

BOOK REVIEWS / BOEK RESENSIES

John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2013. Paperback. 153 pages. US\$14.00. ISBN: 978-1-4335-3183-5.

John Currid (Ph.D., University of Chicago) is a Professor of OT at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina and senior minister at Ballantyne Presbyterian Church. He has extensive archaeological experience in Israel and Tunisia and has authored several books and commentaries.

Against the Gods offers a brief, but remarkably broad introduction to the question of how the OT relates and responds to certain prominent religious ideas of Israel's neighbors in the ancient Near East. The nature of the relationship between the writings of the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern literature is both complicated and controversial. Currid acknowledges this, but also recognizes the importance of this subject for a proper understanding of many passages in the OT. He characterizes his book as "introductory," that is, not specifically written for scholars; as "exemplary," that is, not exhaustive; and "not reductionistic," that is, not seeking to simplify the complexities that are there (pp. 9-10, *all page references are to the book under consideration*). The author's modest aim is "to advance the debate a little, stir up some thoughts, and perhaps to make progress in the discussion" (p. 9). He states his central thesis up front in the Prologue, a firm theological perspective that is reflected in his treatment of the various issues taken up in subsequent chapters: "the Old Testament worldview is unique in the ancient Near East, and this is immediately confirmed by its all-pervasive monotheism" (p. 9).

Currid leads off with two foundational chapters that lay the groundwork for specific topics or aspects of the debate that are dealt with thereafter. He thus begins with "a brief history of ancient Near Eastern studies" (ch. 1), followed by "the nature of polemical thought and writing" (ch. 2). His "cursory outline" (p. 11) of the history of ANE scholarship apportions the field into four temporal stages: First, "the beginnings of research in the ancient Near East (1798-1872)" (p. 12). Ancient historians, such as Herodotus, did not have much interest in archaeological details. Therefore, according to Currid, the first great advance in the field may be dated to 1798 when Napoleon invaded Egypt, including along with his expeditionary force a number of scientists – "scholars, architects, and draftsmen whose primary purpose was to survey the ancient monuments" of the land (p. 13). During this period, some ground-breaking discoveries were made, such as the Valley of the Kings near Thebes (p. 13), the Rosetta Stone, whose hieroglyphic script was later deciphered to "open up the world of ancient Egypt" (p. 14), and over in Mesopotamia, the Annals of Sargon II, who epi-

graphically recorded his deportation of citizens from totally defeated Israel (p. 15).

Currid's second stage, "the period of suspicion," began with the discovery of the Assyrian flood story by George Smith in 1873 (p. 16). Thus, many scholars of this period "believed that the biblical accounts of creation and the flood were stripped of their original polytheism and of many pagan elements," though remnants of such elements "remained in the text" (p. 18), for example, the word *tehom* ("deep") in Gen 1:2. A (third) period of "new horizons" in ANE studies was initiated in 1906 when excavations at the Hittite city of Bogazkoy uncovered "thousands of inscriptions in several languages" (p. 19), including the previously undeciphered Hittite. Other important discoveries of this era included the Ugaritic texts at Ras Shamra, the Hurrian cuneiform archives at Nuzi, and a similar find at the Mesopotamian city of Mari, many tablets of which reflect a setting "quite similar to the patriarchal period of biblical history" (p. 20). Currid's fourth and final stage, the "age of synthesis" (p. 21), began after the Second World War and continues to the present day. One of the few major discoveries of this period was that of "an archive at Ebla (Tell Mardikh) in 1976," Ebla being the oldest known West Semitic language, and the Ebla tablets preceding "the time of Abraham by at least 450 years" (p. 21).

In his second chapter, Currid begins by defining what he means by "polemical theology," his key analytical concept and central theoretical perspective (p. 25):

Polemical theology is the use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meanings. The biblical authors take well-known expressions and motifs from the ancient Near Eastern milieu and apply them to the person and work of Yahweh, and not to the other gods of the ancient world. ... Polemical theology is monotheistic to the very core. The primary purpose of polemical theology is to demonstrate emphatically and graphically the distinction between the worldview of the Hebrews and the beliefs and practices of the rest of the ancient Near East.

Currid then provides an initial selection of examples that illustrate the operation of such "polemical theology" with respect to two distinct categories: "expressions," namely, idiomatic parallels, and second, "motifs," which concern certain key aspects of ancient Near Eastern life and culture. Within the category of idiomatic expressions, he considers "a strong hand" (p. 26), the speech introducer "thus says" (p. 27), and the metaphor of "the heavenly rider" (p. 28). Under "polemical motifs," Currid explores "the serpent confrontation" (p. 28), e.g. Exod 7:8–13, the occurrence of "drought" (p. 30), e.g. 1 Kgs 17:1, and the imagery of a "thundering deity" (p. 30), e.g. Exod 19:16, 18. He argues that in all of these instances the aim of the biblical writer was "to counter

ancient pagan myths that [were] noxious to the Hebrew faith centered on monotheism” (p. 31).

Each of the remaining chapters of *Against the Gods* then discusses in greater detail a notable topic of the OT that has one or more significant parallels in ancient Near Eastern thought and literature. These illustrative chapters all follow a certain general pattern, though this is stylistically modified in each case to avoid monotony: After a brief introduction to the subject at hand, Currid surveys some of the major ANE topical parallels to the biblical account. He then presents a summary of the principal *similarities*, often helpfully illustrated in the form of a chart, and proceeds to apply an argument based on the strategy of “polemical theology.” The latter normally involves an overview of the *critical differences* between the Hebrew text and its closest ANE correspondents, which leads to a concluding summary of the significance of these disparities for understanding the Bible’s Yahweh-focused content as well as the polemical aim(s) of its authors. In each of the outstanding instances of scholarly controversy, the salient options are considered: Did the OT writers simply “borrow” from their ANE neighbors; did they incorporate pagan texts after theologically “sanitizing” them; or did they go further and actually “polemicize” these issues by explicitly or implicitly demonstrating, in dramatic narrative literary form, the absolute superiority of Yahweh over all other gods with respect to moral character, decisive action, and divine purpose?

