

Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years, by Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer. Translated by John Bowden. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997. Pp. xiv + 530.*

Anyone attempting to reconstruct a chronology of Paul's life and ministry quickly discovers that scriptural testimony (in particular, the Book of Acts) regarding the apostle's activities focuses primarily on the period between A.D. 47 and 62. As a result, we are left with significant gaps in our knowledge of Paul's whereabouts and actions between his conversion (c. A.D. 33) and his first missionary journey (A.D. 47) on the one hand and the last few years of his life (A.D. 63-66) on the other. In fact, the argument has been made that it is no more possible to write a consecutive account of Paul's activities on the basis of the Acts of the Apostles than it is to write a life of Jesus on the basis of the Gospels.

The present work leaves no stone unturned in an attempt to fill some of the gaps in our knowledge of Paul's life. One thing is certain: no one will be able to charge Martin Hengel and his collaborator with lack of scholarship. Following three hundred and twenty pages of text are a full one hundred and eighty pages of a total of one thousand five hundred and eighty-four notes (!) plus Scripture and author indices (but no bibliography). As the sequel to Hengel's *Pre-Christian Paul* (1991), this monograph now constitutes the major study of Paul's "unknown years," together with Rainer Riesner's recently published *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Eerdmans, 1998).

In their effort to bring into the relative obscurity surrounding certain phases of Paul's life, Hengel and Schwemer focus primarily on the dark period of thirteen years between the apostle's conversion and his first missionary journey (c. A.D. 33-46). As the authors contend, a study of this period in Paul's life is particularly important because it is precisely these unknown years which constitute the decisive era in which Paul gained that towering missionary and theological status that is later displayed in Paul's travels, ministry, and writings.

The first major chapter deals with Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. Hengel and Schwemer go to great lengths to place this event and its ramifications in relation to other historical evidence from this period. They also explore the influence of this event on the ensuing mission to the Gentiles and compare and contrast this mission with the power of attraction possessed by the institution of the Jewish synagogue. The following chapter investigates Paul's apostolic consciousness and the foundation of his theology. In this surprisingly short chapter (only fifteen pages), the authors identify the center of Paul's theology as his teaching on the sinner's justification by grace alone. Further chapters deal with Arabia and Aretas IV, King of the Nabateans; Paul's return to Damascus and the flight from the city; the visit to Peter in Jerusalem; Paul's return to Tarsus and Cilicia; and Antioch. Of these, the final chapter on Antioch takes up almost one half of the entire book (one hundred and thirty pages).

In a fascinating concluding chapter, the authors compare our knowledge of Paul with our knowledge of Luther. Hengel and Schwemer point out that Luther almost immediately began to write after his conversion while we have no extant writings from Paul's first few years as a Christian. Overall, the authors contend there is a significant disproportion between our vast knowledge of Luther's thought and the much more narrow

range of the extant letters of Paul: "What we have from Paul is a shadow of the fullness of what he preached" (p. 313).

While conservative interpreters may not share Hengel's reluctance to attribute certain writings to the Apostle Paul (note, however, that Hengel is very conservative for German standards) and differ from his assessment at various junctures, they will still be able to benefit considerably from the evidence adduced in this volume and the full interaction with scholarship on the subject of the "unknown Paul." Largely owing to Hengel (and Riesner), Paul is no longer quite as "unknown" as he was before this prolific German scholar did his work.

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