

## BOOK REVIEW

Magness, Jodi, *Stone and Dung, Oil and Spit: Jewish Daily Life in the Time of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). xv + 335 pp. Pbk. \$25 USD.

This work is derived from Magness's research on purity and Qumran, with an expanded emphasis to include purity concerns of other Jewish groups. Despite this expanded emphasis, much of the material still focuses on Qumran.

The book contains twelve chapters, ten of which are dedicated to specific items or practices and how these relate to purity concerns for Jews in the late Second Temple period. Each chapter functions like a mini-essay on its topic. Rather than arguing a particular sustained thesis, the book reads like a 'handbook' of individual articles on each topic. Each chapter (with the exception of the introductory and concluding chapters) could stand alone.

Magness's introductory chapter lays important groundwork for what lies ahead. In it she briefly describes the Jewish religious and economic climate of the late Second Temple period and introduces the concepts of purity and holiness. This chapter serves to remind the reader that Jewish life in Jerusalem was not identical to life in other parts of Palestine during this time period. Magness summarizes her purpose for the book as 'to discuss selected aspects of Jewish daily life based on archaeological and literary information' (p. 15). Her selected areas of examination are: 'ritual purification, diet, household vessels, dining customs, Sabbath observance, fasting, coins, clothing, oil, spit, toilet habits, and tombs and burial customs' (p. 15). She accomplishes her task well.

Her second chapter discusses purification of the body and hands. It contains an informative discussion of *miqva'ot* and their role in Jewish religious life, as well as the much-debated practice of ritual hand washing among the different Jewish sects. Magness is careful to connect her observations to the activities of Jesus and here highlights Jesus'

teaching that impurity comes from within a person's heart, and not from the food one consumes.

Chapter 3 is entitled 'Creeping and Swarming Creatures, Locusts, Fish, Dogs, Chickens and Pigs'. These creatures are all treated in this chapter because they are all considered unclean or inedible. The chapter contrasts instances when various Jewish groups either permitted or forbade the consumption of each creature. Here Magness makes too much of incidental statements in the Gospels. Though Jesus talks about straining gnats (Mt. 23.24) and mention is made of John the Baptist's eating locusts and wild honey (Mt. 3.4), the purpose of these statements was not to comment on purity issues directly, but rather to illustrate other points.

Chapter 4 contains detailed information about the use and distribution of various household vessels in Jewish communities. Magness demonstrates that concerns for ritual purity dictated which type of vessel was used in a given situation. Magness makes good connections to the time and work of Jesus by noting dining practices pertaining to pottery items as they are represented in the New Testament.

The following chapter covers dining customs and communal meals. It describes dining among the poor (primarily the destitute) and also the wealthy. The reader is left wondering how the average Jewish person, who lacked extreme wealth but who was not quite reduced to the category of destitution, dined. Here Magness's attempts to connect to the specific time of Jesus are less than satisfactory. She appeals to distribution of food to widows in Acts 6 (notably happening *after* the time of Jesus) and to Jesus' permitting his disciples to glean grain for food on the Sabbath (Mk 2.23-28). In the latter instance, Magness notes that Jesus permits this because the disciples lived an itinerant lifestyle (citing Mk 6.8-9), though this is not explicitly stated in the Gospels. Clearer reasons for making the connections that she does, along with greater discussion of the evidence, would improve her argument.

The sixth chapter is called 'Sabbath Observance and Fasting' though the subject is what household tasks were (or were not) permitted on the Sabbath by various groups. Additionally, the chapter discusses the conventions surrounding fasting. As with other chapters, Magness appeals to literature written both before and after the late Second Temple period to make her points (for example, *Jubilees* and *Didache*). While these documents may be helpful and may reflect practices that either continued into or extended out of this time period, the reader would do

well to bear in mind the different time periods when these documents were written and the actual time of Jesus.

The seventh chapter deals with coins and their use in Jewish circles. More specifically, Magness discusses the discovery of coins in Qumran, the use of coins in the temple cult and a curiously large deposit of coins found on the receding shoreline of the Dead Sea. Magness tries to connect attitudes to coinage and the teaching of Jesus in this chapter; however her comparison is somewhat lacking. She states that the Jesus movement opposed paying the temple tax (pp. 101-102, based on Jesus' cleansing of the temple) but neglects to take into account Mt. 17.24-27 where Jesus commands Peter to pay the temple tax on behalf of both of them. She has not adequately addressed all the evidence concerning Jesus and the temple tax before stating her conclusions.

Chapter 8 is focused on clothing and garment fringes (*tzitzit*). According to Magness, the average Jew wore colourful garments of wool, while the sectarians at Qumran wore only white linen garments. She also discusses other purity concerns related to clothing such as whether or not a person becomes unclean when their clothing comes into contact with an object or individual that is impure. Magness situates Jesus within this discussion by noting a time when an unclean woman touched the fringe of his garment. This is an example of a time when the connection to Jesus and his actions fits very well into the content of her chapter.

