

identification. . . . El Shaddai is first of several indications that the chapter is the work of the priest-scribe, the so-called Priestly source (P). This title occurs in other passages assigned to the same source" (104–15).

Blenkinsopp does not allow that there could be other possible reasons for the different uses of the deity's names.

Blenkinsopp's analysis of the Abrahamic narratives is couched firmly within source criticism and a resulting dating which greatly affects his narrative exegesis, yet he curiously states: "It is not surprising, therefore, that exegetes who adhere to the classical but *now rather outdated source criticism* have found evidence in this brief passage of all three Genesis sources, J, E, and P" (87, emphasis mine). Also, his various comments on the supposedly awkward mismatched Abrahamic verses (e.g., "which must be considered a strange match indeed" [172]) are a bit wearying in light of recent insights from new literary criticism dealing with the final form of the text. It would have enriched this book if Blenkinsopp had also given evidence of the mounting published narrative work resulting from a close reading of the received text. Additional insights into the Abraham narrative sequence could have been gleaned and some dating problems he suggests might have been solved.

Nevertheless, his appreciation for Abraham is rightfully solid:

If we attend to the narrative context of Gen 15:6, we will assign priority to Abraham's persistent faith and trust, even in desperate situations, in the truth of the messages he receives from God, and therefore in God. It is this more than anything else that accounts for Abraham's greatness (76).

Touché.

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Coogan, Michael. *The Ten Commandments: A Short History of an Ancient Text*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. xiii + 176 pp. Paperback, \$18.00.

Michael Coogan is a prolific writer who teaches OT/HB at Harvard Divinity School. I have noticed that in some of his publications he explicitly mentions Seventh-day Adventists as a religious body that honors Saturday as the biblical day of rest. In this relatively short book, Coogan examines the history of the Decalogue in the context of the American polemics against groups that want to display the Ten Commandments in public places, especially on government property and, thus, presumably make them binding on all citizens.

In the beginning of the book, a claim is made that there are not just two, but several versions of the Decalogue in the Bible. The author, however, focuses on Exod 20, Deut 5, and Exod 34. "Of the three," says Coogan,

the latest is probably that in Exodus 20, because of its rationale for the Sabbath observance in imitation of the divine rest after creation (reported in the alleged P source dated to the sixth century BCE). The version in Deuteronomy 5 is a century or more older in its present wording, and that in Exodus 34 is probably the oldest (34).

The author is still willing to date the Decalogue very early “against a current fad in biblical studies” because he believes that the Ten Commandments “are the essence of the teaching of Moses himself” (47).

Coogan rightly points out that according to Deut 4:13, the Ten Commandments formed the primary text of the contract or the covenant at Sinai. This covenant is often described in the Bible through family metaphors. The number ten follows a good mnemonic device because the Ten Words, as they are called in the Pentateuch, can be counted off on the fingers. The two tablets, the author argues, were two copies of the Decalogue so that each party in the covenant (divine and human) could get one. It would have been helpful at this point to mention that the tablets were written “on both sides, front and back” (Exod 32:15), making each tablet complete by itself. The texts on the front and the back were of unequal length—the first four showing how to worship Yahweh, the last six teaching how the Israelites were to treat each other. The author also reminds us that after the breaking of the first tablets at the foot of Mount Sinai, the new tablets were, this time, written by Moses rather than God (Exod 34:27–28).

Chapter 5 is the longest and most informative part of the book. In his comments about the prohibition against idolatry, Coogan observes that, in contrast with ancient temples in which the statue of the deity was the focus of attention, in Israel’s sanctuary there was no such statue. In other words, the divine throne was empty (57). The author has much to say about the Sabbath commandment that serves as a bridge between the first three and the last six. Jesus himself affirmed its observance “but not at the expense of a greater good” (72). Likewise for the prophets, social justice was more important than superficial Sabbath observance. The author says the NT evidence is clear that “Saturday was the Sabbath observed by the earliest Christians” (73). In conclusion, the change from Saturday to Sunday was made “without biblical warrant” (116).

There are more insights shared in the comments on the rest of the commandments. A literal application of the law of retributive justice “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth” is today considered cruel and inhumane. Coogan concludes: “The fact that the Bible prescribes it does not make it right—and, in my view, the same applies to capital punishment” (83). Then the author translates the eighth commandment as “You should not kidnap,” instead of the usual “steal.” Similarly, in the tenth commandment, instead of the usual “covet,” one finds the phrase “scheme against,” because it describes a state of mind.

In commenting on the importance of the Decalogue in the early church, Coogan observes that as Gentile Christians soon outnumbered the Jewish Christians, only

the Decalogue continued to be binding, and not so much because it was in the Torah, but because it was considered a natural law given by God to all. So Christians, following good Jewish practice, privileged the Decalogue, but in the process downgraded other laws in the rest of the Torah in which it is embedded (111).

A good number of readers will probably conclude that Coogan has at times overstated his case. Commenting on the fact that God wrote the Decalogue with His finger, Coogan says: "This is the stuff of mythology, meant to affirm the privileged status of the Decalogue by making God its author" (17). I wonder if it would be better to view the expression "God's finger" as an idiom borrowed from Egyptian where "finger" stood for authority and power as shown in Exod 8:19. On p. 50, Coogan talks about the subservient status of women in biblical times and only in passing does he mention (and quickly dismiss) the fact that masculine forms in biblical Hebrew can be inclusive of both genders. Sometimes even scholars do not let facts get in the way of a point they are making! On p. 64, it is stated that in the Garden of Eden Yahweh cursed the man and the woman and their offspring. This is a widely held belief, though a careful reading of Gen 3 shows that only the serpent and the ground were cursed by the Lord God, not Adam and Eve.

I consider the most questionable statement in the book to be on p.131 where the author states that different versions and variants "show that the Ten Commandments could not have been divinely given." This dictum is reaffirmed by Coogan's arguments against a universal application of the Decalogue in today's situations. The Ten Commandments do not apply to us today because they were: (1) given to Israel; (2) based on an "unscientific view" of a six-day creation; (3) assume holding of slaves to be legal; (4) imply that if Canaan is the promised land, the United States would have to be the "New Canaan;" and (5) consider women (or wives) man's property; (6) call for the observance of Sabbath instead of today's Sunday; and finally (7) have many "inconsistencies and even contradictions" between different versions of the Decalogue in the Bible.

In the last chapter titled "Honoring The Ten Commandments," Coogan concludes that the values or principles taught by the Ten Commandments "are what matter, not the actual words, with their historically conditioned contents and in their multiple versions" (133). The command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:19), was given to Moses and reaffirmed by Jesus, Hillel, Paul, and Akiba.

That ethos has informed our society's best instincts, freeing slaves, empowering women, welcoming immigrants, caring for the poor and powerless, and considering all persons as equal. It can also continue to inform us, as we strive to love all of our neighbors, as they are, here in the United States and in the global community to which we belong, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, social status, and religious beliefs or lack of them. That is how to honor the Ten Commandments (133).

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