

REVIEW

Hanneke Reuling, *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16-21*

(Leiden: Brill, 2006), hardcover, 390 pp.

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This book, part of Brill's Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, is a revised doctoral dissertation examining rabbinic and patristic exegesis of Genesis 3:16-21. Reuling gives detailed analysis of a selection of rabbinic and patristic sources in order to investigate two main hypotheses. First, she asks, "Do Church Fathers and Rabbis hold fundamentally different evaluations of human life or should we modify this notion?" (p. 341). Secondly, she questions whether, in their exegesis of the primordial decrees of Genesis 3, the Jewish and Christian traditions focus on the arduous nature of human life "after Eden." Reuling contributes a valuable assessment of patristic and rabbinic views on procreation, sexuality, labour, mortality and corporeality, giving not only detailed analysis of the sources in their own right, but drawing attention to where rabbinic and patristic exegesis is similar or divergent in its discussion of Genesis 3:16-21.

The book begins with a brief outline of the history of scholarship on the subject of the encounter between Jews and Christians in their biblical exegeses. This is followed by a nuanced presentation of the main issues for consideration in the analysis of a potential encounter between the two traditions, and an outline of the methodology used by Reuling in analysing the sources. In particular, Reuling considers texts and authors from the fourth and fifth centuries, as a means of comparing rabbinic and patristic exegesis of Genesis 3:16-21 from a broadly similar time period.

The analysis of Genesis 3:16-21 begins with an examination of the biblical verses in the versions used by Church Fathers and Rabbis, including discussion of textual problems and assessment of the differences between the different versions. The source analysis is divided into five chapters. The first three chapters focus on patristic exegesis, examining Didymus the Blind and Ambrose of Milan as representatives of the Alexandrian approach to exegesis, John Chrysostom from the school of Antioch, and Augustine of Hippo from the Latin tradition. Reuling provides a useful introduction to the exegetical approach and theological perspective of these authors, and her choice of authors reflects the necessary consideration of not only a specific time period, but also geographical location, language and style. Reuling properly analyzes these sources in relation to their own specific contexts, examining the Church Father's place within their exegetical school or tradition, and the relationship of the writings of the church father to other patristic authors and writers such as Philo. In this way, Reuling brings out the differences and similarities between the various traditions of these Church Fathers within patristic circles before making any systematic comparison with the ideas found in rabbinic sources.

Chapters four and five of the source analysis focus on rabbinic exegesis with assessment of Genesis Rabbah and Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan (Versions A and B). Given that Reuling wished to focus on the fourth to fifth centuries, the choice of Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan is problematic, although Reuling herself acknowledges this. Scholarship dates this text from the 3rd to the 8th centuries, yet, if Reuling was willing to consider a text that could have a final redaction in the 8th

century, there are other rabbinic texts that would perhaps have been preferable to include in the study that have more detail on the verses in question. For example, the recensions of Tanhuma, or Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer. As with examination of the patristic literature, the analysis of the sources focuses on discussion of the texts within their own context and Reuling relates the traditions in Genesis Rabbah and Aboth de-Rabbi Nathan to the wider transmission of the tradition in rabbinic sources. The investigation of the rabbinic sources takes place on three levels: examination of the specific exegesis of Genesis 3:16-21; consideration of the themes arising from this exegesis; and finally the significance of the exegesis of these verses in the interpretation of Genesis 3 as a whole.

In the introduction to Genesis Rabbah, Reuling addresses the approach to the comparative aspect of her study. She suggests that the most profitable comparison will examine not just the specific interpretations of the verses in question, but would focus on “a pattern of debated issues” (p. 223) and comparison of the assumptions behind the rabbinic and patristic exegesis. This approach considers not only shared interpretations and the distinctiveness of each tradition, but also firmly establishes the place of the examined traditions in the overall perspective of the text in which they are found. The assumption underlying this analytical approach is that there is a redactional perspective in rabbinic texts, which allows for examination of the place of specific exegesis of Genesis 3:16-21 in terms of its significance for the overall themes of a rabbinic text. Indeed, Reuling states in a balanced way “Genesis Rabbah is both a collection of interpretations *and* an editorial statement about the first book of the Bible” (p. 229).

This multi-level perspective is reflected in the conclusions drawn by Reuling. On the wider thematic level, Reuling draws a contrast between the theological views of Rabbis and Church Fathers, particularly, the patristic view of Adam as a type for humanity who transgressed only to be redeemed by Jesus, in contrast with the rabbinic focus on Moses and Sinai, but also the contrast in approach and style. Similarities on the broader thematic level include the extensive discussion in both sets of literature on the future restoration. In relation to the specific exegesis of Genesis 3:16-21, Reuling notes that there is a basic difference in the understanding of sexuality and procreation, labour and corporeality in the two traditions, but this must be seen against the background of a pluriformity of tradition. Reuling notes similarities on the issues of gender and mortality, and overall a particularly close affinity between the exegesis of John Chrysostom and the Rabbis. On the whole, with regard to the first hypothesis, Reuling notes that “the heritage of patristic and rabbinic Genesis-interpretation embodies this intricate relationship of similarity and divergence” (p. 341). The second hypothesis is refuted as the onerous nature of human life “after Eden” is found to be only one of many interpretations.

After Eden is a valuable contribution to the study of the exegetical encounter between Church Father and Rabbis both for its specific study of Genesis 3:16-21, which has not previously been considered in its entirety in comparative analysis, and for the example set by the methodological approach used in the examination of the sources both in their own context and in comparison with the “opposing” exegetical tradition.