THE MASTER’S SEMINARY JOURNAL

CONTENTS

Editorial ........................................................... 161–166
Richard L. Mayhue

The Kingdom of God: An Introduction ......................... 167–171
Richard L. Mayhue

The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament .................... 173–192
William D. Barrick

F. David Farnell

The Mediatorial Kingdom and Salvation ....................... 209–223
Keith Essex

The Kingdom of God and the Millennium ...................... 225–254
Michael J. Vlach

The Kingdom of God and the Eternal State ..................... 255–274
Nathan Busenitz

Bibliography of Works on the Kingdom of God ............... 275–281
Dennis M. Swanson

Reviews .............................................................. 283–320

William D. Barrick
Ecclesiastes: The Philippians of the Old Testament ........... 283–284
Reviewed by Bryan Murphy

Darrell L. Bock
Who is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith .... 285–287
Reviewed by F. David Farnell

Daniel Boyarin
The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ .......... 288–289
Reviewed by William Varner

Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle
Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity and the Things We Made Up ...... 289–291
Reviewed by Matt Waymeyer
Paul Copan  
*Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God*  
292–295  
Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead

Peter H. Davids  
*The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*  
295–296  
Reviewed by Dennis A. Hutchison

Wayne C. Grudem, John Collins, Thomas R. Schreiner, eds.  
*Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible: A Guide to Reading the Bible Well*  
297–298  
Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti

James M. Houston and Michael Parker  
*A Vision for the Aging Church*  
299–301  
Reviewed by Rick McLean

Ian Ker  
*G.K. Chesterton: A Biography*  
301–304  
Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson

Arie C. Leder  
*Waiting for the Land: The Story Line of the Pentateuch*  
304–306  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick

Robert Letham  
*Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology*  
306–307  
Reviewed by Andy Snider

Robert L. Plummer, ed.  
*Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism*  
307–310  
Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead

Eric D. Reymond  
*New Idioms Within Old: Poetry and Parallelism in the Non Masoretic Poems of 11Q5 (=11QPs*)  
311  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick

Randall Price  
*Rose Guide to the Temple*  
312–313  
Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris

Allen P. Ross  
*A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1–41)*  
313–315  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick
Hugh Ross
*Hidden Treasures in the Book of Job* .......................... 315–318
Reviewed by William D. Barrick

Diana Lynn Severance
*Feminine Threads: Women in the Tapestry of Christian History* ...... 318–320
Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead

William Varner
*Awake O Harp: A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* .............. 320
Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue
EDITORIAL

HOW MUCH WILL GOD FORGIVE?

Mary’s stale marriage dissatisfied her. Though she had no biblical grounds for divorce, and other Christians had counseled her against it, she decided to end the marriage. She rejected every attempt to redirect her path according to God’s clear will.

Following the pattern of Scripture (Matt 18:15–17), the elders of her church patiently and lovingly attempted to convince Mary to reverse her decision. But ultimately we had to dismiss her from the congregation. We wondered, Would Mary ever repent of her sin and return?

Over the years, I have met many people like Mary—Christians who rebel against God’s will. But I have also met others who were truly repentant and desperate to be restored. “Dick,” they say, “I’ve committed the unpardonable sin. What do I do now?” Or, “I can’t forgive myself—how could God forgive me?” Sometimes they refer to Scripture passages that seem to put them outside God’s forgiveness (Mark 3:29; Heb 6:4–6; 10:26, 27).

Ironically, some people run from God’s forgiveness because they refuse to part with their sin. Yet other people desperately need forgiveness, but doubt God will give it.

Some also question the forgiveness that God has already provided others. I’ve heard many objections to Scripture passages about forgiveness, particularly at men’s retreats, when I explain King David’s experience of pardon and restoration. Though David broke all of the Ten Commandments, the Bible refers to him as “a man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22).

No Cover-up

The Bible does not cover up the sin of God’s people. Moses dishonored God by his disobedience (Deut 32:50, 51). Nadab and Abihu profaned the tabernacle service (Lev 10:1, 2). Uzziah made an unauthorized sacrifice (2 Chron 26:16–21).

Some of them died immediately for their transgressions; others remained a while before God’s judgment. Still others lived a full life by God’s mercy. But none chronicled the details of their sin and God’s response as thoroughly as King David did after his transgression with Bathsheba.

David’s diary in Psalm 51 presents his spiritual spill and subsequent recovery. His words will assist others who have gravely sinned, but whom God has sovereignly and mercifully allowed to live. Psalm 51 answers the question, “What if this happens to me?”

**The Scope of Sin**

David’s sin (2 Sam 11, 12) occurred during a period of peace. His capital of Jerusalem was safe from attack, and the tabernacle now resided on God’s mountain. Tragically, David’s attention diverted from God’s agenda. While his troops were out securing the kingdom, he stayed home and conquered a woman’s heart.

The sin of adultery alone deserved the death penalty (Lev 20:10). But David directly violated at least three other of the Ten Commandments. He coveted his neighbor’s wife (2 Sam 11:2, 3), he tried to cover his sin with a lie (vv. 6–13), and then he arranged for Uriah’s murder (vv. 14, 15).

In addition, David stole Bathsheba’s virtue, dishonored his parents, profaned the Sabbath with unholy worship, defamed God’s sacred name, made women his idol, and substituted them for God. He represents the classic case of breaking the law in one point and thus violating it all (James 2:10). No wonder the divine commentary reads, “But the thing David had done displeased the Lord” (2 Sam 11:27). It’s hard to imagine any believer sinning worse than David.

Psalm 51 outlines David’s spiritual rehabilitation after an apparently hopeless situation. He first confessed his sin before God – an open repentance (vv. 1–6). He then prayed for God’s restoration (vv. 7–12). Finally, he made a recommitment, praying that God would use him as before (vv. 13–19). If you are facing similar circumstances, you should follow the same course of action.

**Genuine Repentance**

David’s testimony illustrates eight characteristics that distinguish true repentance from selfish regret:

— He openly admitted his sin. When Nathan the prophet confronted him, David immediately responded, “I have sinned against the Lord” (2 Sam 12:13).
— His guilt drove him to cry out for God’s mercy and cleansing. “Have mercy on me, O God … Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps 51:1, 2).
— He openly acknowledged his unrighteous disposition. “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me ... Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (v. 3, 5).
— He understood his sin as rebellion against God. “Against you, you only, have I sinned” (v. 4a).
— He submitted to God’s standards of moral right and wrong. “(I have) done what is evil in your sight” (v. 4b).
— He willingly accepted whatever punishment God deemed just. “You are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (v. 4c).
— He expressed a desire for God’s truth. “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (v. 6).
— He publicly acknowledged his battle with sin to warn others who might also walk in the same unholy way. “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you” (v. 13).

Perhaps David’s Psalm 51 experience led to his memorable prayer of Psalm 139: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (vv. 23, 24).

Years ago, shortly after my conversion as an adult, I had to confront my parents about another kind of sin. They were believers, but actively involved in a congregation that rejected the authority of Scripture. In addition, rather than teaching the true gospel of salvation, the church emphasized a “social gospel” of doing good. God has called us to separate ourselves from such false teaching, I explained. He does not want us to be “yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14–18).

My parents could have told me to mind my own spiritual business. Instead, they approached this issue just as David did. They admitted their error and left that church to worship at a Bible-believing fellowship. They immediately experienced God’s forgiveness and were quickly revitalized through their new diet of God’s Word.

A Basis for Hope

Some might be asking, “Was King David a special case, or will God forgive all true believers?” Seven biblical truths convince me that David is the rule, not the exception:

First, forgiveness represents an essential part of God’s own character (Exod 34:7; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:5; 130:4; Dan 9:9).

Second, salvation extends to all sins (Col 2:13; Heb 10:12, 14; 1 John 2:12).

Third, divine forgiveness is full forgiveness. Though earthly consequences may remain, the divine pardon is complete. God treads our sins underfoot and casts them all into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19). He throws them behind His back (Isa 38:17). He remembers them no more (Jer 31:34). He removes them as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). He completely cleanses us from the stain of our sins (Isa 1:18).
Fourth, Jesus Christ’s high priestly work as our heavenly advocate never fails (Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

Fifth, the Lord designed confession as the means of receiving forgiveness (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9).

Sixth, God’s plan to complete us in Christ anticipates the forgiveness of sin (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:13).

Finally, God’s forgiveness of believers models the complete forgiveness we are to give one another (Matt 18:21–35; Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).

Horatio Spafford beautifully captured the truth of forgiveness in his time–honored hymn, “It Is Well With My Soul”:

My sin – O, the bliss of this glorious thought,
My sin – not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Blessings Restored

In Revelation 2, Christ confronted the Ephesians over leaving their first love. “Remember the height from which you have fallen!” He said, “Repent and do the things you did at first” (v. 5).

The alternative? “If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place” (v.5). Jesus’ message could not have been clearer – repent and I will continue in your presence. Or, continue to sin and I will remove your ministry.

This pattern for Ephesus repeats the process that David followed 1,000 years earlier. Because of its timeless nature, the same blueprint remains valid today.

It’s amazing how much that David gave up, in light of how little he gained by his sin. David, therefore, prayed that God would restore the blessings (not the reality) of his salvation that he had forfeited during his spree of unconfessed sin (Ps 51:7–12):

— Personal holiness. “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow” (v. 7).
— Emotional peace. “Let me hear joy and gladness” (v. 7).
— Physical health. “Let the bones you have crushed rejoice” (v. 8b).
— Intimacy with God. “Hide your face from my sins” (v. 9a).
— Spiritual integrity. “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me’” (v. 10).
— Assurance. “Do not cast me from your presence” (v. 11a).
— Power. “Or take your Holy Spirit from me” (v. 11b).
— Sustaining grace. “Grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” (v. 12b).

After his repentance and revival, the king recommitted himself to five spiritual basics that had characterized his life before the sin: Personal testimony (v. 13), the
song of salvation (51:14), praises to the Savior (51:15), true worship (vv. 16, 17), and prayer for Israel (vv. 18, 19).

**Facing the Consequences**

To say that Christians cannot sin is to misunderstand our unperfected nature, even after salvation begins. Yet, to think that Christians can habitually sin without consequence equally misunderstands the nature and extent of salvation. Both distort the true picture of God’s forgiveness.

To assert that God will not forgive and restore a repentant Christian is to miss the incredible scope of God’s grace and mercy. On the other hand, to assume that God will overlook patterns of unchecked, unconfessed sin in a believer’s life badly misunderstands God’s holiness and purity.

Ananias and Sapphira testify to the awful price paid for lying and hypocrisy (Acts 5:1–11). Because of abuses of the Lord’s Supper, the Corinthians were weak, sick, and some even died (1 Cor 11:29, 30). John warns that sinful patterns can lead to death (1 John 5:16). James urges confession of sin to avoid God’s chastisement through severe illness (James 5:14–20). Paul even alerted the Corinthians, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves” (2 Cor 13:5).

Our Lord designed church discipline to bring about restoration through repentance and forgiveness (Matt 18:15, 16). But those who refuse to deal with their sin should be treated as an unbeliever—because they are acting like an unbeliever in not seeking God’s forgiveness (v. 17).

Mary, the woman I mentioned in the beginning, disobediently divorced her husband. After several months, however, the pain of her sin became greater than its pleasure. When she could no longer bear broken fellowship with the Lord and other believers, she repented and returned to her husband, asking forgiveness of the Lord and him. She also came to the next elders’ meeting to thank us for loving her enough to discipline her sin.

Through repentance, Mary experienced full forgiveness from the Lord, her husband, and the church. She received full restoration to the relationships previously broken by sin.

**Reaffirmed by God**

David’s example shows that any repentant Christian can be forgiven. Did God accept David’s repentance as genuine? Did He answer David’s plea for restoration: Did He respond to David’s prayer of recommitment? Consider God’s affirmation: “I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do” (Acts 13:22). Because these words were repeated a millennium after David’s sin, we can be assured that God brought spiritual recovery to his life.

David certainly had no doubts about his forgiveness from God. Recall his testimony in Ps 32:1–5:
Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

The Starting Point

No sin looms so great that God cannot forgive it. But all sin must be dealt with on God’s terms. God’s forgiveness always begins with true repentance.

Several years ago, a student at The Master’s Seminary tragically embezzled a sizable sum of money. When caught in his sin, he confessed and asked the Lord and the administration to forgive him. He genuinely repented, including total restitution of the funds he illegally obtained. We assured him of God’s forgiveness and ours.

Because the student no longer fulfilled the biblical requirement of blamelessness for church leaders (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6, 7), he was not allowed to continue at the seminary. I have, however, encouraged him in his new pursuits as a forgiven Christian.

Bernard of Clairvaux, in “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” brilliantly captured the spirit of God’s forgiveness for true believers. If need be make it your theme song.

_O hope of every contrite heart,_
_O joy of all the meek,_
_To those who fall, how kind Thou art!_  
_How good to those who seek!

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD: AN INTRODUCTION

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One result of America’s national, inceptive history (i.e., disdaining the role of Britain’s king), is that the scriptural “Kingdom of God” concept has at times been difficult to grasp and explain. An inductive study of this topic in the Bible leads to three macro-conclusions. First, the theme pervades God’s Word from Genesis to Revelation. Second, the motif appears quite intricate, presenting at times perspectives which at first glance seem to be contradictory. Third, the “Kingdom of God” represents the core subject of Scripture. As a result, the grand idea of God’s kingdom in Scripture has become dominant in the church’s hymn history.

* * * * *

Christians have traditionally had particular difficulty understanding and appreciating the biblical teaching on God’s kingship. Generally speaking, many problems arise from differing eschatological views. But especially for Americans, national history adds a cultural hurdle also, in that they successfully rebelled against the British monarch and have never returned to imperial rule as a form of governance.

The Declaration of Independence proved to be clear in its message at the time of ratification (1776) and remains so to this day. A small sample from this landmark document serves to remind the reader of the forefathers’ adamant intent and natural bias against kingship in general.

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world . . . .
We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States; that they are Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown . . . .

As a result, many treatments of the “Kingdom of God” tend to deliver a liberal, non-biblical, social understanding/explanation, or the theme proves woefully inadequate in its treatment. However, when one surveys Scripture, the “Kingdom of God” idea comes across as dominating, although at times perplexing.

Thus, this journal issue intends to provide a macro-view of this grand theme, i.e., to see the most basic, clearest, and primary ideas in Scripture as a whole relating to the Kingdom of God. To put it another way, the following discussion purposes to see more of the entire forest than of the individual trees. This *Master’s Seminary Journal* issue should therefore be considered a primer, not an exhaustive or unabridged effort.

**The Kingdom of God is Captivating**

The broad theme “king, kingdom” (human and divine) appears throughout the Bible. With the exceptions of Leviticus, Ruth, and Joel, the OT explicitly includes various mentions in 36 of its 39 books. Except for Philippians, Titus, Philemon, 1, 2, and 3 John, the NT directly mentions the subject in 21 of its 27 books. All in all, 57 of the 66 biblical books (86 percent) include the kingdom theme.

The OT words for “king,” “kingdom,” “reign,” and “throne” appear over 3,000 times and 160 times in the NT. The first OT mention appears in Gen 10:10 and the last in Mal 1:14. The initial appearance in the NT comes at Matt 2:2 and the last in Rev 22:1, 3, 5.

“Kingdom of God” as an exact expression does not appear in the OT. The two NT phrases “Kingdom of Heaven” (used only by Matthew) and “Kingdom of God” are used interchangeably by Matthew (19:23–24) while “Kingdom of God” appears in parallel passages where Matthew used “Kingdom of Heaven” (cf. Matt 13:11 with Luke 8:10).

Interestingly, Jesus never precisely defined “Kingdom of Heaven/God” in the gospels, although He often illustrated it (Matt 13:19, 24, 44, 45, 47, 52). Surprisingly, no one ever asked Christ for a definition. It can only be assumed that

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2 In preparing this article, I surveyed 17 significant biblically-conservative theologies varying in writing dates from 1679 to 2005. With some exceptions, their treatments of this immensely important biblical theme were disproportionately short by comparison to the vast biblical database.
they at least thought they understood the basic idea from the OT, even if their ideas were mistaken.

Most telling, perhaps, is the plethora of “King” titles given to Christ in the New Testament.

[bullet_list]
- King of Israel (John 1:49; 12:13)
- King of the Jews (John 18:39; 19:3, 19, 21)
- King of kings (1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16)
- King eternal, immortal, invisible (1 Tim 1:17)
- King of the nations (Rev 15:3)

His reign is said to be forever and ever (Rev 11:15; 22:5).

**The Kingdom of God is Complex**

A biblical study of God’s kingdom would lead one to conclude that it is variegated, multifaceted, multidimensional, multifocal, multifactorial, and multifarious. It certainly could not be considered as monolithic in character.

To illustrate this point, examine the following contrasts when considering various biblical descriptions of God’s Kingdom.3

1. Certain passages present the kingdom as something which has always existed (Pss 10:16; 145:11–13), yet elsewhere it seems to have a definite historical beginning (Dan 2:44).
2. The kingdom is described as universal in scope (Ps 103:19), but it is also revealed as a local rule on earth (Isa 24:23).
3. Sometimes the kingdom is pictured as the direct rule of God (Pss 22:28; 59:13), at other times, it appears as the rule of God through a mediator (Ps 2:4–6; Dan 4:17, 25).
4. The Bible describes the kingdom as entirely future (Zech 14:9; Matt 6:10), while in other places, the kingdom is portrayed as a current reality (Ps 29:10; Dan 4:3).
5. The Kingdom of God is set forth as God’s sovereign, unconditional rule (Dan 4:3, 34–35), on the other hand, it appears to be based on a covenant between God and man (Ps 89:27–29).
6. God’s kingdom is said to be everlasting (Dan 4:3), but God will bring an end to part of His kingdom (Hos 1:4).
7. The kingdom is not eating and drinking (Rom 14:17), nor can it be inherited by flesh and blood (1 Cor 15:50), yet the kingdom is at times spoken of in earthly, tangible senses (Pss 2:4–6; 89:27–29).
8. The kingdom is said to be among the Jews (Luke 17:21), yet Jesus told his disciples to pray that it would come (Matt 6:11).

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3 The initial five contrasts were put forth by McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 19–20.
10. Children of the kingdom can be cast into hell (Matt 8:12), yet only the righteous shall inherit the kingdom (1 Cor 6:8–10).
11. The earthly domain has been temporarily handed over to Satan (Luke 4:6), yet all the earth is the Lord’s (Ps 24:1).
12. The kingdom is to be for Israel (2 Sam 7:11–13), yet Christ gave it to the nations (Matt 21:43).

**The Kingdom of God is Central**

The idea of God’s kingdom encompasses every age/stage of biblical revelation. For instance,

1. God is King of Eternity (pre-Gen 1, Rev 21–22, post-Rev 22)
2. God is King of Creation (Gen 1–2)
3. God is King of History (Gen 1–Rev 20)
4. God is King of Redemption (Gen 3–Rev 20)
5. God is King of the Earth (Gen 1–Rev 20)
6. God is King of Heaven (pre-Gen 1, Gen 1–Rev 22, post Rev 22)

All “Kingdom of God” passages can be summarized by recognizing several broad aspects. First, there is the Universal Kingdom, which includes the rule of God which has been, is, and forever will be over all that exists in time and space. Second is God’s Mediatorial Kingdom in which He rules on earth through divinely chosen human representatives. Third is the spiritual or redemptive aspect of God’s kingdom which uniquely deals with a person’s salvation and personal relationship with God through Christ. Anytime “kingdom” referring to God’s kingdom appears in Scripture, it could point to any one aspect of the kingdom or several of its parts together. Careful interpretation in context will determine the particulars for a given biblical text.

With these ideas in mind, this writer proposes that the “Kingdom of God” should be seriously considered as the grand, overarching theme of Scripture. A number of noble ideas have been considered in the past, such as redemption, grace, Christ, covenant, and promise, to name a few. In this writer’s view, each possibility explains a part of “God’s kingdom,” but only “God’s kingdom” explains the whole.

From before the beginning until after the end, from the beginning to the end, both in and beyond time and space, God appears as the ultimate King. God is central to and the core of all things eternal and temporal. The “Kingdom of God” convincingly qualifies to be the unifying theme of Scripture.

John Bright succinctly but eloquently stated this as such:

Old Testament and New Testament thus stand together as the two acts of a single drama. Act I points to its conclusion in Act II, and without it the play is an incomplete, unsatisfying thing. But Act II must be read in the light of Act I, else its meaning will be missed. For the play is organically one. The Bible is one book. Had we to give that book a title, we might with justice call it “The
The author would only edit Dr. Bright’s brilliant summary slightly by deleting one word, “Coming.” For God’s kingdom has been, is, and forever more shall be.

