

[*MJTM* 16 (2014–2015)]

BOOK REVIEW

Chad O. Brand, Tom Pratt Jr., Robert L. Reymond, Robert L. Saucy, and Robert L. Thomas. *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*. Nashville: B&H, 2015. 317 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9780805445268. \$29.99.

With *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*, Chad O. Brand, former professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, presents a volume that surveys the various positions on the doctrine of the relationship between Israel and the Church. To introduce this book, he gives an excellent survey of the history of this doctrine. As his former student at Boyce College, I think it is fair to say that this chapter represents vintage Brand: he demonstrates a thorough knowledge of all the details of the historical development of the doctrine, while presenting its content in an intriguing way that highlights its larger trends, issues, and figures. However, it would have been helpful if he had surveyed and evaluated the foundational hermeneutical differences between the various positions outlined throughout this survey.

Brand provides an outline for each of the contributors. First, he asks the contributors to address the exegetical issues related to Israel and its relationship with God. This question certainly matters, given that it involves the explanation of certain biblical texts. This question, however, would likely have proved more fruitful if Brand not only asked the contributors to address the exegetical issues involved but also their exegetical methods and the presuppositions of those methods.

Second, Brand explains that they need to expatiate what is distinctively new in the coming of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This question is significant because the contributors need to wrestle with and explain precisely the nature of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–34). To make this question more beneficial,

however, the contributors could have considered not only what they believe exegetically to be the new part of the coming of the church, but also *how* they plan to consider what is new. Although exegesis of Scripture should play a part, theologians will likely be able to see where theological tradition plays another central role in determining one's answer as they read these chapters. Third, Brand requests that the contributors analyze the issues in relationship to the doctrines of ecclesiology and eschatology. This aspect of their analysis is important, but defining this issue more precisely would have made for more of a contribution to this doctrinal discussion. Fourth, Brand asks the contributors to comment on the issue of the modern state of Israel, and if it has some role to play in carrying out God's plan for the salvation of the world. This question helps the contributors concretize their responses, and thus provides a helpful access point for understanding each position. However, the usefulness of this question is debatable, because after the contributors have answered the other questions, the answer to this question becomes obvious.

While each of these questions matters, I wonder if two additional questions should have been included. First, what is the proper theological method? Although this question is seemingly unrelated and inherently more scholarly and philosophical, it matters because the theological method is determinative for the theological result. Second, another question to consider is how each theologian has developed their arguments based on feedback from the other theologians who disagree with their positions. In an often emotionally-charged discussion of a doctrine like this one, theologians, pastors, etc., tend to buckle down on their own view to the exclusion of listening to the proponents of other views. An editor, however, can ask contributors to answer only so many questions before the book becomes too lengthy, and thus goes well beyond its intention of being an introduction to the perspectives surveyed. Nevertheless, given the wealth of published material on this issue, one would expect a volume like this one to go deeper.

On the positive side, the editor and contributors have achieved their goal in providing a one-volume work that contains

four views on the relationship between the church and Israel. On the negative side, however, if this volume demonstrates anything, it showcases that this theological match is a stalemate. Many of the contributors demonstrate an unwillingness to take the other positions seriously by interacting with the best sources from the other viewpoints. Furthermore, some of the contributors treat this theological issue as if it were merely an issue of exegesis—that is, as if one’s fundamental hermeneutical convictions have little to no bearing. This debate will likely never be settled by exegesis of biblical texts because this issue demonstrates the divergent results of differing hermeneutical, interpretive, and theological convictions in a way that few other theological issues do.

Robert L. Reymond makes the first contribution to this book by explaining “The Traditional Covenantal View” (17). Although he explains his own position succinctly and well, he chooses some questionable sources to interact with as he critiques dispensationalism. Reymond chose the “DTS Doctrinal Statement” (23). Although Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) is known for embracing dispensationalism, their doctrinal statement is not an ideal choice for interacting with this doctrine. First, this doctrinal statement has to allow for the acceptance of different kinds of dispensationalism, as they have professors on staff who hold different positions on dispensationalism. Dispensationalism, like covenant theology, is not monolithic. To treat it as such is to misunderstand the position at a fundamental level. Brand, in fact, demonstrates this diversity with his helpful survey of historical theology at the beginning of this book. Of course, Reymond would not have had that chapter to review when he wrote, but a cursory survey of the various works on dispensationalism (e.g. Chafer, Ryrie) demonstrates enough diversity. Second, this statement is also not ideal because there are more detailed sources with which to interact. Statements of faith by their very nature are reductionistic, and thus cannot give the kind of fine-tuned theological explanation with which theologians should seek to engage. The fact that Reymond addresses dispensationalism at all in this chapter seems out of place when his chapter was supposed to focus on making a case for his

position. Nevertheless, if theologians plan to interact with other positions well, they need to make sure they choose the best primary and secondary sources.

Robert L. Thomas, the contributor for the traditional dispensational view, presents a prominent yet problematic view of exegesis and theology. He writes: “The following perspective on Israel and the church is exegetical rather than theological in nature. The goal is to implement hermeneutical principles of the traditional grammatical-historical interpretation in investigating the subject under discussion” (87). The context for this quotation is surprising: in a one-volume work highlighting the different theological positions on the relationship between the church and Israel, Thomas begins his essay by explaining that he is concerned with exegesis, not theology. He, however, fails to demonstrate how this matter is simply one of exegesis. Furthermore, he fails to demonstrate how he separates exegesis from theology. How can the two be separate? Theologians, pastors, and anyone else practicing exegesis do so for primarily theological reasons. Also, as they start claiming “This text means . . .” they step into the realm of theological meaning. Yet, Thomas claims he is engaging primarily in exegesis, not theology. Furthermore, he does not seem to understand what the term “hermeneutical” means; he simply equates it with interpretation rather than how the term has come to describe what it means to be an interpreter.

Robert L. Saucy defends “The Progressive Dispensational View” (155). Although this position has gained some traction in recent years with the release of monographs and articles defending it, it remains underdeveloped. For example, Saucy explains, “The relation of Israel and the church often involves biblical typology, which in its general meaning refers to the correspondence between an event, a person, or a thing with other events, persons, or things in biblical history” (161). There are problems with this explanation. First, he supports it with a definition of typology from the 1980s that no one today who publishes in that area would use any longer; there has been a wealth of literature published on typology since then, so why not use it? Second, and following closely from the first point, typology is not mere correspondence; it speaks to the cor-

respondence between the type and the antitype, and how the latter is much greater than the former.

Brand and Tom Pratt Jr. provide “The Progressive Covenantal View” (281). They write: “Thomas argues that his approach takes Scripture literally, while other approaches do not. All evangelicals wish to take Scripture literally, but that commitment is not enough, left to itself, since taking the Bible literally can mean a variety of different things” (152). Brand and Pratt rightly note that using the term “literally” to describe one’s interpretation of the Bible is not enough because that can mean basically whatever anyone wants it to mean. This term, then, needs to be replaced because it has become almost meaningless given its diverse use. Even within traditional dispensationalism, theologians use this term in a variety of ways.

This book would be ideal to use when surveying this doctrine in a systematic theology course at the introductory level. Professors, however, will want to use a book like this to encourage their students to make progress on their doctrinal formulations, highlighting the hermeneutical foundations *and* implications of this doctrine, in the same way Anthony C. Thiselton has done elsewhere (see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007]). Pastors and other teachers could utilize this book in the same way, using it to teach in the local church.

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