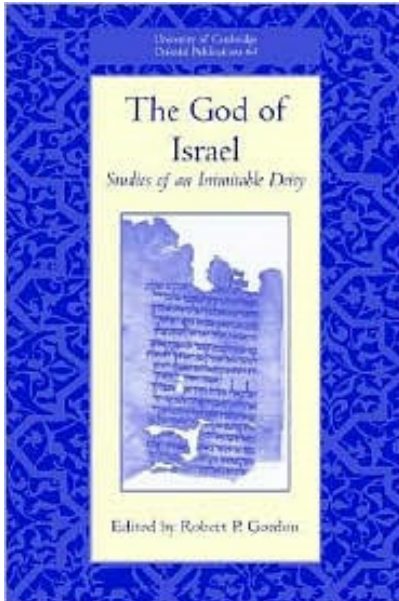


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The God of Israel

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What might we anticipate in a volume of essays entitled *The God of Israel*? I imagine each scholar's anticipations on opening such a volume would differ. This particular book collects a variety of papers presented in "a series of seminars held under the auspices of the Old Testament Seminar of the Faculty of Divinity and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge, in the period 2001–2004" (xi). The essays are grouped into two main sections: "Part I. General Perspectives," and "Part II. Texts and Themes." The papers are listed below, each with a brief description that, of course, fails to do justice to complex and carefully articulated arguments.

Part I. General Perspectives

The introductory piece by Robert P. Gordon, "Introducing the God of Israel," provides an overview of the volume as a whole and briefly comments on the various contributions. Nathan MacDonald, in "Aniconism in the Old Testament," examines the various explanations that have been offered for Israel's aniconic traditions and turns to an exegetical analysis of Ezekiel, Isa 40–48, and Deut 4 to suggest that "human beings, especially Israel, are the appropriate, alternative locus for the divine presence" (34). John Barton's essay contributes to the discussion of the place of the "Imitation of God in the

Old Testament,” concluding that while this at times is a helpful category it cannot be seen as a key to the ethics of the Hebrew Bible.

Ronald E. Clements (“Monotheism and the God of Many Names”), in a brief consideration of the development of monotheism, asks if the doctrine is by nature connected to intolerance. Clements concludes that both intolerance and nationalism are not characteristic in the doctrine in its developed form. Katharine Dell, in “God, Creation and the Contribution of Wisdom,” suggests the important contribution of creation theology to the overall understanding of God in the Old Testament, while also linking creation traditions as an integral component of wisdom writings. Diana Lipton’s “By Royal Appointment: God’s Influence on Influencing God” proposes “that the biblical writers saw kingship both as a locus of God’s power and, more surprisingly, as a vehicle through which God allows himself to be affected (educated)” (73).

R. W. H. Moberly, in “Is Monotheism Bad for You? Some Reflections on God, the Bible, and Life in the Light of Regina Schwartz’s *The Curse of Cain*,” contends with and offers alternatives to the views Schwartz presents. Finally, to conclude this first part of this collection, Simon Sherwin concludes in ‘Old Testament Monotheism and Zoroastrian Influence’: “There is no reason to suppose that Zoroastrianism played any part either in the emergence of monotheistic rhetoric among the Jews or in reinforcing monotheistic ideas among them in the exilic period” (124).

Part II. Texts and Themes

The paper by Janet E. Tollington, “God, Women and Children,” a consideration of the relationship between God and individual women, particularly in Genesis, opens the second section of the volume. Next, providing an analysis of Exod 34:5–6, 6:2–8; and 3:13–15, Graham Davies, in “The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus,” examines the manner in which the text of Exodus contributes to the theology of the book. An appendix to the article, “Notes on the History of Interpretation of *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* in Exodus 3:14,” incorporates a variety of ancient and modern translations of the phrase.

Judith M. Hadley’s “The De-deification of Deities in Deuteronomy” describes the manner in which the book avoids the mention of deities by name, referring to these as “other gods,” and reducing them to ordinary objects. In particular, the case of Astarte’s “demotion” in biblical tradition is considered, and then the similar reduction of status of other deities in Deuteronomy is examined. Peter J. Williams reflects on a number of recent readings of 1 Samuel that suggest that God victimizes Saul. In his contribution “Is God Moral? On the Saul Narratives as Tragedy,” he concludes that the biblical text provides “considerable justification for why Saul is judged” (188) and highlights the

hermeneutical problem that if method is not clear, readings of the text can remain highly subjective. Robert P. Gordon provides a fresh look at the motif of the prophet in the divine assembly in his “Standing in the Council: When Prophets Encounter God.”

Klaus Koch, in “Ugaritic Polytheism and Hebrew Monotheism in Isaiah 40–55,” uses evidence from these two text traditions to compare and contrast their views of deity. Philip P. Jenson’s “Interpreting Jonah’s God: Canon and Criticism” notes that little attention has been paid to the portrait of God in the book and finds in postmodern approaches a cluster of fresh insights into the complexity of this character. James K. Aitken considers the new possibilities to describe God allowed by Greek language in his “The God of the Pre-Maccabees: Designations of the Divine in the Early Hellenistic Period.” Finally, William Horbury, in “Deity in Ecclesiasticus,” examines the Hebrew and Greek forms of Ben Sira’s work and its concept of deity to consider how the work contributes to Jewish monotheistic thought.

It is likely that this eclectic collection of papers will offer something of interest to most readers. Overall, they contribute a variety of helpful perspectives that contribute to various approaches to understanding the deity as conceptualized and worshiped in ancient Israel.