Space allows me simply to list the remaining chapter titles of this book and to document several of Currid’s important observations with regard to each subject area.

(III) *Genesis 1 and Other Ancient Near Eastern Creation Accounts*: The crucial question boils down to this: “Is the Hebrew creation account...merely another ancient Near Eastern myth that has been cleansed, or is it a radical, unique cosmological view? Or is it something in between?” (p. 35). Currid finds that “the dissimilarities are...of great magnitude and import” (p. 40) with respect to factors such as the nature and power of the Creator (whether limited or not), the issue of pagan “theogony” (“birth of the gods”), the use of magic, preexistent waters, *creatio ex nihilo* with mankind as the *imago Dei*, and narrative style. With regard to the last point,

the style of writing of the cosmological texts from the ancient Near East is best described as “mythic narrative.” ... Genesis 1–2, in contrast, bears all the markings of Hebrew historical narrative (p. 44).

Furthermore, the Genesis references to the creation of “large sea creatures” as well as the heavenly “luminaries” may be construed as a polemic against ANE beliefs about their deities (p. 45). Finally, “the biblical account has

as its chief purpose to glorify the one Creator God who is the sole God of all reality” (p. 46).

(IV) *Ancient Near Eastern Flood Accounts and the Noachic Deluge of Genesis 6–9*: Currid provides a useful summary of the primary surviving ANE flood accounts, namely: the Sumerian Flood Story (p. 48), the Death of Bilgames (which also mentions a great flood, p. 49), the Epic of Atrahasis (p. 50), the Epic of Gilgamesh (p. 52), an Ugaritic Atrahasis account (p. 53), and the much later (278 B.C.E.) Berossos story (p. 53). Despite many superficial similarities, “the dissimilarities are profound” (p. 57), that is, in terms of theology, morality, the covenant concept, genre category, and numerous narrative details. “The sovereign control exercised by Yahweh over the floodwaters is in striking contrast to” the reaction of pagan deities, which seem to be at the mercy of nature (p. 62). Furthermore, “one of the unique aspects of the Noachic flood narrative is the Lord’s establishment of a covenant with Noah,” made manifest by the ubiquitous physical sign of a heavenly rainbow (p. 63).

(V) *Joseph, the Tale of the Two Brothers, and the “Spurned Seductress” Motif*: Currid first suggests a reason for the apparent intrusion of Gen 38 into the Joseph story, which spans chs. 37–50: “The tale (*or*, ‘*historical narrative*’?) is placed in its present position so that Judah would serve as a foil to Joseph” (p. 66), especially in relation to the episode involving Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39). Currid then traces the *leitmotif* of “the spurned seductress” in three ancient texts: the Egyptian “Tale of the Two Brothers” (p. 67), the Hittite “Elkunirsa Myth” (p. 71), and the Mesopotamian “Gilgamesh Epic” (p. 72). He asserts in conclusion that the Joseph pericope is a factual, historical account, which “serves as a polemic against” ancient Near Eastern folk tales by playing off of their mythological elements (73).

(VI) *The Birth of the National Deliverer*: There are some “striking parallels between the birth story of Moses recorded in Exodus 2:1–10” and “accounts from Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Hatti” (p. 75). Currid surveys three of the most important of these: the “Legend of Sargon” (p. 76), the “Myth of Horus” (p. 79), and a set of “Hittite tales” (p. 83). He then critiques them in comparison with the scriptural account with respect to facticity, theology, and anthropology (pp. 85–86). His conclusion is that “the writer takes the famous pagan myth and turns it on its head in order to ridicule Egypt and to highlight the truth of the Hebrew world–and–life view” (p. 86). However, this position raises the issue of literary priority, and perhaps genre as well: Were the Pentateuchal narratives composed *primarily* as an *historical* testimony of God’s varied interactions with chosen persons, and later a people – or as *polemical* discourses aimed at critically interacting with surrounding ANE religious beliefs and practices? Of course, one could simply answer “yes” (both–and), but personally I felt that at times the author was pushing his polemical agenda some-

what too strongly, thus deflecting from the prominence of the historical biblical record.

(VII) *The Flights of Sinuhe and Moses*: In this chapter only two texts are compared, the Egyptian Middle Kingdom “Story of Sinuhe” and Moses’ flight from Egypt as recorded in Exod 2:11–22. While these narratives have many elements in common, their endings are strikingly different: Sinuhe longs to return to his homeland, Egypt, whereas Moses, due to his prior crime of murder, definitely does not. According to Currid, through this “use of a polemical ending, the author taunts Egypt and her nationalistic fervor: Moses doesn’t crave Egypt or her kingly deity; he longs only to serve Yahweh” (p. 95). But again, one wonders about the matter of compositional priority and intentionality: Was the biblical author primarily aiming to present a historical account of the facts of Moses’ flight from Egypt, or did he deliberately shape (bend?) a received story to serve a polemical end?

