

LIBOR MAREK, *A Star from Jacob, a Sceptre from Israel: Balaam's Oracle as Rewritten Scripture in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 88; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020). Pp. xii + 290. Hardback. £70/US\$97.50/€80.

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This monography by Libor Marek is a methodologically disciplined study of the use of the fourth oracle of Balaam, “a star shall walk from Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise from Israel” (Num 24:17–19), in four Qumran scrolls: War Scroll (1QM), Damascus Document (CD), Testimonia (4Q175) and Rule of the Blessings (1QSb). Marek’s aim is to “challenge the frequent, monolithic messianic understanding of the Balaam oracle in Qumran” (12) and, more broadly, to shed light on how scriptural interpretation served the community’s particular theological, sociological, or other concerns.

Marek begins with a study of the oracle in its own context within Numbers. He draws out the ambiguities—and thus potentiality for diverse interpretations and applications—within this poetic oracle. Marek finds no messianic meaning intrinsic to the oracle; later messianic interpretations were simply imposed upon it, taking advantage of the open-ended character in the poetic form and future orientation. In Chapter Two Marek lays down the theoretical framework in which the scrolls’ use of scriptural texts is to be examined; that is, the concept of “rewritten scripture” and its various categories, especially new compositions that incorporate biblical texts as proof texts, as source texts and as lemmatic text (in which scriptural expressions are atomized, reordered, reparsed, etc.). This is then followed by a brief review of Qumran biblical scrolls that contain the variants of Numbers 22–24, in order to establish that different interpretations of Balaam’s oracle would not have been the result of using variants, but purposeful exegesis according to the sectarians’ intentions.

The following four chapters each examine Balaam’s oracle in the four above-mentioned scrolls. The author takes an approach that embeds the use of the oracle within each individual scroll’s general literary context and especially the immediate textual context in which the oracle is cited. A translation is offered, which serves as the basis for structural and linguistic analysis, before conclusions are drawn on the function of using the oracle in the composition and the presence or absence of messianic interpretations. The results of Marek’s studies show that the oracle in 1QM is used as proof text for both the community’s past and future, while leaving little space for a messianic figure. On the other hand, in CD, a text that defines the identity of the community by excluding and admonishing dissenters, the star stands for “the Interpreter of the Law” that had been, who was a founding figure of the community, whereas the sceptre represents “the Prince of the Congregation” that was to come, who would be a future military leader. Thus, Marek argues against the common view that the oracle in CD refers to the messianic pair “of Aaron” and “of David.” In Testimonia (4Q175), Marek argues, the Balaam oracle is part of a juxtaposition of three

biblical texts and peshet that presents a perfect prophet, a king and a priest; the purpose of its use is to refute Hyrcanus, the “man of Belial,” who assumed the prophetic, royal and priestly qualifications in himself. Finally, the Balaam oracle is not interpreted in 1QSb but simply incorporated into a free composition of blessing to be imparted upon the “Prince of the Congregation.” Here, Marek recognises an eschatological royal figure, but without association with the Davidic line and ideology.

This monograph presents a sound argument against a uniform messianic interpretation of Balaam’s oracle within the scrolls, and demonstrates the importance of taking into account different social functions and purposes of the texts. It also raises further questions where one might not find its conclusions entirely convincing. Two issues which I have are concerned with some of the non-messianic readings and the methodological categories used. Firstly, even where the star and the sceptre do not have clear messianic references of one or two human agents of God, an eschatological reading suggested by the texts’ eschatological overtone is still preferable to a historical reading, for which the author often opts. Secondly, using scriptures as proof texts, source texts and lemmatic texts constitutes common strategies of using scriptures in Second Temple writings; however, to what extent can their uses all count as “rewritten scripture”? Overall, this monograph, including the questions and debate to which it may give rise, is a valuable contribution to the study of the scrolls as well as scriptural interpretation in the Second Temple period.

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