In *Hope for a Tender Sprig*, Mathew H. Patton examines the character of Jehoiachin in the canon of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, and argues that he “is an important linking figure in salvation history, embodying both the failure and the hopes of the Davidic monarchy” (198). This work, a revision of his 2014 doctoral dissertation from Wheaton College, is a self-proclaimed work of biblical theology focused on a particular character. One of the key theses of this book is that in the canon of Christian Scripture Jehoiachin is important disproportionate to the brevity of his reign. This is because of his unique position of one who straddles exile and return, who underwent an “ameliorated exile,” as Patton terms it.

The book begins with an introductory chapter that offers a brief review of research and a few comments about the author’s method. Interestingly, Patton reserves discussion of his approach to biblical theology for the concluding chapter. The second chapter offers some historical background on issues that will come up in the later chapters examining the biblical text. Issues such as Babylonian foreign policy, the title of *gôbirâ*, the Judean exiles in Babylonia, Mesopotamian imprisonment practices, and what the king’s table may have represented are discussed. These background issues help ground some of the discussion that follows.
The bulk of the book is found in chapters 3–6. These chapters discuss the references to and significance of Jehoiachin in 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Persian period texts, respectively. Each of these chapters are substantial engagements with the biblical text and are full of rich exegetical insights.

In chapter 3, Patton enters into the classic debate as exemplified in Noth and von Rad concerning whether the reference to Jehoiachin’s release contains any element of hope. The discussion of the presentation of Jehoiachin and his release is nuanced and helpful. For example, while Patton notes the significance of changing clothes as a symbol of changing status in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near East, he also notes that the language used to describe Jehoiachin’s new status, as one who is sitting on a “seat” (kissē) above other seats, cannot but remind the reader that he is not sitting on the throne (kissē) of David. Beyond insightful textual comments, a substantial part of this chapter analyzes Jehoiachin by means of various groups of analogous characters. The first group of narrative analogies consists of Hezekiah, Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and Ishmael. By analyzing the character of Jehoiachin against these other kings, whom Patton describes as “anti-patterns to Jehoiachin,” we see that “Jehoiachin’s rehabilitation demonstrates that if one accepts foreign rule, it is possible to enjoy some prosperity even while under the curse of exile” (36). Another interesting narrative analogy is given in comparing Jehoiachin to Solomon. Jehoiachin, Patton argues, “represents the complete stripping of Solomon’s glory. Everything that made Solomon glorious is either missing from Jehoiachin (for example, riches, sovereignty, temple) or present in an ironic way (for example, throne, food)” (38). The chapter finally turns to analyzing Jehoiachin in Kings by examining themes that pertain to him. These are the promise to David and expectations of national restoration. Patton’s conclusion is that the final pericope of the book of Kings about Jehoiachin’s release offers a qualified positive outlook, one that does highlight the dilemma of exile but also holds out hope for a new phase of Israel’s history. This qualified positive outlook on the conclusion of Kings strikes me as an accurate and helpful view of what is portrayed in the text, one that is not reading too much positivity into the moment of exile but not ignoring the positive signals that are there.

Chapter 4 turns to an analysis of Jehoiachin in the book of Jeremiah. In Patton’s analysis, he discusses the textual problem of Jeremiah and makes a case for utilizing the MT of Jeremiah. The analysis in this chapter utilizes a holistic “with the grain” hermeneutic (54) instead of the critical approach often found in studies of Jeremiah. The issue for understanding the biblical theological importance of Jehoiachin in Jeremiah is the seemingly pervasive negative view that the book takes toward Jehoiachin, seen most clearly in the dual pronouncements in Jer 22:24–30. In assessing this, Patton reiterates one of the key arguments of the present book, that “the divine oath to David can never be repealed, while the blessings promised to David (for example, the throne) can be
temporarily revoked” (66). He points out that, despite the prevalence of a negative outlook for Jehoiachin, there may be hints of hope for Jehoiachin. Patton sees these in Jer 27:16–28:17, in the restoration hope for David in 23:18 and 33:14–16, and in the narration of the death of Jehoiachin in 52:31–34. His basic conclusion is that the general rhetoric of the book of Jeremiah fits the complex set of material that is found in relation to Jehoiachin. He argues that “Jeremiah’s theme of uprooting and planting provides the basic paradigm for organizing the material about Jehoiachin (1:10)” (88).

