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veyed, and Arnold takes a middle road between Jacobsen's detailed reconstruction of the progression of Mesopotamian religion and Oppenheim's opinion that a Mesopotamian religion cannot and should not be written.

Chapter 4 deals with the Middle Babylonian Period, and Arnold highlights the Kassite Dynasty. Despite the non-distinctiveness of their religion, their political and literary stability make them predominant at the time. The Amarna letters give great insight into this era as scribes were both busy preserving classical literature and writing anew (*Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* is probably from this time).

What Arnold calls the Early Neo-Babylonian period extends from the fall of the Kassites to the rise of the Chaldeans. This is a pedagogically helpful separation considering both the vast political landscape and the lack of an overarching dynasty in control. It is interesting that this is the only period in Babylonian history when actual Babylonians have power. One highlight of this chapter is Arnold's denunciation of Maspero's "Sea-Peoples" hypothesis in favor of a multi-faceted answer to the collapse of the Bronze Age. Another is Arnold's post-Kassite dating of *Enūma Eliš* based on the rising literary preeminence of Marduk at this time.

The Neo-Babylonian period boasts many great rulers, but Arnold's sixth chapter rightly emphasizes Nabopolassar's removal of Assyrian armies and Nebuchadnezzar's tenuous hold of Syria-Palestine. The usurper Nabonidus distinguishes himself from these two earlier giants by making himself an ally of the past Sargonid kings and becoming a religious reformer by elevating Šin and demoting Marduk.

My criticisms and praise merely reflect personal preferences, and each reader may have different thoughts regarding these matters. Some readers may be frustrated with Arnold's avoidance of controversial issues, but the book's purpose makes it necessary for him to assume a position and not waste too much time on speculation (e.g. his adoption of a middle chronology dating system, despite Gasche's recent dissent). Those accustomed to reading history through the three-tiered archaeological system (Stone, Bronze, Iron) may also find difficulty with his dynastic organization, but this complexity fades quickly. I appreciated his Pan-Babylonian borrowing scenario and found his explanations on spelling (Hammurapi, Nebuchadnezzar), his annotated bibliography, and his many pictures especially enjoyable. There are numerous books to read on ANE people groups, but this is the first on a single group that is handled so briefly and still so ably. However, academic brevity requires density, so readers should be ready for sometimes overwhelming amounts of information.

Some other frustrations were the use of endnotes rather than footnotes, and while I respect the book's main objective, I would have liked more discussion regarding the historical reliability of ancient ideological literature. It is true that Arnold often mentions the paucity of information in these contexts, showing he understands the issues but chooses to skirt them in keeping with his bigger purpose. On the whole, I commend Arnold for a book that should and will certainly be used in college and seminary classes on the ANE.

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✓ *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture: Introduction to the Rabbinic Midrash.* By Jacob Neusner. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004, 230 pp., \$24.95 paper.

One of the world's most prolific writers on Rabbinic literature has written yet another book on the subject. In fifteen chapters, *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture* introduces and selectively illustrates Rabbinic Midrash compilations and their theology.

The preface serves to define "Midrash." Moving beyond a simple definition of "interpretation" (from *darash*), Neusner acknowledges that in its current usage, the term has three levels of meaning: (1) the process or particular way of reading and interpreting a verse of Hebrew Scripture; (2) the result of the process; and (3) the collection of the results of such a process, namely the compilation of such interpretations. Nevertheless, he differentiates between midrash with a lower case "m" as a "fancy way of saying 'exegesis' or 'interpretation'" and Midrash with an upper case "M," which "belongs to normative Judaism alone," which are evidenced in Rabbinic Midrash compilations (pp. viii–ix).

Chapter 1, "How Does Judaism Read Scripture?" reveals how early Jewish sages transformed the Bible into Torah. Neusner begins by stating what early Rabbinic sages do not do when they read Scripture (pp. 1–6). Unlike contemporary interpreters, who use Scripture to yield historical facts and not necessarily religious truths, early sages evidence a different paradigm. In fact, Rabbinic Midrash is not history in our modern sense of the term because "Rabbinic Judaism is ahistorical" (p. 6). He explains that although Hebrew Scriptures clearly present Israel's life as history with a beginning, middle, and end, "Midrash transforms ancient Israel's history (via paradigmatic thinking) . . . so that past, present, and future meet in the here and now" (p. 6). Paradigmatic thinking, he says, "is like a mathematical model, which translates the real world into abstract principles, and like social science in that it seeks to generalize about particulars" (pp. 6–7).

