

BOOK REVIEW

Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (WUNT, 2.204; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005; repr. 2006). xii + 586 pp. Pbk. US\$49.99.

How did Jesus view his own soteriological role in the context of the eschatological tribulation anticipated in Jewish literature? Brant Pitre summarizes his response, in this reprint of a dissertation first released as a WUNT volume, as follows: '*Jesus, speaking of himself as both Son of Man and Messiah, deliberately took the sufferings of the tribulation upon himself in order to atone for the sins of Israel, sins which had led them into exile. Because he saw this tribulation as nothing less than an eschatological Passover, he sought to inaugurate it in both word and deed and, thereby, to bring about the End of the Exile and the restoration of the twelve tribes in a New Exodus*' (pp. 505-506, italics in original). Pitre's exploration is thorough and precise, reminding the reader of forgotten and long-neglected nuances of historical-Jesus research and bringing fresh exegetical and contextual details into focus. His methodology is clear, his faith readily apparent, and his treatment of previous opinions balanced and incisive. But even as he probes evidence of Jesus' perspective on his own suffering and death, his book suffers from problems common to dissertations quickly published, problems which should have been fixed in the reprint and now prevent readers from getting the most from his otherwise excellent study.

In his preface and introductory chapter, Pitre admits that the initial impetus for his project, approaching the atonement from the viewpoint of eschatology, is derived from Albert Schweitzer's *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God: The Secret of Jesus' Messiahship and Passion*. Intrigued, Pitre found that Schweitzer's combination had been taken up by a number of scholars, whose views together constitute a *status quaestionis* of recurring themes and problems: thus the connection between tribulation and messiahship is central to Pitre's appraisal of

Schweitzer, Dodd, Jeremias, Ben Meyer, Dale Allison, N.T. Wright, James Dunn, and most recently, Marvin Pate and Douglas Kennard. This review gives way to methodological comments, including Pitre's adaptation of John Meier's criteria for historical authenticity—multiple attestation, coherence, embarrassment, and discontinuity with the early church—to which Pitre adds a fifth criterion, that of historical congruence (or 'contextual plausibility', p. 28). The author concludes his first chapter with an excursus, evaluating Wright's work on the 'End of Exile' and reformulating the emphasis to include the ingathering of Israel's twelve tribes at the end of the *Assyrian* exile, not just the Babylonian.

The second chapter, 'The Messianic Tribulation and the End of the Exile in Late Second Temple Judaism', reviews relevant literature from the Enochic and Danielic cycles, along with apocalyptic sources and Qumran documents, establishing a basis for Pitre's subsequent New Testament research. The expectation of an eschatological or messianic period of great suffering is shown to have developed considerably earlier than the conventional (post-70 CE) estimate, turning up in multiple genres, and with unifying themes (e.g. final judgment, resurrection, typological Old Testament imagery, dual stages of onslaught) that form a framework for examining the functions of the tribulation and the messiah. Pitre remains true to his previous emphasis on the ingathering of Israel's exiled tribes, but a wider political focus would have complemented this accent, especially given the thematic prominence of both *ingathering* and *tyrannical opposition* within his framework. His consideration of *1QWar Scroll*, for example, admits the enemy 'Kittim' and the bringing of Gentile wealth to the restored Zion (1QM 1.1-3; 12.7-17; p. 115), but leaves this connection underdeveloped. How does the historical reality of *imperial* opposition affect the context of Pitre's research into the restoration-oriented thought of the historical Jesus? Did the Qumran community's practice of appropriating OT typologies—glimpsed in the prophetic and unavoidably political application of Ps 72:9 here (though not mentioned by Pitre) in 1QM 12.14-15—inform Jesus' perspective as well?

Beginning with Chapter Three, 'The Tribulation and the Enigmatic Sayings of Jesus', Pitre formats his argument according to Meier's criteria, asking here whether Jesus spoke on the basis of an expectation of tribulation and a hope for the exile's end. The Lord's Prayer yields a strong eschatological accent in its terminology, particularly in the

applications of *peirasmos* (testing, or trial, hinting at growing opposition and coming judgment) and the appeal for *forgiveness* or *release*, connoting the customs of land-release in the Jubilee tradition and thus recalling rescue from the land of Egypt. This section on the language of deliverance leads to two portions addressing the death of John the Baptist as a catalyst for change in Jesus' eschatological outlook; the 'kingdom suffers violence' logion (Mt. 11/Lk. 16) and the affirmation that 'Elijah has come' and died in a tribulation-ready context (Mk 9) reveal the importance of timing between events, with John's death triggering elements of realized eschatology, an Elijanic typology of suffering, and predictions of escalating violence. The deliberate unleashing of such strife forms the focus of the chapter's final example: the 'not peace but a sword' saying, with its cognate tradition evident in *Gos. Thom.* 16, shows more appropriation of biblical imagery and strong discontinuity with the early church's stand on peacemaking.

The fourth chapter takes on three blocks of tradition from Mark 13 that confirm and refine Pitre's portrait of Jesus and his expectations. Mk 13.3-8 addresses the 'birth pangs' as a preliminary period of war, deception, and suffering, but one that also signifies the coming of the messiah. Jesus' forecasts of impending persecution, proclamation of the gospel, the outpouring of the Spirit, and the onset of familial strife make up the second tradition-block in Mk 13.9-13; as with the first, the images Jesus used are not merely stock motifs, but concepts intrinsically linked to the hope for the end of exile. The final block, warning of the Great Tribulation, the messiah's arrival, and the exile's end (Mk 13.14-27), is an oracle of unparalleled opposition and distress, with the fall of the defiled Jerusalem and the coming of the Son of Man punctuating Israel's exilic sufferings. Pitre does well here in foregrounding the return from exile as a New Exodus, anticipated in Isaianic contexts and introduced through a Danielic hermeneutic as a '*new Passover*: i.e., a new period of trials and plagues which would "put an end to sin and atone for iniquity" (Dan 9:24)' (p. 379). This paschal motif allows a smooth transition to the next chapter.

