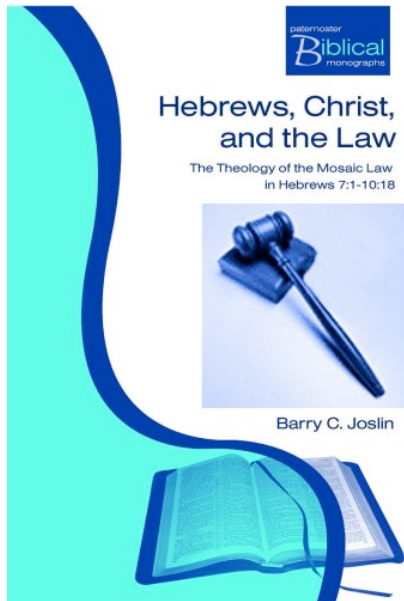


RBL 08/2009



Joslin, Barry C.

Hebrews, Christ and the Law: The Theology of the Mosaic Law in Hebrews 7:1–10:18

Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2008. Pp. xx + 334.
Paper. €29.99. ISBN 1842275305.

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Bearing in mind, for example, the volume of literature on Paul's perception of and engagement with Torah, the comparative vacuum of attention to such matters within Hebrews scholarship is somewhat remarkable. Barry Joslin's monograph, a reworking of his doctoral thesis taken under the supervision of Thomas Schreiner, seeks to fill this lacuna, offering a comprehensive assessment of the way in which Hebrews articulates and reforms its ideas about the law in the light of the Christ-event. Aware that "Hebrews' theology of the Mosaic law is textured and complex" (224), Joslin draws out the continuities and discontinuities in the role of the law as outworked under the two covenants of the letter. He concludes that the law retains an ongoing validity for Hebrews, but he does so in a "transformed" or "fulfilled" fashion: it has been "transposed into a higher key" (5). Christ is the fundamental lens through which such transformation has occurred, and the law has thus been affected christologically.

Joslin begins his analysis with a high-level review of prior scholarly treatment of the topic. While acknowledging the (surprising) absence of a substantial monograph on the issue, he observes two general approaches to the letter's portrayal of the law and reviews the literature accordingly. On the one hand, a corpus of scholars have viewed it as having no ongoing validity, broadly conceiving that Hebrews construes *nomos* in essentially

negative terms; it becomes entwined with the old covenant whose future Hebrews very much lays to rest. Conversely, others aver that Hebrews ascribes an ongoing role for Torah, and Joslin locates himself generally within this camp. However, he remarks that this approach is invariably not worked through in detail, and the aim of his monograph, therefore, is to work out the full implications of this position.

In chapter 2, Joslin take the reader on a whistle-stop, though still fairly comprehensive, tour of contemporary conceptions of the law and its function within Second Temple Judaism: What did Jews understand by “the law”? Discussing appropriate texts under five convenient headings (Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, and Qumran), he works through pertinent examples from each group, teasing out any common tendencies or perceptions within them. Joslin acknowledges that the discussion is “succinct” and hardly the final word on the topic, and it remains to be seen how persuasive specialists in this field will find his analysis. Indeed, the footnotes reveal how much he stands on the shoulders of giants in this area (Simon Gathercole, for example, receives much attention, favorably so). The conclusions of the chapter, however, do remain avowedly broad and high-level; the “law,” Joslin proposes, was highly regarded and authoritative, pertained primarily to Mosaic/Sinai legislation, and was something to which first-century Jews, whatever their particular context, sought to be obedient.

Within the scope of the book, chapter 3 feels a little unexpected and something of a departure from the previous “legal” concerns. As a review of literature on the structure of Hebrews, it is a laudable piece in its own right (and an amended form of it has been published elsewhere), but the broad contours of its content would not be too unfamiliar to Hebrews scholars. The chapter is lengthy, and one wonders whether it requires such length for the overall purposes of the book; Joslin justifies it on the grounds of needing to stress the central role of 7:1–10:18 in his thesis, but the detail into which he goes just to demonstrate what is a relatively accepted point—in what is actually a monograph on Hebrews’ take on the law—seems unnecessary, to this reviewer at least. The well-worked arguments that will be developed in the subsequent chapters do not seem to be substantially dependent upon the structural arguments made.

