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God Meant it for Good: The Covenant and the Church Today (Book Review)

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will be a prime entry-level source book for anyone interested in exploring the issue further. Those concerned with developing a Christian approach to natural science

would do well to read it carefully and learn from the history and tradition that is ours as Christians and scientists.

God Meant it for Good: The Covenant and the Church Today, by Ted Hoogsteen (Burlington, Ontario, Canada: Welch Publishing) 1989. 99 pp. Paperback \$12.95 (Canadian). Reviewed by Gerald W. Vander Hoek, Assistant Professor of Theology.

This book examines the Jacob cycle in Genesis 37-50. After two introductory chapters, Hoogsteen devotes one chapter for each chapter in this section of Genesis. The primary theme of *God Meant it for Good* (hereinafter *GMFG*), could be stated as follows: as God ruled for the good of his covenant purpose and people during a troublesome period in covenant history, so he rules today in a similarly perplexing age. Hoogsteen, I might note, is pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

The greatest strength of *GMFG* is its theocentric reading of the Genesis narrative. In contrast to a moralistic reading which focuses on human characters, this book keeps the reader's eyes focused on God who is working often with characters who are in no way exemplars. Genesis 50:20, which is echoed in *GMFG*'s title, demands a theocentric interpretation.

But there are two serious weaknesses in *GMFG*. First, Hoogsteen closely associates the covenant and a double decretal predestination. The covenant is apparently understood as the Lord's tool to save some and pass by others (see 12, 63, etc.). Such an understanding seems to be the basis for Hoogsteen's repeated assertions that the Lord pushed the Egyptians away from himself. Furthermore, according to Hoogsteen, the primary purpose of the Old Testament covenant was to form a separate people from whom the Messiah would be born (e.g., 12-13, 52). Separation is understood as what I would call isolationism.

This understanding of the covenant is inadequate. On the one hand, it fails to distinguish between election in a salvific and individual sense and God's election of a people as a people. Paul was merely echoing Old Testament teaching when he said that not all Israel is Israel (Romans 9:6). On the other hand, the idea that the covenant is a tool for reprobation cannot be substantiated by Genesis 37-50 or elsewhere from Scripture. More seriously, it flies in the face of the covenant's missionary purpose. The mission of the Old Testament people of God was not merely to be separate and to have babies until the Messiah was born. God chose Israel, not to damn other nations, but to shape Israel into his tool to address the nations (Genesis 12:1-3, Exodus 12:8, 19:4-6).

A second weakness in *GMFG* is its tendency to assert

points rather than demonstrate them from the text of Scripture. While the connection between Scripture and Hoogsteen's points are clear in some chapters (e.g., ch. 4), in many places I was left wondering about the basis for the author's claims. Hoogsteen, for example, sees a movement from Jacob's and his family's covenant unfaithfulness to faithfulness in Genesis 37-50. The evidence for the unfaithfulness is shown clearly by Hoogsteen (e.g., Genesis 38). But Hoogsteen's claims for the final unity in Jacob's family and sanctification of individual members, which are crucial for his book, need to be more fully supported. Does the fact, for example, that five of the brothers in Genesis 47:2 went to ask Pharaoh for Goshen really show a covenantal "singleness" or "unity in thought" (76)? If such is intended by the narrative, I would like to be shown that it is so from the text.

Similar examples of questionable claims are numerous. For example, Hoogsteen claims that Joseph's sending of the Egyptians out of his house before he made himself known to his brothers (Genesis 45:2) shows that "the revelation of the mercy of the Lord could not be spoiled by the presence of unbelievers" (65). Hoogsteen adopts a dubious reading of "Shiloh" in Genesis 49:10 without justifying his repeated use of it for two chapters (87-98). He repeatedly calls Genesis a chronicle and consistently avoids the traditional classification of narrative. This departure from tradition is never explained.

At times, what appears to dictate the book's agenda is Hoogsteen's vision of the church. For example, the discussion moves from the dictator Pharaoh to the dangers of bureaucracy and pluralism (69-70). God's general providence allegedly "grants no insight into the 'how' and 'where' " God leads people (63). One of the first indications of God's grace is that his people "think alike on great and minor issues" (53).

In short, *GMFG* would be greatly improved with a more careful exegesis of Genesis 37-50 to justify the author's views and a more biblical understanding of the covenant. Nevertheless, with my criticisms in mind, I would recommend *GMFG* for pastors and serious students of Genesis 37-50. The theocentric interpretation of the narrative makes the book worth reading.