Patton then turns in chapter 5 to an examination of Jehoiachin in Ezekiel. Contrary to some, Patton finds that Jehoiachin plays an important role in Ezekiel as providing “a link from the present humiliation of exile to the future hope of restoration” (90–91). The aphorism in Ezek 21:26[31] (and 17:24), “Exalt the low and bring low the exalted,” will be thematic for Patton’s understanding of the role Jehoiachin plays in Ezekiel. Patton argues that Ezekiel portrays Jehoiachin as the lowly one. His exile is the temporal reference point for the whole book (Ezek 1:1–3) and is probably in focus in texts about exile such as 17:3–4, 12, and 19:5–9. He is, in Patton’s words “a passive recipient of judgment” (116). However, he sees hope for Jehoiachin in 17:22–24, 34:23–24, 37:21–28 and the Nasi’ in Ezek 40–48. The analysis of these texts in Ezekiel is detailed and helpful, but it is not always clear in these discussions whether Jehoiachin is actually a significant element of these texts or whether it is the Davidides more generally.

Chapters 6 and 7 are a bit briefer. Chapter 6 looks at Jehoiachin in “Persian period” texts, which Patton prefers to the label “postexilic.” Chapter 7 looks at Jehoiachin in Second Temple texts. Patton finds the chronicler’s brief treatment of Jehoiachin “optimistic.” The allusions to Jehoiachin that he finds in Hag 2:20–23 and Zech 6:9–15 resonate with Patton’s case that Jehoiachin’s release functions as a sign of “ameliorated exile.” Chapter 7 looks at a range of texts such as the Septuagint version of some texts already examined, as well as Second Temple texts such as 1 Esdras, 1–2 Baruch, and Josephus. It is not entirely clear what the purpose of this chapter is, since Patton states in the introduction that his analysis is of canonical texts. Thus these texts seem present largely for academic interest but do not clearly contribute to his thesis.

We come now to the penultimate chapter, where Patton seeks to find any importance for Jehoiachin in the New Testament. The material to work with is sparse and limited mostly to references in the genealogy Matthew’s genealogy, the lack of reference in Luke’s genealogy, and possibly in the parable of the mustard seed. His conclusion is that the lack of references to Jehoiachin shows that “he was not a major point of reflection” (178). Nevertheless, especially in the case of Jehoiachin’s double reference in Matthew’s genealogy on either side of the exile, Patton sees some significance for Jehoiachin in his association with exile.

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The final chapter of the book is where Patton attempts to bring these various threads on Jehoiachin together. He proposes a particular model of biblical theology, which he describes as a “salvation-historical approach.” The proposal to analyze this data from the perspective of a salvation-historical approach to biblical theology sounds very much like he intends to enter into the methodological taxonomy of biblical theology offered by Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett (Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012]). However, that book is nowhere mentioned. Patton’s approach often sounds very similar to the approach that Klink and Lockett describe as a “history of redemption” approach. This seems to be what Patton intends. However, in his methodological discussion he interacts mostly with scholars who would probably not endorse this approach. Furthermore, the emphasis on diachrony (by which he means the unfolding of revelation in the chronology of the Bible) in his method does not seem to reflect his actual analysis as much. In fact, if he had engaged with Klink and Lockett’s taxonomy of biblical theology, his analysis would seem to fit the “canonical approach” better than the “salvation-history” approach that Patton suggests. All this means that his discussion of method was not as clear as it could have been, and it remains unclear to me what is gained by the diachronic aspect of his study. The actual analysis, to its credit, seems much more dialogical and canonical than diachronic.

Some key takeaways that Patton offers include his category of ameliorated exile, his thesis that Jehoiachin functions as a key linking figure “embodying both the failure and the hopes of the Davidic monarchy” (194), and his argument that Jehoiachin begins to become something of a type, which, in New Testament perspective, becomes a type of Jesus. “Jehoiachin,” he says, “is a type of Christ based on a close correspondence between their stories.” (197).

In summary, this is a worthy attempt at a constructive biblical theology focused on the figure and theme of Jehoiachin. Patton has certainly convinced me that the figure of Jehoiachin in the biblical text is more significant than often thought. Furthermore, by paying close attention to references and allusions to Jehoiachin, Patton offers a unique look into the theme of exile in biblical literature. Patton has at times overstates his case for the importance of Jehoiachin specifically as opposed to the Davidides more generally. Furthermore, his discussion of method also does not as clearly enter into the discussion about method in biblical theology as one might like. However, despite these few limitations, this remains a significant work and a unique one in its focus on the figure of Jehoiachin. Readers interested in a biblical theology of exile or in seeing how a biblical character may take on significant reverberations throughout the biblical text will find this work interesting and insightful.