

BOOK REVIEW

Ware, James P., *Paul and the Mission of the Church: Philippians in Ancient Jewish Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). 381 pp. Pbk. \$60.00 USD.

This book highlights Paul's explicit missionary command in the book of Philippians, and seeks to determine where his concept of mission came from. Ware defines 'mission' as the consciousness of a divine commission or command to bring about the conversion of others through proclamation of the message and associated activities. This definition is not Paul's own, but is Ware's paraphrase of several verses from Paul's letters. But after what might Paul have modeled his conception of mission? If Christianity arose within Judaism, could Paul's conception of mission have found its roots within Jewish missionary practice? Was there even such a thing as 'Jewish missionary practice', and if so, is it possible to define it? Answers to these questions, according to Ware, have proven to be elusive because scholars have failed to agree on a definition of what 'mission' meant in the ancient world. This book is thus an attempt to shed light on Paul's attitude concerning the Philippian missionary work, and to compare and contrast it with other Jewish traditions concerning missionary work.

In an attempt to uncover a definition for 'mission' within Judaism, Ware seeks first to uncover its prevalence. To do so, he turns to a number of Jewish and non-Jewish sources that describe the conversion of Gentiles. For example, the Roman historians Tacitus and Juvenal both say that proselytization was commonplace, and that they regularly encountered it. The Jewish historian Josephus also describes a number of episodes in which prominent Gentiles are converted to Judaism. In addition, Ware notes two sources that could support the idea that proselytization was also taking place in Palestine. The first is the book of Acts in which Gentile converts are frequently described as 'fearers of God' and 'worshippers of God'. These were Gentile adherents who had accepted the monotheistic faith of Israel, frequented the synagogues

and practiced some of the ceremonial requirements of the law. The second is Mt. 23.15 in which Jesus refers to the proselytizing activities of certain scribes and Pharisees. However, due to a lack of external evidence, Ware dismisses these examples and suggests that they are later interpolations. Neither does he think that they give us a definition of what exactly 'mission' is nor how it was conducted.

Ware then turns to Second Temple literature in hopes of finding a source for Paul's definition of 'mission'. However, the concept of 'mission' during this period was passive in nature, and there is no sense that the Jews actively sought Gentile converts. Instead, there was a belief that Yahweh would draw the Gentiles to himself. This argument is supported by a critical examination of Isaiah, along with several other texts (LXX Isaiah; *Targum Isaiah*; *Sibylline Oracles*; *Wisdom of Solomon*; *Parables of Enoch*; *Testament of Levi*; Philo's *De vita Mosis*; *On Repentance*; *De specialibus legibus*; *De Abrahamo*), regarding Gentile conversion (Isa. 2.2; Hag. 2.7; Zech. 9.7; Zeph. 2.11; Ps. 22.27).

Ware argues that the basis for this concept of mission begins in Isa. 2.2-5. Throughout Isaiah, several allusions to the nations coming to Yahweh can be found. For example, Isa. 11.10 suggests that the 'root of Jesse' will be sought by the nations and will eventually become their resting place. Ware suggests that the prominent point to be taken from these verses is that mission begins not with the Jews, but with God drawing the nations to himself. This perspective highlights the role of Yahweh in 'gathering' people for himself. Ware understands this to mean that the Jews expected Yahweh to form a political hegemony including Jew and Gentile (Isa. 55.3-5). This political unity comes about due the efforts of the servant described in chs. 40-55. The servant is described as a 'light to the nations' (42.1-9; 49.1-6) that will participate in Yahweh's eschatological reign. Though this servant suffers in the process of reconciling the Gentiles to Yahweh, the identification of the servant is not made explicit. Regardless, the appearance of the servant combined with the overarching theme of Gentile conversion, points to a motif that Ware argues is present in Second Temple literature.

