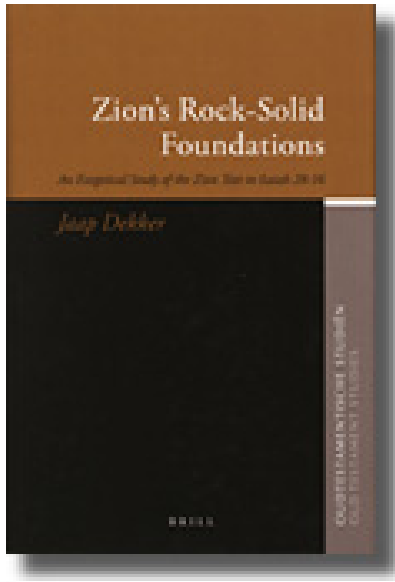


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Dekker, Jaap

Zion's Rock-Solid Foundations: An Exegetical Study of the Zion Text in Isaiah 28:16

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This book is based on Jaap Dekker's 2004 Ph.D. dissertation, undertaken at Apeldoorn Theological University in the Netherlands, which has been translated from Dutch to English by Brian Doyle (K.U. Leuven). The author admits that the present study was almost ten years in production, and the time spent in research is highlighted by the expansive bibliography, spanning some twenty-three pages and several languages. The author identifies from the start that the subject of "Zion" is dealt with in more depth in the book of Isaiah than any other text of the Hebrew Bible, and the text makes a significant declaration concerning Zion in 28:16 ("therefore thus says the Lord GOD, See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: 'One who trusts will not panic'" NRSV 1991). This verse and the images within were employed with the introduction of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and have been included in the language associated with Christology, in addition to the original preaching of the prophet, particularly concerning the connection between his words of judgment and his words of salvation.

The first chapter provides an introduction and methodological considerations. The wide-ranging aim of the work is to review the implications of the 28:16 and its imagery for a contemporary understanding of the Zion theme by primarily investigating the

interpretation of the verse in its original context in the Hebrew Bible. Dekker makes it clear that he does not agree with an antihistorical reading of the text of the book of Isaiah (4). With this method, the historical roots of the prophetic word are deemed immaterial for a modern-day understanding of the text and its message. The author aims to allow the synchronic approach to interrelate with a diachronic method and to concentrate on the preaching of the historical prophet Isaiah so as to adequately consider the function of “Zion” in the text (5).

Chapter 2 provides a review of the diverse ways in which this Zion text has been understood in the course of history. Dekker begins with the Septuagint reading of 28:16 (11), followed by its interpretation in the New Testament and by several eminent exegetes in the early church, such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, and Cyril. The treatment of the Zion text of Isa 28:16 within Judaism is treated separately, with concentration on Qumran (25), Targum Jonathan (28), and the Talmud (30). The interpretation of the “stone” in the Qumran community avoids any messianic explanation but rather relates the content in ecclesiological terms with the community itself. The version of Isa 28:16 in the Isaiah Targum speaks of a dominant sovereign whom YHWH will establish on Mount Zion. The allusion to the Zion text in the Talmud is principally concerning the temple, and unlike other messianic interpretations of “stone texts” elsewhere in the Midrash (e.g., Gen 28:18), the Talmud does not feature any messianic interpretations of the stone referred to in Isa 28:16. Following a concise appraisal of the relevant medieval exegesis, attention is focused on the interpretations of Luther and Calvin. Taking into consideration that one of the objectives of the Reformation movement had been to realign Christianity with the Scriptures (51), Dekker notes that Luther’s reading of 28:16 is extremely soteriological and intrinsically linked with his thinking on the subject of justification (63). Calvin’s ecclesiological explanation of the text is in line with the authority of the New Testament, where Jesus Christ is termed as the “cornerstone” given by God and stemming from Zion and is the foundation rather than the unifier (53). The chapter concludes with a survey of the history of exegesis of the verse, with a review of interpretations carried out in the twentieth century. In limited space, Dekker admirably manages to survey the principal components of modern interpretations of the text in question, including Hans Wildberger’s metaphorical reading of the stone and the small group of exegetes who maintain a messianic interpretation of the text (54).

