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My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs, Jonathan Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 2015 (ISBN 978-0-19-935933-2), xv + 225 pp., £47.99

The biblical Song of Songs is love without carpools, in-laws, and budgets. It is unlike the covenanted love of obligation and loyalty in the other books of Scripture. Second Temple Judaism, preceded by certain images in the Bible and followed by rabbinic Judaism, however, read the Song of Songs as expressing the relationship of God and the Jewish people, fusing intimate love with covenanted love. How did these interpreters do that, and why?

Jonathan Kaplan has proposed a solution steeped in contemporary scholarship and very sensitive exegesis to this problem by analyzing tannaitic midrashic texts. The Introduction contains a history of scholarship in the field. Chapter 1 identifies the figural tannaitic reading as 'typological' and not allegorical. This reading embodies the mission of rabbinic Judaism: 'to craft a vision of Jewish society in the wake of destruction ... [to] perform the ideal of Jewish history in order to renew the ongoing covenantal relationship'. Chapter 2 identifies 'historicization of the national narrative' with a view to establishing the 'ideal vision' of the proper relationship of God and the people. In this, the rabbinic reading of Song of Songs shares an affinity with the reading of epic, not erotic, poetry in the ancient world.

Chapter 3, perhaps the key chapter in the book, connects the interpretation of the bodily imagery of the female with the commandments (study, tefillin, tsitsit, mezuzah, circumcision, sexual purity, etc.), and especially with martyrdom. Kaplan shows that the rabbis linked the theme of 'female beauty with the affective nature of rabbinic piety' for the purpose of reinforcing loyalty to the beliefs and practices of rabbinic Judaism. In Chapter 4, Kaplan proposes that the tannaim used the Song of Songs to show the 'exemplarity of Israel's beloved', thus reinforcing the value of *imitatio Dei*. Finally, in Chapter 5, in a fascinating essay, Kaplan shows how the rabbis subverted the image of the elusive lover of the biblical text and substituted the ever-present Shekhina of the rabbinic texts to ground a theology of presence in the wake of oppression, destruction, and exile.

Kaplan, thus, proposes that the tannaitic interpretation of Song of Songs had two purposes: first, to construct 'an exemplary portrayal of Jewish life ... marked by mutual devotion and fidelity sealed in Israel's observance of the commandments'; and second, to portray Israel's 'ideal national narrative' so as to 'valorize Israel's past, to interpret and shape their community's present'. He also maintains that this interpretation 'helped shape rabbinic thought and practice characterized by intense, affectionate, and reciprocal devotion between model Israel and her beloved'.

I think Kaplan is correct in his historical, and in his theological, analysis. The rabbis did cause intimate and covenantal love to coexist; so does life. Longing, intimacy, and desire require covenant, obligation, and law. Marital love is a mixture of both, as indeed the sources suggest. So is religion, where piety, devotion, and longing exist side by side with commandments, obedience, and *imitatio Dei*. The rabbinic understanding of this is central to Jewish religion and Kaplan's book makes this clear.

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