



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2016.10.12*

**Michael E. Peach, *Paul and the Apocalyptic Triumph: An Investigation of the Usage of Jewish and Greco-Roman Imagery in 1 Thess. 4:13–18. Apocalypticism: Cross-disciplinary Approaches 1.* New York/Bern: Peter Lang, 2016. ISBN: 9781454190097. Pp XII + 198. \$83.95. Hardback.**

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In this study, Michael E. Peach argues that Paul skillfully blends the Jewish and Greco-Roman imagery in 1 Thess 4:13–18 in order to convey eschatological hope to the ethnically diverse congregation at Thessalonica which experienced the death of some members and the threat of persecution. Peach develops his argument across three chapters.

Chapter 1 offers a lengthy overview of the history of interpretation of Pauline eschatology, highlighting how scholarship has identified Paul's eschatology and the varying degrees of Jewish and/or Greco-Roman influence. Chapter 2 investigates the meaning and function of imagery found in 1 Thess 4:13–18, namely, the cry of command, the archangel's call, the trumpet of God, the cloud, the parousia, and the meeting in the air. Peach employs the New Testament, Second Temple literature, the Septuagint, and Greek and Roman authors to demonstrate that these images were widely known in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts. He offers clear and comprehensive summaries of his findings for each image. Chapter 3 elaborates the meanings and the functions of these images in the context of the congregation at Thessalonica.

While this study is insightful, there are several problematic issues. First, the underlying assumption is that this analysis leads to understanding Paul's intentions while he was writing 1 Thess (8). Today many biblical scholars agree that the meaning-making process is a complex interaction between authors and their audiences. Therefore, Peach's study could benefit from looking at different ways in which the diverse congregation at Thessalonica might have interpreted the imagery of the letter, rather than stating how Paul intended it to be interpreted by them.

Second, Peach fails to explore how several images in 1 Thess 4:13–18 carry imperial-militaristic significance and how a portrayal of Christ as a triumphant conqueror, similar to Roman emperors (74–75), could have been received in Thessalonica. As the capital of the province and the center of Roman administration in Macedonia, the city was familiar with imperial propaganda. It received many privileges—from the emperor, as rewards for its loyalty to the Roman rule, and

these depended on its continuing favorable relations with Rome. The message of the triumphant Christ could have been interpreted as politically subversive in the eyes of loyal supporters of imperial ideology in the city. Peach's study would benefit greatly if this dimension of meaning had been discussed in detail.

Third, Peach's discussion engages the meanings and functions of the images in 1 Thess 4:13–18, their wider Greco-Roman context; the cultural and ethnic identity of Paul; and the particular situation at Thessalonica. However, the argument fails to bring these three components together in order to construct the meaning of the text.

Fourth, in his presentation of the congregation at Thessalonica, Peach refers to a "great persecution" that they were facing at the time (57, also 8). Peach could deepen his presentation of the circumstances of Christians in Thessalonica if he were to engage with Warren Carter who persuasively argues against empire-wide imperially sanctioned persecution of the Christians in the first century. A brief discussion of this most likely local harassment and opposition to Christians would allow Peach's readers to better understand the particularity of this community.

Fifth, Peach employs both undisputed Pauline letters as well as pseudepigraphic letters attributed to Paul without proper distinction or even acknowledgment (13). Similarly, Peach ignores the differences between Paul's own portrait of himself in his undisputed letters and his portrait found in Acts (86), treating these different sources as one comprehensive description of Paul.

While this study offers a helpful survey of the meanings and functions of the images mentioned in 1 Thess 4:13–18, it would greatly benefit from locating these images more firmly in the diverse and complex congregation at Thessalonica and their particular cultural, political and religious context.