The Kingdom of God can be explained in this manner: the divine, eternal Triumvirate literally created a kingdom and two kingdom citizens who were to have dominion over it. But an enemy usurped their rightful allegiance to the king and captured the original kingdom citizens. God intervened with consequential curses which exist to this day. Ever since then, He has been redeeming sinful, rebellious people to be restored as qualified kingdom citizens, both now in a spiritual sense and later in a kingdom-on-earth sense. Finally, the enemy is vanquished forever, as is sin. Thus, Revelation 21–22 describes the final and eternal expression of the Kingdom of God where the eternal Triumvirate restores the kingdom to its original purity with the curse having been removed and the new heaven and the new earth becoming the forever abode of God and His people.

Final Thoughts

The articles that follow look at some of the particular trees that make up the forest of God’s kingdom which has briefly been pictured in this introduction. They emphasize the role of Israel, Messianic promises, the church, salvation, the millennial kingdom, and eternity in this most important of all theological themes—the Kingdom of God.

Certainly, hymns should never be the source of our theology. But through the ages, hymns have illustrated and perpetuated the theology of the church. Significantly, no major theme of Scripture is as frequently and beautifully expressed in the hymns of the church as that of God’s kingdom. What began as proper theology has continued as profound hymnology.

Therefore, one ought ever to pray as our Lord taught His disciples, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt 6:10).

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5 The writer utilized Kenneth Wilson, *A Concordance to the Worshiping Church* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1991) to conclude that approximately 225 hymns out of over 800 (over 25%) were written with an explicit theme of God’s kingdom.
Surrounded by more success, opulence, and pleasure than most people could ever imagine, Solomon hits rock bottom in his miserable existence. Then he begins a spiritual odyssey to return from the quagmire of nothingness in which he flounders—a search for meaning in life. He concedes that his view of life has been bleak and dismal. He looks more closely at God, man, salvation, and future judgment. He learns that from an earthly perspective life appears like nothing but trouble and he finds that life is a gift to be enjoyed from the divine Creator whom people should obey.

The commentary set to which this volume belongs represents a completely revised edition of the Expositor’s Bible Commentary. Each volume includes a number of helpful features including: comprehensive introduction for each biblical book, brief bibliographies, detailed outlines, insightful expositions of passages, overviews of sections of Scripture to provide the big picture of the biblical story, select notes on textual questions and special problems. This volume includes a commentary by Dr. Michael Grisanti, one of the OT professors at TMS.
THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

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God’s kingdom program is a major theme of both the Old Testament and New Testament. Since the New Testament builds upon the literal meaning of the Old Testament message, a thorough study of both testaments is necessary to understand the kingdom. An inductive study of the kingdom, based on sound hermeneutical principles, will show that the Lord’s plan for His kingdom dominates history from the first creation to the new creation. The Old Testament predicts a coming earthly kingdom, a kingdom that will be fulfilled someday through Jesus Christ, the second Adam, and the One who fulfills the covenants of Scripture.

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Introduction

The kingdom of God does not appear as a peripheral topic in Scripture. Both testaments speak of God’s kingdom. Students of Scripture must understand the kingdom in order to properly apply its truths and their implications. Too often the readers of Scripture, and we as dispensationalists in particular, tend to limit the topic of the kingdom of God to a discussion merely of the eschatological and earthly messianic kingdom of one thousand years duration. In the same fashion, the discussion too often addresses the matter of the future land of Israel alone. On the other hand, too many scholars automatically assume that the kingdom of God refers only to greater spiritual realities with reference to salvation and either ignore or deny outright the reality of a literal eschatological and earthly kingdom. In truth, the earthly and eschatological messianic kingdom yet to come is only one part of the program of God. Referring to the overall kingdom program as the universal kingdom and to the outworking of that kingdom through history as the mediatorial kingdom helps in the discussion and development of theological thought.

In any treatment of this topic, we dare not treat the OT any differently than the NT treats it. NT writers took the OT seriously—and literally. So must we. As
The OT concept of the kingdom of God relates directly to God’s sovereignty throughout all the ages. We serve a sovereign God who controls His program throughout history. God’s kingdom program does not commence late in the OT as some form of prophetic movement or as a new theological construct later converted into a spiritualized concept. God began His kingdom program at creation, long before the establishment of an earthly messianic kingdom. As Erich Sauer puts the case, “God is Ruler. He rules over matter. He forms and shapes and moulds it into a well-ordered whole. He is therefore the Lord of all development, the God of history.” The eschatological kingdom brings to completion God’s kingdom program. We habitually give at least lip service to the literal eschatological kingdom whenever we recite the Lord’s Prayer—“Your kingdom come. Your will be done.” On earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

Part of the reason God’s kingdom has not yet come stems from fallen mankind’s consistent antagonism to God’s sovereign purpose for His own earthly kingdom. From ancient times Babylon has served as the chief representative of this rebellion. According to Eugene Merrill, Nimrod (Gen 10:8–10) provided leadership
in a movement to sidetrack the kingdom program of the Lord in favor of one of human creation. The Babel (Babylon) kingdom of God antithesis marks the pages of the sacred text, not only throughout the OT but the NT as well (Isa 47:1–15; 48:14–15; Jer 50–51; Dan 2, 4; Rev 17–18). Babylon epitomizes all the cities and nations of the world that challenge the City of God and His dominion.9

Babylon still opposes God’s kingdom whereby man intends to establish his own kingdom contrary to the one of God’s design. In the Fall, man abdicated his regency in God’s kingdom. After the global flood, Noah failed to exercise his mediatorial role as vice-regent. David, though the recipient of the kingdom promise (2 Sam 7:8–16), falls short of the eschatological kingdom hope. Thus, historically, the glimmers of hope fade and mankind still awaits the regency of the second Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:22, 45, 47), Jesus Christ.

Second, Christ’s prayer echoes and is patterned after the OT prayer of David himself which also focuses on God’s sovereignty in 1 Chron 29:11:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all.

The Lord’s Prayer is kingdom-saturated and kingdom-oriented, and it acts as a reminder to the disciples that because of their fallen state they cannot be the anticipated mediators. Their leadership and their program, their teaching and preaching, and their miracle-working will not establish the mediatorial kingdom. The disciples are not the second Adam.

How can the kingdom of God exist in two different forms? It might help to understand the distinctions by comparing the universal kingdom to God’s omnipresence while taking the eschatological kingdom as comparable to His emphasized, localized residence by which the omnipresent God resides in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud at the Tabernacle or at the Temple—or, His residency within the believer while not residing in the unbeliever. An alternative comparison might consist of the universal church as distinguished from the local church as its immediate manifestation. Yet another analogy exists with the believer being presently a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, but not yet residing in heaven. Therefore, both the universal kingdom and the historical, mediatorial kingdom are distinct entities, wherein the latter is the localized and temporal expression of the former.

Considering the Vocabulary of Kingdom

A brief survey of the Hebrew root mlk (מלך) reveals the distribution of the concept of kingship and kingdom throughout the OT. Forms of this root occur 3,154 times in the Hebrew Bible. The vast majority of uses involve human kings and kingdoms. Soggin’s table in Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament (TLOT) provides the statistics for the verb (347x) as well as the cognate nouns “king”

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9 Ibid., 224.
The interpreter must avoid thinking that this word group comprises the totality of revelation on the concepts of kingship, kingdom, and royalty in the OT. We must consider other Hebrew words like רָדָה (rādâ, “rule”; e.g., Num 24:19; Ps 110:2), מָשַׁל (māšal, “rule”; e.g., Ps 8:7 [Eng. 6]; Zech 6:13), מָכַשׁ (mākṣ, “subjugate/subdue”; e.g., Gen 1:28), סָפַט (šāpaṭ, “judge/govern”; e.g., Obad 21), דִּין (dîn, “judge”; e.g., Ps 9:5 [Eng. 4]), כִּסֵּא (kissēʾ, “throne”; e.g., Isa 6:1; Jer 3:17), שֶׁבֶט (šēbeṭ, “scepter”; e.g., Gen 49:10), and מַטֶּה (maṭṭeh, “rod/scepter”; e.g., Ps 110:2; Jer 48:17), and הֵיכָל (hêkāl, “palace”; e.g., Mic 1:2). Even if we exhaust the vocabulary, some biblical texts that speak obviously of a divine kingdom or divine king do not manifest any of the regular vocabulary. Note how the Song of Moses at the Reed Sea (Exod 15:2–18) makes no specific mention of the expected vocabulary until the final line: “Yahweh reigns (מלֶּק, mlk) forever and ever” (v. 18). Psalm 118 uses no kingdom vocabulary, yet in the NT both Jesus and several of the apostles understand its reference to the “corner stone” to refer to the Messiah’s elevation to kingship over the kingdom of God (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4–8).

The reader will do well to commence this study with the understanding that a kingdom possesses four essential elements: first, a right to rule; second, a rule; third, a realm to be ruled; and, fourth, the exercise of the function of rulership. These defining elements help to maintain an understanding of biblical teaching beyond a mere reference to the right of kingship or limiting it to the person of the King himself.

Promised Potential Fulfilled

One of the major features of an earthly kingdom involves the fulfillment of God’s original creative purposes for mankind. Sometimes we tend to focus so much on Israel that we neglect the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom that apply to all mankind. However, one who commences the study with the first kingdom revelation will soon understand that God’s eschatological kingdom is an outgrowth of His kingdom from creation onward. McClain astutely declares that

if men would understand clearly the future consummation of the Kingdom, they must first understand the Kingdom in history; if they expect to understand the Kingdom of which our Lord spoke, they must first consider

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11 McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 17 gives only three, but includes this right in his “rule with adequate authority.”
what the Old Testament prophets have said about it; if they desire to expound the Book of Revelation, they must begin with the Book of Daniel.12

With mild apologies to McClain, this writer begs to disagree very slightly and to make an adjustment. Biblically, in order to expound either the book of Revelation or the book of Daniel, we must begin with the book of Genesis.

Arie Leder, while expounding upon the story line of the Pentateuch, remarks that “Royal language is a pervasive metaphor in the Pentateuch.”13 John Sailhamer, in a similar fashion, concludes that the major poetic seams within the Pentateuch (Gen 49; Num 24; Deut 32) link the narrative by means of a single theme focused on Messiah with royal imagery.14 Indeed, the entire Hebrew Bible, from Genesis to Chronicles, reveals a focus on dynasty and dominion that finds ultimate fulfillment through the line of David.15 As Stephen Dempster notes, “Significantly, a key concept in the last narrative section of the Tanakh that begins with Daniel and ends with Chronicles is the term ‘kingdom’ (of God). The Tanakh ends on a note of hope, pointing to the future.”16

The flow of Scripture proceeds from a global perspective and narrows to a focus on the Davidic Messiah, then opens up again to close with the book of Revelation and its renewed global/universal extension of the kingdom of God.17

Figure 1. Chiastic Structure of the Kingdom Program in Scripture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genesis 1:1 Creation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 1:3 God’s Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 1:26 Man’s Rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:8–17 Old Eden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 3:17 Curse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation 21:4; 22:3 No Curse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation 22:1–2 New Eden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation 20:4 Man’s Rule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation 21:23; 22:5 God’s Light</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation 21:1 New Creation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Ibid., 6.
16 Ibid., 49.
Both of the chiasms presented in the previous two figures (Figures 1 and 2) can be extended much further than the nested parallels depicted above. The first chiasm focuses on the kingdom program of God while the second chiasm focuses on the anti-kingdom program resulting from Satan’s rebellion and mankind’s fall. Protology (doctrine of first things) and eschatology (doctrine of last things) point to Christ as the focal point of divine history (Figure 3).

Revelation 19:10

The kingdom of God has existed through all time from creation (Ps 10:16). Geerhardus Vos noted quite succinctly that “A God who cannot create cannot consummate things because he is conditioned by something outside himself . . . .” 18 It comprehends the entire universe, not just mankind, not just planet earth (Ps 103:19; Isa 24:23). Although God is His kingdom’s High King and ultimate Sovereign, He has chosen to rule the kingdom mediately (Ps 59:13; cf. Ps 8). His first mediatorial ruler was the first man Adam.

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18 Geerhardus Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, ed. by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2001), 1. Vos wraps up this thought as follows: “that will not lend itself to him for the execution of a set purpose and for the plastic handling of what is antecedently given to him toward that end. For eschatology, God needs not only to be the Potter sovereign with reference to the clay, but he needs to be a Potter who can produce his own clay with reference to its tractableness.”
The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament | 179

Mankind’s Created Potential

Dominion: Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:4–8; Hebrews 2:5–9; 2 Timothy 2:12.


In the pre-Fall world, God, in His own royal role as the High King of creation, established His chosen vice-regents, Adam and Eve, to rule immediately over all the earth:

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” . . . God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:26, 28).

The Fall interrupted God’s creation blessing and mandate for mankind. Tragically, fulfillment of mankind’s promised potential cannot come to its fullest expression because of mankind’s fallen nature. Any exercise of that original dominion proves to be incomplete and imperfect. The psalmist refers to that high and lofty role in Ps 8:3–9:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Thus the psalmist presents the ideal for mankind, not the current reality—the designed future of kingdom rule, not the diminished past and present. Of course, Messiah, as the “Son of Man,” will fulfill mankind’s role as the human race’s only perfect representative. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

For He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, “WHAT IS MAN, THAT YOU REMEMBER HIM? OR THE SON OF MAN, THAT YOU ARE
CONCERNED ABOUT HIM? YOU HAVE MADE HIM FOR A LITTLE WHILE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS; YOU HAVE CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOR, AND HAVE APPOINTED HIM OVER THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” . . . Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, . . . (Heb 2:5–12, 14)

The writer states that “we do not yet see all things subjected to” Christ—His mediatorial kingdom has not commenced. In the end, even the currently reigning prince of this world, Satan (John 12:31; Eph 2:2), will come under the Messiah’s reign and kingdom power. As long as Satan reigns as prince of this world, the kingdom of Christ has yet to be established. For that reason Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come.”

Israel’s Covenanted Potential

In the pages of the OT we find that Yahweh has entered into six covenants with the people of Israel:19 the Abrahamic, the Mosaic,20 the Priestly,21 the Deuteronomic,22 the Davidic, and the New. God unilaterally and unconditionally promulgated the terms or stipulations of all six biblical covenants. Man had no significant choice in their wording. The covenants were not the product of human manipulation—they were imposed and enforced by a sovereign God. Ultimately, all covenantal promises will be fulfilled.

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19 These covenants are distinct from the Noahic Covenant which was established with non-Israelites long before the existence of Abraham and his descendants.
20 The Mosaic Covenant is also known as the Sinaitic Covenant.
21 The Priestly Covenant is also called the Levitical or Zadokite Covenant.
22 “Deut also adds to the Horeb covenant another, made in the land of Moab, prior to the entry into the land, a covenant that seems to be a renewal of the former and similar in character” — Gordon J. McConville, “căz,” in New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis, 5 vols., ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren, 1:747–55 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 750. The Deuteronomic Covenant is sometimes given the title of “Palestinian Covenant.” Some theologians include this covenant in the Mosaic Covenant, rather than distinguish between the two.
According to the Abrahamic Covenant, the following themes will highlight covenant fulfillment for the descendants of Abraham:

- **Nation:** “I will make you a great nation” (Gen 12:2).
- **Seed:** “count the stars . . . So shall your descendants be” (Gen 15:5).
- **Land:** “To your descendants I have given this land” (Gen 15:18).
- **Blessing:** “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:3).
- **Kingdom:** “your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies” (22:17).

If it is possible to demonstrate that the Abrahamic Covenant is a permanent, unilateral, unconditional, and immutable covenant, then there is no way that the disobedience of either Abraham, Jacob, or the Israelites could have abrogated or annulled its promises. First, Scripture labels the covenant as an “everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron 16:17; Ps 105:10). Regardless of circumstances, God’s promise is permanent—He will eventually fulfill it. Second, God established His covenant with Abraham while the latter slept (Gen 15:12)—it was a unilateral commitment that did not depend upon Abraham’s continued obedience for its ultimate fulfillment. Yes, one might argue that this covenant could

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23 Cp. William D. Barrick, “The Mosaic Covenant,” Master’s Seminary Journal 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 218, Figure 2. Over the past thirteen years, I have developed the themes more completely and, I believe, more accurately. Recommended reading: this entire MSJ issue presents articles by TMS faculty on the biblical covenants.

24 See Gen 49:10.

25 John H. Walton, Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 132, points out that possible translations of הָיָהוֹ “include ‘indefinitely, permanently, in perpetuity or perpetual, enduring, always.’ It expresses open-endedness or an agreement without specified end.” He states that “The implication of the terminology is that these agreements are not temporary, not stopgap, nor on a trial basis. They are permanent in the sense that no other alternative arrangement to serve that purpose is envisioned” (ibid.).
not commence until Abraham had left his home country (Gen 12:1), but once God
enacts the covenant, its fulfillment no longer depends on Abraham’s obedience. His
obedience “was a foregone conclusion (Gen 18:19). The renewal to Isaac and Jacob
was based upon the past obedience of Abraham, not on the continued obedience of
the seed of Abraham (Gen 26:3, 5).” Third, this covenant was unconditional. No
conditions are stated in any of the repetitions of that covenant’s stipulations. Fourth,
God’s promises in this covenant are immutable according to NT revelation (Heb
repeated confirmation of the covenant’s promises to individuals like Jacob, who
had been disobedient (Gen 28:13–15).

For the Mosaic Covenant, some of the same themes recur as a progressive
development of divine revelation founded upon the Abrahamic Covenant:

- **Nation:** “you shall be to Me . . . a holy nation” (Exod 19:6).
- **Land:** “that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God
gives you” (Exod 20:12).
- **Blessing:** “He will love you and bless you and multiply you . . . You shall be
blessed above all peoples” (Deut 7:13–14).
- **Kingdom:** “and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod
19:6).

Although expositors often overlook the Priestly Covenant, it likewise echoes
at least two of these themes in its association with the Davidic Covenant:

- **Blessing:** “My covenant of peace” (Num 25:12).
- **Kingdom:** “David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel
and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before me” (Jer 33:17–18).

Zechariah 6:13 reveals that the Messiah “will be a priest on His throne.”

These dual offices, king and priest, bring together the two key roles of the
mediatorial kingdom’s ruler. What Israel did not accomplish in their appointment as
a “kingdom of priests” in the Mosaic Covenant, the Messiah will fulfill as their
representative.

Later in progressive revelation, the Deuteronomic Covenant likewise spoke
of a number of these themes:

- **Nation:** “that He may establish you today as His people” (Deut 29:13).
- **Land:** “in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you” (Deut
28:11).
- **Blessing:** “The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give
rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand”
(Deut 28:12).

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26 William G. Bellshaw, *Clarifying God’s Covenants: Adult Teacher Bible Study Guide* (Denver,

Kingdom: “The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above . . .” (Deut 28:13).

When the prophet Nathan announced the **Davidic Covenant**, it also featured equivalent themes:

**Nation:** “That you should be ruler over My people Israel” (2 Sam 7:8).

**Seed:** “I will raise up your descendant after you” (2 Sam 7:12); “your house . . . shall endure before Me forever” (7:16).

**Land:** “I will also appoint a place for My people Israel” (2 Sam 7:10).

**Blessing:** “let men bless themselves by him; Let all nations call him blessed” (Ps 72:17).

**Kingdom:** “your kingdom shall endure before Me forever” (2 Sam 7:16).

One of the major issues concerning the Davidic covenant in present-day discussion/debate involves whether Christ is currently seated on the throne of David. According to John Walvoord, “The New Testament has fifty-nine references to David. It also has many references to the present session of Christ. A search of the New Testament reveals that there is not one reference connecting the present session of Christ with the Davidic throne.” Some interpreters confuse the Father’s throne with the throne of David—the two are not identical—Christ is currently seated on the Father’s throne according to Scripture, not the Davidic throne.

Finally, the **New Covenant** contains the same basic themes:

**Nation:** “Shall [not] cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jer 31:36).

**Seed:** “I will sow . . . with the seed of man” (Jer 31:27); “the offspring of Israel shall [not] cease” (31:36).

**Land:** “The city shall be rebuilt for the LORD” (Jer 31:38); “it shall not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever” (31:40).

**Blessing:** “I will put My law within them . . . I will forgive” (Jer 31:33–34).

**Kingdom:** “the city will be rebuilt for the LORD . . . And the whole valley of the dead bodies . . . and all the fields . . . shall be holy to the LORD” (Jer 31:38–40).

In summary, the dominant theme of all six biblical covenants is **blessing**. Since those covenants are based upon the Abrahamic, that is an expected emphasis. The second most frequent themes are **land** and **nation**. Biblical covenants indicate a continuing nation of Israel in the land promised to Abraham and his descendants. Ultimately, the true **seed** of Abraham is the Messiah Himself. The Messiah fulfills

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29 Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!,* 89–90.


