

The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology. By Jason C. Meyer. NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 6. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009, xx + 331 pp., \$19.99.

In this revised dissertation (mentor: T. R. Schreiner; Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY), Meyer proffers the following thesis: “Paul conceives of the Mosaic (old) covenant as fundamentally non-eschatological in contrast to the eschatological nature of the new covenant. . . . [It] is now old because it belongs to the old age . . . and therefore . . . is both transitory and ineffectual. . . . The new covenant is both eternal and effectual because it belongs to the new age and partakes of the power of the new age, the Holy Spirit” (pp. 1–2, 268). Although the exact relation between covenant and law calls for further clarification, Meyer is content to view them as “intertwined realities” (p. 146) and makes use of passages about the law to determine the nature of the old covenant, for reasons that come into focus as he proceeds.

The “Introduction” (pp. 1–19) sketches the state of the question and sets forth a method for inquiry. E. P. Sanders’s influential challenge to the Lutheran polarization of “law” and “gospel,” proposing instead a common “pattern of religion” in Palestinian Judaism and Paulinism, did not reckon with the differential in grace between God’s election of an earthly people to “covenantal nomism” (Sanders’s term) and God’s “eschatological intervention” (Meyer’s term, p. 2) to create in covenanters what he demands from them. In chapter 1, as throughout the study, Meyer more often takes sides with critics of the new look on Judaism and Paul (D. A. Carson, A. Das, S. Gathercole, D. Moo, T. R. Schreiner, M. Seifrid, F. Thielman, S. Westerholm) than with contributors (J. D. G. Dunn, S. Hafemann, R. Hays, F. Watson, N. T. Wright), while showing sensitivity to nuances of each and a willingness to learn from all.

Rather than confine himself to a study of the nine occurrences of *diathēkē* (“covenant”) in Paul’s letters, Meyer widens his data set to include related (overlapping, opposing, subordinate, and contiguous) terms that branch out in the same contexts. This linguistically sophisticated method shows how pervasive is the covenant concept in Paul’s thought, even where he uses other vocabulary, and paves the way for structural analysis of that concept in relation to other ideas.

“A Transhistorical Understanding” (pp. 20–33) surveys passages where Paul assumes a line of continuity between the OT and the NT, setting references to the biblical “covenants [plural]” (Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12) alongside of God’s “promises” (2 Cor 1:20), the prophetic witness of “the law” (Rom 3:21), and the fulfillment of the paschal lamb (1 Cor 5:7). The bulk of what follows homes in on discontinuities.

To lay a foundation, chapter 3 (“The Old and New Antithesis in Paul,” pp. 34–61) delves into how Paul applies the adjectives “old” (*archaios* and *palaios*) and “new” (*neos* and *kainos*) to things other than covenants. Passed in review are the old versus the new man (Adam/Christ), letter/Spirit, old leaven and new lump, and, most comprehensively, old creation and new. Structurally, these binary oppositions correspond to others, such as law/faith, sin/righteousness, flesh/Spirit, and slavery/freedom. The conclusion is that Paul’s theology pivots on a “transcendental antithesis” (p. 55) between two ages, this world and the world to come, so that newness indicates an “eschatological advance” over the old, “accomplishes what the ‘old’ failed to do,” and “replaces the ‘old’” (p. 53).

The central chapters (chaps. 4–6, pp. 62–114, 115–76, 177–229) enter into exegesis of the chief Pauline texts on the two covenants: 2 Cor 3:1–4:6, Galatians 3–4, and Romans 9–11, respectively. Meyer’s engagement with the cream of commentaries and relevant monographs on these passages is thorough, penetrating, and judicious. Thematic in all these chapters are “two defining dichotomies” (p. 63): the ineffectuality of the old covenant to redeem versus God’s prevenient initiative and recreative energy

in the new; and the temporal boundary of the old era versus the open-ended permanence of the new. Associated with the old covenant are characteristics of the present evil age in contrast to blessings of the age to come that have been inaugurated with the new covenant, in contrasting pairs. In sum, in 2 Corinthians we encounter letter/Spirit, writing on stone tablets versus the human heart, glory/surpassing glory, veiledness/unveiledness, (slavery)/freedom, and condemnation/righteousness. In Galatians, word pairs include doing/believing, curse/blessing, law/promise, mediation/unilateral gift, Mt. Sinai/Jerusalem above, slavery/freedom. In Romans, discussed are doing/believing, division of covenanters (tiny remnant distinguished from unfaithful majority) versus a monolithic body of the faithful, hardening/mercy, and judgment/forgiveness.

Chapter 7 (“The Mosaic Covenant on Old Testament Terms,” pp. 230–67) shows that Paul’s old/new schema has roots in the self-understanding of the OT. Deuteronomy already identifies the defect in the covenant—Israel is “rebellious,” “unbelieving,” and “stiff-necked”—and therefore expects the nation’s disobedience to draw down the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28, 31) before God will undertake to make them compliant, as expressed in a passage (Deuteronomy 30) that anticipates new-covenant promises in the major prophets (Isa 59:20–21; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:17–20; 36:24–31). The same schema can be traced in the OT theme of circumcision of the heart (Lev 26:41–42; Deut 10:15–17; 30:6; Jer 4:3–4; 9:25–26; Ezek 4:7–9).

