Review: Zion, City of Our God by Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham

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Review
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This recent anthology, which "grew out of a special meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Study group held in Cambridge in 1996" (p. ix), is a collection of eight loosely connected essays reflecting on the city of Jerusalem in the historical and religious imagination of ancient Israel. It includes a study by Richard Hess on the textual and historical problems surrounding Sennacherib's invasion, an examination by John Monson of the ways archaeological evidence sheds light on the religious and political centrality of the Jerusalem temple, several contributions dealing with images of Zion or Jerusalem in various biblical books—including one on "The Psalms of Ascent" by Philip Satterthwaite, an article by Knut Heim on Lamentations, one on Ezekiel by Thomas Renz, two contributions on Chronicles—one by Martin Selman and one by Gary Knoppers, and concludes with a piece by Rebecca Doyle on Jerusalem's Molek cult.

While all of the essays make serious contributions to the field of biblical scholarship, they do vary in quality. Some, like Gary Knoppers' "Jerusalem at War in Chronicles," truly break new ground. Knoppers calls into question the continued endorsement by many scholars of von Rad's view that the battle accounts throughout Chronicles are strongly spiritualized, and puts forward a highly nuanced reading of the various types of war imagery in Chronicles. Others, such as Richard Hess' "Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18-20" and Rebecca Doyle's "Molek of Jerusalem?" are less innovative, but do a fine job of bringing the reader up to date on the current state of scholarly debate in the areas they examine.

While one is thankful that the editors have gathered together a series of essays related to such a central theme in the Hebrew Bible and that the publishers have made this book available for a very reasonable price, this anthology does have certain weaknesses. Even though the essays all deal with Jerusalem or Zion in some sense, it is not immediately evident to the reader what really binds them together as a whole. Perhaps the editors could have provided more connective tissue than the page-and-a-half introduction and the publisher's blurb on the back cover. Furthermore, while each article is introduced by a very brief abstract, one does not see any real effort by either the authors or the editors to integrate their work or explain its interconnections. The sense of this volume's overall diffuseness is exacerbated by the lack of any bibliography or indexes, which also diminishes its usefulness to those conducting research. In spite of these drawbacks, which could certainly be remedied in future publications by this working group or by other groups working with this publisher, this book will surely be of value in certain classroom situations and most especially to anyone conducting research on almost any aspect of the Zion tradition or the city of Jerusalem in the ancient Israelite period.

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After issuing small volumes on cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, Linear B, Greek inscriptions, Etruscan, runes, Maya glyphs, and even mathematics and measurement, the British Museum's "Reading the Past" series has now looked east to bring out a book on Chinese. The series is aimed at the interested general reader, not the specialist nor necessarily the student. Such readers will be well served by the volume at hand. For it is pleasant to report that, within the limitations of space...