Chapter 9 contains information about perspectives on oil and spit. The Essenes apparently viewed oil as a means of transferring impurity and by all appearances did not use oil in bathing or in anointing of the feet. In contrast, other Jews offered oil to anoint the feet to their guests and participated in the Roman practice of bathing using oil. The chapter then goes on to discuss views concerning spit. The Essenes believed spit to be impure in all circumstances, whereas at times the Romans and other Jews (like Jesus in his healing miracles) saw spit as having healing properties. Her inclusion of Jesus in this chapter neither adds to nor detracts from the discussion.

Chapter 10 concerns the toilet habits of different Jewish groups. The chapter is informative and a good eye-opener for those who hold a 'sanitized view' (as Magness puts it) of the ancient world. Whereas we value privacy to care for our bodily needs, most of the ancient world did not. In contrast to this, the sectarians at Qumran did value privacy, considered human waste impure and held that the act of defecation

rendered one ritually impure. Generally speaking the rest of Judaism did not see excrement as unclean, though they took care to hide human waste from God's sight. Magness's attempts to connect Jesus to this chapter are a stretch. Citing Mk 7.17-23, Magness suggests that Jesus may not have found excrement unclean. In this passage he says (with emphasis on the original food only) that a food that enters the body, goes into the stomach and then leaves the body as waste does not render a person unclean. The biblical text speaks only to the ultimate source of uncleanness (the heart) and is not speaking directly to specific items that are clean or unclean. Her inclusion of this particular line of discussion does not add to her argument.

Chapter 11 clearly describes the variety of burial practices throughout Palestine, their development over the years and the influence of Roman customs on them. The chapter also addresses recent archaeological discoveries of the James Ossuary and the Talpiot Jesus Family Tomb and evaluates how the evidence from these discoveries compares with the known burial practices of the time as well as the textual evidence for the burial of both Jesus and James. Magness offers a fair and convincing treatment of the evidence. This is one of the most effective chapters and she does a very good job not only of describing late Second Temple burial practices, but also of making solid, meaningful connection with the life of Jesus.

In her concluding chapter, Magness observes that sectarianism and concerns for purity did not completely cease with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Without the temple, the sacrificial system had to be abandoned and purity laws gradually became more metaphorical. There also appeared to be more of an attitude of 'agreeing to disagree' on some issues, though not everything was permitted. This chapter is a nice conclusion to the material presented as it gives the reader a sense of how the practices of Jewish life both changed and stayed the same after this major turning point in Jewish history.

On the whole, Magness's book is well written, easy to read and very informative. Slightly more than one-third of the book is notes and bibliography with an additional twenty-four pages of images and drawings to assist the reader in understanding her information. Magness's claims are well supported through extensive quotations from ancient literature in every chapter, which is both helpful and problematic. At times the quotations are so lengthy that the reader has forgotten what was being demonstrated by the time he or she gets back to Magness's text.

Despite this, the extensive quotations and documentation are definite assets for those wishing to do further research on any of her topics.

For those who are interested in the social aspects of life during the time of Jesus, this book's perspective on Jewish life is a welcome addition to the many volumes that highlight the Roman social world during this time period. Contrary to what may be suggested by the title, however, this is not a comprehensive examination of all aspects of Jewish daily life, nor is it specifically confined to the time of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, this book focuses on daily life as it concerns purity habits, primarily in the lives of those Jews in Qumran and the Jerusalem area from approximately the first century BCE to the end of the first century CE. Admittedly it would be difficult to isolate specific practices during the approximate thirty-year time period when Jesus is believed to have lived and so an expansion of the time period she addresses is a practical one.

Magness does make a concerted effort to connect her observations to Jesus specifically, but at times it seems like Magness's links with Jesus are done more out of necessity (to fulfil the subtitle of the book) rather than because they have something substantial to contribute to the discussion. It is worth noting that Jewish daily life 'at the time of Jesus' does not necessarily mean Jewish daily life 'according to Jesus'. To some extent it seems that Magness is attempting either to do both, or equate the two. She accomplishes the former much better than the latter.

Magness's book will be easiest to understand if the reader has at least a basic knowledge of archaeological terms and the history and geography of the time period. A beginner may not grasp the significance of some of the technical language and those who know nothing of the geography or the history of the time period may find themselves slightly lost. Having said this, the book is certainly not useless to the beginner and could be used at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The book would work nicely as a companion volume to another text on introductory Near Eastern archaeology, Jewish history, or the use of archaeology in biblical interpretation.

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