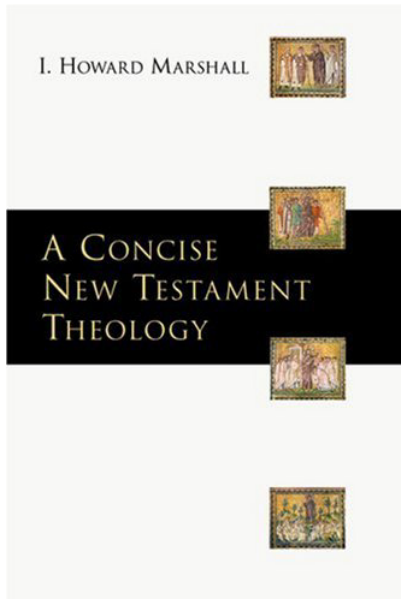


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**Marshall, I. Howard**

***A Concise New Testament Theology***

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I. Howard Marshall, Emeritus Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Honorary Research Professor at the University of Aberdeen (Scotland), has now authored *A Concise New Testament Theology*. This book is an abridgment and simplification of his earlier volume *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (2004), which was reviewed by Edward W. Klink III in *RBL* in September 2005 ([http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4549\\_4628.pdf](http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4549_4628.pdf)). Like its larger predecessor, the volume intends to present a biblical theology of the New Testament in a way that is faithful both to the distinctiveness and unity of the books and their authors. Thus Marshall concludes the volume: "There is a common, basic theology that can be traced in all our witnesses, but it is developed by each in their own distinctive ways" (291).

In the introductory chapter Marshall describes his goal as showing the distinctive theology of each individual document as well as the basic theological understanding that fits each document into a unified development. Recognition of the missionary character of the documents will help us "to see them in true perspective and to interpret them in the light of their intention" (15). In successive chapters Marshall proceeds through the four major collections of writings (Synoptic Gospels and Acts, the Pauline Letters, the Johannine literature, and the remaining works, Hebrews–2 Peter) in what he takes to be

their order of composition. Q material is treated in its Matthean and Lukan context; Galatians is held to be the first letter, prior to 1–2 Thessalonians. For answers to most traditional historical questions and alternative answers to interpretative questions, the author sends the reader to his larger text and the more extensive bibliographies included there.

With each New Testament writing, Marshall proceeds in the same manner. First the “Theological Story” of each book is described with attention to the basic storyline in the Gospels and Acts and the theological argument or line of thought in the letters and Revelation. In both cases he does not make much use of current narrative or rhetorical analyses. While recognizing tensions within and between the letters of Paul, Marshall takes them to be unitary compositions and eschews composition theories. From this theological story the “Theological Themes” of each book are disentangled and drawn together so as to highlight the overall concerns of the author in writing or the individual author’s theological (and Trinitarian), christological, or soteriological ideas and images. For example, the theological themes present in Philippians include: the believer’s relationship to Christ; Christ’s humility and exaltation; the Holy Spirit; God the Father; and new life in Christ (135–38). The text of these expositions of story and theme is largely an abridgment of the longer, fuller text of *New Testament Theology*. Marshall does, on occasion, add additional paragraphs to clarify his own understanding of fundamental topics (e.g., on Paul and the law, 168). His own general attitude toward the whole enterprise of New Testament Theology is well expressed in a specific comment he makes on Ephesians: “Ephesians glorifies God the Father for his greatness, demonstrated in his blessings bestowed on his people. It is easy to overlook this element in expounding New Testament theology and try to reduce everything to cold, systematic, propositional form. Ephesians reminds us that New Testament theology is expressed in worship” (150).

Following the treatment of each collection, Marshall offers either a presentation of the theology of that collection taken as a whole (so “The Theology of the First Three Gospels and Acts” or “The Theology of the Pauline Letters”), or, as with “John, the Synoptic Gospels and Paul” (225–38), he presents to readers a summary of the common core of beliefs that he takes to manifest a reasonably unity among the diversity. The volume ends with a treatment of “Diversity and Unity in the New Testament,” in which he emphasizes the importance of what he has come to see as the principle theme of New Testament theology: mission. In the introduction, written after the completion of the text, Marshall expressed it as follows: “The New Testament is primarily about God’s mission and the message associated with it” (15).

