

[MJTM 24 (2022–2023)]

BOOK REVIEW

Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell. *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. xxxi + 981 pp. Hbk. ISBN 9781433569692. \$64.99.

In their ambitious new book, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell join forces to offer a significant contribution to the discipline of biblical theology in an accessible and helpful way. Demonstrating their adroitness in their respective specialties—i.e., Köstenberger in the New Testament and Goswell in the Old Testament—the duo offers the readers a fresh and insightful perspective. Using a Christo-centric interpretive method, they demonstrate great effort to defend the unity of Scripture.

The subtitle explains the general layout of the book. Presented in two parts, the first part of the book covers the Old Testament and the second the New Testament. Not just your typical resource on biblical theology, this book is a stand-out among its peers. The authors uniquely weave together three elements: (1) the utility of canonical Scripture; (2) the inclusion of thematic concepts; (3) and use of ethical horizons. Readers can anticipate a depth of insight into the storyline and progression of the Bible as well as its ethical demands, both ancient and modern. Offering a varied and multi-dimensional approach, this book serves as a Swiss-Army knife of sorts; it is a useful tool for preaching research, studying biblical concepts thematically, or exploring canonical questions.

In the introduction (1–63), the authors provide a brief overview of the nature and practice of biblical theology before moving into the significance of the canon, order of the books of the Bible, and the implications of how they have been rendered in

the past. The introduction carefully explains how biblical theology, themes of the biblical text, and the canonical ordering of the books *result* in ethical implications for the readers of Scripture.

Each section of Scripture (e.g., the Law, Prophets, Letters of Paul, etc.) is treated individually. For example, in the section entitled “The Prophets” in Part 1, the reader is offered an overview of the prophets’ role in the canon. This is followed by a high-level view of their unifying themes. The four books are covered one at a time. It is structured to overview the content of the book itself first; it then offers studies of its individual themes. The section finally presents a review of the ethical contours. An example of this is demonstrated in dealing with the command in Joshua from YHWH to destroy the Canaanites; the authors quickly summarize various views previously put forward, while, at the same time, examining the problematic texts in light of the broader ethics and themes within Joshua (e.g., Rahab, the Gibeonites, the negative example of Achan, etc.). This example showcases Köstenberger and Goswell’s holistic approach to understanding Scripture, rather than just offering a narrow apologetic of any one section. In summation, they keep the whole in mind—this is something that the apostles themselves model in the New Testament. Each chapter includes a section that explores the topics beyond the context of the book or canonical unit, that looks towards the New Testament, and what culminates in the work of Christ. In this section, the authors explore how the New Testament writers not only referenced the characters and events but also utilized them for their Christo-centric approach. The authors’ pattern of over-viewing canonical placing, summarizing dominant themes, and reviewing ethical implications culminates in a bridging of Old Testament and New Testament worlds. Woven throughout Part 1 is a consistent focus on the New Covenant, and the authors repeatedly display their commitment to understanding and exploring the unity of Scripture.

Part 2 begins with a chapter on the order of the books in the New Testament canon and the way this impacts interpretation. The pattern of Part 1 is repeated in Part 2, which offers continuity and consistency between both parts. The conclusion (687–763) features a detailed walk-through of the previous parts of the

book. It concludes with a Bible-spanning presentation of themes and ethics from the Old Testament and then the Bible as a whole. To summarize, the themes and ethics of the Old Testament are offered with eyes turned towards the future, that is, the New Testament's fulfillment in Christ, while the New Testament themes and ethics sections are presented with eyes looking back to the past, demonstrating the conclusion of themes introduced in the Old Testament (e.g., king, kingdom, mission, etc.).

In this one book, the authors provide a comprehensive yet concise resource that offers a survey of every book of the Bible from three different horizons. Their thoughtful engagement of significant themes is evident in their coverage of each book of the Bible. For example, when addressing the Gospel of Mark, after an overview of the content, their analysis features a well-sourced study on the various themes found specifically in Mark (e.g., conflict, understanding, and the role of the "messianic secret," etc.). The authors also draw on exegetical commentaries, biblical theologies, narrative critical studies, and Church Fathers among others. It is evident that this book is the result of years of careful study and engagement with the text, and the readers are treated to an accessible and helpful study of each part.

In the end, Köstenberger and Goswell deliver to the church an immensely *usable* resource with multiple applications. Pastors, for example, would be well-served by making use of this book; whether preaching through Old Testament or New Testament sections of the Bible, this biblical theology can serve as a first stop and introduction to the material under review. The authors skillfully keep an eye on the progression of the biblical storyline. By placing any section of the text or *story* of the Bible in its broader thematic, ethical, and canonical place, the readers are left with a far greater understanding of how, as Jesus put it, the Scriptures "testify about [him]." With an impressive bibliography, there are more than enough avenues available for further investigation, should the study warrant it or the reader desire. More than a resource to read in one (or a few) sitting(s), this book serves as a study guide for those who are committed to the unity of Scripture and will help ensure that each reviewed text is seen through its Christo-centric lens.

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