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Review of *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude – Living in the Light of the Coming King*

Submitted to Dr. Craig Price for the course BISR9302 NT Genre

February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Dauids, Peter H. *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*. Biblical Theology of the New Testament volume 6. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

### **Author Information<sup>1</sup>**

Since 2006, Dr. Peter H. Davids has served as Professor of Biblical Theology at St. Stephen's University, New Brunswick, Canada. He has also taught courses at HGST; Houston Baptist University; Tyndale Theological Seminary; Badhoevedorp, the Netherlands; Institut Gemeindebau und Weltmission, Zurich; and Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia.

Dr. Davids received an MDiv degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a PhD from Victoria University of Manchester. He has published several books and numerous articles, including *The Epistle of 1 Peter* (NICNT), *The Epistle of James* (NIGTC), *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary), and *A Greek Handbook on Jude and 2 Peter* (forthcoming).

### **Purpose**

This book is a part of an eight volume series, entitled *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* and edited by Andreas Köstenberger, with the express purpose of covering the “entire New Testament”(13). According to the series preface (13), each individual work includes:

1. A survey of recent scholarship and of the state of research
2. A treatment of the relevant introductory issues
3. A thematic commentary following the narrative flow of the document(s)
4. A treatment of important individual themes
5. Discussions of the relationship between a particular writing and the rest of the New Testament and the Bible

Biblical Theology is defined as “the study of the biblical text while giving careful consideration to the historical setting in which a given piece of writing originated”(13). Peter Davids contributes to this series by addressing the biblical-theological elements of Peter, James, and Jude's respective New Testament works.

### **Summary**

Chapter one, entitled “Introduction: Common Themes and Issues,” addresses the matters related to the shared contexts of the works of Peter, James, and Jude. In terms of commonality, Davids points out their shared “Greco-Roman Background” (23), their shared “Theology” (24) and “Christology” (24-25), their view of “the Source of Sin” (25-26), their “Eschatology” (26),

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “Peter Davids' Faculty Page,” February 18, 2015, n.p. Online: <http://www.hgst.edu/academics/faculty/peter-davids/>.

their “Implied Authorship” (26-27), their “Pseudonymity” (27-29) and their “Ecclesiological Stance” (29-30). However, even with such commonality acknowledged, Davids concludes, “The commonality does not justify homogenizing them so that we do not grasp their individual voices” (30).

In Chapter two, entitled “James,” Davids turns to the “individual voices” of the works. Following the five-point sectional outline provided in the *Series Preface*, the author begins with a section on recent scholarship in the book of James. Davids briefly notes how the study of James “languished in the scholarly world” due to some degree to “Luther’s apparent rejection of the letter” during the Reformation, leading to a lack of “theological interest” (33). Eventually, disinterest gave way to a renewed interest in the work that led to several modern scholarly works toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Before concluding the first section of this chapter, Davids documents several modern critical commentaries and monographs on the book of James for further study. In the second section, entitled “Introductory Issues,” Davids begins to address the matters of date, authorship, and historical context (36-41) and the literary form of the book (42-45). Regarding authorship, which necessarily impacts dating and historical context, Davids raises four issues that the traditional understanding (James, the brother of Jesus) must attempt to overcome (36):

1. Would a person with James’s background be capable of the quality of Greek and the rhetorical sophistication found in this letter?
2. Does James show a knowledge of Paul’s letters and, if so, would James have been alive long enough to have written such a letter?
3. Was James prominent enough after his martyrdom and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE that a later writer or community might have used his name to give authority to a letter that they have composed?
4. If James, the Lord’s brother, did write the letter, why is the letter so poorly attested until the period of Origen?

