of dissemination among a wider audience.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es handelt sich um ein Buch zur Interpretation der Jakobs-geschichte. Es ist etwas ungewöhnlich in seiner Kombination von historischen und thematischen Ansätzen zu dieser Geschichte. Der Fokus liegt auf der Beziehung zwischen der Geschichte des biblischen Textes und der Wichtigkeit des Themas der Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit Gottes in der Jakobs-geschichte. Die Schlussfolgerung lautet, dass dieses Thema für die vorliegende Geschichte zentral ist, und dass es auf allen Ebenen des Textes gegenwärtig ist. Es handelt sich um eine stimulierende und bedachtvolle Arbeit, die sicher eine Verbreitung bei einem größeren Publikum verdient.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage traite de l'interprétation du cycle narratif de Jacob. Il présente une certaine originalité en ce qu'il combine une approche historique et une approche thématique du récit. Il s'intéresse à la relation entre l'histoire du texte biblique et l'importance du thème de la présence et de l'absence de Dieu dans l'histoire de Jacob. Il conclut de son étude que ce thème est central dans la narration telle qu'elle se présente aujourd'hui et qu'il y est présent à tous les niveaux du texte. C'est là une étude réfléchie et stimulante qui mérite d'être connue d'un plus large public.

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Like many volumes in Paternoster's Biblical and Theological Monograph Series, this one had its origins in a Ph.D. thesis, in this case under the supervision of Walter Moberly at Durham. The thesis concerns the interpretation of the Jacob narrative, and adopts a somewhat unusual approach in combining historical and thematic aspects of the narrative. The result is a stimulating and thoughtful piece of work which is certainly worthy of dissemination among a wider audience.

Walton argues that an appreciation of the historical development of the text is important to understanding the story of Jacob. Though he finds no evidence of

continuous sources along the lines of the Documentary Hypothesis, he does conclude that the text combines several older traditions, some of which contain signs of additional perspectives, as well as an underlying redactional unity. The Bethel and Peniel episodes are important examples of some of the oldest traditions, while the Jacob-Laban episode is a self-contained story comparable to a German *Novelle*. These different kinds of material have been brought together into a discrete unity which has become the Jacob narrative. However, Walton is doubtful about speculation concerning possible historical contexts for the development of this material, and is critical of recent attempts to place it in settings as varied as a semi-nomadic context, the reign of Jeroboam I, or the exilic or early post-exilic periods.

On the thematic side, Walton argues that the Jacob narrative is constructed around the theme of divine presence and absence. This theme is present at all levels of the material, and it is a mistake to assume that a theological perspective has been superimposed over a purely human story or series of traditions. The idea of divine absence is equally important to the narrative alongside the theme of God's presence and self-revelation in the three key episodes of Jacob's birth, his dream at Bethel and his struggle at Peniel. This is because of the complex and intense nature of Jacob's story, and since this complexity seems to be rooted in the figure of Jacob, his whole relationship with God is bound up with paradox. Particular attention is given to Gen. 35, especially the summarising role of vv. 9-15, where Walton reaffirms von Rad's observation that the *deus absconditus* of earlier parts of the Jacob story has become unambiguously a *deus revelatus*.

Walton also considers the relationship between the patriarch Jacob and the nation of Israel, and considers Jacob as both a figure of promise and a type for Israel. While the focus of the story is the person of Jacob, it has been written in such a way that at many points it is also Israel's story. Again, this is an integral part of the narrative, and is intended to reflect the struggles and questions of later Israelites as well as Jacob's personal experience.

One quibble might be that the book probably underestimates the interaction between God and Jacob, and that the passages where God appears to be unseen reflect the impact of the three key revelations just as much as the accounts of those revelations. It would also have been helpful to have integrated the observations about God with the development of Jacob's character. Part of the problem here is that the book takes almost no account of the conclusion of the Jacob story in Gen. 48-50. Though on one level it can be argued that a definite ending occurs at 35:29, it is particularly unfortunate that Jacob's testimony in 48:15-16 and the account of his death and burial in 49:29-50:14 are left out of consideration. The book also does not really consider how the Jacob story relates to the plot of Genesis, and only briefly discusses its relationship to the themes of promise

and blessing.

On the more technical side, it would have been interesting to consider the impact of at least three levels of redaction, of the Jacob story itself, of the book of Genesis, and of the Pentateuch and beyond. One wonders too how long scholars will continue to use the language of the Documentary Hypothesis when they are really talking about something quite different. The term 'Priestly' for example, is used here only of a redactional function, and without any reference to priestly interests.

