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Caleb Gordon
Duke University, cgordon51@liberty.edu

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Review of L. Ann Jervis' *Paul and Time: Life in the Temporality of Christ*

Abstract

This review of *Paul and Time* offers a summary and critique of Dr. Jervis' thought-provoking contribution to Pauline Studies concerning an alternative temporal approach to the undisputed Paul in place of the Jewish apocalyptic "two age" framework. This scholarly work is a necessary read for serious Pauline scholars and advanced students in New Testament scholarship.

Keywords

Jervis, Biblical Studies, Paul, Pauline Studies, Temporality

Cover Page Footnote

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Jervis, L. Ann. *Paul and Time: Life in the Temporality of Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. 224 pp. \$32.99.

In *Paul and Time: Life in the Temporality of Christ*, scholar L. Ann Jervis offers a re-orientation to reading the undisputed Paul through examining temporal nuances surrounding the Pauline concept of union with Christ. Attempting to refute the standard “two age” framework consistent across salvation-historical and apocalyptic interpreters of Paul, Jervis advocates that Paul’s understanding of believers “in Christ” through the victory of the Christ event transfers them into a new temporality connected to God’s eternal life, disconnected from that of “the present evil age.” Using exegetical analysis and philosophical contemplation to support her thesis, she proposes a new framework for Pauline interpretation that consequently re-imagines the place of suffering, death, and sin in the lives of believers as they await God to be “all in all,” the ultimate trajectory by which all things must be considered for Jervis (168, see 1 Cor. 15:28, ESV). While this advanced read offers a radical re-evaluation of Pauline theology that runs against many past interpretations, this articulate proposal pushes Pauline scholarship to revisit its assumed presuppositions and consider the scope and totality of union with the victorious Christ in His present life.

To front her analysis of temporality connected to Christ and believers in union with Christ, L. Ann Jervis opens *Paul and Time* by offering a brief survey of various philosophical positions held historically on the concept of time as well as its relation to the eternality of God to create an awareness of temporal presuppositions in biblical interpretation (xxvi-xxxiii). Primarily, she recognizes two overarching positions of temporality assumed in Pauline interpretations: the linear approach of salvation-historical interpreters and the encroaching of eternality into time within apocalyptic interpretations of Paul (xxxiii-xxxiv). Examining key advocates of each position, Jervis understands the salvation-historical method as grounding God’s purposes played out within historical progression, with the most significant end being the person and work of Christ in history (2-17). On the other hand, the apocalyptic interpretation assumes some level of radical discontinuity with the time before the Christ event and time after or some manner of the future pressing in on the present because of the Christ event (19). While both positions regularly employ a two age framework, apocalyptic interpreters recognize a re-structuring of reality in the Christ event for the new age (20). The finitude of the past age is being replaced by the eternality of the new one with Christ’s victory over the spiritual powers, allowing the interpretative possibility of an overlap between (42). However, Jervis attacks this two age paradigm with “already, not yet” dimensions as a reading of Jewish apocalyptic into Paul that does not belong (47-48). Noticing a glaring absence of direct mention of a “new age” temporally in the undisputed Paul, she instead

explains that the language of “new creation,” “kingdom,” and “eternal life” are rather tied to a present life possible in union with Christ (49-57).

Key to Jervis’ refutation of the “new age” reading of Paul is that union with Christ implies its own temporality, unique and distinct from the temporality experienced by those outside of this union (61-74). Challenging what she deems the “commonplace” understanding of time based largely on Aristotelian philosophy as an often default presupposition in Pauline interpretation, the author presents God’s temporality as fundamentally different, possessing separate, non-sequential tenses of past, present, and future (61-65). Within Paul, Jervis sees two distinct temporalities to which humans can belong, either “death-time,” a temporality with a clear ending in death, or “life-time,” a temporality without ending connected to God’s eternality of three tenses and made accessible through union with Christ in His experience of it (69-71). Christ’s temporality of three tenses allows believers temporal connection to Christ’s past, present, and future as co-existing tenses (77). Thus, Christ’s death and resurrection apply to believers in union with Christ in the present, with Christ’s future also experienced presently by Christ and believers due to this temporal tense co-existence (79-88). However, Jervis acknowledges an anticipation of Christ handing over His present reign to God in the human experiential future, as well as believers’ gaining freedom from mortality (82-89). Connected to her view of time as necessitating change for temporal movement, the scholar clarifies that Christ’s future is revelatory despite these “not yet” events due to little change for Christ and mere unveiling of Christ’s present (88-93).

To justify her articulation of Christ’s future as disclosure of His present, Jervis offers an exegetical review of pertinent passages in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 8 (93). Working through a web of difficult interpretative choices for verbs and their tenses, she sees 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 as temporally focused on Christ’s time, with believers’ futures experiencing change only by the full revelation of Christ’s present (93-110). In Romans 8, Jervis understands “future glory” in terms of total liberation for believers from their corrupted bodies while they experience glory in present union with Christ (110-111). The future bodies of redemption will evidence to the glorious adoption that believers already possessed in Christ (115). Furthermore, Jervis connects present suffering facing Christ and believers as “groaning” for the rest of creation’s deliverance from its present bondage (114).

After covering the nature of Christ’s temporality and believers’ relationship to it in union with Christ, L. Ann Jervis demonstrates the meager attention given to the temporal implications of the theological “in Christ” motif in Pauline scholarship (117). Supporting temporality in this terminology, she injects “future eschatology” in Paul into her “life-time” concept, which is Christ’s present to be revealed fully in future human chronological time (124-126). While humans

may existentially seem to exist in an “already, not yet” from their vantage point, Paul prioritizes Christ’s time in his work (133). Through union in Christ and His time, suffering, death, and sin all are transformative for believers in this union (xvii). Suffering is rooted in this union, although Jervis fails to clarify the specifics of such suffering, other than as related to “groaning” in Romans 8 (137). Death does not attest to a continuance of the power of death for believers, but it instead allows entrance into a greater experience of Christ’s present life (138-139). However, Jervis struggles with the specifics of this experience in relation to incorruptibility at Christ’s Parousia (138). For believers, sin is a force which can be avoided due to union with the Christ who has already died to sin, according to Jervis (140-142). The avoidance of this force evidences the victory of God to others in the present (151).

Addressing the implications of this model for those not in union with Christ, Jervis argues that “death-time” lingers on out of God’s mercy to those not in Christ as it awaits its end once He is “all in all” (161, see 1 Cor. 15:28). Until this end, “death-time” limps forward in defeat before destruction (166-167). Once God is finally “all in all,” creation and those in bondage in “death-time” will be joined to God’s life, or “life-time,” with believers, showing the centrality of the unsaved in Jervis’ eschatology (162-168). To Jervis, God’s “all-ness” is the eschatological end of Pauline thought, not an eschatological new age breaking into a “present evil age” (168).

In assessment of Jervis’ challenging proposal, the studied author meticulously defends her thesis through scholarly review of interpretative positions, exegetical analysis, and theological reflection. While this fresh contribution spurs needed awareness to the blind preconceptions concerning temporality that is often brought into Paul’s thought in the undisputed letters, the model presented by L. Ann Jervis for understanding the temporality of those in Christ breaks down by nature of Jervis’ assumption that time necessitates change for temporal movement in relation to Christ’s future (88). While she successfully demonstrates that most elements of Christ’s eschatological character remain consistent to His present, the author honestly but evidently disregards treatment of the disappearance of Christ’s suffering at the eschaton as change by virtue of Paul’s lack of attention (90). With change still anticipated in this loss of suffering for Christ in His future and consequently believers in union with Him, there is more than a revelatory nature to the eschaton in this model for Christ and believers. Thus, Jervis’ admission undermines her own argument about consistency between Christ’s present and future (90). Even limited temporal sequence in Christ’s future still implies temporal sequence for Him and believers in union with Him, begging the question whether there is a future time beyond a revelation of a present temporality due to temporal change (89-90).

Beyond this point, focused treatment on the specifics of what constitutes the presence of a Jewish apocalyptic “two age” framework as opposed to a mere examination of the absence of clear “new age” terminology in Paul would have contributed to a stronger defense of her alternative reading. Finally, while the imminent salvation of all is a secondary thought in the sea of Jervis’ discussion points in *Paul and Time*, a more focused justification of universalist readings of 1 Corinthians 15:28 would be ideal for audiences not sympathetic or previously committed to this position.

Despite these critiques, L. Ann Jervis’ book *Paul and Time* is a must read for the seasoned Pauline scholar to contemplate and re-examine the frameworks that they bring to interpreting the apostle’s undisputed letters and the temporal implications present within.