

Chennattu, Rekha M. *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006. 256 pp. Paper, \$29.95.

Rekha M. Chennattu, Chair of the Department of Scriptural Studies at Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, the Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion, India, makes a significant contribution to Johannine studies by arguing that the Evangelist models discipleship in his Gospel after OT covenant-renewal motifs. Chennattu argues that John made extensive use of covenant motifs from the Hebrew Bible, primarily Josh 24. She draws a number of implications based on covenant language for reconstructing the idea of discipleship in Johannine community. Chennattu proposes to limit her study to the "call stories" found in John 1:35-51 (chap. 1), the "covenant re-enactment" found in John 13-17 (chaps. 2-3), and the postresurrection discipleship narrative in John 20-21 (chap. 4). A final chapter draws conclusions for understanding the Johannine community within first-century Palestinian Judaism.

Chennattu begins her study with a literature survey on the Johannine view of discipleship. As she notes, until recently few scholars have produced detailed studies on the theme of discipleship in the NT. Of these studies, only a handful have focused on the Gospel of John, in spite of Raymond Brown's statement that "discipleship is the primary category in John" (2). Chennattu offers critiques of more than a dozen works produced since 1970 that highlight the problems associated with how the disciples are portrayed in the Gospel. The disciples, according to Chennattu, represent the disciples of the historical Jesus and the believing Johannine community, as well as the contemporary reader (18). After a brief exegetical survey of 1:25-51, she offers several discipleship motifs that look back to OT covenant themes, which are expanded in the second discipleship section (John 13-17). Of primary importance is the "abiding motif" (43-44). In this early section of John, the disciples ask Jesus where he "abides," anticipating the expansion of this theme in John 15. Abiding in the words of Jesus is a theme found frequently in "invitation" contexts in John (4:40; 6:27, 56; 8:31-32). Chennattu argues this idea is found in Isa 30:18 (LXX), the one who abides in the Torah will be blessed. A second aspect of discipleship is knowledge of Jesus. The disciple's knowledge grows in the call stories in John 1, initially calling Jesus "Rabbi," but eventually "Messiah." True knowledge of God was to be a part of the covenant (Exod 29:45-46; Jer 9:24; Isa 11:1). Third, those who abide in Jesus' words are called to be witnesses. In John 1, those who become Jesus' disciples immediately find others and bear witness that they have found the Messiah. Chennattu notes that the Law was to be read to all the people (Deut 31:9-13, 24-27) and that the people of Israel were to pass their knowledge of God on to the next generation (Deut 6:20-25; 11:1-9). A fourth aspect of the call stories is the renaming of Simon Peter (John 1:47), analogous to covenant scenes in the OT in which God renames the recipient of his promises (e.g., Abram is renamed Abraham, Gen 17:1-22). Lastly, the call stories contain a number of promises. For example, when Jesus calls people to follow him, he promises that they "will see" (1:42); Peter "will be called" Cephas (1:42), and Nathanael "will see greater things" (1:50). For Chennattu, these promises recall the frequent covenant promise that God dwells with the people (Exod 29:45-46; Num 14:14; Deut 12:11).

After a short survey of covenant motifs in the OT (50-66), Chennattu attempts to demonstrate that John 13-17 is a covenant reenactment. Although covenant themes are found throughout John (70-80), it is in the second half of the Gospel of John that she finds covenant motifs are the most clearly expressed. While Chennattu is not the first to suggest parallels to covenant structure in John 13-17 (cf. Yves Simoens, *La Gloire D'aimer: Structures Stylistiques et Interprétatives dans Le Discours de La Cène [Jn 13-17]*, where this section as parallel to Deuteronomy is cited and critiqued, 66-68), she makes a unique contribution by demonstrating a number of parallels with the covenant renewal at Shechem (Josh 24), which is more appropriate to the evangelist's purpose because it is a renewal rather than an initial enacting of the covenant. Chennattu is clear, however, that there is no structural parallel (68) between these passages: John 13-17 is only analogous to the covenant renewal in Josh 24, although she describes the two covenants as "very similar" (208). Six elements are then listed as rough parallels: the people's gathering in the presence of God (Josh 24:1; John 13:1-38), the proclamation of God's election and guidance (Josh 24:2-13; John 14:1-

