

# BN *Biblische Notizen* *Biblical Notes*

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*Neue Folge. Herausgegeben von Kristin De Troyer und  
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**HERDER FREIBURG · BASEL · WIEN**

Chris W. Lee, *Death Warning in the Garden of Eden. The Early Reception History of Genesis 2:17* (FAT II/215), X + 217 p., € 75,00, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020, ISBN 978-3-16-158858-7.

This book is a revised edition of Lee's dissertation submitted to the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, supervised by Timothy H. Lim. It contains a thorough examination of God's warning of Adam (or humanity) that "in the day" he will eat from the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he "shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). He first offers a synchronic analysis of the text within the context of chapters 2-3, then discusses the ancient Greek translations of 2:16-17, and finally analyses the references to the death warning in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Book of Ben Sira, 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 5. The point Lee wants to make is that the text in Genesis does not inform the reader about whether Adam and Eve were immortal or became mortal due to eating the forbidden fruit. The association between God's command in Genesis 2 and the introduction of death in God's creation appears only in late interpretation in the Second Temple Jewish literature and was further made explicit in the epistles of Paul.

In his introduction Lee makes clear that his study will show that the traditional Christian view as expressed by the Council of Carthage (418 CE), stating "Whosoever says, that Adam was created mortal, and would, even without sin, have died by natural necessity, let him be cursed", can not be defended on the basis of the text in Genesis 2 alone. Lee also disagrees with James Barr who suggested in his book *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (1992) that Genesis 3 can be read as a story of how human immortality was almost gained but in fact was lost. In the rest of the book Barr appears to be Lee's most important sparring partner. Sometimes this leads to unnecessary repetition.

It comes as a surprise that Lee states that, although he has to admit that he is not the first to research the question about the original mortality or immortality of Adam, "no one has thus far focused exclusively on providing a detailed exegetical analysis of the divine prohibitive command (Gen 2:17) and its subsequent reception" (p. 7). This can be regarded as the customary defence for the choice of the topic of a dissertation and is, moreover, contradicted by the wealth of secondary literature presented and evaluated in this study. Also the overview of the history of interpretation is not limited to the early Jewish reception, considering the mass of information given in the sometimes very long footnotes about the interpretation by later Jewish and Christian authors and in modern research. Nevertheless, when it comes to the use of recent literature, one cannot help to notice certain lack of non-English literature. For instance, one misses German studies like M. Arndt, *Durch Adams Fall ist ganz verderbt ... Studien zur Entstehung der alttestamentlichen Urgeschichte* (2007); E. Blum, "Von Gottesunmittelbarkeit zu Gottesähnlichkeit. Überlegungen zur theologischen Anthropologie der Paradieserzählung", in: E. Gönke / K. Liess (eds), *Gottes Nähe im Alten Testament* (2004), 9-29; C. Dohmen, *Schöpfung und Tod. Die Entfaltung theologischer und anthropologischer Konzeptionen in Gen 2/3* (1996); and the important commentary by J. Gertz (ATD 2018).

The ambition "to consider the original Hebrew text in order to determine its original meaning" is obvious, but one can question the decision to restrict this to a synchronic analysis. Important issues like the question whether we have to assume different traditions about the tree of knowledge and the three of life are mentioned, but not evaluated. Also the comparison with other texts in the ancient Near East about the cause of human mortality would have been useful to find out what views can be assumed behind the words of Genesis 2:17.

In his conclusions Lee is reluctant in making bold statements. Time and again he has to admit that the text does not contain clear clues in finding the answer to his questions. It leads him to the sobering remark: "Perhaps such questions regarding the mortal / immortal status of man were not really of concern to the narrator" (p. 65). A more positive result of his study is that Paul's explicit attribution of death to the disobedience of Adam and Eve most probably was influenced by some of the discussed literature of the Second Temple Period. One of the traces of this interpretation of Genesis 2:17 is found in the Septuagint, referring not to the individual figure Adam, but more generally to the "human being". The most innovative element of Lee's study is his interpretation of the Book of Ben Sira, especially his suggestion to read 14:17 as a possible allusion to the death warning in Genesis 2:17 and presupposing the idea of human mortality as due to the transgression of Adam. Like all his conclusions this is based on an extensive assessment of all possible interpretations of the text.

The book contains indices on texts from the Bible, Second Temple Literature and Dead Sea Scrolls, Rabbinic Literature, Patristic Literature, on authors, and on subjects.

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