'The Paschal Tribulation, the Death of Jesus, and the New Exodus' follows its predecessor in sharpening the resolution of previously established themes. Here, Jesus' words and actions point to his Passion: the 'ransom for many' in Mk 10.35-45 is held to be a unified passage, envisioning ransom as the act of redemption that ends the exile, and

producing formidable arguments for both continuity *and* discontinuity with the language found in early ecclesiastical statements of faith. Similarly, the striking of the ‘shepherd’ (Mk 14.26-28) imports from Zechariah a strong sense of messianic identity for Jesus, with the eschatological restoration of Israel tied to the prospect of her slain shepherd’s resurrection. In Mk 14.32-42, the Gethsemane prayer permits Pitre a paschal reading of Jesus’ warning to the disciples, ‘Keep awake and pray that you not enter into *peirasmos*’ (9.38, p. 479), and a return to the same theme discussed earlier in the Lord’s Prayer: did Jesus pray for deliverance as he taught his disciples to do? This form of recapitulation is one of the book’s best features: motifs of eschatological Passover, *peirasmos*, and ingathering are gathered and reviewed so often that their linguistic and thematic coherence grows increasingly plausible.

Pitre’s concluding chapter underscores the congruence of the blocks of tradition he has studied, asserting that the historical Jesus’ messianic mindset applied not just to the way he understood his own *mission*, but also to its *timeframe*. As the messianic Son of Man, he believed his suffering and death would have redemptive value, functioning as an atonement for the sins of Israel (p. 513). The author closes with five implications for the continuing study of the historical Jesus: (a) the priority of placing Jesus in the context of Jewish restoration eschatology; (b) the authenticity and structural integrity of the Olivet Discourse in Mark 13; (c) Jesus’ evident commitment to some form of Noachic *remnant theology*, with potential ramifications for his *ecclesiology*; (d) the renewed complexity of the relationship between the tribulation and Jesus’ prophetic signs and expressions; and (e) the question of whether or not Jesus taught that his death would have a redemptive efficacy. These implications align roughly with the focus of each of the preceding chapters, and the last of the five may be the hardest sell, as it is still developing as Pitre ends his book. His claim, following and reworking Schweitzer, is that ‘in some sense, what we have arrived at through our investigation is an “eschatological doctrine of atonement”’ (p. 507); as it was never explicitly advanced as a goal of the study, such a forceful doctrinal claim may surprise those readers who are still thinking through Pitre’s conclusions.

The book is not without some problems, and the greatest of these may be structural. The reprint is identical to the WUNT release, save for the latter’s listing of previous volumes in the series. Comparison

with the original Notre Dame dissertation yields few changes, most of which are alterations of section titles (e.g. the ‘Coming of the Spirit’ is here labelled the ‘Ingathering of the Gentiles’; a subheading in Chapter Five now reads ‘The Death of the Shepherd Messiah’, rather than simply ‘the Shepherd’, emphasizing the distinctively *messianic* element in Jesus’ self-understanding). Greek originals for many of the lengthy cited texts have been dropped, along with some of the most technical form-critical notes. The only substantive changes are small additions that strengthen the coherence of Pitre’s highlighted themes: a summary of Mk 14.26-28 presenting ‘a grim but plausible window on Jesus’ view of his last days and the unfolding of the great eschatological drama that was about to take place’ (Dissertation, 2.614-15) becomes an opportunity to point out the *positive* emphases of ingathering, resurrection and creation-renewal (2006, pp. 477-78). Such minor changes speak well of Pitre’s thesis as a model for all of those engaged in doctoral studies, but the fact remains that *a published work should not necessarily ‘read’ like a dissertation*. The chapters are often protracted, impeding readers who might approach the book from a popular (or even an undergraduate) level. Sadly, those same readers would miss many of Pitre’s keenest points. A fine critique of exegetical reasoning is hidden in a footnote, 140 pages into his longest chapter: ‘It is, of course, quite easy to deem a Jesus tradition an early Christian creation if one forces it into early Christian categories; but is this proper exegesis, much less good history?’ (p. 359).

If Pitre’s work has another weakness, it can be found in the area of coherence—not that of historical or textual authenticity, but in helping his readers to ‘connect the dots’, both within his portrait of the historical Jesus and in relation to studies in other related fields. His reviews of information he has already covered are helpful, but he covers so many motifs in relation to the central pairing of tribulation and restoration (as is indicated in his wide-ranging book title) that readers will be challenged to integrate early points with later ones. Regarding related areas of study, Pitre’s case for establishing an ‘eschatological doctrine of atonement’ would gain considerable momentum by appealing to sources that draw their theological reflections deliberately from the unified narratives of the Gospels. The first volume of Robert Tannehill’s *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986; see esp. pp. 65-67), for instance, follows the linguistic theme of *aphesis*, or release, throughout Luke’s text, noting the applications of

the root in terms of deliverance from socioeconomic oppression, freedom from physical disorder and/or demonic possession, and release (or forgiveness) of sins. When Pitre claims that *ransom for sins* means first and foremost a *release* as from bondage or exile (p. 413), a blended, linguistic-theological focus resembling Tannehill's would enrich his argument and enliven his resulting doctrine of atonement.

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