31 Ibid. The reference is to the building of Jerusalem as the capital city of the Messianic kingdom.
all of the covenant themes in their totality in His various roles as the Seed of Abraham, the Mosaic Prophet and Priest, the Davidic King, and the Savior of Israel and of the world. He calls and governs the nation. He blesses the land and the people. He establishes and rules over His kingdom.

The Messianic Kingdom’s Physical Blessings

Before describing the physical aspects of the Messianic kingdom, we must not neglect its other characteristics:

- The messianic kingdom is primarily soteriological (Isa 52:7–10). It is a kingdom of grace, of unmerited divine favor (Zech 12:10). In addition, God establishes the messianic kingdom in holiness and His holiness pervades the kingdom (Ezek 28:25; Zech 14:20). He initiates the kingdom by pouring out His Holy Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28–29).
- Due to the spiritual nature of the messianic kingdom, sinful and immoral values give way to readjusted moral values in accord with divine perfection (Isa 51:4–5). Yahweh’s own objective standard will measure all ethical thought and behavior (Isa 2:3; 30:20–21), so that Messiah will judge on the basis of an accurate appraisal (Isa 32:5; Mal 3:18). Personal responsibility will dominate interpersonal relationships (Jer 31:29–30) and truth will characterize all matters (Ps 89:14; Zech 8:3).
- In the realm of society, Messiah will abolish warfare and establish peace (Isa 9:7; Mic 4:3–4). Social justice will prevail in every class and race of mankind (Isa 65:21–22; Ps 72:4) and God will reclaim social wastes (Ps 72:16; Isa 61:4). Messiah will teach mankind to emphasize worthwhile relationships (Isa 42:3; Mal 4:6).
- In the political venue, the Messiah will establish Himself as the international authority (Isa 2:2–4; Ps 2:8–10) and will establish a world capital at Jerusalem (Jer 3:17). In His kingdom, the Messiah will put an end to the perennial “Jewish problem” (Zech 8:13, 23). As a reversal of the curse at Babel, language will cease to be a barrier to all human interaction and relationships (Isa 19:18; Zeph 3:9).
- Ecclesiastically, Messiah will rule as priest-king over Israel and the world community (Zech 6:12–13; Ps 110:4). In the messianic kingdom, Israel will become the religious leader of the world (Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6, 9) and the world’s religious capital will be Jerusalem (Zech 14:16–17). As a result, the Temple in Israel will be the focal point of worship (Hag 2:6–9; Ezek 40–48).

Scripture often characterizes divine promises as perpetual in these covenants for Israel (Gen 13:15; 17:7, 8, 13, 19; 48:4; 2 Sam 7:13, 16, 24–26, 29; Pss 89:29,

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32 Eugene H. Merrill, *An Exegetical Commentary: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 224, “YHWH has promised that Jerusalem will be restored, repopulated, and reconfirmed as the center of His covenant interests (vv. 1–8).”
The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament | 185

36–37; 105:8–11; 1 Chron 16:15–18). Walter Kaiser points to the fact that “all three parts of the covenant (i.e., the seed, the land, and the gospel) were bound together as one promise with a promise that this one promise was eternal. . . . to use a theological scalpel to cut out one part is to expose the rest of this same covenant to diminution and a time limitation.” Indeed, as Kaiser expresses elsewhere, any “conditionality was not attached to the promise but only to the participants who would benefit from these abiding promises. If the condition of faith was not evident, then the patriarch would become a mere transmitter of the blessing without personally inheriting any of its gifts directly.”

Our focus here is on the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom. Covenantal promises clearly indicate that the future nation of Israel will inherit the land of Canaan again. To this, both pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets agree (Ezek 36:8, 12). Land, the pre-eminent factor in the physical aspects of the messianic kingdom, comprises an indelible element in the Abrahamic Covenant’s blessings recited in Lev 26:4–12. Those blessings fall into six categories:

2. Peace (v. 6; cf. Gen 22:17)
3. Power (vv. 7–8; cf. Gen 22:17)
4. Population (v. 9; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6)
5. Provision (v. 10; cf. productivity, above) and
6. Presence (vv. 11–12; cf. Gen 17:7, 8).

Scripture associates all these blessings with the land that Israel will receive from Yahweh. They are consistent with all the various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant.

In order to fulfill these promises, God will: (1) alter the topography (terrain) to make it more fruitful and more inhabitable (Ps 72:16; Isa 4:2; 27:6; 29:17; 32:13–15; 33:10–11; 35:1–7; 41:18; Ezek 36:4–11; 47:1–12; Amos 9:13; Zech 14:4, 8), (2) change the climate to increase the rainfall (Isa 30:23–30; Ezek 34:26; Joel 2:21–24), (3) alter the nature of animals (Isa 11:6–9; 65:25; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:18), and.

35 One of the classic treatments of this topic is that of McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 234–41.
37 A possible exception to such fruitfulness and habitability might be the region of Edom whose judgment will leave a scarred landscape even during the messianic kingdom (see Isa 34:8–15).
38 “To reject a literal understanding of these passages about nature seems unwarranted, however, in light of the biblical teaching of the effects of sin on the natural realm (cf. Gen 1:29–30; 3:14, 17–18; 9:2–3).”—Robert L. Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 237. “There seems no reason to doubt that this is to be understood literally. . . . Any adaptation of the eco-system involved will presumably be a restoration of the world to its unfallen condition.”—G. W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” in The
(4) enable Israel to extend her national boundaries\(^39\) (Isa 26:15; 33:17) leading to the adjustment of tribal allotments (Isa 49:8; Ezek 47:13–48:29).\(^40\) Messiah will also intervene in the physical welfare of mankind by putting an end to disease and physical deformities (Isa 33:24; 35:5–6; 61:1–2; 65:20; Ezek 34:16; 47:12; Mal 1:8).

Note that several of these characteristics were undeveloped or unfulfilled during the return of Israel to the land following the Babylonian Exile (viz., altered topography, climate changes, and extension of boundaries).\(^41\) This would seem to contradict those theologians who insist that the promises to Israel for restoration were all fulfilled when Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah led their various groups of Israelite exiles back into the land from Babylon. If these promises were fulfilled by the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, “How then shall we explain the prophecy in Zechariah 10:8–12\(^42\) that announces in 518 B.C. a still future return, which would not only emanate from Babylon, but from around the world?\(^43\)

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\(^39\) Even if the reader identifies a minimal extension of the land (from Wadi el-'Arish to Nahr el-Kebir in northern Lebanon), it would include “the whole of the Phoenician coastal section from north of Beirut”—Kaiser, “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” 218–19. No Israelite king in the Davidic dynasty ever controlled such boundaries.


\(^41\) Amillennialists deny any literal fulfillment to a new temple, to changes in the geography and climate of Israel, insisting that such interpretations “are out of line with the New Testament’s own interpretation, which relates the prophetic hope to its messianic fulfillment in Jesus.”—Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 341.

\(^42\) Note the specific geographical entities identified in this passage (e.g., Egypt, Assyria, Gilead, Lebanon, and the Nile)—obviously intended to be literal. Any figurative interpretation would render the text virtually unknowable due to the multiplication of potential interpretations. Note, also, the spiritual relationship that Israel will have to God at that time: “in His name they will walk” (v. 12).

\(^43\) Kaiser, “The Land of Israel and the Future Return (Zechariah 10:6–12),” 213. An allegorical approach to this text in Zechariah can be found in Thomas Edward McComiskey, “Zechariah,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, 3 vols., ed. by Thomas Edward McComiskey, 3:1003–1244 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 1183–86. E.g., “When we read promises of great repopulation we must not fail to see the church, for the promise to Abraham of great posterity includes redeemed Gentiles” (1183); in regard to the references to Lebanon and Gilead in v. 10, “The terms must be understood metaphorically. . . . both are metaphors for the Restoration, the time when the blessings of the new covenant became a reality. . . . Gilead is a metaphor for the Shepherd-King’s provision for his flock (Jer. 50:19–20; Mic. 7:14),” 1184–85.
Kingdom Hope

The dominant characteristic of the messianic kingdom is that a holy God dwells “in the midst of a holy people in a holy land” (Ezek 37:25–28). This one factor alone makes it impossible for the revival of the nation of Israel in Palestine in 1948 to fulfill the OT prophecies about Israel’s inheritance of the land. Because of that singular biblical truth, not a single OT prophecy would be violated nor one divine promise contradicted, if the Arab nations should succeed in pushing the modern nation of Israel into the sea and ending their tenure on the land promised to Abraham’s descendants. Indeed, when God restores Israel to the land according to Scripture, they will be believers who have called upon the name of Yahweh (Joel 2:32). Those whom He will gather into the land of promise will be converts experiencing His cleansing and His Spirit—He will give them a new heart and a new spirit with which to obey His Word (Ezek 36:24–29; cp. Dan 12:1). This is not the condition of the modern nation of Israel.

Let’s take a brief side trip to the teachings of Jesus in Luke 19:11–27. His disciples had “supposed that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately” (v. 11). This occasioned Jesus’ response with a parable about a nobleman who “went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return” (v. 12). Before he leaves to receive that kingdom, he calls his servants to him, distributes some funds, and exhorts them to carry on until he returns (v. 13). In that same location the citizens demonstrate hatred for him and reject his rule over them (v. 14). By context, those are clearly the people of Israel to whom Christ came in His first advent. Later, when “he returned, after receiving the kingdom” (v. 15), he calls upon his slaves to account for what they did during his absence. Note that Jesus identifies himself with this nobleman. He is rejected by His people. He then departs from them to a distant place (in His case, heaven) to receive His kingdom and then to return (His second advent). Jesus has not yet brought His kingdom to earth, to Israel! At His ascension He left to receive the kingdom—He did not establish it during His first advent. Acts 1:6 confirms this truth when the disciples again ask if He is going to establish it prior to His ascension.

Now, back to Ezek 37:21–28. With regard to this text, Hal Lindsey correctly asks that we consider the following points:

1. The Church has never been scattered in discipline among the nations.
2. The Church has never been in a civil war that resulted in two kingdoms called

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45 Cp. Showers, There Really Is a Difference!, 74–75.

46 See Irvin Busenitz, Joel & Obadiah, Mentor Commentary (Geanies House, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 192.

47 Kaiser, Recovering the Unity of the Bible, 138, arguing that Christ currently possesses the Davidic throne, makes a point of the fact that Christ receives the kingdom before His return. However, he fails to adequately deal with the equal fact that Christ has not yet established that kingdom on earth.
Israel and Judah. (3) The Church has never been promised restoration to the land and mountains of Israel. (4) The Church cannot be in view when it says, “They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived.” (5) If this were in any conceivable sense referring to the Church, why does it say that the Gentiles will recognize who God really is when He makes Israel holy and His sanctuary is among them forever?48

Thus, the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church.49 Bible readers must be equally distinguishing in their comparing the future eternal kingdom of God to the future messianic kingdom on earth. With regard to this latter comparison, Renald Showers makes the following careful observations:

During His reign Messiah will have dominion from sea to sea (Ps. 72:8; Zech. 9:10), but eternity future will have no sea (Rev. 21:1). Unsaved wicked people will be present during Messiah’s reign (Isa. 11:4; Rev. 20:8–9), but no such people will be present in the new eternal earth and heaven (Rev. 21:8—in eternity future all the unsaved will be in the lake of fire). Some people will die during Messiah’s reign (Isa. 11:4; Jer. 31:29–30—rebels will be executed), but there will be no death in eternity future (Rev. 20:14; 21:4). Children will be born during Messiah’s reign (Jer. 30:19–20; Ezek. 47:22), but no children will be born in the new eternal earth and heaven. . . . These contrasts require the conclusion that Christ will reign over a kingdom on this present earth before it is destroyed and before eternity future begins.50

Such an approach differs from that of a New Covenant theologian like Steve Lehrer, who believes that the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were already fulfilled historically “by the time of the conquest of the Land of Canaan under Joshua.”51 Those who confuse the church with Israel, the eternal kingdom with the messianic kingdom, and the conquest under Joshua with the Abrahamic Covenant’s fulfillment all violate the same logical dictum: Similarity does not mean identity (or, in symbols: \( \approx \neq \)).

In an appendix to this study, a brief analysis of Obadiah 15–21 serves to demonstrate the results of a literal-grammatical-historical interpretation of an OT prophetic text. There are so many equivalent texts in the OT on the future earthly Messianic kingdom that it is not possible to expound every one of them here. One unifying factor, however, stands out in most of them: specific geographical details

48 Hal Lindsey, The Road to Holocaust (New York: Bantam Books, 1990), 108 (all emphasis is Lindsey’s).
49 For a detailed refutation of so-called replacement theology (wherein the church replaces Israel in God’s kingdom program), see Michael J. Vlach, The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism, EDIS Edition Israelologie 2 (Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang, 2009) and Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).
51 Lehrer, New Covenant Theology, 32.
tie the prophecies to actual locations in Israel and the ancient Near East. In order to counter such clear testimony, one must either (1) allegorize on an astounding scale without any certainty at all regarding interpretive accuracy; or (2) one must make the theologically questionable claim that such prophecies are merely ancient near eastern hyperbole (amounting to bluster without any real fulfillment); or (3) one must gut the OT text by jettisoning such passages from Scripture entirely. All three of these options run counter to the NT writers’ usage of the OT.

**Kingdom Government**

**Form.** According to the OT, the messianic kingdom will be a monarchy (Isa 32:1). Christ, as the head of that government, will act as the ultimate representative fulfilling all prophetic relationships. The social strata of the kingdom’s citizens will look like a pyramid commencing with a broad base and each subsequent level being progressively narrower (Figure 5). The governmental hierarchy will possess similar stratification (Figure 6).

**Figure 5. Social Strata in the Messianic Kingdom**

In order to fill out the biblical picture of the eschatological, earthly, messianic kingdom, concise summaries will round out this essay. The summaries address the kingdom’s form, nature, extent, and duration.

**Figure 6. Governmental Roles in the Messianic Kingdom**

Jesus promised that His disciples will reign with Him in some heightened role in His kingdom (see Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30). Both Paul and John indicate that believers will reign with Christ in His kingdom (1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:6). While the church saints enter the kingdom with glorified bodies (1 Cor 15:50; cp. 1 Thess 4:14; Rev 19:14), there are other individuals who at Christ’s second advent either enter the kingdom with physical bodies yet subject to death (cp Isa 65:20) or
are subsequently born during the kingdom (obviously from parents also alive physically). Thus, the kingdom government possesses a hierarchical structure which might be described in a general fashion by the following diagrams of the social and governmental strata under Messiah’s rule.

Nature. The messianic kingdom’s governing principles include righteousness and justice (Ps 97:1–2), supernatural power (Ps 2:7–9), and mercy and tenderness (Isa 16:5; 40:11).

Extent. In its extent, the messianic kingdom will be universal (Dan 2:34–35).

Duration. As to length of time, the messianic kingdom will endure for one thousand years (Rev 20:1–7). Its effects, however, are everlasting (1 Cor 15:24–28).

Conclusion

God’s kingdom program stands as a major theme within both the OT and the NT. Our sovereign Lord’s plan for His kingdom dominates history from the first creation to the new creation. His kingdom program will be fulfilled. He has not altered his plan—there is no “Plan B.” He speaks plainly and specifically. If the reader cannot take the biblical text literally with regard to both a universal kingdom and a future, earthly, eschatological, messianic kingdom, then even the Lord’s Prayer will suffer loss. We still pray, “Your kingdom come.” We cannot inaugurate the mediatorial kingdom, because we, as direct descendents of the first Adam, are not the second Adam. Just as God created historically, so He will consummate His kingdom program in history. “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev 22:20).
## Appendix: Obadiah 15–21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>&quot;For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations...&quot;</td>
<td>This period is the eschatological period that involves divine judgment upon all nations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>&quot;But on Mount Zion there will be those who escape, And it will be holy. And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.&quot;</td>
<td>Mount Zion is the location and it is not a heavenly Mount Zion—it is the earthly one. Descendants of Jacob (the inheritors of the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant) will take possession of the land God promised to give to them. Since this prophecy is much later than the conquest under Joshua, that period cannot be the fulfillment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>&quot;Then the house of Jacob will be as fire, And the house of Joseph a flame, But the house of Esau will be as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau,&quot;</td>
<td>Both the houses of the nation of Israel (south and north) will consume the Edomites (descendants of Esau). This is a physical conquest, since there will be no remaining survivor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Then those of the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau, And those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain; Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, And Benjamin will possess Gilead.</td>
<td>Restoration of Israel to the land of promise is physical, not spiritual. The geographic locations are neither figurative nor allegorical—they are literal. The restored remnant will take up residence in various locations and then move to conquer the rest of the land, which will evidently be under the control of their enemies. Israelites residing in the Negev will move eastward to seize the hill country of Edom. Israelites residing in the Shephelah (the foothill region of Judah) will take control of the area that the Philistines had controlled in the past. That same group will also take the hill country of Ephraim and the area of Samaria north of Jerusalem and west of the Jordan. Descendants of the tribe of Benjamin will take the Transjordanian region of Gilead in modern Jordan, the region of the biblical Ammonites.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, Who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad, Will possess the cities of the Negev.</td>
<td>The Canaanites living in the region of Phoenicia (Tyre, Sidon, and Zarephath) sold at least some of the exiles (who had been removed from Judah and Jerusalem) to the Greeks (cp. Joel 3:4–7). Some exiles from Sepharad (a location identified with six or seven different sites from Sardis to Spain) will move into the Negev that had been vacated by other Israelites (v. 19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion To judge the mountain of Esau, And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.</td>
<td>Thus, Israelites will possess Mount Zion and the hill country of Esau. But, the main point is that Yahweh will establish His sovereign rule in the Messianic kingdom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- These details are physical—ethnic, political, and geographical.
- The text speaks of real people, real locations, and real events.
- Obadiah associates all of it with the kingdom.
- The details do not match any past historical situation.
- The church never took possession of these territories in the manner described.
- The church cannot be satisfactorily equated with these exiles.
- The fulfillment has not yet taken place, but awaits a future time—unless the interpreter should decide that the prophecy is erroneous and that it has not been fulfilled and will never be fulfilled.
THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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A proper understanding of the kingdom of God involves a correct understanding of both the Old and New Testaments. The Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation together affirm the OT expectation of a physical, future, premillennial fulfillment of the promised Messianic kingdom. This is in line with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants.

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Introduction

The Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) must be the primary sources for our information concerning the kingdom of God. When the evidence is examined carefully, the New Testament presents the overwhelming idea that the “kingdom of God/heaven” refers to the promised Davidic Messianic Kingdom centrally based in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15), the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7; Pss 2, 110) as well as its spiritual requirements necessary for its realization in the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 36:25–27; cp. John 3:1–6). The Gospel infancy narratives (Matt 1–2 and Luke 1–3) are deeply tied to Old Testament prophetic promises regarding the Messiah and Davidic kingdom. Only main themes can be highlighted due to the brevity of this article. Prominent in both Matthew and Luke are fulfillment themes, both direct and indirect, tying Jesus directly into OT predictions, e.g. Matt 1:22 (cp. Isa 7:14; Mic 5:2)—“Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophets might be fulfilled” and Luke 1:32 (cp. 2 Sam 7:16)—“he will be great” . . . called the Son of the Most High, “the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David . . . he will reign over the house of Jacob forever . . . His kingdom will have no end.”

The New Testament period opens with several verbal announcements tied into the coming of John the Baptist and Jesus. In Luke 1:11–17, the angelic announcement to Zacharias is that of the birth of John: “And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Verse 17 ties John directly into Mal 4:5–6 that announced the coming of Elijah before the “day of the Lord” when the prophetic kingdom would be established.

Similarly, in Luke 1:26–35, the angelic announcement to Mary by the angel Gabriel has strong emphasis on the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7). Luke 1:27, 32 ties the engaged couple and their child directly to the Davidic line (“of the descendants of David” and “the Son of the Most High,” “the throne of His Father David”) with Luke 1:33 introducing His kingly reign with: “he shall rule” and “his kingdom”:\n
$$\text{βασιλεύσει \ ἐπὶ τὸν ὀἶκον Ἰακὼβ \ ἐις τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ \ ἔσται \ τέλος.}$$


In Luke 2:1–20, the angelic announcement of Jesus to the shepherds ties Him directly to Messianic salvation—vv. 10–11: “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.’” In Luke 2:25–32, Simeon’s prophesying links Jesus not only to Jewish redemption but also Jesus as “A Light of Revelation to the Gentiles” refers to Isa 42:6 and especially to the whole of Isa 42:1–9 where the Messianic Servant’s characteristics and blessings are detailed. In Luke 2:26, Simeon’s prophesying is linked directly to revelation from the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw “the Lord’s Christ.” The identification of the prophetess Anna in the blessing of the baby in Luke 2:36–38 links Jesus’ arrival with “the redemption of Jerusalem” from foreign domination.

