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Book Review: Now Choose Life

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Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy, by J. Gary Millar. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998. Pp. 216.

Now Choose Life is part of the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* edited by D. A. Carson. The series addresses key issues in the area of biblical theology, such as the nature and status of biblical theology, the articulation and exposition of a particular writer or corpus in biblical theology, and the delineation of a biblical theme within a corpora. This particular book, written by J. Gary Millar, associate minister of Hamilton Road Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland, is a reworking of his Oxford dissertation.

In *Now Choose Life*, Millar attempts to exposit and articulate the theology and ethics of the *Book of Deuteronomy*. For Millar, Deuteronomy concerns itself with Israel's relationship to God, a relationship characterized by the Exodus "and the belief that Yahweh is now Israel's absolute ruler who must be obeyed in every detail of life." Moreover, as part of *this relationship*, God has delivered Israel into a new land in order for Yahweh and Israel to enjoy one another.

Ethics, on the other hand, is theology (the aforementioned relationship) applied to life. In articulating the theology of Deuteronomy, Millar focuses his attention on various pillars, each of which translates into some ethical norm. For example, the theology of the Exodus "translates into a concern for the equality among those whom God has rescued." God's sovereignty reflects His right to define Israel's worship, and God's gift of the land spurs everyone to enjoy God's blessings.

For the most part, *Now Choose Life* is an excellent book. Although a reworked dissertation, it is not unnecessarily difficult to read. However, its friendly style should not be understood as nonacademic. Throughout the book Millar demonstrates his ability to interact with the relevant scholarly literature, as well as with the different languages. In fact, the single most laudable aspect of this work is the twenty-page bibliography at the end.

A second positive aspect to Millar's work is his introduction. After stating his methodology and defining Old Testament ethics, Millar reviews the study of Old Testament ethics from the close of World War I to the present. In this section he addresses those who have attempted to address the ethics of the Old Testament, those who question the validity of this task, and lastly, those who exhibit a renewed interest in the subject. A sampling of those mentioned includes Johannes Hempel, Walther Eichrodt, John Barton, Brevard Childs, Walter Kaiser, Bruce Birch, Christopher Wright, and Waldemar Janzen. In his critiques Millar mentions both the positives and the negatives of each one's work.

Despite these positive contributions, Millar's analysis demonstrates two areas of concern. In the first place, he presents the ethics of Deuteronomy as temporally bound. The ethics of Deuteronomy "is theology applied to one specific situation, as Israel prepares for life in the land of promise." That is, he fails, at least in the eyes of this reviewer, to illustrate that the New Testament church is also called to follow the ethic of the Old Testament. This disjunctive understanding, I believe, flows from my second major concern from Millar's book, his understanding of Scripture and revelation.

Millar does not write as though the Bible embodies perfectly God's revelation of Himself to humanity. Rather, he considers both, the theology of Deuteronomy and God's revelation of *Himself, as ever-changing*. For example, he writes, "Deuteronomy suggests it will always be difficult to speak of the ethics of the Old Testament, because the ethics of the people of God result from applying theology to an ever-changing situation. If that theology is also changing, as God reveals more of Himself to His people, then the situation becomes even more complex. Hence, Millar suggests that God may reveal something to the church today that would cause individuals to respond to ethics differently than they would based upon how God has revealed Himself in Scripture. At this juncture, one must question Millar's proposal. Despite these two areas of concern, nonetheless, Millar's book is enjoyable. I recommend it for those in the fields of theology, Old Testament, or ethics, if for no other reason than its bibliography and his analysis of various other major works.

John Tarwater