



# **The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited**

*Scot McKnight*

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## **The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited** Scot McKnight

Contemporary evangelicals have built a "salvation culture" but not a "gospel culture." Evangelicals have reduced the gospel to the message of personal salvation. This book makes a plea for us to recover the old gospel as that which is still new and still fresh. The book stands on four arguments: that the gospel is defined by the apostles in 1 Corinthians 15 as the completion of the Story of Israel in the saving Story of Jesus; that the gospel is found in the Four Gospels; that the gospel was preached by Jesus; and that the sermons in the Book of Acts are the best example of gospeling in the New Testament. The King Jesus Gospel ends with practical suggestions about evangelism and about building a gospel culture.

## **The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited Details**

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# **From Reader Review The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited for online ebook**

## **Nathan Mladin says**

Much needed corrective to soteric reductionism (sobering quote: "We have reduced the life of Jesus to Good Friday, and therefore reduced the gospel to the crucifixion, and then soterians have reduced Jesus to transactions of a Savior" - p. 119).

My main quibble with McKnight is that he's given us a more or less snappy, little book, when such an important theme would have deserved a lengthier and even more nuanced treatment. For example, his definition of the gospel as the story of Jesus completing or consummating the Story of Israel has not lead to 'aham' reactions, rather to a series of questions like: what about pre-Israel biblical material? what about Adam and Eve? The controversial question about the relationship between Israel and the Church also popped up? What do contemporary Romanian, British, American Christians (etc.) have to do with Israel's story being completed? Admittedly, McKnight has cogently answered many of these questions on his blog. However, it would have been better to produce a much more substantial treatment from the outset, rather than qualify and clarify in subsequent blog posts all sorts of loose ends in the snappy book. Nevertheless, the book is a good start. It will constitute a good trigger and point of departure for healthy theological reflection. I still feel he has downplayed a bit the soteric aspect of Jesus's ministry in the attempt to present him in His Kingly capacity, as the Messiah and Lord.

We do indeed need the bigger vision, narratively framed, in order to understand particular functions of Jesus' ministry. And for this purpose, McKnight's King Jesus Gospel is just great.

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## **Ali Wurm says**

Yup. This is the root of the gospel, by which, believers should be orienting their lives. Our misunderstandings of the gospel, keep us from living it well, and from understanding the true nature of God.

"If I am asked to break the gospel and a gospel culture down into simple statements, I would borrow from the imagery from the man from Northern Ireland, from Belfast, C.S. Lewis. From The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, where we first meet the story of Aslan, we will find a few central themes about Aslan. It's the story of Aslan, which is how Lewis told the Story of Jesus:

Watch the Lion roan.

Watch the Lion die on the Stone Table.

Watch the Stone Table crack with new creation powers.

Listen to the Lion's Roar.

Trust the Lion.

Love the Lion.

Live for the Lion.

There's our gospel: it's the saving Story of Israel now lived out by Jesus, who lived, died, was buried, was raised, and was exalted to God's right hand, and who is now roaring out the message that someday the

kingdom will come in all its glorious fury." (160)

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## Gregory says

Scot McKnight's new book, "The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited," is a keeper. In fact, I would say it's one of the best theological books I've ever read. Part of what makes it exciting is that McKnight is excited himself! You can sense his energy and his joy in his subject, as he leads us step-by-step through his own theological development. It takes some work to read Jesus in his own context, and McKnight is patient with us.

I used this book in my classes at a Christian school, to help bolster my case that Christians should read the Old Testament more. My students were honest in their admission that they don't read the Old Testament much, and don't see the point. McKnight argues that, unless we understand the story of Israel, we cannot really understand Jesus.

I appreciated his critique of the Reformation, his insistence that we learn about the early church, and his endorsement of prayer-books and creeds. If you don't see how those are connected with Jesus in first-century context, you'll just have to buy the book and find out for yourself!

