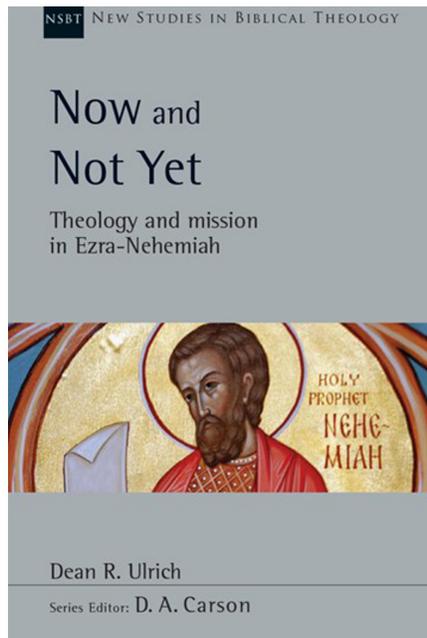


REVIEW: *Now and Not Yet: Theology and Mission in Ezra-Nehemiah* by Dean Ulrich

ems

REVIEWED BY
STEPHEN
STALLARD

Ulrich, Dean. *Now and Not Yet: Theology and Mission in Ezra-Nehemiah* (New Studies in Biblical Theology) Dowers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. 2021. 216 pp, ISBN: 978-1-5140-0407-4 \$28.00 paperback.



Dean Ulrich (PhD, Westminster Theological Seminary) has been a PCA pastor and a professor serving at Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry, China Reformed Theological Seminary, and Belhaven University.

Ulrich believes that the eschatological tension of the post-Exilic era advances the redemptive narrative of Scripture and contributes to our continued missional self-understanding. For the author, this tension lies at the heart of Ezra-Nehemiah.

Ulrich narrates the story of Ezra-Nehemiah in a concise fashion, as is typical for volumes in the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series. After a helpful introduction on biblical theology (and its relation to Ezra-Nehemiah), he explores this Old Testament book with a redemptive-historical approach. Each chapter functions as a cursory commentary on the relevant sections of the text. Ulrich does not get bogged down in textual details and eschews a verse-by-verse approach. Instead, he moves rapidly through the text, pointing out how the narrative is situated within the flow of redemptive history. He also includes practical applications that were frequently encouraging.

There are two primary strengths of this volume. First, the sections of application were interspersed throughout each chapter, providing notes of encouragement to contemporary readers. These exhortations were usually directed at those who are engaged in the hard work of ministry.

Second, Ulrich's work shines as he focuses on the eschatological tension inherent within Ezra-Nehemiah. Ulrich notes that the post-Exilic era was challenging for faithful Israelites, as they struggled to honor the covenant while living in new circumstances. He emphasizes that the Jewish remnant embraced the motif of the second exodus (predicted by Jeremiah) and hoped for the eschatological blessings of the Kingdom. Yet reality in Israel was not what they had expected. Ulrich notes, "Those who lived in Ezra-Nehemiah's Jerusalem might have sampled a preview of the city of God (the 'now'), but fell short of the eventual perfection of the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem (the 'not yet')" (160). For Ulrich, this tension is at the heart of this Hebrew book and is relevant to our contemporary mission as the New Covenant people of God.

The chief weakness of the book is its lack of engagement with urban missiology. A text that chronicles how God's people moved into the city to bring renewal (spiritually and societally) seems ripe for urban missiological reflection. It was somewhat surprising that, in a book about mission in Ezra-Nehemiah, the urban dimension was neglected.

Overall, this volume by Dean Ulrich is a significant contribution to the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series. *Now and Now Yet* offers a fresh, missional lens through which to read this ancient Hebrew text. Scholars, pastors, and students of the Old Testament will benefit from this textual engagement. Those who read this slender volume will be challenged to reevaluate Ezra-Nehemiah and to consider what its eschatological tension might mean for our contemporary mission.

Stephan Stallard
Western Seminary