



Sinning in the Hebrew Bible: How the Worst Stories Speak for Its Truth

Alan F Segal

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Stories of rape, murder, adultery, and conquest raise crucial ethical issues in the Hebrew Bible, and their interpretation guides many societies in forming their religious and moral convictions. From the sacrifice of Isaac to the adultery of David, narratives of sin engender vivid analysis and debate, powering the myths that form the basis of the religious covenant, or the relationship between a people and their God.

Rereading these stories against different forms and contexts, Alan F. Segal demonstrates the significance of sinning throughout history and today. Drawing on literary and historical theory, as well as research in the social sciences, he explores the motivation for creating sin stories, their prevalence in the Hebrew Bible, and their possible meaning to Israelite readers and listeners. After introducing the basics of his approach and outlining several hermeneutical concepts, Segal conducts seven linked studies of specific narratives, using character and text to clarify problematic terms such as “myth,” “typology,” and “orality.” Following the reappearance and reinterpretation of these narratives in later compositions, he proves their lasting power in the mythology of Israel and the encapsulation of universal, perennially relevant themes. Segal ultimately positions the Hebrew Bible as a foundational moral text and a history book, offering uncommon insights into the dating of biblical events and the intentions of biblical authors.

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