

Paul: Missionary of Jesus by Paul Barnett. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich. 2008. Pb. 240 pp. Reviewed by Johan D. Tangelder.

Was Paul the true founder of Christianity as claimed by many liberal Protestants? Those who make this claim don't do it to praise Paul. On the contrary, they complain that he hijacked the religion of Jesus and made it into something that was never intended or envisaged. They argue that Paul introduced all sorts of ideas and emphases that complicated and spoiled the original, simple religion of Jesus. Paul is even accused of promoting anti-Semitism. The author James Carroll, an ex-Roman Catholic priest, says that Paul's surviving letters contain some of the first evidence of anti-Semitism. And he believes that Paul had no idea of what Jesus actually said.

What is the current status of Pauline studies? We are now living in a post-or ex-or anti Christian world in considerable uncertainty and we need, perhaps more than ever, to look freshly at the life and teachings of Paul to know how to live in these unchartered waters. Historian Paul Barnett, lecturer at Moore Theological College, Sydney, and a teaching fellow at Regent College, Vancouver, offers a refreshing introduction to Paul. But his book is not a "theology of Paul." He tracks down Paul's career chronologically, reflects on the number of years passed in relative obscurity, and the astonishing brevity of his missionary career. He examines him in his historical context and as revealed by his writings. And he reflects on a number of theological issues on the way. He asks, " Was Paul's mission to the Gentiles according to the mind of Jesus and an authentic extension to his own ministry in Israel?" Was Paul a true missionary of Jesus? Paul's mission was nothing less than the outworking of Jesus' own mission. Paul's "call" to preach to the Gentiles came directly from Christ on the Damascus road. This encounter with the ascended Christ as an objective and historical event is crucial for the understanding of Paul, since it opened the way for him to be "the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles", on the one hand, and a "minister of the new covenant" to Israel, on the other. Barnett shows that Paul's letters reflect an extensive knowledge of Jesus' life and death. To a significant degree, they quote, echo, and adapt the word of Jesus, even though we cannot know how much material was accessible to Paul. He preached Christ crucified, risen and ascended. He embodied the Christ-centred message he preached. In short, Paul, who was both "converted" and "called" at Damascus, became a true missionary of Jesus.

Paul: Missionary of Jesus is full of valuable information written in a very accessible style, including maps of Paul's travels and five helpful appendixes. It is a concise introduction to his activities based on his letters and Luke's Acts of the Apostles. Pastors and catechism teachers will find Barnett's book a wonderful, Biblically sound resource. Warmly recommended!