

JOSEPH JENSEN, OSB, *God's Word to Israel: New and Augmented Edition* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2021). Pp. xvii + 380. Paperback. US\$39.95.

As the subtitle indicates, this is a new edition of a book that was initially published by Jensen in 1968 with Allyn & Bacon Press. An earlier revised edition was published in 1982 with Glazier Press. According to the Forward by Mark Smith the book is “an Old Testament Introduction for college students and laypersons.” For Jensen, a Benedictine monk, the books of the “Old Testament” are those in the Catholic canon, although he notes and discusses differences between it and the Hebrew and Protestant canons (cf. pages 329–333). According to Jensen the Old Testament is “salvation history” (4). That is, those responsible for its production recounted events in Israel in a way that claimed God was directing them towards the overall goal of redemption for all humankind. Jensen accepts the modern critical view that Old Testament accounts of events are objective historical reports. Modern historical-critical analysis “has helped us see where event ends and interpretation begins, and thus helps us to understand the message of the Bible more fully” (5–6). In support of this Jensen provides in chap. 2 a survey of modern critical scholarship; how it has developed, how it has been refined, and how it has been enriched by ANE literary and other kinds of artefacts.

In chap. 3 Jensen provides an overview of Israel’s history as presented in the Old Testament, setting it within the larger context of ANE history. Useful references to ANE texts are provided so that readers can consult them. The chapter concludes with a brief chronological chart of Israel’s history; a more extensive one is provided towards the end of the book (351–355). Jensen then goes on to survey each part of the Old Testament canon (Catholic version); namely, Torah/Pentateuch, Prophets (including the Former Prophets or Historical Literature), and Writings. Each book of the Catholic Canon of the Old Testament is then surveyed, with the sequence of

the survey according to the location of each book within the biblical chronology.

Jensen accepts the hypothesis of four sources for the Pentateuch (J, E, D, P), although he recognises that the initial versions were subsequently revised and enhanced, preferring to describe them as “source traditions.” He favours linking J with the “great kingdom” of David and Solomon in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE, with E a somewhat later tradition, likely of northern provenance. Although he recognises ongoing debate about the composition of the Pentateuch, Jensen does not discuss the recent alternatives to the source hypothesis proposed by scholars such as Rendtorff, Otto, Kratz, and others. Jensen accepts the hypothesis of a Deuteronomic History and believes it was initially compiled in the reign of Josiah after the finding of the law book in the temple. However, as with the Pentateuch, he does not discuss the findings of a number of recent scholars who reject the hypothesis altogether or substantially revise it.

The section on Prophetic literature is arranged in a similar way to that on the Pentateuch, with an initial overview and discussion of prophecy, followed by a survey of prophets in historical order—the pre-exilic, the exilic prophets, and the post-exilic “prophets of the restoration.” Included in his survey of the restoration are the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The Chronicler’s use of Samuel and Kings and other sources provides a window on to how Israel wrote up its history and why—to assure faithful Israelites that, despite the exile, they will see in a new way the fulfillment of the promises to David (cf. 264).

In his survey of the Writings, Jensen devotes a special chapter to the Psalter (“The Songs of Israel”) because, as he emphasises, it contains Israel’s response to God and its conviction about being God’s chosen people. The Psalter also provides an appropriate setting for a survey of Israel’s liturgy and how it relates to the various kinds of psalms that have been classified by Form Criticism. The bulk of the Writings are comprised of what is termed Wisdom Literature and Jensen distinguishes two main types of Wisdom

Literature, the “gnomic” such as Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus which provide “down-to-earth” advice about living, and “problem books” such as Job and Ecclesiastes that question aspects of the gnomic view, such as God’s justice and mercy.

The final section of Jensen’s survey of the Old Testament is devoted to a survey of 1 and 2 Maccabees and the book of Daniel. The former provide an account of Judah’s struggle with Greece as the superpower that replaced Persia, which oversaw the restoration of the early post-exilic period. The book of Daniel is not included in the Prophetic part of the Hebrew canon and is better classified as early apocalyptic literature, particularly the visions in chaps. 7–12. The book concludes with three appendices that provide useful theological reflections on Revelation, Inspiration, Inerrancy, Canon, Senses of Scripture (Appendix 1); the Christian Use of the Old Testament (Appendix 2), and Church Teaching and the Bible (Appendix 3). There is a Scripture index and a Subject index.

Although Jensen does not engage in some of the more recent debates in historical critical analysis, this is not because of any unfamiliarity with them. Jensen is too formidable and long standing in the field. But, given the aim of the book and its target readership, to have done so would have necessitated a much longer and more complex work. Moreover, there is an invitation to readers to further their studies by the way each section and chapter ends with a concise but well-chosen bibliography.

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