In Luke 3, the genealogy, like Matthew 1, links Jesus’ birth to the royal household of David (Luke 3:31). Such genealogies forcefully show proof that Jesus was the offspring of the Davidic king, in line for the Davidic throne and also a descendant of the father of the Jewish people, Abraham.

The gospel of Matthew’s very first words tie Jesus directly to His descent from the royal line in Israel—“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). The genealogy stresses Jesus’ descent from Abraham through the Davidic line. Matthew 1:16 ties Jesus directly to the title “Messiah,” or Anointed One, who would deliver his people (Dan 9:25). Matthew not only links Jesus to the royal Davidic line but also connects Him directly to the
work of Yahweh in the New Covenant with “it is he who will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). While the Jews expected the Messiah to redeem Israel from Roman tyranny and foreign domination, here Matthew introduces the unexpected link of the Davidic Messiah’s work in giving His life a ransom for many (Matt 20:28—“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many”).

In Matt 2:1–12, the magi from the East seek to honor the newly born Davidic heir. This is a direct link of Jesus to David’s city of Bethlehem with the prophecy of the Israelite king’s birth in Micah 5:2. Here a great irony is also seen in Matthew; Gentiles honor the Jewish world ruler at His birth, while the nation as a whole in Matthew rejected Him (cp. Matt 27:25).

**John’s Teaching on the Kingdom of God**

When scholars examine the gospel record of John the Baptist and his teaching, most would admit that John had in mind the Davidic promises of the Old Testament theocratic kingdom, i.e. the prophesied Davidic kingdom. Even an older amillennialist like A. B. Bruce readily admitted that the clarity of John’s preaching spoke of the Old Testament kingdom promises:

> We know what John meant when he spoke of the kingdom. He meant the people of Israel converted to righteousness and in consequence blessed with national prosperity. And that being his ideal and aim, he was a gloomy man, and those who were with him became affected with his gloom. For he saw too soon and too well that the conversion of Israel to righteousness was a very improbable event.  

Ladd, who was a historical premillennialist, also affirmed this very same thought in the linkage: “John the Baptist had announced the coming of the Kingdom of God (Matt 3:2) by which he understood the coming of the Kingdom foretold in the Old Testament . . . Some would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and experience the messianic salvation of the kingdom of God, while others would be baptized with the fires of final judgment (Matt 3:11).”

The clear logic would be that if John preached the promised prophetic, theocratic kingdom of Messiah and the early, nascent church proclaimed the same hope, then Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom would be understood along the same foundational lines. Unfortunately, as has been seen, *a priori* traditions of men and philosophy have interfered with that judgment (Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5).

In the angelic announcement of John’s birth, the angel Gabriel linked his mission directly to the status of forerunner of the messianic reign:

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2 A. B. Bruce, *The Kingdom of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904), 54.

For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:15–17).

Here the angelic pronouncement linked him directly to the mission of Elijah, tying John directly to prophecy of Mal 4:5–6 that announced Elijah’s return: “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” In addition, his appearance and dress was very much Elijah-like: “Now John himself had a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey” that reflects Elijah in “He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, ‘It is Elijah the Tishbite’ (Matt 3:4; cp. 2 Kings 1:8).

All four canonical gospels tie John directly to the OT promises of a prophetic forerunner of Isa 40:3–4 who would prepare the way for the Messiah (Matt 3:2–11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:3–15; John 1:19–34). Luke 3:14 records that because of John’s preaching a pronounced messianic fervor was among the people who were wondering “as to whether he [John] might be the Christ.” John forcefully points out Jesus and His role in the New Covenant (John 1:29, 36) as the messianic fulfillment of prophecy (Matt 3:11–12; Luke 3:16–17).

In Matt 11:7–10, Jesus tied John directly to the prophetic promises of Malachi 3:1 regarding Elijah, who would prepare the way for Messiah and His kingdom:

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces! But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.’”

In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist, although denying that he was literally Elijah, tied the significance of his preaching about the kingdom to the promised coming of the Messianic kingdom and deliverance of the Jewish people from captivity as reflected in Isaiah 40:1–3:

They asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” And he said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you, so that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am A VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE
WILDERNESS, ‘MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD,’ as Isaiah the prophet said” (John 1:21–23).

Jesus tied John’s ministry directly to Elijah’s in Matt 17:10–13:

And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist (cp. also Matt 11:10).

When John was imprisoned in Matt 11:2–6, he sent messengers to Jesus to inquire regarding Jesus’ messianic mission. Any theories as to whether or not John was despondent about his own mission as well as the divine call misses the thrust of John’s questioning. John’s problem centered in his puzzlement as to why Jesus was not acting like the Messiah whom he had announced. No baptism of the Spirit had occurred nor judgment of the wicked. John’s idea of the kingdom plan had trouble reconciling how Jesus’ mission was developing:

Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, “Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me” (Matt 11:2–6).

Jesus’ reply focused on the fact that He was the promised Messiah by tying His messianic mission to the prophecies of Isa 61:1–2a, regarding the blessings that Messiah would bring to Israel. Jesus himself preached in the synagogue in Nazareth that this prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in Him: “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18–21).

Jesus’ quotational inclusion to John, of “blessed is the man who keeps from stumbling over Me,” may also well be a subtle allusion to Isa 8:13–14—“It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (cp. Isa 35:4; 61:2). Through this, Jesus gently hinted to John and John’s disciples that the blessings of the millennial kingdom were being evidenced in His ministry, although the judgment that John rightly expected had been delayed. In essence, as Carson noted, “[i]t is therefore an implicit challenge to reexamine one’s presuppositions about what the Messiah should be and do in

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light of Jesus and his fulfillment of Scripture and to bring one’s understanding and faith into line with him."5

The essence of John’s message recorded in the gospels ties him directly to the messianic kingdom: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2). Matthew 3:6 (cp. also Luke 3:3) records that his preaching of the imminent arrival of the messianic kingdom focused on spiritual preparation that was necessary for the promised Messianic kingdom: “And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 3:5–6). John’s preaching immediately corrected false conceptions in Judaism about entrance into that kingdom in a strategic way: physical lineage to Abraham alone did not automatically qualify someone for entrance. He dashed Jewish expectation that their physical status as a chosen people guaranteed the outcome—God was able to raise children up “children of Abraham” from the stones (cp. Gal 3:7–9, 29—“if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise!”). In Luke, this criticism was directed at the Jewish “multitudes,” while Matthew especially focused on the elite classes of Pharisees (legalistic, self–righteous hypocrites; cp. Matt 23) as well as Sadducees (elite wealthy religious clerics) that came up to Jesus. Matthew 3:7–9 (cp. Luke 3:7–18) records, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.’” Instead, John pronounces a winnowing process on the Jewish people through Messiah, i.e. blessing on those who genuinely repent and judgment on those who do not (Matt 3:12 cp. Luke 3:17). John’s preaching near the time of Jesus’ baptism links Him directly as the object of John’s preaching (cp. Matt 3:11–17; Luke 3:16–17; Mark 1:8–11).

Jesus’ Preaching and Teaching on the Kingdom

Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom was the same theme as John’s preaching: “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:14–15). Matthew relates that Jesus’ preaching of the kingdom was accompanied by signs evident as to the authority of His message (Matt 4:23–25). As already referenced in the discussion on John, throughout the gospels, Jesus’ miracles of healing, cleansing and exorcism are tied directly to OT prophecy regarding the role of Messiah (Isa 61:1–2a; cp. Luke 4:18–21—“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”). In Luke 4:43, at Capernaum, Jesus directly declared His purpose for His preaching in the declaration of the Messianic kingdom: “When day came, Jesus left and went to a secluded place; and the crowds were searching for Him, and came to Him and tried to keep Him from going away from them. But He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose’” (ὅτι ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἀπεστάλη).

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1 See D. A. Carson, Matthew, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 8:262.
Yet, a strategic theme begins developing in the Gospels of growing opposition and rejection to Jesus’ proclamation as Messianic King. Immediately after Jesus’ declaration of His fulfillment of this prophecy, His own home town of Nazareth sought to kill him (Luke 4:22–30). As this Jewish opposition grew against Him, especially by the Pharisees and the religious leaders, Jesus’ ominously announced some startling changes about the composition of the citizens of the kingdom, i.e. it will also include non-Jews:

Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 8:10–12).

This continues the OT prophetic theme of the Messiah being a light to the Gentiles (Isa 9:1–2; cp. Luke 2:10—“good news . . . for all the people;” Luke 2:30–32—“salvation . . . prepared in the presence of all people; a light to the Gentiles”). Matthew 12 evidences this decisive turn with the pronouncement of blasphemy against the Pharisees for attributing Messianic miracles to the power of Satan. Matthew 21–23 reaches a crescendo of rejection by Jesus of the nation. In Matthew 21:41–42, Jesus identifies the involvement of the Jewish nation with the citing of the Passover psalm, regarding the “stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone; this came about from the Lord and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Ps 118:22). He then abruptly, decisively announced against the nation His rejection of them due to their responsibility (John 19:11) for rejecting the Jewish Messiah: “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you, and be given to a nation (ἔθει) producing the fruit of it” (Matt 21:43; Rom 11:26; cp. LXX Dan 2:44).

The nation here is most likely a reference to the church, and receives support in other New Testament passages (cp. 1 Peter 2:9–10—“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation [ἔθνος ἄγα] (1 Pet 2:9; cp. Exod 19:6)), a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light”). Romans 10:19 also refers to the church as a nation: “But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation [οὐκ ἔθνει], by a nation [ἔθνει] without understanding will I anger you’” (Rom 10:19 NAS). So Toussaint remarked on Matt 21:43: “The logical conclusion is . . . that the church is the nation to whom the kingdom is given in Matthew 21:43.” Also supporting this is the general principle that the word “people” (λαος) refers to the Jews as distinct from “Gentiles” (ἔθνη) (cp. Matt 1:21—αὐτός γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν

6 For a dispensational discussion of this verse, see Stanley D. Toussaint, Behold the King: A Study of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1980), 250–51.
Scripture indicates that the church enters into the blessing of the kingdom through the promises to Abraham: “in you all of the nations will be blessed” (Gal 3:7–9, 29). Such a conclusion is also indicated by the immediate context of chapter 21, which constitutes a contrast between the national rejection by Israel of its Messiah (as represented by its spiritual and national leaders) and His rejection of their status as Messiah’s people—the proclamation of the kingdom would go to those whose works demonstrate their true understanding of the privilege.

However, Scripture does indicate that such a loss of Jewish privilege is temporary, for Rom 11:1 and vv. 26–27 declare that God is not finished with His purposes for Israel. In Matt 26:64–66 (also Mark 14:62–64), the crescendo of rejection is forcefully portrayed when the high priest directly asked Jesus: “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus responded by quoting Dan 7:13, clearly linking Himself to the “son of man” image of Messiah, which results in pronouncement of blasphemy and a death sentence by the religious authorities.

Further support for the physical nature of the “kingdom of God” as based in the prophetic promises of the OT is found in the persistent arguments of the disciples over privilege in Jesus’ kingdom. Matthew 20:21 (also Mark 10:35–45) indicates that James and John both wanted privileged positions in the messianic kingdom of Jesus, using their mother as their spokesperson: “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left.” Jesus rebuked both of them but did not deny the physical nature of the kingdom in their thoughts but said that such privilege was in the Father’s authority (Matt 21:23). That such thoughts about kingdom privilege persisted among the disciples is seen even to the very end of Jesus’ ministry during the last supper in Luke 22:21–30, when an argument broke out again about which disciples would have special places in the kingdom. Jesus abruptly washed the disciples’ feet to show them that the way of privilege in the kingdom is through service (cp. John 13:3–11). In spite of their rancor with each other, Jesus promised the disciples that they “will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:31).

In Luke 24:13–35 two disciples of Jesus, one named Cleopas, were discussing whether Jesus’ death ended their kingdom hopes: “But we were hoping it was He who was going to redeem Israel.” Here the “redemption of Israel (λυτροῦσθαι τὸν Ἱσραήλ) in mind is most likely that of instituting the Jewish expectations of the kingdom of God (cp. Acts 28:20). Jesus then pointed out the necessity of the suffering of Messiah’s spiritual redemption as a prerequisite to physical redemption of His people (Luke 24:25–26; cp. Pss 16, 22; Isa 53). Jesus, in his post-resurrection appearances, began instructing the disciples thoroughly on the entire Old Testament’s messianic passages that related not only to His glory but His suffering prior to glory. Importantly, the various speeches, especially in Acts 2–10 (e.g. Acts 2:17–21 and Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:25–28 and Ps 16:8–11; Acts 2:34 and

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Ps 110:1) where the earliest disciples proclaimed Jesus from the OT, indicate what texts most likely were in view here (e.g. Deut 18:15; Pss 2:7; 16:8–11; 110:1; 118 and Isaiah 53). First-century Jewish understanding did not anticipate a suffering Messiah, only a victorious one. But as Jesus noted, Judaism as a whole had corrupted itself, becoming a people, not of the OT, but of their own oral traditions (Matt 15:1–14). The gospel, the grace of God regarding the kingdom, would now go to all nations (Matt 28:19–20; cp. Matt 13).

The gospel of John has five references (John 3:3, 4; 18:36 [3x]) to the “the kingdom of God.” Strategically, the fourth gospel adds important information regarding the spiritual qualifications of the kingdom of God that John the Baptist had warned in Matt 3:8–9—“bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance” (3:8) and “do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you, that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham” (3:9). In John’s gospel, Jesus takes John’s preaching on the spiritual prerequisites for the kingdom of God and ties such qualifications to the necessary prerequisite of the new birth experience with language referring to the New Covenant (Jer 31:31–33), when He responds to Nicodemus with “Truly, Truly, I say to you, unless one is born of the water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

The mention of a Jewish man of the caliber of Nicodemus as a “Pharisee,” “ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1) and as “the teacher of Israel” greatly emphasizes the absolute necessity of the new birth that goes qualitatively beyond physical lineage or religious status as opening entrance into the kingdom. While Jesus’ language of “born of water and of the Spirit” does not occur in the Old Testament verbatim, these pictures of speech tie directly back to concepts involving the New Covenant, especially Ezek 36:25–27, “where water and the spirit come together so forcefully, the first to signify cleansing from impurity, and the second to depict the transformation of heart that will enable people to follow God wholly.” Here, physical lineage or privilege of position is completely removed as a necessary qualification for entrance. Instead, a radical, spiritual transformation that involves the renewal of the whole nature that goes beyond mere physical birth into the covenanted people. The great irony of this passage is that Nicodemus, as a ruler and established religious authority in Israel, was completely unaware of the spiritual requirements of the new birth for the kingdom of God that Messiah would institute through his substitutionary atonement (John 3:14–18).

John 18:36–37 also adds that the kingdom of God does not come through power of men imposing it, but on God’s power directly intervening in human history. The emphasis here is on the power of God needed to institute Jesus’ kingdom rather than human effort. The phrase ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου may constitute a veiled reference to Daniel 2 and 7, where the

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“stone made without hands” intervenes in human history to destroy human kingdoms arrayed against God. Hence, Jesus relates that no human, physical struggle will be involved when His kingdom is established: εἰ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου ἢ βασιλεία ἢ ἐμή, οἱ ὑπηρέται οἱ ἐμοὶ ήγουντον Ἰνα μὴ παραδοθῶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις. In John’s theology, Satan is the God or ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) who holds it in spiritual darkness (John 3:19; 1 John 5:19). Only God’s power could overthrow such territory (Dan 2:34–35; 7:13–14).

The Epistles’ Teaching on the Kingdom

In Acts and the Epistles, the occurrences of references to the “kingdom” are much less prevalent than in the Gospels. The term βασιλεία or “kingdom” appears 121 times in the Synoptic gospels with five references in John’s gospel (John 3:3, 4; 18:36 [3x]). Yet in Acts, the record of the history of the early church’s spread throughout the Roman empire, that also records the church’s transition from a Jewish to a predominately Gentile composition, it occurs only eight times (Acts 1:3, 6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Other occurrences in the Epistles are plentiful (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 4:1, 18; Heb 1:8; 12:28; Jas 2:5; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 1:6, 9, 5:10; 11:15 [2x]; 12:10).

Ladd, a historical premillennialist, recognized this was a problem for his “already/not yet” position that the “kingdom of God” was initially inaugurated. If the kingdom was somehow present, why would its mention be so infrequent?

Paul says almost as little about the Kingdom of God as he does about the messiahship of Jesus. . . . the reason is to be sought in the fact that Paul’s letters are addressed to Gentile audiences . . . to proclaim any king other than Caesar made one liable to the charge of sedition (Acts 17:3, 7). In addition, the frequent use of kingdom in the Gospels as well as in Revelation (e.g. Rev 17:14; 19:16) show that the term was not really being avoided. The early church’s usage of “Lord” for Jesus also shows that they did not avoid the implications of Jesus’ kingship.10

Progressive dispensationalist, Bock, prefers to find the explanation “in the epistolary material, themes tied to deliverance operate as equivalents for the current realization of the promise [i.e., about the kingdom of God].”11 Moreover, “dividing the epistles from the gospels” cannot deter an idea of the presence of the kingdom already operative and “where Kingdom does appear explicitly in Acts and the Epistles” (Acts 14:22; 2; Pet 1:11; Heb 12:22–28; Col 1:13; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Rev 1:6) “it fits the future-present emphases.”12


12 Ibid., 57–58.
More traditional dispensationalists, such as Ryrie, are not persuaded by such arguments. Ryrie argues, “Our differences with the new progressive dispensationalists include denying that Christ is now reigning in heaven on the throne of David. Revisionists seem to forget that appointment of Christ as the Davidic king does not necessarily mean that His reign as such has begun.” Moreover, none of the verses mentioned by progressives regarding the present operation of the kingdom necessarily require that the “already/yet” aspect be the only adequate explanation for the meaning of the verse.

An examination of the earliest activities of the post-resurrection church in Acts (Acts continues as the second part of the teaching found in Luke [Luke 24:49–50; cp. Acts 1:1–3]) reveal that much of Jesus’ teaching in His forty days of appearances (Acts 1:3) centered around the subject of the kingdom of God: “To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3 NAS). From Luke 24:13–24, the road to Emmaus revealed that they still had hopes of the “redemption of Israel” in terms of political aspirations and Jewish national exclusivism and did not comprehend fully the need for spiritual redemption not only of the Jewish people (Matt 16:21; cp. Luke 24:21), but the universal implications of the gospel for Gentiles to be included in the kingdom centering in the Great Commission to reach all peoples, not Jews only (Rom 1:16–17; Matt 28:19–20; cp. Col 1:13).

In Acts 1:6, the future aspects of the kingdom are clearly evidenced in the disciples’ question again, “Will you at this time Lord restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Such a question shows clearly the disciples expected a literal, earthly kingdom that was grounded in the teaching of Jesus and the Old Testament. Jesus’ reply also constitutes a difficulty if somehow the kingdom was to be considered already present in some way, for Jesus’ reply placed their expectation in the future—“It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority” (Acts 1:7). Instead, they are told to be witnesses of His coming and ministry throughout the world (Acts 1:8). The implication was that kingdom expectations were delayed, if especially one understands the term ἀποκαθιστάνεις as a futuristic present. That Jesus was recasting His kingdom as spiritual and denying a literal physical kingdom is clearly not the case here. He does not negate but delay its realization due to missionary proclamation throughout the world of the gospel message to all peoples.

An important passage is found in Acts 2 that separates more traditional dispensationalists from progressive dispensationalists. First, Acts 2:29–36 has been briefly mentioned previously, where Peter declares that Jesus is exalted “at the right hand of God” through the resurrection, as well as “God has made this Jesus . . . both Lord and Christ.” This great message of Peter is anchored in the messianic psalms 16:8–11 (Acts 2:25–28) and 110:1 (Acts 2:34–35). Progressives interpret the

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13 Charles Ryrie, Dispensationalism (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 213.
language as indicating that the sitting at the right hand of Ps 110:1 indicates that Jesus is already seated on the throne of David. Blaising reasoned:

The promise to raise up a descendant, in 2 Samuel 7:12, is connected with the promise to establish His kingdom or, putting it another way, to establish his throne. Peter argues in Acts 2:22–26 that David predicted in Psalm 16 that this descendant would be raised up from the dead, incorruptible, and in this way, He would be seated upon His throne (Acts 2:30–31). He then argues that this enthronement has taken place upon the entrance of Jesus into heaven in keeping with the language of Psalm 110:1 that describes the seating of David's son at the right hand. Peter declares (Acts 2:36) that Jesus has already been made Lord over Israel (Ps. 110:1 uses the title Lord of the enthroned king) and Christ (the anointed king) by virtue of the fact that He has acted (or been allowed to act) from the heavenly position on behalf of His people to bless them with the gift of the Holy Spirit.16

For progressives, Christ has inaugurated His Davidic reign at the ascension in an already/not yet sense, i.e. He has already begun His reign as evidenced by the sending of the Spirit.

