

## BOOK REVIEW

*Outside the Bible: Ancient Writings Related to Scripture*, edited by Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel and Lawrence H. Schiffman. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society [Lincoln: University of Nebraska], 2013, 3 volumes, 3300+ pages. Reviewed by David J. Zucker.

This three-volume set is an anthology of ancient Jewish writings which, as the title indicates, never became part of the official Jewish Bible and in most cases were not incorporated into rabbinic tradition. They come from various sources: the Dead Sea Scrolls; Jewish writings in Greek, such as those of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria (died c. 50 CE) or the writings of the historian Josephus (died c. 100 CE); and an enormous grab-bag of apocalyptic visions, fictional "last wills and testaments," retellings of biblical narratives, and various prayers and songs all known to scholars under the title of "Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha."

Some of these writings will be familiar to readers, including those translated from Hebrew or Aramaic into Greek which made their way into various Christian canons, where they were classified as "Old Testament Apocrypha." Among these are 1 and 2 Maccabees, which record some of the history of Hanukkah; the Wisdom of Ben Sira[ch]; Judith, Tobit, Susanna and the Elders, and several more. Many of the other works will be altogether new. All these writings were composed some time between the end of the Babylonian Exile (538 BCE) and the end of the second century, and thus help to fill a considerable literary gap between the last parts of the Hebrew Bible and the codification of the Mishnah. These compositions were originally intended for various Jewish communities inside and outside of the Land of Israel. Many of them preserve traces of ancient *midrashim* (nonlegal expositions of Tanakh) and *halakhot* (legal rulings) that appear later, or are disputed, in the writings of the Rabbis.

Each section begins with an introduction that places the material within its original Jewish context. There are summaries of each text, a history of its

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composition and transmission, and a guide to its highlights. Then come the texts themselves (in English translation), along with running commentaries to explain the particulars. These commentaries have been prepared by an array of internationally known scholars – Jewish and Christian, men and women. They not only interpret the text but highlight connections to other Jewish writings, from the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and various midrashic collections. Some of the translations that appear here are republished from earlier collections, such as *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (James Charlesworth, ed., 1983, 1985) from the Anchor Bible Series. There also are brand new translations created especially for *Outside the Bible*. In this latter category are Philo's *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, as well as the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a work dating from the first-century BCE. Extensive notes, written specifically for this publication, supplement all of the selections.

On the one hand, these volumes are written by and for scholars – witness the seven double-columned pages of abbreviations. On the other hand, the notes also provide interesting and helpful material for the general public. To offer historical context as part of the introductory material, there is a section entitled "Important Dates of the Second Temple Period."

The volumes commence with five short introductory essays: on the Septuagint; the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; the Writings of Philo; Josephus and his Writings; and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In the essay on the Septuagint, Emanuel Tov points out that the "LXX [Septuagint] was translated from a Hebrew text that differed, often greatly, from the MT [Masoretic Text]. This is not surprising, since in antiquity many differing copies of the Hebrew Scripture were in circulation. All these copies were considered 'Scripture' in early Judaism (but not in the later Rabbinic Judaism) and in Christianity" (p. 3). Writing about the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, James L. Kugel observes that an interesting feature of these works is "that the exegetical motifs that they cite are overwhelmingly focused on narratives that appear in Genesis. (One partial exception is the *Book of Biblical Antiquities*, which retells biblical narratives from Genesis through I Samuel) . . . [This contrasts with] many texts from Qumran that are concerned with matters of *halakhah* (Jewish law), for example, the *Temple Scroll* and *Some Precepts on the Torah*." Kugel

notes that the writings of Philo and Josephus also often show "interest in, and familiarity with, halakhic traditions" (p. 9).

The actual texts included are too numerous to mention here, but among them are the *Septuagint*; the *Book of Jubilees*; Pseudo-Philo's *Book of Biblical Antiquities*; generous selections of the writings of Philo and Josephus; various testaments, including the *Testament of Abraham* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*; wisdom literature, such as the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*; stories set in biblical and early post-biblical times, such as *Joseph and Asenath*, *Judith*, and *Tobit*; historical writings from post-biblical times, including 1 and 2 Maccabees; and numerous sectarian texts found at Qumran, such as the *Rule of the Community* and the *Temple Scroll*.

The three-volume set, nearly 3400 pages in length, concludes with Source Acknowledgements and an extensive 65-page, three-columned General Subject Index. While many of the texts included in this set have previously been dealt with individually, this is the first time that the major components of these various texts have been brought together in a single collection. These worthwhile volumes will open a whole new world of exegetical literature to the general public and are highly recommended.