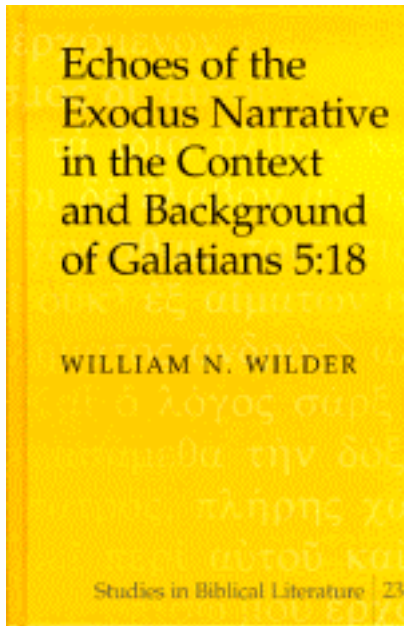


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**Wilder, William N.**

*Echoes of the Exodus Narrative in the Context and Background of Galatians 5:18*

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In this carefully researched and clearly written dissertation turned monograph, William Wilder looks back from the vantage point of Gal 5:18 to the exodus narrative and certain psalms and prophetic passages of the Old Testament to see what relation they may have on Paul's appropriation of the Christian life as expressed in the maxim "if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." What Wilder observes is that—contrary to conventional interpretations of this verse—Paul has in mind here a "new exodus" typology in which the guiding Spirit corresponds to the exodus cloud and existence "under the law" to the Israelites' bondage in Egypt. Moreover, this "second exodus" of the Christian experience, as interpreted through Paul's apocalyptic framework, generates a fresh perspective of Paul's broader theological horizon at such crucial points as divine justification and human will. In other words, Wilder locates in Gal 5:18 a lever with which he is able to raise a number of unique insights about the nature and significance of Paul's theological understanding of the history of redemption.

Wilder's study begins with an analysis of the interpretive history of this verse from the patristic era through the Reformation to the modern period. Of particular importance to Wilder are the various ways interpreters have understood the phrases "under the law" and "led by the Spirit." Since Chrysostom and Augustine, interpreters have widely construed

the phrase “under the law” in terms of “constraint” and “condemnation” (i.e., the first and second uses of the law), both of which are rendered universally relevant, fundamentally subjective, and synthetically connected to one another (20). Behind each is a “law-engendered fear of punishment,” which is the antithesis of Spirit-engendered love. From the Reformation through the modern period, however, the so-called “third use” of the law for ethical guidance emerged. As Wilder shows, this interpretive extension, coupled with modern criticism, disrupted the “traditional synthesis.” As a result, the various perspectives of “under the law” have been harmonized or neglected in a way never envisaged originally. For instance, some find no element of condemnation in the use of this phrase, while others have denied the element of constraint. Thus, interpreters today seldom understand the phrase “under the law” in the same way, and questions for relating these traditional “uses” with the current reassessment of Paul’s theology remain.

Similarly, in his investigation of the phrase “led by the Spirit,” Wilder highlights the traditional synthesis of interpretation, which contrasts the “external location of the law” with the “internal guidance of the Spirit,” the “fear engendered by the law” with the love implanted by the Spirit, and the “compulsion and constraint” motivated by the law with the spontaneous obedience to God’s will directed by the Spirit (34). Wilder groups the majority of interpretations of being “led by the Spirit” into soteriological and psychological categories. His investigation, though, shows that a minority line of interpretation linking this phrase to exodus themes has been largely ignored, especially in the West. Wilder calls this distinctive perspective the “dynamic dimension,” and its chief proponents are Ignace de la Potterie, Sylvia Keesmaat, and N. T. Wright. Further, while the soteriological and psychological dimensions can be correlated to the traditional “uses” of the law, this dynamic dimension of being “led by the Spirit” cannot. Consequently, Wilder must posit new questions about the meaning and relation of these phrases in Gal 5:18 in light of the exodus and Paul’s appeal to it (32–34, 61–62).

