BOOKS I HAVE READ: SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

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A very good book indeed; though it doesn't quite do what it says on the tin.
Category: Observations

IVP has just released a second and updated edition of the excellent Salvation to the Ends of the Earth by Andreas Kostenberger and T.D. Alexander. This is going to be a somewhat confusing review, because while I think that this book is very good indeed, I also have a significant reservation about it - more or that later.

The book is a medium format paperback and around 340 pages long. The style is academic and there are enough references and footnotes to keep anyone happy. The paperback will set you back about Â£17 at Amazon and the Kindle version is about half that price. Other bookshops are available. I read it as a pdf file kindly provided by the publishers.

The book is subtitled "A Biblical Theology of Mission" and this gives a clue as to the contents. In the words of the series editor, D. A. Carson:

> *The second edition, which you are holding in your hand, aims, no less than the first, to trace the theme of mission across the Bibleâ€™s storyline. Instead of envisaging mission as a late post-resurrection afterthought, it teases out the organic wholeness of the theme from Genesis to the Apocalypse.*
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> *p. xi*

The authors fill out their approach further:

> *Rather than unilat- erally focusing on Jesusâ€™ messianic or Paulâ€™s apostolic consciousness, therefore, without denying the seminal impact of these key leaders, we have chosen in the present work also to pay closer attention to the various major and minor voices across biblical history and to trace as closely as possible their underlying convictions as they are attested in the multi- faceted writings they produced and that are included in the canon of Scripture.*
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> *p. 6*

> *At the heart of the biblical metanarrative is â€˜the story of Godâ€™s mission through Godâ€™s people in their engagement with Godâ€™s world for the sake of the whole of Godâ€™s creationâ€™.4 Rightly, the emphasis falls here on what God does; it is the missio*

> *Dei that shapes and permeates the whole of Scripture.*
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> *p.12*

After an introductory chapter, the book divides into two sections; the first which consists of one chapter, tells the story of Israel and then section two addresses the story of Jesus and the Early Christians in five chapters. There is also an appendix which considers the context of second-temple Judaism.

I found myself facing somewhat of a dilemma reading this book. To capture the whole sweep of the developing theme it is necessary to read it relatively rapidly. However, to capture the detail, you need to slow down and savour the individual arguments. It says a lot for a book that it has such a gripping central theme, backed by thorough detail.

If you want to trace the story of God's plan of salvation as it works through the whole of the canon, you can't really do much better. This is an excellent book.

The way in which the story of salvation is traced is both fascinating and helpful. The OT chapter follows the story of the woman's offspring (see Gen. 3), the Abrahamic blessing, the Davidic king and the prophetic servant all of which point to the coming Messiah. The NT books are grouped together around the Gospels. Chapter 3 looks at Matthew and other writings which were aimed primarily at a Jewish audience; Hebrews and James. Chapter four brings together Mark and the letters of Peter and Jude. The fifth chapter is the longest and most fascinating; it is based around Luke's two-volume work Luke-Acts. However, once the authors get into the story of Acts, they introduce the letters of Paul at appropriate points in the narrative. This brings home the message that Paul's letters were not isolated theological writings, but they emerged from a missional context and deal with real-world issues. Chapter six looks at John's writings; the Gospel, the letters and the Apocalypse.

The concluding, summary chapter brings together the arguments from earlier in the book.

It should be noted that this second edition is a significant revision. It's many years since I read the first edition, so I didn't notice the updates, but they are mentioned in the introduction.

Now, about that reservation that I mentioned earlier. The subtitle calls this book a Biblical Theology of Mission. The problem with a statement like that is that there is no universally accepted definition of mission. The authors clearly have adopted one which focuses on the proclamation of the Gospel

and which often ignores other aspects of what most scholars internationally would consider to be mission. As a result, the book The thing is, when you decide what mission is, you then choose the Scriptures which fit your framework. This means that the book gives very little space to the Old Testament and pays relatively little attention to Jesus' ethical teaching. That being said, I don't think this is a problem. The book does an excellent job of tracing one aspect of mission through the Bible and it is well worth a read. I just don't think that the subtitle is accurate. This is a small complaint, but it did need to be mentioned.

