

*Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64.* By Darrell L. Bock. Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1998, pp. xiv + 285, n. p. paper.

Darrell Bock is research professor of NT at Dallas Theological Seminary, and has published significantly in the arena of gospel studies, including a mammoth two volume commentary on Luke and his dissertation on prophecy and proclamation in Luke. In this study Bock examines the charge of blasphemy that was raised against Jesus of Nazareth according to Mark 14:61-64. He inquires as to why the words Jesus pronounced before the Sanhedrin were considered to be worthy of death, and he also considers whether the account is historically credible. Chapter one consists of a survey of scholarship since the work of Hans Lietzmann in 1931. The work of Paul Winter, Josef Blinzler, David Catchpole, August Strobel, Otto Betz, E. P. Sanders, Martin Hengel, Robert Gundry, Raymond Brown, J. C. O'Neill, and C. E. Evans is surveyed. This chapter helpfully acquaints the readers with the parameters of the discussion and sets the stage for Bock's own contribution.

Chapter two is the most extensive in the book. Here blasphemy in Judaism is investigated, beginning with the OT and concluding with the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds. All other relevant Jewish literature between these two points is also examined. The use of God's name constituted blasphemy according to Judaism. Bock shows, however, that blasphemy cannot be limited to the utterance of God's name. People were also guilty of blasphemy if they were idolators, manifested disrespect towards God, and

insulted his chosen leaders. What Bock demonstrates here is that the Jewish background does not support the idea that Jesus would have been condemned only if he pronounced the divine name (cf. *m. Sanh.* 7:5). Other offenses could also count as blasphemy, especially comparing oneself to God, and hence the accuracy of the Markan account should not be disputed on the grounds that Jesus did not utter God's sacred name. Incidentally, Robert Gundry argues that Jesus did pronounce God's name, but Bock rightly questions that thesis, and notes that even if Jesus pronounced God's name in citing Ps 110:1 it is not clear that this would have been grounds for blasphemy.

In the third chapter exalted figures in Judaism are explored since Jesus claimed that he would sit at God's right hand and return with glory on the clouds. In recent scholarship the Jewish antecedents to NT christology have been the subject of intense study. One thinks here of Larry Hurtado's, *One God, One Lord*. Bock considers both human and angelic figures in this chapter. Most of the human figures were honored by God and hence received revelations about what would occur in the future. A few honored men do sit in God's presence, including Moses, David, and Enoch. Adam and Abraham sit to witness the final judgment, and Abel sits when the last judgment commences. The most exalted figure is Enoch in *1 Enoch* 37-71. He is honored as the Son of Man who will conduct the end time judgment. Angels on the whole do not share the exalted position of the few human beings bestowed with honor. Only Gabriel among the angels sits in God's presence and in this instance he serves merely as Enoch's escort. Further, Bock shows that the high honor bestowed on Enoch and Enoch-Metatron led to criticism of his stature in some circles, showing that some Jewish writers feared that the uniqueness of God was threatened.

The concluding chapter examines the text in Mark 14:61-64 where Jesus is charged with blasphemy. It is here that Bock pulls together the threads of his study. He argues that the examination of Jesus before the Sanhedrin was not intended to be a capital trial, and hence the fact that the trial does not accord with the rules of the Mishnah is irrelevant. I think Bock rightly argues that we have a preliminary hearing by which the Jews were attempting to find grounds to hand Jesus over to the Romans. Bock also contends that a number of sources for the trial exist, including Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and even Saul. I would like to add that the resurrected Lord himself may have communicated to his disciples what occurred during the trial scene. Scholars rarely consider this possibility, but evangelicals who uphold the truth of the resurrection may legitimately list Jesus himself as a possible source of the events at the trial. Bock argues that Jesus' appeal to Ps 110:1 and Dan 7:13 was considered to be blasphemy. Indeed, in claiming to ride on the clouds of heaven Jesus claims for himself something that was true only of God (Exod 14:20; Num 10:34; Ps 104:3; Isa 19:1).

Bock goes on to say that Jesus' claim to be the end time judge was not blasphemy per se to the Jewish leaders (given the tradition of Enoch as Son of Man), but what they objected to was Jesus' arrogation of this role. But I wonder if Bock's own evidence points beyond this, in that Jesus was claiming divine authority as one riding upon the clouds. In any case, Bock is correct that the startling directness with which the earthly Jesus claims such authority would scandalize the religious leaders. Those honored in the past might have been considered worthy of such a role, though even here, as Bock shows, some Jews were nervous about Enoch's reputed status. Assigning divine authority to Jesus, as a teacher from Galilee, was, however, unthinkable. I think Bock is correct here, but he

could have strengthened his thesis by pointing out in particular what made Jesus' objectionable to the Jewish leaders. In other words, they found it difficult to believe that Jesus of Nazareth could have divine authority and contravene the sabbath, hold suspicious views on the Torah, associate with tax collectors and sinners, promise the destruction of the temple, and engage in a fierce critique of the religious leaders. Bock also shows that Jesus also implicitly claimed to be the future judge of the religious leaders, which they believed violated Exod 22:27. Bock concludes his study by saying that the events and the sayings have a strong claim to historical reliability. We can be thankful for the reverent scholarship informing this work, one which is informed by a sound and rigorous historical method and one in which the supernatural character of early Christianity is maintained.

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