

With these criticisms addressed, however, I value Novenson's genuine contribution to our understanding of Paul's *χριστός* language, in particular, in relation to ancient Jewish messiah language and thus recommend this volume for scholars, theological students, and pastors who are interested in Pauline Christology and/or ancient Jewish messianism.

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*1 & 2 Thessalonians*. By Gary S. Shogren. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012, 375 pp., \$32.99.

Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians had been neglected for a long time by biblical scholars—so much so that they were once named as “the Cinderellas” of the Pauline corpus. Happily, the situation today has changed as these two letters have now finally “made it to the ball” and begun to receive over the past decade or so the attention that they deserve. This renewed interest in 1 and 2 Thessalonians can be seen in, among other things, the appearance of several significant commentaries in English: Abraham Malherbe (2000), Gene Green (2002), Greg Beale (2003), Ben Witherington III (2006), Victor Furnish (2007), Linda McKinnish Bridges (2008), and Gordon Fee (2009). To this growing list may now be added the commentary by Gary Shogren.

Shogren's volume is part of a new commentary series entitled “Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament” (ZECNT). Key features of this series include: the practical use of Greek, a concise one or two-sentence statement about the main point of each passage, the pragmatic use of word studies, a graphical display of the grammatical flow of each passage (in English), commentary on the text by evangelical authors, a summary of key theological insights from each passage, and a discussion of the relevance of the text for contemporary Christians. In other words, like most commentary series, it claims to do everything a busy pastor, Bible teacher, or scholar would want a commentary to do. Unlike many commentary series, however, this one—or, at least, this volume by Shogren—largely delivers on its claims.

Shogren has been teaching at ESEPA Bible College and Seminary in San Jose, Costa Rica since 1998 and the emphases of his teaching setting—an evangelical perspective, missions, and practical ministry—are all reflected in his commentary. Introductory issues are treated in a brief manner (20 pages out of a 375-page volume), and traditional evangelical understandings of the two letters are affirmed: Acts is a reliable source in reconstructing the historical origins of the Thessalonian congregation; the church was established during Paul's second missionary journey; the congregation consisted of a majority of Gentiles and a minority of Jewish believers; the two letters date to AD 50 or 51; both 2:13–16 in the first letter and the whole of the second letter are authentically Pauline; the canonical order of the letters is likely correct; the Thessalonian church was actively involved in evangelism and was experiencing persecutions that were economic, familial, social, and physical;

another major issue facing the congregation involved questions of eschatology. More debatable assertions involve the confident and repeated claim that Timothy delivered both letters and that the church “consisted of several assemblies, each with a few dozen members, in various parts of the urban area” (p. 24).

Introductory matters, however, are not the place where users of a commentary will spend most of their time. The true measure of a commentary is found in its exegetical analysis of the biblical text, and it is here where Shogren delivers on the various claims of the ZECNT series. Each passage is treated according to the following pattern. First, there is a discussion of the literary context—placing the passage within the overall structure of the letter. Second, there is the “Main Idea”—a one- or two-sentence summary of the key idea at work in the passage. Third, there is the author’s translation of the text, given in the format of a grammatical outline with headings in the far left column about the function of each main clause, sub-clause, or prepositional phrase. This graphical display of the grammatical flow of the text is accompanied by a discussion of the passage’s internal structure which then leads into a proposed “Exegetical Outline” of the passage.

The lengthiest section involves the “Explanation of the Text” where Shogren engages in a detailed analysis of the relevant pericopes—an analysis that surprisingly follows not the headings proposed in his “Exegetical Outline” but a verse-by-verse treatment of the text. This section frequently consists of citing the original Greek and engaging in a detailed discussion of grammatical issues. Shogren does a fine job in discussing technicalities of the Greek language in a user-friendly way. This emphasis on the original language is in keeping with the claim of the ZECNT series that “this commentary series might be for you if you have taken Greek and would like a commentary that helps you apply what you have learned without assuming that you are a well-trained scholar” (p. 7). However, there is much more in the “Explanation of the Text” section than commentary on the Greek text. Taken up in this section are also literary and especially historical issues that are a necessary part of good exegesis. Overall, Shogren does a fine job in finding a balance between, on the one hand, treating a given issue with enough detail that the contemporary reader is helpfully informed about the subject at hand but not, on the other hand, doing so in such a lengthy and technical manner that one becomes overwhelmed with details of minutia that are either not helpful or become confusing. Shogren is clearly in command of his material: he demonstrates throughout the commentary a good awareness of the key issues and the diverse viewpoints on these issues and treats them in a judicious manner. Scattered periodically in this main exegetical unit are also “In Depth” sections where specific issues are treated in a more detailed manner (e.g. “Were the Thessalonian Believers Evangelistic?” “Was Paul Anti-Semitic?” “Did Jesus Teach That He Would Return at the End of the Age?”). Each section concludes with a “Theology in Application” section that examines the theological issue(s) at work in the text and that also considers its relevancy for the church today.

