

Calum Carmichael, *The Sacrificial Laws of Leviticus and the Joseph Story*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-107-18967-6. Hardcover, pp. 202. £ 84.99.

- [1] In this work, Calum Carmichael offers another counter to today’s scholarly mainstream. After an entire career working in the field of comparative literature with a focus on the interdependences of narratives and laws in the Bible, Carmichael spends about two hundred pages to prove one point: that the laws of Lev 1–10 are not reflections of hypothetical ancient practices in Israel but rather rules for proper practice and conduct in a future nation called Israel (6). Yet, they are not mere creative inventions but, according to Carmichael, represent a retrospective “commentary on the Joseph story and argue that each of these laws is a wholly intelligible response to matters in that story (Gen 37–50)” (2). Having learned from the mistakes narrated there, Leviticus is eager to prevent future generations from such negative behavior.
- [2] In his work, Carmichael follows the structure of the commandments given in Lev 1–10. After a short chapter on “Genesis and Exodus as Prelude to Leviticus” (15–34), he devotes seven chapters to the comparison between the two corpora. To him, Lev 1–3 challenge the idolatrous behavior of Joseph in his imagined dreams, in his brothers’ worship, and during the families first joint meal, which Carmichael perceives as feasting before a deity (35–59).
- [3] Moving on to Lev 4 and inadvertent offenses (60–76), Carmichael states: “Together, Lev 1–3 and Lev 4 are set against a background of wrongful worship and all the rules are inspired by ideas about inadvertence because the dreams represent involuntary offensive ideas” (60). According to Carmichael, the author of Lev 4 meant to prevent people from religious offenses like those caused by Joseph’s retelling of his dream (Gen 37:9). Surprisingly, against current scholarship, Carmichael seems to think Joseph inadvertently sinned against God by recounting his dreams and portraying himself in them as a god-like character. If in fact he did have these dreams, he is very much responsible as to when and to whom he recounts them. This is even more so the case if, as Carmichael thinks, Joseph invented the dreams (e.g., 46).
- [4] As we move on to Lev 5:1–6:7 (chapter 4, 77–103), Leviticus seems preoccupied with various offenses, which Carmichael again tries to tie back to various interactions between the characters of the Joseph story. Withholding information in Lev 5:1 is an answer to the brother’s silence about Joseph’s blood-soaked coat (Gen 37), while the following prohibition of touching unclean things (Lev 5:2, 3) corresponds to the trickery of Joseph’s brothers killing an innocent domestic animal, which is an offense against the natural order. Jacob swears to mourn Joseph’s death for the rest of his life (Gen 37:34, 35), but after having heard of his son being alive, he returns to happiness, thus breaking his word and failing to honor his oath. In all of this, Carmichael is convinced, against an overwhelming majority of scholars, that the “diverse rules [of Lev 5:1–16] all derive from the same episode and are paradigmatic examples of how the lawgiver(s) went over an element in a story from different perspectives, identifying one, then another type of problem, and formulating different kinds of seemingly unrelated rules in response” (93–94).
- [5] In chapter 5 (104–23), we are shown a number of offenses occurring at Joseph’s two banquets (Gen 37; 43). Here is another repetition or expansion of the laws concerning worship, especially in Lev 1. During his banquet in Gen 43, Joseph presides over the meal as though he were a god to whom worship is offered through bowing (which the brothers do) and offerings (which the brothers bring). As a response, Lev 6:8–23 stipulates that all

offerings belong to the worship of Yahweh and him alone. Leviticus 7:11–21 also allegedly orders that well-being sacrifices be offered in a mode of thanksgiving, unlike Joseph's offerings, who used banquets to further maltreat his family. In fact, all offerings in Lev 7:11–36 are supposed to correct the malevolent and ill-advised intensions and practices Joseph employs in his banquet.

- [6] In a similar manner, Carmichael compares Aaron to Joseph in Lev 8–9 (145–58) and the impact of the golden calf on Lev 9–10 (159–73). As a sort of excursus, the last chapter is devoted to Carmichael's reading of Jesus, the lawyer, and the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37 (174–88). This chapter, originally a public lecture unrelated to the narrow focus of the book, is included here to illustrate the afterlife of the interplay between law and narrative that Carmichael finds between Genesis (or the Joseph narrative) and Leviticus. Carmichael argues that "Joseph as the ancestor of the Samaritans, is fundamental to the parable's meaning" (174). Both the parable and Joseph are seemingly connected through the Levitical call to love one's neighbor in Lev 19:18 and the failure of the lawyer to do so. The parallels Carmichael makes out are the following: the indifference of the observers to the man's plight, Joseph's direction to bring Benjamin to Egypt, the call to "do this and you shall live" (Luke 10:28), and the eventual merciful attitude of Joseph toward the Israelites. To round up the book, a summary of the author's findings would have been welcomed, in addition to the customary bibliography and indices.
- [7] To read Carmichael's book is a twofold challenge. In one sense, to follow his thoughts and findings one must be open to doubting the current scholarly consensus about the order and pragmatics of Leviticus and its laws. Carmichael shows an extraordinary willingness to read both texts together and thereby traces similarities and parallels generally overlooked in current discussion—as far as I can see. In another sense, the author's connections between some scattered laws and certain episodes of the Joseph story simply fail to convince at any level. That is at least for three reasons: (1) Throughout, Carmichael wishes to convey the impression that the structure and order of the laws in Leviticus do not make sense if they are not understood as a commentary on the chronological mistakes in the Joseph story. He does not tire of emphasizing the uniqueness of his approach, yet at the same time he sparsely cites or uses secondary literature (the bibliography only spans 189–93 and includes a lot of commentaries but not in-depth investigations). (2) Many times in his work, Carmichael offers assertions instead of arguments. Even the slightest similarities between the Joseph story and Lev 1–10 are taken to be exact reactions of the latter to the former. For a significant claim of dependency, there would have to be heaps of clues, both logical and semantic, in both texts. In many cases, the reader must contend with unsubstantiated assertions rather than hard evidence and compelling argumentation. (3) The most important deficiency, it seems to me, is the lack of methodological reflection. The author makes heavy use of mirror-reading, as the following citation shows: "Where there are repeated rules about one or other of these sacrifices [in Lev 1–7], the explanation is not that at some later point in Israel's history one rule revises and supplements the other, which is the standard view of critics and commentators. The explanation is that each rule mirrors a different aspect of how the lawgiver looked at problems occurring in Joseph's dealings with this family" (124). If these rules actually mirror the lawgivers' readings of the Joseph story, why, then, is there competing legislation in Leviticus at all? Just because similar issues appear in the Joseph story? Would it not have been better simply to write a *summa*, a kind of learning diary in response to the Joseph story?

- [8] Granted, the arrangement of the laws in Lev 1–10 is strange, but the parallelisms detected through the Joseph story are just too forced. Carmichael often offers nothing more than keyword connections or interpretations that could have come from the Joseph story but that could just as easily have arisen in response to other false worship, false offerings, and so on. Why the Joseph story in particular seems to provoke Leviticus to propose these laws, I still fail to understand.
- [9] Let us end on a more positive note. Carmichael manages to show the obscure order in which the Levitical laws are put. He offers a creative account of how we ought to understand Lev 1–10 in its present order without literary-critical changes. Additionally, he tries to establish a closer link between the Joseph story, which is often seen as foreign to the Genesis narratives, and the laws of Leviticus—two texts normally investigated separately and sometimes even entirely without regard for their canonical contexts.

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