Ten of the fifteen essays in this volume were presented at a seminar in Tübingen in 1997–98. The essays by Bartelmus, Bauks, Bieberstein, Hartenstein, and Keel were written specifically for this publication. Each essay has a substantial bibliography, and there are numerous illustrations in the essay by Keel, but also similar drawings for several other essays.

The first three essays in part 1 are introductory to the whole issue of the “picture of the world” in antiquity. Bernd Janowski discusses methodological questions and the relationship between empirical reality and symbolic interpretation. The ultimate goal of this investigation is to understand better the meaning of life. Othmar Keel describes Egyptian and biblical pictures of the world and relates them to the pre-Socratic philosophers. Although in Egypt and in the rest of the ancient Near East biological metaphors depicted the world as a living organism, the Bible presents God frequently as a handworker. The precreation situation in Gen 1:2 can be illuminated by Egyptian traditions. The pre-Socratic philosophers did not have to face the issue of theodicy, since the world lying behind the real world was not considered better than it. On page 57 Keel offers a unique picture of the biblical cosmos based on iconographic images from Israel’s environment. Annette Krüger argues that cosmological formulas in the Old Testament,
such as heaven, earth, and the underworld, have a background in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Using these ideas as building blocks, Israelite writers constructed poems according to cosmological points of view in Pss 104 and 148 and in Job 38.

The three essays in part 2 deal with God, the stars, and heaven. Rüdiger Bartelmus largely repeats the semantic and traditional historical aspects of the concept “heaven” that he wrote for ThWAT. Friedhelm Hartenstein insists that the Jerusalem temple in preexilic times was the place of Yahweh’s dwelling and theophany. The throne of God was in the temple on Zion. In the exilic Deuteronomistic prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple in 1 Kgs 8 the divine throne is placed in heaven. Exodus 24:9–11 and Ezek 1 and 10 show how this concept was taken up in the exile and later under Mesopotamian influence. At Bethel, in the northern kingdom, there was a cosmic axis between heaven and earth, but the supplementary hymn in Amos 9:5–6 describes the creation of heaven as the place of lordly rule. Matthias Albani discusses Job 38:32 and claims that God’s control of the Mazzaroth is a motif transferred from Marduk to Yahweh. Innocent suffering was also discussed in relation to Marduk by ancient Mesopotamians. In Mesopotamia and in the divine speeches in Job humans cannot ascertain the will of God.

The five essays in part 3 deal with the earth, noting both issues on the periphery and at the center. Bernd Janowski believes that the temple outside of Israel represents the cosmic mountain that emerged at the beginning of creation. The sun is born from the lap of Nut, who bends over the Hathor temple, and it returns to the mouth of the goddess at sunset. Some of these ideas about the temple recur in the Old Testament, but the Priestly writer also makes room for new activities of God, such as the erection of the sanctuary on Sinai. Beate Pongratz-Leisten notes that in Sumerian and Assyrian-Babylonian texts space is divided politically and socially into center and periphery. The irrigated and cultivated territory housed the cultic center, but mountainous and desert regions were seen as places of enemies and antiorder. Through various means the kings tried to incorporate this antiorder into the cosmic order. Manfried Dietrich finds parallels between the garden of Eden and the mythology of human creation in Mesopotamia. An ivory plaque shows the God Ea/Enki standing in a garden and uniting in himself four streams of sweet water that come from four sources. The direction of the flow of the streams is reversed in the story of Eden, but the biblical garden may be inspired by the temple garden at Eridu. Herbert Niehr shows that there are three traditions for El’s dwelling at Ugarit, stemming from Anatolian, North Syrian, and Middle Syrian traditions. El’s residence in any case is on earth, although one text mentions that his power extends to the heavens. Beate Ego observes that the waters of the city of God in the Bible are treated positively and symbolize the waters of life, since God is in the midst of the city. With the destruction of the temple, the concept of the city of God is
transformed, and Ps 87 shows that all peoples belong to Zion. The notion of the river in
the city of God is treated eschatologically in Ezek 47:1–12 and Sir 24.

The four essays in part 4 deal with death, life, and the underworld. Stefanie Gulde finds
parallels to the Ugaritic notions of the sun passing through the underworld or the chaos
battle in Anatolian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian texts. But she also identifies distinctive
elements at Ugarit and finds some continuity between this world and the other world in
Ugaritic religion. Michaela Bauks describes chaos as the endangering of the world order.
Outside the Bible the chaos battle deals not so much with cosmogony as with the threat to
royal power and ideology. The Bible deals with the chaos battle before creation but also
transfers this motif to the battle against the sea. The chaos battle did not affect the earthly
king in the Bible, but Yahweh deals with the people in past, present, and future. Angelika
Berlejung studies life and death among the Israelites. While the Israelites portrayed the
danger of death as similar to a hunted or trapped bird, the dead were not changed into
birds after death, as they were in the ancient Near East. Klaus Bieberstein reports that
Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions locate the last judgment at a specific spot on the
periphery of the city. In Isa 30:33, Jer 7:30–34, and 19:5–7, Hinnom as the place of sin
becomes the place of punishment. In Joel 4, Zech 14, and subsequent texts the location of
the last judgment is transferred from Hinnom to the Kidron Valley.

Ego and Janowski supply sixteen pages of bibliography in part 5. There are three indexes.
This rich volume provides many new insights into the picture of the world in the Bible
itself and fascinating forays into the realm of extrabiblical parallels.