

THEOLOGY OF BLINDNESS IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

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Problem

A number of passages in the Hebrew Scriptures discuss blindness. Scholars have studied them individually, but not with a view to developing a theology of blindness. The purpose of the present dissertation, then, is to analyze theological implications of blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures systematically.

Methodology

This dissertation systematically analyzes blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures against their ancient Near Eastern background. The study looks at cultic implications, causation, social justice, healing, and social and religious meanings of blindness. Both physical and metaphorical aspects of blindness are examined.

First, blindness in the ancient Near East is considered, with emphasis on Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Hittite Anatolia. Next, Hebrew words associated with blindness are investigated. Then, in the next three chapters, respectively, each passage discussing blindness in the three portions of the Hebrew Bible (Torah, Prophets, and Writings) is examined. The focus is on translation and exegesis of each passage, with synthesis of the findings at the end of the chapter. The final chapter presents a general synthesis of the topic, setting forth theological conclusions regarding blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Conclusion

In the Hebrew Scriptures, blindness is described as a most devastating condition, especially when compared with other physical disabilities. In relation to the ritual system, blindness could be a blemish, disqualifying a priest from officiating and an animal from serving as an offering. Whether caused by old age or an act of divine or human agencies, blindness was an undesirable deviation from God's original design at Creation. Concerning social justice, the Hebrew Bible places right treatment of the blind in the context of true holiness. Other ancient Near Eastern cultures, if addressing the topic at all, simply mention right treatment of the blind in wisdom literature as an act of good conduct.

In the Hebrew Bible, physical blindness carries meanings of weakness and imperfection. Metaphorically, blindness could represent lack of mental or spiritual insight. Nearly all types of blindness could be associated with the consequences of rebellion. It is recognized that complete reversal of blindness would never be fully realized until the Messianic era.