After systematically answering the questions he posed, Davids concludes on page 41 that “the best explanation is that the letter of James was written shortly after the death of James, the brother of Jesus, making use of sermons and sayings stemming from James (and/or Jesus).” To be fair, while Davids presents his conclusion without apology, he documents others, like Scot McKnight, that come to different conclusions about the author of James. In the next section, which covers Literary Form, Davids rightly identifies the book of James as “very much a letter” with a mixed “rhetorical form” (42). One will also find Davids addressing sources, explaining the author’s use of “catchwords,” and providing a general outline of the book’s content. The third section, entitled “A Literary-Theological Reading of James,” reads like a running theological commentary of the book of James. This section tends to take up the bulk of each chapter in Davids’ book. In addition to the theological reading, the reader will find comments on the rhetorical features found in the text. The fourth section of chapter two, entitled throughout the book “Important Theological Themes,” considers the major themes that emerged during the literary-theological reading of the text and then attempts to synthesize them in terms of the particular author and his setting. Of some of the themes addressed in James, Davids notes that James is a committed “monotheist” (71) that views God as bringing about salvation through the “word of truth” (73). Davids follows this discussion with a look at James’ understanding of the

“Nature of Jesus,” which suggest the highlighting of the Jesus’ lordship, especially in regarding to “ethical” matters (75). In the next two sub-sections, Davids addresses the nature of wisdom and the nature and situation of humanity (75-76). While the discussion of wisdom and its relationship to virtue is interesting, Davids’ interaction with James’ use of the term “desires” and its relationship to Jewish theology is excellent (77-79). In sub-section 2.4.5, Davids tackles James’ understanding of the “nature and content of the good news.” Davids finds James to understand the gospel as the declaration of the Lordship of Jesus, which will have significant implications for how one understands the demands of the gospel and James’ understanding of “saving faith.” In the remaining sub-sections (2.4.5-9), Davids addresses the themes of demon opposition to God’s plan (80-81), the intention of the law (81-82), the nature of the community (82-84), and James’ understanding of end times, particularly as it relates to “God’s ultimate judgment” (84-85). The fifth and final section of chapter two, entitled “James’s Canonical Contribution,” lists five contributions. They are as follows:

1. The Role of Jesus
2. The Theology of Suffering
3. The Theology of Healing
4. The Meaning of Commitment to Jesus
5. The Ethical Importance of Speech and Money

Of these five contributions, the fourth, “The Meaning of Commitment to Jesus,” receives the most attention. This is most likely due to the controversial debate regarding the relationship of James to Paul on the matter of saving faith and justification. Section 2.5.6 summarizes the contributions and helps the reader transition to the next chapter.

Chapter three, entitled after the book it discusses, investigates the same five elements of the book of First Peter. Like chapter two, this chapter addresses recent scholarship (Section 3.1) on the book. Davids notes that the most relevant issues in recent scholarship have typically dealt with information (or lack there of) about the implied author and the matters of audience, context, ethics, and suffering (97). In sub-section 3.2, Davids begins to deal with the matters of implied vs. actual author. Given that Luke claims that Peter was “illiterate,” Davids addresses the difficulties that face those who would favor Simon Peter as the actual author of First Peter. Davids eventually concludes that one’s decision in this regard is a matter of “theological conviction and historical weighing of the material” that he has laid out in the chapter (121). As for an audience, the debate swirls as to whether the “elect exiles of the dispersion” are to be taken literally or metaphorically. In sub-section 3.2.3, Davids discuss both the Greek style and the rhetoric found in First Peter. At this point, the reader will find some helpful definitions from rhetorical criticism. The Greek and use of rhetoric is so advanced in First Peter that most scholars seriously doubt Simon Peter was able to write the letter himself. Sub-section 3.2.4 introduces an interesting discussion of the apparent influence of Pauline material on Peter. Davids notes, “there is significant overlap in form, vocabulary, and intertextuality” between Paul and Peter (110). However, Davids notes that no “indisputable evidence” exists that demonstrates a reliance on Paul, which means that no ultimate conclusions regarding dating can be deduced from the overlap. Sub-section 3.2.5 brings the second section to a close with an exploration of persecution and how such details might assist in the dating of the work. The third section briefly outlines the book before a “thematic and rhetorical commentary” begins in the fourth section. As

