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978-0-521-88807-3 - Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences

Saul M. Olyan

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DISABILITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Mental and physical disability, ubiquitous in texts of the Hebrew Bible, receive their first thoroughgoing treatment in this monograph. Saul Olyan seeks to reconstruct the Hebrew Bible's particular ideas of what is disabling and their potential social ramifications. Biblical representations of disability and biblical classification schemas – both explicit and implicit – are compared with those of the Hebrew Bible's larger ancient West Asian cultural context and with those of the later Jewish biblical interpreters who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. This study helps the reader gain a deeper and more subtle understanding of the ways in which biblical writers construct hierarchically significant difference and privilege certain groups (e.g., persons with “whole bodies”) over others (e.g., persons with physical “defects”). It also explores how ancient interpreters of the Hebrew Bible, such as the Qumran sectarians, reconfigure earlier biblical notions and classification models of disability for their own contexts and ends.

Saul M. Olyan is Samuel Ungerleider Jr. Professor of Judaic Studies and Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. His previous publications include *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (2004), *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representations of Cult* (2000), *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism* (1993), and *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel* (1988). He has contributed to, and served as editor of, various publications in the areas of biblical literature and ancient religions.

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I am grateful to several publishers for allowing me to reproduce materials from earlier publications. Some of the content of my article “Anyone Blind and Lame Shall Not Enter the House’: On the Interpretation of Second Samuel 5:8b,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998):218–227, appears in chapter 2 in reworked form. I would like to thank the Catholic Biblical Association for permission to reproduce this material. Much of my article “Why an Altar of Unfinished Stones? Some Thoughts on Ex 20,25 and Dtn 27,5–6,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 108 (1996):161–171, appears in revised form in chapter 6. I would like to thank Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co. for permission to include this material. Some of the content of my article “The Exegetical Dimensions of Restrictions on the Blind and the Lame in Texts from Qumran,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8 (2001):38–50, appears in chapter 7 in reworked form. I would like to thank Koninklijke Brill NV for permission to include content derived from this article.

Finally, a note on transliteration: I have employed a simplified form of transliteration for Hebrew, Akkadian, and Greek that does not indicate vowel length in many cases.

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Abbreviations

The following is a list of abbreviations used throughout the text and notes.

- AHw* von Soden, W. *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1965–1981.
- BDB* Brown, F., S. Driver, and C. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000. Reprinted.
- CAD* Oppenheim, A. L. et al., eds. *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2007.
- CAT* Dietrich, M., O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, eds. *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras ibn Hani and Other Places*. 2nd enlarged ed. Münster, Germany: Ugarit Verlag, 1995.
- EM* Cassuto, U. et al., eds. *’enšiqlopedyah miqra’it*. Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1965–1988.
- EncDSS* Schiffman, L. H., and J. C. VanderKam, eds. *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- GKC* Kautzsch, E., and A. E. Cowley. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*. 2nd ed. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1910.
- KAI* Donner, H., and W. Röllig, eds. *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*. 4th ed. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1979.
- LXX* Septuagint
- MT* Massoretic Text
- NJPS* New Jewish Publication Society Version

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- NKB Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Trans. M. E. J. Richardson et al. 5 vols. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1994.
- TDOT Botterweck, G. J., H. Ringgren et al., eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Trans. J. T. Willis et al. 14 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2004.
- WO Waltke, B. K., and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.