31), a call to decision and obedience (Josh 24:14-15; John 15:1-17), a warning of the consequences for disobedience (Josh 24:16-20; John 15:18-16:24), the people's promise of total obedience to God (Josh 24:21-24; John 16:25-33), and a sealing of the covenant (Josh 24:25-28; John 17:1-26).

Chapters 3 and 4 are a demonstration of elements of NT discipleship that are parallel to covenant-renewal motifs in the OT. It is in the details that Chennattu's thesis has some difficulties. For example, John 13 as analogous to the people's gathering in the presence of God is attractive, but the connection between footwashing and covenant motifs is tenuous at best. While it is true that the OT describes footwashing as hospitality in several contexts, Chennattu cites only one text where the washing of feet is mentioned as a preparation for meeting God (Exod 30:17-21); the rest of the texts she assembles speak of washing, but not at all like the footwashing found in John 13, nor is this washing part of a covenant renewal similar to Josh 24. That Aaron is told he will have no share in the land (Num 18:20) has some verbal parallel to Jesus' words to Peter in 13:8; however the connection is superficial and does not really help since Num 18:20 is not in the context of a covenant renewal, nor is washing of any kind mentioned. A second example is in the "warning of consequence" section (John 15:18-16:24). Chennattu observes a symmetrical pattern in the text (119) that highlights the central purpose of the discourse as 16:1: the disciples ought not give up their faith. The real danger is not persecution, but rather the potential to forsake Jesus and to no longer "abide" in him. Chennattu sees this as analogous to the total commitment envisioned in the command to not worship idols in Josh 24:14, 23. There is, however, a major difference between Jesus' warnings of persecution and the covenant warnings typically found in the OT. In the covenant, these warnings are threats of punishment when the nation is disobedient to the covenant, but in John the persecutions are promised in spite of the obedience of the disciples—they will occur. One final example is the discussion of the gift of the Paraclete. The idea of the Paraclete finds OT grounding in the promises of a presence of God among his people, but this is the new-covenant language of the prophets and not at all a predominating theme in the covenant-renewal materials cited by Chennattu. In the end, the parallels to Josh 24 may not be as closely aligned as Chennattu would believe. At best, the idea of covenant in John 13-17 seems present merely in a general sense.

In the final chapter of the book, Chennattu develops some implications on her thesis for understanding the Johannine community. This section follows Brown's reconstruction closely, although the view is modified with insights from sociology. Any reconstruction of the community behind the Gospel is necessarily hypothetical, a concern Chennattu recognizes (196). In her view, the Johannine community continued to worship in the synagogue as believers in Jesus the Messiah. At some point, these believers were put out of the synagogue as deviants from Judaism and persecuted. The community dealt with a crisis of identity and faith by developing a high Christology and by defining their disciple relationship with Jesus in terms of an OT covenant. In order to develop this idea, Chennattu briefly sketches the covenant motif in first-century Judaism (examining the Qumran literature, Pseudo-Philo, 2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*), concluding that these texts respond to the crisis of 70 A.D. by reasserting Israel's election by God and emphasizing the promises of God in OT covenants. The Johannine community responded similarly to their expulsion from the synagogue by defining themselves as the true remnant of God and heirs of the OT promises.

In spite of misgivings concerning some of the parallels with specific OT covenant ideas, this book is a valuable contribution to the study of John's Gospel. Chennattu has produced a well-written text that describes the idea of discipleship and covenant in the Fourth Gospel from a decidedly Jewish perspective. Many of the conclusions about the Johannine community are valuable and could have been expanded more fully.