I will now survey some of the conclusions reached by Shogren about various key issues found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The fact that I disagree with a number

of these conclusions should serve to nuance but ought not to negate the many positive features of his commentary already identified above.

(1) Co-senders are listed in both letter openings (1 Thess 1:1 and 2 Thess 1:1–2), and this raises the question of who actually authored these two epistles. Shogren argues for a more literal understanding in which Paul may be the dominant voice but Silas also had an active role. This is a minority position as most commentators see instead here a *literary* plural in which Paul is the primary author. Shogren also hints that Timothy played a part, too, as letter writer but an even lesser one than Silas: “while Paul was the author, Silas and *to an extent* Timothy are involved in the production of the letter” (p. 243, emphasis added). Unfortunately, Shogren never clarifies or justifies this active yet diminished role of Timothy.

(2) In his treatment of the thanksgiving (1 Thess 1:2–10) Shogren argues that “this extended giving of thanks also functions as an *exordium*” (p. 49). He thereby introduces a category from rhetorical criticism, although no other section from either letter is classified according to this methodological perspective, nor is there any broader discussion about the legitimacy of treating Paul’s letters by means of a rhetorical rather than epistolary approach.

(3) Shogren rejects the older, traditional idea that Paul in 2:1–16 is defending himself and adopts the view, widely held today, that this passage has an implicit *paraenetic* function in which the apostle presents himself to his readers as a model for them imitate. There exists compelling evidence, however, that a smear campaign was waged against Paul by the believers’ “fellow citizens” (2:14) who charged the apostle with being just another religious charlatan who curried people’s favor and then ran out of town at the first sign of trouble. Paul, then, feared that his infant church, under heavy opposition, might buy into these trumped up charges, and so he opens the first half of the letter body (2:1–3:13) with a calculated defense of his integrity, intended to reaffirm his readers’ trust in him such that they would hear and heed his admonitions in the second half of the letter (4:1–5:22).

(4) Shogren rightly sees Paul in 2:1–16 develop the three metaphors of presenting himself and his co-workers as infants (2:7b), wet-nurse (2:7c) and father (2:11). He also has a lengthy “In Depth” section that deals with the perennial textual problem in 2:7 of whether Paul wrote “infants” (νήπιοι) or “gentle” (ἤπιοι), and correctly defends the former reading as original.

(5) Shogren downplays the seriousness of the concerns addressed in the second half of the letter (4:1–5:22), stating: “Paul is not offering the Thessalonians any word of rebuke” (p. 156). This ignores, however, the apostle’s explicit statement in 3:10 that he has been repeatedly praying that God will allow him to return to the Thessalonian church and “supply what is lacking in your faith.” As positive as Timothy’s report was about the Thessalonians’ faith in God and their love for Paul (3:6), he also shared with Paul some areas where these believers were “lacking” in their faith—areas that the apostle takes up in the immediately following second half of the letter. Furthermore, the fact that in 4:1–12 Paul four times reminds his readers that they already had been instructed in these subjects (4:1, 2, 6c, 11b), as well as the strong warning “the Lord is an avenger concerning all these things” (4:6b), all suggest that the problems of sexual conduct (4:3–8) and idleness in the context of

brotherly and sisterly love (4:9–12) were, in fact, significant issues in the apostle’s mind.

(6) The issue of identifying precisely the problem lying behind 4:13–18 is more complex and difficult than is often recognized. Shogren treats this problem at some length already in the introduction of the commentary, concluding that “the Thessalonians were earlier taught the resurrection as we know it from 1 Thess 4 and other passages, and that under duress some failed to apply it properly; some ‘forgot’ it altogether” (p. 36; see also p. 176).

(7) On the issue of whether Jesus’ return in 4:17 envisions a final destination on earth or in heaven, Shogren sees in the key term “reception” (ἀπάντησιν) a clear allusion to the ancient practice of sending a delegation party outside the city first to welcome a visiting dignitary and then to escort that person *back* into the city. This, in turn, leads to the following conclusion: “Based on this conventional usage of ‘meeting’ (ἀπάντησιν), it may be concluded with a relatively high degree of certainty that Paul envisions Jesus coming in the air; resurrected believers and then living ones will ascend to honor him and *they will accompany him back to earth*” (p. 190, emphasis original).

