

[MJTM 22 (2020–2021)]

BOOK REVIEW

Joshua W. Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. xi + 469 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-8028-7717-8. \$50.00.

Joshua Jipp begins this contribution by explaining that his hope in writing is to show that even in the plurality and variety within the New Testament canon, there are common threads running through the texts producing a unity and fundamental coherence that allow the texts to be read together compatibly. In his words, “the central argument of this book is that the Messianic identity of Jesus of Nazareth is not only the presupposition for but is also the primary (though certainly not exclusive) content of New Testament theology” (3). The work, therefore, is an examination of Christological common threads that make for a fuller picture of the thought of the New Testament writers, and for Jipp, this most frequently involves understanding Jesus as an anointed Messianic ruler. He notes the many themes, titles, and conceptual categories that New Testament authors utilize to articulate the significance of Jesus, but the angle of his approach pushes “for the centrality of Jesus’ Messianic kingship” (6).

The book is divided into two parts. The first explores royal theology in various New Testament books (whether individual books or groups) through nine chapters and nearly three hundred pages, and the second deals with broader, wide-ranging concepts as deduced from the previous part, related to Scripture, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The first four chapters deal with each of the four Gospels. Jipp notes first how Matthew presents Jesus as God’s royal, Davidic Son who enacts God’s rule, restores the Davidic kingdom, delivers, teaches, acts with compassion and mercy, and invites his disciples to share in his rule and way of life. In Matthean purview, Jesus is the

Messianic agent who identifies with Israel for their sake and is a king who internalizes Torah and adheres only to God's will in his use of authority. Second, Jipp explores how Mark portrays Jesus in light of his kingdom proclamation, uses *Χρίστος* as a royal honorific, and casts Jesus as one who speaks and acts in ways only appropriate for the king of Israel, while at the same time reorienting the meaning of Jesus' Messianic identity as to not be misunderstood in light of common views of Messiahs and kings. Third, Jipp describes how in Luke-Acts, particular linguistic choices of the author emphasize the regal aspects of Jesus and how he fulfills the covenantal promises to king David. Lastly, he notes how John, despite various differences with the Synoptics, is consistent in portraying Jesus as a Messianic king endowed with God's authority to enact his rule.

Chapters 5 through 7 deal with the Pauline epistles, with Jipp first making the case that Paul understands Jesus as a king and that certain Messianic themes in his letters (the Messiah as crucified, the inheritance of the nations, the Messiah and law, and the Messiah and justice) all attest to this overarching idea. Jipp also discusses participatory soteriology across numerous Pauline works. Participatory soteriology is the idea that Paul "conceptualizes believers' union with Christ as sharing in the rule and reign of the Messiah" (148). Along similar lines, beginning with the undisputed letters, he explores how Paul's idea of Jesus as a Messianic king and of believers as his subjects involves the sharing of Jesus' rule and the benefits of that rule with Jesus as his people. Jipp does not discuss every Pauline work, and some are explored more fully than others (as in Chapter 7, which has a thorough, helpful, and profound treatment of royal language in Ephesians).

The first part closes with a discussion largely of Hebrews and 1 Peter in Chapter 8 and of Revelation in Chapter 9, first noting how Hebrews' emphasis on Jesus as priest and lord accords with other New Testament ideas of him as an idealized representative, and how Peter accords with Paul in his view of a participatory soteriology and of his "belief that God's resurrection of the Messiah is his enthronement to a position of cosmic rule and authority" (278). In Revelation, Jipp explores the prevailing question

throughout the text regarding who rules and who is the victor in the spiritual conflict against evil, noting that “at the center of John’s apocalypse is the question of power and authority” (284). Again, there is here a focus on how John’s exegesis of the Old Testament contributes to his idea of the Messiah as an enthroned, heavenly king who is victorious in battle (and who, in participatory fashion, has his people join in that battle).

The second part begins with a broad analysis of how the New Testament literature comes together in unified fashion to present Jesus as a righteous (but suffering and misunderstood) anointed king who establishes God’s kingdom, and that this Messianic conviction is the “starting point for the early Christian interpretation of the scriptures of Israel” (326). In Chapter 11, the focus turns to ecclesiology, with Jipp arguing that the New Testament is unified in portraying six activities of Jesus as relating to the inauguration or foreshadowing of God’s kingdom: incarnation and birth, baptismal anointing, proclamation and inauguration of the kingdom, suffering and crucifixion, resurrection and enthronement, and royal reign over the nations. Jipp contends that Jesus’ identity as a Messianic king was indispensable for understanding how the early Christians saw him as divine and worthy of worship, given his relationship with the God of Israel.

In Chapter 12, Jipp probes deeply into the idea of participatory soteriology and how Jesus’ salvation is part of his role in establishing the kingdom of God. He also takes pains to demonstrate that Jesus’ entire life (rather than certain actions) is the New Testament’s soteriological testimony, or in his words, “the NT testifies to a soteriology that is a necessary entailment of the entire narrative and identity of Jesus’ Messianic life. The Messiah’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the means whereby God enacts his saving reign over his people” (367). This continues into Chapter 13, where Jipp argues that from an ecclesiological perspective, an important aspect of the Messiah’s saving rule is the creation of a people composed of both Jews and gentiles who replicate the Messiah’s character and participate in his activity and mission as they are empowered by the Spirit in fellowship with him. Here again we see Jipp’s strong emphasis on the participatory aspect of Christ’s work in the New

Testament, especially as it relates to how believers model Jesus' life in their own ecclesial practices. Lastly, in Chapter 14, Jipp explores how power is revealed in Jesus' kingship, and how this power is displayed that disarms and exposes other powers and provides an example for how his followers relate to other powers. The book ends with a discussion of the various areas of life that are affected by a believer's allegiance to Christ, and how these different facets of such allegiance should be conceptualized as a believer's sharing in Christ's rule as king.

There is much to commend in Jipp's work. It is detailed and comprehensive, and uniquely hews out a place among New Testament theologies in its focus on the idea of Jesus as king unifying the varied New Testament portrayals of him and his accomplishments. Additionally, there are some fresh insights on the significance of participatory soteriology as a common thread running through the canon. Jipp makes a strong case that participatory language only further highlights the role of Jesus' kingship in the broader New Testament picture. From a critical standpoint, the second part of the book felt rather repetitive at times, leading a reader to wonder whether the entire volume was unnecessarily lengthy. Similarly, while the second part was profoundly helpful, its structural organization was a bit harder to follow than the first part, which simply examined various New Testament books in their canonical order of appearance. Even so, this is an extremely helpful tool for serious readers and students of early Christianity, and belongs in the library of New Testament scholars. It is exhaustively researched, unique in its thematic focus, unique in its underlying assumption of the existence of unifying common threads between the various texts, and overall an exceptional contribution to the colorful ways in which the New Testament testifies to Jesus as royal Messiah.

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