

In conclusion, this book raises the issue of Christian nationalism as a far-reaching topic that needs careful analysis and study. A similar work within Adventism is overdue. It was the reading of this book more than anything else that prompted me to spearhead an online conference about this topic under the auspices of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS), cosponsored by the North American Division (NAD) Ministerial Department, and cosponsored by several other denominational entities on Sabbath afternoon, April 24, 2021. This is a first attempt to explore the challenges posed by Christian nationalism by Adventist thought leaders (for those readers interested, the full conference can be viewed at <https://www.nadministerial.com/stories/christian-nationalism-adventism-and-prophecy>). According to NAD leaders, this was up until then one of the best attended virtual events they had ever hosted, with thousands of comments and views. If such online participation is any indication, this is an extremely relevant topic that deserves further exploration in the future.

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Estes, Douglas, ed. *The Tree of Life*. TBN 27. Leiden: Brill, 2020. xxii + 467 pp. Hardcover. USD 298.00.

The Tree of Life is volume 27 of Brill's Themes in Biblical Narrative (TBN) series, which "publishes studies dealing with early interpretations and receptions of Biblical materials" (<https://brill.com/view/serial/TBN>). Modern scholarship has offered relatively little engagement with the tree of life motif (1). The new addition to the TBN series attempts to "fill this lacuna with a constructive investigation of the tree of life from its origin in human history up to various modern theological perspectives" (1). *The Tree of Life* contains fourteen contributions by seventeen scholars, led by editor Douglas Estes, then associate professor of NT and practical theology at South University, Columbia, SC, now associate professor of biblical studies and practical theology at Tabor College, Hillsboro, KS.

After a foreword by James H. Charlesworth and an introduction by Douglas Estes, the remaining articles examine the tree of life motif focusing on six main perspectives: ANE material (chs. 1–2), biblical texts (chs. 3–4, 8), early extrabiblical literature (chs. 5–7, 9–11), the medieval period (ch. 12), Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian traditions (ch. 13), and the modern period (ch. 14). The book closes with a conclusion written by the editor. In this review, I interact in a little more depth with the articles dealing directly with biblical material since it is the area of research *AUSS* readers are most attentive to.

In chapter one, "The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Literature," Charles L. Echols surveys the ancient Near Eastern texts for the phrase "the

tree of life.” He finds the expression extremely rare outside the Bible. An exact match is available only in three Egyptian texts (The Hymn to Ptah, The Great Cairo Hymn of Praise to Amun-Re, and The Great Hymn to Osiris). But “the concept of a sacred tree appeared as early as the fourth millennium in the ancient Near East and was ubiquitous by the second millennium” (5). Thus, Echols seeks parallels to “the tree of life in Gen 2–3 ... based not on nomenclature, but on taxonomy and function” (9). In three regions (Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant), Echols finds texts describing sacred trees that, in varying degrees, promote life, prosperity, and suggest hope of immortality. To a tree that prevents death such as the one in Genesis 2–3, however, Echols does not find any “unequivocal parallel” in the literature of the ancient Near East (27). Chapter two, “The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Iconography,” was written by Amy L. Balogh. She notes that even though “the phrase [tree of life] does not appear on any extant images at all” (32), sacred trees are prominent in the ancient Near East iconography. They are either “symbolic of a nurturing goddess in charge of life-cycles or ... symbolic of kingship” (32). The latter is especially notable in Mesopotamian iconography (51).

Chapter 3, “The Tree of Life in Genesis,” is written by Christopher Heard. He offers a synchronic reading of Gen 2–3, zooming in on the tree of life motif. Heard attempts to show that such a perspective “can yield a coherent” and more satisfactory reading than diachronic approaches (75). In the first segment, Heard contextualizes his reading by explaining the three main reconstructive approaches to the trees in the middle of the garden of Eden: (1) the tree of life was inserted into an original story that contained only the tree of knowledge; (2) two parallel stories were later joined; or (3) the tree of life was part of the original story (77–80). Heard favors the third approach and presents his arguments for it in the second part of his article. The first issue Heard deals with is the absence of an explicit reference to “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in 3:3 (the woman simply mentions “the tree which is in the midst of the garden,” NKJV). After exploring some options in dialogue with other scholars, Heard concludes that “it is *not* necessary to amend 2:9b or 2:17 in light of 3:3 for the canonical version of 2:4–3:24 to read as a coherent narrative” (86). His rationale is that 2:9b implies that the two special trees “stood relatively near one another” in the garden, that God differentiated the tree of knowledge of good and evil from the tree of life in 2:17, that the man communicated such information to the woman (her knowledge is secondhand), and that in 3:3 she uses an expression (“the tree that is in the midst of the garden”) “that was meaningful to her” to point to the forbidden tree (83–85). The second issue Heard addresses is the tree of life in 3:22–24. He deals with modern critical issues such as the use of doublets, apparent conflicting reasons for the eviction of humans from the garden, plurality in the divine address in 3:22, and “the correspondence between announced and actual penalty” (88). Heard takes the scene as “the

