

BOOK REVIEW

Stanley E. Porter, ed., *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). xiv + 268 pp. Pbk. US\$29.00.

The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments, edited by Stanley Porter, stems from the 2004 H.H. Bingham Colloquium in New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. This well-written volume contains a series of excellent papers that discuss Jewish messianic expectations and the various ways in which those expectations were seen to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

The first part of the book includes four chapters that discuss the Messiah in the Old Testament and related literature. Tremper Longman III begins with a treatment of the Law and the Writings. His consideration of this literature begins with the stated claim: 'it is impossible to establish that any passage in its original literary and historical context must or even should be understood as portending a future messianic figure' (p. 13). In the Torah, *mšh* is used of priests, and in the Writings, it is used of kings (highlighting their role as protector and vanquisher of Israel's enemies), both present rather than future figures. Longman argues that some of the passages that speak of these anointed ones were not completely fulfilled in any earthly person, and would naturally have led to an expectation of a future anointed one that God would send. He concludes that, in hindsight, the disciples were able to see how Jesus fulfilled these messianic expectations, and that we too should understand the Old Testament prophecies in the light of Jesus' person and work. Throughout his article, Longman focuses on Psalms 2 and 110, Genesis 14 and Dan. 7.13-14.

Mark Boda concludes the study of the Old Testament with an analysis of the prophets, the longest chapter in the book (40 pp.). He commences with an erudite discussion of words sharing the root *mšh* to defend the legitimacy of an Old Testament scholar embarking on a study of the Messiah. He concludes that these words were 'used

generically for religious functionaries [i.e. kings, priests and prophets] operative in Hebrew society and tradition, functionaries for whom there was hope of an enduring role' (p. 45). Boda limits his discussion of the Messiah in the prophetic books to Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, due to space limitations, his own expertise and the role of these books in Hebrew and Christian tradition. In his cautious analysis of the texts under study, Boda suggests a close relationship between the religious functionaries, with each being identified as *mal'āk* YHWH, and hope for their renewal in a distant future day being carried forward by the prophetic stream.

Al Wolters provides a succinct analysis of two differing scholarly perspectives on the Messiah in the Qumran documents with a review of two very different books. The first is John J. Collins's *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995). The second is Michael O. Wise's *The First Messiah: Investigating the Savior before Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999). Collins argues for four distinct 'messianic paradigms' within the Qumran literature: king, priest, prophet and heavenly messiah. Wolters agrees with much of what Collins has written, but presents a lucid argument for only three messianic paradigms. Wise, on the other hand, argues that the Qumran Messiah was an actual historical person (whom he names Judah), who, by analogy, can help us understand Jesus more clearly. Although Wolters commends Wise for writing a learned book that may open up new avenues for investigation, he remains unconvinced by Wise's argument.

Loren Stuckenbruck brings the first part of this book to a close with his chapter: 'Messianic Ideas in the Apocalyptic and Related Literature of Early Judaism'. He limits his study in five ways by: (1) focusing on the term 'messiah' to see what Jewish writers had in mind when they used this particular designation for an agent of God; (2) investigating non-Christian Jewish literature; (3) considering Jewish literature that was early enough to shape Christian theology; (4) inquiring into both the nature and the function of the Messiah; and (5) attempting to determine if these texts allow inferences to be drawn about the social setting in which hope in a messiah was expressed. These limitations lead Stuckenbruck to study the Messiah in four works: *Psalms of Solomon*, *Similitudes of 1 Enoch*, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*. His study allows him to draw a broad profile of the Messiah: 'an eschatological ruler, chosen by God to act decisively against the wicked on behalf of the righteous of

God's people Israel' (p. 112). Beyond this broad profile, he finds much diversity within the Jewish writings, which makes it easy to see why many Jews did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

The second part of the book includes five chapters examining the Messiah in the New Testament. I. Howard Marshall launches this study with a look at Jesus as the Messiah in Mark and Matthew. Holding the belief that Matthew utilized Mark in the writing of his Gospel, Marshall begins his discussion with Mark. Marshall argues that, although there is continuity with Old Testament and Jewish expectation in Mark, the Messiah is now understood in terms of what Jesus says and does. Through the use of the terms *Messiah*, *Son of God* and *Son of Man* in particular, Mark shows how Jesus fulfills (and alters) messianic expectations. Marshall presents a solid argument for *Son of Man* being a term with messianic overtones. Matthew follows Mark's lead with the use of terms, but also presents Jesus as *Servant*, *Wisdom* and a *New Moses*. Jesus as Messiah is seen as 'good news for Mark and the incarnation of salvation from sin for Matthew' (p. 143).

Stanley Porter furthers the examination of the Messiah in the New Testament with a look at Luke and Acts. He ably argues that, throughout both works, Jesus is presented as the 'eschatological prophetic messianic figure', and secondarily as the 'Messiah as the royal Davidic figure'. Porter finds support for this argument in Luke in the birth narrative, in the passages about Jesus' discussions with John the Baptist, Jesus in the Nazareth Synagogue, Peter's acclamation that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus before the authorities, and in the post-resurrection accounts. In Acts, Porter finds support for his argument in the accounts of Pentecost, in Peter's sermon in the temple, in Paul's speech in Thessalonica, and in Paul's defense before Agrippa. Throughout these passages, Jesus is seen as the 'coming one' foretold by the prophets, who speaks with the prophetic voice. Porter argues that Jesus' prophetic role is supported by his demonstration of prophetic signs, and declarations that certain prophetic texts are fulfilled in Jesus.