More traditional dispensationalists, like Ryrie, counter this interpretation by pointing out that (1) the sending of the Holy Spirit is not a part of the Davidic Covenant but the New Covenant; (2) the proleptic idea has a corresponding equivalence in that David himself was designated and anointed king some time before he began to reign actually as king (cp. 1 Sam 16; cp. 2 Sam. 2); and (3) the language of Psalm 110 indicates that the Messiah is still awaiting future conquest and victory, i.e. His position is one of honor in the presence of his enemies who constitute a strategic hindrance to his reign.17

Another important passage is found in Acts 3:19–21, where both progressives and traditional dispensationalists hold that the phrase “restoration of all things” points to the futurity of the full arrival of the Messianic kingdom as a main focus of the kingdom of God, i.e. its main implementation is still future. Saucy notes that, “The question of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel looks to the future for the arrival of the kingdom (Acts 1:6; cf. 3:21).”18 In spite of significant differences, both progressives and traditional dispensationalists agree that the primary focus of the New Testament regarding Jesus’ reign as messianic king is still future, awaiting the return of Messiah Jesus’ at his second coming.

Acts 8:12 reveals that early Christian preaching about “the kingdom of God” was not only offered to Jews after the persecution of Stephen (Acts 7; cp. Matt 28:19–20; Acts 1:8) but also to other ethnic groups like the Samaritans who were once considered excluded by the apostles from such considerations (Luke 9:51–56).

18 Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, 104.
The kingdom was receiving universal proclamation in Acts (cp. Acts 10:34)—“I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality” (Acts 10:34 NAS—Cornelius). The earliest Jewish apostles were clearly slow in understanding the universal implications of kingdom preaching.

Acts 14:22 notes that entering the kingdom of God involves much tribulation (“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God”). Here the emphasis is on “futurity” of the kingdom that involves great conflict. Acts 19:8 and 20:25 indicate that Paul’s preaching had the kingdom as a primary focus. Interestingly, Acts started and ended with a focused preaching regarding the “kingdom of God” (Acts 1:6–8; cp. Acts 28:17–30, note esp. v. 23 and v. 31), with a strong emphasis on Jewish rejection but Gentile acceptance in its proclamation.

Outside of Acts, in the epistles, the dominant teaching of the “kingdom of God” centers on a future kingdom and not a present one.19 In the following, the idea of inheriting is prominent (1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:12–13; Jas 2:5; 2 Pet 2:11). Both 1 Thess 2:12 (καλοῦντος) and 2 Thess 1:5 stress the worthy walk as well as suffering that is a necessary component of being called into God’s kingdom (cp. Acts 14:22).20 Second Timothy 2:12 clearly places reigning with Christ in the future after the sufferings of the present world have ceased for His followers.

Some verses have been used to relate the kingdom to the present experience of believers (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:8, 20; Col 1:13). Cranfield noted regarding 14:17 that “it is in the presence and activity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and only so, that the kingdom of God is experienced in the present.”21 Hence, the emphasis is on the blessings that Christ’s present work through the Holy Spirit that brings to God’s people (cp. Gal 5:22) rather than on the presence of the kingdom. Similarly, 1 Cor 4:8 and 20 would similarly be used to indicate blessings of the kingdom without necessarily requiring the established presence of it. In Cor 4:8, in a very ironic sense, Paul scolded believers for believing that they had already begun to reign. Instead of reigning, Paul points out the real condition of God’s people at the time was in 4:10–13 (e.g. “fools,” “weak,” “without honor,” “hungry,” “thirsty,” “poorly clothed,” “roughly treated,” “homeless,” “reviled,” “persecuted,” “filth” and “offscouring of the world” hardly speak of any conditions of current reigning of God’s people). In addition, no references exist as to any present reign of believers in some type of kingdom. Importantly, “there is no unambiguous reference in the epistles that uses the word ‘reign’ (βασιλεύω) in relation to the present ministry of Christ.”22 Although Jesus has been exalted to the position of kingly authority (Acts 2–3), any exercise of that kingship remains future.

Others, who follow some sense of realized eschatology, believe that Col 1:12–13 indicates that a spiritual form of the kingdom is present now. For example,

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19 Ibid., 104–05.
20 1 Thessalonians 2:12 has a textual problem, with καλοῦντος being the better attested reading than the aorist καλέσσω.
22 Saucy, The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, 106.
O’Brien, commenting on these verses, asserts that the “aorist tenses [ἵκανώσαντι, ἐρρύσατο, μετέστησεν] point to an eschatology that is truly realized.” However, these verses may be easily understood as futurist aorists that emphasize the certainty of the future event, especially since inheritance is in Paul’s mind in the immediate context which points to the accompanying blessings of that kingdom (Col 1:12). While believers have been transferred to citizenship in the future kingdom, they also experience spiritual blessings while they await its appearance, as Col 1:14 goes on to stress: “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Such references to citizenship without a kingdom also explain the thematic emphasis of “stranger” and “alien” status of believers in 1 Pet 2:11: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.” The latter term is a prevalent OT theme that refers most likely to the day of the Lord when He returns as Judge (Isa 10:3; Jer 27:22). Often overlooked is the profound theology of Hebrews 11, the Great Roll Call of Faith chapter, which also reinforces this idea. Reviewing Abraham’s life as a wanderer in 11:8–14, Hebrews notes:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

After mentioning the OT saints not belonging, Hebrews then concludes the chapter with a direct connection between the status of OT saints and that of NT saints in Heb 11:39–40: “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.” This latter verse ties the

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OT and NT saints together, experiencing concurrently the future blessings of citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem (ep. Dan 12:2; Luke 14:14; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:13–18; Rev 20:4–6; 1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:12). Revelation 20:6 puts that reign into the future [“will reign,” βασιλεύσουσιν] marking any type of “reigning” as an action related to the future kingdom when all saints together, OT and NT, participate in that kingdom.

Hebrews 12:28 also mentions the reception of the kingdom—“Therefore, since we receive (aorist participle, παραλαμβάνοντες) a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe.” Although a temporal aorist participle is used, the context places that reception at a future time of judgment and contrasts the temporary nature of earthly kingdoms with the permanence of that future kingdom (Heb 12:26–27).

The last book of the NT, Revelation, relates that reign to the future. Revelation 1:6 states: “and He has made (ἐποίησεν) us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever.” Revelation 5:10 has a closely similar wording: “And Thou hast made (ἐποίησας) them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign (βασιλεύσουσιν) upon the earth.” Such a status, though placed in the aorist, is proleptic, for Revelation places Christ’s kingdom as a future event yet to be experienced: Revelation 11:15 places that time as a future event: “And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign (βασιλεύσει) forever and ever.’”

Conclusion

The New Testament’s teaching on Christ’s future mediatorial kingdom in fulfillment of the Abrahamic (Gen 12, 15, 22), Davidic (2 Sam 7; Pss 2; 110), and New covenants (Jer 31:31–33; Ezek 36:35–36) may not be quite as obscure in understanding as theologians often express it. Many views on the kingdom evidence captivity to philosophy and traditions of men (1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 2:8) that obscures the perspicuity of the NT teaching on Christ’s future reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. The doctrinal statement of The Master’s Seminary encapsulates its essence:

We teach that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31–33; Acts 1:10–11; 2:29–30) and establish His messianic kingdom for a thousand years on the earth (Revelation 20:1–7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezekiel 37:21–28; Daniel 7:17–22; Revelation 19:11–16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Daniel 7:17–27; Revelation 20:1–7).

We teach that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Isaiah 65:17–25; Ezekiel 37:21–28; Zechariah 8:1–17) to restore them to the land which they forfeited through their disobedience (Deuteronomy
28:15–68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matthew 21:43; Romans 11:1–26) but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Ezekiel 36:22–32; Romans 11:25–29).

We teach that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isaiah 11; 65:17–25; Ezekiel 36:33–38), and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan (Revelation 20:7).24

Both older and more recent dispensationalists all affirm the physical, future, premillennial fulfillment of the promised Messianic kingdom of the Old and New Testaments, even if some assert a present spiritual form of the kingdom in its inceptive state, i.e. already/not yet. Fears of older dispensationalists that progressives have gone off into covenant theology and neglect the Jewish aspects of the kingdom have so far not materialized. Both traditional and progressives affirm futuristic premillennialism, with the latter seeing an inceptive in-breaking of the kingdom.

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THE MEDIATORIAL KINGDOM AND SALVATION

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There is wide agreement that the kingdom and salvation themes are linked throughout the NT. The Gospels display this link in their many statements concerning entrance into the kingdom. Matthew 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 18:8–9 (cf. Mark 9:43, 45, 47); 19:14 (cf. Mark 10:14–15; Luke 18:16–17); 19:16–30 (cf. Mark 10:17–31; Luke 18:18–30); 23:13; and John 3:5 state how one can enter the future kingdom. There must be repentance and faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior with a resulting righteousness if one will experience the future kingdom. The NT Epistles reflect this same understanding as they speak of those who will inherit the kingdom. Finally, the book of Revelation demonstrates that genuine believers who are called overcomers will experience the blessings of the kingdom and the eternal state. Thus, the NT clearly demonstrates that it is the saved who will enter the mediatorial kingdom when it is established on the earth.

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Introduction

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:3, 5).1 With these words to Nicodemus, Jesus declared the inseparable link between regeneration and entrance into the kingdom of God. This linkage of the kingdom and salvation themes in the Bible is a well-established fact recognized by authors from a variety of theological perspectives. Goldsworthy, an amillennial covenantalist, writes, “That which believers possess by faith, the regeneration for us in Christ, becomes that which begins to be formed in them. At the return of Christ the regeneration of believers is completed, and the whole creation is renewed. The kingdom of God, first revealed

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1 All Scripture quotations are from the NAU, 1995.
in Eden, is consummated for eternity.”

Dispensational premillennialist, McClain, states, “The discourse which follows, dealing with Himself as the Bread of Life [i.e. John 6:32–51], was not intended to be a denial of the importance of physical life and its needs, but rather to indicate the supremacy of spiritual matters above all else in the Kingdom of the Messiah.”

Ladd, a historic premillennialist, notes, “When we ask about the content of this new realm of blessing, we discover that basileia means not only the dynamic reign of God and the realm of salvation; it is also used to designate the gift of life and salvation . . . . The Kingdom of God stands as a comprehensive term for all that the messianic salvation included.”

Promise premillennialist, Kaiser, concludes, “The kingdom of God is both a soteriological as well as an eschatological concept.” Finally, the mainstream Presbyterian OT scholar Bright remarks, “… while the complexity of the Bible is by no means to be minimized, there nevertheless runs through it a unifying theme which is not artificially imposed. It is the theme of redemption, of salvation; and it is caught up particularly in those concepts which revolve around the idea of the people of God, called to live under his rule, and the concomitant hope of the coming Kingdom of God.”

Even though these writers, and many others like them, have disagreements on the definition of the kingdom of God, there is wide agreement that these two biblical themes of the kingdom and salvation are interrelated. This article will seek to demonstrate what the relationship is between the “Kingdom” and “Salvation” themes in the NT. In the following discussion, the term “Kingdom” will refer to the mediatorial kingdom. McClain defines the mediatorial kingdom as “(a) the rule of God through divinely chosen representatives who not only speaks and acts for God but also represents people before God; (b) a rule which has especial reference

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The Mediatorial Kingdom and Salvation

The mediatorial kingdom is to be contrasted with the universal kingdom, the direct rule of God from heaven over all His creation. Through creation originally, and now through physical birth, all of mankind is and will be under the universal rule of God. This is in contrast to the spiritual rebirth that is necessary for one to enter the mediatorial kingdom (John 3:3). The universal kingdom is entered into through a spiritual rebirth that is necessary for one to enter the mediatorial kingdom (John 3:3).

### The Words of Jesus Concerning Entrance into the Kingdom

The writers of the Gospels include statements of Jesus concerning how one entered the kingdom. The following chart summarizes these statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage(s)</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Terms for “Kingdom”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:20</td>
<td>Righteousness surpassing Scribes &amp; Pharisees</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:21</td>
<td>Doing the Will of the Father</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 18:3</td>
<td>Converted (Turned) &amp; Become like Children</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 9:43</td>
<td>Cut off Hand &amp; Foot</td>
<td>Life, Life, Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 9:45</td>
<td>Pluck out Eye</td>
<td>Life, Life, Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 9:47</td>
<td>Cut off Hand</td>
<td>Life, Life, Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 18:8-9</td>
<td>Throw out Eye</td>
<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 9:43</td>
<td>Converted (Turned) &amp; Become like Children</td>
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<td>Pluck out Eye</td>
<td>Life, Life, Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 9:47</td>
<td>Cut off Hand</td>
<td>Life, Life, Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 19:14</td>
<td>Receive the Kingdom like a Child</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 10:14-15</td>
<td>Receive the Kingdom like a Child</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 18:16-17</td>
<td>Receive the Kingdom like a Child</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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8 McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 41.

9 McClain (Ibid., 22–30) lists seven characteristics of the universal kingdom: (1) It exists without interruption through all time (Ps 145:13; 2) It includes all that exists in space and time (1 Chron 29:12); (3) The divine control is generally providential (Ps 148:1); (4) The divine control may be exercised at times by supernatural means (Dan 6:27); (5) It always exists efficaciously regardless of the attitude of its subjects (Dan 4:35); (6) Its rule is administered through the eternal Son (Col 1:17); and (7) It is not exactly identical with that kingdom for which the Lord taught His disciples to pray (Ps 103:19).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Saying</th>
<th>Kingdom Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 19:16–30</td>
<td>Sell all &amp; Follow Jesus (Hard for a Rich Man)</td>
<td>Eternal Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Perfect</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Saved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Regeneration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eternal Life</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Age to Come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 10:17–31</td>
<td>Sell all &amp; Follow Jesus (Hard for a Rich Man)</td>
<td>Eternal Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>The Age to Come</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Age to Come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 23:13</td>
<td>[People Shut off]</td>
<td>The Kingdom of Heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John 3:3, 5</td>
<td>Born of Water &amp; the Spirit</td>
<td>The Kingdom of God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What follows is an exposition of each of these rows of sayings concerning entrance into the Kingdom.

Matthew 5:20

*The Context:* The gospel of Matthew emphasizes the kingship of Jesus and the kingdom program of God.¹⁰ The book begins with the clear demonstration that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the OT based upon His genealogy (1:1–17) and the events associated with His birth and childhood which fulfilled OT Scripture (1:18–2:23). But not only was Jesus “born King of the Jews” (2:2), He was also named Jesus, i.e. ‘the Lord is salvation,’ because “He will save His people from their sins” (1:21). Thus, Jesus was both Messiah and Savior.

With the public appearance of John the Baptist, the kingdom program of God is introduced in Matthew. The essence of John’s preaching was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (3:2). The call for repentance implied that the Israelites needed a spiritual conversion for entrance into the kingdom that was approaching. The religious leaders of Israel, in particular, needed to change their minds from thinking that descent from Abraham guaranteed their participation in the imminent kingdom and to confess their sins, showing the reality of their conversion in changed lives that conformed to God’s righteous standards (3:6–9). Then, in response to His obedience in being baptized by John, Jesus received the Holy Spirit and the Father declared that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased (3:13–17; cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). Further, Jesus displayed this divine Sonship and submission to the Father by withstanding the testing of the devil in the

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wilderness (4:1–11). This compliance with the will of God proved that Jesus was qualified as the Messiah to rule over God’s kingdom (4:8–10).

After John the Baptist was imprisoned (4:12–13), Jesus went to Galilee, preaching the same message as John, “Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” (4:17). The first specific event that Matthew narrates from Jesus’ Galilean ministry is the call of four disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John (4:18–22). These four men responded to the authority of the Messiah, having previously repented of their sins and believed in Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29–42). They followed Jesus and became learners of His teaching.

With this background, Matthew records Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, His discourse to teach His disciples (5:1–7:29). In the introduction to the sermon, Jesus described the character of the disciples and their place in the coming kingdom (5:3–12). They had received divine favor, “blessed are you” (5:11). This favor from God meant that they already were identified with the kingdom that God will establish in the future upon the earth (5:3, 10). When the future kingdom comes, they will experience their rewards for their present faithfulness (5:4–9). Toussaint states two conclusions concerning the beatitudes, “First, it will be noted that each of the beatitudes is pronounced on one who processes a certain spiritual quality. This indicates that entrance into the kingdom is based on one’s spiritual condition. Second, the basis of each blessing in every case is a reference to some phase of Jewish kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament.”

Jesus concluded the introduction to the sermon by describing the calling and position of His disciples in the present age as salt and light (5:13–16).

The body of the sermon was the declaration by Jesus of the righteousness that needed to characterize His disciples (5:17–7:12). Jesus began by stating His relationship to the OT (5:17–20). He needed to do this because in 5:20–7:12 He would present His instruction which was in stark contrast with the teaching of the Pharisees which the disciples had previously received. Jesus made it clear that He had not come to abolish the OT, but to fulfill it (5:17–18). There were fulfillments of the OT in Jesus’ first coming and other fulfillments to be associated with His second coming and His mediatorial kingdom. Thus, every disciple needed to be a student of the OT and follow its properly understood instruction which Jesus gave in 5:21–48. It follows that disciples (heirs of the kingdom) who break

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11 Stanley D. Toussaint, Behold the King: Studies in Matthew (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 96. Toussaint (Ibid., 67, 96–97) articulates the OT prophecies of the Jewish kingdom referred to in the Matthean beatitudes thusly: (1) inheritance of the kingdom of heaven (5:3, 10; cf. Dan 2:44; 4:26; 7:27); (2) comfort (5:4; cf. Isa 66:13); (3) inheritance of the earth (5:5; cf. Ps 2:8–9; 37:11); (4) filled with righteousness (5:6; cf. Isa 45:8; 61:10–11; 62:1–2; Jer 23:6; 33:14–16; Dan 9:24); (5) receive mercy (5:7; cf. Isa 49:10, 13; 54:8, 10; 60:10; Zech 10:6); (6) see God (5:8; cf. Ps 24:3–4; Isa 33:17; 35:2); and (7) called sons of God (5:9; cf. Hos 1:10).

12 David L. Turner (Matthew, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008], 162) states, “To Matthew’s Christian Jewish audience, ‘good works’ (5:16) would imply righteous works . . . enjoined by the law and the prophets. Thus, Jesus’s relationship to the Hebrew Bible must not be misunderstood. . . . The mention of the law and the prophets here and the summary statement of 7:12 is an inclusio, or framework, that brings the main body of the sermon full circle.”

13 Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), 75.
commandments and teach others to do so also will suffer a loss of status when the kingdom is established (5:19).

_The Verse:_ Jesus confronted His disciples with a stern warning, “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). Jesus was not speaking here of status in the kingdom, but of entrance itself into the kingdom. The scribes were students of the OT law who interpreted it in accordance with Jewish oral tradition. A summary and codification of this interpretation was later collected (ca. A.D. 200) in _The Mishnah._ The Pharisees sought to scrupulously observe the letter of the law as interpreted by the scribes and to teach others to do so also. However, as Jesus demonstrated in 5:21–48, the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was only an outward obedience that came not from the inner man and thus neglected the real, spiritual meaning of the commandments. To enter the kingdom, the disciples needed changed hearts which would result in lives characterized first by an inner compulsion to obey, followed by observable actions of obedience to God’s standards. In this way, they were to be perfect (i.e. “complete,” “mature”) as was God their Father (5:48). This was the righteousness that “surpassed” that of the scribes and Pharisees. This was the kind of righteousness necessary to enter the mediatorial kingdom.

Matthew 7:21

_The Context:_ After the body of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed His disciples with exhortations to follow Him completely and warned of the dire consequences if they did not (7:13–29). Turner describes the contrast Jesus presented as one between discipleship (following Jesus and His teachings) and lawlessness (a refusal to follow Jesus and His teachings) and provides a helpful chart of the structure adapted below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matthew 7</th>
<th>Discipleship</th>
<th>Lawlessness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two gates/ways (7:13–14)</td>
<td>Narrow gate</td>
<td>Wide gate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult way</td>
<td>Broad way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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15 This was the same kind of “righteousness” that Paul wrote of that characterized his pre-conversion life (Phil 3:6). From his converted perspective, Paul was able to acknowledge that this personal righteousness derived from keeping the law according the Pharisees’ interpretation was insufficient for salvation. Salvation, rather, came from “not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:9).