In addition to the above-mentioned passages in Isaiah, other texts show an interest in proselytization. The LXX renders several passages of Isaiah in a way that highlights the conversion of Gentiles. The *Sibylline Oracles* indicate that the Jews will adopt a leadership role that will

train the Gentiles—labelled as impious—in righteousness. Diaspora literature such as the writings of Philo and other Wisdom literature also indicate a growing interest in the conversion of the Gentiles. Palestinian literature such as the *Parables of Enoch*, *Testament of Levi* and *Tobit* suggest the same. On the other hand, some literature such as the *Targum Isaiah* and excerpts from the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QIsa-a) suggest that the authors understood certain Old Testament passages as promoting the cohesion of the Jews and not Gentile conversion.

When Ware turns to his study of Philippians, he suggests that the epistle contains a missionary consciousness that ‘stands out strikingly’ (p. 237). He also suggests that Paul thinks of missionary work as something that every Christian should be engaged in. This is motivated by a number of factors. In Phil. 2.5-11, Paul proclaims Christ as the eschatological ruler of the nations, and indicates that this rule is currently under way. In 2.12-18, Paul spells out what this means. The Philippians are to work out (*κατεργάζεσθε*) their own salvation (2.12) through missionary work, which, according to Ware, signals the climax of Paul’s appeal in 1.12–2.11. And though this missionary work would be done in an extremely hostile environment, Paul assures them that their sufferings will result in their resurrection (1.28-29; 2.12).

The Philippians live during the eschatological reign of Christ and are regarded as the light to the nations, a title that occurs frequently in Jewish literature. Paul communicates this by rewording Dan. 12.3 to include the Philippians in the eschatological renewal of the nations. Shining as lights in the world (2.15), the Philippians are identified as the wise who will instruct many in righteousness.

Despite the similarities to Daniel, Ware contends that Paul’s exhortation towards missionary work contrasts with the Jewish traditions described in part one of this book. The verbal proclamation in an active missionary practice (1.12; 1.14-18) stands in ‘striking’ contrast to the belief that God would draw all nations to himself. This marks the uniqueness of the early Christian mission as described in the letter to the Philippians.

In my estimation, this book provides an excellent survey of Second Temple literature that is concerned with the Jewish attitude towards missions. However, there are some problems with the book. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is how the book is weighted. More than half of the book is devoted to the background of Ware’s study while less than half is given to the actual discussion of Philippians. This leads me

to suggest that the book should have been named something different that would reflect the prominent subject of the book.

The second problem is that Ware commits a number of etymological fallacies. The example I will use to describe this is his treatment of the word ἔργον. Ware says, ‘As we have seen, ἔργον and its cognates are regularly used by Paul and other New Testament writers with reference to the work of spreading the gospel’ (p. 243). He lists a number of usages of ἔργον and its cognates in note 16 on p. 243. This is an example of a false assumption about a technical meaning, and it includes the assumption that each use of ἔργον has the same meaning. Of the examples he notes on p. 243, in most passages—if not all—it is impossible to discern the exact meaning of the word. For example, in Rom. 16.21, Paul refers to Timothy as his ‘fellow worker’ (συνεργός). It is hard to tell if Paul is using this word in the same way that Ware suggests he is using it in Phil. 2.12. Neither can we attach to it the same theological weight that Ware suggests it carries. My concern is that Ware is committing a *confirmation bias* fallacy: he designates a meaning that confirms his thesis. In other words, he allows his presuppositions to guide his exegesis.

A third problem occurs when Ware attempts to answer how Paul understands missions. He devotes almost two-thirds of the book to a discussion of Second Temple literature that, in the end, only points out that Paul thought of missions differently. Very little attention is given to the possibility that Paul’s conception of mission may have been informed by more contemporary examples—such as itinerant philosophers. What is more is that no connections are made to either Jesus or John the Baptist, who were active itinerant preachers. Why does Paul only need to be informed by Second Temple literature that could have been written over one hundred years prior to his ministry? It seems as though this book was researched after conclusions were made.

As mentioned, this book is useful because it introduces the reader to a number of Second Temple sources. However, I am not sure that it will make a large scholarly impact in its treatment of Philipians.

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