

BOOK REVIEW

Schreiner, Thomas R., *The King in his Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013). xix + 736 pp. Hbk. \$44.99 USD.

With this monograph, Schreiner contributes to biblical theology, a field receiving an abundance of publications and interest from scholars across the larger theological enterprise. His main point is that the theme of God's kingdom, or, in his words, *The King in his Beauty*, is one of the central themes in the entire story of the Bible. Through each section, he comments on how this theme is presented throughout Scripture. He, however, does not argue that this theme is *the* central theme or center (*mitte*). His book differs from others in biblical theology because most other authors argue for a central theme, or, more recently, a cluster of themes.

Schreiner writes for college students, laypersons, seminary students and pastors, and, consequently, notes the book's introductory nature. Although he footnotes resources and provides a bibliography, his citations of the secondary literature are limited. His method includes providing the results of his work on the biblical text and incorporating insights from other scholars afterwards. Readers of his other recent publications will likely note that this method is used in them as well.

The layout of the book is simple and easy to follow. Schreiner begins his retelling of the stories of the Bible in Genesis and ends in Revelation. He divides this larger story into nine parts: 'Creation to the Edge of Canaan'; 'The Story of Possession, Exile and Return'; 'Israel's Songs and Wisdom'; 'Judgment and Salvation in the Prophets'; 'The Kingdom in Matthew, Mark, and Luke-Acts'; 'Eternal Life in the Gospel and Epistles of John'; 'The End of the Ages Has Come according to the Apostle Paul'; 'Living in the Last Days according to the General Epistles'; and 'The Kingdom Will Come'.

For each section, Schreiner retells the story of the Bible, covering the highlights and connecting each book to the person and work of Christ.

Although he provides interpretation of the stories, explanations are minimal. Between the sections, he provides summaries. He also gives applications for modern-day readers.

One of the main strengths of this book is the masterful retelling of the larger story of the Bible. Because Schreiner is a full-time pastor and a full-time professor—an amphibious creature that walks on the land of academia and swims in the sea of the church—he undoubtedly has ample experience from which to draw. One can notice the careful thought and meditation that goes into his comments. For example, in his discussion of the book of Job, Schreiner notes, ‘In effect, Job has made himself lord of the world by telling God what is wrong with its government’ (p. 246). This explanation reveals Schreiner’s understanding of one of the key problems concerning Job’s discussions with and about God in the book of Job. He often provides helpful insights like this into the texts of Scripture.

This book fills an important lacuna. As someone who is also an amphibious creature—in the academy and the church—I have noticed that many churches fail to prepare their congregations enough to notice the larger story of the Bible, its pointing to Christ, and, then, applications. Although this may seem problematic for the local church only, I have met numerous students in Bible colleges and seminaries who lacked an understanding of these basic concepts of Scripture. This book serves as an important tool for filling the void because, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24.25), many Christians have difficulty understanding how the biblical story ties together to point to both the person and work of Christ.

Schreiner’s main point should be instructive for the discipline of biblical theology. Many in biblical theology argue for only one theme or cluster of themes as the center of the Bible. He, however, recognizes that ‘no one theme adequately captures the message of Scripture’ (p. xii). This move is innovative and also preserves the richness of the diversity in Scripture.

The subtitle, *A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, however, should perhaps be reconsidered; this book is not a biblical theology per se, but an introductory retelling of the biblical stories. Although biblical theology is a diverse field of study, merely retelling the biblical story is not usually considered biblical theology.

Although Schreiner discusses his method, his discussion lacks necessary detail. He is aware of methods in biblical theology and Old

Testament Theology, but he indicates that his method will be ‘to unpack the canonical writings in their final form’ (p. xv). He explains that his approach is different for various books—‘some books are examined chronologically, others thematically, and in the Psalms the canonical ordering of the books is explored’ (p. xvi). This explanation is problematic for at least two reasons. First, he does not explain which method(s) underlie his unpacking or examining and whether or not his underlying method(s)/approaches complement or contradict one another. In the larger theological enterprise, there are countless methods. Several of them, in fact, contradict one another, even within biblical theology. If he produces a second edition, I would suggest explaining his methods further in the prologue so his audience can reflect on their own methods and see that methods matter. The diversity of methods also makes his examination section seem haphazard. I would suggest that he choose and stay with one style for consistency; at times the book is difficult to follow because the approach changes from chronological to thematic to canonical.

Throughout the book, Shreiner states the conclusions of his exegesis and surveys the larger metanarrative of Scripture, but he never reveals *how* he arrives at his conclusions. He translates ‘the book of the genealogy’ in Mt. 1.1 and interprets it as meaning ‘the inauguration of the new creation in Christ’ (p. 433). Schreiner cites two sources in favor of his view. I, however, wonder whether he should have cited material that surveys the various options for translation and interpretation. Both are debated in Matthean studies, but he does not mention that. Students and congregations need to learn not only *what* their professors and pastors believe, but also *how* they arrive at their conclusions so they can consider matters for themselves. This kind of omission is disappointing because, as it stands, his conclusions appear to be based on intuition or personal theological preference rather than sound exegetical and biblical theological principles, as he likely intends.

His use of secondary literature seems haphazard. At times, he cites supporting sources, and at other times, sources that oppose his view. Citing both would seem to be better so his readers could investigate these matters further. Schreiner’s use of citations can also be confusing. In the prologue, he mentions the lack of consensus that one theme adequately captures the message of the Scripture. He footnotes a brief discussion on the nature of the task of writing a biblical theology and then cites several recent monographs that have helped him. Yet, most

of the authors he cites would disagree with the point he is trying to make. James Hamilton (*God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2010]) argues that his cluster of themes is the center of the Bible, while Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum (*Kingdom through Covenant* [Wheaton: Crossway, 2012]) argue that their cluster of themes explains the entire message of the Bible, albeit not as a center. This footnote requires further explanation because, as it stands, readers of these publications may be confused.

Finally, Schreiner's book is a useful introductory text for Bible college and seminary courses to help students understand the larger story of the Bible. Pastors could use this book with members of their congregation for the same purpose, perhaps in conjunction with a Bible-reading plan through the entire Bible.

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