### The Mediatorial Kingdom and Salvation | 215

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two trees/fruits (7:15–23)</th>
<th>True prophets (implied)</th>
<th>False prophets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>Good trees</td>
<td>Wolves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good fruit (grapes, figs)</td>
<td>Life (implied)</td>
<td>Bad trees (thorns, thistles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the Father’s will</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bad fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Judgment (fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saying, “Lord, Lord…”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two builders/foundations (7:24–27)</th>
<th>Wise person</th>
<th>Foolish person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hears/obeys Jesus</td>
<td>Hears/does not obey Jesus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House built on rock</td>
<td>House built on sand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House stands during flood</td>
<td>House falls during flood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Verse:* In Matthew 7:21, Jesus contrasted those who will enter from those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. He said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.” Jesus had just warned of false prophets who will come and given the criteria by which the disciples can discern them (7:15–20). It is these false prophets who seem to be primarily in view in 7:21–23 as those whom Christ never knew who practiced lawlessness, and so will not be allowed to enter the kingdom. However, their judgment was a sober warning to any who were self-deceived as to how one entered the kingdom. In 7:21, two characteristics (the first implied and the second explicit) were presented of heirs of the kingdom. First, true disciples of Jesus have a personal relationship with Him. In the future day, they will be among those who will say, “Lord, Lord.” They will profess then because they already profess the lordship (deity and authority) of Jesus. They will be the ones whom Jesus knew. Second, unlike the self-deceived, their actions, doing the will of the Father, will demonstrate that their faith in Jesus was genuine and thus they will enter the kingdom when it is established upon the earth. As in Matthew 5:20, Jesus declared that true righteousness (doing the will of God from the heart) fitted one to belong in the kingdom.

Matthew 18:3

*The Context:* Following His narration of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew describes the Galilean ministry of Jesus to demonstrate His Messianic authority (8:1–10:4). Then Jesus commissioned His twelve disciples to go throughout Galilee proclaiming, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (10:5–11:1). However, the response of Galilee to the message of Jesus and His disciples was opposition (11:2–12:50). This led to Jesus giving His parables of the kingdom of heaven and never again was the kingdom declared to be imminent by Jesus (13:1–53). Rather, Jesus withdrew from the multitude to spend time with His disciples and to confirm their faith in Him as Messiah. Upon their confession of faith, Jesus began to tell the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die (13:54–17:27). While going to Jerusalem, the disciples asked Jesus, “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of
heaven?” (18:1). Jesus gave His answer with further teaching and illustrations in 18:2–19:2.

The Verse: After setting a child in the midst of His disciples, Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (18:3). Turner gives insight into the meaning of Jesus’ words here:

He [Jesus] says no one will enter the kingdom unless one turns from sin and becomes like a child. Jesus does not choose a child out of a sentimental notion of innocence or a subjective humility of children, since children may already exhibit in seed form the traits that Jesus speaks against here. The childlike character trait that is foremost in the simile of becoming like a child is humility. In this sense, conversion entails a radical change amounting to the renunciation of all one’s human prestige and acceptance of kingdom values. Children are not innocent or selfless, nor do they consistently model humility. Rather, children have no status in society; they are at the mercy of adults. Similarly, repentant disciples admit that they have no status before God and that they depend on the love of the heavenly Father.17

Jesus went on to add that humility was not only necessary to enter the kingdom, but it was the requirement for eminence in His kingdom when it will be established on the earth (18:4).

Matthew 18:8–9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47

The Context: Matthew continues to relate Jesus’ discourse to His disciples. Jesus counseled His disciples to receive childlike believers and warns of the severe judgment that will come to one who does not and causes the believer to stumble (18:5–6). The “woe” of verse 7 is directed against those of this world who would seek to cause believers to sin. That Christ’s disciples would be attacked by opponents of the kingdom was inevitable, but the stumbling blocks will reap the consequence of great punishment from God because of their human responsibility for their despicable actions. These words of “woe” here anticipate Jesus’ future words of “woe” directed against the Pharisees (cf. Matt 23:13, 33) and Judas (cf. Matt 26:24). The gospel of Mark also records in an abbreviated form this instruction of Jesus to His disciples (9:42–48). It too begins with Jesus’ words concerning stumbling blocks (9:42).

The Verses: After speaking of outside stumbling blocks, both Matthew and Mark record Jesus’ words to His disciples that they might become internal stumbling blocks to themselves. Matthew states, “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into eternal fire. If your eye

17 Turner, Matthew, 435–36.
causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell” (18:8–9). Significantly, Mark 9:47 substitutes the words “kingdom of God” for “life” in the saying concerning the eye. This demonstrates that when Matt 18:8–8 and Mark 9:43, 45 speak of “life” that this is a synonym for “kingdom of God.” Again, Turner gives insight into these verses in Matthew:

Failure to deal radically with sinful proclivities indicates that one is in danger of punishment in hellfire (cf. 3:10–12; 5:22; 25:41). As grotesque as these images of amputation and gouging are, the prospect of eternal punishment is far worse. This language is hypothetical as well as hyperbolic (cf. 5:29–30). Ridding oneself of one’s hands, feet, and eyes would not reach the root of sin, the heart (15:18–20). The point is, rather, that one must deal radically with one’s sinful tendencies (cf. Prov. 4:23–27; Rom. 13:11–14).

Conversion (18:3) demonstrated by a “righteous” lifestyle was necessary to avoid eternal punishment in hell and enter into life, the kingdom of God. This is the thrust of Jesus’ words recorded here.


The Context: Each of the first three gospels record an incident as Jesus and His disciples continued on their way to Jerusalem. As babies were brought to Jesus for His touch and prayer, His disciples rebuked those bringing them. When Jesus saw what was taking place, He was indignant and again used children as an illustration of those who will enter the kingdom.

The Verses: Matthew records Jesus’ words in this way, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (19:14). Here, as in 18:3, children illustrate the humble ones to who will enter the kingdom. Toussaint points out, “The Evangelist [Matthew] uses the character of children to sharply contrast the distinction between their faith and humility and Israel’s unbelief and blindness.”


The Context: Immediately after the previous event of Jesus receiving the children, each of the first three gospels narrate the interaction of Jesus with a young man who asked what he needed to do to obtain eternal life. After the interchange, when the man went away grieving, Jesus used the occasion to give further instruction to His disciples concerning entrance into the kingdom. Thus, these passages are the longest and most detailed in the Synoptic Gospels concerning the interrelationship between the themes of the kingdom and salvation. They are to Matthew, Mark, and

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18 Ibid., 438.
19 Toussaint, Behold the King, 226.
Luke what John 2:23–3:21 are to the fourth gospel. When the three synoptic passages are compared, seven synonymous terms appear: (1) the kingdom of heaven, (2) the kingdom of God, (3) eternal life, (4) life, (5) salvation, (6) the regeneration, and (7) the age to come. Each of these terms, in these gospels, is speaking of the same reality.

The Verses: The following discussion will be based on Matthew’s account. The man is introduced in the narrative as “someone” (19:16). As the event unfolds, the writer adds that he was a “young man” (19:20) and “he was one who owned much property” (19:22). In Luke, he is introduced as a “ruler” (18:18); thus the traditional ascription of this individual as “the rich, young ruler.” He was probably somewhere around thirty-five years old; he had attained high status in Israel, possibly as a member of the Sanhedrin; and he had much wealth. He was also a man who was committed to keeping the Mosaic Law (19:20). To sum up, he was young, wealthy, influential, and legally righteous; if anyone could enter the kingdom based on human works, it was this man.20

With all of his advantages, the man did not have the assurance that would obtain eternal life by entering the kingdom (19:16). However, he did believe that life could be gained by a “good thing” that he could do. Jesus pointed him to the second half of the Decalogue and Leviticus 19:18 (19:17b–19). The man affirmed that he had kept these commandments, but wanted to know what he still lacked (19:20). Although he might have kept the commandments outwardly, Jesus showed that his heart was full of coveting. If he truly wished to be complete, i.e. to attain his goal of obtaining life, Jesus commanded him to “go, sell your possessions and give to the poor” (19:21), “and come, follow Me” (Luke 18:22). This call of Jesus implied that the man repent of his sin of covetousness for forgiveness, the “fruit of repentance” in his particular case being to sell all and give it to the poor, and become a disciple of Jesus. In his case as well, there needed to be the confession of sin and the embracing of Jesus as his Savior and Messiah if he was going to enter the kingdom.

Jesus used the example of the rich man to teach his disciples of how hard it was and how humanly impossible it was21 for the wealthy to enter the kingdom (19:24–25). The disciples concluded from these words that no one can be saved (19:25). But Jesus replied that God is able to do the humanly impossible and save some (19:26). It is clear from these words that the disciples assumed that salvation was a necessity to enter the kingdom and the words of Jesus do not correct that assumption.

20 Later, Saul of Tarsus would be described as a “young man” (Acts 7:58), and he would describe himself as “advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Gal 1:14), and “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless” (Phil 3:6b). The apostle Paul was previous to his conversion a rich, young ruler. Truly, “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26)!

21 Turner (Matthew, 472) notes, “Despite sermonic lore based on medieval tradition and modern anecdotes, there is no early historical evidence for the existence of a small gate in Jerusalem, supposedly called the Needle’s Eye, through which a camel on its knees could barely squeeze. This mistaken understanding weakens Jesus’s hyperbole and implies that it is not actually impossible for rich people to enter the kingdom.”
When Peter stated that the disciples had done what Jesus commanded of the man—"left everything and followed You" and wanted to know of their reward (19:27), Jesus pointed them a future period of time called the restoration (19:28–29; called the age to come in Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30) as the time of the reward. While Mark (10:30) and Luke (18:30) include reward in the present age as well, Matthew speaks only of the future reward. The threefold future reward for the disciples of Jesus was sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, receiving many times as much as what they had left, and inheriting eternal life (19:28–29). These are kingdom of God realities that will be experienced by the Twelve in the age to come, the restoration.

Matthew 23:13

The Context: As recorded in Matt 21:1–11, Jesus finally arrived in Jerusalem, entering the city in the manner prophesied in Zech 9:9. He presented Himself in this “acted parable” to the nation of Israel as their promised Messiah. However, the crowds only affirmed Him as a prophet, not as Messiah (21:11). The religious leaders, on the other hand, were indignant when Jesus cleansed the temple and children in the temple shouted out the messianic claim concerning Jesus, “Hosanna to the Son of David” (21:12–17). What followed was an intense debate between the chief priests and elders concerning the exercise of God’s authority over the temple and the nation of Israel (21:23–22:46). To the consternation of the religious leaders, Jesus bested them in the confrontation. They wanted to seize Him then, but did not do so because the people held Jesus to be a prophet (21:46). The scribes and Pharisees (22:15), in particular, were dogmatically opposed to Jesus. In Matt 23:1–36, Jesus pronounced His “woes,” expressions of sorrow and warnings of judgments that would come upon these Jewish leaders. The result would be the national judgment of Israel (23:37–39; cf. the woes of Isa 5:8–23 that resulted in Jerusalem’s previous destruction [586 BC] and Judah’s exile).

The Verse: The first woe that Jesus uttered is recorded in 23:13, “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” Wilkins succinctly summarizes the thrust of Jesus’ words:

Similar to Jesus’ key statement in the SM [Sermon on the Mount] (5:20), the scribes’ and Pharisees’ emphasis on external righteousness not only blinded them to Jesus’ gracious offer of inward righteousness through transformation of the heart, but their leadership role in Israel had caused the people to be blind as well. Therefore, Jesus condemns these leaders for hypocrisy.

. . . . Here he condemns them for the type of hypocrisy in which they deceive the people through their fallacious leadership. They have mounted the seat of Moses, from which they offer their teachings and traditions, but their pronouncements are false. They do not lead the people to God but away from the kingdom of heaven. Not only have they rejected the offer to enter the kingdom themselves, but their teachings and opposition to Jesus’ ministry
influence the people to reject that invitation as well. This is a terrible abuse of their responsibility.

Jesus condemns them for their hypocrisy, that is, attempting to bring the people into a righteous relationship with God while at the same time not being in a genuine relationship themselves.22

John 3:5

*The Context:* The only uses of the expression “kingdom of God” in the gospel of John appear in 3:3, 5 (Jesus spoke of “My kingdom” three times in 18:36). The immediate literary context of 3:5 is 2:23–3:21, the account of Jesus’ interchange with a Pharasaic member of the Jewish Sanhedrin named Nicodemus. According to Jesus, Nicodemus was the preeminent teacher of the OT of all of Israel, yet he did not understand a basic OT teaching (3:10). Nicodemus was willing to acknowledge Jesus as a God–sent teacher based on the miracles which He had done in Jerusalem (cf. 3:2 with 2:23). However, Jesus confronted this man with the need of spiritual regeneration if he or anyone else was to “see the kingdom of God” (3:3). Jesus stated the one must be born from above to ever experience the realities of the kingdom.23 This was a concept that Nicodemus was unable to comprehend (3:4), therefore Jesus further explained the meaning of His words (3:3) in 3:5.

*The Verse:* “Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ (3:5). Here Jesus expounded what it meant to be “born from above.” Regeneration produced by one action involving water and the Holy Spirit was necessary for entrance into the kingdom.24 Jesus repudiated the notion that anyone who has only experienced physical birth during this age will enter the kingdom when it is established on the earth in the future. He also implied (3:10) that this truth was already revealed in the OT. The specific OT passage to which Jesus was referring was Ezek 36:25–27, which echoed Jer 31:33–34 and Ezek 11:19–20.25 Jeremiah predicted that under the New Covenant the Lord will make with Israel, “I [the Lord] will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (31:34b). The Lord also declared, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it” (31:33b). These two phases of God’s one action correspond to Ezekiel’s words from the Lord to

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23 D. A. Carson (*The Gospel according to John*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991], 189) explains, “This regeneration is *anothen*, a word that can mean ‘from above’ or ‘again.’ Because Nicodemus understood it to mean ‘again’ (cf. ‘a second time’, v.4), and Jesus did not correct him, some have argued the ‘again’ must stand. But Jesus also insists that this new birth, this new beginning, this new regeneration, must be the work of the Spirit, who comes from the realm of the ‘above’. Certainly the other occurrences of *anothen* in John mean ‘from above’ (3:31; 19:11, 23).”

24 Andreas J. Köstenberger (*John*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004], 124) notes, “The phrase [‘born of water and the Spirit’] probably denotes one spiritual birth. This is suggested by the fact that ‘born of water and spirit’ in 3:5 further develops ‘born again/from above’ in 3:3, by the use of one preposition (*ex*) to govern both phrases in 3:5, and by antecedent OT (prophetic) theology.”

25 Ibid., 123.
Israel, “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (36:25) and “I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances” (36:27). This latter phase is also described as the removal of the heart of stone and the giving of a new heart, a heart of flesh (36:26; cf. Ezek 11:19–20). Spiritual regeneration through receiving and believing in the Word, not mere physical birth, was necessary for any man, including the prominent Israelite Nicodemus, to become a child a God and ultimately enter the kingdom of God (3:5; cf. 1:12–13).

Conclusion

The words of Jesus recorded in the canonical Gospels are consistent. One needed to experience salvation if one was to enter the kingdom of God. The disciple must repent of his sin and embrace Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior to experience the coming kingdom. Without spiritual regeneration, one will not see, nor enter the kingdom of God. This new spiritual life will produce a “righteousness” without which one is not fit to live in the kingdom.

The Inheritance of the Kingdom in the NT Epistles

While the NT epistles speak much less about the kingdom than did the Gospels, a number do address those who will or will not inherit the kingdom. The term “inheritance” denotes the eschatological portion assigned to a man. While believers are qualified now as those who will inherit the kingdom, the blessings of the inheritance will come in the future. The following chart gives the characteristics of those who will or will not inherit the kingdom.

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27 Robert L. Saucy (The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface between Dispensational & Non–Dispensational Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1993], 101) summarizes the gospel teaching in this way, “The statements concerning a present entrance into the kingdom also do not portray a present kingdom on earth. Rather, as Robert Recker explains, these statements teach a relationship to God through Christ. ‘The passages in question point not to a realm but to a relationship, and this is substantiated by many passages in their context which call for a receiving of Christ (Mt. 7:21–22; 8:22; 10:25; 10:32–33; 38–40; 11:6), a submission to God or a stance of humility in relation to God (Mt. 5:3; 18:3–4; 20:25–28; 23:10–12), or simply subjection to God.’ This concept, that entering the kingdom is equivalent at present to beginning a relationship with Christ, is similar to that held by the early church, which saw its citizenship in heaven in relation to the King, whose return they awaited for the establishment of the kingdom on earth (Php 3:20).”

28 Ibid., 108–09.
### Chart 3 – Those Who Will/Will not Inherit the Kingdom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Those Who Will Inherit the Kingdom</th>
<th>Those Who Will not Inherit the Kingdom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The washed, the sanctified, the justified (1 Cor 6:11)</td>
<td>The unrighteous (1 Cor 6:9–10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The imperishable, the immortal (1 Cor 15:52)</td>
<td>Flesh and blood (1 Cor 15:50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those who practice the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:19–21)</td>
<td>No immoral, impure, covetous man who is an idolater (Eph 5:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those the Father rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:12–13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rich in faith (Jas 2:5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the Gospels, it is the one who has experienced genuine salvation who will enter the kingdom. As Saucy concludes, “The teaching of the early church, therefore, yields the same picture of the kingdom as that found in the Gospels. The establishment of the kingdom on earth is still future. The believer is related to the kingdom through faith in the King and is therefore an heir and already a citizen of the coming kingdom.”

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**The One Who Overcomes in the Book of Revelation**

The book of Revelation records the future blessings in the kingdom and eternal state of “he who overcomes” in the present age. According to 1 John 4:1–6, the one who overcomes the deceptive spirits in the world who deny Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is the genuine believer. He is ‘beloved,’ ‘from God,’ and ‘God’s little child.’ Thus, the “overcomer” in Revelation is best understood as a true

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29 Ibid., 110.
The Mediatorial Kingdom and Salvation | 223

Christian.\(^{30}\) The chart below lists the future blessings of “he who overcomes” in Revelation.

*Chart 4 – The Future Blessings of “He Who Overcomes” in Revelation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blessing</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I [Jesus] will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”</td>
<td>(2:7b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He . . . will not be hurt by the second death.”</td>
<td>(2:11b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I [Jesus] will give to him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”</td>
<td>(2:17b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I [Jesus] will give [him] authority over the nations; and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.”</td>
<td>(2:26b–28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“[He] will thus be clothed in white garments; and I [Jesus] will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”</td>
<td>(3:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I [Jesus] will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem, which comes out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”</td>
<td>(3:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I [Jesus] will grant to him to sit down with me on My throne, as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”</td>
<td>(3:21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“[He] will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”</td>
<td>(21:7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the Gospels and NT Epistles, the book of Revelation links the experience of the coming kingdom to those who are saved in the present age.

**Conclusion**

Thus, an inseparable link is seen between the kingdom and salvation in the NT. The Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation all show in differing ways that it is the saved of this age who will experience the kingdom when it is established on the earth with the return of Christ. God has, is, and will glorify Himself through the salvation of sinners. Those He has, is, and will save (regenerate) from fallen humanity will see and enter the kingdom of God when it is established upon the earth under the Messiah’s reign. They will also inhabit the new earth when the mediatorial kingdom is merged with the universal rule of God in the eternal state.

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\(^{30}\) For a complete discussion and strong defense of the interpretive conclusion that the one who overcomes is a genuine believer, see James E. Rosscup, “The Overcomer of the Apocalypse,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3, no.2 (Fall, 1982), 261–86.
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THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE MILLENNIUM

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The Master’s Seminary

The kingdom of God has multiple facets to it. One important phase of God’s kingdom program is the millennium. The position argued here is that the millennial kingdom of Christ is earthly and future from our standpoint in history. The millennium is not being fulfilled today but will follow certain events such as worldwide tribulation, cosmic signs, the rescue of God’s people, and judgment of the nations. This view of the millennium is found in both testaments of the Bible. The Old Testament tells of an intermediate era that is different from both our present age and the coming eternal state. The New Testament then tells us how long this intermediate period will be—one thousand years.

*****

Introduction

Revelation 20 tells of a kingdom reign of Jesus Christ that lasts for one thousand years. Yet the nature of this kingdom and when the reign of Jesus the Messiah occurs have been major issues of debate. The purpose of this article is to address both the nature and the timing of the one thousand-year reign of Christ or what is commonly called the “millennium.” We will argue that the millennium of Revelation 20 is an earthly kingdom that is established by Jesus after His second coming to earth. Thus, the millennium is both earthly and future from our standpoint in history.¹ This millennial and messianic kingdom of Christ follows certain events—a unique period of tribulation and distress for Israel, peril for dwellers of the earth, cosmic signs, the rescue of God’s people, and judgment of the nations.