My only real question concerns the "contextualization" question. McKnight presents a solid case that Apostolic preaching looked like thus-and-such. Basically, the preaching of Peter and Paul was dramatically different than our "four spiritual laws" presentations and arm-twisting methods of "gospel" persuasion. Granted. But, Peter and Paul were preaching to a largely Jewish culture. Even when Paul is writing to sort out problems between Jews and Gentiles, he's still working within Jewish categories. When we take the Gospel to Africa, do we still stress every aspect of Old Testament history as much as the Apostles did? Stephen's speech in Acts wouldn't seem to work so well in remote jungles. I hope McKnight will take this up in another book.

Overall, this is a splendid book, and I hope it will help to shake up the anemic and shallow American church!

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## James says

There is so much that is good here about not letting gospel be reduced to a personal salvation plan but hearing it as Jesus fulfilling the entire story of Israel that I was tempted to give this 5 stars. I reason I didn't is that most of it has been said before (My wife called it N.T. Light) and that his foil seems a bit of a strawman. That evangelicals reduce the gospel to individualistic salvation I don't doubt and have seen, so I think it's an important point; however most thoughtful engaged evangelicals that actually read their bible and books wouldn't fall into the category McKnight puts him in. This book stands in a long line of books criticizing the evangelical tendency to make the gospel entirely about taking care of sin without making Jesus Lord. I am grateful for the point and think McKnight makes it rather well but its ground I've seen covered before (as McKnight would admit).

What I did appreciate is that McKnight articulates how a fuller gospel presentation which does justice to how Jesus fulfills Israel's story effects our evangelistic proclamation. I think NT Wright's *Challenge of Jesus* does a similar thing in terms of 'how we live' in light of the gospel; this might do a better job of thinking things

through in terms of Evangelism.

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### **Brianna says**

This book asks the question of how close what we commonly understand/present as "the gospel" lines up with what we see of "the gospel" in Scripture. Addresses differences and similarities and presents suggestions what returning to the original Gospel might look like. (Took a little while for me to grasp what was being presented. Partially due to the number of other books I was simultaneously reading, I felt somewhat lost, but I hope to reread it when I am in the middle of less others so the progression will make more sense.)

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### **Jeff McCormack says**

Great book! Hits the nail on the head about how today's gospel is in fact not really that. Today we have taken a small portion of the gospel and use it as THE gospel. We have made the full gospel into simply a "plan of salvation" or "method of persuasion" leaving behind the full story of the gospel. This has caused, over the past few hundred years, quite a weak and less captivating message that does not lead to discipleship, but only decision-ism.

I won't spoil it by telling you what the real gospel is, but lets just say it is much needed to renew the true message of the Word of God to mankind. Great stuff.

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### **Nate Claiborne says**

At this point, I'll be brief. I'll say right off that I enjoyed reading this book and felt that McKnight made his points in a clear and compelling manner. He was generous in his criticisms when at times he could have been much more sharp and made some disparaging remarks. I might not be personally inclined to accept that his sketch of the problem is accurate, and there is some question as to who McKnight is specifically addressing in this book. One gets the impression that it is aimed in part at the young, restless, Reformed crowd, or possibly just easy-believism broader evangelicalism.

I can see this book working well for both, so if you consider yourself to be an evangelical, and you simultaneously think we might have gotten off track in our approach to discipleship (as in, maybe it seems to lack an organic connection to conversion and evangelism) then you should probably take a long Saturday afternoon and engage McKnight in this book.

This book isn't the last word, or the definitive treatment of the topic, but I value McKnight's perspective on the issues he addresses and feel that he offers an important work that clarifies our understanding of just what the gospel is, and in turn, how it changes everything.

See a more comprehensive review my blog

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## **JR Rozko says**

Scot wrote a book that needed to be written and wrote it well. It will appeal to a broad readership. Some will understand it... and get angry. Others will misunderstand it... and get angry. Then there will be people like me... who get it, but far from getting angry, feel like he should have said more, or at least different things in order to A) get his point across and B) be more constructive w/ his proposal. In the final analysis, I think he does his readership a dis-service by overly separating what he calls "a gospel culture" and "a soterian culture." In my estimation, the real problem isn't that we've conflated these ideas, but that we've misunderstood them. Put another way, the gospel-problem as I see it played out, both in theology as well as in the life of church communities, isn't that we've focused on salvation when we should have focused on the gospel, it's that we haven't rightly understood the proper relation between these things. Scot does a great job of critiquing the un-biblical notion of "personal salvation," as a way to understand the gospel, but could (or ought to really) have said more about a more proper way to understand the relationship b/t the gospel and salvation. In a future book perhaps.

