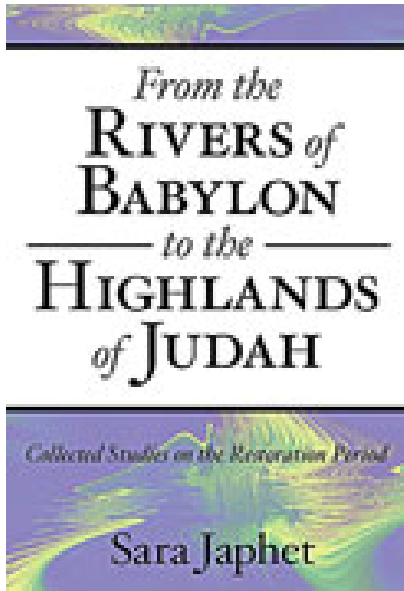


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Japhet, Sara

***From the Rivers of Babylon to the Highlands of Judah:
Collected Studies on the Restoration Period***

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Sara Japhet has been a major figure in the study of the exilic and postexilic periods of Israel, with particular emphasis on Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. This collection of twenty-two essays (see the end of this review for a complete list of essays), originally published in journals and in collections of essays (primarily Festschriften) provides easy access to her life-work. This collection, however, appears without any introduction, so that Japhet does not take the opportunity to sum up her work, indicate changes over the years, or update the original publications. No rationale is given for the order these essays are printed in this volume, although a little searching demonstrated that the order is chronological, from 1968 to 2006. Unfortunately, there also is no indication where these essays were originally published, except when Japhet cites her own articles in her essays. It is no surprise that the index makes most frequent mention of Joseph Blenkinsopp, Yehezkel Kaufman, Wilhelm Rudolph, and H. G. M. Williamson.

In addition to these essays and other essays not included in this collection, Japhet is deservedly famous for her dissertation, published in Hebrew in 1977 and in English in 1989 (*The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*), and, of course, for her classic commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles published in 1993 in the Old Testament Library.

The first article in this collection and her most influential essay is her study of the linguistic distinctions between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah that called into question the notion of a Chronicler's History that embraced Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which had been a standard scholarly opinion since the work of Leopold Zunz in the early nineteenth century. While the linguistic conclusions of this article have been questioned by a number of scholars, including David Talshir and Mark Throntveit, this article initiated a wider discussion about the separateness of these works that now has gained a majority status, based more these days on the theological or ideological distinctions between these works than on their linguistic differences. Japhet herself contributed to the identification of these different views on central religious issues in essay 9, published in 1991, and in other publications as well.

In her view, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah looked forward to no political change from the Persian domination and was anti-eschatological. Hence Ezra-Nehemiah is silent about the Davidic origin of Zerubbabel. She concluded that Sheshbazzar was probably a descendent of David and the first governor of Judah in the restoration period. Although Josephus attributes greater importance to the high priest Joshua than does 1 Esdras, he still does not consider him equal in status to Zerubbabel. Ezra-Nehemiah views the restoration in terms of God's compassion. For Chronicles, by contrast, God's justice is the most decisive factor in his handling of Israel's history. There is no confession of accumulated guilt in Chronicles, and God's justice provides a solid foundation for Israel's future.

While fully embracing the critical method, Japhet has been relatively conservative in her assessment of the historical value of Chronicles. The division of Ezra-Nehemiah into historical periods, she holds, however, reflects a historiographical principle rather than historical reality. Many of these essays were written in preparation for or are an elaboration of positions taken in her commentary, but she also ventures into other issues, including a critique of Yadin's understanding of the Temple Scroll. The last essay in this volume argues that the concept of the remnant provided a framework in which the inevitability of divine judgment and the possibility of Israel's future existence could be linked, while preserving hope for continuity and survival.

Japhet's contribution to the understanding of the history and literature of the Restoration period has been immense, and her numerous essays since the publication of her commentary should lead all in the scholarly community to hope for her and to wish for her *multos annos*.

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