was the case in chapter two, section four expositionally progresses through the book of First Peter. Of the many helpful things that Davids points out in this section is how one finds the author reframing his audience's suffering/persecution in light of the Christ's suffering. This interplay between Christology and human suffering is particularly enlightening. In section five, bearing the same title as section five from the previous chapter, Davids addresses the nature of God, dealing specifically with the Trinitarian theology replete in First Peter. Follow a discussion of the Godhead, Davids briefly address "other spiritual beings" that are scattered throughout the book. Subsection 3.5.3 considers the Nature of Revelation, in particular, the fulfillment of prophecy in the "Christ-event" (163). The next subsection, 3.5.4, deals extensively with the nature of salvation, addressing the author's use of metaphors pertaining to sacrifice and the new birth, and the often-misunderstood section on baptism in chapter three of First Peter. The discussion of salvation leads to a discussion of the saved or "believing" community. This theme explored comparatively deeper than others in the chapter. Davids concludes the section with reflections on First Peter's eschatology, with some particularly comments on "judgment" for the both believing and unbelieving communities. In the final section of the book, which again deals with the respective work's contribution to the Canon, Davids explores First Peter's relationship to the Hebrew Scriptures (181-183), other New Testament works (183-185), and finally the formation of the Canon (185).

Chapter four, entitled "Second Peter," begins with a brief section on recent scholarship like previous chapters. However, it is considerably shorter due to its unfortunate neglect as the "ugly stepchild of the New Testament" (189). The author readily admits "the introductory issues concerning 2 Peter are some of the most difficult in the New Testament" (191). While the book bears the name of Simon Peter, there's considerable doubt among New Testament scholars as to whether Simon Peter the apostle could have written the letter. Davids takes up the issue at length leaving a full conclusion up to the reader. On page 195, the author speculates regarding the identity of the primary audience. Given the difficulty of ascertaining the relationship of Second Peter to First Peter, Davids concludes that the audience was most likely "a community characterized by Hellenistic thought in which it was possible for "false teachers" to arise (196). In the next subsection, the author attempts to identify the false teachers mentioned in Second Peter. He provides the reader with three proposals on page 197. The proposals are as follows:

1. They are Gnostics.
2. They are an unknown out-group (from the perspective of the author).
3. They are Epicurean-influenced teachers.

After detailing the possibilities, the author concludes "the false teachers are under the influence of Epicurean thought, although they surely expressed it in a manner consistent with the language of the Jesus movement" (199). Given the disputed authorship of the book, a clear date for Second Peter remains elusive. In the next section, 4.2.2, Davids briefly addresses literary style and form with a bit of special attention paid to the Asiatic nature of the rhetoric found in Second Peter. After providing a general outline of the book, the author moves to discuss the relationship between Second Peter and the book of Jude. On page 203, the author states, "We been making the assumption all along the Second Peter is dependent on Jude." For five pages the author compares the overlapping content found in the two books. In the third section of the chapter, entitled "Thematic Commentary," the author once again systematically works through the

content of the book and provides analysis in light of the introductory material. Of the material that was found in this section, Davids' discussion of virtue (1:5-11) is particularly insightful (213-15). As was the case in the fourth section of the other chapters, Davids addresses the themes of theology, soteriology, eschatology, and the minor themes of ecclesiology in Scripture. In chapter four, though, Davids introduces the theme of cosmology. Second Peter's use of the creative word, *logos*, and allusions to First Enoch reveal that the author expected his audience to have a degree of familiarity with these concepts. Though Davids does not develop the theme beyond a few pages, it is an interesting inclusion alongside of the more common themes found in the Catholic (or General) epistles. In the final section of the chapter, Davids concludes with the canonical contributions of the work. In summary, Second Peter contributes to one's understanding of concepts like apostasy, judgment, the lordship of Jesus Christ, salvation, and a "specific hermeneutic of reading the Hebrew Scriptures through the lenses of Judaism current in his day" (248).