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## **Chris says**

I notice there are many great reviews on what Scot McKnight has done with this particular piece of writing. I won't rehash what has already been said.

Perhaps the best thing I could say (or would want someone to say if it were my book) is that this explanation of the Gospel and the Story we say we believe has motivated me more than any other recent book I've read to press on in my own journey with Christ.

I want to spend more time in the Scriptures...getting to know the story of Israel which Jesus fulfills, immersing myself in the gospel accounts of Jesus' story, exploring the early church's "acts" of gospeling, and even digging out my old church history texts from seminary by Gonzalez and studying the ways in which the church carried on the gospeling from then until now.

I'm more compelled than ever to engage the Word in the context of community and incorporate the Christian calendar, daily prayer, and other spiritual disciplines in order to more faithfully live out my role as a member of the People of God.

What McKnight lays out here really challenges a reductionist (soterian) approach to the Gospel and makes you think deeply about evangelism as well. For such a brief, easy-to-read book it really packs a punch!

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## **David says**

McKnight asks the question, "what is the Gospel?" He argues that when evangelicals answer this question, they are usually presenting the plan of salvation and not the gospel. While salvation is included in the gospel, it is not the gospel. Part of his argument here is that the "gospel" many evangelicals preach is not what Jesus preached which means Jesus did not preach the gospel. Such a point alone should cause us to rethink things.

McKnight starts with 1 Corinthians 15 where Paul reports the Gospel that was passed on to him. From his McKnight argues that the Gospel is that Jesus Christ has completed the story of Israel (or, the story of Jesus

completes the story of Israel as revealed in the Old Testament). Along with 1 Corinthians 15, McKnight's argument hinges on the story of Jesus in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These four books are called "gospel" which means they must preach the gospel, not just serve as background for the other parts of the New Testament where we have traditionally gone looking for gospel. McKnight looks at what Jesus preached, arguing Jesus preached himself as completing Israel's story (and this is gospel). Then we move through Acts, where Peter and Paul also preach Jesus as completion of Israel's story, thus again the gospel is Jesus.

McKnight ends with a chapter on how this plays out in evangelism today and a chapter on creating a gospel culture (or how this gospel plays out in communal church life). Overall, this is a fantastic book and a must read for pastors and church leaders.

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## **Bo White says**

The primary thrust of the book is two-fold: 1) take the whole Bible seriously when articulating the gospel, 2) bullet point salvation stories don't tell the whole story.

Scot McKnight does a good job in this of being critical and friendly simultaneously and builds bridges to those he knows will either disagree or find some thing controversial. This is no small point. Preaching to the proverbial choir is en vogue (or so it seems) and speaking across denominational lines is important in a day where news travels at the speed of broadband.

There is much to glean from McKnight's book and it's worthy of a lively discussion if for no other reason than the fact that the subject is of central importance. I particularly appreciated the wide angle lens view of the whole scope of the good news and the necessity to understand the OT prior to jumping in to a five minute Campus Crusade or tract approach. If taken seriously, McKnight's discussion will force people to count the cost prior to saying 'yes, I am a Christian,' and in a world where the word evangelical has been tossed around in political discourse, reassessing one's understanding of the evangelical message is timely.

There are flaws in the writing and the book could have been longer (truncates some historical overviews and is selective in interaction...ie: Greg Gilbert is critiqued, where I would have rather seen McKnight interact with Tim Keller or D.A. Carson, whose works bridge the gap often between scholarly/intellectual types and popular works). With that said, it's worth the read and McKnight is someone who treats people respectfully and the texts with care, both admirable traits.

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## **John says**

McKnight started to write a book that desperately needed to be written, unfortunately he didn't finish it.

The strength of McKnight's book is in his message that "we evangelicals (mistakenly) equate the word gospel with the word salvation. Hence, we are really "salvationists." When we evangelicals see the word gospel, our instinct is to think (personal) "salvation." We are wired this way. But these two words don't mean the same thing, and this book will do its best to show the differences." In doing this, he corrects the

biggest weakness in Greg Gilbert's "What is the Gospel?".