As always, a selection of quotes to pique your interest:

> *From the opening chapters of Genesis onwards, the orientation of the missio Dei is towards the future, culminating in Godâ€™s dwelling in a new Jerusalem that is coterminous with a new earth. In the light of the goal of Godâ€™s redemptive activity, it is hardly surprising that the â€˜the ingathering of the Gentilesâ€™ is an important component of Old Testament eschato- logical expectations.*
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> *p.37*

> *Pervading the Matthean mission discourse are references to the prospect of rejection of the gospel message (10:11â€“16; cf. 40â€“42), issuing in perse- cution of the messengers (10:17â€“20, 23â€“33) and division even among a personâ€™s own family (10:21â€“22, 34â€“39). Even such division, however, is shown to fulfil Old Testament Scripture (10:35â€“36, par. Luke 12:53, citing Mic. 7:6).*
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> *p.51*

> *â€˜allâ€™ dominates the entire â€˜Great Commissionâ€™ passage: Jesus has â€˜all authorityâ€™ (v. 18); his followers are to go and make disciples of â€˜all nationsâ€™ (v. 19); and Jesus will be with them â€˜alwaysâ€™ (lit. â€˜all the daysâ€™; v. 20).*
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> *p.61*

> *Finally, at the climax of Markâ€™s Gospel, the Roman centurion exclaims at the foot of the cross, â€˜Surely this man was the Son of God!â€™ (15:39 niv), indicating that now the*

messianic secret has been lifted even for the (Roman) Gentiles, so that the missionary power of Jesusâ€™ suffering and death has been extended also to non-Jews.54 If there is a genuinely Markan equivalent to the Matthean â€˜Great Commissionâ€™, the centurionâ€™s confession would certainly qualify. Indeed, the fact that it is not a Jew but a Gentile who confesses Jesus at the end of Mark is highly significant for the Gospelâ€™s narrative thrust.

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While Matthew and Mark provide significant accounts of Jesusâ€™ mission and his vision for the discipling of the nations following his ascension through his new messianic community, it is Luke who raises the New Testamentâ€™s mission theology to new heights.

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...the stages of the apostolic witness should be conceived ethnically as well as geographically: (1) In Jerusalem, Jesus completed his mission and Israel was restored in the form of the Jewish remnant of believers in Jesus as Messiah (the nucleus being the twelve). (2) Next came Judea-Samaria â€“ significantly, these two locations are connected with a single article in Greek â€“ designating the area of the previous kingdoms of Judah and Israel and fulfilling the expectation of a restored house of Israel under one royal head (e.g. Ezek. 37:15â€“22).86 (3) The apostolic witness will spread to â€˜the ends of the earthâ€™ (cf. Isa. 49:6, cited at Acts 13:47), which makes clear that Godâ€™s salvation through the Messiah is intended for all nations. Geographically, the expression refers to the end of the world in a general sense. Ethnically, it pertains to the Gentiles, indicating that while the gospel is first for the Jews, it is also for the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1:16â€“17).

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If Rome, therefore, is not to be identified with â€˜the ends of the earthâ€™, the endings of the book of Acts is intentionally open-ended: â€˜The ends of the earth are never reached in Acts. The mission goal is never completed. It remains open . . .â€™. The churchâ€™s mission to the ends of the earth thus remains an unfinished task.

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> *Thus, the churchâ€™s persecution in Jerusalem provided an important impetus for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth (not, one might add, the result of brilliant apostolic strategizing or human missiological engineering).*
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> *p.133*

> *The Fourth Gospelâ€™s primary focus is the mission of Jesus: (1) he is the one who comes into the world, accomplishes his work and returns to the Father; (2) he is the one who descended from heaven and ascends again; (3) he is the Sent One, who, in complete dependence and perfect obedience to his sender, fulfils the purpose for which the Father sent him.7 He is also (4) the shepherd-teacher who calls followers to help gather his eschatological harvest. The mission of Jesusâ€™ followers is presented within this framework.*
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> *p.200*

As I noted earlier, I was provided with a review copy of this book by the publishers. I have not allowed this generosity to influence my review.It's a very good book and if it were a stinker, I would have said so.