Tom Thatcher approaches the Johannine literature (Gospel of John, 1-3 John) in an attempt to suggest how high Christologies and low Christologies can reside side-by-side within these texts. He argues that John focuses on the disciples' 'memory' of Jesus, which involves 'a complex interface between their recollections of things that Jesus did, their awareness of Jesus' ultimate destiny, and a messianic reading of passages from the Hebrew Bible' (p. 173). John's christological

formula, therefore, is an interplay of memory, faith and Scripture. His Christology was dynamic but consistent, because it was guided by the Holy Spirit. Thatcher argues that John's Christology 'becomes coherent only when viewed against the backdrop of the "social crisis" that led to the composition of these books' (p. 175). First, John was demonstrating that Jesus was the prophet who was greater than Moses (high Christology), and who exceeded the expectations of the Jews. Secondly, he was demonstrating that Jesus was in fact human (low Christology) in response to the Antichrists. Thatcher has suggested a plausible setting for the Johannine writings, and succinctly argues his case.

In S.A. Cummins's examination of the Pauline writings, he argues that 'an integral aim and outworking of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ is the incorporation of the whole of humanity into Messiah Jesus and his Spirit, and thereby into the divine life that is eternal communion with the triune God' (p. 190). He identifies two specific and inter-related aspects that support this claim. First, after his Israel-specific life and death, Messiah Jesus was exalted as the universal Lord. Secondly, all who are incorporated into him as the messianic and Spirit-empowered eschatological people of God follow this same pattern and path. Cummins argues that Paul was influenced by Jewish expectations of a human messianic agent, whose intimate relationship with God was identified by the term 'son of God'. He then suggests that at Paul's conversion, he learned in astonishment that Jesus, as Messiah and Son of God, now exalted, reveals who God is even as God himself. Cummins then analyzes Gal. 2.15-21 and Romans 5-8 to conclude that justification is available through Messiah Jesus, and that his followers receive his Spirit, which enables them to 'know, reflect, and ultimately enjoy eternally the transfiguring glory of God' (p. 209).

The fifth and final chapter of the New Testament section is Cynthia Westfall's look at Hebrews and the General Epistles. These biblical books, she writes, have 'often been overlooked in discussions about the Messiah' (p. 229). In order to determine the messianic content in them, she focuses on three factors. First, she considers the likelihood that a given letter's author and recipients would share an understanding of messianic terminology and content. Secondly, she argues that *christos* likely has 'semantic value' in the majority of its occurrences, particularly for Jewish Christians. Thirdly, she contends that the scenarios of *enthronement*, *victory* and *temple* are 'overlapping pragmatic categories that correspond to the broad spectrum of Jewish messianic

expectations' (p. 215). With these three factors in mind, Westfall examines, in the following order, the books of Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude and 1–3 John. She convincingly concludes that much of the Christology in these books should be regarded as messianic.

The book is brought to a close with a learned critique of the previous nine chapters by Craig Evans. His instructive responses highlight points of agreement, suggest alternative lines of thinking, and raise significant questions about some of the arguments and conclusions drawn by the contributing scholars. The usefulness of this book is greatly enhanced by Evans's contribution.

There are a couple of significant ways in which *The Messiah* could have been improved. First, the articles read with little awareness of each other. A few examples should suffice. Longman devotes four pages to a critique of Gerald Wilson's argument of a messianic structure to the book of Psalms (pp. 20-24). Yet Boda argues for a future messianic hope in the Old Testament based in part upon Wilson's messianic paradigm of the Psalms, without any acknowledgement of what Longman has written (p. 40). Similarly, both Boda and Porter use Isa. 61.1 to support their arguments for an eschatological prophetic messianic figure (pp. 39 and 154), but there is no dialogue between the two scholars on this issue. Finally, to different extents, Porter and Cummins both argue for a titular use of *christos* in the Pauline writings (pp. 162 and 198), without any apparent recognition of the other scholar's arguments. Greater dialogue between the contributing scholars would have greatly enhanced these articles.

Secondly, since this volume is intended to be used by pastors and laypersons (according to the back of the book), a synthesis of what has been said about the Messiah within its pages would have been of inestimable benefit. Pastors in particular have to respond to questions like, 'What does the Old Testament say about the Messiah?' and 'How does Jesus fulfill the Old Testament messianic prophecies?' The contributing scholars have done a commendable job of demonstrating the diversity of Jewish messianic expectations and the variety of ways in which Jesus was seen to fulfill those expectations. Unfortunately, the reader is generally left to put it all together. Some summary comments from Evans or a concluding chapter by the editor could have effectively helped the reader think through the implications of what has been communicated within this book's pages. Furthermore, pastors would have benefited from a treatment of those Old Testament passages that are popularly

thought to be of utmost significance in a discussion of the Messiah, such as Isaiah 52–53. Boda did make a good argument for his focus on Haggai–Malachi, and his insights certainly should not be devalued. Even so, a chapter dealing with the longer prophetic books would have increased this book’s usefulness.

Despite these minor weaknesses, *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* is an erudite evangelical contribution to the study of messianic expectations and subsequent fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. One strength of this work in particular, evident throughout many of its chapters, is a recognition that a study of the Messiah must move beyond a simple examination of *māšîah*, *christos* and the contexts in which they, and related words, are found. The hopes of the editor of this volume will undoubtedly be fulfilled: ‘We all hope that this volume will serve as a useful guide to this important topic’ (p. ix). All who read this book will be enriched by its valuable contents.

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