(VIII) *Who is “I Am that I Am? Moses 3 and the Egyptian Book of the Heavenly Cow*: The latter text with this strange title is apparently “the oldest extended mythical narrative from ancient Egypt” (c.a. 1300 B.C.E.), and is perhaps also a rare example “of polemical theology on the part of the ancient Egyptians in response to a major theological tenet of Hebrew theology” (p. 97). Currid traces the fascinating, but fragile historical and literary connections between a reference to Pharaoh, who personified the sun god Re, as “I am who I am” (*ywy ymy*) in the opening section of the Book of the Heavenly Cow and Exod 3:14 in the Hebrew Bible, shortly before the confrontation between Moses and the current Pharaoh. A natural question then is this: what was “Yahweh” doing in a pagan Egyptian creation myth, and how or why did he get there? Currid’s reasoning towards some possible answers to this question (which, he admits, cannot be conclusive), is too complicated to summarize, but one “polemical” option is as follows (p. 107):

Re and Pharaoh’s appropriation of the name “I am that I am” was a way to vanquish Yahweh and to abduct his character for themselves. Re and Pharaoh were thus claiming that they were the only eternal, unchanging deities!

During the course of his discussion, Currid also presents a helpful synopsis of the theological significance of the name “Yahweh” (*yhwh*) with reference to Exod 3:14 (pp. 100-101).

(IX) *The Rod of Moses*: In this case, a specific object used in a particular way in the Hebrew Bible serves as a subtle critique of Egyptian superstitious beliefs and magical practice. The “rod/staff/walking stick” (Heb. *matteh*) was an important symbol of power and authority in both Israel and Egyptian culture. Currid offers an unusually detailed study of its significance in both societies (pp. 111-116) and proceeds to discuss the twofold irony, judicial and linguistic, of the rod in chs. 5-15 of the Exodus account (p. 117). Moses was in

possession of a divinely-supplied staff, “a highly esteemed Egyptian emblem, in order to humiliate and defeat the Egyptians” (p. 117). Thus Currid concludes that the author of Exodus (p. 119):

...simply polemicized Egyptian beliefs in order to exalt Yahweh as the true sovereign of the universe. That was accomplished not only by employing linguistic parallels but also by structuring the very events and objects of the episode as a critique of Egyptian practice.

But again this construal might raise the question of the extent to which such a prominent *polemical* motivation jibe with the actual *historical* veracity of the biblical account (at least as it textually presents itself)? Did the former concern perhaps even preempt the latter, for example, by “structuring” the rod creatively, or imaginatively, into the narrative in order to create a special rhetorical effect?

(X) *The Parting of the Waters of the Red Sea*: After introducing the account of the Red Sea crossing (Exod 14:13–31) as “the salient event in the history of Israel” (p. 121), Currid turns to a description of a mythic Egyptian parallel, as recorded in the Westcar Papyrus, also known as “King Cheops and the Magicians” (p. 122). Next he identifies three important polemical motifs in the Exodus narrative: the shameful eclipsing of the Egyptian sun deity Amon-Re (Exod 14:20), the earth “swallowing” the Egyptian army (lit. the “water covered” them, 14:28), and the unflattering “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart (14:4, 8). Thus,

it seems clear that the biblical writer regarded the event of the crossing of the Red Sea as a polemical parallel with the myth of [the Egyptian ‘chief lector-priest’] Djadjaemonkh’s separation of the waters of the lake...in search of a valuable charm (p. 126).

(XI) *Canaanite Motifs*: In this final chapter Currid explores several of the chief correspondences between the Canaanite pantheon, as revealed in the Ugaritic texts discovered at Ras Shamra (e.g. the Baal Cycle), and the theology of the literature of Scripture. He notes that “the parallels are particularly striking in the poetical genre,” including the compositional device of parallelism (p. 135). Currid then investigates some of the key terms and concepts of Ps 29, which commentators such as Mitchell Dahood observe “have clear and distinct correspondences with Canaanite phraseology,” for example, “the sons of god[s]” (v. 1) and “the voice of Yahweh” (vv. 3 ff., p. 136). Currid argues that the reiterated divine name “Yahweh” probably serves as a *leitwort* which reveals this psalm to be “a polemic against Baal and Canaanite religion” (p. 137). He concludes this chapter, and his book with a comparative consideration of imagery relating to “the god of the mountain” motif, as expressed also in the Hebrew divine name *El Shaddai*, which most likely “means ‘God of the mountain’” (p. 138). Currid agrees with Dahood’s assessment that such termi-

nology and the local imagery which it reflects functions as a polemical assertion of Israel's God passing judgment upon all pagan deities (p. 140).

In conclusion, Currid reiterates his claim that "polemical theology" functions as an essential hermeneutical frame of reference which aids in the interpretation of biblical (Hebrew) passages manifesting some noteworthy intertextual correspondence with other ANE literature. This approach also serves as a critical evaluative "instrument to underscore the uniqueness of the Hebrew worldview in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern conceptions of" deity—as well as of God's universe and how it operates (p. 141). Whether or not one agrees with all of Currid's generally conservative theological opinions on the range of topics he discusses in this condensed overview of the field, one can certainly benefit from his concise summary of a relatively large number of ANE texts that have many significant parallels with the well-known accounts contained in the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch in particular. A substantial amount of scholarly literature on the subject is also referenced (in footnotes). There is some degree of repetition between chapters, which is probably due to their being generated from a series of seminary lectures (v. 10). However, the book is generally well organized (including a subject and a scripture index) and evinces a straightforward, easy-to-read style throughout. It would therefore serve as an excellent introductory text for a comparative literature course relating to OT narrative literature at the seminary or theological college level—or it could provide a handy review for those who have already taken such courses. *Against the Gods* introduces readers to some of the most ancient Near Eastern religious texts on record, but the different issues discussed from the author's chosen perspective of theology with a polemical point are sure to be of interdisciplinary interest to those from various academic fields in today's increasingly pluralistic age.

