

Book Reviews

PROPHETS AND PROVERBS: MORE STUDIES IN OLD TESTAMENT POETRY AND BIBLICAL RELIGION. By Anthony R. Ceresko. Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2002. Pp. xiv + 160. Paper, n.p.

Ceresko's book, *PROPHETS AND PROVERBS: MORE STUDIES IN OLD TESTAMENT POETRY AND BIBLICAL RELIGION*, is a collection of eleven articles previously published in various journals and is the second anthology of his writings (the first one is *PSALMS AND SAGES: STUDIES IN OLD TESTAMENT POETRY AND RELIGION*, published in 1994). Most of these articles are published in journals with a limited audience, in India and the Philippines, two countries where he taught as a seminary professor. He states that his purpose for compiling the book is to share the work with a wider audience than is available in India or the Philippines (p. xi).

The themes of the eleven articles, each one a chapter, are quite varied and are much broader than the prophets or poetry suggested by the book's title, such as covenant, ecology, and the Indian Church. Yet, most of the chapters tend to have a very specific focus (examining a specific passage, such as Genesis 1:26–28 in chapter 8) and are disjointed in relation to each other. The first two chapters focus on two prophetic passages, one from Isaiah (52:13–53:12) and another from Amos (1:3–2:16). Chapters 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11 incorporate biblical wisdom literature to some degree; yet most of the references come from the Wisdom of Ben Sirach. Chapters 4 and 7 claim to be about the Indian Church; however, chapter 7 actually has little to do with the Indian Church beyond the title (“The Identity of the Indian Church: A Biblical Perspective”) and one sentence in the last paragraph (p. 96). Chapter 6 deals with Israel's origins, using Joseph Callaway's discovery of a jar handle at Raddana inscribed with the name “Ahilud” as a launching point. Chapter 10 discusses the

Hebrew terms for blind and lame in 2 Samuel 5:8b (but the chapter actually focuses on the larger passage 5:6–10). The book has an author index and an index of scriptural references, both of which will be helpful to the reader.

I find *PROPHETS AND PROVERBS* to be exactly what Ceresko intended—a collection of articles he has written since 1994 and previously published in various journals. They are not connected by theme or by any discernable reason except perhaps that they contain an emphasis toward social concerns and Liberation Theology. One chapter does not lead into the next; thus they can be read independently. The language is easy to read, so that it should not be a problem for a layperson to understand the message that Ceresko is trying to convey. Most of the articles, however, are too elementary for the scholar, since they include much general information when claiming, by chapter title, to look at a more specific topic.

Assigning an audience to the book is difficult. The disjointedness of the book does not lend it to classroom use, nor does its subject matter seem appropriate for someone looking to learn more about prophets, proverbs, or the Wisdom Literature. Perhaps an appropriate reader would be someone who wishes to examine a Liberation Theology/social justice approach to selected biblical passages or a person interested in the work of Anthony Ceresko.

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WHO WERE THE EARLY ISRAELITES AND WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? By William G. Dever. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 2003. Pp. xi+268. Cloth, \$25.00.

In his recent book, *WHAT DID THE BIBLICAL WRITERS KNOW AND WHEN DID THEY KNOW IT?*, Dever asserted that the writers of the First Testament knew a good deal about Israel's past, using his extensive archaeo-

logical experience to support his claim. This volume addresses the origins and identification of those early Israelites who began Israel's “past.” Like the previous book, it blends archaeology and textual sources to discredit those historical “minimalist” or “revisionist” scholars who reject the possibility of identifying an early Israel. Dever begins by discussing the present crisis in understanding Israelite origins, noting that the Exodus and Conquest are still “hot topics” (p. 3) in the Biblical truth stakes. He examines the Exodus, the conquest of Transjordan and the land west of Jordan. Then he introduces the archaeological evidence for the presence of the “proto-Israelites” (p. 67) and summarizes the material culture of Iron Age I (ca. 1200–1000 BCE) the proposed period for Israel's emergence. Archaeological data and textual sources are then brought together in an effort to answer two closing questions: who were of the early Israelites, and Should the Biblical tradition be regarded as history or myth.