Though these are not minor matters, they do perhaps indicate the stimulating nature of this book, and its potential impact on a series of related issues. This volume will certainly have an impact on future interpretation of the Jacob story, and the emphasis on the role of the divine perspective is especially welcome.

Martin Selman, London, UK

Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch

T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker
[eds.]

Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003, xxii + 954 pp.,
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SUMMARY

This volume is a very worthy addition to the four earlier volumes in IVP's sister NT series. It contains 159 articles from the pens of 86 contributors located mainly in North America and the UK. It includes the anticipated variety of article types, with no article being less than a thousand words long, and some of them being fairly substantial (up to 26 pages in length). Many of the contributors are already well-known in the evangelical constituency (and beyond) for significant works in their allotted subject area. The publishers anticipate three distinct audiences for the work: students, church educators, and scholars, although the first two categories are likely to be the main beneficiaries.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Band ist eine sehr wertvolle Ergänzung der vier früheren Bände des IVP-Pendants zum NT. Er enthält 159 Artikel von 86 Autoren, die hauptsächlich aus Nordamerika und aus Großbritannien kommen. Er beinhaltet die erwartete Vielfalt von Artikeltypen. Keiner der Artikel ist weniger als 1000 Wörter lang, und einige sind recht umfangreich (bis zu 26 Seiten). Viele der Autoren sind bereits in der evangelikalen Welt (und darüber hinaus) gut bekannt aufgrund signifikanter Arbeit in den zugeordneten Gebieten. Die Herausgeber gehen von drei verschiedenen Adressatenkreisen aus: Studenten, kirchliche Ausbilder und Gelehrte, obwohl die ersten beiden Kategorien wahrscheinlich am meisten von dem Werk profitieren werden.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce volume vient s'ajouter aux quatre volumes déjà parus dans la série sur le Nouveau Testament publiée par IVP.

Il contient 159 articles rédigés par 86 auteurs, principalement d'Amérique du Nord et du Royaume Uni. Les articles sont de types variés. Ils font tous plus d'un millier de mots et certains d'entre eux sont très substantiels (jusqu'à 26 pages). Parmi les auteurs, beaucoup sont déjà bien connus du monde évangélique et au-delà pour des travaux d'envergure dans le domaine relatif au sujet qui leur a été imparti ici. Les éditeurs comptent que cet ouvrage bénéficiera aux étudiants, aux enseignants dans les Églises et aux spécialistes, même si les deux premières catégories seront sans doute celles qui en tireront le plus profit.

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This volume is a very worthy addition to the four earlier volumes in IVP's sister NT series and fills this reviewer with anticipation for the remaining volumes in the OT series. It contains 159 articles from the pens of 86 contributors, the vast majority of whom are from North America and the UK.

The dictionary includes the anticipated variety of article types. However, no article is less than a thousand words long, with the result that one will not find here the kind of brief article found in other dictionaries on each place or personal name occurring in the text of the Pentateuch (e.g., no articles on 'Amalekites', 'Ararat', or 'Nile'), although some of these may be listed in the 12 page Subject Index towards the end of the volume. Also, other subjects that have dedicated articles in other dictionaries are either not covered here at all (e.g., 'Anger', 'Adoption'), or, are subsumed under related categories (e.g., 'Glory' is mentioned under both 'Holiness' and 'Tabernacle'). On the other hand, one finds articles here on subjects (e.g., 'Alien') that are not always covered in other dictionaries.

Some articles provide fairly substantial treatments of their subjects, e.g., 'Sacrifices and Offerings' (26 pages); 'Tabernacle' (20); 'Law' (18); 'Covenant' (17); and 'Ethics' (15). Many of the contributors have already written significant works on their allotted subject (e.g., McConville on 'Deuteronomy', Walton on 'Creation', Goldingay on 'Hermeneutics', Fretheim on 'Exodus', and Williamson on 'Covenant').

The publishers anticipate three distinct audiences for the work: students, church educators, and scholars. On the basis of the content and depth of many of the articles this is a reasonable assumption, although the first two categories are likely to be the main beneficiaries. Undergraduate students should find many of the articles very helpful in the early stages of their preparation of essays and dissertations, while postgraduate students beginning their research could also derive benefit from the summaries of the present state of scholarship, and also from the (often) significant bibliographies. Scholars may find that some of the articles from outwith their particular research area provide helpful orientations to the subject, particularly if they are required to teach undergraduate classes in these areas. Preachers and other church educators will benefit from the subject overviews