

Mark J. Keown, *Jesus in a World of Colliding Empires: Mark's Jesus from the Perspective of Power and Expectations*. 2 vols. Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2018. Vol. 1: Introduction and Mark 1:1–8:29. (255 pp.) [ISBN: 9781532641336]; Vol. 2: Mark 8:30–16:8 and Implications. (306 pp.) [ISBN: 9781532643842]

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In this two-volume work, Mark Keown views Jesus in Mark's Gospel from the perspective of power patterns in the ancient world and expectations about an anticipated intervention from God or his agent. This work was inspired by Keown's experience of teaching the subject of Mark's Gospel, his work on an EEC commentary about Philippians, and especially his "time thinking about Philippians 2:6-8" (vol. 1, p. 1). Reflecting on the common problem of people vying for position, Keown asserts that the global church needs to rediscover the Jesus who showed what true life looks like; that is, living, not out of coercive force and violence, but "out of love seen in sacrifice, self-denial, selflessness, service, and suffering to the point at which it hurts" (p. 5). Keown highlights the uniqueness of Jesus and urges readers to embrace Jesus' compelling vision of the kingdom of God, as portrayed in Mark's Gospel.

Both volumes are packed with information. Volume One comprises an Introduction and six chapters. Volume Two comprises an Introduction and ten chapters. In Chapter 1, Keown presents the background of Mark's Gospel – its setting and importance. In Chapters 2 and 3, he examines the colliding empires that had affected Israel up to the time of Mark's account, and those beyond the Roman Empire in the known world at the time of Christ, respectively. In Chapter 4, Keown discusses "Israel's story" in the midst of this clashing world, as presented in the Old Testament. In Chapter 5, he focuses on the hopeful expectation of a deliverer (labelled "Theo" = "The Expected One") within that story. Keown summarises ideas about the agent of God's intervention from the Old Testament, and also from the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, Philo, Josephus, the Rabbis, and the New Testament. The "flawed but prevalent idea" was "that God would come in violent force to resolve Israel's problems" (p. 140). These first five chapters prepare readers thoroughly for the exegetical material that follows and eventually for understanding why Jesus' disciples did not comprehend what it meant for Jesus to be the messiah.

Keown spends the next ten chapters (6-15) reading Mark "against the backdrop of the pattern of a warrior-king and a military/religious empire" (p. 5). This reading reveals deep irony in the story. In Chapter 6, Keown considers the account of Jesus in Mark 1:1–8:29 from the perspective of those swept up in expectations of rising and falling power, brought about through war and violence. This chapter and the whole first volume conclude appropriately at the point where Keown deals with Mark's account of Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ/Messiah. The sections of text explored in Chapters 7–15 are shorter. Among other issues, Keown highlights the call to follow the pattern of Jesus' own life (Mark 8:34–9:1), the emphasis on greatness found in service rather than military and political glory (9:2-50), the calls to fidelity, making children a priority, and giving to the poor (10:17–31), the contrast between James and John's arrogant request for power and Bartimaeus' insightful request for healing (10:35–52), Jesus' challenge to the

Temple system in Jerusalem (11:1-26), how Jesus confounded the leaders in public debate (11:27–12:37), Jesus' final teaching including the commendation of an "unlikely heroine of the ideals of discipleship" (12:35–13:37), the plan to destroy Jesus and the disciples' incomprehension of Jesus (14:1–15:47) (vol. 2, pp. xvii–xviii).

Chapter 16 includes the author's conclusions and some implications of his exploration for reading the Old Testament, for Christian leadership, for various other aspects of Christian life, for being male, and for the Second Coming. For example, with respect to Christian leadership, Keown commends the "Jesus way" of being a leader—service (p. 239).

Key strengths of *Jesus in a World of Colliding Empires* include the consistent focus on the title theme and thorough development of the author's argument. Keown presents a generous amount of evidence to indicate that Mark's Jesus is not the sort of messiah that God's people had been expecting. On the other hand, the singular focus has led to some over-simplified distinctions between the Old and New Testament portrayals of God (Warrior and Judge vs. non-violent, loving servant-leader) that could be balanced by including such incidents as God demonstrating his concern for repentant Nineveh (Jonah 3:10; 4:11) and God's severe punishment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Furthermore, I suggest that the complex and perplexing issue of how to deal with the Old Testament today warrants more rigorous treatment. Surely promoting the task of "recognizing where God is to be seen" in Israel's story also endorses subjective selectivity (pp. 234–35).

Keown has chosen to write "a book that an educated Christian can understand" (vol. 1, p. 11), rather than an academic work. To this end, he supports readers in their processing of new material by introductory and summary sections that revise the argument and/or state the new focus, and concluding comments that anticipate upcoming chapters. For the most part, Keown addresses the targeted audience, with appropriate use of extensive vocabulary on the one hand, and scaffolding for specialised concepts (e.g. explanations of theological terminology) on the other. Keown also lightens the tone of his writing by weaving phrases from "modern vernacular" (e.g. Jesus "said zilch") and illustrations from contemporary culture (e.g. "Empire strikes back") into his explanations about the ancient texts. A future revision of the volumes could focus on some proofreading details, a slight reorganisation of some introductory sections, and the addition of further scaffolding for those without a theological education and parallel timelines for the historical background.

Overall, Keown's two-volume work presents a thorough exploration of how Mark's Jesus turns people's expectations for the Messiah upside down, along with an earnest plea to pursue Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God.