



Treasures Old and New: Essays in the Theology of the Pentateuch

Joseph Blenkinsopp

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The Pentateuch is one anchor of the Western religious heritage, a rich source of theological and spiritual instruction capable of being plumbed again and again. In "Treasures Old and New" accomplished biblical scholar Joseph Blenkinsopp engages twelve topics of great interest to thoughtful people today, and does so in dialogue with texts from the Pentateuch. In keeping with the view that the Pentateuch is far too multiplex to be encapsulated in a single theological system, Blenkinsopp has written "Treasures Old and New" as a sketchbook of theology in the Pentateuch. This fruitful approach allows him to consider themes that easily fall through the cracks of more systematic works of biblical theology. Among the many interesting subjects Blenkinsopp explores are the role of memory in the construction of the past, the dependence of Christianity on Judaism, the close connection between sacrifice and community in Old Testament Israel, the proper meaning of human stewardship of the world, and belief (or lack of belief) in a meaningful post-mortem existence. Blenkinsopp believes that scripture is infinitely interpretable, and that we are free to read the Bible in more flexible, fascinating, and exciting ways. In keeping with the great variety of discourses in the Pentateuch, the standard historical-critical method must coexist with other, and in some cases, much older interpretive approaches to texts. Blenkinsopp here ably demonstrates this perspectival approach to scripture by reading well-known texts from less well-known angles. The Garden of Eden story, for example, gains in resonance when read together with "Gilgamesh," and the laws governing diet and cleanliness come clearer in the light of current ecological concerns. Blenkinsopp's approach also throws new light on such important yet enigmatic stories as the Creation, Cain and Abel, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, the Call of Abram, Sodom and Gomorrah, and others. Blessed with an extraordinary ability to transmit complex issues in concise and lucid fashion, Blenkinsopp has put forth great effort to make this sketchbook accessible. Footnotes have been kept to a minimum, and Blenkinsopp has transliterated the few Hebrew references and used his own, more idiomatic translations of biblical texts wherever they seemed clearer than the standard translations. As a result, this volume can be pursued profitably by scholars, students, and readers alike. Above all, "Treasures Old and New" shows that serious engagement with biblical texts, while sometimes demanding, can be intellectually and religiously rewarding.

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