Holding this small book in hands and shuffling through the pages you may ask yourself: How can the complex phenomenon of “worship in ancient Israel” be treated adequately on 104 pages? And, how then can the series it is part of be called Essential Guides? At least the latter question is answered perfectly by the series description printed on the back of the cover: “The purpose of the Abingdon Essential Guides is to fulfill the need for brief, substantive, yet highly accessible introductions to the core disciplines in biblical, theological, and religious studies.” Additionally, in terms of the audience addressed by this series, one notes that Essential Guides are “written with the need of students foremost in mind, addressed to learners in a number of contexts.” With this the basic layout and program of the series is circumscribed, and these two aspects must be the guidelines for any reviewer. Of course, at the same time certain limits are therefore set to the authors of the individual topical books, which can however mean a good chance for anyone who participates in the series to get rid of long-winded and complicated discussions. Thus, it might be much easier to come to the core of a problem without beating about the bush.

With Walter Brueggemann, William Marcellus McPheeters Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, Georgia), a distinguished scholar perfectly fit for the topic “worship” was found, since he has authored several monographs that might form a background for the book under discussion, such as *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997) and *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (2003), not to forget additional
commentaries on the Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, to mention only a few of his works and areas of research.

Not only the dedication to Patrick D. Miller, Charles T. Haley Professor of Old Testament Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, but as well the acknowledgements tell about Brueggemann’s gratitude to this expert on the history and religion of ancient Israel and at the same time reveal his honesty as he attributes his knowledge not to himself alone but to his friend. So he writes: “I have been stimulated and disciplined by his study. But such a debt to him is simply typical and representative of my immense debts to him over a long time.”

Basically, the book is subdivided into five chapters followed by notes (87–100) and an index of biblical references (101–4). With “Orthodox Yahwism in Dialogic Modes” (1–9) Brueggemann circumscribes the assignment set as “to consider some of the leading motifs of ancient Israel’s worship traditions in the Old Testament” but not without taking into account “the worship of the church in its ecumenical character” (1). Brueggemann is right when he states that “worship in Israel consists in a dialogic interaction in which both parties are fully present” and that “this relationship that defines both parties is reconstituted, again and again, in decisive ways” (9). This sets the framework for the next chapters, which then focus on “The Gestures of Worship and Sacrifice” (11–23), “The Utterance of YHWH in Worship” (25–37), “The Utterance of Israel in Worship” (39–61), and “Worship: Israel at ‘Play’ ” (63–85).

Without losing sight of his audience and despite the small space given in this volume, Brueggemann even speculates about “petitions to which a divine oracle is an effective response” that are almost omnipresent in the Psalms (33–37). The examples selected as evidence for this view are well chosen and help to illustrate the ambivalence often present in many individual psalms. Parallels can be found in Jeremiah and Isaiah and consequently are reproduced alongside Pss 6; 18; 34; 35; 40; and 85. Here, even more than at other places in the book, Brueggemann’s own background becomes visible, his profound knowledge of exactly those three biblical books he has already commented on.

No doubt, for the specialist and the scholar this small volume does not provide anything new and astounding. However, as mentioned above, the book is addressed at students and learners and is meant to single out the most significant motifs of ancient Israel’s worship. This task has perfectly been fulfilled in only 104 pages, above all supported by the author’s crisp and concise style of writing. So, in conclusion Brueggemann’s depiction of “worship in ancient Israel” can serve pretty well as an introduction to that timeless topic and help to encourage students to take his ideas as a starting point for independent reflections and studies.