The bulk of this study then listens attentively to the echoes of the exodus narrative both in Paul’s letter-speeches and in the Old Testament, wherever the expressions “under the law” and “led by the Spirit” occur. He first (ch. 2) examines 1 Cor 9:20; Rom 6:14–15; and Gal 3:23; 4:5, 21, concluding that Paul has in mind “Egypt-like bondage” where he writes of existence “under the law.” Second (ch. 3), drawing support from Rom 8:14; Hag 2:4–5; Isa 63:11–14; Neh 9:19–20; and Ps 143:10, Wilder relates being “led by the Spirit” to the guidance provided through the exodus cloud. This, then, calls for further consideration of the exodus as the principle context and background for Gal 5:18 (ch. 4). Here the immediate context is freedom from the law, and the primary background is rooted in Ps 143. A secondary background is formed by Stoicism. This leads to closer inspection of the “flesh/spirit” antithesis, which is given further examination and analysis (ch. 5). In particular, Wilder looks at the contexts of salvation history, exodus typology,

and Paul's apocalyptic perspective before probing Ps 143:2, 10 as the specific background for Gal 5:18. He argues that Paul's addition of the phrase "from the works of the law" to Ps 143:2 and the substitution of "all flesh" for "no one living" in the same verse show that Paul associated "works of the law" with the arena of the "flesh" (235). Thus, according to Wilder, Paul establishes in Gal 5:18 "an explicit contrast between two modes of existence"—life centered on human activity, which is a life of Egypt-like slavery, and life oriented around divine activity, which is a life of freedom in a "rejuvenated wilderness, one which offers within itself an advance token of God's promised covenantal blessings and a distinct aspect of present enjoyment of them" (275).

In his conclusion (ch. 6), Wilder revisits the questions that he raised at the beginning. Regarding existence "under the law," Wilder acknowledges that there are subjective and universal dimensions to the expression, but they are not primary to Paul. Rather, "the subjective and universalistic components within the traditional interpretation of existence 'under the law' ... miss the mark by neglecting the fundamentally particularistic, Judeocentric sense of this phrase," which is "Paul's core understanding" (252). Wilder also contends that the element of constraint envisaged in the traditional synthesis is not entirely the kind of constraint found in the exodus interpretation of existence "under the law," which is viewed in terms of slavery or bondage to rebellion and sin (255). And although the traditional perspective correctly preserves an element of condemnation for all who exist "under the law," it misses the mark again, for "Egypt-like bondage" in the exodus narrative "exists as a 'representative subset' within the broader human slavery to sin" (260). With respect to the question whether ethical guidance of the law is connoted in Gal 5:18, Wilder answers no. He notes, however, that this does not rule out the so-called "third use" of the law, for other contexts support this perspective. Here, though, ethical guidance is assigned to the Spirit (264). So what kind of freedom do those who are "led by the Spirit" have? They are free to subject themselves to "the exodus-like guidance of the Spirit, they are free from the bondage of the law (as it expresses itself in the dominion of sin and Jewish exclusiveness)" (266). Walking by the Spirit, though, is not only a matter of free will. Wilder observes that the hortatory nature of the paranesis indicates that one's ability to choose is part of Paul's perspective, but the "life which the law failed to bring (Gal 3:21) and which the Spirit has brought (Gal 3:10–14) is also a Spiritual life which precedes and enables the subsequent walking by the Spirit (Gal 5:25)" (273). God provides divine guidance through the Spirit to bring the people of God to the destination of God's choosing. This and more come into view when Gal 5:18 is interpreted against the background of the exodus and the particular interpretation of this event in Ps 143:10.

Throughout this volume Wilder draws substantially from the works and methodologies of Ignace de la Potterie, Sylvia Keesmaat, James M. Scott, Meredith Kline, Scott Hafemann,

N. T. Wright, and Richard B. Hays. Of particular importance to Wilder's study—as the title indicates—is the intertextual approach advanced by Hays, especially Hays's investigation of Paul's use of Ps 143 in Rom 3 (see *JBL* 99 [1980]: 107–15) and his later criteria explicated in *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. In one sense, Wilder has but demonstrated that Ps 143 also relates directly to the logic of Gal 5:18 and provides a basis for the apocalyptic flesh/Spirit antithesis that pervades the larger context of Gal 5–6. In another sense, though, Wilder has helped raise into view the importance to Paul of the “second exodus” reflected in Gal 5:18 and so has advanced our understanding of Paul's worldview. He has also brought into view a fresh perspective on the relation between divine agency and human will in matters of justification. Of central importance to Wilder's argument is his Spirit-cloud identification, which is a new reading of Gal 5:18, drawn especially from Ps 143 and Isa 63:11–14.

In short, this is an important study for understanding Paul's argument in Gal 5–6 and Paul's theological perspective as a whole. It is well-researched and persuasively argued, and it will play a constructive role in the ongoing reevaluation of Paul's view of the Jewish law and the Christian life. Readers will find the bibliography and indexes of Scripture passages, authors, and topics useful. Unfortunately, the volume suffers from a disturbing number of format errors, especially widows and orphans (e.g., 26–27, 29, 34, 43–44, 47–48, 55–58, 60). Still, this is an insightful work that warrants close attention.