Marshall acknowledges in his preface the consequences of his own abridgment and simplification (765 pages in *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses* became 304 pages

in this volume) and with characteristic honesty and forthrightness provides his own critique:

To make the book widely accessible, I have deliberately omitted references to scholarly debates and the accompanying documentation; consequently, statements are often made without any indication of the many problems of interpretation that surround them and discussion of the relative merits of the different solutions that are offered to them. This may give a somewhat oversimplified and dogmatic tone to the book, with statements being made more bluntly and with an appearance of greater confidence than in the longer work, where there was more room for discussing alternative interpretations and recognizing the existence of difficulties that are here passed over in silence. (9–10)

Thus, readers of the individual chapters no longer can see Marshall's own nuanced understanding of a variety of subjects that are based on his own detailed past research on Luke and Acts, the Johannine Epistles, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and 1 Peter and the research of his talented former doctoral students in Aberdeen: righteousness in Matthew (41); Luke (and Jesus) on the law (53); how Jesus' death is to be seen as sacrificial and redemptive in Luke-Acts, where there is a relative lack of ransom language (71–72); how atonement in Galatians is to be understood as substitutionary (87); how one is to understand the absence of major motifs in 1 and 2 Thessalonians in comparison with the main Pauline letters (96); whether Paul understands God as Trinity in 2 Corinthians or Jesus as God the Son throughout the Pauline letters (165–66); how one is to understand "the faith of Jesus Christ" in Romans (129); what is the relationship of the theology of the main Pauline letters to that theology found in Colossians-Ephesians and the Pastorals. Additional questions could be raised resulting from the abridgments in the treatment of the Johannine materials and the later writings such as Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, and Jude.

Beyond the treatment of these individual questions, it is to be regretted that the abridgment process has impacted the longer chapters of intermediate-level theological analysis and synthesis of theological themes that were so valuable in *New Testament Theology*. "The Theology of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts" (67–81) does not consider the theological themes of the four books together as previously but now treats the themes of the Gospels and Acts separately. The abridgment of "The Theology of the Pauline Letters" (ch. 17) does not really do justice to the work already done in the preceding ten chapters, where Marshall analyzes the collection of letters as those of Paul himself or as letters behind which stood Paul's direct or implied authorship or authority (Colossians-Ephesians), or as letters from one author or circle whose authorship was transparent and not intended to deceive the readers (the Pastorals). Earlier Marshall had treated separately

but sequentially the theology of the earlier (principal) and later letters. In *A Concise New Testament Theology* the exposition of the theology of the Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastorals in relation to the principle letters of Paul has simply been omitted. Another omission to note is that of the theology of “Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter and Jude in the New Testament” (ch. 30 in *New Testament Theology*)!

One other abridgment that is to be regretted is the sharp reduction in size of the long chapter 1 from the earlier *New Testament Theology*—“How Do We Do New Testament Theology?”—whose importance was highlighted in Klink’s earlier review. This chapter is reduced in *A Concise New Testament Theology* to a torso. No longer can the intended reader of the text under review see the variety of other options available for the structuring of the material of a New Testament theology or see discussed so systematically the place of Jesus in a New Testament theology.

Lest I seem negative about this version of the book at the end of my review, it comes from a desire to “Let Marshall Be Marshall”! Intersity Press is to be congratulated for its success in bringing out this book by a great evangelical commentator on Scripture in the form and at the length it did. While the reading of a 765-page book in an undergraduate course or by interested readers may be too much to expect, a book of half the length is probably just the right size for its intended audience (professors and students of New Testament undergraduate courses; pastors and laypeople seeking an accessible New Testament overview; laypeople leading Bible studies) and allows the interested reader to go on and read the New Testament itself or alongside other studies of particular topics. Setting the price of the book at \$23.00 for the paperback edition is also something for which the press should be congratulated at a time in which the cost for books used in university and seminary classes and among lay groups has made individual purchases difficult.