

## BOOK REVIEWS

Das, A. Andrew. *Paul and the Jews*. Library of Pauline Studies, ed. S. E. Porter. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003. 238 pp. Paper, \$24.95.

The writing of any book requires an immense expenditure of energy and time, and it is always with trepidation that one releases one's work to the public. The present volume would have been no exception. Andrew A. Das's bold new volume has much that is commendable, but in the present form it fails to do justice to the wealth of valuable research it contains.

In the first chapter, Das prefaces his discussion by taking note of the fact that Paul's statements on the law and Israel can be interpreted in two very different ways—that Gentile Christians have replaced ethnic Israel as the new covenant people of God, and that ethnic Israel remains as God's covenant people in the new epoch. In the main body of the chapter, Das offers a brief survey of the history of the current debate, which is traced along two separate trajectories. The first is the traditional Lutheran understanding of Judaism, articulated by Ferdinand Weber in 1880, which saw Judaism as “fundamentally a legalistic religion” (4). The second trajectory is a newer view that argues that the Judaism of Paul's day was not legalistic, but fully cognizant of divine grace and mercy. Owing to E. P. Sanders's monumental *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), this second trajectory has, in recent decades, become the dominant view of Pauline scholarship. Interestingly, Das seems to come full circle in his perspective on Judaism. First, he essentially accepts the premise of this new understanding of Judaism, but rejects the perspective given to it by James D. G. Dunn, who argues that Paul's problem with Judaism was that Jews had misappropriated the Law of Moses as a means to bolster their “ethnic presumption” (10). Then, he proposes a different perspective, which is, essentially, a return to the traditional view: Paul's problem with Judaism was that its notions of grace and mercy could never be “efficacious for salvation” without faith in Christ (12). He feels his new proposal does justice to the strengths of the traditional view of Judaism, while fully taking into account the newer view. The rest of this chapter lays out the plan of the chapters to follow.

The second chapter, on Galatians, identifies Paul's opponents as Jewish Christians who wanted to circumcise the Gentile converts in order to avoid persecution from the Jewish community at large. This historical reconstruction is neither particularly new nor overly problematic, but the evidence Das adduces in support of his arguments and the inferences he draws from them about Paul's opponents and their theology are certainly idiosyncratic and problematic. The most troubling point of the chapter, and one on which much of the chapter's historical reconstruction is based, is that Paul *consistently* employs the third person plural (“they” as opposed to “we”) in Galatians to refer to his Jewish Christian opponents. Although this is an intriguing suggestion, it is not a view that can be sustained (see below). In addition, Das postulates that the scriptural citations and the theological propositions appearing in Galatians are those used by Paul's opponents, which Paul is reinterpreting to buttress his own gospel. The main reason Das gives for his position is that Paul's scriptural exegesis and theology in

Gal 2 and 3 fit poorly with his overall argument in the letter (21, 32). This, however, is not a point that can be simply stated, but one which must be argued because many scholars feel that Paul's reading of Scripture in Gal 2 and 3 is compelling and fits well into his overall argument. Moreover, I find it difficult to agree with Das's notion that during the Second Temple period the covenants of Abraham and Moses were considered to be identical (42), at least not on the basis of Sirach. Das makes other problematic claims in the chapter without providing hard evidence. For instance, he suggests that Paul's opponents did not find the exile to be a continuing reality (38). The biggest problem, however, is that the overall thesis of the chapter is too finely formulated to be clear: in spite of his clarification on p. 33, it is unclear how Paul's new view on the law (that "the law must be understood . . . *in terms of Christ*" [48, emphasis supplied]) precisely differed from that of his opponents (who taught that "a gospel message . . . *included Law observance along with faith in Christ*" [48, emphasis supplied]). As we shall see, the lack of clarity on this point will continue to dog Das's fuller presentation of the Spirit's relationship to the law in chapter 7 (more below).

Moreover, in his critique of Dunn in this chapter, Das misrepresents Dunn when he translates Gal 3:10 as "Those who rely on their Jewish identity are under a curse" (39) in order to expose the weakness of Dunn's position. Dunn, however, is not arguing that "Jewish identity" is the only way to translate the Greek term *ἔργα*. Dunn's notion of "boundary marker" also needs to be evaluated as a concept, which, in my view, has much to commend.

Das also misses the mark in his critique of Mark D. Nanos. Nanos is not saying, as Das charges (24-29), that Paul was in conversation in Gal 2:1-21 exclusively, or even basically, with unbelieving Judaism. Nanos's point is that Paul's conversation in those verses cannot be limited to Jewish Christians. At some level, Paul must have been dialoguing with Judaism in general, not just Jewish Christians.

