

Baal has a house, for example; Yahweh eats and bathes; and Kothar wields a bow and arrows. Texts also use simile and metaphor to attribute human, animal, vegetable, and even natural qualities to deities. Many of these comparisons are aspirational, and point out “what humans are not, but might wish to be” (50). A statement like “Baal sits (enthroned) like the sitting of a mountain,” for example, attributes to Baal qualities of size, majesty, and solidity that worshippers could themselves receive (54). Similarly, the golden calves of Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12: 28–29) are more than simple throne-pedestals. They are metaphors for Yahweh’s martial power. S. makes a cogent case for this claim, using comparative iconography to show that many cultures associated storm deities and bovids. Cultic interactions with the calf icons allowed martial worshippers to receive the power symbolized in them.

S. ends his study with an investigation of cities, which, he claims, were “temples writ large.” He traces the way that urban shrines take on to themselves the prestige of older, usually rural, shrines. S. demonstrates from sources as various as liturgical texts and treatises that this relationship existed between the cults of Baal in Ugarit and Sapon, as well as the shrines of Yahweh in Zion and in Hebron and Teman. These earlier shrines had prestige because they were anthropomorphic “houses” of the deity; similarly, whole cities became the god’s house when they inherited the prestige.

S. ties his reflections together with his final thoughts on the personification of Jerusalem. Cities, as human communities and loci of ritual activity, represent the human before the anthropomorphized divine. Jerusalem’s personification, therefore, is a consequence of Yahweh’s anthropomorphic qualities. Jerusalem is Yahweh’s “female counterpart,” that mediates his presence and nature, an idea found both in Revelation 21: 2, 9–27, and Augustine’s *City of God*.

S. thoroughly demonstrates his claim that sacred spaces make divinity available for human communities. Not only do they illustrate claims about divine nature, they make participation in it available through worship. S.’s encyclopedic knowledge of primary sources coupled with his insights on the anthropomorphism provide new insights on ancient ritual practice and divine ideology. This book belongs in the library or on the syllabus of anyone interested in the religion of ancient Israel.

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*Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of the Johannine Literature and Why It Matters.* By Urban C. von Wahle. Library of New Testament Studies 517. New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015. Pp. xix + 229. \$112.

“. . . The present approach shows that the background of the Gospel can be understood much more fully and more precisely when viewed within the context of the compositional history of the Gospel and Letters” (xviii). The history shows that the development was far from homogeneous. “Rather the tradition was rocked again and again by

crisis, a tumult caused by repeated reconceptualization and reinterpretation of the ministry” of Jesus (212). Eerdmans has written a three-volume commentary *The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (2010) that substantiates in greater detail the claims made in this volume. While he offers a helpful summary in a “Prequel,” the issues raised here can be evaluated on their own grounds.

Part 1 provides a fine review of various viewpoints on Gnosticism and part 2 on Docetism in both 1 John and the Gospel. But the key to the book is part 3, that proposes the weaving together of three distinct forms of first-century Judaism: the canonical Hebrew scriptures (without apocalyptic); the considerably different worldview of apocalyptic; and the Hellenistic worldview of the diaspora principally represented by Josephus and Philo. The author actually proposes six phases in the development of the Johannine community’s history derived from the various “contexts” of the Johannine literature. The stages “are most clearly and most meaningfully distinguishable by the evolution of the Johannine theological tradition under what the community believed was the profound guidance of the Spirit” (189). The fourth refers to the crisis in 2–3 John and the sixth to the Hellenistic background of the Prologue, but the crucial insight is the introduction of the apocalyptic viewpoint of 1 John between the second and third editions of the Gospel.

