

4-2014

Book Review: The King in His Beauty

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Recommended Citation

Bruno, Christopher R., "Book Review: The King in His Beauty" (2014). *Biblical and Theological Studies Faculty Publications*. 313.
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Thomas R. Schreiner. *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013. 736 pp. \$44.99.

Few scholars have completed the remarkable feat of writing a Pauline theology, a NT theology, and a whole-Bible Biblical theology. But with the publication of *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*, Tom Schreiner has done just that. Over the course of 2,216 pages in these three volumes, Schreiner has canvassed the depth of NT and biblical theology like few other scholars of this generation.

As we consider the contribution of his latest work, *The King in His Beauty*, it is important to set it in the frame of Schreiner's larger body of work. In particular, not only does Schreiner recognize that there is no single right way to approach biblical theology, he has modeled two methods himself. While in his NT theology Schreiner uses a thematic approach, in this volume he employs a canonical approach. That feat in itself adds to the impressiveness of Schreiner's accomplishment.

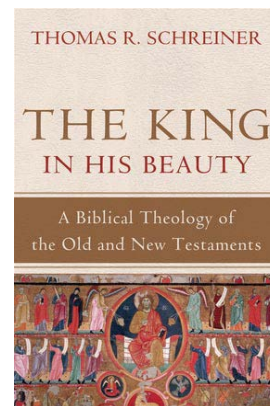
Many readers of *Themelios* are likely aware of Schreiner's work. What is more, other reviews of this particular book have appeared on *The Gospel Coalition* site. [Editor's note: See Gerald Bray, "A Systematician Reviews Tom Schreiner's *Biblical Theology*" in this issue of *Themelios*.] Because of this, I will forgo much of the typical summary that might be expected in this sort of review. It is sufficient to say that Schreiner traces the theme of God's glory—particularly his beauty and worthiness to be praised—as seen in his reign as king, overcoming his enemies and redeeming a people for himself. Moving through every book or section of both OT and NT, Schreiner convincingly demonstrates that the kingdom of God, when properly understood, is clearly unfolding through the scope of redemptive history.

So then, rather than working through the particulars of this book, I will highlight some of the key contributions and most helpful insights for pastors, with the goal of providing a springboard for its use in preaching and teaching and as a resource for further study.

At the outset, any pastor or teacher who is struggling to make connections between the details of the OT and the wider story of redemption in Christ would be well-served by observing Schreiner's method of reading the OT. Schreiner's general method is rather straightforward: he explains the OT in its context, including key principles and historical movements with a particular focus on the unfolding of the kingdom throughout the canon. He then makes NT connections where appropriate.

Even in books like Proverbs, which can be notoriously difficult to fit naturally into a redemptive-historical reading of the OT, Schreiner's observations arise naturally from the text (in both its near and wider context). Thus, when speaking of the wisdom of God in Proverbs 8, Schreiner astutely observes, "Wisdom does not represent Christ in 8:22, for it is pictured as something created. But typology always involves escalation, so that Christ fulfills and exceeds what is said about wisdom in Proverbs, since he is the wisdom of God" (p. 299). The OT section includes many similar observations that are both firmly anchored in the text of the OT while also faithfully pointing forward to the full revelation of Christ.

Another insight from Schreiner that might provide help to those tasked with preaching and teaching is his description of the kingdom of God. While it is probably best to refrain from citing specific examples, it is not uncommon for modern authors to either so narrow or broaden the definition of God's kingdom so as to make their definition almost useless. Schreiner's work helps us avoid falling



into either of these ditches. While he certainly sees multiple facets of the kingdom in the Bible, he does not broaden his definition beyond biblical boundaries. Therefore, he demonstrates throughout the book, “the kingdom of God has a threefold dimension, focusing on God as King, on human beings as the subjects of the King, and the universe as the place where his kingship is worked out” (p. xv). With this perspective in place, he helpfully walks us through the drama of the kingdom as it is “worked out in history and in a certain place” (p. xv).

Finally, it was not surprising to find that Schreiner’s summary of Pauline theology in this book is among the finest I have ever read. For the past three decades, Schreiner has been actively engaged in the study and teaching of Paul, and this chapter felt like the culmination of those years of study. For the pastor, student, or curious reader who wants to get a handle on both the current state of Pauline studies and the substance of Paul’s theology, this 35-page chapter may be the place to start.

I found very little to complain about as I read this book; however, if I have one substantial criticism of this work, it is that its treatment of some OT sections can be a bit uneven. While of course I understand that additional material would have made this already 700-page book more intimidating than it already is, I did wonder at times what criteria Schreiner used to decide what to include in the book. For example, while the chapter on the Book of the Twelve skirted over some of the details in each Prophet while only hitting the high points, the chapters on the “Major Prophets” provide much more detail.

The King in His Beauty reflects years of faithful study and teaching, but it is not primarily an academic book. And for that I am profoundly thankful. Pastors, teachers, and all Christians will benefit from this book, and it is my prayer that it will be used of God to strengthen and equip his church for many years to come.

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N. T. Wright. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. 2 vols. Fortress: Minneapolis, 2013. xxvii + 1,600 pp. \$89.00.

N. T. Wright’s *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (*PFG*) is the bibliographical equivalent of a European basilica or cathedral. *PFG* is imposing, cavernous, and breathtaking in its scope and ambitions. In just over 1,500 pages of prose that is paradoxically both dense and engaging, Wright surveys a millennium of Jewish history and literature, half a millennium of Greco-Roman philosophy, first-century Hellenistic religion, the fall of the Roman Republic and rise of the Roman Empire, and dozens upon dozens of Pauline texts. And he does so all the while engaging the relevant secondary literature.

This survey is a capstone to thirty-five years of Wright’s published research in the theology of the apostle Paul. Not only does *PFG* present Wright’s understanding of Paul’s teaching, but *PFG* stands as the fourth installment in his broader *Origins and the Questions of God* project, now in its third decade of life. Wright liberally cites not only the first three volumes of this series, but also his many previous publications on Paul. Readers looking for major retractions in *PFG* will be disappointed. On a few occasions, Wright concedes that