The apparent thesis of the third chapter (on Romans) is the straightforward traditional view that "Israel apart from Christ lies outside the sphere of salvation" (73). However, the reasons given in support of this thesis are idiosyncratic and rather involved. The discussion begins with a rather detailed dialogue on the dating, nature, and validity of Claudius's expulsion of the Jews from Rome in the fourth decade C.E. He argues that the expulsion primarily impacted the Jewish ring leaders who were involved in the "Chrestus" controversy, rather than the entire Jewish population of Rome (56-59). This tendentious conclusion then serves to establish the notion that Claudius's expulsion was the beginning of the "split" (59) between the Jewish and Christian communities of Rome and elsewhere (cf. 14-15). After further trying to bolster his conclusion with the internal evidence of Romans, Das postulates that the makeup of the Roman congregation was mostly Gentile, with the possible exception of the handful of Jews mentioned in Rom 16. The thrust of Das's extensive argument up to this point is that the "weak" mentioned in Rom 14 were Gentile Christians, who had been part of the Jewish communities of Rome before Claudius expelled the ringleaders. According to Das, the reason the weak abstained from meat and wine was that they were barred from obtaining kosher foodstuffs from the Jewish community, which then brings him to an unexpected conclusion: the unbelieving Jews are excluded from

salvation (cf. 73), and the believers are no longer under obligation to keep the Law of Moses since it has become a matter of indifference in Christ (75). The detailed discussion of the historical background of Romans here serves to underscore how little historical and exegetical basis there is for Das's expansive and general statement about the defective nature of the Law of Moses, a fact which threatens the credibility of the book as a whole.

Das accuses Nanos of being guilty of a "worse" anti-Semitism when Nanos applies the term "weak" to the Jews (76). Das's accusation is, however, inelegant and disingenuous. As Nanos makes clear, Paul nowhere uses the term "weak" in Rom 14 to disparage those who are struggling. Also, Das tries to sidestep the question of anti-Semitism by stating that Paul's argument in Rom 9–11 was "intra-Christian." But if Paul is indeed saying that unbelieving Jews are excluded from salvation, as Das argues, then it is no longer simply a matter of "intra-Christian" dialogue, but, in actuality, has far-reaching anti-Semitic implications for Judaism.

The fourth chapter is a detailed study of Rom 9–11, in which Das argues that ethnic Israel has a special place in God's plan of salvation at the end of time. Das opens the discussion by arguing that the apology of Rom 9–11 was necessitated by Paul's practice of applying the election language of the OT to his Gentile congregations. Then he launches into a detailed study of Rom 9–10 to reiterate the point of his previous chapter: Christ is the sole basis of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. With this conclusion in hand, he proceeds to refute fallacious notions about Israel in scholarship. The first is the so-called two-covenant theory, according to which God has entered into two separate covenants: Jews are saved by keeping the Law, while Gentiles are saved by faith in Christ. According to this theory, Paul's criticism of non-Christian Jews was not that they refuse to believe in Christ, but that they refuse to recognize the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God by faith as an eschatological act of God. The second view Das rejects is one that sees Israel as the new covenant people, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. Das argues that this is impossible because the term *Israel* occurs in Rom 9–11 with consistent reference to ethnic Israel. The third view to be set aside is that the term *Israel* refers only to Jewish Christians, who function as the eschatological remnant of God. Das's key reason for rejecting this view is that the redemption of the remnant in the OT always resulted in the redemption of the rest of ethnic Israel. Das concludes the chapter by stating that the only viable option left is to see Israel in Rom 9–11 as the Jews who "will come to faith in Christ en masse" (109) at the end of time. The present chapter is the most coherent and well-argued piece in the entire book. If Das has accomplished nothing else in this chapter, he has effectively demonstrated through his carefully stated argument that the debate about the identity of Israel in Paul's letters is far from over.

In the fifth chapter, Das argues that Paul held fast to the notion of Jewish priority in spite of his conviction that both Jews and Gentiles are sinful and saved only by faith in Christ. Das tries to show that Paul's idea of Jewish priority and restoration is not something that suddenly popped up in Romans, but had antecedents in his earlier writings, particularly Galatians and 1 Thessalonians. This chapter is, unfortunately, full of digressions and contradictions. Das's discussion of Galatians gets bogged down on the question about Paul's usage of first- and second-

person plural pronouns in the letter. The problem of this drawn-out discussion is not only that it fails to directly address the central concern of the chapter, but makes statements that flatly contradict his earlier positions. In chapter 2, Das argued that the second-person plural “you” refers consistently and exclusively to the Gentile readers in Galatia: “Paul is *remarkably consistent throughout the letter* in employing the second-person-plural pronouns (‘you’) in clear contrast to third-person-plural pronouns (‘they,’ ‘those people,’ ‘some’). . . . Paul addresses *his Galatian readers* with the second-person ‘you’ . . . In Gal 4:8 he identifies the recipients of his letter as *former Gentiles, or non-Jews*” (18; emphases supplied). But in the present chapter, Das does an about face and declares: “*Paul freely shifts between pronouns*. . . . The best reading of [Gal 4] vv. 3-7 therefore takes the first-person pronouns as referring to *all believers, whether Jew or Gentile*, and the *second-person pronoun as similarly inclusive* but perhaps rhetorically pointed toward the Gentile recipients of the letter. *Paul does not appear to be speaking exclusively of Jewish or Gentile Christians*” (125; emphasis supplied). The phrase “perhaps rhetorically pointed toward” does little to mitigate Das’s self-contradiction when he spends nearly nine pages of detailed discussion (120-128) to prove that Paul is remarkably inconsistent in his use of the personal pronouns. Another glaring contradiction is the way he speaks of the “Israel of God,” mentioned in Gal 6:15-16. In the present chapter, Das clearly argues that “the Israel of God” includes anyone who believes in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile:

