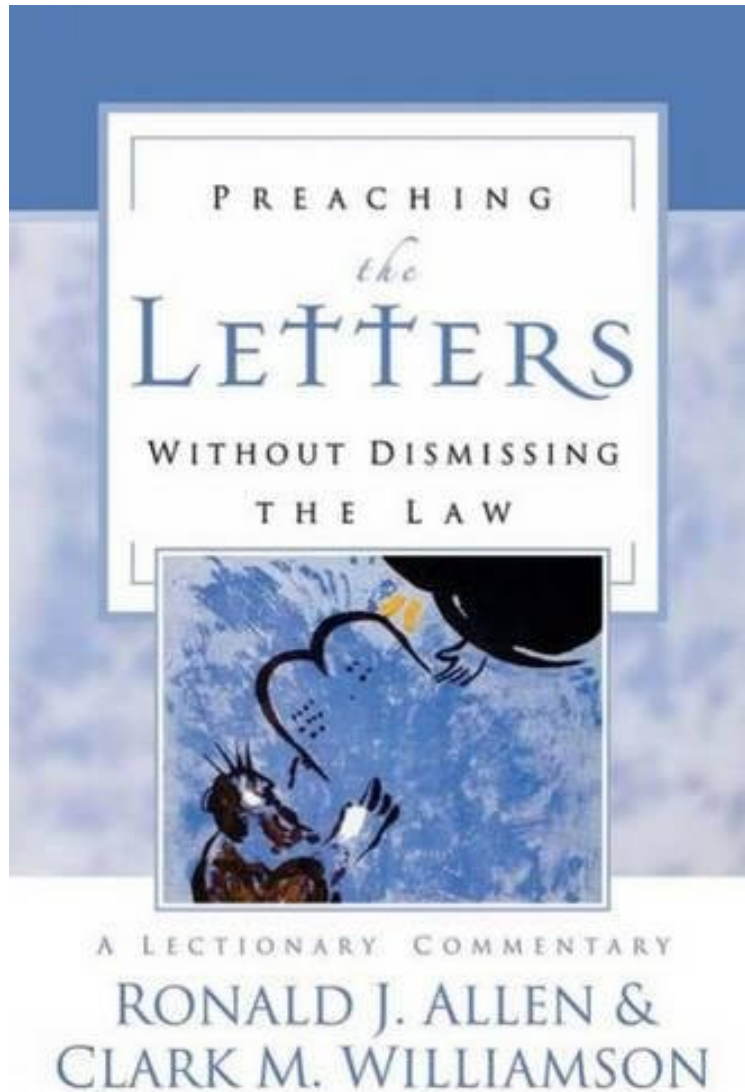


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Preaching the Letters without Dismissing the Law: A Lectionary Commentary

Ronald J. Allen, Clark M. Williamson
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Ronald J. Allen, Clark M. Williamson : Preaching the Letters without Dismissing the Law: A Lectionary Commentary before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Preaching the Letters without Dismissing the Law: A Lectionary Commentary:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. why quote texts that are readily available in the Bible whilst not doing to for obscure texts?By Mr. D. P. JayThis is the companion to their Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the

Jews: A Lectionary Commentary. It goes into a lot of detail and will help preachers avoid errors about Judaism in their preaching: after all, very few seminaries deal with this subject. Preachers will be able to see how knowledge of first-century Judaism can help them avoid incorporating misunderstandings and stereotypes into their sermons on the letters. The authors explore insights from recent Christian-Jewish dialogue, continuities between Judaism and the theology of Paul, and the Roman occupation to help them understand the Jewish context of the letters. They also suggest how today's preacher can deal with issues or comments in the text that are inappropriate or controversial in today's context. I welcome quotations from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha much Judaism developed in them and some of the New Testament doesn't make full sense unless you take them into account. However, some of the references are obscure or simply mistaken. And it's odd that they quote texts that are readily available in the Bible whilst not doing so for obscure texts.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Laying down the law... By Fr Kurt Messick

