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## Book Review: The God Ezekiel Creates

Brian R. Doak

George Fox University, [bdoak@georgefox.edu](mailto:bdoak@georgefox.edu)

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PAUL M. JOYCE and DALIT ROM-SHILONI (eds.), *The God Ezekiel Creates* (LHBOTS 607; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015). Pp. xiv + 217. \$120.

This deftly edited volume is a collection of ten essays on Ezekiel's unique presentation of God. Indeed, as Joyce and Rom-Shiloni write in the preface, "[F]ew, if any, books of the Bible . . . have a more distinctive presentation of the deity than the book of Ezekiel, or are more dominated by the central place taken by the divine figure" (p. xiii). This core focus on Ezekiel's God organizes the topics and (most of) the titles in the volume, all of which were written by presenters in the Society of Biblical Literature's section on "Theological Perspectives on the Book of Ezekiel" (in 2010, 2011, and 2012): Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, "The God Ezekiel Envisions"; John T. Strong, "The God That Ezekiel Inherited"; Madhavi Nevader, "Creating a *Deus Non Creator*: Divine Sovereignty and Creation in Ezekiel"; Dexter Callender Jr., "The Recognition Formula and Ezekiel's Conception of God"; Ellen van Wolde, "The God Ezekiel 1 Envisions"; Corrine L. Carvalho, "The God That Gog Creates: 'Drop the Stories and Feel the Feelings'"; Stephen L. Cook, "Ezekiel's God Incarnate! The God That the Temple Blueprint Creates"; Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Ezekiel that G-d Creates"; Daniel I. Block, "The God Ezekiel Wants Us to Meet: Theological Perspectives on the Book of Ezekiel"; and Nathan MacDonald, "The God That the Scholarship on Ezekiel Creates." The volume ends with indexes of primary sources and authors.

Readers of even the titles of the essays in the volume will notice the coherence of the theme of "Ezekiel's deity," yet the authors strike out in many directions to trace elements of this theme.

Darr's opening essay takes the form of a refutation of a study that attempts to see in Ezekiel a wounded, traumatized deity. On the contrary, Darr argues, God's own commanding agency in the book—arguably Ezekiel's most defining feature—is the ruling idea.

Strong contends, against prevailing arguments, that Ezekiel did not reinvent Israel's religion in a visionary manner, but rather the prophet used the inherited symbolism of Zion theology. Even though Ezekiel used some Zion terminology and other imagery compatible with the Zion myth, he did so in a subtle manner that recognized the exilic state of temple and monarchy.

Nevader attempts to make the case that creation traditions are not only hard to find in the book—"they are entirely absent" (p. 63). For the most part, Nevader takes aim at weak arguments about creation language that rely on a single word or a vague set of associations that cannot be clearly linked with Genesis 1–2 or any of the *Chaoskampf* traditions. In the end, she makes a provocative suggestion about this lack of creation imagery: as a counter to the Babylonian Marduk's claim as creator, Ezekiel opted not for appropriation of the rival deity's powers (cf. Isaiah 40–55) but rather for complete silence on the issue.

Callender explores the Ezekielian recognition formula "they/you will know that I am Yhwh" through the lens of Lacanian structuralism and other related concepts of language and subjectivity, arguing that Ezekiel's deity is not cast in onto-theological terms but rather appears as a subjective and contingent part of the book's symbolic universe.

Van Wolde carries out a study in the style of a literary and linguistic commentary on Ezekiel's first chapter. Among many other insights, she argues that the word *qeset* in Ezek 1:28 refers not to a "rainbow" but to a warrior's "bow," along the lines of ancient Near Eastern depictions of the divine warrior armed with a bow.

Carvalho encourages us to “feel the feelings” and experience the Gog narrative in Ezekiel 38–39 as an “aesthetic artifact.” Her treatment of elements such as the use of symbolic space and the role of nature in the divine warrior motif combine elements of historical context and literary analysis, invoking concepts such as “magical realism” and “virtual reality” to describe the audience’s triumphant participation as viewers of the drama.

Cook’s essay takes up the interpretive line that considers Ezekiel an inheritor of the H tradition (Leviticus 17–26) to argue that Ezekiel’s God is anthropomorphic, audible to people, and present on earth (as opposed to alternative depictions in Isaiah 40–66). Ezekiel’s distinct contribution to this theology locates God’s glory in a “permanent, secured presence” (p. 141) within the visionary temple of Ezekiel 40–48.

Sweeney flips the title theme around and inquires into the book’s “Ezekielcentricity,” the Ezekiel God creates. Ezekiel’s career as a priest maps onto various elements of the book, even including chaps. 40–48, as Ezekiel’s seven-day silence following the initial visionary experience corresponds to priestly ceremonies in Exodus 29, Leviticus 8, and Numbers 8.

Block’s essay is reprinted from an earlier publication (in his *By the River Chebar: Historical, Literary, and Theological Studies in the Book of Ezekiel* [Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013] 44–72); he attempts to defend Ezekiel from charges that the prophet is graceless and hopeless. Instead, Block argues “that elements of ‘grace’ and ‘hope’ are not even limited to restoration texts that offer hope for the future, but the notion underlies the entire book, and that Ezekiel’s message can only be understood against the backdrop of the history of YHWH’s [com]passion for his people and Israel’s response thereto” (p. 167).

MacDonald closes out the volume with a thoughtful review of each essay, which readers can consult for further criticism and commentary.

*The God Ezekiel Creates* exhibits the same strengths/weaknesses dichotomy as almost all books of its type—namely, what it lacks in theoretical and even, despite its titular theme, topical coherence, it makes up for by offering to readers approaches that highlight the vibrant diversity of contemporary Ezekiel studies. Scholars of theological perspectives on Ezekiel will find in this volume a feast of studies that point forward to new directions and to old directions considered anew, while those new to the field will find a solid, representative sample of current work.

*Brian Doak, George Fox University, Newberg, OR 97132*