He actually addresses Gilbert directly, writing:

"Please recognize that I'm not saying Gilbert's expositions of specific points are wrong even if I would frame things differently. What I am saying is that Gilbert begins in the wrong place because he equates gospel with salvation — the Plan of Salvation — and does not therefore see the fundamental gospel to be a declaration about Jesus Christ as the resolution of Israel's Story. He has processed the story through the lens of the Plan of Salvation, but the gospel of 1 Corinthians 15 processes the gospel through the lens of Israel's Story, finding its resting place in Jesus Christ. In doing this Gilbert has omitted fundamental layers of the gospel."

This is dead on--which is why I would never give Gilbert's book to a non-believer. He criticizes what he calls the "soterian" gospel model, writing:

"When the plan gets separated from the story, the plan almost always becomes abstract, propositional, logical, rational, and philosophical and, most importantly, de-storified and unbiblical. When we separate the Plan of Salvation from the story, we cut ourselves off the story that identifies us and tells our past and tells our future. We separate ourselves from Jesus and turn the Christian faith into a System of Salvation."

One of the most helpful arguments he makes, is to push his readers back to the four gospels. It is there that we ought to work to seek to understand what the gospel is. The four books were named "The Gospel According to ..." for a reason.

All this being said, the setup is great--he really seems to understand what is missing in our "plan of salvation" culture. What is missing is the back story--the Old Testament. But here is the greatest weakness of the book, he doesn't do much to explain that back story. What little he says, is much too brief and flat.

Because he does so little to develop the story that Jesus completes, the rest of the book is a bit hollow. Much more could have been said and developed than was, and this is the most glaring weakness of the book.

So this is a better book than "What is the Gospel?" but I'm still looking for a book that really articulates the breadth of the gospel in a satisfactory way.

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## **Robert Martin says**

Every now and then, someone comes along and writes a book that turns upside down all our thinking about what Christianity is all about and what we're supposed to be doing in the meantime. Some folks have said that Brian McLaren's books "Generous Orthodoxy" or "A New Kind of Christian" were such a book. Those books, however, only asked a lot of questions and really didn't put forward many answers. There was no roadmap, really, of how to move forward from the questioning that is so prevalent in post-modernist/post-Christendom thinking and discussions. Even the missional conversation has spent a lot of time asking questions.

McKnight has hit a home run with this one. There is so much talk among Christian circles about what we're supposed to do next, how do we change our churches, how do we do these different things. But no one, until now, has taken us back to the beginning of the whole story and said, "We must start here". McKnight has



done so. All our other conversations about what "church" should look like, what Christians should be doing, what the mission of God is" spend time looking at the effects of the gospel. McKnight takes us to what the REAL gospel is and sets aside all sorts of bad assumptions and bad ideas to take us to the heart of the problem. Hints of this were in the "Jesus Creed" but I think, as a starting point moving forward for Western Christianity, "The King Jesus Gospel" is, by far, the best book for grounding us firmly in who Jesus is and what it means for our lives.

Read it.

Read my blog at Abnormal Anabaptist for a more detailed review.

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### **Laura says**

This book happens to be written by my dad, so you should read it! :)

I like how he concludes the book, with C.S. Lewis' description of Aslan (Jesus):

Watch the Lion roam.

Watch the Lion die on the Stone Table.

Watch the Stone Table crack with new creation powers.

Listen to the Lion's Roar.

Trust the Lion.

Love the Lion.

Live for the Lion.

This sums up our gospel as Christians, the King Jesus Gospel.

