

PROTECTION AND REWARD: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANCIENT MID-RASHIC EXPOSITIONS ON GENESIS 15:1-6

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Gen 15:1-6, because of its content, provides singular opportunities for the study of ancient midrashic documents. This kind of study is being increasingly performed and has interest from theological, historical, and—especially—exegetical viewpoints.

Chap. 1 attentively analyzes the treatment of the entire unit in midrashic documents (Jubilees, Genesis Apocryphon, Philo, Josephus, the Targumim, and Genesis Rabbah), identifies their individual theological and exegetical concerns, and shows their progression over time. The most ancient ones are found to emphasize the covenantal aspects of the passage, while later documents stress the eschatological reward of Abraham as a fruit of his good works.

Chap. 2 exegetes the unit by means of structural analysis, as well as historical and lexicographical research. The results confirm ancient insights into the covenantal character of the passage and into Abraham's faith as a reaction to the opening promises of protection, rather than to the promise of offspring. The characteristics of ancient grant-covenants are employed to shed light on terms of theological significance in the unit, such as "protection," "reward," "offspring," "trust," and "righteousness."

A comparison with the gains of chap. 1 then shows how the ancient documents anticipated both the identification and the solution of several exegetical difficulties in the passage, including text, language, and theology. These findings tend to substantiate recent recommendations to use ancient midrashim as valid interlocutors at each step in the exegetical tasks.

The progression, over time, of exegetical stances and theological ideas in those documents is shown to have implications for certain issues of the history of Judaism in current debate. The insights gained from the study of ancient midrashim and the historical setting of the unit contribute to a better grasp of its import. In redirecting the interpretation away from a doctrinaire attitude to one more historically determined, these insights are also able to lead scholars of different persuasions toward common grounds of understanding for the passage.