Meyer establishes his thesis hands down. Naturally one might split hairs over exegetical minutiae, but there is no fault in the main buttresses. Readers will have to make allowance for an authorial bent to put argument that ought to be in the text into too many long footnotes and for a glaring habit of enumerating *ad taedium*, both in options for interpretation and in factors for deciding. The only serious anticlimax comes in the “Conclusion” (pp. 268–87), which merely rehashes the already clearly stated thesis and the results of the individual chapters and then hastens straight into “Practical Implications,” instead of returning to the big issues outlined in the introduction and driving the screw on errant views of the old covenant in scholarship.

By clarifying the nature of the old covenant, Meyer beams a ray into the ferment over Paul’s doctrine of justification. Paul rejected “works of law,” not because the very attempt to perform commandments is itself an act of hubris, even before actual transgressions (Luther, Bultmann); nor because Judaism is dogmatically “not Christianity” (Sanders); nor again merely because law-keeping was a boundary marker that served Jewish ethnocentrism (Dunn, Wright); but because (1) Torah belongs to the old covenant, (2) the chosen people no less than the rest of Adamic humanity fails to fulfill these stipulations, and (3) the letter does not regenerate people radically, with the result that its sanctions for inevitable disobedience can only kill (pp. 146–75). Justification by faith, then, is God’s answer to the universal human plight of objective guilt before him, made hopeless by God’s unbending standard of righteousness clashing with our utter impotence to remedy our own condition. Justification “directly addresses the issue of eternal life . . . not nationalism,” the latter emphasis being present in Paul but “secondary and derivative, not primary” (p. 158). Aspects of Meyer’s view of the law have been outlined in publications of those listed above who distance themselves from the new perspective (and in my identical but briefer *Way of Salvation* [Milton Keynes: Pater-noster, 2005], chaps. 4–6).

Among “Issues for Further Study” (p. 287), Meyer might have raised afresh, in the light of his findings, the question, also up for debate, whether God’s approval of believers at the Last Assize will recognize the Spirit’s fruit in a decree that finalizes their justification. Most Protestants, echoing the stout “No” the Reformers retorted in polemics with the Schoolmen, construe justification as the sole item of NT eschatology that is totally realized in the here and now, on an exclusively Christological basis. Yet if a

defining feature of the new covenant is the recreative power of God already moving saints to please him, as Meyer rightly holds, is it coherent to bar off this pneumatic reality from the grounds for God's terminal verdict that people are righteous (Gal 2:17a; 5:4–6; 1 Thess 3:12–13; 2 Thess 1:5–12; 1 Cor 3:13–15; 4:4–5; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 2:13; 8:33–34; 14:10–12, 17–18; 2 Tim 4:8)?

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Philippians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition. By Dean Flemming. New Beacon Bible Commentary. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2009, 255 pp., \$25.99 paper.

Long overshadowed by the theological heavyweights of Romans and Galatians, Paul's short epistle to the Philippians has in recent years gained increasing interest among Pauline interpreters. For example, led by the works of Stephen E. Fowl and Michael J. Gorman, scholars have reassessed the place of the so-called "Christ-hymn" of 2:6–11, not only within Paul's theology in general but also within our understanding of Paul's apostolic purposes for his churches. Thus, the appearance of an explicitly theological commentary on the letter written by an author with broad international experience is a welcome development.

At the same time, I admit to approaching this commentary with some reluctance. I have no reservations about the author, the commentary series itself, or Paul's little jewel of a letter. Rather, the multiplication of commentaries and commentary series on the market is enough to make one's eyes glaze over at the thought of yet one more. What I found when I read the book, however, was an astute compendium of scholarship, both ancient and modern, expressed in a succinct and lucid style. In other words, this is an ideal commentary on Philippians for students, teachers, or pastors who want an informed, even-handed tour through the letter.

After a 24-page introduction, the commentary proper follows the format for the New Beacon Bible Commentary. That is, the letter is broken down into major subsections (seven for Philippians), each of which is examined in a three-stage process. The first stage, a brief "Behind the Text" component, locates the text within its literary and social-historical context. Second, the longer "In the Text" section offers a mostly verse-by-verse treatment of the text based upon the *New International Version*. No Greek is required to follow the discussion, though Flemming refers to the Greek using transliteration when necessary. A final "From the Text" segment examines issues of theological import, history of interpretation, and contemporary application. Sprinkled throughout are short excursions on a variety of subjects that arise in the course of the letter. For example, Flemming treats such topics as "Women Leaders in Philippi" (4:2–3); "Paul and Financial Support" (4:10–20); "Augustine on Jesus' Incarnation" (2:5–11); and "Paul's Story and Ancient Autobiography" (3:1–11). The book contains no indices, though an index of authors cited would have proved helpful. After all, in a series advertised as written "from the Wesleyan theological perspective," one would like to be able to locate readily what Mr. Wesley himself said about the letter.

Flemming's introduction covers the standard issues for studying Philippians including the city of Philippi, Paul's mission there, and the thorny problem of Philippians's date and place of writing. He also discusses Philippians as rhetoric and as a letter, dealing with issues of unity in the process. Finally, the introduction examines key themes including, among others, the defining story of Christ, the surpassing knowledge of Christ, cruciform living, and partnership in the gospel.