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Philip F. Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with its Ancient Audience*. Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2012. Paperback. xi + 408 pages. US\$55.00. £27.50 ISBN: 978-0-227-67991-3.

After introducing his book by two chapters about the current readership and then the original context of OT narrative recipients, Esler applies his methodology to eight case studies, one from Genesis, six from the two Samuel-books and one from the deuterocanonical book of Judith. The first two stories from Gen 38 and 1 Sam 1–2 fall under the heading, "Wives," the next stories from 1 Sam 8–31, 1 Sam 17:1–18:5, 1 Sam 19:1–2 Sam 5:5 and the story about Judith under the heading, Warriors, while the last two stories from 2 Sam 10–12 and 2

Sam 13 resort under “Sex.” The initial impression is that these headings would address these topics within the broader OT, but are then found to be limited to only these specific passages. The one-page “Overview” to each group does not clarify how these three headings add to a better understanding as several of the stories could be categorized under more than one heading. A four-page Epilogue concludes the work, drawing together the main cultural and literary aspect of each story. That Esler approaches these narratives from a very wide background is clear from his 23-page Bibliography, his seven-page Author Index and his almost 16-page Scripture Index, the latter to prove how seriously he takes the narrative component of the Bible.

Esler’s aim is to describe the context of the original recipients of these stories from a cultural–anthropological approach (p. ix) and with reference to a number of twentieth century scholars. This is necessary as many of these stories were written within a “high–context culture” where many dimensions of the context of these narratives were assumed to be well–known by the original recipients but no longer so for current ones. He deals with them in their MT form, sometimes contrasting them to their apparently older Septuagint version of which he does, however, include Judith.

Eight aspects of this context are high-lighted, although they often do not add much new to what is probably relatively familiar amongst OT scholars: material conditions, group orientation, honour and shame (crucial in this work), challenge and response, limited good, patron and client relationships, patrilineality, patrilocality and polygyny, as well as the elite and non-elite strata. He is explicitly silent about the historicity of the narratives and about the historical development of the text. This has meant that the date of the MT text is of lesser importance to Esler as he accepts a relative stability of the culture between 900 and 100 B.C.E. (p. 24)! Another such generalisation is his acceptance of a broadly homogenous Mediterranean culture (e.g. p. 40) which is relevant even in its twentieth century manifestation (p. 39), therefore going way beyond the two date limitations just mentioned. This broad cultural framework is then opposed to that of northern Europe and North America (p. 40-41). It is therefore surprising when Esler resorts to modern, western psychiatric categories when describing the emotional state of Saul (p. 173), linking it even to modern-day Taiwanese cases which would most probably have had a different interpretation amongst the original recipients of the MT.

Contrary to these particular cultural circumstances he also relates the different stories to universal literary models as identified by Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots* (although he sets out to challenge any opposition between these two approaches, cf. p. 20). This would assist particularly current non-religious recipients to appreciate these narratives within a broader intercultural framework.

Although he links the various narratives – also across their group headings – the book becomes somewhat cumbersome as many social–scientific and literary issues are repeated in each chapter, even when the sequence in which they are dealt with varies. Even the two introductory chapters could have been more condensed to facilitate the flow of reading. Just as the most relevant cultural aspects (from the eight listed above) of a specific narrative’s context are elaborated upon, the various elements of a particular dominant plot type (or types) are identified in each narrative while acknowledging when certain typical literary features are lacking. His classification of the David-Bathsheba narrative as a “Voyage and Return” story-line seems somewhat forced and one wonders if this parallel to other stories really adds anything to better aid in their interpretation. One benefit of the repetition, however, is that each chapter could therefore be read independently without prior knowledge of the preceding chapters.

Apart from a number of typographical errors, which seem to increase as one continues reading, there are also some other corrections to be made in revised editions, such as regarding the Kabyle as an Arab people (p. 305) whereas they are, in fact, a Berber group. A missing article before a noun often gives the impression that brief notes have been integrated into the text without further editing. In addition, some of the longer sentences can be rather confusing in English.

Even though it was not his prime intention with this work, Esler has succeeded very well in highlighting the theological common denominator (p. 213-215) running through all the narrative contents as contrasts to their lively contexts: the God of the OT critically subverts the status quo ideology and practices by the shocking irony of his justice and grace.

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Nathan MacDonald and Izaak J. de Hulster (eds.). *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism*. Studies of the Sofja Kovalevskaja Research Group on Early Jewish Monotheism. Volume 2. *Forschungen zum Alten Testament II/61*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. 323 Seiten. Paperback. ISBN 978-3-16-152433-2.

Der Band vereinigt Beiträge eines Kolloquiums, das im Mai 2011 in Göttingen stattfand. Er umfasst nach einer Einleitung (XI–XVI) 12 Essays, davon 9 in englischer und 3 in deutscher Sprache.

Anders als die übrigen, sich auf das Alte Testament (und den Alten Orient) beziehenden Beiträge widmen sich die ersten beiden hermeneutisch-theologischen Überlegungen. Trevor Hart (*Complicating Presence: Inter-*

Disciplinary Perspectives on a Theological Question, 1–21) bedenkt die Frage von Präsenz und Absenz Gottes unter den Bedingungen der Moderne und bietet unter Zuhilfenahme von Überlegungen von Ingolf Dalferth eine Typologie verschiedener Weisen göttlicher Erscheinung unter trinitarischer Optik. Johannes Zachhuber (*Transzendenz und Immanenz als Interpretationskategorien antiken Denkens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, 23–53) zeichnet die Begriffsgeschichte der heute populären, auf Kant zurückgehende Opposition von Transzendenz und Immanenz nach und zeigt die damit verbundenen Prämissen und Veränderungen im Verständnis auf.

