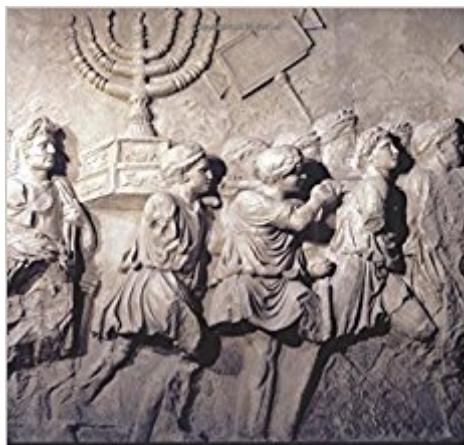


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Josephus And The Theologies Of Ancient Judaism



Josephus
*and the Theologies
of Ancient Judaism*

JONATHAN KLAWANS

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Synopsis

Though considered one of the most important informants about Judaism in the first century CE, the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus's testimony is often overlooked or downplayed. Jonathan Klawans's *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* reexamines Josephus's descriptions of sectarian disagreements concerning determinism and free will, the afterlife, and scriptural authority. In each case, Josephus's testimony is analyzed in light of his works' general concerns as well as relevant biblical, rabbinic, and Dead Sea texts. Many scholars today argue that ancient Jewish sectarian disputes revolved primarily or even exclusively around matters of ritual law, such as calendar, cultic practices, or priestly succession. Josephus, however, indicates that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes disagreed about matters of theology, such as afterlife and determinism. Similarly, many scholars today argue that ancient Judaism was thrust into a theological crisis in the wake of the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE, yet Josephus's works indicate that Jews were readily able to make sense of the catastrophe in light of biblical precedents and contemporary beliefs. Without denying the importance of Jewish law-and recognizing Josephus's embellishments and exaggerations-Josephus and the *Theologies of Ancient Judaism* calls for a renewed focus on Josephus's testimony, and models an approach to ancient Judaism that gives theological questions a deserved place alongside matters of legal concern. Ancient Jewish theology was indeed significant, diverse, and sufficiently robust to respond to the crisis of its day.

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Customer Reviews

"As a work that 'is primarily addressed to those who engage in the work of reconstructing the history

of ancient Judaism', it provides plenty of food for thought. The book includes very substantial endnotes, a fairly full bibliography, and helpful indices." --Journal of Semitic Studies "As in his previous books, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism and Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, Professor Klawans displays his enviable skill in absorbing, digesting, and presenting with clarity a vast amount of material on a complicated subject: the theologies of ancient Judaism. Perhaps only a scholar who has already demonstrated his expertise in the area of Jewish law and observance could treat with complete credibility the tricky and touchy topic of 'theology' in ancient Judaism. His achievement is all the more admirable because he focuses upon that protean Talleyrand of first-century Judaism, *Josephus*."--John P. Meier, William K. Warren Professor of Theology, University of Notre Dame"Erudite, deeply thoughtful, and engagingly written... an important and largely persuasive book that should be read by anyone interested in the theological and religious landscape of first century Palestine." --Religious Studies Review"This learned and engaging volume provides an expertly executed corrective to several common misconceptions about ancient Judaism and replaces them with a nuanced and convincing picture. It offers a much-needed defense of the importance of theology, clarifies our understanding of sectarian division, and counters the notion that after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, Judaism went into eclipse, and the Jews into despondency. It illuminates ancient Judaism and Christian origins alike."--Jon D. Levenson, author of *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*"Over the past couple of decades there has been an understandable move to put special emphasis on legal interpretation of second temple Jewish documents. But as Klawans shows in his latest book, this has come at the cost of taking seriously the theological commitments of the various Jewish groups themselves. This volume is a very sophisticated re-appraisal of the role such commitments played in the shaping of Jewish identity in this crucial period. As we have come to expect from the work of Klawans, he provides a necessary corrective to long held assumptions."--Gary A. Anderson, Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology, University of Notre Dame"A well-written work... Klawans's arguments are worth reading, whether they bring us to give up long-held opinions or only to re-examine their foundations." --Journal of Jewish Studies"This volume will be a valuable addition to libraries with collections on the Roman world, Judaism, the New Testament, and early Christianity. Summing Up: Highly recommended." --CHOICE

Jonathan Klawans is Professor of Religion at Boston University. He is the author of *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism and Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism*.

Klawans is an excellent writer on some rather neglected Biblical and Jewish topics. Josephus, a first century Jew has by Jewish neglect been adopted by Christians and even used for Christian apologetics. But this book rightly points and nicely documents he did address several important topics in late (at the terminal point) second temple Judaism, some issues still echo in modern Jewish thought. Josephus is an important writer for Jews to know about, he speaks to a blank period in Jewish thought before the rise of the oral Torah. This book looks at theological issues that are commonly ignored by Jews.

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