

Book Reviews – Recensions – Buchbesprechungen

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A Reader's Hebrew Bible

A. Philip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, xxviii + 1652 pp.,

£25.99, pb; ISBN 978-0-310-26974-8

SUMMARY

The *Reader's Hebrew Bible* fills an immense gap for those hoping to maintain and improve their Hebrew reading skills. All Hebrew words occurring less than 100 times are footnoted (less than 25 for Aramaic) and those that occur 100 times or more are listed in a glossary in the back. With Hebrew vocabulary being so much more difficult than Greek, this volume is invaluable for the time it saves the reader.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die *Reader's Hebrew Bible* füllt eine riesige Lücke für diejenigen, die hoffen, ihre hebräischen Lesefähigkeiten zu behalten und zu verbessern. Alle hebräischen Wörter, die weniger als 100 Mal vorkommen, werden in Fußnoten vermerkt (weniger als 25 Mal beim Aramäischen), und Wörter, die 100 Mal oder öfter vorkommen, werden am Ende in einem Glossar aufgelistet. Weil das hebräische Vokabular viel schwieriger als das griechische ist, ist dieser Band im Hinblick auf die Zeit, die er den Lesern erspart, unschätzbar.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage vient combler une grande lacune pour ceux qui souhaitent maintenir et améliorer leur aptitude à lire la Bible en hébreu. Tous les mots hébreux apparaissant moins de cent fois (et les mots araméens dont le nombre d'occurrences est inférieur à vingt-cinq) sont traités en notes de bas de page et un glossaire en fin de volume donne la liste des autres. Le vocabulaire de l'hébreu est bien plus difficile à maîtriser que celui du grec et cet ouvrage permet au lecteur de gagner du temps dans sa lecture du texte biblique.

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As one who has benefited immensely from my *Reader's Greek New Testament* (RGNT), I was pleased to see the release of Zondervan's *Reader's Hebrew Bible* (RHB). Though I have only used this edition for a short time, I have been just as pleased with it as with the RGNT. With the advent of Bible software, readers can find more detailed help with parsing and the like, but this volume is especially helpful for reading larger quantities without having to spend time looking at a computer screen or in a lexicon.

Unlike the critical edition of the Greek New Testament, which is a composite text based on the best selected reading of each variant, most current Hebrew texts (e.g.,

BHS and BHQ) are based on one text, the Leningrad Codex with text critical variants footnoted. RHB follows this model (without any text critical notes), using the Westminster Leningrad Codex 4.4 (WLC) version, which is provided in BibleWorks 7.0. There are a limited amount of variations between this text and BHS, and the editors list the 27 differences they know exist between WLC and BHS in an appendix. There are neither a critical apparatus nor Masora notes, which follows the editors' goal to make this text easy for reading rather than a tool for detailed exegesis. Important to the Masoretic Text is the distinction between *Kethib* (written) and *Qere* (spoken) forms. Rather than using marginal notes as other editions, both forms are included in the text but are marked with a superscripted K and Q, respectively.

With regard to the Hebrew parts of the Bible, all words occurring less than 100 times are footnoted, and those that occur 100 times or more are listed in a glossary in the back. For Aramaic, words occurring less than 25 times are footnoted, but none of the more frequent words are included in the glossary. For the sake of space, proper names occurring less than 100 (Hebrew) or 25 (Aramaic) times are not footnoted but rather coloured grey in the text. For the footnotes, the root of the word and the homonym number along with context- and stem-specific glosses are given from HALOT and BDB. If glosses from these two sources were not deemed adequate, others sources were used such as Holladay and *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, and are marked accordingly. For verbs, the stem/binyan (Qal, Niphal, etc.) is also noted, which along with the root makes parsing much easier, especially with weak verbs.

The RHB does not suffer from the problems of the first edition of its cousin the RGNT. In particular, the font is very readable, as it is the one used in BibleWorks. Although the footnotes are not laid out in columns, the Hebrew word and footnote number are a much darker font than the rest of the footnote, making the correct one relatively easy to find.

The editors' conservative backgrounds have bothered some who automatically assume that this means their work will be biased. I have seen no evidence of a bias that has affected the work (In general, is it certain that those with different [non]confessional backgrounds could not be any less biased in other directions?) In fact, the format of following HALOT and BDB by the editors would seem to preclude the issue of bias. For instance, with Isaiah 7.14 the gloss for *almah* is only 'young woman' and does not include 'virgin' as an option.

The Duo-Tone leather is comfortable, but the cover does not seem sturdy enough for long term use, as I have already noticed some creasing. This is a larger issue

than with the *RGNT* because of the larger size of this volume, which is about the same as a study Bible. At the same time, this issue would not at all give me pause from purchasing the work.