Mit dem Beitrag von Claus Ambos (*Überlegungen zu den Voraussetzungen für göttliche Präsenz im Alten Orient und zu den Gefahren ihrer Beeinträchtigung*, 55–65) wechselt der Band von philosophisch-theologischen Erörterungen im Bannkreis der Moderne in den Alten Orient. Seit frühster Zeit bestand die Vorstellung, dass die Gottheiten in Gestalt von Kultbildern unter den Menschen präsent waren. Letztere waren von den Göttern zur Ernährung und Versorgung erst erschaffen worden. Bei Störungen wurde die göttliche Präsenz beeinträchtigt. In Mesopotamien finden sich Beispiele von „Wiederentdeckungen“ verloren gegangener Urbilder und ihrer Kulte. Angelika Berlejung (*Divine Presence for Everybody. Presence Theology in Everyday Life*, 67–93) untersucht die im syrisch-palästinischen Raum gefundenen Amulette als Ausdrucksweisen der Alltagspräsenz einer Gottheit. Typen (mit oder ohne Kurztexte) und Funktionen dieser mobil-persönlichen, ja auf dem Leib getragenen Formen der Gottesnähe – es geht weithin um Fürsorge, Bewahrung, Schutz – werden erörtert. Die überwiegende Zahl der Amulette aus Israel weist ägyptische oder ägyptisierende Motive auf. Eine Ausnahme bilden die bekannten Silberamulette aus *Ketef Hinnom*, unweit von Jerusalem (6./5. Jh. v. Chr.). Sie enthalten biblische Bezüge (aaronitischer Segen; Dtn 6,6–9 u.a.) und verbinden insofern „offizielle“ Theologie und persönliche Frömmigkeit. Nathan MacDonald (*The Spirit of YHWH: An Overlooked Conceptualization of Divine Presence in the Persian Period*, 95–111) sieht hinsichtlich der Reaktion auf die Tempelzerstörung in Jerusalem neben einer *schem-* sowie einer *kabod*-Theologie auch eine solche in der Gestalt von *ruach*-Aussagen: den Geist als Modus göttlicher Präsenz. Er erweist sich dabei als Wendepunkt und Katalysator für nachexilische Perspektiven zu Geist und Prophetie. Texte wie Num 11 und 1. Sam 10; 19 werden (mit Nihan) einer perserzeitlicher Redaktion zugewiesen und in die Nähe von Joel 3 gerückt. Stephen L. Cook (*God's Real Absence and Real Presence in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomism*, 121–150) untersucht das Paradox von Distanz und Nähe Gottes in der Theologie des Deuteronomiums, unter spezieller Berücksichtigung von Dtn 12. Im Fokus steht nicht die visuelle, sondern die auditive Kommunikation, die sich in der Proklamation und Anrufung seines Names äussert. Die Unverfügbarkeit und Freiheit JHWHs ist betont: „Most definitively, God can remove the divine name from any site – even Jerusalem! – where the Lord's claims and the Lord's covenantal programs

are not honored.“ (s. 147) William A. Tooman (*Covenant and Presence in the Composition and Theology of Ezekiel*, 151–182) sieht in der Redaktionsgeschichte des Ezechielbuches eine Entwicklung der Thematik der Gottespräsenz abgebildet. Ezechiel 36,23–38 gibt dem Buch nicht nur seine finale Gestalt, sondern markiert diesbezüglich zugleich den theologischen Schlussstein: „The redactor who gave us 36.23c–38 introduced the divine presence as the solution to permanent covenant obedience and the pathway to full national restoration.“ (s. 178) Jill Middlemas (*Divine Presence in Absence. Aniconism and Multiple Imaging in the Prophets*, 183–211) untersucht die Art der Präsenz bzw. Absenz JHWHs in den prophetischen Büchern, speziell Hos und Ez. Als Ausfluss des Götzenkults wird auch die Verhaftung von Gottespräsenz an sichtbaren Ausdrucksweisen (Cherubim, Lade) zugunsten von Bildlosigkeit und metaphorischer Rede (Vergleiche) von Gott zurückgedrängt: „The prophetic collections of Hosea and Ezechiel reveal the destabilization of a concretized Yahwistic image, rather than divine absence, in the aniconic stances from therein. In so doing, they emphasize the presence of the divine through metaphorical speech.“ (s. 205) Joel S. Burnett (*Come and See What God Has Done! Divine Presence and the Reversal of Reproach in the Elohistic Psalter and in Iron Age West Semitic Inscriptions*, 213–254) interpretiert den Elohistischen Psalter (Ps 42–83) auf dem Hintergrund der Zerstörung von Stadt und Tempel Jerusalem. Dazu werden der Schlusspsalm 83 und weitere Phänomene untersucht sowie Querverbindungen mit inschriftlichen Befunden (*Deir Alla* u.a.) angezeigt. Als wesentliche Charakteristika der besagten Psalmenformation werden herausgearbeitet: eine spezifische Namenstheologie, Klagen und Bitten um Rettung und Beschämung der Feinde sowie das Insistieren auf die Durchsetzung göttlicher Gerechtigkeit auf Erden. Michael Emmendorffer (*Das Gebet in der Krise oder die Abwesenheit Jahwes als Thema der Psalmen*, 255–266) evaluiert die auf die Geschehnisse von 587 v. Chr. reagierenden Volksklagen (mit Seitenblick auf die mesopotamischen *balag*-Klagen) hinsichtlich ihrer Bearbeitung der Gottesferne. Äusserungen des Gotteszorns, die Metapher von Gott als Hirt seiner Herde und der Aufruf an JHWH, zu „gedenken“ (*zkr*) und einzugreifen, gehören dazu. Wie etwa Ps 74 zeigt, machte das Gebet in der Krise das Volks sprach- und hoffnungsfähig für die Zukunft. Bob Becking (*Silent Witness. The Symbolic Presence of God in the Temple Vessels in Ezra and Nehemiah*, 267–281) macht deutlich, dass Gott in Esr-Neh nicht als abwesend von der Geschichte, wohl aber als hintergründig wirkend gezeichnet wird, der seine Pläne durch menschliche Werkzeuge realisiert. Die Tempelgeräte in den beiden Büchern sind Ausdruck der Kontinuität mit dem vorexilischen Kult; im Betrieb des zweiten Tempels spielen sie – überraschenderweise – keine Rolle. In den Gefässen selbst dürfte sich der zurückkehrende Gottes anzeigen – „as aniconic representations of the divine and hence as silent witness to the inscrutable presence of God“ (s. 278). Lisbeth S. Fired (*The Torah of God as God. The Exaltation of the Written Law Code in Ezra–Nehemiah*, 283–300) untersucht die