The first edition is a straightforward narrative that includes all the “signs” up to the raising of Lazarus with a progression of belief on the part of the common people and a corresponding increase of hostility on the part of the “Pharisees,” “chief priests,” and “rulers” (190). The detailed and accurate knowledge about historical places indicates a witness that was close to the actual events. The second edition reflects the first major crisis of theological disagreement that led to expulsion from the synagogue. The charge of blasphemy is based on claims about the identity of Jesus and the validity of his “witnesses” (John, the “works,” the words of Jesus as from the Father, and the Scriptures). Adversaries are simply referred to as “the Jews” but the argumentation is fully Jewish (rabbinic) with the claim to possess the prerogatives of the Spirit, such as to “know” God with no need for anyone to teach them and freedom from sin and judgment (192).

The apocalyptic worldview of 1 John created a crisis of interpretation. Apocalyptic was not new except to the Johannine tradition but it modified the understanding of the benefits received from the bestowal of the Spirit. Now it is possible to sin so eternal life is not guaranteed. There is need for correct belief and ethical practice. Material reality is important: the teaching of Jesus “from the beginning” and his bodily death as an atonement for sin. The third edition (the fifth phase) incorporates theological changes based on the apocalyptic worldview of 1 John as well as other concerns such as the community’s relation to the apostolic church. But the most important factor is that apocalyptic introduces a dualism of opposed forces, the Spirit vs. Satan, this age and the age to come, the love commandment only for those who belong to the community, and so on.

In part 4, the author offers concluding reflections on “why it matters.” “Most interpreters do not raise the question of the worldview presupposed by the Gospel when they go to interpret it. This has been the cause of a number of serious errors in

interpretation” (183). Thus, the first reason is to interpret the Gospel properly in the light of the complexity of the various worldviews. This helps to avoid interpreting the Gospel as anti-Jewish, as exclusive in the love commandment, as ambiguous in relation to the “world,” and so on. Other reasons pertain to recognizing the stages of composition and the nature of the community behind the Gospel, which he develops in the final chapter. The book is an intriguing and insightful view of the Johannine literature that can help to solve some of the more difficult and seemingly insoluble conundrums that the Gospel and the Letters present. I highly recommend it along with the fuller commentary.

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*The Role of Old Testament Theology in Old Testament Interpretation and Other Essays.*  
By Walter Brueggemann. Edited by K. C. Hanson. Havertown, PA: Casemate Academic, 2015. Pp. xiv + 190. \$30.

This volume consists of nine essays by Brueggemann, which originally appeared in *Festschriften*, all published between 1995 and 2003, except one essay from 1978. Because *Festschriften* can become graveyards for fine essays left undisturbed by readers, the decision to bring these essays into a single volume is praiseworthy. The quality of the essays validates the decision and rewards the reader. Naturally, the volume lacks the scope of B.’s monumental *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997; reprinted 2005), and it also falls short of *Ice Axes for Frozen Seas: A Biblical Theology of Provocation* (ed. D. Hankins, 2014), which provides a more programmatic collection of B.’s writings. Nonetheless, the essays in this volume may be regarded as a valuable supplement to those books.

B. has long established himself as one of the most prolific, prophetic, and theologically-sensitive exegetes of the Old Testament, and this collection highlights some key aspects of his biblical theology. For example, two recurrent themes in B.’s work are: (1) his insistence that biblical theology not be separated from the biblical texts themselves or from the readers who interpret them; and (2) his conviction that theological contradictions among those texts should not be minimized but taken as evidence of God’s inherent plurality.

Both themes are found in the essay “Texts that Linger, Not Yet Overcome,” which considers biblical instances of divine abandonment and invites interpretive communities to come to terms with the “unsettling character” of God. Likewise, “A Characteristic Reflection on What Comes Next (Jer 32: 16–44)” and “A Shattered Transcendence?: Exile and Restoration” explore the incongruity between Israel’s lived experience of destruction and exile and God’s promise of restoration. In both essays, B. emphasizes that such discontinuity reveals “a God who moves in and through terrible disjunctions to newness” (109).

Another key feature of B.’s theology is the concomitance of God’s sovereignty and his solidarity with humans. In “The Epistemological Crisis of Israel’s Two Histories,”