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### **Brett says**

Defining the gospel has become a battleground between warring theologies. Is the gospel primarily about justification by faith, the kingdom of God, or the restoration of all things? McKnight's offering here is an important (game changing?) contribution to the discussion. McKnight begins at First Corinthians 15 and fleshes out the contours of the gospel: The story of Israel (shorthand for God's self-revelation throughout the OT) brought to completion in the story of Jesus. This is the gospel that Paul preached, and Peter (McKnight walks us through their "gospel" in Acts). In fact, this is the gospel that Jesus preached: Himself – and ultimately His own death and resurrection – as the fulfillment of God's work in Israel. McKnight calls to repentance the contemporary church, which often sees the gospel only in terms of salvation (four spiritual laws). This truncates a rightful understanding of God's work in history. McKnight's contribution to the gospel debate is a must-read. A+

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### **Steve says**

If you have an interest in Christian Theology I recommend this read. I'm down for listening to any New Testament Scholar who has points as to what we're doing wrong as Christians and in particular Christians here in America. His focus though is in 'revisiting' the apostolic Gospel (which is/should be our Gospel as well) and how the word Gospel itself is often confused today which can potentially make the term more

about ourselves than about Jesus. This, he claims leads to a 'salvation culture' as opposed to a 'Gospel culture.' Good and important read.

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## **Benjamin says**

I had heard some rave reviews of this book, so thought I'd give it a chance. However, since I was already familiar with some of the basic ideas in it, my expectations were not overly high. The problem McKnight proposes to tackle is truly an important one: how to see those in churches become disciples. While the discussion is worthy, I don't believe that his answer really holds water.

In the introduction, the author makes this statement: "Evangelicals have the same struggle of moving the "decided" into becoming the "discipled", because they've created a smug salvation culture, where the obsession is making the right decision, so we can cross the threshold from the unsaved to the saved, the "decided". A gospel culture though encompasses it all and leads the members into the "discipled" because it equates the former with the latter." McKnight spends lots of time bashing a "soterian" culture that emphasizes a status-change (aka, being born again) as the problem behind the lack of discipleship in the church. It took me a second and third glance to pick up on what the former quote actually implies: the decided ARE the discipled, which means only the discipled can be considered the decided (aka, Christians). Now, at a later point in the book he says that "Initial faith and discipleship are two dimensions of the same response." This later statement at least allows for the understanding that initial faith in Christ begins the process of discipleship rather than equating some attained level of discipleship with being a Christian. To put it more succinctly: birth leads to maturity, but maturity is not a pre-requisite for birth. But while McKnight does seem to give a nod to the idea of being "born again", it is deemphasized to a point where it seems to lose most of its importance.

McKnight seeks to define "Gospel" in his own way as some kind of magical key to overcoming the discipleship crisis. He often repeats that preaching the Gospel is "preaching Jesus as the completion of Israel's story." He makes a lot out of the contiguous story between Israel and Jesus to the point where he says, "Gospel is not driven by the atonement story, but by story of Israel." He then has to do a good deal of stretching to make Paul's sermons in Acts 14 and 17 fit his narrative. These examples of Paul preaching the Gospel without any reference to Israel ought to make it clear that, while Jesus IS the completion of Israel's story, this truth is not necessarily at the "heart" of the Gospel, nor is it necessary to understand the history of Israel to understand the essence of "the Gospel".

I was reminded a number of times as I read of the words of Tim Keller that, "not everything is the Gospel and the Gospel is not everything." If McKnight had simply sought to bring out more of the richness in Jesus' story against the background of Israel and , it would have been helpful enough. However, as "belief in the Gospel" is what the Bible lays out as the condition for salvation, I believe that loading the term with more than it implies is not only inaccurate but potentially dangerous. It follows that, unless one understands the connections with Israel that McKnight lays out, one has not yet believed "the Gospel". He does reference 1 Cor. 15:3-4 a good deal "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..." However, he attempts to drag the "story of Israel" into this simple, apostolic definition via the rest of the chapter (which also doesn't necessarily reference Israel.) Besides this, he also tries to separate "the Gospel" and "the plan of salvation", as if they are two separate things. While certainly the Gospel has layers and applications that are not necessary to understand to be born again, to make them two separate things is untrue to the biblical text: "the Gospel...is the power of God unto salvation for all those who believe." (Rom.

1:16)

The author apparently blames the Protestant Reformation for the shift to a Gospel definition that emphasizes guilt and justification and faith and grace. He instead claims that the first 1,500 years of church history were shaped by a "Gospel culture", and cites the Nicean creed as embodying this. However, at one point he does come clean and says, "I'm not contending that the Gospel culture of the first centuries created an inordinate amount of disciples..." This seems exceedingly odd, as the whole premise of the book is that a "Gospel culture" (as McKnight defines it) is the key to solving our discipleship crisis.

