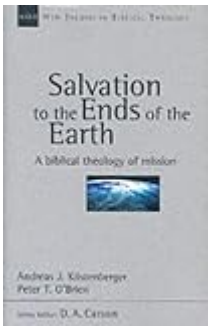
SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

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Category: Reviews



This is a short overview of Salvation to the ends of the earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission (New Studies in Biblical Theology) by Kostenberger and O'Brien. The book is in the IVP Academic series (the ones with the annoying silver covers)Â and justifies its academic title by having lots and lots of footnotes. That being said, it is a fairly easy read though it is rather dry. This book follows a similar pattern to the last book I reviewed by Andreas Kostenberger.Â Each chapter examines an area of biblical literature by firstly giving an exhaustive list of the passages referring to mission in the corpus and then a brief summary of the overall teaching. The whole book then closes with a summary statement that draws together all of the threads.

The whole Bible (and the inter-testamental period) are covered under the following headings.

- The Old Testament
- The second-temple period
- Mark
- Matthew
- Luke-Acts
- Paul
- John
- The General Epistles and Revelation

In as much as it covers a lot of ground and provides references to other literature, this book is of value. However, it suffers from at least two fairly serious deficiencies.

Firstly, the Old Testament is not given anywhere near adequate attention. Considering that the Old Testament forms the majority of the Christian Bible, it is hard to see how a book can claim to be a 'biblical-theology of mission' when it pays so little attention to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is not simply an introduction, a scene setting for the New and we miss an awful lot when we treat it as such. This quote from Green and Robinson's Metavista bears repeating:

> *It is a recurring deficiency of many Protestant evangelical readings of the biblical narrative that it can be told without the inclusion of Israel at all! An over-individualistic concentration on the Fallâ€¦ results in a stunted engagement with the biblical text which almost inevitably leads to an interpretation that individual salvation was the whole purpose of Godâ€™s creative act. Consequently, we quickly jump from the Fall episode to the coming of the Messiah whose death and resurrection fixes the personal sin question â€“ and hey presto! weâ€™re back on track!â€¦ To the contrary it is really only when we get into the Israel story that all our interlocking overtures sound forth with a new vitality and vibrancy, mainly because this story consumes so much of the overall narrative.*

The truth of this observation is borne out in my second reservation about this book; it has a far too narrow definition of mission. In fact, I thought I was going to be able to write that there was no definition of mission, but I finally found one on page 254, less than twenty pages from the end of the book.

> *... mission is defined as a conscious, deliberate organized and extensive effort to convert others to one's religion by way of evangelization or proselytization.*

A further discussion on page 268 emphasises that for the author's mission is all about evangelism and seeing people saved. There is a, seemingly, grudging acknowledgement in the very last paragraph that mission will also involve helping to bring New Christians to maturity, but they stop there. The breadth of God's missionary activity, which we are called to take part in, is simply not reflected in this book. Chris Wright highlights some of the issues raised here far more eloquently than I can:

> *Why should we imagine that doing evangelism in obedience to the New Testament excludes doing justice in obedience to the Old? Why have we allowed what we call the Great Commission to obscure the twin challenge (endorsed by Jesus himself) of the Great Commandment?*
>
> *How can it be suggested that evangelistic proclamation is the only essential mission of the church? It seems impossible to me to justify such reductionism if we intend to sustain any claim to be taking the whole Bible seriously as our authority for mission and as that which defines the content and scope of our mission. Mission belongs to God â€“ the biblical God. The message of mission is to be drawn from the whole of Godâ€™s biblical revelation. So we cannot simply relegate the powerful message of events such as the exodus or institutions like the jubilee to a bygone era. They are an integral part of the biblical definition of Godâ€™s idea of redemption and of Godâ€™s requirement for his redeemed people. We pay no compliments to the New Testament and the new and urgent mission of evangelistic mission it entrusts to us in the light of Christ by relegating the Old Testament and the foundations of mission that it had already laid and that Jesus emphatically endorsed. Whole Christian mission is built on the whole Christian Bible.*

From The Mission of God (quoted here, with comments).

This is not a bad book, it's just no where near as good as it could or should have been. If you have read Transforming Mission by Bosch and the Mission of God by Wright, then you might want to give it a go (but *only* if you have read Wright and Bosch first).