implementation of the death threat of 2:17" (90), which he does not interpret as "absolute immediacy" but as a reference to "the *certainty* of death" (94). He concludes that "the garden story suffers without the tree of life, or some substitute for it, in 3:22, 24," as attempted in some reconstructions (95). Specifically, the "excision of the tree of life leaves an important plot point, the death threat of Gen 2:17, without resolution, while the canonical text allows the very interdiction of that tree to serve as the mechanism by which the humans' death moves from potential to certainty" (96).

Chapter four, "The Tree of Life in Proverbs and Psalms," was written by William R. Osborne. Since the book of Proverbs does not refer directly to "the tree of life" but rather to "a tree of life," Osborne explores the four occurrences of the expression in Proverbs (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) through the lenses of metaphor. He expands on the definition of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By* [University of Chicago Press, 2003]) to include communication. As Osborne explains in previous work, "metaphor is understanding, experiencing, and communicating one thing in terms of another" (*Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*, *BBRSup* 18 [Eisenbrauns, 2018], 21). Osborne also observes, based on the advances provided by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, "the importance of worldview in accessing the significance of linguistic figurations." In this regard, Osborne points out, "If metaphors arise out of conceptual frameworks of how one sees the world, in order to make sense of such frameworks, the interpreter must maintain a level of shared knowledge for the comparison to work. Without shared knowledge, figurative language simply does not work" (102). Considering the work of Job Y. Jindo (*Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered: A Cognitive Approach to Poetic Prophecy in Jeremiah 1–24*, *HSM* 64 [Eisenbrauns, 2010]), which "bring[s] together a broader understanding of an ancient Near Eastern worldview with the developments of cognitive linguistics," Osborne comes to "three major conceptual metaphors" (103). Specifically, he points out that the tree imagery in biblical and the ancient Near Eastern contexts may be symbolic of "prosperity, deity, [and] kingship" (105). He concludes noting that while there are "similarities with other ancient Near Eastern material, the biblical authors of . . . [Proverbs and Psalms] were knowledgeable of broader conceptions of tree imagery as it related to cultic and wisdom contexts, yet for these writers, such traditions were always to be understood solely in a Yahwistic worldview" (119).

The following three articles interact with the tree of life motif in mostly early extrabiblical texts. Chapter five is entitled "The Tree of Life in Jewish-Christian Legendary Texts." In it, Peter T. Lanfer assesses the motif in Pseudo-Philo, 4 Baruch, 4 Maccabees, and the Life of Adam and Eve from the perspective of shared themes, such as a sign of "eschatological renewal," "God's presence," or "a source of life/immortality" (122). In chapter six, Beth M. Stovell discusses

“The Tree of Life in Ancient Apocalypse” through Gilles Fauconnier’s and Mark Turner’s conceptual metaphor theories. She analyzes the tree of life symbolism in apocalyptic texts spanning from the first to the eleventh century CE. Chapter seven, by Ken M. Penner, deals with “The Tree of Life in Enochic Literature,” including first, second, and third Enoch. In all of these, the tree of life is related to the divine presence. Penner suggests these sources provide “the background that John’s Revelation assumes when using the tree of life to symbolize the eschatological reward for the righteous” (180).

