

mainstream scholars. While Sprinkle, as we have noted, provides E2 readers with a detailed defence of the E2 approach to Daniel, arguing that it is academically more reasonable than the mainstream view, this is even clearer with Tanner. Tanner describes what the aim of this commentary is: “For too long, critical scholars have dominated the discussion of Daniel. I hope this commentary will fill a much-needed gap, providing evangelical pastors and teachers with a full-orbed commentary.”⁶¹ This sentiment is also clear from the endorsements for the book, e.g., “The evangelical world has long needed a commentary of this magnitude ... If you can only own one commentary on Daniel, this is it.”⁶² I take this to mean that this commentary is meant to be the one stop shop so that evangelicals do not have to look at mainstream commentaries and be led astray. Why bother reading, say, Collins, when Tanner has (allegedly) covered all the same ground (but from a theologically “sounder” angle)? In fact, in my judgement, what has been produced are two large commentaries on Daniel that are (especially in Tanner’s case) apparently comprehensive in their coverage of issues and bibliography, and yet, are very often misleading in their presentation and engagement with mainstream scholarship.

OTHER BOOK REVIEWS

MARIO BAGHOS, *From the Ancient Near East to Christian Byzantium: Kings, Symbols and Cities* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021). Pp. xxxviii + 264. Hardback. £64.99.

This monograph written by my former colleague, Mario Baghos, is a detailed and insightful study of the symbolism of city and kingship in ancient cultures in the wider Mediterranean world. What first makes the subject matter interesting and thought-provoking is the sharp contrast between ancient and modern cities. While modern cities are conditioned by Central Business Districts, utilitarian in structure and outlook, structures of ancient cities were motivated by a deep human consciousness of imitating the sacred. Ancient societies built their city to be the *axis mundi* and *imago mundi*, “centre of the world” and “image of the world,” striving to make their existence meaningful by cosmicising their living space and thus participating in the sacred (xii). The ancient city recapitulated the three cosmic tiers of the celestial, terrestrial and subterranean/inferral, while their rulers embodied and regulated cosmic order, a function Baghos terms “ecosystemic agents” (xvii). This monograph surveys how this universal religious consciousness was encapsulated, albeit in diverse ways, in ancient

⁶¹ Tanner, *Daniel 2*.

⁶² Endorsement by Rick Griffith at Tanner, *Daniel* ii.

Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, as well as biblical Israel, early Christianity, and Rome and Byzantium after Christianisation.

As an overview, two admirable characteristics of the book should be commented on, the first of which is the broad scope around the one central thesis, and the amazingly wide range of sources. The author draws evidence from civilisations that are Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, Minoan and Mycenaean, Greco-Roman, and Judeo-Christian. The materials also come in diverse genres such as epic poetry, philosophical works, historical accounts, Jewish and Christian scriptures, rabbinic and patristic texts, imperial panegyrics, and ancient visual art and architecture.

The second characteristic worthy of remark is its diachronic or longitudinal approach, gaining insight from the *longue durée* into the development and transformation of cultures and religious mentalities. Preceded by “Introduction” and “Definition” (which, in my opinion, should form a chapter proper in their own right), the book has eight chapters, arranged chronologically from Mesopotamia 5000 BC to Christian Constantinople in the medieval period. At the heart of the book are two important chapters on “Israel” and “Christianity” respectively, which, through exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament and early Christian texts, present the symbolism of city, mountain, and temple as *axis et imago mundi* and God himself as king and the ecosystemic agent in early Judaism and Christianity—as interactions with and responses to Ancient Near Eastern notions on the one hand, and to Greco-Roman ideas and practices on the other.

To make this review most relevant to the interests of *ABR*'s readers, I will focus on the chapters on “Israel” and “Christianity” specifically. In Chapter Five, “Israel,” Baghos looks into the symbolism within the Hebrew Bible that presents Mount Zion, the City of Jerusalem and the Temple as *imagines et axes mundi*, and how these images share the same symbolic force with and recapitulate Eden, Jacob's ladder, Sinai/Horeb and so on in the Pentateuch and prophetic books. Intertwined with that symbolic cosmic centre is the Son of David and Son of Man figures, portrayed as the ecosystemic Messiah in Israelite eschatological expectations. There are striking parallels with Near Eastern cosmogonies and theophanic motifs, as Baghos points out (96); it makes one recognise not only how ancient Israelites were influenced by neighbourly civilisations but also how they made counterclaims—using the same symbols—about the true referents of these shared symbols.

Chapter Six is the longest and also “the most pivotal” (230) chapter of the book. Through a survey of the Gospels and Pauline epistles, Baghos argues that what the early Christians claimed was that Jesus Christ is to be identified as both *axis mundi* and the personal ecosystemic agent, who assumes the identity of multiple biblical images: the tabernacle, the Temple, the cosmic mountain, the vine (who is Son of David, Son of Man, the Temple builder; see Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8, 6:12; Ps 80: 14–15, 17), and the cornerstone. Being the lamb

“slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 3:8) and the one who “descended into the lower parts of the earth” and “ascended far above all the heavens” (Eph 4:9–10; also 1 Pet 3:19), Christ intersects and transcends the subterranean, earthly and celestial realms “as an *axis mundi* and an ecosystemic agent” (132). The Cross presents the most direct visual representation of the vertical axis that unites all three realms. Baghos comments that “early Christians did not dispense with the *imagines et axes mundi* and ecosystemic symbolism inhering in Israelite culture”—shared with and appropriated from Mesopotamia and Egypt, “nevertheless they transferred it emphatically to Christ, the eternal head of the Church, who is the goal of the celestial Zion and Jerusalem” (129). I would differ slightly by saying that it was not a transferral but an actualisation of that symbolism. The early Christians were Jews who recognised Jesus as the very image that once had been only dimly traceable through the various symbols in their Scriptures but was now clearly appearing before their own eyes. Chapter Six further offers a particularly detailed exegesis of the symbolism in the Book of Revelation, which worked as a rebuke to the false claim of the Roman empire to be the centre of the world and cosmic lord, and as a reclaim of the symbolism of the *axis et imago mundi* for Christ and his heavenly Jerusalem. The New Testament understanding of this symbolism received confirmation in patristic writings, was applied in the lives of saints, and transformed over time the use of symbols in Rome and Constantinople from the 4th century—topics dealt with in the remaining part of Chapter Six and the following chapters.

I fully recommend Baghos’s book to everyone who is interested in the study of ancient religions and cultures, which offers valuable alternative perspectives on our own culture and time. For students of biblical texts in particular, the book draws our attention to the symbolic mentalities of ancient authors, and that, in turn, raises questions about how to better read and interpret their texts.

LYDIA GORE-JONES

St Andrew’s Theological College, Sydney College of Divinity

HANNAH K. HARRINGTON, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2022). Pp. v + 529. Hardback. US\$52.00.

Hannah K. Harrington’s commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament is a welcome contribution to the field. Harrington’s commentary replaces Charles Fensham’s contribution to the series which was published in 1982. With the rise of publications on Ezra-Nehemiah an updated commentary was necessary, and Harrington’s work is a fresh update.

The commentary begins with an exhaustive 97-page introduction. This introduction covers the expected topics and the discussions that are unique to Ezra-