

# Reviews



**THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS**, by Richard N. Longenecker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. Pp. 1208. \$80.00 (c10th).

If you are one of those readers who wants to uncover the riches of the Greek NT, done in the English language, this volume by one of the noted NT scholars of our day will both challenge and reward you. A strong, devoted, and Christian mind can yield rich dividends as you pore over the pages of this book. As “the most highly acclaimed writing of the NT” it represents to a large degree “the heartland of Christian thought, life, and proclamation” (xi).

In his Preface, Longenecker sketches out some items that will alert the reader to key issues in the study of this epistle. First, he discusses the vitality of Romans for Christian piety and practice; second, the centrality of Romans for Christian thought; and third, challenges in the study of Romans. He writes with the aim of impacting the Christian community to come to some agreement on what the importance of their message is, how that message should impact peoples’ thoughts and actions today, and how there can be an effective contextualization of the message in our own day.

The main divisions of the commentary are outlined as follows:

1. Introduction to the Commentary (1–39)
2. Opening sections of the Letter (43–123)
3. Body Opening (127–143): A Brief Introduction
4. Body Middle (145–1019)
  - Section I—Righteousness, Faithfulness, and Faith (1:16–4:25)
  - Section II—Peace, Reconciliation, and Life “in Christ”: (5:1–8:39)

Section III—The Christian Gospel  
*vis-à-vis* God’s Promises to Israel  
(9:1–11:36)

Section IV—Exhortations, Both  
General and Specific (12:1–15:13)

## 5. Body Closing

“Apostolic Parousia” (15:14–32)

## 7. The Concluding Sections of the Letter (15:33–16:27)

To anyone reading Romans (and comparing it with Paul’s other letters) a number of issues may be raised. Was it written primarily to people of a Jewish background, or of a gentile background? Was it a polemical letter, or a pastoral one? Is it to be viewed as a *protreptic* piece, that is, a kind of hortatory speech, for the purpose of winning converts, and pointing the readers toward fashioning a particular way of life? These and other issues are broached in this full introductory section, and apart from simply a scholarly interest, will be an aid to many readers in approaching the exegetical task of interpreting this epistle.

In its beginning section are some important, if not unusual, items of interest. Longenecker, taking a note from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (3:9), opines that “in recent years, more has been written about this unit, especially (Romans) 1:3–4 than about any other New Testament text”; “also that in recent years more [or at least as much] has been written about the salutation of 1:1–7 than about any other section in Paul’s letters” (47). These seven opening verses are packed with basic, if not profound, personal and theological revelations, and could keep the exegete occupied for a lengthy period of study and meditation.

Both in the salutation (1:1–7), and in each

following section of the letter, the student will find a breakdown of the unit as follows: (1) Translation; (2) Textual Notes; (3) Form/Structure/Setting; (4) Exegetical Comments (always the fullest section); (5) Biblical Theology; and (6) Contextualization for Today. The textual materials, the interpretative comments and investigations, and the application(s) to the present day are set out for the reader to study and put into a contemporary perspective.

Included are a few samples of our author's exegetical work on some crucially important texts in the epistle. On the title "Son of God" (1:4) our author concludes this was a title used by early Jewish believers for their acclaimed Messiah; that it was part and parcel of a collection of messianic ideas and expressions familiar to them; that due to their familiarity with the theology and religious terminology of Jewish Christianity they may well have used the "Son of God" title for Jesus; and it seems to have been one of a number of theological themes and ascriptions familiar to his readers.

Again, in the crucial statement given in 1:16–17, Paul introduces the important themes that will dominate 1:16–4:25, seen in the terms "righteousness, faith, and to believe." These terms dominate the discussion in the unit of material. It is "chock-full of biblical quotations," fifteen to eighteen in all, a sign of the unity of the material in this unit. Also contained within this unit are a number of traditional formulations seemingly stemming from Jewish or Jewish-Christian formulations.

Third, what did Paul mean in 5:1 about having peace with God? There is much discussion carried on whether this text should be read as "we have peace with God," or as "let us have peace with God." Furthermore, what did Paul mean by "peace"? Further, this comes to us "through our Lord Jesus Christ." Longenecker's discussion on pp. 553–573 is helpful,

if not fully satisfying to readers holding various exegetical or theological positions.

After expounding his message regarding human sinfulness, justification by faith, and a new state of life empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a large unit on the theme of the Christian gospel *vis-à-vis* God's promises to Israel (9:1–11:36). It is a penetrating discussion of the history of Israel's calling and the "cutting down" of that chosen tree, making way for a grafting-in of a wild olive shoot. Yet God did not forsake his ancient covenant people—for "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom 11:26). Our author sums up the exposition with the rejoinder that the believers at Rome would have understood this proclamation "to express both theological and Christological nuances" (900). These represent just a few samples of the lengthy exposition.

The theological and hortatory materials in Romans are both basic and of great variety. One will encounter great profundity, spiritual history, and challenging application. One will discover truths concerning Israel and the church that will both illuminate and challenge one's viewpoints. I encourage you, reader, to encounter and benefit your spiritual and intellectual horizons. We now await the Greek Testament Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians to complete these profound analyses of Paul's epistles.

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**THE HIDDEN GOD: LUTHER, PHILOSOPHY, AND POLITICAL THEOLOGY**, by Marius Timmann Mjaaland. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. xii + 233. \$70.00 (cloth).

In *The Hidden God*, Marius Timmann Mjaaland—Professor of Philosophy of Reli-