

*Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3.* By Scott J. Hafemann. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. II/81. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995, xii + 497 pp., DM 228.

This work represents the completion of Hafemann's study on 2 Corinthians 2-3, and fortunately his book is also available in an affordable version from Hendrickson publishers. The first work is contained in his 1986 dissertation, *Suffering and the Spirit*, which was also published by J. C. B. Mohr in the WUNT series (an abridged and edited version of this book titled *Suffering and Ministry in the Spirit* is available from Eerdmans, 1990). Hafemann tackles one of the most controverted texts in the pauline corpus (2 Corinthians 3), and his study and conclusions are bound to be of interest since one's understanding of 2 Corinthians 3 impinges on central issues in pauline theology, such as Paul's understanding of the Mosaic law and the hermeneutical implications of his use of the Old Testament. Indeed, from now on all scholars who address these issues must reckon with Hafemann, for his work represents the most thorough interpretation both of 2 Corinthians 3 and the Old Testament background to that text, and he directly challenges the scholarly consensus on this text.

The work commences with an introduction in which the history of research on the letter and spirit in Paul and the "new perspective" on Paul's theology of the law are sketched in. Part one of the book examines the sufficiency and call of Moses and the sufficiency and call of Paul. Moses' call is examined in the Old Testament and a wide range of Jewish literature (including the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran, Philo, Josephus, and Rabbinic literature), and it is argued that in the Old Testament his call functions as the

"prototype" and "precedent" for the call of the Old Testament prophets. Even though Moses (and the prophets) are insufficient in themselves to accomplish God's purposes, they are made sufficient by God's grace for their calling. Hafemann does not argue that the same portrait of Moses exists in all of Jewish literature. For instance, Philo emphasizes Moses' intrinsic superiority and Josephus downplays his insufficiency. The common theme found throughout the literature is that Moses' authority was presupposed, and it functioned to support the theological agenda of the various writers. Any attempt to form a "synthetic picture" of Moses is wisely avoided by Hafemann. Instead, the history of interpretation provides the interpretive background for Paul's own use of the tradition.

Paul's calling, it is argued, is patterned after the call of Moses and the prophets. He too is made sufficient by God's grace despite his insufficiency. The idea that Paul is actually a second Moses is rejected. Instead, Paul alludes to the call of Moses and the prophets to establish his legitimacy and authority. Paul, like Moses, was made sufficient by God's grace despite his insufficiency. It is not the case, however, that absolute continuity exists between Moses and Paul. Hafemann provides a careful analysis of the new covenant text in Jer. 31:31-34 and interprets Paul's understanding of the new covenant and letter/spirit in light of the Jeremiah text and Ezek. 36:25-26. He convincingly argues that the letter/spirit contrast must be interpreted in terms of salvation history. The term "letter" does not signify any criticism of the content of the law, nor does it refer to legalism. Hafemann rightly demonstrates that the new covenant texts in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 teach that the law will be *kept* when the Spirit is given. Thus, the letter/Spirit contrast should be interpreted functionally and in terms of salvation history. The "letter" refers to the law without the Spirit. Israel transgressed the law because it lacked the power of the Spirit to

put it into practice. The presence of the Spirit, therefore, does not involve doing away with the law. Those who have the Spirit keep the law, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied. Moses' problem, then, was not that he transmitted the law to Israel. The problem was that the law was given apart from the transforming work of the Spirit to a hardened and resistant people. By contrast, Paul's ministry is superior because through the preaching of the cross the Spirit is given with the result that the law is obeyed. Hafemann's exegesis is penetrating and convincing on this issue. It is hard for me to see how any other interpretation could overturn his.

