

ARTHUR WALKER-JONES, *Psalms Book 2: An Earth Bible Commentary, "As the Doe Groans"* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2020). Pp. vi + 173. Paperback. AU\$59.99.

This volume is part of the *Earth Bible Commentary* series, several volumes of which are now published—from Jonah, Ecclesiastes and Ruth, to John, Acts, Colossians and Hebrews.

The background to the volumes is the work of the series editor, Norman Habel, who has focused on ecological hermeneutics for over twenty years, firstly with a series of commentaries beginning with the title *The Earth Story* in the early 2000s and more recently with a second series where volume titles incorporate the words *An Earth Bible Commentary*. Knowledge of the six Earth Bible principles Habel articulates in the introductory chapter of *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008) is critical to understanding the focus and methodology of Walker-Jones. An editor's foreword outlining the focus of the series would, however, make the methodology of the Earth Bible series more accessible, despite Walker-Jones addressing methodology in his own terms in the introductory chapter.

Within the concept of Earth, written with a capital letter to develop the idea of Earth as subject not as something inanimate, Walker-Jones' primary interest is animals and ecology. Walker-Jones chooses "Psalms Book 2" as biblical evidence, giving the reason that references to animals are numerous in Psalms 42–72. Possible translations from the Hebrew to English are frequently discussed. This is reflected in the third part of the title, "*As the Doe Groans*," a translation from the Hebrew of Ps 42:1 [2] by Walker-Jones, which is in contrast to, for example, "as a deer longs" (NRSV).

The volume is structured with an introductory chapter followed by seven chapters. In the introductory chapter, Walker-Jones explains his engagement in the animal world and ecological issues, and includes personal stories. In the seven chapters, he works his way sequentially through the thirty psalms of Psalms Book 2, which are subdivided into seven groups. The chapters are of varying lengths—Chapter 3 "Urban Empire (Pss 45–49)" occupies pages 51–60, and Chapter 6 "Earth as Enemy (Pss 56–60)" occupies pages 89–117. In each chapter different animals and features of Earth are discussed. An ecological aspect is extrapolated from the discussions of each chapter which is reflected in the chapter headings.

Though Walker-Jones' primary interest is to investigate animals and ecology in the psalms, in the process of his investigations he applies standard exegetical techniques, turning if pertinent to biblical parallelism, issues of the multivalency of metaphor, analysis of psalm types and form criticism, and images of God. Superscriptions and relationships between different groups of psalms within Book 2 are also discussed, if such information advances points Walker-Jones wants to make.

As animals or features of Earth appear in the psalms, they are discussed in terms of the cultures of the ancient Near Eastern world, insofar as this is possible to reconstruct. This involves looking at the animals in a wide range of ways, from animal taxonomy to archaeological evidence. Walker-Jones speaks of, for example, the ecological needs of *caprines* (e.g. 39) and proffers data from research papers and evidence of sheep and goat bones found at archaeological sites.

In Chapter 2, titled “‘As a Doe Groans’ (Pss. 42–44),” animals that appear, such as the doe (Ps 42:2 [1]), and sheep and goats by way of reference to flock in Ps 44:12–13 [11–12]), or Ps 44:23 [22]) (38–50), are addressed. The subject of sheep and goats encompasses issues such as domestication of animals, pasturing needs of the animals, length of life for male or female, and use of animal by-products, from wool to dairy and meat. Biblical Hebrew is relatively rich in vocabulary for sheep and goats which reflects the importance of these animals. Domestication of sheep and goats permits discussing the relationship between animals and humans in terms of interdependence or interrelationship (e.g. 39), wherein Walker-Jones uses Oded Borowski’s terms of “nomadic, transhuman and sedentary” (e.g. 42). Discussion in the footnotes and the bibliography are valuable for readers seeking recent research and information on specific animals. In the course of presenting evidence on sheep, Walker-Jones ventures into broader literary evidence with a story from the *Odyssey* (e.g. 44) and also draws on the parable of “The poor man’s lamb” that Nathan relates to David (2 Sam 12:3).

On a conceptual level, Walker-Jones proffers the idea of “Earth as a Refuge (Pss 51–55)” in Chapter 5, after working through possible meanings of hyssop, images of the green olive tree and wings of a dove. Walker-Jones likens David lamenting his sins to a green olive tree nourished by the environment and “rooted in Earth” (e.g., 87). Therein is expressed the desire and possible reintegration of humanity with “Earth and Earth community.” In contrast, in Chapter 6 the idea of “Earth as Enemy (Pss. 56–60)” is proposed as Walker-Jones writes of “God attacking Earth” (e.g. 117). The quaking and shaking of the ground echoes fractured humanity suffering hardship. With yet another turn, in Chapter 7 (Pss 61–64 and 65–68) God is portrayed as rock and “Earth’s Joy.”

The last decades challenge scholars to interpret biblical texts with the lens of issues, such as feminism or post-colonialism, which arise as society moves and changes. Walker-Jones’ work on Psalms 52–72 is from the perspective of ecological and Earth readings. These varied perspectives bring new insights and fresh meaning to the biblical texts. However, sometimes the interests of the perspective push sense beyond the plain or natural meaning of the text.

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