Chapters 4–6, however, are the meat of the book and the portion in which Joslin’s thesis is cogently and carefully developed. They are likewise the most helpful part of the work and cover the core central section of the letter (respectively, 7:1–28; 8:1–13; 9:1–10:18). Each one begins with a steady exegesis of the whole text in view, seeing how the law fits in the overall argument being made in that section. In the second half of each chapter, more specific “legal” questions are examined, and key conclusions are drawn on crux issues. The fourth chapter, for example, gives particular attention to Heb 7:12 and what is meant by the “change” in the law. Joslin argues that it pertains only to the commandment

regarding the Levitical priesthood: only *this* commandment has changed, and the law as a whole has not been removed. The old Torah-founded priesthood has certainly ceased because it was ineffective, but the new priesthood in the order of Melchizedek still fulfills the law's intentions. The law has now become the "Christologized law" (172).

Where *nomos* is viewed somewhat (though not completely) negatively in 7:1–28, Joslin suggests that 8:1–13 redresses the balance and offers a more positive portrayal of the law's intent. The focus of chapter 5, therefore, is on the citation of the Jer 31 prophecy, specifically the expectation that the divine laws would be written on new-covenant believers' hearts (8:10; 10:16). Joslin notes three scholarly views on 8:10; the first of these, the "non-view," is quickly dispensed with, as this position simply ignores the implications of the internalization of the laws, but the other two receive more discussion. The "no-correspondence" view sees no correlation between 8:10/10:16 and the Mosaic law, conceiving the action as something akin to divine will or instruction, but Joslin finds such a sense unpersuasive, mainly because, as he argued in chapter 2, "law" was understood as Mosaic legislation. Hebrews should be seen no differently. The alternative—"direct correspondence"—is similarly unpersuasive; Joslin contends that it requires new-covenant believers to embrace all Mosaic laws, the sacrificial system included, something that sits ill with the rest of the letter. As such, he proposes a fourth position: the "transformed law"; christologically expanded and escalated, the law is no longer *over* the community but is internalized *within* them and becomes the blessing of the new-covenant experience.

Chapter 6 completes this threefold discussion of legal matters, paying particular attention to the depiction of the law as a shadow of the new-covenant hope (10:1). Such shadow terminology, Joslin ventures, is construed both positively and negatively; the sacrificial system proscribed by law was unable to bring blessing, but it remained as a pattern for what Christ would ultimately achieve. Essentially, therefore, Hebrews sets forth a fulfillment hermeneutic: Christ has fulfilled the law, completing the purposes that were foreshadowed within it. Within this discussion, Joslin offers a pithy tag-line for those seeking to explain Hebrews' thought flow through the central chapters of the epistle: where 8:1–13 announced that a new covenant *had* happened, 9:1–10:18 shows *how* it happened.

Joslin's work—particularly the last three chapters—is well argued and provides a useful starting point for dialogue on a rarely discussed topic. It is well structured, delineates clear conclusions at regular intervals, and is attentive to detail, though it possesses some rather long footnotes. The book also contains a number of appendices covering issues of the epistle's structure as well as several good indices and a comprehensive bibliography. It undoubtedly reflects a particular, more conservative theological position, as befits the

series in which it sits, but such a position only occasionally manifests itself, in the discussion, for example, of the epistle's warning passages or in Joslin's skepticism about the work of Ed Sanders. The book is to be very much welcomed; it will not be the last word on the topic—and a self-deprecating personal note at the end of the book admits that—but at the very least it invites further conversation on what is an area of scholarship previously left ignored.