This view that the return of Jesus to earth ushers in the millennial kingdom is called premillennialism. This title comes from the belief that the second coming of

¹ “Earthly” is not in contrast to spiritual. The millennium is an earthly kingdom but it also has spiritual characteristics and requirements.
Jesus is before (pre-) the millennium. Premillennialism is in contrast to amillennialism and postmillennialism which insist that the millennium is in operation now between the two comings of Jesus. For those two perspectives the millennium is spiritual and now. While respecting the historical debate between the millennial views, this writer will argue that premillennialism alone is consistent with the biblical witness while amillennialism and postmillennialism are not. Since the case for premillennialism is based on many positive evidences from Scripture, this paper will focus mostly on why the premillennial view is correct and not on why the other two views are in error.2

A Rationale for Premillennialism

Before looking at the specific biblical arguments for premillennialism, we will offer a rationale for the premillennial view. Since the Fall of man (see Genesis 3) God has enacted a plan to bring this rebel planet back into conformity with His universal kingdom in which His will is perfectly done. Part of this plan is for His Son, Jesus the Messiah, to rule the nations, including His enemies, from Jerusalem and a restored Israel. He will rule with righteousness but also with a rod of iron (see Pss 2 110; Rev 2:26–27). Jesus must rule over the planet that rejected Him. When this phase of the kingdom program is over Christ will hand the kingdom over to God the Father and the millennial kingdom will merge into the universal kingdom or what is often referred to as the eternal state (see 1 Cor 15:24–28). Thus, Scripture teaches an “intermediate kingdom” that is distinct from both this present evil age and the coming perfect eternal state. The time period for this intermediate kingdom is explicitly stated to be one thousand years in Revelation 20, but the concept of an earthly messianic kingdom is found in both the Old and New Testaments. It is not the case that Revelation 20 is the only passage that supports premillennialism. Premillennialism is rooted in the Old Testament and stated in a New Testament book (Revelation) that is explicitly prophetic in its genre and gives chronological details concerning things to come. Premillennialism is based on a consistent application of historical–grammatical hermeneutics which take into account the genre and literary structure of the books of the Bible, along with canonical

2 The three millennial views in summary are: (1) Amillennialism—the “thousand year period” (or millennium) is fulfilled spiritually now between the two comings. Christ is ruling in his millennial kingdom now over His church and/or in the hearts of His people. Satan is restrained in his ability to deceive the nations but he is still active. While Christ’s kingdom is in operation this is also an evil age. The world will continue to get worse until Jesus comes again. The millennium will end with Jesus’ second coming and the Eternal State will be ushered in; (2) Postmillennialism—the millennium is fulfilled spiritually now between the two comings of Christ as Christ’s kingdom starts small and eventually permeates all areas of society, Christianizing the world. Satan is restrained in his ability to deceive the nations but he is still active. When the gospel has triumphed over all areas then Jesus will return. The world will get better and better and then Jesus comes again. Then the eternal state will be ushered in; (3) Premillennialism—the millennial kingdom is entirely future from our standpoint. This kingdom will be established immediately after Jesus physically returns to earth. Then Satan’s activities will completely cease for one thousand years and the saints of God will reign over the nations during this time. After this millennial kingdom, Satan will be released for a short time but then he is sentenced to the lake of fire forever. Then the eternal state will begin.
developments regarding the kingdom program. And it is compatible with multiple Bible passages that place the kingdom reign of Christ with His second coming to earth. This premillennial view was the strong consensus position of the Christian church of the first two hundred years. It is a position that is consistent with the biblical worldview which affirms the goodness of God’s creation and the restoration of all things material and immaterial that God created (see Col 1:15–20).

**Scriptural Support for Premillennialism**

The biblical case for premillennialism is multifaceted. In sum, the case for premillennialism can be summarized in three main categories:

- Predictions of a coming reign of the Messiah over the nations on a restored earth after a time of worldwide tribulation.
- Old Testament evidence of a period of time—an intermediate kingdom—that is distinct from both the present age and the eternal state.
- Explicit prediction of an intermediate kingdom that is one thousand years long (Rev 20:1–10).

1. Reign of Messiah on Earth after Worldwide Tribulation and Judgment

Amillennialism and postmillennialism place the millennium in this present age between the two comings of Jesus. But several major sections of Scripture indicate that the kingdom of God is preceded by certain conditions. These passages speak of a coming unique period of tribulation both for the world and for Israel. In connection with this “tribulation” or “Day of the Lord” are other events such as cosmic signs, the rescue of God’s people, the coming of the Lord to earth, and the judgment of God’s enemies. These conditions occur before the establishment of the kingdom of God. Thus, an essential claim of premillennialism is that Christ’s messianic reign follows these events and does not come before them.

**Isaiah 24–25**

Isaiah 24–27 is one of the most significant passages in the Old Testament concerning the future. This section is sometimes referred to as “Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse” since it gives detailed information concerning events to come and mirrors much of what is found in the book of Revelation. Our focus here will be on chapters 24 and 25 where the pattern of tribulation before kingdom is evident.

Isaiah 24:1–20 details a great worldwide judgment that is coming upon the entire earth and its inhabitants. Verse 1 declares: “Behold, the LORD lays the earth

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3 That this chapter is referring to a global judgment is also clear from the fact that Isaiah 13–23 discusses the nations of the earth and 24:13 states, “For thus it will be in the midst of the earth among the peoples.”
Verses 5–6 indicate that this time of catastrophic global judgment is because of sin:

The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

This speaks of global judgment upon the people of the earth who have transgressed God’s standards. But not only are the earth dwellers facing judgment, the earth itself is suffering during this period:

The earth is broken asunder,  
The earth is split through,  
The earth is shaken violently.  
The earth reels to and fro like a drunkard  
And it totters like a shack. (Isa 24:19–20b)

So not only are the people of the earth being judged; the planet itself experiences the ramifications of God’s judgments. The time of global tribulation involves judgment on wicked spiritual and earthly forces:

So it will happen in that day,  
That the LORD will punish the host of heaven on high,  
And the kings of the earth on earth.  
They will be gathered together  
Like prisoners in the dungeon,  
And will be confined in prison;  
And after many days they will be punished (Isa 24:21–22).

But tribulation and judgment are then followed by kingdom conditions as Isa 25:6–8 reveals:

The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain;  
A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow,  
And refined, aged wine.  
And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples,  
Even the veil which is stretched over all nations.  
He will swallow up death for all time,  
And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces,  
And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth;  
For the LORD has spoken.
The “banquet” imagery used here refers to God’s kingdom (see Matt 8:11). And the events described here follow the tribulation and judgment previously discussed. Thus, Isaiah 24–25 reveals the following: Global tribulation, then judgment, then kingdom. This pattern is found in other passages as well.

**Daniel 12:1–3**

In three concise verses of Dan 12:1–3 we see the pattern of tribulation, judgment, and then kingdom:

Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Daniel 12:1 tells of an unparalleled “time of distress” that will come upon Daniel’s people, Israel. This is not just general persecution and tribulation but a unique period that has “never occurred” before. Verse 2 then tells of the judgment of the righteous and the wicked. Verse 3 then states that those who belong to God “will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” This is a reference to the blessings of the kingdom of God. In Matt 13:43, Jesus quoted Dan 12:3 in reference to the righteous at the end of the age who will enter His kingdom. Thus, with Daniel 12:1–3 we see the pattern of tribulation (“time of distress”) then judgment then kingdom. Or put another way:

12:1: Tribulation  
12:2: Judgment  
12:3: Kingdom

**Zechariah 14**

Zechariah 14 is another major passage that discusses future events. Here we see that the kingdom of God follows tribulation, cosmic signs, the rescue of God’s people, and judgment of God’s enemies. The first three verses detail a siege of Jerusalem by the nations:

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut
off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle (14:1–3).

This is a future time of tribulation for Israel as the city is under siege by Gentile powers. Verse 4 then discusses the return of the Lord to the Mount of Olives:

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

Note that the Lord comes to the Mount of Olives in front of Jerusalem. This is a literal coming to earth that brings topographical changes to the area. As the siege of Jerusalem is occurring, things look bleak for its inhabitants before the Lord physically comes to rescue the city. But then He does come to the rescue. The return of the Lord is connected with cosmic signs:

In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light (14:6–7).

Zechariah 14:9 then tells of the kingdom of God: “And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one.” This verse is important in that it shows that the Lord’s kingdom comes after a time of tribulation and the Lord’s return to earth. It is also significant because when the King reigns, He reigns “over all the earth.” Thus, there is an earthly kingdom. The nations that were warring against Jerusalem on earth are now displaced by God’s kingdom in the same realm.

Verse 12 then describes judgment for the enemies of God at this time: “Now this will be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the peoples who have gone to war against Jerusalem; their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongue will rot in their mouth.” Those who survive this judgment are then allowed to participate in the kingdom that is centered in Jerusalem: “Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.”

In sum, with Zechariah 14, a chronology of events is established: (1) tribulation for Israel; (2) a rescue of God’s people; (3) return of the Lord to earth; (4) cosmic signs; (5) judgment; and then (6) establishment of the kingdom.

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4 That this section was not fulfilled in A.D. 70 with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem is clear by the fact that Zechariah 14 predicts the rescue of Jerusalem by the Lord who physically comes to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. Jerusalem was not delivered nor did the Lord physically return to the Mount of Olives in A.D. 70. Plus, the changes to the land discussed in Zechariah 14 have not occurred.
Matthew 24–25

When one shifts to the New Testament, the pattern is repeated. The kingdom of God follows events such as the Tribulation, cosmic signs, a rescue of God’s people, and judgment. For example, in Matthew’s account of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus described events in regard to His coming that are similar to those found in the Old Testament. In 24:4–28 Jesus described a coming time of “tribulation” (v. 9). This will include false christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines, and plagues (4–8). It also will include persecution of God’s people (9–13). This period is also marked by the abomination of desolation that was spoken of by Daniel the prophet (15–22; cf. Dan 9:27). Jesus then detailed cosmic signs, His own coming, and the rescue of His people that will occur immediately after this Tribulation period:

But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other (29–31).

Note the chronology here. Jesus described a unique time of tribulation that is followed by cosmic signs, His own return, and the rescue of God’s people. Matthew 25:31–46 is also significant in that Jesus described the judgment of the nations that will take place after His return to earth and just prior to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Particularly significant are verses 31–34 which state:

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

Note the chronology here. Jesus comes in His glory with His angels and then He sits on “His glorious throne.” This is the glorious coming of Jesus from heaven to earth to sit on the Davidic throne. While Jesus is currently at the right hand of God in heaven, it is at the time of His second coming to earth that He assumes the Davidic throne and reigns fully as Messiah on earth. Jesus does not claim that He is sitting on the throne of David before He returns to earth. At this time of Jesus’ coming in glory and His assumption of the Davidic throne “all the nations” are “gathered before Him” (v. 32). This is a judgment of the nations that was predicted in Joel 3:12. Unbelievers are referred to as “goats” and believers as “sheep.” These
are separated from each other and they enter different destinies. The reward and destiny of the righteous sheep is the kingdom—“Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. . . .” (34). Note that the sheep were not in the kingdom of God before Jesus returned in glory or before the Tribulation period. Instead, the sheep enter the kingdom after the Tribulation, after Jesus’ return, and after the sheep/goat judgment. The judgment of the nations precedes the kingdom of God.

Note the chronology of events according to Matthew 24–25:

- Tribulation
- Cosmic signs
- Return of Jesus
- Judgment
- Inheriting of the kingdom


“There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Jesus described cosmic signs and “dismay among nations.” Then the Son of Man comes in power and glory. Also significant is what Jesus declared in 21:29–31 where He likened the events of the Tribulation with a fig tree and its leaves and what this meant for the nearness of the kingdom of God:

Then He told them a parable: “Behold the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they put forth leaves, you see it and know for yourselves that summer is now near. So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near.”

When Jesus said “when you see these things happening” He was referring to the tribulation events He had just described. It is the events of the tribulation that indicate that “the kingdom of God is near.” The kingdom does not run concurrent or before the tribulation—it follows it. There are tribulation events and then the kingdom comes. The dramatic events of the tribulation period mean that the kingdom’s establishment is near. Tribulation gives way to Christ’s kingdom.

This same pattern of tribulation and judgment before kingdom is found in the book of Revelation. Chapters 6–18 describe dramatic events in a tribulation that is followed by the second coming of Jesus, the judgment of God’s enemies including
Satan (19:11—20:1–3) and the reign of the saints with Jesus in His millennial kingdom (20:4–6). Later in this article we will go into more detail on the millennial kingdom in the book of Revelation. But the testimony of both the Old and New Testaments is that certain conditions occur before the Messiah’s reign on earth. These conditions are the Tribulation, cosmic signs, rescue of God’s people, and judgment of God’s enemies. This is strong evidence for the premillennial view.

2. Old Testament Evidence for an Intermediate Kingdom

In his defense of amillennialism against premillennialism, Robert B. Strimple makes mention of “one–text premillennialists”—premillennialists who allegedly rely solely on Revelation 20:1–10 for their view that there will be an earthly kingdom of Christ after the second coming of Jesus. It is true that there is a common perception that premillennialism is based solely on Revelation 20. Supposedly, without this passage premillennialism would have no biblical support. But the concept of an earthly kingdom after the return of Christ but before the eternal state is consistent with Old Testament prophetic passages as well. While Revelation 20 is the most explicit passage discussing an intermediate kingdom, various passages in the OT support this idea as well. In discussing this point we will see two things. First, Isaiah 24–25 is a backdrop for what is described in Revelation 19 and 20. And second, there are OT passages that suggest an era of time that is different from our present era but also different from the time of the eternal state.

Isaiah 24–25 and Revelation 19 and 20

The book of Revelation corresponds with earlier revelation from the Old Testament. Beale and McDonough are correct that, “The OT in general plays such a major role that a proper understanding of its use is necessary for an adequate view of Revelation as a whole.” Isaiah in general, and Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse of Isaiah 24–27 in particular, have a strong connection with Revelation. Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse is a major backdrop and part of the informing theology for events of the book of Revelation, including its discussion of a millennial kingdom.

Isaiah 24:1–20

Earlier we discussed the chronology of Isaiah 24–25 in which the kingdom follows worldwide tribulation; here we will discuss Isaiah 24–27 as a specific backdrop for the millennium of the book of Revelation. But first the context must

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5 Robert B. Strimple, “Amillennialism,” in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 118. Strimple was mostly referring to George Ladd. We are not claiming that Strimple is saying that all premillennialists only claim they have one passage to support premillennialism.

be established. Isaiah 9:6 predicted that a “son” would come and that “the government will rest on His shoulders.” This is a reference to the coming Messiah. Chapters 13–23 then discuss God’s judgment plan for the nations of the earth. Then Isaiah 24–27 brings together God’s plans for the nations and the plans for this “son” to rule the nations. Isaiah 24:1–20 describes a time of terrible tribulation for the earth and its inhabitants. Verse 1 summarizes the chapter: “Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.” This is not a localized judgment on the land of Israel but universal judgment. The entire earth and its inhabitants are in view here. As Grogan states:

This chapter is fundamental to the three that follow it. It speaks of a judgment that is universal. Not only does it make no reference to particular nations or specific historical events, it does not even restrict the judgment to the earth. This means that it sums up all the judgments on particular nations, as predicted in chapters 13–23, and goes beyond them.7

Isaiah 24 corresponds to the global judgments of the book of Revelation (see Rev 1:7; 3:10). This universal judgment occurs because mankind has not obeyed his Creator (24:5). The punishment from God includes the removal of food and drink (v. 7) and rejoicing (v. 8). It also includes desolation in the cities (v. 12). These events correspond to the seal judgments of war, famine, and death discussed in Rev 6:3–8 which also details global judgment to come. Yet while the vast majority of mankind is terrified and shaken from God’s judgments, a remnant of the righteous exists throughout the world who “shout for joy” (14–16a). The once stable planet earth is itself in turmoil. The earth is “split through” and “shaken violently” (v. 19). It “totters like a shack” (v. 20). Revelation 6:12–14 describes “a great earthquake” and “every mountain and island” being removed from their places. What is predicted here in Isaiah 24 coincides with what is described in Revelation, especially chapters 6–19. Isaiah 24 predicts wrath and judgment on the earth and its dwellers; Revelation 6–19 also describes God’s wrath and judgment on the earth and its inhabitants. This sets the scene for the significant section of Isa 24:21–23—a text that has relevance for a coming intermediate kingdom we know as the millennium.

Isaiah 24:21–23

Isaiah 24:21–23 has a strong connection to Revelation 19 and 20 and the concept of an intermediate/millennial kingdom:

On that day the LORD will punish
the host of heaven above
and kings of the earth below.
They will be gathered together

like prisoners in a pit.  
They will be confined to a dungeon;  
after many days they will be punished.  
The moon will be put to shame  
and the sun disgraced,  
because the LORD of Hosts will reign as king  
on Mount Zion in Jerusalem,  
and He will display His glory  
in the presence of His elders. (Isa 24:21–23, HCSB)

In connection with the worldwide judgment of 24:1–20 this passage (Isa 24:21–23) shows there will be a two-phase judgment of the enemies of God. Before we look at this two-staged judgment, though, observe the links between what this passage describes and the events of Revelation 19 and 20:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isa 24:21 mentions “kings of the earth” that are opposed to God.</th>
<th>Rev 19:19 refers to “kings of the earth” who are opposed to God.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:21 states that both the kings of the earth and the host of heaven will be incarcerated.</td>
<td>Rev 19:21 tells of the defeat of the kings of the earth and Rev 20:1–3 tells of the binding of Satan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:22 mentions imprisonment in a dungeon/pit.</td>
<td>Rev 20:1 mentions Satan’s confinement in an “abyss” which is also called a “prison” in 20:7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:22 states that final punishment takes place “after many days.”</td>
<td>Rev 20:7–10 states that after a thousand years Satan is released for a short time and then sentenced to the lake of fire; Rev 20:11–15 states that all unbelieving dead are sentenced to the lake of fire after the thousand years are completed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:23 states the Lord will reign as King.</td>
<td>Rev 20:6 states that Christ will reign for a thousand years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These parallels show a strong connection between Isaiah 24 and Revelation 19 and 20. Also, Isa 24:23 and its discussion of the moon and sun being diminished also parallels Rev 21:23 which states that the New Jerusalem has no need of the sun or moon to shine on it because of the glory of God through Jesus the Lamb.

Significantly, Isa 24:22 is a backdrop for the millennial kingdom that John will discuss in Revelation 20. Here Isaiah says that in connection with God’s judgments “the host of heaven” and the “kings of the earth” will be “gathered together” and “confined to a dungeon.” And then he says that their punishment will take place “after many days.” Note that the coming of the Lord and His kingdom means incarceration for these groups but their final judgment is not yet. This

mention of “after many days” is significant and seems to point to some intermediate situation—a situation that is explicitly discussed in Rev 20:1–6. As Blaising states, “The structure of the oracle in Isaiah 24–25 indicates some kind of intermediate situation between the coming of God in the Day of the Lord and the everlasting reign in which sin and death are done away completely.”

Isaiah 24:22 does not explicitly promise a “millennium,” but as Grogan rightly notes, “we can at least say that it harmonizes with a premillennial interpretation of Revelation.” Blaising points out, “The many days of imprisonment between the coming of God in the Day of the Lord and the punishment after which the Lord reigns in glory greater than sun or moon bear a correspondence to the millennial period in Revelation 20, which also follows the coming of the Lord in the Day of the Lord . . . .”

Other sections of Isaiah’s Little Apocalypse also correspond to the events of Revelation 19–21:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isa 25:6 says the Lord “will prepare a lavish banquet” for His people.</th>
<th>Rev 19:9 says God’s people “are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isa 25:8 says the Lord “will swallow up death for all time.”</td>
<td>Rev 21:4 says “there will no longer be any death.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 25:8 states that the Lord God “will wipe tears away from all faces.”</td>
<td>Rev 21:4 states, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes” and “there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:11 says “fire will devour your enemies.”</td>
<td>Rev 19:20; 20:9–10; and 20:14–15 mention God’s enemies facing fiery judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:19 predicts bodily resurrection—“Your dead will live; their corpses will rise.”</td>
<td>Rev 20:4 says God’s people “came to life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 27:1 predicts the punishment of the Leviathan serpent and the dragon who lives in the sea.</td>
<td>Rev 20:2 states that Christ will incarcerate “the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two points are worthy of note here. First, the use of Isaiah 24–27 in Revelation shows that the message of Revelation harmonizes with the message of Isaiah 24–27. What Isaiah predicted is also what Revelation foretells. Second, Isaiah 24–27 is a backdrop for the millennial kingdom discussed in Revelation 20.

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9 Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, ed. Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 203.
11 Blaising, 203.
Intermediate Kingdom Conditions Predicted in the OT

Revelation 19:11–21:8 tells of an intermediate era between the present age and the eternal state. But in addition to Revelation 20, several Old Testament passages predict an era on this earth that is far better than the current age we live in but not yet as perfect as the coming final eternal state. Thus, there is a necessity of an intermediate kingdom after the second coming of Jesus but before the eternal state. As Wayne Grudem puts it:

Several Old Testament passages seem to fit neither in the present age nor in the eternal state. These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption which is far greater than the present church age but which still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth.12

Isaiah 65:20

One such passage that points to an intermediate period is Isaiah 65. While discussing eschatological events verse 20 states:

No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the child shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

The issue at hand in this verse, which is discussing conditions associated with the new heavens and new earth (cf. Isa 65:17), is longevity of life. When this prophecy is fulfilled people will be living so long that if they die at age 100, something must be wrong since people will live much longer than that. In fact, it will be assumed that a person dying at the age of 100 must have done something wrong. They must be “accursed.” So notice two important things here with Isa 65:20—an increased longevity of life and the presence of sin which brings curses and death.

