

D. E. Hartley. *The Wisdom Background and Parabolic Implications of Isaiah 6:9-10 in the Synoptics*. Studies in Biblical Literature 100. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. Pp. 400. ISBN: 0820486655. \$86.95 USD, cloth.

1. Hartley attempts to cover a great deal of ground, as the title for his monograph implies. This revision of his doctoral dissertation is as much a study of the theological and philosophical problems associated with the sovereignty of God and human freedom as it is an exegetical examination of Isaiah 6:9-10 as background for reading parables in the synoptic Gospels. In fact, a major motive for this study may be theological since Isaiah 6 and Mark 4:10-12 are frequently discussed in studies of human freedom in salvation.
2. As Hartley observes, most solutions to the *crux interpretum* assume a position of libertarian freedom and therefore read the “fattening” of the heart in this passage as a judicial act of God. Chapter one is a literature survey of studies dealing with hardening of the heart. This literature typically argues God fattens the hearts of the people in response to their rejection, as in the case of Pharaoh. Hartley, on the other hand, argues that the heart is “congenitally fat.” Isaiah 6:9-10 therefore refers to God depriving man of salvific wisdom required for their repentance and allowing them to remain in their fat-hearted state. In order to make this case, Hartley examines the idea of the heart in the Hebrew Bible with a special emphasis on the wisdom literature.
3. Chapter two is a review of the philosophical presuppositions of the study. Here Hartley deals with the nature of time and the problem of causation, with a special interest in the freedom of humans. This section seems motivated by the “openness of God” debate within American evangelicalism. Primarily the position of Arminian systematic theologians, the “openness” position preserves the freedom of human choice by arguing God does not actually know the future nor does he force individuals to come to faith. This position has generated a fierce response among Calvinistic writers, many of whom are found in the footnotes of this section. The major weakness of this chapter is this movement into philosophical and theological territory. Hartley relies too heavily on recently published synthetic theological volumes rather than the philosophers themselves.
4. Hartley then moves into a major review of the biblical material concerning the heart (chapter 3). This is the most significant contribution of the study as Hartley gathers data from the entire Hebrew Bible in order to create a rubric organizing the material. He suggests there are two types of descriptions of the heart in the Hebrew Bible. There are a number of texts which are ontological descriptions of the heart shared by all humans since the fall. Other texts describe the heart functionally (behaviors, actions, and states of the heart). Hartley combines these two categories into an ontological / functional (the condition which is identical to action) and a functional /ontological (actualizing of the natural state). Given this four-part grid, Hartley then sifts the evidence in the Pentateuch and wisdom literature and finds similar patterns of description. Later in the book he deals with hardening of Pharaoh’s heart and Isaiah 6:9-10 with respect to these categories. He sees both as an ontological / functional, but Pharaonic hardening is volitional while Isaianic fattening is on cognition and only by implication volitional (155). By this he means that in Isaiah God deprives the fattened heart of the understanding (cognitive) it needs in order to repent (volitional).
5. Hartley suggests a set of seven syllogisms to demonstrate that the “fattening” of Isaiah 6:9-10 is a deprivation of wisdom which leads to salvation rather than a judgment for unbelief (123-125). In order to validate his premises, Hartley surveys wisdom literature from the Hebrew Bible through the Qumran literature. Again he finds evidence that humans do not possess

salvific wisdom in a post-fall world (Job 12:24, for example.) “To be fat-hearted, therefore, is an ontological statement about the absence of wisdom in mankind.” (122) This is also the view found at Qumran, although the specifics are quite different since salvific wisdom is imparted only to the community through the agency of the spirit. From this survey, Hartley concludes that when heart is used in the context of understanding or perceiving, a wisdom tradition should be assumed (155). This may be troublesome for some since it seems to assume much of the wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible *predates* Isaiah, although it may be that Isaiah simply stands in the same stream of tradition as the sages. Finally, Hartley finds that wisdom produces understanding, rather than understanding producing wisdom. Wisdom is only acquired by a “gratuitous impartation of God and is not precipitated by either external merit or internal volition” (155).

6. Chapter four focuses on Isaiah 6:9-10. Hartley points out that many commentators recognize a wisdom background for Isaiah but they seldom make any use of this observation. Hartley therefore catalogs wisdom ideas in Isaiah using the semantic domains present in Isaiah 6:9-10 (seeing, hearing, knowing, perceiving, understanding). This demonstrates clearly that the call of Isaiah is programmatic for the rest of the book. He therefore argues that Isaiah’s message will cause the hearts of the people to continue to be fat. His message is not the immediate or efficient cause of the fatness, but rather a contributory cause (208). This is the reading of the text found at Qumran, although with significant variations. At Qumran this text is harmonized with Isaiah 35:15 in order to shift the audience to time of the community (218).

7. Chapters five and six apply Hartley’s understanding of heart and “congenital noetic impairment” to the synoptic gospels. In view here is the use of Isaiah 6:9-10 on the “explanation” of the so-called “kingdom parables” (Mk 4:10-12, Mt 13:10-17 and Lk 8:9-10). Mark 4 is studied in detail, while Matthew and Luke are treated in somewhat summary fashion. Hartley proposes to study the quotation of Isaiah without reference to the source of the saying, but rather as it appears in the text of Mark’s gospel. Jesus is not explaining his method for teaching, as is often observed in the commentaries, but rather he is explaining why his parables produce two responses (252). The solution, for Hartley, is that the disciples are “insiders” who have been given insight into the mystery of the kingdom, while the crowds are “outsiders” who have not been given this same insight. The citation of Isaiah 6:9-10, then, “is designed to highlight the divine prerogative” for continuing the congenital condition of the human heart. For the crowds, parables remain “riddles” because they have not been given the requisite wisdom for understanding them, as the disciples have. As found in Isaiah 6, this is not a divine judgment for unbelief, but rather a deprivation of wisdom which leave the crowds in their natural “fat” or “hardened” state.

8. In summary, this is an ambitious study which succeeds on many levels. Any one of the chapters of this book would have made a worthy dissertation topic; that Hartley attempts a synthesis of so wide a range of topics is commendable. Some readers, however, may desire more depth in the theological and philosophical sections. While there are a few shortcomings, Hartley’s view of the heart and the application of this view to both Isaiah 6 and the Synoptics is a major contribution to the study of both testaments.

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