Chapter five, which addresses the book of Jude, is essentially the last substantial chapter in the book. Emulating the previous chapter, chapter five has a brief section on recent scholarship followed by a section dealing with introductory matters like authorship, date, and the historical context of the letter. Given the dependence of Second Peter on the material found in Jude, it is reasonable to date the work prior to or around 80 CE. As was the case with First Peter, the question of the implied author's ability to write with "such skillful rhetorical devices" is rightfully questioned (256). In terms of purpose, Davids believes the work was "written to oppose the influence of a group or movement within the larger community of the followers of Jesus" (260). In the second section, the author discusses Jude's use of First Enoch and Second Temple Judaism literature from literary perspective (262-65). The third section a running thematic commentary is provided with helpful details on historically difficult sections of the book. The fourth section addresses important theological themes similar to those in previous chapters with the addition of a discussion regarding ethics (287-89) and divine messengers (289-90). Interestingly enough, while Jude is the shortest of the books analyzed in this volume, its section on canonical contribution is one of the longest. One of the unique contributions is how Jude exemplifies a "way of reading and appropriating the foundation narrative of Israel, the Torah (or Pentateuch), within the community of the followers of Jesus" (292). Following a conclusion from Second Peter, Davids suggest that Jude also has no category for eternal security with his stress on "strengthening their commitment and praying 'in the Spirit' that the 'beloved' keep themselves in God's love" (296).

The book ends with a brief conclusion that brings some synthesis to the overall work of the book. In particular, Davids notes that "the Catholic (or General) epistles" balance the "unbalanced picture" of Paul (301). In the last paragraph, Davids writes, "These letters call us to Jesus and in one way or another to the teaching of Jesus. They balance Paul, perhaps, but in their own minds they are completing and defending the Gospels" (302).

### **Critique**

Given the length of the summary, the critique will be abbreviated for the sake of space. In terms of the commendable aspects of the work, the first thing that jumps out is the literary-theological reading sections (variously named throughout the book) that provided wonderful,

concise interpretations of the entire book. While such sections would not supplant the need for full-scale critical commentaries, they do provide excellent summaries of the respective pericopes. Also, the consistent structure of each chapter makes this resource an important tool for repeated use. Specifically, the book offered some very helpful reflections on the relationship between Paul and James. Davids comments on the completion of faith in action illustrate how there is no conflict between Paul and James, nor is there a need to attempt to redefine the word “justification.” Prior to reading this book, this reviewer had never noticed the absence of the Holy Spirit in James or the fact that James taught a gospel that accords more with the witness of the synoptic gospels than Paul (“Jesus is Lord” vs. “Death, Burial, Resurrection”) In chapter three, the section on persecution is excellent. Davids deftly addresses the historical concerns that surround the interpretation of First Peter in light of actual accounts of formal persecution in the Roman Empire. This helps the reader make sense of Peter’s admonish to “honor the emperor,” since it was most likely not the case that Roman was systematically persecuting Christians at that particular point in history. Davids’ discussion of suffering in baptism was another excellent contribution to the study of First Peter. In light of the Lordship of Christ (which allowed believers to submit to other authorities), Davids reframing of human suffering in light of Jesus’ suffering was compelling.

In terms of general improvement, there are section of the book that would have been aided by more explanation and definitions, especially regarding rhetorical analysis. Whereas chapter three included some of these details, the concepts were encountered prior to chapter three without much explanation. There were also points when footnotes would preserved the flow of the text better than parentheses.

In terms of content critique, on page 182, Davids suggests that the author of First Peter misreads the Old Testament. He writes, “It is not the text in context that is authoritative; there is no attempt to limit the meaning of the intention of the original authors in part or in whole; there is no detailed exegesis. What is authoritative is the text as read and applied to the contemporary community in line with the hermeneutical traditions used by the community.” This reviewer feels like this statement does not adequately explore the possibility of the author understanding the Old Testament within context. Other works, like those by Beale and Carson, have been able to demonstrate that the context of the Old Testament might be broader than initially assumed by New Testament scholars and that it entirely possible the New Testament authors really were committed to understanding the text within its context. Davids comment at this point, while possibly true, is not well enough established to be made without qualification. A final point of concern comes from page 240 where Davids writes, “Our author does not believe in eternal security.” Without belaboring the point, it would seem like such a comment would require more explanation, especially considering how part of this chapter is intended to explain the contribution of the Second Peter to the whole of the canon. In light of text like Philippians 1:6, which speak of the faithfulness of Christ to complete the work of salvation that he began in believers, it seems that Davids would be required to give more than a two-sentence comment on apostasy in the concluding section of the chapter. This argument is simply too weak to be taken seriously. However, with these comments stated, it should be said that this is a tremendously helpful book. This reviewer looks forward to using it and recommending it to others in the future as they seek to study these particular Catholic Epistles.

No Reviews Currently Available for Synopsis