(8) On the debate over the background of the phrase “peace and security” in 5:3, it is difficult to discern Shogren’s position. He first seems to support an OT background by stating that this phrase “has its roots in Jeremiah’s complaint against Judah,” but then one paragraph later asserts: “It seems more than coincidence that Paul echoes a well-known slogan of the Roman empire, *Pax et securitas* (“Peace and security”), which comes from living under the *Pax romana*” (p. 203).

(9) The vocative ἀδελφοί is consistently translated by Shogren as referring broadly to “brothers and sisters.” Yet in 5:14 he argues that in this lone instance it refers more narrowly to leaders in the church (p. 221). The more likely alternate understanding of referring here also to “brothers and sisters” has an important contemporary application: *all* Christians—not just ordained or paid leaders—have a responsibility to minister to troubled congregational members (5:14–15).

(10) Shogren treats 2 Thess 2:1–12 as an independent unit rather than recognize the several literary clues that show that this unit actually continues to include the immediately following material of 2:13–17. Determining the proper ending of Paul’s argument in 2 Thessalonians 2 is important for discerning his primary purpose in this discussion of end-time events. If one reads only up to verse 12, the passage closes with a note of judgment for unbelievers. If, however, one reads all the way to verse 17, the passage closes with a note of comfort for the Thessalonian Christians (note the double occurrence of “comfort”—the noun form in v. 16 and the verb form in v. 17). Paul’s eschatological discussions are never intended to *predict* but rather to *pastor*, that is, to comfort his readers (note how both 1 Thess 4:13–18 and 5:1–11 conclude with the exhortation “Comfort one another!”).

It is clear from the above survey that I do not agree with Shogren on several key exegetical issues arising in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Nevertheless, in many of these disagreements I readily acknowledge that Shogren enjoys the support of other Thessalonian commentators, and so his positions are by no means esoteric or without grounds. Furthermore, this brief survey distorts the fact that there are

many more examples of exegetical conclusions with which I concur. In summary, Shogren's commentary involves a detailed yet pragmatic analysis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians from an evangelical perspective that will be used profitably and thus appreciated greatly by both pastor and scholar alike.

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*James*. By Chris A. Vlachos. Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament. Nashville: B&H, 2013, xxx + 225 pp., \$24.99 paper.

Chris Vlachos's exegetical guide to the Greek text of James is a unique resource amidst a growing field. While James no longer suffers under the kind of neglect it once did, this sort of focused exploration of the Greek has not been done quite like this since Ropes provided his brief commentary on the Greek text in 1916. What sets this work apart from the recent commentaries on the Greek text (besides the fact that Davids's NIGNT came out in 1986 and Martin's WBC in 1988, leading to flexibility to the use of the word "recent") is Vlachos's incredible brevity, even amidst his consistent focus on the grammar of the epistle and on how understanding that can help one unpack greater depth and meaning from the text.

Vlachos's book follows a straightforward format—similar to a commentary—of introduction followed by textual investigation (oddly, the exegetical outline is given at the very end of the book). In the six-page introduction, one is immediately clued in that the author does not intend to write or substitute for a full commentary. Instead, Vlachos quickly lays out the various positions taken regarding authorship, date, and occasion and purpose, and in very brief order presents the arguments for an early date of writing by James, the brother of Jesus. He does not, however, presume to have settled the discussion. Instead, this pattern sets the tone for the rest of the book: discussions of complicated issues will be short, both sides presented but the chosen interpretation given slightly longer argumentation. One bonus in the introduction is his description of the five commentaries focused on the Greek upon which he depends most. For the new student who is unfamiliar with the various commentators, his reviews of Davids, Dibelius, Martin, Mayor, and Ropes—one sentence summarizing the content and one sentence discussing the biases of the texts (pp. 7–8)—could provide a profoundly helpful introduction.

Following the introduction, the book then cycles through a consistent format: a descriptive summary of the structure of a given small section of text, and then a verse-by-verse discussion in which every grammatical tag is given, and relevant debates regarding grammatical or lexical points are laid out in simple fashion. Where there are two or more positions of interpretive significance, these appear in outline form, followed by translations and commentators that defend each. Where relevant, a star (\*) signals the position supported in the exegetical guide. Following this is a section entitled "Further Study," in which Vlachos provides a select bibliography regarding any number of topics raised by the section (e.g. the one on 1:13–18 includes such topics as "temptation and sin," "God the giver of good gifts,"