

his suggestion seems to be generally true, there are other statements from her suggesting that the Holy Spirit operates in various modes. He shows scenes, gives thoughts, provides explanations, revives the memory, suggests words, etc. Sometimes several modes operate simultaneously; at other times the Spirit only uses one mode (see, e.g., E. G. White, MS 31, 1889; idem, Letter 265, 1907; idem, *Spiritual Gifts* [Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1860], 2:292–93; idem, “Questions and Answers,” *Review and Herald* [Oct. 8, 1867], 260). Hence, Levterov’s distinction seems too static and absolute.

Poking around in someone else’s work is always easier than making a substantial contribution oneself. Despite some minor flaws, Theodore Levterov’s book stands as a seminal contribution to Adventist scholarship and self-understanding. It provides deep insights into the early Seventh-day Adventist efforts and challenges in understanding Ellen White’s prophetic ministry, her role in the church, and the differences in scope and authority between her writings and the Bible as the ultimate rule of faith and practice. The historical development of the arguments illustrates how these challenges turned the attention of early Adventists to particular issues, provoking them to study and come to a better, more precise, and more realistic understanding of the prophetic gift. Levterov needs to be commended for his scholarly work, and his work is recommended to everyone interested in Ellen White studies or early Adventist studies.

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Mermelstein, Ari, and Shalom E. Holtz, eds. *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 308 pp. Hardcover, \$115.00.

Dr. Ari Mermelstein holds a PhD from New York University and is assistant professor of Bible at Yeshiva University in New York. His first publication is *Creation, Covenant, and the Beginnings of Judaism: Reconceiving Historical Time in the Second Temple Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2014). Shalom E. Holtz gained his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania and is an Assyriologist and associate professor of Bible at Yeshiva University in New York. His most recent book is *Neo-Babylonian Trial Records* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

The *Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* contains contributions of twelve different scholars and an introduction written by the editors. The chapters are based on presentations delivered at a conference entitled, “The Divine Courtroom,” hosted by the Leonard and Bea Diener Institute of Jewish Law at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law. The motif of the gods enacting divine justice is common to all religions, and the editors specifically offer this volume to demonstrate the need for interdisciplinary scholarship on this very diverse area.

Diversity truly is a feature of the book. Biblical studies are in the majority, but there are investigations of apocryphal, rabbinical, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Muslim literature as well. The book approaches divine justice from different angles, not only culturally, but also topically. While all of the twelve contributions in the present book are worth reading and are mentioned below,

space limitations have forced me to summarize only those which I believe make the greatest contributions to one of the two main trajectories of the book. These two overarching topics are the influence of the concept of a divine courtroom on the earthly justice system and the general notion of appeals to and against God in court. Due to my personal interests as well as space limitations, this review will focus on the latter aspect.

In chapter 2 (chapter 1 is the introduction), “Divine Judges on Earth and in Heaven,” Tzvi Abusch writes about the Mesopotamian *Maqlû*, a set of incantations, part of a complex ritual, in which a human petitioner implores the gods for justice in his case against an unknown witch or warlock who is thought to be responsible for a curse. While Abusch gives much attention to the details of composition, he also describes the character of the plea for justice. The gods, especially Girra (a fire god) are seen to be in the role of warlords, rather than civil judges, and it is interesting to note that there is little to no question as to the truthfulness of the accusation. The author does point out though, that in extant cases of Mesopotamian law, the process of truth finding while implied, is not documented either, so this may just reflect this practice rather than implying that the guilt of the accused was assumed.

Chapter 3: Joseph L. Angel, “The Divine Courtroom Scenes of Daniel 7 and the Qumran Book of Giants: A Textual and Contextual Comparison.”

Chapter 4, “Justice without Judgment: Pure Procedural Justice and the Divine Courtroom in *Sifre Deutoronomy*,” written by Chaya Halberstam, analyzes the views on God and justice expressed in the rabbinical commentary on the book of Job, *Sifre Deutoronomy*. Her major argument, based on the categories developed in John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice*, is that the rabbis imagined the justice of God as “pure procedural justice.” In this concept, justice is brought about by a perfect procedure and only by this procedure. They depict the divine court in such a way that God himself is bound by law and unfree to give anything but justice. This, Halberstam argues, places humans on a near equal footing with God and protects us from capriciousness. Nevertheless, she observes that the rabbis recognized the need for a further dimension, which is described as a “personal, affective relationship” (68). Thus, procedural justice becomes impure and moves closer to imperfect justice: a correct judgment exists and can be found, but there is no procedure to make that certain. However, God will make the right judgment.