Chapter eight, written by Douglas Estes, is entitled “The Tree of Life in the Apocalypse of John.” By Looking at the four references to the tree of life in Revelation (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19), Estes points out that three of these occurrences are “tangential to the larger narrative. . . . Only in Rev 22:2 does the writer bring the tree of life into the world of the narrative” (185). Locating the tree of life within the biblical context, Estes notes that “Genesis is the primary referent, and Ezekiel is the secondary” (186n10). In addition, he observes that “both Genesis [2:9] and Revelation [22:2] share one, and only one, statement where the tree of life is mentioned as an existent of the narrative world, outside of descriptive speech or theological reference. These two direct statements serve as the two poles” (186). Thus, the author, while dealing somewhat with the tangential texts, for the most part seeks to establish the meaning of the tree of life in Rev 22:2. He interprets it as multistable and polyvalent. His final assessment is heavily dependent on Artemidorus’s parameters and the reader’s imagination (207, 210).

There is, however, much to commend in Estes’s article. He investigates the tree of life in Rev 22:2 in light of both Genesis and Ezekiel (186, 191, 197), which from a canonical perspective is necessary, and attempts to offer an interpretation that does justice to all of these passages. Readers are enriched by his discussion on the art of describing visual images (186–190). Estes well locates John’s reliance on a Hebrew worldview to create Revelation’s visual texture (191). And finally, in a very stimulating presentation, Estes offers informed attempts to interpret the challenging image of the tree of life in Rev 22:2 (192–208).

The next three articles, once again, interact with early extrabiblical views of the tree of life motif. In chapter nine, “The Tree of Life in Early Christian Literature,” Mark Edwards explores the motif in the works of several church fathers. While the motif was interpreted in many ways through literal, moral, and spiritual readings, the most prevalent view was that which thought of the tree as a metaphor for wisdom. Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer addresses “The Tree of Life in Philo” in chapter ten. She assesses several texts and relates Philo’s allegorical interpretation of the tree of life motif as a metaphor for virtue in life to the influence of “Greek philosophy” (247). In chapter eleven, “The Tree of Life in Gnostic Literature,” Carl B. Smith II studies the tree of life in the Nag Hammadi literature. He finds the motif is “not a prominent

symbol” in most of these texts (275). In gnostic texts, he explains, the tree of knowledge takes center stage.

Beyond the biblical period, Pippa Salonijs writes on “The Tree of Life in Medieval Iconography” (ch. 12). Her visually rich presentation on the tree of life in medieval art documents the several ways in which the image was used in the period. The motif is found as part of texts, bowls, paintings, pavements, windows, walls, ceilings, monuments, and religious objects. A variety of meanings are expressed in these artistic designs, such as “a path towards God,” “terrestrial community, lineage, and power,” “longevity,” and “salvation,” among others (330–331). The tree of life was also used as “a meditative tool,” “a didactic instrument,” and “a way to propagandize” religious orders (332). In chapter thirteen, “The Tree of Life in the North,” G. Ronald Murphy discusses the tree of life motif in Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian traditions, where the motif is reflected in ecclesial architecture. In chapter fourteen, Daniel J. Treier, Dustyn Elizabeth Keepers, and Ty Kieser discuss “The Tree of Life in Modern Theological Thought” in historical-critical, literal, theological, and symbolic readings.

As a whole, *The Tree of Life* presents readers with a wealth of information on the topic—from biblical and extrabiblical material to description of the ancient Near Eastern context, from early reception history to modern thought. It provides Bible students and researchers with access to much of the literature in a single volume. The book is an important resource for research on the tree of life motif.

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FLAVIO PRESTES III

Furlong, Dean. *The John Also Called Mark: Reception and Transformation in Christian Tradition*. WUNT 2/518. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020. 251 pp. Paperback. USD 79.00.

Dean Furlong’s study explores Christian traditions relating to “the John also called Mark” (Acts 15:37) and his portrayal as a Markan figure (i.e., a figure sometimes identified with Mark the Evangelist) and as a Johannine figure (i.e., a figure sometimes identified with the beloved disciple John the Evangelist). Furlong refers to John Mark as John/Mark in recognition that the figure in question was not called “John Mark” but rather “John” or “Mark.” Furlong suggests that the same individual is referred to as “John” in Acts 13:5, 13, as “Mark” in 15:39, and as “John, who was also called Mark” in 12:12, 25, and 15:37 (3). A shorter version of this study focusing on the reception of John the Evangelist in early Christian writings was submitted in 2017 as part of Furlong’s doctoral dissertation written at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, under the supervision of Professors Peter-Ben Smit and Aza Goudriaan.