Frage, ob JHWH (auch) dem zweiten Tempel einwohnte – eine Frage, welche die Rabbinen verneinten (vgl. bJoma 21b). Dazu werden vier Textkomplexe innerhalb Esr-Neh befragt. Mit Blick auf die Memoiren Nehemias wird die Frage bejaht, in denen von Esra bleibt der Sachverhalt offen, in Esr 1–6 (Tempelkonstruktion) ist davon auszugehen, dass JHWH nicht im Tempel, sondern im Himmel lebt. Im redaktionellen Rahmen Esr 7–Neh 11 schliesslich ist Gottes Präsenz in der (physischen) Gestalt der Tora gegeben. Der Band wird beschlossen mit einem Stellen- und einem Autorenregister.

Fragen rund um die An- bzw. Abwesenheit Gottes bzw. welcher Art diese je zu denken ist, erweisen sich als zugleich modern wie alt. Namentlich in grossen Verwerfungen und Krisenerfahrungen ist die Fragestellung von besonderer Virulenz. Dabei zeigen die einzelnen Beiträge, wie unterschiedlich die biblischen und anderen Zeugen damit umgegangen sind und welche Sichtweisen ihnen zuteil wurden. Ob dabei in allen erörterten Zusammenhängen die Geschehnisse von 587/6 v. Chr. als Katalysator wirkten, lässt sich freilich diskutieren.

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Sarah J. K. Pearce, *The Words of Moses: Studies in the Reception of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple Period*. Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum 152. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. Hardcover. xviii + 404 pages. € 139. ISBN 978-3-16-150733-5.

This book is a much revised, updated and expanded version of Pearce's Oxford Ph.D. thesis (1995), supervised by Geza Vermes and Martin Goodman. It deals with the interpretations of Deut 16:18–17:13 in the Second Temple period. The underlying main questions of this investigation are questions like: "To what extent were the laws of Deut 16:18–17:13 already recognized in this period as laws for an ideal constitution? Did Jewish interpreters think that these laws should be put into practical effect, and if so how and by whom?" (p. 6). The book is divided into an introduction, three main chapters and a short epilogue. The three chapters are dealing with (1) the appointment of judges: Deut 16:18–20; (2) the prohibition of single testimony: Deut 17:6par; and (3) the administration of justice at the central sanctuary: Deut 17:8–13.

Pearce starts off the introduction providing a short overview of the state of discussion that lead her to the questions mentioned above. She then briefly introduces the texts of Deuteronomy in the Second Temple period, namely the MT, the Samaritan Pentateuch, Qumran Manuscripts, and rabbinic writings and

Targums. Yet, she decides not to consider the rabbinic texts and Targums as main sources, due to the fact that it is very difficult to evaluate the Second Temple traditions behind these texts, which mainly reflect “the realities of a very different Jewish world, without the Temple and its priesthood” (p. 12). Finally, Pearce introduces the main sources for the interpretation of Deut 16:18–17:13 in the Second Temple period: The Books of Chronicles, LXX Deuteronomy, the Temple Scroll, Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. The decision to assign LXX Deuteronomy to the sources rather than the texts seems to me reasonable, since the translation from Hebrew into Greek certainly belongs to the Second Temple period, even if it might be based on an older Hebrew text tradition that differs from the MT.

In the three chapters, Pearce carefully examines the sources one by one. Several times she concludes that the sources take the relevant texts of Deuteronomy in a quite idealistic way. Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and 17:8–13 stand, for example, in the background of the narrative of Jehosaphat’s judiciary (2 Chr 19:4–7 and 8–11). However, according to Pearce this story “does not [...] reflect the actual judicial history of Judah at any time, but instead presents the Chronicler’s own distinctive vision of ideal judicial government” (p. 67). Similarly, when LXX translates the שטרִים as γραμματοεισαγωγείς, “scribe-instructors,” Pearce states that there is no evidence that they “existed outside the imagination of the translator” (p. 75). Elsewhere, she rejects the interpretation of Josephus’ dealing with Deut 17:8–13 “as description of the Sanhedrin of the first century CE” and proposes to read it rather as “an ideal model of the supreme authority in judgment, which goes back to the model of Moses himself” (p. 326). Concerning the sources that deal with Deut 16:18–20 she summarizes, “None of the sources provides substantial evidence to show that the biblical law was envisaged as having a role in any practical context” (p. 144).

The Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX and also the Temple Scroll show some attempts of harmonization of the texts with other biblical passages. In some cases, the laws are expanded, particularly the law that forbids a single testimony. According to the Damascus Document, a single testimony is valid if three single witnesses of three separate offences are combined. According to the Book of Susanne, witnesses must be questioned separately. Josephus (*Ant.* 4.129) extends the witness laws by explicating that a witness is only valid if his past makes his testimony reliable. Women and slaves are completely excluded as reliable witnesses. Since this does not follow universal Jewish practice, Pearce suggests that Josephus presents Moses’ teaching in a way which might “be expected to appeal to elite Romans” (p. 197). Philo, who draws not only on the Pentateuchal texts but also on Platonic traditions, arranges the laws under the headings of the Decalogue. Deuteronomy 16:18–20 and 17:6par. are treated under the ninth commandment (false testimony), while he deals with Deut 17:8–13 in another class of laws “as an ideal for all rulers to follow” (p. 305). In several cases, the sources apply the Deuteronomic laws to other contexts.

Philo “is probably the first known Jewish writer to transfer Deuteronomy’s requirement of two or three witnesses to matters outside the strictly juridical context” (p. 185). In the Testament of Abraham, the need of three witnesses stands in the context of the eschatological concept of a last judgment in three stages. The principle of two or three witnesses is taken up in the NT in several ways, e.g. in the community rule (Matt 18:15–17) or in a theological sense in the *Corpus Johanneum* (John 5:31–40; 8:14–18; 1 John 5:4b–12). According to Pearce, the words of the Johannine Jesus “in fact represent the strongest claim in all our sources for the status of the testimony demanded in Deuteronomy” (p. 228f.).

This study is indeed a careful and comprehensible examination of the different Second Temple period sources that deal with the relevant topics. Yet, I miss a clear synthesis. The “conclusions” of the chapters are summaries rather than conclusions. The same applies to the Epilogue. The analyses of the different sources remain quite isolated individual studies and leave me somewhat baffled in answering the questions asked on p. 6. The conclusion “that our major ancient sources for the interpretation of Deut 16:18–17:13 [...] have much to say about the ideal character of these laws as models of justice to be emulated and admired” (p. 329), followed by another list of what each source has to say, is quite vague. One of the questions on p. 6 is, for example, “Did Jewish interpreters think that these laws should be put into practical effect, and if so how and by whom?” If we assume an “ideal character” of the laws in the sources, then what is the answer to this question? Does an ideal character mean that Jewish interpreters didn’t think these laws should be put into practical effect? Or, only by the members of the community of faith? The conclusions of Pearce are in my view a little too superficial.

Nevertheless, this study provides a thorough analysis of the reception of Deut 16:18–17:13 in the Second Temple period, and is therefore an important contribution for the reception history of the Pentateuch in this period.

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Stone, Michael E. *Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views*. Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011. Paperback. xiv + 242 pages. US\$30.00. ISBN: 978-0-8028-6636-3.

In this book, Michael E. Stone examines several issues relevant to the study of Second Temple Judaism. It consists of seven chapters, an extensive and helpful

bibliography and two indices (subjects and names, as well as ancient sources). In each of the chapters of the book, Stone discusses a different topic concerning our knowledge of Second Temple Judaism and some of the many sources of such knowledge, especially the Dead Sea scrolls, Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature.

Stone's first chapter draws attention to the fact that "orthodoxy" (the forms of Judaism and Christianity that eventually gained dominance) has a major impact on how histories of the Second Temple period are written. This is so, because the dominant forms of Judaism and Christianity (1) determined, to a large extent, what sources are available for the period (by transmitting over a long span of time those Second Temple period writings that were acceptable from their points of view); and (2) continue to influence the perspectives from which historians view and construe the period. Stone challenges scholars to be sensitive to and critical of these "spectacles of orthodoxy" in their studies on Second Temple Judaism. For an inclusive historical portrayal of the period, it is necessary to make use of all the surviving evidence and data relating to the period. These include (1) contemporary writings transmitted (especially by the Church and often in translation) by hand and later in print; (2) partial or whole writings / traditions embedded in later works (such as those of the Church Fathers), and (3) archaeological discoveries (artefacts and manuscript finds).

In the following chapter, Stone focuses on the contributions that the non-sectarian pseudepigrapha from Qumran can make to our knowledge of Second Temple Judaism and how the distribution of these works provide insight into the way the Qumran community saw the state of the world.

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the topics of apocalyptic historiography and visions in pseudepigraphic apocalypses. With regard to the latter, Stone argues convincingly that the visions recounted in the pseudepigraphic apocalypses are rooted in real religious experiences. The traditions and "artificial" language of the apocalyptic literary genre provided the means by which these experiences could be communicated. Stone also points out that pseudepigraphy was a way the apocalypses could ensure authority for their bold claims regarding revealed redemptive knowledge. These claims were bolstered by attributing the visions to ancient worthies known from the authoritative written traditions.

In ch. 5, Stone tackles the complex issue of authoritative writings in the Second Temple period, especially the question when the five "books of Moses" / "Torah" gained special status as a collection. Stone is of the opinion that by the fourth century B.C.E. this group enjoyed pride of place as the most important of the "inspired" writings. The contents of the other known category of authoritative writings, the "Prophets," are more difficult to determine. Some of the important conclusions that Stone draws include the following:

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- (i) The collections of Torah and Prophets existed in the Second Temple period and these collections encompassed the writings that were regarded with special reverence.
 - (ii) During this period, different groups considered other writings to be inspired and authoritative without including them in the collections of either Torah or Prophets.
 - (iii) For the period before 70 C.E. terms such as “canon” and “Bible” are anachronistic and inappropriate.