Chapter 5: Warren Zev Hardy, “Rabbi Nissim of Girona on the Heavenly Court, Truth, and Justice.”

Job Y. Jindo, the author of chapter 6, “The Divine Courtroom Motif in the Hebrew Bible: A Holistic Approach,” attempts to investigate the concept of the divine courtroom in light of God’s universal kingship and how these two elements influence each other. God is viewed as a monarch, supported by a heavenly council of prophets and angelic beings. Their main function is to maintain order in the universe, but they also deal with transgressions of that order in legal proceedings. There are a number of biblical phenomena that Jindo believes can be better understood with this background (e.g. human creation in the image of God [Gen 1:26–30] and the taboo against

committing violence against the king [1 Sam 24:5–7]). With these emphases, I believe Jindo makes a valid point, but I wish he had included the problem of mercy as opposed to justice in his deliberations about the double role of God as king and judge.

Chapter 7: Meira Z. Kenski, “Getting Perspective: The Divine Courtroom in Tertullian of Carthage’s *Apologeticum*.”

Chapter 8, “Disqualified Olympians: The Skeptical Greek View of Divine Judges,” written by Victor Bers and Adriaan Lanni, introduces the reader to the ancient Greek views on the influence of gods on human justice. The authors point to numerous examples from classical Greek poetry, in which the gods play no role or merely a marginal one in the legal proceedings of humans. The reason for this is the Greeks did not view their gods as fit for the role of judges, especially not in mortal affairs. While there are different explanations for this phenomenon, such as the morally questionable behavior of some of the gods themselves, the authors conclude that, most importantly, the gods could not really relate to and were not interested in the weight that legal proceedings had in a short human life. Even eschatological or post-mortem judgments are therefore performed by the dead rather than the Olympians.

Chapter 9: Andrew T. Lincoln, “A Life of Jesus as Testimony: The Divine Courtroom and the Gospel of John.”

In chapter 10, “Trying the Crime of Abuse of Royal Authority in the Divine Courtroom and the Incident of Naboth’s Vineyard,” by far the longest in the book, F. Rachel Magdalene treats the story of the murder of Naboth by Ahab and Jezebel over his vineyard. A careful exposition of the narrative told in 1 Kgs 21–22 and 2 Kgs 9–10 is preceded by an investigation on how abuse of power was treated, first, in the ancient near east and, second, in Israel (according to the Bible). In a final section, Magdalene compares the situations of Job and Naboth, noting that both are the victims of a judicial intrigue and that the situation of both is alleviated by actions taken in the divine courtroom. Her conclusion is that YHWH is a God of justice, and, according to the biblical world view, his court is the venue to which humans can appeal if the highest judge on earth, the king, misuses his power for personal gain. The story of Job widens this picture to include even God, showing that a human believing himself to be a victim of abuse by God himself can expect a hearing and just treatment.

Carol A. Newsome, in chapter 11, “The Invention of the Divine Courtroom in the Book of Job,” further investigates the motif of the divine courtroom in Job. She argues that the idea of being able to meet God in court restores to Job a sense of agency previously lost because of his helplessness in what seemed to be senseless suffering. While Newsom does not believe that the call for a trial between God and suffering humanity emerges as a valid relationship model in the book of Job, it is interesting to follow her in exploring the implications such a trial would have. One of the purposes of a trial is to make parties that are unequal as if they were equal for the purpose of finding truth. Of special importance for this idea is Job 31:13–14, where

Job argues that it does honor to the “social father” to treat his dependents as equals in the context of the court.

Chapter 12: Mathieu Tillier, “The *Qadi* before the Judge: The Social Use of Eschatology in Muslim Courts.”