Part two of the book explores the letter/spirit contrast in light of the second giving of the law in Exodus 32-34. A thorough study of Exodus 32-34 in both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint ensues. Hafemann rightly insists that we must read this text as a coherent narrative since this is the form in which Paul knew the text. Both the Masoretic text version and the Septuagint are substantially the same with some minor differences. The exegesis of this entire section is masterfully done, and many exegetical insights await the reader. The most important conclusion from this section, which flows from Hafemann's exegesis of all three chapters, is the reason why Moses wore a veil. He contends that Moses did not wear the veil "to make up some deficiency in the glory or in himself, nor as an expression of his humility and modesty, nor to keep the glory of God from being wasted, nor even to keep it from being profaned" (p. 224). The veil was given to Moses as an expression of God's mercy and judgment. It revealed his mercy because the glory of God was still available to the people, though in a veiled form. The covenant with Israel which was broken by the golden calf incident had been restored. God's judgment is also involved because a direct revelation of God's glory would have destroyed Israel in her stiff-necked state. Once again,

Hafemann's analysis is persuasive and grounded in a contextual analysis of Exodus 32-34. One objection might be that the glory of God in the tabernacle in Exodus 40 shows that the glory is now restored to Israel, but Hafemann rightly remarks (p. 224) that the glory hidden behind the curtain in the tabernacle is analogous to the glory being both hidden and revealed in Moses' experience in the tent of meeting.

The last two chapters are sustained interpretations of 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 and 3:12-18 respectively. Hafemann attempts to demonstrate that the argument of these verses functions as a support for Paul's sufficiency as an apostle. In verses 7-11 Paul, says Hafemann, does not argue that the Mosaic covenant possesses less glory than the new. The surprising element here is the conjunction of the glory of the Mosaic covenant with death. How can something which is glorious produce death? Hafemann rightly insists that Paul cannot merely *assume* that the Mosaic covenant led to death since for most Jews the law was the pathway to life. The reference to the letters engraved on stones indicates a reference to the second giving of the law in Exodus 32-34 and highlights the glory of the law. When verse 7 says Israel could not look at the glory of God which was shining on Moses' face, this does not mean that Israel could not gaze upon God's glory at all. The infinitive *atenisai* signifies that Israel could not look at his glory "*directly and continuously*" (p. 282 italics his) without being destroyed by God's judgment. Thus, verse 7 functions as evidence for the thesis propounded in verse 6 that the letter kills. In verse 7 Paul summons the narrative of the golden calf to illustrate the point that the law apart from the Spirit kills. Since God did not grant Israel his Spirit, the ministry of Moses became one of death for them. The problem, then, cannot be located in the content of the law. It is the law without the gift of the Spirit which produces death, and since Israel lacked the Spirit she could not

keep the law.

One of the most intractable issues in the interpretation of 2 Corinthians centers on his interpretation of the veiling of Moses. Most interpreters argue that Paul departs from the meaning of Exodus 34 and proceeds from Christian presuppositions. Paul, according to most scholars, contends that the glory on Moses' face faded or came to an end, even though the most natural reading of Exodus 34 and the unanimous view in Jewish tradition is that the glory on his face lasted forever. Hafemann charts a different course and engages in a thorough study of the key verb *katargeo*. The view that the verb means "abolish, nullify, or bring to an end" is ably defended. Not only does the verb signify that something has been brought to an end, but the consequences or effects of that which is nullified or abolished are also involved. Hafemann conclusively demonstrates that the idea that the verb means "fade away" cannot be sustained. His understanding of the verb *katargeo* leads him to the following interpretation of verse 7. The veil on Moses' face brought to an end the consequences or effects which would have occurred if the glory of God were not covered. The effect for Israel would have been judgment and destruction were it not for the veil of Moses. Hafemann's understanding of *katargeo* is crucial for his book, and if one were to dispute his interpretation this would probably be the place to begin. Nonetheless, I found his analysis of the term to be persuasive, and those who dispute his findings will need to provide not only an alternate definition of *katargeo* but also a plausible explanation for the use of the term in the context of 2 Corinthians 3.

