

CHILDREN OF EZEKIEL: ALIENS, UFOs, THE CRISIS OF RACE, AND THE ADVENT OF THE END TIME. By Michael Lieb. Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1998. Pp. x + 308. \$54.95; \$18.95.

The prophet Ezekiel described in highly symbolic language a vision of God's glory, God's presence, coming to him in Babylon; this came to be called his vision of God's chariot (or *merkavah*, in Hebrew). The "children" of Lieb's title are those who seek to literalize, or technologize, the ineffable centered in this vision and to harness its power (ultimately God's power) to their own ends. The subtitle indicates some of the areas where in modern times this has been manifested.

In Part 1, L.'s discussion ranges from Milton's "chariot of paternal deitie" (opposed to the clerics of whom Milton disapproved), through Israeli "*merkavah* tanks," UFO sightings and subsequent theories (e.g. those of E. von Daniken), and end time beliefs (Jehovah's Witnesses, Hal Lindsey, and fundamentalist apocalypticism), to Ronald Reagan and his attempt to "arm the heavens." Part 2 examines in depth the ideology of the Nation of Islam, focusing on two key figures, Elijah Mohammad and Louis Farrakahn, both of whom were strongly influenced by a vision of the "Mother Plane," clearly influenced by Ezekiel's vision.

L. begins with "a few words" about Ezekiel's vision itself, focussing on a few select details (e.g. the word *hashmal*, "amber"). Given the importance of the vision, much more could have been said about its background, imagery, and function within the Book of Ezekiel as a whole. I was surprised, for example, to see no discussion of its storm theophany background. The storm clouds as Baal's war chariot in the sky would certainly have been germane. And given Ezekiel's concern to stress the symbolic nature of his vision (it was "something like . . .," "in the image of . . ."), one can wonder what he would have thought of his "children" and their betrayal of this key point. While the vision may invite (be a temptation to) literalization, it hardly "indeed, compels" that this happen (11).

L. notes that "the inaugural vision will become a machine whose forces can be harnessed and channeled in whatever direction the person who has conquered these forces sees fit" (16). This impulse to literalize, to technologize, to "nuclearize" or "racialize" the vision is at root an attempt to control God, if not in fact to play God (as L. notes at various points). From a viewpoint of theology and biblical religion, then, this is a study in the impulse to idolatry, and the destructive consequences that ensue.

Jewish rabbinic tradition regarded Ezekiel's vision with great apprehension: "If one is not destroyed by *hashmal*, one risks at the very least being driven insane" (12). Perhaps the rabbis were on to more than they realized. As a study in culture and ideas as they interact with a biblical text, this book is a stimulating and provocative study of some rather bizarre phenomena.

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