Dov Weiss, the author of chapter 13, “Lawsuits against God in Rabbinic Literature,” examines three pieces of rabbinic literature in regard to their treatment of legal issues that are brought before God. The three cases are cases of appeal, in which a decision previously made by God is repealed. Weiss adduces two primary purposes to these courtroom scenes: It sanctions the right to confront God, and it protects God by offering a framework for complaints against him, in which these complaints do not challenge the nature of his character or his claims as ruler and judge of the Universe. The Rabbis of the post-tannaitic period thus imagined God not just as a judge, but also as the one who is judged in the community, yet by himself.

*The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective* is the product of careful editing. Every single one of the chapters is very readable. The different contributions are notably well-argued and cogent. To a Bible-believing Christian, they pose a challenge, because Scripture is treated in the same manner as non-Scripture and because a historical-critical hermeneutic is assumed by all of the authors. However, while it is evident that the writers do not hold the Bible to be a product of divine inspiration, they do treat their respective sources with a kind of benevolent respect, be it the book of Job or the anti-witchcraft ritual *Maqlû*. Since none of the chapters specifically concern themselves with hermeneutics and do not bother to offer much explanation or defense of the approach they employ, I do not think it is necessary to comment extensively on this. Suffice it to say that I would have treated the Biblical text differently at times.

One of the main contributions of the book, in my opinion, is the difference the authors find between the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the gods of Mesopotamia and Greece. This observation gains more weight as one considers that the authors do not seem to have a religious motivation for coming to this result. The God of Scripture is a god that does not shy away from being questioned by his creatures on his judicial decisions. In the divine courtroom, representatives of God’s kingdom examine and approve his decisions, even though they are his alone to make. The different places in which God is questioned, and in which he consequently reverses his judgment, ultimately only serve to illustrate that the final decision of the divine court is not only just but also approved by the community. Thus, God opens himself to the scrutiny of his creation. While this motif reappears throughout the present volume, I believe it would have been even more pronounced if the authors had been willing to treat Scripture as a theological whole, not emphasizing seeming differences but searching for the underlying principles that explain them coherently. I especially missed a mention of the obvious point in Job that the explanation of the legal proceedings that led to Job’s suffering is withheld until the very end. This illustrates an important point: the justification of God in judgment is deferred to the eschaton. While the

Bible claims the justice of God and gives explanations for why it may not be visible yet, the actual justification of God is accomplished only when the necessary information is laid out before his dependents.

That said, for those who are interested in comparative studies as well as matters of theodicy and/or Adventist sanctuary studies, there is a lot of interesting material to gather from the contributions in *The Divine Courtroom*.

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Middleton, J. Richard. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. 332 pp. Paperback, \$26.99.

When going through books on eschatology, one may find a lot of material focusing on prophetic calculations, future speculations, and bizarre imagery, which, to a certain degree, have their place in biblical studies. However, it is rare for one to find books that do not follow such pattern. J. Richard Middleton's *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* stands out as a fresh outlook on the subject. Instead of being interested in prophetic minutiae, Middleton attempts to present the big picture of the biblical narrative, especially in regard to the nature of humans and the nature of the biblical eschatological hope, namely, the bodily resurrection of God's redeemed followed by their benign rule on earth. Thus, in his work, Middleton demonstrates the extra-biblical character of the traditional Christian belief in a disembodied and heavenly eternal destiny.

Middleton, professor of biblical worldview and exegesis at Northeastern Seminary and adjunct professor of theology at Roberts Wesleyan College (Rochester, NY), divides his material into twelve chapters and an appendix, which are organized into five parts.

In the introduction (ch. 1), Middleton explains the basic problem with the traditional, otherworldly, Christian eschatological hope. He demonstrates that "heaven"—as an ultimate destination—is an idea derived from a platonic worldview, not from Scripture. The author also indicates that the lack of concern with the redemption of this world in the traditional view negatively impacts the way people live now, because "how we attempt to live in the present" (ethics) is a manifestation of "what we desire and anticipate as the culmination of salvation" (eschatology) (23–24). The appendix complements the introduction by tracing, from the first centuries of the Christian era down to the Protestant Reformation, the shift of expectation in the Christian tradition from a concrete and renewed earth to an ethereal heaven. Then, from the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries down to the present, Middleton documents another shift back to what he calls "holistic eschatology." According to Middleton, the trend towards the expectation of a tangible redemption of the cosmos and of humanity has intensified since the 1960s and gained momentum in recent years both in academia and in the church. Such developments led him to conclude, "we are in the midst of a