This study seeks to demonstrate that the apocalypse 4 Ezra “maintains a surprisingly traditional, essentially positive view of the material creation and envisions substantial elements of continuity between this world and the world to come” (161). The key word is “surprisingly,” since most scholars consider the imminent and total dissolution of the world to be a signature feature of apocalypses. Moo, however, presents a compelling case for his thesis.

Ch. 1 situates the study within the ongoing debate on the nature of apocalypses and apocalypticism. Moo admits that 4 Ezra presents a difficult challenge for those who claim the apocalypses are anything but pessimistic and world-denying. That said, he finds in the work of scholars such Christopher Rowland a way of understanding apocalypses which does not proceed from the presumption that their worldview is rigidly dualistic, or that their orientation is exclusively eschatological and otherworldly.

Ch. 2 addresses the question of the narrative perspective of 4 Ezra. Moo rejects Karina Martin Hogan’s argument that Ezra’s dialogues with the angel Uriel in the first half of 4 Ezra reflect a theological debate between two schools of wisdom, and that the author of the apocalypse proposes his own, “apocalyptic” theology in the revelatory visions of the second half of the book (cf. Theologies in Conflict in 4 Ezra: Wisdom Debate and Apocalyptic Solution [JSJSup 130; 2008]. Moo contends—correctly—that 4 Ezra relates a tension between two theologies, not three, which are espoused by Ezra and Uriel and represent different stages of the author’s evolving viewpoint. Strangely, Moo does not engage with Stone here, even though Stone is the scholar who is most associated with this position.

Ch. 3 focuses on the creation of the world as described in 4 Ezra 3:4-6, 6:1-6, and 6:38-54, where the author saw the world as intrinsically good, and did not associate its material nature with the evil seed that later corrupted the human heart. Most importantly, God’s chief purpose in creating the earth was for it to serve as a future inheritance for his people. Therefore Moo argues that 4 Ezra specifically and the apocalyptic worldview in general allow for the possibility that not everything in the present age is fated to pass away.

Ch. 4 gets to the heart of Moo’s thesis. The imminent dissolution of the present world which is implicit in the logic of the apocalyptic worldview may be attributed to the effects of human sinfulness or reckoned as the final stage of the divine plan for creation. Both notions are present in 4 Ezra. But its
author also imagined the created world to have a special destiny of its own, that proceeds apart from the main, one-way road to total cosmic annihilation that the apocalypse otherwise anticipates. Moo identifies this side-track in 4 Ezra’s natural theology, which in standing outside humanity finds itself uncorrupted by it. This in turn leads to the prospect that if the created world is liberated from the baleful effects of human corruption, it might be renewed in the age to come and thus fulfill its first and chief purpose.

Ch. 5 asks whether the hope for the continuity and renewal of the created earth, in an apocalyptic worldview that anticipates a radical and total break between the two ages, might also be detected in 4 Ezra’s portrayal of the age to come. Here Moo’s task is quite difficult: the impending end of the present world-age informs Uriel’s pronouncements throughout his dialogues and is the message of the visionary revelations of the second half of the book. Yet for all this, in the references to “another land” (13:39-50), where the lost tribes will someday be able to keep the Law, and the “field of flowers” (9:26), where Ezra’s great conversion takes place halfway between heaven and earth, Moo again uncovers clues that apocalyptic discontinuities in time and space are perhaps not absolute, which allows for the possibility that the present world will be renewed at the appointed time, rather than replaced wholesale.

Ch. 6 presents Moo’s conclusions, along with a summary statement on the natural theology of 4 Ezra and a section on future research. A bibliography and indexes of ancient sources and modern authors follow.

This highly stimulating book is perhaps the best study published on 4 Ezra since Stone’s 1990 Hermeneia commentary. Its prose is crisp. Its line of reasoning is original. Nearly every page contains insights that cast new light on a difficult text. The contribution of its thesis, however, is not immediately apparent. Moo treats 4 Ezra very much in the manner of a skilful defence attorney who is faced with what seems to be an overwhelming case against him. As a result, he works around the evidence—questioning a supposition here, pointing out an exception there—until he establishes what in the popular idiom is known as “reasonable doubt.” Sensu stricto, Moo makes his case. He demonstrates that it is possible that the author of 4 Ezra could have envisioned a renewal of the old Earth within the context of the new creation, despite the expectation for a radical cosmic transformation that is central to the apocalypse specifically and the apocalyptic worldview in general. Yet the point seems so peripheral to the function of 4 Ezra and the logic of the worldview that one wonders why Moo is so keen to make it.

This question suggests that the principal contribution of his book ought to be measured by another yardstick. Although his investigation is about 4 Ezra, it is clear that Moo has something else in view. For his book is also