According to Hafemann, then, Paul interprets Exodus 34 in accord with its original context. He maintains that the point of the comparison between the glory of the two covenants is not quantitative. The difference expressed between the two covenants in

verses 9-10 is eschatological, in that the old covenant primarily demonstrated God's glory in judgment, while in the new covenant his glory is manifested by his saving righteousness through the gift of the Spirit.

The most interesting issue in verses 12-18 is whether Paul "plays with" or distorts the Old Testament narrative regarding the veiling of Moses (Exod. 34:29-35). Scholars generally agree that Paul veers away from the historical meaning of the Exodus text. But Hafemann boldly (and in my opinion, convincingly) argues that Paul interpreted Exodus 34 in accord with its historical meaning. Moses wore the veil so that stiff-necked Israel would not experience the consequences of God's judgment, which would have been his "death-dealing judgment" (p. 358). Hafemann maintains that in verse 13 *telos* bears the meaning "outcome" or "consequence." And once again *katargeo* signifies the bringing to the end of the effects of God's judgment. That is, Israel was spared by the wearing of the veil from encountering the glory of God in an unmediated form which would have spelled Israel's certain judgment given her hardened condition. When Paul speaks of the veil over Israel at the reading of the law, the point is not that Israel cannot understand the law, but that she is morally hardened so that she will not and cannot submit to the law. Only the Spirit, which is mediated in Paul's ministry, can remove that hardness. Israel in rejecting Christ continues the pattern of her history which commenced with the golden calf incident. Those who turn to the Lord, which Hafemann identifies as Yahweh, will have the veil removed.

The identification of the Lord and the Spirit in verse 17 has long been debated. Hafemann understands the Lord here to be Yahweh, but insists that no ontological identification of the Lord and the Spirit is intended. Rather, Paul's point is that Moses' experience with Yahweh is analogous to the experience of the Spirit which was mediated

through Paul's ministry. The freedom proclaimed in verse 17, Hafemann contends, is the freedom to fulfill the law in accord with Jer. 31:31-34 and Ezek. 36:26-27. Verse 18, then, refers to the gradual transformation of believers through the power of the Spirit which occurs as they behold the glory of the Lord. Unlike Moses Paul did not have to veil God's glory because his glory does not destroy those who have the Spirit but transforms them. Paul saw the eschatological promises of the Old Testament and the Second Exodus promises of Isaiah as being fulfilled in his ministry. Through the Spirit the people of God keep his law and avoid the judgment which came under the old covenant. Paul was bold as an apostle because he understood that his ministry was radically different from Moses', in that the Spirit was mediated through his ministry.

If Hafemann is correct, and I think he is, then the consequences of his study for New Testament scholarship are weighty. The content of the Old Testament law is not criticized in 2 Corinthians 3, nor is there a critique of legalism here. In fact, Paul maintains that the law is kept by those who have the Spirit. Hafemann suggests that the opponents were Judaizers who trumpeted Moses' ministry as superior to Paul's. But Paul strikes back by highlighting the superiority of his ministry to Moses', for through his suffering the Spirit was mediated, and the gift of the Spirit was precisely what was lacking in Moses' ministry. The major difference between the ministry of Moses and Paul, therefore, relates to salvation history. The Spirit was not bequeathed through Moses' ministry, while the gift of the Spirit was at the very center of Paul's ministry. This study also calls into question the creativity of Paul's hermeneutic. Many scholars appeal to 2 Corinthians 3 to justify the thesis that Paul does not read the Old Testament in accord with its historical meaning. In fact, 2 Corinthians 3 is often the pivotal text for those who defend an ahistorical hermeneutic in

Paul. And they go on to argue that Paul's playful use of the Old Testament text is a paradigm for our hermeneutical work. But Hafemann enters the lions' den by arguing for a careful contextual reading by Paul of the Old Testament based on its original canonical meaning in 2 Corinthians 3. He calls into question, then, the idea that Paul used the Old Testament text in a playful and creative way contrary to its original intention. The pattern of Paul, Hafemann suggests, is to read the Old Testament in its original context, and thus if modern day interpreters accept Paul as their paradigm they must do the same.

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