This book is a follow-up to an earlier volume by Ronald J. Allen and Clark M. Williamson - 'Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews.' Like that book, this is also a commentary with an agenda and a context. The agenda is to reduce the not-always-latent tendency toward supersessionism in North American pulpits. This might require some explanation -- supersessionism is a 'big word' not many have encountered. Supersessionism in this context refers to the tendency of looking at Judaism and the Jews of the pre-Christian times as simple prelude and precursors to Christianity -- that the only 'value' of Judaism and studying, tolerating, etc. Jewish texts and ideas is as it relates to (and leads to) Christian texts and ideas. Authors Allen and Williamson (each friends of mine, if truth in advertising is to be maintained) hold that Judaism has an inherent value all its own, as a covenant from God that has not been broken or altered, but indeed is maintained and should be recognised by current and future Christian communities, the power of which often resides in the preaching. Allen and Williamson give a brief introduction -- they introduce the writings of the New (Second) Testament in ways perhaps unrealised by most. Paul, for example, is often characterised as one who rails against 'the Jews'; we are told that Paul is a Pharisee (by Paul himself, no less), but it is often overlooked that Paul himself never has a disparaging or discouraging word about the Pharisees. By the following generation (when the gospels were written) there were many negative references to Pharisees, but these did not come from Paul himself, and are more likely representative of an internal debate and division among Christians (which at that time would have included many self-identified Jews who did not see Judaism and Christianity as contradictory or mutually exclusive affiliations). In this introduction, Allen and Williamson also discuss the two sets of oral tradition, various ways of reading (and misreading) the text, and ways the churches can look at overall context to recast the lectionary in ways that are not judgemental toward Jews. As the authors state in the preface, 'Far from attacking Judaism, the letter writers typically want Gentile converts to become more Jewish in their attitudes and behaviors. The ancient authors did not envision Christianity as a new religion to supersede Judaism.' Indeed, there were some Gentiles in the ancient world who, upon becoming Christian, would then progress further into becoming Jewish. It is further true that many characterisations of Paul have him as railing against Judaism; 'the problem with the anti-Jewish reading of Paul is not only that it distorts and misinterprets Paul, it also distorts and misinterprets Judaism.' One of the key elements in this commentary is to understand that Paul did not set out to start a new religion independent from or superseding Judaism, and that Paul's writing was usually not to fellow Jews about Judaism, but rather about Judaism's relationship to and understanding of the Gentiles. The actual commentary section follows the Revised Common Lectionary, followed (more or less) by many churches in ecumenical agreement. Allen and Williamson are both academic and ordained professionals within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) -- however, this is a commentary that will have broad appeal. Just as the CC(DoC) church is one of the most committed institutions to ecumenical intention, so too are Allen and Williamson dedicated to this broad approach, preferring to see that which draws us together over that which pulls us apart. Like the earlier volume, the commentary is very useful. It is not footnote-heavy, jargon-laden, or obtuse and academic as many commentaries can tend to be. This is not a commentary written to impress other scholars, but intended for regular use by 'regular' preachers. To this end, the commentary on each of the Sunday lectionary pieces (three years in the cycle, tied to gospels) as well as some special days (Ash Wednesday, Pentecost, etc.) is but one to one-and-one-half pages long. Each commentary can be read in a five to ten minute span; for the regular preacher concerned with time, this is a real god-send. Best to read this commentary in advance of others, as it will inform the information of the others. It works most of its power through persuasion and gentle direction (a very process oriented approach, indeed). It is likely to repeat familiar information, and provide new ways of thinking at the same time. The commentary is tied to the lectionary, but not to any particular year or sequence. The preacher or reader interested could pick up the volume at any point (just as I have done) and begin reading and use from the particular Sunday now, and go forward for three years. At the end of this time, preaching (or, for the non-preaching reader, listening) will be transformed. I have used this commentary since the week I received it, and together with the book on the gospels, I find it an invaluable aid.

This unique lectionary commentary on the Epistle readings in the Revised Common Lectionary helps preachers see how knowledge of first-century Judaism can help them avoid incorporating misunderstandings and stereotypes into their sermons on the letters. Allen and Williamson highlight insights from recent Christian-Jewish dialogue, call

attention to the continuities between Judaism and the theology of Paul, and explore how awareness of the Roman occupation can help the preacher understand the Jewish context of the letters. As in *Preaching the Gospels without Blaming the Jews*, they also suggest how today's preacher can deal with issues or comments in the text that are inappropriate or controversial in today's context.

This commentary is both very preacher-friendly and utterly essential to the preacher's weekly work. --Homiletic. . . a truly original commentary. . . . This is a book that deserves as wide an audience as possible. --*The Living Pulpit*
About the Author Ronald J. Allen is Nettie Sweeney and Hugh Th. Miller Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana. He is the author of numerous books about preaching and about the New Testament, including *The Life of Jesus for Today*. Clark M. Williamson is Indiana Professor Emeritus of Christian Thought at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana.