

## BOOK REVIEW

*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures – Volume 1*, Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila and Alexander Panayotov, eds. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 808 pp. Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg.

The term Old Testament Pseudepigrapha refers to a text which falsely claims to be written by a biblical character or to give an account of events from the biblical era, particularly adding episodes or details not mentioned in the Bible (p. xviii). These works were considered significant and perhaps even sacred in ancient times, yet they often represent alternative views than those destined to become part of what may be described as "normative Judaism" today. One of the better known of these works, discussed in the pages of this journal, is the *Book of Jubilees*. This new collection is meant to add material to the classic two-volume collection, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (OTP; 1983-85), edited by James H. Charlesworth, who also wrote the foreword to this volume. Material that appeared in that work is not repeated here, unless there is another version of the text, for example, the Coptic version of *Life of Adam and Eve* (the OTP had the Greek and Latin versions). The current volume is meant to add works not included there for various reasons, notably material discovered since then. This work does not use the definite article when referring to the Pseudepigrapha, to make it clear that this is not, and indeed there cannot be, a definitive collection of Pseudepigrapha, because there is no canon of this material and new discoveries are still being made (p. xxvii). The cutoff point chosen for the works presented here is the early seventh century CE (p. xxviii).

Such works include the *Eighth Book of Moses*, a fourth-century CE book of magical rituals, additional books purporting to have been written by Ezra, additional visions of Daniel describing events in the Byzantine era, and many others. While there is no claim that these books are "real" or divinely inspired, they do teach us a great deal about the mindset of Jews and early Christians in antiquity, their beliefs, and how they related to the Bible.

*Rabbi Dr. Simcha Rosenberg teaches Tanakh in Jerusalem at a variety of yeshivot and seminars.*

A highlight of this volume is *The Balaam Text from Tell Deir 'Alla*, discovered in Jordan in 1967. It seems to date at least from the first half of the eighth century BCE and, as such, it is the only extra-biblical document from the pre-exilic period that mentions a figure from the Torah. It tells of a dire vision that Balaam ben Beor relates to his audience, in which the gods decree darkness over the world because it is in a state of chaos. Balaam also warns his listeners that the events on earth are leading them to the underworld, which he describes. While the Balaam portrayed here is not the villain we are familiar with from the account in Numbers, this does at least point to the fact that Balaam was known in the region as a great prophet and emissary of divine forces, and that he was the subject of extra-biblical literary works.

The texts selected for inclusion here occasionally strike this reviewer as unusual, for example, the *Legend of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi*, an account of how Yehoshua ben Levi tricked the Angel of Death and was able to visit Gan Eden and Gehinnom while still alive. A version of part of this story is found in TB *Ketubbot* 77b and alluded to at the end of the first chapter of Tractate *Derekh Eretz Zuta*. As such, the text may be considered early midrashic rather than pseudepigraphic, but as one reads through this volume the distinction between these two literary forms is increasingly blurred. While the *midrash* is not generally written as if told by a biblical character, it does retell biblical narratives with additional information, a major feature of "Old Testament" Pseudepigrapha.

While the OTP focused on Jewish works from around the Second Temple era, this volume also includes later texts up to the rise of Islam along with a number of works of Christian and pagan authorship. Although documents are given helpful introductions and explanatory notes, unlike the OTP the date of a work is not listed alongside its entry in the contents. An extensive index includes references to the Bible, rabbinic literature, and other Pseudepigrapha. A second volume is already planned and the documents to be included there are listed in this volume's introduction. This important collection includes a wealth of information that will be invaluable to scholar and interested layperson alike, making it an instant classic.