Neusner further describes paradigmatic thinking by explaining its origins and results (pp. 7–14). While scrutinizing Scripture, where real historical events are recorded, early Jewish sages searched for regularities or patterns, which in turn served as the basis for their paradigmatic reasoning. For them, 586 BC—the date of the destruction of the first temple—presented a sustained narrative of the past into the present. Events of 586 BC were relived by early sages with the Roman destruction of the temple in AD 70. Thus, Neusner suggests that "the present and past formed a single unit of time, encompassing a single span of experience, because to them times past took place in the present, too" (p. 9). Rabbinic sages, therefore, transformed genres of Scripture into patterns that apply to the contemporary world as much as it applied to times past as well as to times yet to come. As a result, classical Midrash compilations turned Hebrew Scriptures into a theological system and structure for Israel's contemporary social order, which in turn dictates and defines the context in which Scripture is studied.

Chapter 2 introduces "An Overview of the Rabbinic Midrash—Compilations." Neusner presents three modes of writing with Scripture. First, there is verse-by-verse exegesis of a given scriptural book, with episodic compositions that set forth propositions as evidenced in *Sifre Deuteronomy* (ca. AD 200–300), *Leviticus Rabbah* (ca. AD 450) and *Pesiqta deRab Kahan* (ca. AD 500) exemplify a second mode of writing with Scripture, propositional compositions or philosophical discourse. Propositional Midrashim are not organized around the sequential verses of a single scriptural book, but rather formed from groups of diverse verses and their exegesis put forward propositions that serve to define the structure of these works. Finally, there is the mode of Rabbinic Midrash exegesis that is repetitive. *Song of Songs Rabbah*, *Lamentations Rabbah*, *Ruth Rabbah*, and *Esther Rabbah* tend to be theological discourses that repeat the same point time and again in sequential exegesis while working through a particular text of Scripture.

Chapters 3–14 illustrate and sustain propositions stated in chapters 1–2. Neusner faithfully provides helpful historical, contextual, and theological background information for each Midrash compilation, which helps the reader appreciate his text selections. He discusses portions of text from *Genesis Rabbah* (chap. 3), *Mekhilta attributed to R. Ishmael* (chap. 4), *Sifra* (chap. 5), *Leviticus Rabbah* (chap. 6), *Sifre to Numbers* (chap. 7), *Sifre to Deuteronomy* (chap. 8), *Esther Rabbah* (chap. 9), *Ruth Rabbah* (chap.

10), *Song of Songs Rabbah* (chap. 11), *Lamentations Rabbah* (chap. 12), *Pesiqta deRab Kahana* (chap. 13), and *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (chap. 14).

Chapter 15, "The Theology of Rabbinic Midrash," concludes the book. Although Midrash compilations differ, Neusner argues that they "turn the facts of Scripture into rules capable of encompassing further facts, forming data into a capacious structure, a working system-theology" (p. 208). "The categorical structure of every document of the Rabbinic Midrash," he says, "encompasses the components, God and man; the Torah, Israel and the nations. The working-system of the Torah finds its dynamic in the struggle between God's plan for creation—to create a perfect world of justice—and man's will" (p. 209). For Neusner, the theology within Rabbinic Midrash tells a simple story:

- (1) God created a perfect, just world and in it made man in his image, equal to God in the power of will.
- (2) Man in his arrogance sinned and was expelled from the perfect world and given over to death. God gave man the Torah to purify his heart of sin.
- (3) Man, educated by the Torah, in humility can repent, accepting God's will of his own free will. When he does, man will be restored to Eden and eternal life (p. 224).

This book is not for people uninformed about Midrash. Yet, despite the compressed discussions in chapters 1–2, *Judaism and the Interpretation of Scripture* is a worthy read. For the informed, more documentation might be helpful. For example, Neusner's use of lower case "m" and upper case "M" seems similar to Bruce Chilton's in "Varieties and Tendencies of Midrash: Rabbinic Interpretations of Isaiah 24:23" in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (JSOT, 1983, pp. 9–32). How does Neusner differ from Chilton? Furthermore, due to his numerous previous publications, I wondered whether Neusner really advanced his discussions. For example, in *What is Midrash?* (Fortress, 1987) he presents an all-inclusive perspective about "Midrash" with a capital "M." Here he limits "Midrash" to Rabbinic Midrash compilations. It would be helpful if Neusner acknowledged when he may be shifting or advancing previous presentations on the subject.

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Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance. By John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004, xix + 412 pp., \$49.99.

Excellent callouts, awesome aesthetics, and contemporary relevance describe this book. As seasoned scholars, the authors employ the approach of Zondervan's NIV Application Commentary series, which divides the material according to "Original Meaning," "Bridging Contexts," and "Contemporary Significance," to the entire OT. The application of this method results in an OT introduction that encourages proper hermeneutics in order to arrive at contemporary application. The authors' vision for the work is "to introduce students to the Old Testament by going beyond basic content to help them know just what they are supposed to do with it and what it is supposed to mean to them" (p. xiii). They accomplish this vision by being selective in their approach to content and strong in providing interpretational principles.

After an introduction entitled "Fundamentals," the authors divide the OT into five units: Pentateuch, Historical Literature, Prophets, Wisdom Literature, and Psalms.