

BOOK REVIEW

Horsley, Richard, *The Prophet Jesus and the Renewal of Israel: Moving beyond a Diversionary Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). vi + 161 pp. Pbk. \$20 USD.

Historical Jesus research continues to be a fascinating enterprise, and it is thus expected that new proposals will continue to proliferate. As fascinating as this field of study is, the main concern should be whether new proposals are actually original in terms of their theory or methodology. This key concern is important; otherwise, students who are new to this field of study can become confused with the plethora of recycled theories that have existed in the discipline since its usually identified inception in the early seventeenth century. More importantly, new proposals should address a specific, narrow topic so as to be able to state explicitly what new contribution they provide. This book by Richard Horsley, retired Distinguished Professor of Liberal Arts and the Study of Religion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, must be evaluated in light of this concern.

In two balanced sections, Horsley's goal is to address 'briefly and provisionally' what he considers to be two major problems in contemporary historical Jesus research. The first problem is the diversionary debate over the apocalyptic Jesus by neo-Schweitzerian and neo-liberal scholars. The second problem concerns the standard research procedure that focuses on individual sayings and attempts to determine 'their meaning from the occurrence of terms and phrases in comparative material' (p. 23). The first section, Chapters 1 to 5, attempts to demonstrate that the sayings of Jesus and John the Baptist do not reflect the themes of the 'apocalyptic scenario'. The second section, Chapters 6 to 10, introduces Horsley's 'relational and contextual approach', which views the Gospels as 'whole texts' and takes them as historical sources. Horsley's key proposal is that Jesus was a prophet leading the renewal of Israel in opposing the imperial rule. In what follows, I briefly

summarize the highlights of each chapter before commenting on the points where I find the author's argument problematic.

Chapter 1 lays the foundation for the overall argument of the book, showing how both Schweitzer's and Bultmann's representations of the apocalyptic Jesus became the 'time-honored standard approach[es] in discussion of the historical Jesus' (p. 14). The author argues that both scholars' representation of Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet unavoidably neglects passages that deal with his daily social life and interaction with different groups, as well as his teaching and miracles. Chapter 2 mainly discusses John Dominic Crossan's neo-liberal presentation of Jesus as a Mediterranean Jewish sage. Horsley notes that Crossan (along with other liberal skeptics) wants to respond to the neo-Schweitzerians but gives no references to sapiential texts from late Second Temple literature to support his case. Chapter 3 focuses on the work of Dale Allison. Horsley presents what Allison identifies as the 'themes' of the apocalyptic scenario—eschatological judgment, the resurrection, restoration of Israel, tribulation and imminence—to demonstrate that, with the notable exception of the restoration theme, the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels do not provide evidence for such an apocalyptic scenario. Consequently, Chapter 4 examines some Judean apocalyptic texts, such as Daniel, *2 Enoch*, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* to see whether they attest to themes of the apocalyptic scenario. Horsley concludes that virtually no late Second Temple Judean texts actually reveal an apocalyptic scenario, except for Dan. 12.1-3, but that these texts instead deal with the restoration of God's people from oppressive empires. Chapter 5, based on what has been discussed in the previous four chapters, argues that both neo-Schweitzerians and neo-liberals agree on and operate with 'the standard older view of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology more or less as articulated a century ago by Schweitzer and summarized a generation later by Rudolf Bultmann' (p. 53). Yet both groups of scholars, the author claims, have been working within the apocalypticism of synthetic modern constructs, and not within the typical vision-and-interpretation themes, which 'reveal that the overarching, determinative reality in late second-temple Judea was Hellenistic and then Roman imperial rule' (p. 62).

Chapter 6 refutes the standard protocol of using individual sayings of the Gospels to reconstruct the historical Jesus, since Horsley rightly asserts that the meaning of a saying or story depends on its context. Thus, 'the Gospels, as stories and speeches, are our principal historical

sources for the historical Jesus...in context' (p. 71). As such, Chapter 7 investigates the political, economic and religious context of Jesus' activities in Galilee and Judea. The author gives a historical sketch of the successive takeovers of Judea and Galilee beginning with Antiochus Epiphanes's invasion in 168 BCE, paying attention to events related to the Roman imperial (dis)order in Judea and Galilee, and the hopes, protests and movements for renewal of Israel in scribal circles. Chapter 8 portrays a relational Jesus in interaction and conflict with various groups of people based on the Gospel of Mark and Q. The author shows that the sequence of the episodes in Mark and the speeches in Q give parallel portrayals of Jesus' overall program, which is 'the renewal of Israel against the rulers of Israel' (p. 103). Horsley notes that all the other activities of Jesus hinge on this larger agenda. Thus, 'historical investigation into the historical Jesus in historical context requires that we take the Gospels whole as the sources, and not isolate on text-fragments' (p. 110). From this 'relational and contextual approach' discussed in Chapters 6 to 8, Chapters 9 and 10 investigate how Jesus initiated his renewal program of Israel by being a prophet, and how this program was opposed by the religious leaders of Israel, culminating in his crucifixion. Whereas Chapter 9 emphasizes Jesus' prophetic role, and in particular, his healing and exorcism activities, as rooted in cultural tradition, Chapter 10 points to the fact that Jesus' prophetic pronouncements against the scribes, Pharisees, temple and high priests threatened the Roman imperial order, and thus led to his crucifixion. Nevertheless, the author says that he became 'a martyr for the cause of his renewal of Israel under the direct rule of God' (p. 156).

