

Steven Coxhead, review of David Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament: Prayer and Agriculture (Vol. 1)*, *Reformed Theological Review* 65 (2006): 117 (used with permission, and re-edited to conform with SBL style).

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TRADITIONS OF THE RABBIS FROM THE ERA OF THE NEW TESTAMENT: Volume I: Prayer and Agriculture

By David Instone-Brewer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 456 pp.

This book is the first instalment in a six volume series known by the acronym TRENT, which is derived from the title of the series: Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament. According to Instone-Brewer, “the aim of this series ... is to provide ready access for New Testament scholars to the ... rabbinic traditions which can be shown to originate before 70 CE” (p. xviii).

The format of the series follows the structure of the Mishnah, which was completed around 200 CE. The Mishnah consists of six orders, which gives TRENT its six volumes. The first volume, subtitled *Prayer and Agriculture*, corresponds to the first order, *Zeraim* (Seeds). This order deals with the laws relating to tithing, although it commences with the tractate *Berakhot* (Blessings), which has to do with various regulations relating to prayer. Instone-Brewer’s method is to treat each tractate in order. An outline of the relevant tractate is followed by a treatment of individual mishnot or verses. Instone-Brewer gives a summary of each mishnah but only comments on content and dating for those mishnot that contain material that can confidently be dated to pre-70 CE. Where relevant, a paragraph or two is given to make clear the connection between the tradition of the mishnah in question with the New Testament. These early mishnot are printed in the book in unpointed Hebrew with an English translation. The elements of each mishnah that can be dated to before 70 CE appear in bold in the English translation.

The methods of dating employed by Instone-Brewer are heavily dependent on the work of Jacob Neusner. The main method of dating is according to attribution of authorship (pp. 30–32). A second method, of lesser importance, applies to anonymous sayings, that is, dating according to “logical precedence” (p. 33). Three other methods, “which are less useful by themselves but which may provide supporting evidence” (p. 34), involve extra-mishnaic parallel sources (pp. 34–35), “references to Temple practices” (pp. 35–38), and the internal structure of the tractate (p. 38). Instone-Brewer also has a system of thirteen levels that indicate levels of confidence in dating (pp. 39–40). The TRENT volumes “contain all the traditions which can be dated with a confidence level between 1 and 8, and a few which have a level of 9 or 10” (p. 40).

This volume is invaluable in throwing light on many of the Jewish traditions that are reflected on the pages on the New Testament. Even where there is no direct connection of a particular mishnah with the New Testament, a fascinating insight into the world of first-century Judaism is obtained. In addition to its value for the study of the New Testament and early Judaism, this volume contains succinct but comprehensive introductory material on early rabbinic literature and authors that is the perfect summary

for anyone who would like to become familiar with the general landscape of early rabbinic traditions without getting lost (pp. 1–27).

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