Chapter 3 looks to the literary and historical context of the text and focuses on a number of important preliminary issues as groundwork for the exegetical study of the text: colometric analysis of Isa 28 (66); delineation of pericopes within with Isa 28 (73); the unity of the pericope in which the Zion text of 28:16 is to be found; the authenticity and date of the said prophecy together with an outline of the historical situation corresponding with the suggested date (during the period of Hezekiah’s revolt against

Sennacherib). An excursus concerning the prophetic historiography of 2 Kgs 18–19, a text that consists of the narrative of Jerusalem’s deliverance, highlights that the account is twofold in form and derived from an intentional prophetic composition of the text (101). One of the principal merits of this work is the clear and logical layout of the detailed exegesis of the Hebrew or Greek of the text. The analysis of the colometry of Isa 28 (68–72) is a case in point.

Chapter 4 is devoted to exegesis of Isa 28:16 with the immediate context of the pericope in which it is located and against the broader background of Isa 28 as a whole. An additional excursus linked with the exegesis of the text follows and deals in particular with the relationship between the “covenant with death” that is referred to in 28:15, 18 and necromancy. This chapter forms the center of the argument in the book, as it offers the author’s answer to the question regarding the exegesis of the Zion text in 28:16. Dekker focuses on the unified terminological, thematic, and historical relationships between the vital prophecies of judgment (28:7–13, 14–22) and the instruction of 28:23–29 as the groundwork of his argument and notes that “it is not by accident that a prophetic instruction, in which the language of wisdom is employed, is located precisely at the end of Isaiah 28” (241).

The sphere of study is widened in the fifth chapter from an exegetical analysis of the individual pericopes of Isa 28 and their affiliation to the position of chapter 28 in the book of Isaiah as a whole, and 28:14–22 in particular within the redactional unit of Isa 28–33. Dekker’s clear yet thorough analysis of the text in this wider context sees Isa 28 as the “overture” (258) to the redactional unit of Isa 28–33, and thus the prophecy of judgment featured in 28:14–22 (262) can therefore be appreciated as an interpretative key to the rest of this section of the passage.

Chapter 6 examines the meaning and significance of the Zion theme in Proto-Isaiah. The understandable limitations in the scope of a doctoral dissertation do mean that the author does not include a comprehensive investigation of the Zion tradition. The author clearly states that the use of the name “Zion” in Proto-Isaiah may be clearly divided into three distinct categories of texts (266), namely those where clear mention is made of Mount Zion, to the daughter of Zion, and finally to texts in which Zion is used autonomously. This method of approach to his research allows for an excellent survey of the text of Proto-Isaiah. It makes his conclusions easily applicable to the matter of the prophet’s preaching, where Dekker concludes that the prophet was of the opinion that Zion was the most important salvific institution that YHWH had founded and that, although the people would be judged, this sacred institution would remain steadfast (325).

Chapters 7 and 8 offer a summary of the main conclusions and helpfully follow the sequence of the previous chapters. Principally, Dekker underlines his assertion that the Zion motif serves as the area of juxtaposition between Isaiah's preaching of judgment and his preaching of salvation. The Zion text of Isa 28:16 operates in the framework of the declaration of judgment; the impact of its expression is of such size that the thought expressed in it and in connected Zion texts must almost certainly have contributed to the more forward-looking salvific preaching concerning Zion.

The book concludes with an appendix in which the results of the research are further examined from the perspective of the New Testament and also features an index of authors and biblical texts, although no index of themes or terms.

Overall this is an excellent book, well-structured and laid out as is befitting a dissertation. While the vast and detailed content does make it somewhat extensive for those who may not have sufficient background in studies of the book of Isaiah, it is a worthwhile study for anyone interested in the Zion theme as a whole in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, as well as those who have a particular interest in the book of Isaiah, particularly Proto-Isaiah and the preaching of the historical figure of Isaiah. Unfortunately, the cost of the book would presumably prohibit individuals from purchasing it out of interest alone; disappointingly, for biblical studies it will likely be accessible only through purchase by institutions and libraries.