There are at least three interesting observations that can be made and some critical comments that can be subsequently given regarding Horsley's study. One observation is the obvious fact that he has not actually made any new contributions to the scholarly discussion of the historical Jesus. The first major section merely reviews a select few works of a small number of scholars to support his claim that both the sayings of Jesus and the Second Temple Judean texts do not attest to an apocalyptic scenario in accordance with the five apocalyptic themes defined by Allison. What readers would perhaps want to see with respect to his proposal is not an extended engagement with a few scholarly works, but a more accurate assessment of the current state of play in Jesus research based on a presentation of more scholarly works pertinent and substantial to his proposal, although I realize that it would be difficult

for him to achieve this, especially in such a short book. Furthermore, not only does Horsley fail to clearly define what he specifically means by the elusive term or genre of ‘apocalypticism’, but his proposal that Jesus was ‘a prophet generating a movement of renewal of Israel over against the rulers of Israel’ (p. 5) is an old and overused thesis (e.g. see J.P. Meier and N.T. Wright). One might suspect then that Horsley’s approach to historical Jesus research is his key contribution. Regrettably, however, his ‘relational and contextual approach’ is not new either, although he rightly argues that the meaning of the Jesus sayings must be gleaned from their usage in context. E.P. Sanders, for instance, claims that his study is first based on facts, and only secondarily based on some saying materials. In fact, Horsley fails to note in his review of Crossan the ‘triple triad’ methodology Crossan employs; only in the third triad does Crossan actually tackle the individual sayings of Jesus. Horsley does not actually indicate *how* to proceed with reading the Gospel episodes and Q speeches as ‘whole’ and not as ‘individual’ sayings, but rather offers his own arguments and interpretations of these Gospel materials.

A second observation is that Horsley does not take into account that scholars were addressing specific issues and responding to their own situational context in studying the historical Jesus at each stage or period of research. Schweitzer’s work, for instance, is a survey of the existing historical Jesus literature from Reimarus to Wrede, outlining his own position only in the final chapter (as Horsley also notes). Thus, he is considered by many to be a key transitional figure in historical Jesus research. By contrast, Bultmann’s work coincided with the rise of form criticism, and even though he summarized Schweitzer’s work sometime later, his main contribution to the field of Jesus research was whether the quest was theologically necessary, or even legitimate. This is clearly seen in Käsemann’s rejoinder in his famous 1952 article to Bultmann. Assuming that Horsley is right in noting that Schweitzer and Bultmann and their followers ‘were thinking of “apocalypticism” in terms of theological doctrine (dogma)’ (pp. 48-49), this does not necessarily mean that the ‘modernly scholarly construct of apocalypticism [which Horsley attributes to these scholars]...may be a good illustration of how biblical studies in general, including investigation of the historical Jesus in particular, operates’ (p. 57). Aside from it being a sweeping statement aimed at the entire field of biblical studies, Horsley does not adequately, if at all, substantiate this claim. He also does not

note that many scholars have seen the entire ongoing historical Jesus quest as a single multi-faceted study of Jesus' life, starting even before Reimarus (e.g. S.E. Porter, W.P. Weaver and Allison). On this view, his entire thesis simply cannot stand. This is why I suggested at the outset of this review that new proposals must address a topic that is as specific and narrow as possible.

A third and final observation is that the objective of treating individual Jesus sayings in the Gospels may not necessarily be the same as reading the Gospels as whole episodes. On the one hand, scholars have typically treated individual sayings in an attempt to authenticate specific sayings or actions of Jesus, but it does not follow that they 'ignore the Gospels themselves as potential sources' (p. 71). Perhaps only those who follow William Wrede would be completely skeptical about the Gospels as reliable sources for the life of Jesus. On the other hand, scholars who read the Gospels as 'whole' episodes may have all kinds of purposes for doing so. Some read them for the sake of spiritual nourishment. Others read them for academic purposes, such as analyzing particular discourses to determine their meaning, outlining the narrative or literary structure of a particular Gospel, identifying the theological motivations of the evangelist (e.g. redaction criticism), etc. For all these reasons, I am quite unsure how Horsley's proposal of Jesus leading a renewal program for Israel in opposing the Roman rule actually addresses his two stated major problems—the apocalyptic scenario debate and the treatment of individual sayings—in historical Jesus research. Perhaps what he has shown is his own interpretation of the Gospel of Mark and Q in conjunction with some Second Temple Judean texts based on his 'relational and contextual approach' to these materials.

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