



Hurtado, Larry W.

God in New Testament Theology

Library of Biblical Theology

Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010. Pp. xii + 152. Paper. \$21.00.
ISBN 9780687465453.

Nick Norelli

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

New Jersey

Over thirty years ago Nihls Dahl recognized a lacuna in NT theology, namely the lack of attention paid to “God” in writings *on* the NT, which is strange since the writings *of* the NT spoke so much about God and without God there’s not much to say about *theology*. In the past thirty-plus years scholars have said a bit more (Marianne Meye Thompson comes to mind immediately) but there’s still relatively little attention paid to God in the grand scheme of things. There’s seemingly no end to the production of volumes on issues like Justification in the Pauline corpus, the Historical Jesus of the Gospels, and Christologies of varying stripes spanning most every book of the NT, but still so little on God *qua* God. Larry Hurtado has thrown his hat into the ring in an attempt to help fill this void with the most recent contribution to Abingdon’s Library of Biblical Theology series, *God in New Testament Theology*.

The introductory chapter introduces the reader to Dahl’s recognition of a lack of scholarship on God in NT theology while also stating the book’s proposed aims and self-intended limitations. Hurtado is interested in NT discourse on God and not later Christian theology, which is worthy of study in its own right.

The first chapter looks at what scholarship has said about God in the NT in the past thirty years or so, and while there have been significant advances, Hurtado believes that much has gone unnoticed or uncommented upon as can be seen from the literature survey, which favors books

about God in the Pauline corpus and the Gospels. Some work has been produced on God in the NT more broadly but Hurtado suggests that major NT writings like Matthew, Hebrews, and Revelation have not received the attention they deserve. To his suggestion I'd add "minor" writings like the Catholic Epistles and Petrine material.

The second chapter asks who God is in the NT, with the conclusion that he is the same God that is found in the OT, the God of Israel and not some generic deity. This is the impetus of Hurtado's placing "God" in quotation marks throughout the volume, i.e., they emphasize the particularity of the NT God rather than any of a number of connotations that the word might have held in the ancient world. He's careful to point out that God was known to his people through his actions. He also recognizes a proto-trinitarian shape to the NT discourse about God where we now hear much about Father, Son, and Spirit.

The third chapter is Hurtado's bread and butter: "'God' and Jesus in the New Testament." For more than twenty years Hurtado has been writing about the link between Jesus and God in the NT and this chapter represents a nice distillation of his work. Jesus' relation to the Father is viewed not only in terms of his actions and purposes, but also in terms of the devotional patterns of early believers. Jesus is worshipped in reference to God and in a manner that the earliest Christians felt they must have worshipped him in order to be obedient to God. He does not compete with God nor is he a second deity set up alongside God so that the early believers would have violated their monotheistic commitments. In the NT both Jesus and God are defined with reference to one another.

The fourth chapter turns its attention to the Holy Spirit. A quick survey of the Spirit in the OT and other early Jewish literature shows that the Spirit was seen as more of a "special power from 'God' given to individuals to enable them for particular tasks or roles." (74) The NT, while maintaining continuity in many ways with the OT and early Jewish literature, tells its own story with several unique features. In the NT the Spirit is personal and pervasively described as "Holy." The Spirit plays an important role in NT eschatology and speaks to an experienced reality. And drawing from the work of Max Turner and Mehrdad Fatehi, Hurtado notes how the Spirit's relationship to Jesus in the NT has its best analogy with the Spirit's relationship to God in the OT and early Jewish literature.

The concluding chapter simply presents a reiteration of major points made throughout the work with some concluding reflections and a defense of his "synthesizing approach" to handling the NT data (i.e., there's enough unity in the NT's diversity to justify Hurtado's method).

God in New Testament Theology is a step in the right direction for fixing the problem that Dahl noted so long ago. Is it the final word on the subject? Of course not, and Hurtado knows it, but it does a more than adequate job of surveying the current landscape and providing a solid foundation on which to build. As a longtime reader of Hurtado's scholarship I can say that this book fits into his corpus with ease—in fact I found myself a bit bored at times because he wasn't saying *much* that he hasn't said elsewhere—but just to be clear, he does say things in this slim volume that he hasn't said in others and it merits attention on that basis alone. Copious endnotes, a nice bibliography, and an ancient source index complete this volume. This is a nice introduction to the subject and I'd recommend it to students of NT theology at every level study.