

BOOK REVIEW

Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark, *Getting 'Saved': The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). xii + 324 pp. Pbk. US\$30.00.

When is the 'whole story' not the 'whole story'? The present volume answers this question unwittingly in the course of responding to many others with rewarding deliberation. That is, where the title might lead one to expect a manifold of discrete images of salvation in the New Testament, the book offers multiple reflections on the same soteriological facet, so it is multifaceted only inasmuch as the texts examined vary in their presentations of this particular brand of salvation—or, put differently, what the texts have to say according to a specific soteriological rubric. What the authors intend by 'whole story' is the *lifelong* story, the *staying* 'saved' as well as the 'getting'. Not that this focus is necessarily a bad thing; quite the contrary, it is an implicit and valuable statement about the coherence of New Testament soteriology. Nor does that acknowledgment exhaust the book's value: because its central questions concern categories introduced to scholarship by E.P. Sanders, the volume also serves as a progressive primer on post-Sanders and post-'new perspective' thought with regard to the images of covenant, piety and of course salvation.

As the acknowledgments and Whitlark's refreshingly brief introduction make clear, *Getting 'Saved'* is a collectively authored work, one in which a substantial number of chapters represent reprints or revisions of earlier work (though all date from approximately the past decade, and most from the past few years). Of the twelve chapters, Talbert has contributed five (four of which have appeared previously), and Whitlark is responsible for three (two revisions, one reprint). The remaining four are new contributions by Andrew Arterbury, Clifford Barbarick, Scott Hafemann and Michael Martin. Four chapters address the Pauline Epistles (including Hebrews and the Pastorals), the next four deal with

the canonical Gospels, the next three apply to the Catholic Epistles and the last relates to Revelation.

The Pauline section opens with the oldest reprint, Talbert's 2001 article on 'Paul, Judaism and the Revisionists'. In conversation with Sanders, Talbert asks whether or not Paul's writings accurately represented a real situation with true-to-life, Hellenistic Jewish opponents. He surveys various first-century qualifications for Jewish and Gentile entrance into the age-to-come and notes the soteriology assumed in each case. When his findings lead him to the conclusion that Paul faithfully addressed 'a real issue when he polemicized against "works righteousness"', he rightly insists that 'a paradigm shift beyond the "new perspective" on Paul seems not only justified [!] but required', an apparently unintended soteriological pun (p. 23). He follows Timo Laato, Christiaan Beker and N.T. Wright in emphasizing divine enablement within Paul's participatory thought. Finally, he reviews Paul's metaphors of transformation—focusing on the image of being clothed—as illustrative of the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 and the priority Paul placed on it.

Next, Whitlark examines the manner in which Philo and Ephesians each transformed cultural conventions of reciprocity: against the expectations of its milieu, Ephesians in particular claims 'that divine χάρις *actually enables human fidelity*' (p. 35, italics original). While the long-term nature of the benefactor–beneficiary relationship remains consistent among Philo, Ephesians and sources from their cultural environment, the relational quality is dramatically different, so much so as to *undermine* reciprocal norms. In Philo, gratitude can only express humility rather than securing divine patronal loyalty; in Ephesians, benefits are given not as Rome's emperor gave them (to increase his own glory and secure fidelity) but so that the recipients might both enter into the *life* of salvation and remain faithful there. A brief link from χάρις to Old Testament conventions of steadfast/covenantal love would have added substantially to the chapter's appeal, but it is well argued as it is.

Talbert's only new contribution, 'Between Two Epiphanies: Clarifying One Aspect of Soteriology in the Pastoral Epistles', discusses the patterning of transformation and discipleship, encouraged rhetorically by means of *exempla* and theologically through the imaging of God-in-Christ as a present and powerful deliverer. The chapter succeeds in establishing a basic 'continuity with the understanding of soteriology in the undisputed Pauline letters' (p. 71), but brevity evidently prevents

Talbert from fleshing out the expressly *missiological* aspect of divine enablement at which he hints regarding the service of Paul, Timothy and Titus. Whitlark then rounds out the Pauline section with a revision of a chapter from his earlier book, balancing election and enablement in Hebrews. The soteriology he finds there 'is something more than covenantal nomism, but a new covenant piety that is continuously enabled by God from the beginning to the end of the Christian sojourn in this present age' (p. 75). Like the previous chapter, the study thoughtfully draws attention to the graciousness of God's *presence*, both in and of itself and for its value in the lives of the faithful; this and the previous chapter also assume an experienced audience familiar with technical abbreviations such as NC (new covenant) and PE (Pastoral Epistles).