On the whole, this work fills an immense gap for those hoping to maintain and improve their Hebrew reading skills. With Hebrew vocabulary being so much more difficult than Greek, this volume is invaluable for the time it saves. I could not recommend it more highly.

Ben C. Blackwell
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*Joseph Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of
Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50*

Lindsay Wilson

Paternoster Biblical Monographs

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004, xvi + 339pp.,
£24.99, pb; ISBN-10: 1-84227-140-7

SUMMARY

This revised doctoral thesis addresses the question of the genre of the Joseph narrative. The Joseph story has been variously categorised, but with considerable debate on whether or not it is a wisdom text. Wilson argues persuasively that it includes 'wisdom like elements', but that a synchronic reading must also attend to its integration into the rest of Genesis where it develops the covenant themes from the Abraham story while also preparing for the events of Exodus. Joseph acts wisely, but this wisdom enables God's purposes to be worked out.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese überarbeitete Dissertation widmet sich der Frage des Genres der Josephserzählung. Die Story über Joseph ist unterschiedlich kategorisiert worden, inklusive einer beachtlichen Debatte darüber, ob es sich um einen Weisheitstext handelt oder nicht. Wilson argumentiert überzeugend, dass die Story „weisheitsähnliche Elemente“ beinhaltet, dass sich eine synchrone Leseweise aber auch der Integration der Story in den Rest der Genesis widmen. In diesem Gesamtkontext entwickelt die Story die Bundesthemen der Story über Abraham weiter und sie bereitet gleichzeitig auf die Exodusereignisse vor. Joseph handelt weise, aber seine Weisheit macht es möglich, dass Gottes Absichten Gestalt gewinnen.

RÉSUMÉ

Cette monographie est la révision d'une thèse de doctorat sur le genre littéraire de l'histoire de Joseph. Ce récit a été rangé dans diverses catégories et la question de savoir si c'est un texte sapientiel a été largement débattue. Wilson montre de manière convaincante qu'il inclut des éléments sapientiaux, mais qu'une lecture synchronique du texte doit prendre en compte la manière dont il s'intègre au reste du livre de la Genèse en prolongeant le thème de l'alliance qui domine le récit consacré à Abraham et en

préparant le récit de l'exode. Joseph agit avec sagesse, mais cela contribue à la réalisation des projets de Dieu.

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Originally prepared as a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Melbourne, Wilson here tackles the question of the genre and purpose of the Joseph narrative (Genesis 37-50). Ever since von Rad argued that it was a wisdom text, the genre of the narrative has been vigorously debated, with a variety of criteria developed and rejected by scholars in seeking to assess this proposal. Wilson wades into this discussion, seeking to develop a model for understanding the finished text. He criticises previous research on wisdom in the Joseph narrative for failing to develop a proper method for identifying (or rejecting) wisdom in this narrative, though in fact the debates about how to identify wisdom go much wider than just this narrative. Rather than depending on particular terminology, social setting, form or content, Wilson argues for the presence of 'wisdom like' material which points to the role wisdom plays in the narrative. Although this is heuristically helpful, identifying these elements still seems a trifle impressionistic.

With his method established, Wilson then provides a close reading of the whole narrative, though because the wisdom like elements play a lesser role in chapters 46-50, this section is treated more briefly. Wilson focuses then on Genesis 37-45, analysing the way Joseph is presented, and in particular his characterisation. Against those who have suggested that Joseph is presented negatively, Wilson argues that the presentation of the dreams in chapter 37 and the encounters with his brothers leading to the point where he reveals himself offer a neutral interpretation of him because we are never given any indication of his motivation. This is not as convincing as the rest of his reading, principally because arguments from silence are difficult to substantiate. More impressively, he also shows how the Judah – Tamar narrative of Genesis 38 functions as a macrocosm of the whole of the Joseph narrative. Both the narrative as a whole and Genesis 38 in particular demonstrate the importance of acting wisely though the wisdom like elements do not have to include elements such as dream interpretation since Joseph does not employ wisdom techniques in their interpretation.

From the close reading, Wilson then explores the function of the wisdom like elements in view of the covenant context in which the narrative is now placed. Wilson is able to demonstrate that Joseph acts wisely but that through this God is actually achieving his own purposes. God's kingly reign is thus demonstrated through the actions of the wise, so wisdom and covenant interact with one another. The Joseph narrative therefore demonstrates the value of acting wisely while also showing how God's rule is worked out through those who do so. Covenant themes are evident throughout, but God's sovereignty is not expressed apart from the faithfulness