He seems to deemphasize and even knock a focus on atonement and justification throughout. While he does not deal with his views on justification directly in this book, McKnight really looks to NT Wright as a mentor of sorts and espouses His dangerous view of justification which it based in a synergistic way on our own works. Knowing this makes many of his disparaging comments about justification unsurprising.

While he often downplays this aspect of substitutionary atonement, he proposes what is essentially a recapitulation theory of atonement. The problem is that, while substitutionary atonement is certainly not the whole picture, neither is recapitulation. Instead, it would've been nice to see McKnight underscore the importance of both. This is only one of the areas in which the book seems more reactionary than balanced and well thought out.

Despite these cautions, there are certainly a few good challenges in the book, such as a renewed appreciation for the creeds and church history, as well as not focusing on penal substitutionary atonement to the exclusion of other valid theories of atonement. Nevertheless, the attempt to redefine the term "Gospel" as including more than it does makes McKnight's theories potentially dangerous to the unexperienced believer. So, while the problem is valid, the solution is unsatisfactory.

Practical notes:

- I listened to the audible audiobook version and had to pause and rewind a LOT. This was the first and last theology book I will listen to as opposed to reading text. Deep thoughts require time to engage, which the audio format does not allow.
- The book is very repetitive. The author could've fit the points he was making into half the space.

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## John says

Scott McKnight's *The King Jesus Gospel* only came out seven years, but its influence along with the voices of NT Wright and others have been so influential (in ways both direct and indirect) that reading *The King Jesus Gospel* for the first time I was surprised how little of the culture in evangelical circles that McKnight criticizes is still present. This may sound like a criticism or even a backhanded compliment. I really don't intend it to be either. I am both encouraged by how influential McKnight's book has been.

McKnight's central thesis is that evangelicalism has misunderstood the gospel. For evangelicals, the gospel is merely about salvation, not the sweep of the good news brought in Jesus Christ. McKnight criticizes evangelicalism's focus on ushering people through the door of salvation by getting them to agree intellectually with propositional statements such as "I am a sinner and I accept Jesus as my Savior." McKnight critiques evangelicalism's conflating the gospel to a personal story, "'We evangelicals (mistakenly) equate the word gospel with the word salvation. Hence, we are really 'salvationists.' When we

evangelicals see the word gospel, our instinct is to think (personal) ‘salvation.’ We are wired this way. But these two words don’t mean the same thing...” It is not that McKnight disagrees with these propositions, he just thinks that they are too thin a version of Christianity that has led to the state of spiritual immaturity in the American church.

The good news of Jesus Christ cannot be summed up in a simple propositional statement. Instead, McKnight says, “We need to go back to the Bible to find the original gospel.” The good news is, rather, the life of Jesus Christ that is lived out with the backdrop of God’s covenant with Israel. As such, Jesus comes not just as our Savior, but as Messiah – the one who completes Israel’s story and ushers in a new Kingdom.

McKnight sweeps us through the New Testament, from Paul’s proclamation of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, to the presentations of the gospel in Acts (Stephen and Peter’s sermons, for instance) and he makes a convincing argument that our own gospel presentations are a far cry from the biblical proclamations of the gospel.

I recognize that we all inhabit different worlds, but in my corner of evangelicalism, I think we would all nod our heads in agreement with this basic argument. “Four Spiritual Law” evangelism and evangelicalism is all but dead in my corner of the world. We all agree not with the diagnosis but with the cure when McKnight says, “Most of evangelism today is obsessed with getting someone to make a decision; the apostles, however, were obsessed with making disciples.” That speaks to the power of the corrective voices McKnight and others have brought to the church.

