

BOOK REVIEW

Phillips, Thomas E., *Paul, his Letters and Acts* (Library of Pauline Studies; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). xiii + 243 pp. Pbk. US\$24.95.

Phillips has been a professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, CA, and edited both *Acts and Ethics* (2005) and *Contemporary Studies in Acts* (2009). This book is a significant contribution to the Library of Pauline Studies, edited by S.E. Porter.

All scholars acknowledge the significance of Paul for Christianity. The issue many New Testament scholars raise, however, is which Paul is the most 'real', the Paul of the Pauline letters or the Paul of Acts? Which corpus gives us the more precise image of the historical Paul? In this book, Phillips examines the description of the Apostle Paul in recent studies in the light of these two major New Testament portraits.

Phillips divides the book into six main chapters. The first chapter, 'The Plurality of Plausible Pauls', reviews the work of Bruce Chilton and compares it to that of John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed. The latter authors point out that the two divergent views of Paul are based on Chilton's willingness to give more weight to the accounts in the book of Acts. Phillips says that, according to Crossan and Reed, 'much of the confusion that surrounds Paul's relationships in Acts stems from an incongruity between the religious categories presupposed by Luke and by Paul' (p. 17). On the other hand, Crossan and Reed 'severely restrict their use of Acts as a source for reconstructing Paul's life, and the resulting Paul does, by design, look significantly different from the Paul of Acts' (p. 27). In contrast, some scholars believe that a secondary source like the book of Acts is far less important for comprehending the Apostle Paul than the primary sources of Paul's epistles.

In the second chapter, Phillips looks for the origins of Paul's divided personality in critical scholarship and finds them in the work of F.C. Baur in the nineteenth century and John Knox and Philipp Vielhauser in

the twentieth. The scholarly traditions, however, that have split Paul's personality between the Paul of the epistles and Paul of the book of Acts are much bigger than the legacy of these scholars and these two epochs. Phillips ends this chapter with his own methodology and asserts that scholars often move to the extremes when comparing the portraits of Paul, frequently overestimating the difficulties that exist.

The remaining chapters start with an introduction, a review of the Pauline epistles data set, a review of the Acts data set and a comparison of the two. With this approach in place, the rest of the book discusses the problem, bearing in mind four main areas that cause difficulty to interpreters of Paul, namely (1) as ancient documents, both Paul's letters and the book of Acts were never intended to answer the kinds of questions that contemporary interpreters often pose; (2) the inconsistency and diversity within Acts and Paul's letters create problems for those seeking to reconstruct Paul's life and theology; (3) the accounts in Acts and Paul's letters are flexible enough to allow for a diversity of plausible readings; (4) the letters and Acts contain frustrating silences.

Chapter 3 surveys the chronological challenges in coordinating the data from Paul's letters and the book of Acts. Paul's trips to Jerusalem are mentioned; however, Galatians records two visits, while Acts records five. Thus, one important question to ask is, which Galatians visits match up with which of the visits recorded in the book of Acts?

Chapter 4 deals with Paul's relationship to the Greco-Roman world. Phillips looks at the issues of Paul's family, his educational context, his identity as a Jew, his vocation and finally his political status. The most important question in this chapter is how the Apostle Paul saw himself in connection to the Roman Empire. A further question is, did Paul consider himself part of the Empire or as existing outside of it? In Chapter 5 Phillips tries to define Paul's place in the early church, especially his relationship to those who played a part in or attended the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, i.e the three leaders of the Jerusalem church (Peter, James and John) and two of Paul's co-workers (Barnabas and Titus).

The last chapter deals with other individuals who were a part of the Pauline churches. Phillips groups them in the two larger categories of associates and converts, and then focuses on one person, Apollos.

By way of conclusion, Phillips, who at this point has not yet shared his position with the reader, finally gives the conclusions he has reached. In the first place, he considers the relationship of Galatians 2

to Acts 15 to be the main question in relating the Paul of the letters to the Paul of the book of Acts. Secondly, he asserts 'that the primary effect of critical scholarship's strong tendency to separate the Paul of Acts from the Paul of the letters has been to create an "historical Paul" (the Paul of the letters) who needed to be rehabilitated by Acts if he was to be accepted in the post Pauline churches' (p. 94). In the end, Phillips thinks that the Paul of Acts is indeed a different version of Paul than the Paul of the epistles.

This book demonstrates extensive research. Phillips has interacted with a broad variety of Pauline scholars, and he brings up important issues and questions that every serious scholar of Paul must take into consideration. Phillips's conclusion, however, is problematic. It describes the author of Acts (Luke) as being so interested in offering an apology for Paul that he fails to give an accurate historical account. It is more likely that Luke is interested in giving both. Luke's declared objective in writing Acts is to provide an accurate account, and there were many contemporaries who could verify his story. Phillips's assertion that Silas had a 'disdain for Paul's law-free inclusion of the Gentiles' (p. 185) is hard to substantiate. Further, Phillips believes that it is difficult to reconcile Paul's circumcision of Timothy in Acts with Paul's own account in Galatians, since, according to Paul, if the Galatians permitted themselves to be circumcised, Christ would be of no benefit to them (Gal. 5.2). However, these two reports are hard to reconcile only if one fails to consider the context and purpose of each account.

In spite of these shortcomings, the book makes several contributions to the present debate. Of particular value is its comprehensive survey of some key primary and secondary materials. The book provides a timely service for contemporary Lukan scholarship as well, as it successfully fulfills its goal of reframing important questions and provides a basis for further discussions. Scholars engaged in the study of the Lukan works must pay attention to the questions raised by this volume.

Students of the New Testament will find this book useful for laying out the main questions regarding the life of the Apostle Paul and the problems in bringing together the data from Paul's epistles and testimony of the book of Acts. The book has an extensive bibliography, as well as useful author, subject and Scripture indexes.

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