The chapter on the Exodus notes that, despite the efforts of conservative scholars, archaeological support for the biblical account is severely lacking. Concerning the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites according to the book of Numbers, Dever concludes that “the silence of the archaeological record is deafening” (p. 32). He says the same of the conquest narrative of Canaan found in Joshua: modern excavations of the sites of Joshua's conquests do not support the Biblical account—see the useful table on pp. 56–57. In fact, as Dever notes (p. 74), most scholars now accept the fact that the Israelites were an indigenous group, from the Canaanite population. He then turns to the more recent, post-1970s, excavations of the small sites that lie in what the First Testament hints was the heartland of ancient Israel: sites that include Shechem, Shiloh, and Beersheba. In three chapters (5–7) he provides a careful and readable description of the excavations at these sites, the opinions of the principal archaeologists, and their methods in surveying, all

abundantly illustrated with line-drawings of site-plans, maps of site-distributions and demography, and isometric reconstructions of villages and dwellings. He collects the material culture produced by archaeology under the headings of subsistence and economy, social structure, political organization, technology and aesthetics, and ideology and religion. The problem of synthesizing the data produced by archaeology and the texts occupies the next three chapters (8–10). He conveniently recaps the positions of biblical scholars and archaeologists on Israelite origins, German, Israeli, and American from Albrecht Alt in the 1920s to the present. He includes conservatives and those minimalist scholars, based in Sheffield, England and Copenhagen, Denmark, who reject the existence of any ancient Israel and skillfully exposes the implausible conclusions of both sides. Those who have little or no archaeological experience justifiably incur his ire.

As he approaches his own synthesis, he engages with the Israeli archaeologist, Israel Finkelstein, to agree and to differ. The areas of agreement are significant: a future emphasis on

archaeology over texts, and population growth in the hill country west of the Jordan in Iron I that came from within Canaanite society and, in fact, represented an ethnic mix. The important difference for the reader is that while Finkelstein refuses to classify these settlers as early Israelites, Dever is willing to do so. After a concise summary of the reasons for the collapse of Late Bronze Age Canaan and the ensuing disruption, he suggests that the vacant hill country was occupied by dissidents and refugees coming mainly from the Canaanite lowlands—mostly already skilled farmers who could meet the challenges of hill-country agriculture, perhaps joined by some pastoral nomads. He further asserts that there was a level of social revolt against the feudal model that had obtained in the now defunct society of the Canaanite city-states. Thus he envisions an “agrarian movement with strong reformist tendencies” (p. 189) as motivating his early Israelites and the continuing dislike of monarchy and large estates that certainly appears in much of the literature of the First Testament. Dever is aware, however, that his identification of those

agrarian reformist settlers as early Israelites may be perceived as facile, and he attempts to counter this. He admits to the presence of a variety of ethnic groups in Iron I, but believes that archaeology, ethnicity and textual sources can place a unique group in the hill-country that may with some confidence be termed Proto-Israelite. At the very end he refers to the sad and dangerous practice of modern Palestinian and Israeli extremists identifying themselves with these ancient groups.

The book has many positive qualities. It offers the attentive reader an excellent survey of scholarship on Israelite origins, traditional and current; and it provides an analysis of the data by one of the most eminent archaeologists in the field. Whether or not Dever's synthesis creates a believable “early Israel” may be left to the reader to determine. Once more, however, Dever has written a compelling and sympathetic study that can only serve to advance the debate.

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Correction

Please note that the title of S. Scott Bartchy's article, *Who Should Be Called Father? Paul of Tarsus between the Jesus Tradition and Patria Potestas*, was incorrectly transcribed both in the Table of Contents for our previous issue (Vol. 33, n. 4), and in the annual index (in the same issue, on p. 174). In both cases, the title is wrongly transcribed as *Who Should Be Called Father? Paul of Tarsus between the Jewish Tradition and Patria Potestas*. We sincerely regret the error.