

helpful as preparatory material for a series of sermons on Rom 6–8. With regard to the latter, I often found myself reading well past the comments on my particular passage—wanting to see what came next! With regard to sermon preparation, I found the array of references to theological interpreters, ancient and contemporary, to be broad and refreshing. Chrysostom, Augustine, Karl Barth, Martin Luther, Frederick Buechner, Origen, John Calvin, John Wesley, John Biddle, Leander Keck, and others were packed into forty pages dealing with Rom 6–8. In addition, I found it helpful that on many pages pertinent quotations from the history of interpretation are highlighted—some from hymns and some from scholars. Almost all are thought-provoking, from the hymn “Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart” (p. 115) to Barth’s “We—God’s children! In uttering these words we are talking blasphemy or we are singing the song of the redeemed” (p. 141). Sarah Lancaster has succeeded in writing a commentary that “speaks to the church and brings it forward in the life of discipleship.”

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## **Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians**

by *A. Andrew Das*

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016. 304 pp. \$79.00 (cloth). ISBN 978-1-4514-9009-1.

IN THIS REFRESHING ADDITION to Pauline studies, A. Andrew Das offers a welcome “call for sobriety and methodological rigor” (p. 31) in analysis of possible narratives behind Paul’s thought. Indeed he wants to “splash water onto the faces of interpreters” (p. 31), and he succeeds brilliantly.

The structure and argument of the book are straightforward. The introductory chapter lays out the issues, making two important overall points. First, any theory of an overarching or structuring narrative for Paul’s thought must be

grounded exegetically in his use of Scripture. This means careful attention must be paid to the debates around detecting citations, allusions, and “echoes.” Second, analysis of Paul’s use of Scripture must take seriously his largely gentile audience, and whether they would have recognized allusions and echoes, let alone the evocation of scriptural narratives.

Focusing on Galatians as a test case, Das analyzes the evidence for and against six current theories that propose underlying narratives in Galatians: the influx of the gentiles into Zion; Paul as covenantal theologian; the Akedah; the exodus; the Spirit as the cloud in the exodus; and the imperial cult. The first five theories concern Paul’s use of Israel’s Scripture and “the stories of Israel,” as promised in the title. Das carefully weighs the textual arguments in their Second Temple and Roman contexts. Two examples will suffice: in the chapter on exodus themes, he offers a cogent appraisal of adoption language; in the chapter on the Akedah he compares Paul and his Jewish contemporaries on the theme of Abraham’s faithfulness. The last theory posits a narrative of the imperial cult in Galatians. Das finds no evidence for official Roman persecution of believers during the time of Paul nor for reading Galatians as subversively anti-imperial.

The final chapter sums up “lessons learned”: the importance of textual anchors for narrative theories; the importance of Paul’s original audience, as well as his Second Temple Jewish context; the recognition that Paul (or any scriptural author, for that matter) may take up an earlier biblical narrative only to subvert or reframe it; and the danger of an overenthusiastic embrace of narrative theories that may overlook opposing evidence.

With careful argumentation, probing analysis, attention to literary and historical contexts, many insightful new observations, and considerable wit, this book is a delight to read. It is also an important and timely contribution to the study of Paul’s letters.

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