

**Dirk Monshouwer, *The Gospels and Jewish Worship: Bible and Synagogal Liturgy in the First Century C.E.*, translated by Maria van Strien (SkanDalon 2010), 447 pages.**

Grant Clay, pastor, Evangelical Covenant Church of Clay Center, Kansas

Before his untimely death in 2000, Dirk Monshouwer wrote the following to a professor in Germany: “I think I can prove that a triennial circle of readings of the Torah was in use in the first century C.E. All of the Gospels became more or less primary for the Jewish cycle of festivals, and were secondarily influenced and formed by the triennial Torah cycle” (11). *The Gospels and Jewish Worship*, ably translated in English by Maria van Strien, is Monshouwer’s posthumous case for the above assertion. Working from the premise that “the Old and New Testament were written down and edited to be heard,” Monshouwer sets out to show how the Gospel accounts were informed and shaped the liturgical cycles of synagogue worship.

Monshouwer frames his research around a cluster of key questions concerning the way the Gospels relate to the cyclical pattern of Jewish worship: a) *Composition* (does the written form of the Gospels bear a liturgical rhythm?); b) *Quotations from Scripture* (is the synagogue a source from which the writers drew their knowledge of the Scriptures?); c) *Testimonia* (how does Israel’s narrative shape the Gospel accounts?); d) *Continuity and Discontinuity* (why does Jewish influence on Christianity recede after the first century?); e) *Synagogue* (can a clear pattern of Christian worship be discerned from the synagogue pattern?); “*Christianity and anti-Judaism* (a future reconciliation?). The first four chapters are Monshouwer’s attempt at reconstructing the operation of the first century Jewish liturgical calendar. Monshouwer then proceeds to unearth evidence of an explicit connection between the synagogue pattern and the Gospel accounts. I will briefly outline his approach using the example of Luke.

Following scholarly consensus that Luke used the Markan text as a primary source for his account of Jesus, Monshouwer breaks down the key verses and themes that reflect readings adaptations from both the Jewish Annual Cycle (AC) and Triennial Cycle (TC). Finding an array of intertextual links between Luke’s usage of texts from the LXX and synagogue liturgy, Monshouwer concludes that Luke expands upon Mark’s account to shape his own narrative as one “bound to the words of the Scriptures and who was part of the tradition of exegesis of the synagogue” (96). So in Luke 4 when Jesus enters the synagogue and reads from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:1-21, the promised Jubilee of Israel becomes reenacted each year for the Christian audience as a celebration of the resurrected Jesus (cf. Luke 24:44-49). “The Messiah himself refers to a prophetic text in order to search the Torah, the Prophets and the Psalms, which were read and are still being read, for their actual, gracious, and jubilant import” (346). Monshouwer concludes his work with a brief glance at how the Old Testament readings have been used by the church throughout history, arguing that the increased presence of Torah readings in common lectionaries available for Christian churches recaptures the original intent of the New Testament authors, who intended to have the New and Old Testaments being continuously read together.

The obvious strengths of this book is its detailed and meticulous attempt to show how the Gospels were intended to be read in an annual, cyclical manner similar to the synagogal readings of the Torah. Additionally, Monshouwer raises the oft-neglected question of how the texts were being *heard*, not just read, by their original audiences.

However, the book’s strength is also its weakness. The scrutiny by which Monshouwer analyzes the Gospels in relation to the synagogue worship gets bogged down in various parts and one wonders if the forest gets lost in view of trees. Additionally, the secondary literature with which Monshouwer interacts surprisingly omits the major players of the last few decades who have wrestled with how the Jewish scriptures have shaped the New Testament, such as Bauckham, Dunn, Hays and Wright. However, Monshouwer’s work is a provocative read and approaches the Gospel accounts from a fresh angle and should be a welcome partner in the conversation on how the New Testament was shaped by the Jewish soil in which it was birthed.