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My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs

Jonathan Kaplan

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Most studies of the history of interpretation of Song of Songs focus on its interpretation from late antiquity to modernity. In *My Perfect One*, Jonathan Kaplan examines earlier rabbinic interpretation of this work by investigating an underappreciated collection of works of rabbinic literature from the first few centuries of the Common Era, known as the tannaitic midrashim. In a departure from earlier scholarship that too quickly classified rabbinic interpretation of Song of Songs as allegorical, Kaplan advocates a more nuanced understanding of the approach of the early sages, who read Song of Songs employing typological interpretation in order to correlate Scripture with exemplary events in Israel's history. Throughout the book Kaplan explores ways in which this portrayal helped shape a model vision of rabbinic piety as well as an idealized portrayal of their beloved, God, in the wake of the destruction, dislocation, and loss the Jewish community experienced in the first two centuries of the Common Era. The archetypal language of Song of Songs provided, as Kaplan argues, a textual landscape in which to imagine an idyllic construction of Israel's relationship to her beloved, marked by mutual devotion and fidelity. Through this approach to Song of Songs, the Tannaim helped lay the foundations for later Jewish thought of a robust theology of intimacy in God's relationship with the Jewish people.

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