The benefits of this gospel are multifold: 1) this is a gospel that aligns with the gospel as we see it in the New Testament witness; 2) this is a gospel that speaks of the necessity for the entirety of Scripture and helps us make sense of the shape of redemptive history (consider the recent controversy involving Andy Stanley in light of McKnight’s statement: “One reason why so many Christians today don’t know the Old Testament is because their ‘gospel’ doesn’t even need it.”); 3) this is a gospel that speaks to whole of our lives and not just to intellectual assent; 4) because of the Kingdom-nature of the gospel, this is a gospel that can engage a host of cultural issues.

It is hard to mentally transport myself back to 2011 and consider what the state of the church was at that time, but I have a sense that evangelicalism was already moving well down this path when McKnight published his book. There are multiple times throughout the book that it seems to me that McKnight goes after a strawman and not the real evangelicalism. At his best, he is engaging Greg Gilbert and his book *What is the Gospel?* When he is strawmanning evangelicalism, he is putting his college students in as stand-ins for understanding the state of evangelicalism. Those attacks feel a bit hollow.

Furthermore, there are times when McKnight’s gospel, ironically, becomes too rigid. McKnight’s rejection of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus or the plan of salvation, for instance, are understandable on the one hand, but can’t make sense of the way in which parts of the gospel can stand in for the whole at times. Jesus, for instance, several times merely tells potential disciples to “Follow me.” And Paul, after beginning the first two chapters of Galatians with no less than nine references to “the gospel” (if there is any letter about the gospel, this is surely it!) finally gives a shorthand of the gospel as a propositional statement: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:15-16). This seems like it falls right into McKnight’s harsh critique of a gospel presentation where “...the plan gets separated from the story, the plan almost always becomes abstract, propositional, logical, rational, and philosophical, and most importantly, de-storified and unbiblical. We separate ourselves from Jesus and turn

the Christian faith into a System of salvation.”

While I’m in agreement with the sweep of McKnight’s The King Jesus Gospel, then, I am concerned by the rigidity of it, at times. Despite all the good work McKnight does to help us make sure that the gospel is grounded in Scripture, it seems as though his own definition of the gospel isn’t quite flexible to encompass a full biblical understanding. For more on this, specifically relating to justification and atonement, I would point you to Trevin Wax’s excellent review on The Gospel Coalition.

I’m really grateful not just for McKnight’s The King Jesus Gospel, but for the powerful impact it has had. I am truly indebted to McKnight and hope our churches more and more become places where the full gospel is preached and lived out.

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### **Jeff Bettger says**

WOW! This is the book every Christocentric Evangelical Theologian should begin with. We so often forget that the life, death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus Christ has more significance than our "Personal Salvation". This book is a great reminder of an active living, loving God who is reconciling all things to Himself, and ruling over all creation. Christ is the fulfillment of scripture, and that is bigger than we generally preach. As a pastor at a mega-church, and one who sees many "Salvations", and "baptisms" every year this was a book that inspired and excited me to preach the full Gospel message to those whom I get to disciple, teach, and pour into. Substitutionary atonement is a major piece of the work Christ has done, but there is so much more, and the scope of That work He did is infinitely larger than my "Personal Salvation". I am so thankful that Scot took the time to articulate this with love, tact, and keeping Jesus as the center point of the conversation.

I recommend this book to any one in ministry who needs to be refreshed by the Gospel message. Which is everyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ.

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### **Brad says**

One of the things I love about the holidays is a little extra time to read. I've been really enjoying that this season, as I'm now posting my second review in three days, this time moving from the world of fiction to Christian Ministry/Theology with Scot McKnight's The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited.

I'll cut right to the chase: Over on GoodReads, I gave this 5 out of 5 stars without thinking twice. It's one of the best books I've ever read. I absolutely loved it.

McKnight explores the reality that we live in a soterian culture, where the word "gospel" has simply come to mean "the plan of salvation." McKnight eloquently and convincingly tells why the gospel is so much more than this, especially focusing on the story of Israel and how Jesus is the culmination (or, perhaps better said, the fulfillment) of that story. It is an essential reminder for every American Christian, in my opinion.

One final note: On pages 148-153, in a section called "The Gospel Sketched," McKnight beautifully summarizes the story of Israel (which, in case you missed the point, is our story as Christ-followers). If you don't do anything else with this book, at least go to the bookstore and read this section. (But I really, really strongly recommend you just buy it and read the whole thing.)

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