Talbert begins the section on the Gospels with an analysis of indicative (in the sense of a divine gift) and imperative (the demand for a human response) in Matthean soteriology. He stresses not legalism or covenantal nomism but grace alone, grace in the forms of Jesus' presence 'with' disciples (or 'in their midst', etc.), granting the disciple revelation and protection and the disciple's being 'with' Jesus. For Matthew, argues Talbert, Jesus' influence supersedes that of any given philosophers as moral models in Hellenistic convention; 'for the disciples to be "with Jesus" is for them to be transformed by their vision of God-with-us' (p. 114). As Talbert puts it, the indicative controls the imperative, shaping every area of discipleship. Martin's essay furthers recent conversation about Mark's Jesus as the divine warrior of Isaiah's New Exodus. As such, the study models an intriguing way forward in the examination of complementary soteriological (or, more fully, christological) motifs: it tracks Markan portrayals of Jesus as liberator, shepherd and covenant-maker as markers of divine enablement along this New Exodus journey. Especially effective here is the manner in which Martin develops and distills previous research on Jesus' stilling of the storm in Mark 4.

Arterbury's contribution on Luke–Acts is well positioned, for it draws upon Talbert's methods in the reprinted piece on John that follows. Arterbury begins with a potentially provocative comparison of divine enablement in the discipleship (and failures) of Peter and Judas. Sandwiched between Talbert's emphases on the beginning and end of the discipleship journey, Arterbury concentrates on 'Luke's depiction of the middle period' of the process (p. 56) as glimpsed in the divinely enabled faith/faithfulness of Peter and Judas's even more drastic failure to

persevere. Arterbury nuances our understanding of Judas—noting, for instance, that while Luke does foreshadow Judas’s apostasy, he never treats him as a disciple and a traitor simultaneously—but he refuses to speculate further about why Peter survives his ordeal and Judas does not. Instead, he focuses on Judas’s marked absence at the end of Luke and the beginning of Acts. For his part, Talbert seeks parallels for the reciprocal images of indwelling in Jn 15.1-17 and finds that the metaphor speaks of dependence and the shaping of identity. I might dispute his assessment of brokerage as ‘a modern social-science category’ (p. 184): ‘broker’ is only a modern *term* for what seems to have been a commonplace of ancient patronal relationships, and brokerage seems alive and well a few pages later, during Talbert’s construal of the (new) covenantal role of the vassal king. I also wonder why he does not note that the titular reference to ‘getting saved’ is similarly anachronistic, but I find his thesis and conclusions persuasive overall.

Turning to the later New Testament, Whitlark investigates the motif of the implanted word (Jas 1.21) and its soteriological significance concerning the new covenant as imaged in Jeremiah 31. The ἔμφυτος λόγος, Whitlark asserts, is ‘a motif of enablement grounded in inward transformation experienced through the gospel proclamation’ (p. 197), a source of *extrinsic* aid in discipleship. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deuteronomy, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Philo and Irenaeus are among those marshaled to support Whitlark’s intertextually rich reading of ἔμφυτος. Wisely, Whitlark admits the active role of disciples, more so than do some of the book’s other chapters: ‘While both Paul and the author of James acknowledge that the Christian’s life is from God from beginning to end, they also both acknowledge that their addressees are not passive recipients of this power’ (p. 214).

Barbarick and Hafemann devote their essays to 1 and 2 Peter respectively. Like Whitlark in the previous chapter, Barbarick centers his work on a single image, in which God ‘nourishes the newly born with his word-milk in order to grow them into eschatological salvation’ (p. 216, with reference to 1 Pet. 2.2-3). Barbarick understands this nourishing word to refer to the gospel as both the *medium* and the *power* of salvation. But in critical dialogue with Karen Jobes, he insists that the ‘milk’ in question ‘enables the moral transformation; it is not the moral transformation itself’ (p. 230). In parallel with Talbert’s entry on the Pastorals, Barbarick appeals to the philosophical/rhetorical convention of *exempla*, which he applies not just to the person of Christ but

to the *story of the gospel itself*, in a manner reminiscent of Michael Gorman's work. Hafemann's chapter on the soteriological logic of 2 Pet. 1.8-10a is perhaps the most finely nuanced in the volume. He offers a detailed explanation of the nearsighted/blind metaphor of 1.9a; reminds us of the soteriological value of baptism (i.e. being 'cleansed *from* one's old sins in order to be cleansed *for* a new life of virtue represented by verses 5-7' [p. 257, italics original]) in context; provides a thorough extrapolation of what he calls the (un)conditionality of God's new covenant; and stresses the importance of the human side of covenant-keeping without denying the determinative power of God's presence at work.

Another study from Talbert concludes the book. Again, Talbert focuses on images as indicators of enabled Christian faithfulness: in Revelation, these include graciously granted 'knowledge of the certainty of history's outcome' as well as the actions of sealing, measuring, re-clothing, entering names in the Book of Life and the descending of the New Jerusalem. Talbert compares the indicatives and imperatives apparent in Revelation with those found among other ancient apocalyptic sources. In keeping with the rest of the book, he stays true to Sanders's categories of 'getting' and 'staying in', even as he and the other contributors repeatedly emphasize how much more these categories need to be re-examined, and how much more room needs to be made for grace in our understanding of New Testament soteriology.

Matthew Forrest Lowe
Dundas Baptist Church, Dundas, Ontario