With regard to the Dead Sea scrolls, Stone claims that for the Qumran community “inspired” status was not the same as “scriptural” status. Accordingly, all “scriptural” writings were regarded as inspired, but not all inspired writings were “scriptural.” For example, the Qumran community held writings such as *Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, the *Aramaic Levi Document*, the *Hôdayôt*, the *Habakkuk peshet*, the *Temple Scroll* and 4QMMT to be inspired and authoritative works, but they did not form part of the “scriptural books” included in the Torah and Prophets. It remains to be seen to what extent this all–thumbs–are–fingers–but–all–fingers–are–not–thumbs kind of argument will convince other scholars. One might also take issue with Stone’s use of terminology. When he states that “canonicity” and “Bible” are meaningless terms for the Second Temple period and in the same sub-heading writes that inspiration and revelation are not identical to “biblical” status at Qumran (pp. 148-149), the reader is left to wonder why Stone resorts again to concepts such as “biblical” and “scriptural” to distinguish between the Pentateuch and a writing such as *Jubilees*. Does the well-argued view that the Pentateuch formed an acknowledged and venerated collection by the time of Ezra necessitate a reading of the Qumran evidence in terms of the distinction between “biblical” inspired writings and non-“biblical” inspired writings? Furthermore, Stone does not discuss in detail the relevance of writings’ textual histories for the matter of their inspired and authoritative status. The issue of *Textgeschichte* is broached in the chapter, but, in view of the complex developments of some texts (e.g., the different literary editions evidenced by writings’ textual representatives from Qumran and their Greek translations), the interrelatedness of literary history, textual history and the recognition of inspired status merit detailed attention in a discussion of writings’ authoritative nature during the Second Temple period.

Chapter 6 deals with the transmission and authorship of so-called “textual clusters.” “Textual clusters” refer to multiple versions of the same textual material that cannot, with the available data, be related genetically to one another. These “clusters” include the different versions of the Life of Adam and Eve, the Esdras and Sedrach literature (Greek *Apocalypse of Esdras*, Greek *Apocalypse of Sedrach*, Latin *Visio beati Esdrae*, Armenian *Questions of Ezra*, and Armenian Expansions of *4 Ezra*), as well as the fragmentary Elijah literature.

In the final chapter, Stone discusses more issues concerning the transmission of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as some of the challenges facing modern scholarship devoted to these writings.

This book reflects the great erudition and experience of its well-known and –respected author. Stone proves himself capable of writing knowledgeably about the wide ranging and complex issues that form the topics of the book. Due to the complexity of the issues and the specialised nature of the scholarship devoted to them, however, it will not be surprising if many experts do not agree with the views Stone expresses on some of the topics. Nevertheless, Stone’s book issues clear challenges to future scholarship on Second Temple Judaism and many valuable insights will be gained from reading it. Finally, I suggest that (advanced) students who are interested in the Second Temple period will benefit greatly from Stone’s insights and the large amount of material he lists in the bibliography.

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John H. Walton, *Genesis*. Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 2013. Paperback. xv + 159 pages. Price US\$16.99. ISBN 978-0-310-49208-5.

This commentary was previously also a part of the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume 1, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, published in 2009, of which Walton was the general editor. The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary also includes Volume 2 (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel), Volume 3 (1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther), and Volume 4 (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel). Monetarily, Volume 1 is selling at a reasonable price compared to buying a single book commentary. If one is simply interested in Genesis, buying the single book commentary is the way to go; however, to get the best value for money, the volumes are a better deal.

The commentary begins with an Introduction which addresses in brief the issues of authorship, historical setting, literary setting, and Genesis and mythology. For Walton, we cannot afford to lose what there is to learn in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature in an attempt to preserve the conviction of the unique status of the Bible as the Word of God (p. 9). The commentary section presents background information to various biblical concepts that have ANE comparables. Genesis 1:1–3:24, the Creation and Fall section, receives great attention as compared to other sections. This is understandable, considering the attention that Gen 1–3 has received through the ages, and also the modern debates regarding the cosmogonies in this text and the scientific

worldview. Walton's extensive work on the Gen 1 cosmology in light of other ANE cosmogonies is also reflected in his other more technical background works published between 2009 and 2013. In this commentary, the tying of various concepts in Genesis with the conceptual world of the ANE makes this commentary a useful resource in exploring and understanding the world to which the text refers to (or the story world). The commentary includes 149 images (excluding the maps). The inclusion of pictorial evidence, seals, and maps helps the reader to visualize the Ancient Near Eastern world to which the text refers. Also noticeable is the attention given to places in terms of giving the geographical descriptions, brief history, and maps, which all aid the reader to locate and understand the significance of the locations in the biblical text.

The commentary discusses the various backgrounds without making overt claims about the historicity of Genesis. The ANE literature is not used to support or dismiss the historicity of the Genesis narrative – parallels and contrasts are noted whether they support or conflict the biblical narrative. In many instances a variety of possibilities are presented leaving it to the reader to draw inferences. Note the following examples: In Gen 3:5, Walton discusses concepts of godlikeness with reference to Gilgamesh, Adapa, and Enkidu as parallels to the Adam and Eve attempt to be godlike. Walton writes, "These examples show that in the Ancient world it was common for people to meditate on ways in which people succeeded and failed in becoming like deity. ... This is then an excellent example of how the comparison between the Bible and ANE literature shows a similar landscape but with important variations in the essential nature of the issue" (p. 35). In Gen 5:24 Walton discusses the issue of humans taken to heaven. Enoch's ascension experience is not regarded as uncommon considering other figures from ANE literature, who also had similar experiences, namely Etana and Adapa, and Utnapishtim (p. 43). The commentary is intended to immerse the biblical reader into the ANE world; however, it is left for the readers to manoeuvre on the basis of their convictions or to develop new convictions in the process. This commentary will be a useful resource for lay readers, pastors, students, and scholars.

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