

Levine, Amy-Jill and Douglas Knight. *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us.* New York: HarperOne, 2011.

Chapter Twelve

Here we learn a considerable amount about the diaspora. Our writers define the word and then astutely observe that

... the initial message that exile is a punishment became, for those in exile, transformed into a blessing (p. 363).

Perhaps Levine and Knight have put their fingers right on the reason which Judaism was able to survive when the religions contemporary with it died out: it could, and did, regularly adapt to its circumstances.

Whether that be the case or not, L. and K. also discuss the Ten Lost Tribes and the various rather silly theories about their continued survival amongst such diverse claimants as the Cherokee, the Pashtun, the Lemba, the Igbo, the Sefwi, the Bene Epraim, and the Beta Israel.

Whilst the fate of these 10 tribes is lost in the mist of history, the claimants to the Babylonian diaspora are another matter altogether. Those claimants, the Judeans, and their historians, the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler, were able to argue continuity based on a theologized historiography.

But there were more dispersed Judeans than simply those in Babylonia. The Elephantine community too had reason to argue for its 'Jewishness' and their Temple, modeled on the Jerusalem prototype, is evidence of the fact.

These Judeans, the dispersed, told stories (according to L. and K.) and these stories, as embedded in Esther, Daniel, and Tobit, were aimed at, to paraphrase,

... preserving identity, resisting assimilation and expressions of religious sentiments (p. 391).

If I'm reading between the lines of Levine and Knight's work correctly in this chapter, the Diaspora wasn't the death of the Jewish community- but, in fact, its birth.

I have to confess at this point that I'm very pleased with the contents of this chapter. I think it so nicely summarizes the subject that I highly recommend it to students and interested readers without a shred of hesitation.

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