Jewish Christians maintain a position of priority in God’s plan *as the Gentiles flock to join their heavenly city* on the basis of common faith in Christ. Paul concludes the letter by affirming an “Israel of God” (Gal 6:15-16), *a people who follow this rule*,” that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!” *For by faith in Christ, those who are of this Israel have died to the world* (Gal 6:14) (128, emphasis supplied).

Yet in chapters 3 and 4, he forcefully argued “that ‘the Israel of God’ refers to ethnic Jews” (107, n. 86) and cannot refer to “an ‘Israel of faith,’ all people who believe in Jesus Christ whether Jewish or Gentile” (106). It is unclear why Das has decided to leave these contradictions in his book. It is unfortunate that these and others mar the credibility of a work that is otherwise well researched.

Das’s discussion on 1 Thess 2:14-16 is unnecessarily given to the question of authenticity—a discussion only marginally related to the question of Jewish priority, which is the issue at stake in this chapter. Time and space would have been better expended on fleshing out the controversial point that the apocalyptic understanding of Jewish recalcitrance in the 1 Thessalonians passage “neatly conforms to the statements of God’s wrath in Romans” (139).

The sixth and seventh chapters attempt to lay bare Paul’s concept of the law based on the occurrences of the term νόμος in his letters. In the sixth chapter, Das grapples with the fact that Paul’s statements about the law come in both negative and positive varieties. He offers a three-pronged solution to explain this thorny problem: every occurrence of *law* (νόμος) in Romans and Galatians refers to the Law of Moses; Paul’s negative statements about law point out the impossibility of obeying the Mosaic Law; Paul’s positive statements about law portray the Law of Moses as prophecy promoting faith in Christ. The focus of chapter 6, however, is on the second point, namely, what Paul finds wrong with the Mosaic Law. Das

states: "The Mosaic Law, apart from the Abrahamic promises, has become in Paul's hand an empty set of requirements and stipulations that no human being could adequately obey" (155). Then in chapter 7, Das turns to Paul's positive statements about law in order to explain the identity of "the law of Christ" in Gal 6:2. Building on his foundational assumption that the term "law" in Romans and Galatians always refers to the Law of Moses, Das offers another three-pronged solution: the Law of Moses continues in the life of the Christian as the norm of conduct; the Christian fulfills the Law of Moses when the Spirit "takes hold of" the Law (84); and the Law of Christ is the Law of Moses *seen* through Christ. Das states: "The Christian fulfills 'the law of Christ,' the Law [*sic*.] when *viewed* in the hands of Christ. By the Spirit's power the believer looks to and follows Christ's example. *Then the requirements of the Mosaic Law will take care of themselves*" (172, emphasis supplied). This last point is a bit slippery, however.

Indeed, many questions remain unanswered in these chapters. For the sake of space, I shall point out only the most obvious ones. If Das is correct, one wonders whether Paul's position on law really differed from that of his opponents. He claims that the problem with Paul's opponents at Galatia was that they "were supplementing the gospel message with guidance from the Mosaic law" (167). But in his conclusion, he equivocates on this point: "The Law [of Moses] often remained an unstated premise in [Paul's] ethical reasoning, *even though he preferred first to admonish the community to embody Christ-like behavior*" (191, emphasis supplied). If Paul was in the habit of reaching for the Law of Moses when his first wave of admonitions failed to do the job, wasn't Paul just as guilty of supplementing his "gospel message with guidance from the Mosaic law" as did his opponents? Moreover, Das never satisfactorily explains how the teachings and example of Jesus are able to function as an interpretive key to the Law of Moses. The passages he cites on pp. 173-180 fail to suggest a clear hermeneutical direction, except that "Christians must treat one another as likewise in Christ" (176)—a point to which Paul's opponents would have readily agreed (cf. Gal 2:16c: καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν). In addition, the subsequent history of the church has made it abundantly clear that even when the Law of Moses has been filtered through Jesus' teachings and example, it cannot be made serviceable to Christianity without mutating into yet another—perhaps even more lethal—form of boasting and works of righteousness (cf. 5). Finally, Das offers no convincing reasons as to why Paul should have rejected those portions of the Law of Moses that have an "ethnic" Jewish flavoring, such as circumcision and the Sabbath.

In the eighth and final chapter Das tries to summarize and bring together all the loose ends of his arguments, which, unfortunately, compounds, rather than alleviates, the book's lack of clarity. The reason for the lack of clarity is that his discussions in the present book too often vacillate between whether there is or isn't something fundamentally wrong with the Law of Moses. Until he makes up his mind on this point, his argument will always have—his erudition notwithstanding—a ring of uncertainty and confusion.