Now we must ask the question, “When in history have these conditions described in Isa 65:20 occurred? Can it be during our present age?” The answer is clearly, no. We live in a day where people live between 70–80 years on average (see Ps 90:10). If a person dies today at age 100 we say he lived a long life, not a short one. So will Isa 65:20 be fulfilled in the coming eternal state? The answer again must be, no. In the eternal state there is no longer any sin, death, or curse (Rev 21:4; 22:3), so no one will by dying. Therefore, Isa 65:20 must be fulfilled in an era that is different from our current period yet distinct from the eternal state. This means there must be an intermediate kingdom or what we call a millennium. Compare the three eras:

Present Age: Lifespans of 70–80 years
Millennial Kingdom: Lifespans well beyond 70–80 years but death still occurs.
Eternal State: People live forever with no presence of sin, death, or curse.

This understanding of Isaiah 65 being a reference to a millennium is not recent. Christians of the second century viewed this passage as support for premillennialism. Martin Erdmann points out that Isa 65:20–25 formed “the scriptural basis, besides Revelation 20:1–10, on which Asiatic millennialism built its chiliastic doctrine.”\textsuperscript{13} This was also true for Justin Martyr. In reference to Isaiah 65 Justin said, “For Isaiah spoke thus concerning this period of a thousand years.”\textsuperscript{14} Erdmann points out that Justin’s reference to Old Testament prophets “indicates his reliance on the Old Testament as the primary source of his chiliasm. He did not shy away from utilizing different passages from the Hebrew Bible to strengthen his argument in favor of a literal millennium.”\textsuperscript{15} Likewise, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas was a premillennialist, and according to Erdmann, “his chiliastic views are partially based on verses from the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{16}

Zechariah 8

Zechariah 8 offers some descriptions of God’s coming kingdom when Jesus returns. The chapter begins with God restoring Jerusalem. With “great wrath” and “jealousy” (8:2) the Lord returns to Zion and dwells in Jerusalem (8:3). The great city will have another name—“City of Truth” (8:3). This capital city of God’s kingdom will be characterized by sweet peace and fellowship, as the Lord himself says:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zech 8:4–5).

When the Lord comes again and reigns from Jerusalem, the elderly and young people will be talking and playing in the streets. It appears that age and age discrepancies still exist when the Lord’s kingdom is established. Old men and women at this time need the aid of a staff “because of age.” They possess some weakness because of advanced years. This suggests the concept of an intermediate kingdom (or millennium), an era that is different from the present evil age but different also from the eternal state in which all negative aspects of aging and death

\textsuperscript{13} Martin Erdmann, The Millennial Controversy in the Early Church (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 118.
\textsuperscript{14} Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, The Ante-Nicene Fathers 80, 1:239.
\textsuperscript{15} Erdmann, 138.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 149.
are removed. From Zechariah’s time until now there has never been a time where the conditions of Zechariah 8 have happened. On the other hand, there will be no elderly who are weak in the final eternal state for all remnants of the curse have been removed (see Revelation 21 and 22). What Zechariah describes here, therefore, must take place in an initial phase of God’s kingdom before the eternal state begins. Such an intermediate state between the present age and the eternal state is described in Revelation 20 where a thousand-year reign of Christ is emphasized.

Zechariah 14

Zechariah 14 also supports premillennialism. It describes kingdom conditions after the return of Jesus to earth. Verse 9 states that the “LORD will be King over all the earth” after His feet stand on the Mount of Olives (v. 4), but there is still disobedience and rebellion on the part of some nations. It is predicted that Egypt and other nations will be punished with drought when they do not obey the Lord as they should:

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, there will be no rain on them. If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the L ORD smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zech 14:16–19).

Grudem states the issue well when he points out that the sin and punishment of the nations after Jesus returns does not fit the present age or the eternal state:

Here again the description does not fit the present age, for the Lord is King over all the earth in this situation. But it does not fit the eternal state either, because of the disobedience and rebellion against the Lord that is clearly present.17

Thus, the events of Zechariah 14 best fit with a premillennial understanding of the kingdom. While people from all nations are being saved in the present age, the nations themselves do not obey our Lord (see Psalm 2). In fact, they persecute those who belong to the Lord. In the millennial kingdom Jesus will rule the nations while He is physically present on earth. The nations will obey and submit to His rule, but as Zechariah 14 points out, whenever a nation does act as they should there is punishment. On the other hand, in the eternal state there will be absolutely no

disobedience on the part of the nations. The picture of the nations in the eternal state is only positive. The kings of the nations bring their contributions to the New Jerusalem (see Rev 21:24) and the leaves of the tree of life are said to be for the healing of the nations (see Rev 22:2). To compare:

| Present Age: | Jesus is in heaven and the nations do not yet submit to Jesus as King. |
| Millennial Kingdom: | Jesus rules the nations on earth and punishes those nations that do not act as they should. |
| Eternal State: | The nations act exactly as they should with no need of punishment. |

The idea of an earthly kingdom that comes after Jesus’ return but before the eternal state is consistent with several Old Testament passages. In the course of progressive revelation, Revelation 20 will reveal to us how long this intermediate kingdom will be (“a thousand years”), but it is not the first and only reference to such an era. When someone says, “You have only one passage, Revelation 20, which allegedly teaches a millennium,” the answer is, “That’s not true. Revelation 20 tells us how long Christ’s intermediate earthly kingdom will be—one thousand years—but other passages teach the idea of an intermediate kingdom.” Premillennialism, therefore, is a doctrine found in both the Old and New testaments.18

3. Explicit Mention of a Millennium in Revelation 19–20

The biblical case for premillennialism also includes Revelation 20, for it is here that an intermediate kingdom of one-thousand years is explicitly revealed. The millennium is found in Rev 20:1–10:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first

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18 I purposely have not discussed many New Testament passages that are consistent with premillennialism such as Matt 19:28; 25:31; Acts 1:6; Rev 5:10 and others that place the coming of the kingdom in the future at the time of the second coming. The main point to show here is that the Old Testament teaches the idea of an intermediate earthly kingdom.
resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This section can be summarized as follows:

- Satan will be bound and all his activities are completely ceased for a thousand years (1–3).
- Positions of kingdom authority were granted to previously martyred saints (4).
- These martyrs who were slain for the testimony of Jesus are resurrected and reign with Christ for a thousand years (4).
- Another group, “the rest of the dead,” came to life one thousand years later (5).
- Those who are part of the first resurrection are priests of God and Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years (6).
- At the end of the thousand years Satan is released and leads a rebellion that is immediately defeated with fire from heaven (7–10).

That this millennium is both earthly and future can be understood from several aspects. Before looking at this section, though, some information about the genre of the book of Revelation must be understood.

*Genre—Prophecy*

The book of Revelation describes what John experienced and saw via divine revelation:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw (Rev 1:1–2).

What John receives is a “revelation” (apokalupsis) of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is pictured as a revealer of information that God wanted revealed to His
servants. Jesus “communicated” or “signified” this revelation by an angel to John. Jesus then refers to the prophetic nature of this revelation to be given:

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it (Rev 1:3a).

The nature of this revelation is “prophecy.” In continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament, John received divinely inspired revelation that is prophetic in nature. This is a case, therefore, where the genre of the book of Revelation is explicitly stated. The genre is prophecy. Often much is made of the alleged “apocalyptic” nature of Revelation in which John supposedly wrote in the style of non–inspired Jewish apocalyptic writers of his era. Such discussion is complicated by the fact that there is considerable disagreement concerning how to define “apocalyptic genre.” It is also complicated by the fact that the book of Revelation has elements in it that do not fit with the traditional understanding of “apocalyptic.” For instance, with apocalyptic literature the real author is not known, but in the case of Revelation we know its author—John. Also, Revelation has an epistolary section to it (chaps. 2–3), something other apocalyptic literature writings do not have.

So is there no relation between the book of Revelation and apocalyptic genre? The answer to this question depends on what one means by apocalyptic. If one identifies apocalyptic as divine revelation about the future in the form of visions and symbols to a prophet under divine inspiration, then, yes, the book of Revelation is apocalyptic. So too were OT prophetic books such as Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. But if one views John as mimicking the genre of other Jewish apocalyptic writers of his day who were not inspired then there are major problems. First, unlike the Jewish apocalyptic writers, John was writing under inspiration from God. The contents of John’s writings are not coming from his own mind but from actual revelations from God. And unlike other apocalyptic writers of his era, John did not sit down to intentionally write cryptic messages. He did not say to himself, “I need to give my people encouragement in difficult times so I am going to use cryptic symbols to encourage them.” If we take John at His word, he is simply writing down what God revealed to him via an angel of God. And unlike

19 There is some issue as to whether Jesus is the One being revealed or the One who is doing the revealing. The latter view is more likely. As Thomas states, “it refers to data that Jesus Christ was inspired by God to reveal to His servants.” Robert L. Thomas, Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 52.

20 Some claim that the word “signify” (semaino) is an indicator that the contents of the revelation are to be understood non-literally or symbolically. But this is reading too much into the term. The meaning here is that Jesus is going to “show,” “announce” or “declare” the contents of the revelation without indicating that there are cryptic meanings behind the terms used.

21 Ladd observes that “apocalyptic writings appeared between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, which purported to bring revelations from God explaining the reason for the prevalence of evil, disclosing heavenly secrets, and promising the imminent coming of His kingdom and the salvation of the afflicted.” George E. Ladd, “Apocalyptic,” in The New Bible Dictionary, ed. by J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 1:43. 1 Enoch, Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, 4 Ezra, 2 Esdras, the Apocalypse of Baruch, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs were written during this time.
Blessed is he who heeds the words of the *prophecy* of this book (Rev 22:7).

And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the *prophecy* of this book, for the time is near” (Rev 22:10).

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the *prophecy* of this book . . .” (Rev 22:18a).

“and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this *prophecy* . . .” (Rev 22:19a)

In light of these verses, we do not have to guess what kind of literature Revelation is. The book of Revelation, including the millennium of Revelation 20:1–6, is prophecy. Some of the details of this prophecy will be given in the form of symbols, but behind these symbols are literal truths.

**Literary Structure**

Where do the events of Revelation 20 fit within the overall structure of Revelation? Below is a listing of the major sections of Revelation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prologue</td>
<td>1:1–1:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters to Seven Churches</td>
<td>1:9–3:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavenly Court and Its Judgment</td>
<td>4:1–11:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophetic/Apocalyptic Narrative</td>
<td>12:1–16:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall of Babylon</td>
<td>17:1–19:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophetic/Apocalyptic Narrative</td>
<td>19:11–21:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jerusalem Established</td>
<td>21:9–22:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>22:10–22:21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John’s discussion of the millennium comes within the literary section of 19:11–21:8, a section that describes the return of Jesus and chronological events after His return. Here John uses the expression *kai eido* eight times (19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1). *Kai eido* can be translated “and I saw” or “then I saw.” This expression can refer to chronological progression which seems to be the case here. As Robert Mounce observed, “It should be noted that the recurring ‘and I saw’ of 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 12; and 21:1 appears to establish a sequence of visions which
carries through from the appearance of the Rider on the white horse (19:11) to the establishment of the new heaven and new earth (21:1ff).”

As the events within 19:11–21:8 unfold, John tells of several things he saw in succession, one after the other:

19:11–16: John saw (“And I saw”) the return of Christ with the armies of heaven to strike down Christ’s enemies and rule the nations.

19:17–18: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) an angel in heaven calling to the birds to eat the flesh of the enemies of Christ.

19:19–21 Then John saw (“And I saw”) the beast and the armies of the earth wage war against the returning Christ; the beast and the false prophet are seized and thrown into the lake of fire and the rest of the enemies are slain.

20:1–3: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) an angel coming from heaven with a great chain to bind Satan and throws him into the pit where his evil activities are totally ceased.

20:4–10: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) thrones established, the resurrection of the martyrs and their reigning with Christ for a thousand years, and the rest of the dead coming to life after the thousand years are completed. After the thousand-year period is over, Satan is released from his prison and leads a rebellion of nations against God’s people and the holy city. Satan is defeated and thrown into the lake of fire.

20:11: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) a great white throne established that could not be escaped.

20:12–15: Then John saw (“And I saw”) the great and the small judged, with those whose names were not found in the book of life being cast into the lake of fire; death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.

21:1–8: Then John saw (“Then I saw”) a new heaven and a new earth and the coming of the New Jerusalem.

The main point here is that in Revelation 19:11–21:8, John describes the second coming of Jesus and the events that follow it. This includes the thousand-year reign of Christ of Rev 20:1–10. The events of Rev 20:1–10 follow the second coming of Jesus described in Rev 19:11. There is sequential progression, not recapitulation in this section.

This understanding is a logical conclusion based on a section that is describing a chronological progression of events. As Craig Blaising observes, “It is noteworthy

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that when the issue of theological–historical significance is suspended and the
question is strictly literary, there is general agreement that the events in the visions
of 19:11–21:8 are correlative with or consequent to the Parousia of 19:11.”

Six of the eight visions that start with “and/then I saw” in 19:11–21:8 are
commonly viewed as happening at the time of or after the events of the parousia
as described in 19:11. The only two debated ones are 20:1–3 and 4–7, which describe
the binding of Satan and the reign of the saints. Amillennialists and
postmillennialists place these sections between the two comings of Jesus. But is it
not simpler to understand all eight sections as describing events after the coming of
Jesus? We think it is arbitrary to claim six of these are post-parousia, but two of
them recapitulate. Blaising is correct that, “The presumption is in favor of viewing
the remaining two visions [found in 20:1–6] in a similar manner.” Mounce is also
accurate that “The interpretation that discovers recapitulation for the segment 20:1–
6 must at least bear the burden of proof.”

Also, the chronological understanding based on a proper understanding of the
literary context makes most sense of what is being described in Revelation 19 and
20. This section tells of the defeat of the false trinity that is opposed to God—Satan,
the beast, and the false prophet. As the beast and the false prophet are defeated by
the returning Christ in 19:19–21, the natural question involves what will happen to
Satan who is the power behind the beast and the false prophet. A chronological
progression view understands that at this time of Christ’s return Satan will be dealt
with too. Off the heels of the defeat of the beast and the false prophet, Rev 20:1–3
finds Satan being incarcerated. This means that all three enemies are defeated with
the return of King Jesus.

But if one insists on stating that Revelation 19 is about the second coming of
Jesus, yet Rev 20:1 kicks the reader back to the beginning of the church age, then
there is a disconnect in how God deals with His ultimate enemies. In this odd
scenario, Satan is bound at the beginning of the church age (sort of), but the beast
and the false prophet who are empowered by Satan are not defeated until the second
coming of Jesus. It seems better to view all three members of the false trinity dealt
with at the same time. Thus, the best reading indicates that Christ appears from
heaven (19:11–19), He destroys His enemies, including the beast and the false
prophet (19:20–21), and then He deals with the third member of the false trinity,
Satan, by binding him and casting him into the abyss (20:1–3). Blomberg
summarizes this well:

In the process, we are told about the fate of two of the three members of the
so-called satanic trinity introduced in 12:1–13:18. The beast and the false
prophet, parodies of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, are captured and thrown alive
into the lake of fire (19:20). Readers expect to hear next about the fate of the
ringleader of the three, Satan himself, the one who wanted to usurp the place
of God the Father, and they are not disappointed. Revelation 20:1 continues

23 Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, 213.
24 Mounce, Book of Revelation, 352.
seamlessly, describing Satan’s confinement to the abyss until the very end of the millennium. The rest of the chapter follows equally inexorably from there on.\textsuperscript{25}

George Ladd also was correct when he declared, “There is absolutely no hint of any recapitulation in chapter 20.”\textsuperscript{26} And as Blomberg has aptly stated, “No matter how many flashbacks or disruptions of chronological sequence one might want to argue for elsewhere in Revelation, it makes absolutely no sense to put one in between Revelation 19 and 20 as both amillennialists and postmillennialists must do.”\textsuperscript{27}

\textit{The Binding of Satan}

Another reason for holding to a future and earthly understanding of the millennium of Revelation 20 is the nature of the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3. This passage describes an incarceration of Satan which results in a complete cessation of his activities:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.

The language here is powerful. Note several truths concerning what happens to Satan:

1. Satan is “bound.”
2. Satan is thrown into the abyss.
3. The abyss that Satan is placed in is “shut” and “sealed” over him.

Much attention often is given to whether the activities of Satan are curtailed or ceased, but before one even considers the activities of Satan, one must recognize what is happening to Satan himself, as a personal being. Satan himself is incarcerated and confined in a real place, a place called “the abyss.” Our point here is not just that a specific function of Satan (i.e. deceiving nations) is hindered; Satan himself is absolutely confined to a place that results in a complete cessation of all that he does. Satan is imprisoned. He used to be able to inflict his evil ways on the earth but now he is no longer able to do so because his presence is


\textsuperscript{27} Blomberg, 67.
transferred to the abyss. In Rev 9:1–3 the “bottomless pit” or “abyss” was a place that locust-like beings were confined. But their release from the abyss meant they were free to do their damaging activities “upon the earth” (9:3). On the flip side, while they were in the abyss they were not free to do anything on the earth. With the account of the demoniac in Luke 8, many demons pleaded with Jesus so they would not be sent to the “abyss” (8:31). It seems that they were afraid of being removed from having any presence or influence on earth and not just a curtailing of their activities to some degree. With this understanding that Satan himself has been taken from the earth to imprisonment in the abyss, conclusions can be made concerning what this means for his activities.

Since Satan is confined to the abyss it can be said that one of his major activities—deceiving the nations—ceased as well. But as we saw, the main reason Satan is no longer able to deceive the nations is because he is in prison with no access to the earth. *Imprisonment of a person means a cessation of that person’s works.* To use an example, if a law enforcement officer arrests a serial killer who terrorized a city and puts him in prison we could say, “This wicked person has been jailed so that he cannot continue with his murdering ways.” Such a statement does not mean only that this person’s murdering activities are curtailed. Nor does it mean that he is free to rape and rob. That would be absurd. His incarceration as a person means his wicked ways have totally stopped. Likewise, the binding of Satan means for the first time in human history mankind will not have to deal with Satan’s deceptive tactics. That is why Mounce is correct when he states: “The elaborate measures taken to insure his [Satan's] custody are most easily understood as implying the complete cessation of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities).”

This truth that Satan is totally incarcerated during the millennium is not compatible with the views of amillennialism and postmillennialism. Both of these positions assert that the millennium is present during this present age and that Satan is present and active. His limitation is that he is not able to stop the gospel from going to the nations. This view, though, is wrong. The Scripture indicates that Satan’s ability to deceive is alive and well in this present age:

2 Cor 4:4: “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

1 Pet 5:8: “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

1 John 5:19: “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

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28 Mounce, 353.
These passages, which were written by three apostles after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, make clear that Satan is still actively involved in worldwide deception. Plus, the book of Revelation itself explicitly states that before Jesus returns, Satan is actively deceiving the nations, with much success. Revelation 12:9 declares:

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

The sphere of Satan’s deception before Jesus returns is “the whole world.” This worldwide deception over the nations is again discussed in Rev 13:2, 7–8:

And the dragon [Satan] gave him [the Beast] his power and his throne and great authority . . . . It was also given to him [the Beast] to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him.

Satan is the energizing power behind the beast who has authority over “every tribe and people and tongue and nation.” Thus, in the time period between the two comings of Jesus, Satan is characterized by deceiving every people group. This is why the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3 is so dramatic and historic. Before Jesus comes again Satan’s deceptive power over the nations is strong but in one moment his ability to deceive the nations will end. This passage directly contradicts any theology that says that Satan’s ability to deceive the nations is bound today. As Wayne Grudem points out, “It seems more appropriate to say that Satan is now still deceiving the nations, but at the beginning of the millennium this deceptive influence will be removed.”29

Those who assert that the binding of Satan is taking place in this present age between the two comings of Jesus link the events of Rev 20:1–3 with Jesus’ victory over Satan at the cross. Of course it is true that the Bible indicates that Jesus was victorious over Satan at the cross. Yet the cosmic battle between God and Satan includes a progression of events that eventually culminates in Satan’s imprisonment in the lake of fire (see Rev 20:10). Just as a major war between two nations can involve many battles, so too, the battle between God and Satan involves several battles, with God’s victory involving several events:

1. Satan judged and cast down from heaven before the fall of man (Isa 14:12–15 and Ezek 28:11–19).
2. Jesus’ demonstrations of power over Satan’s realm through his casting out of demons (Matt 12:28).
3. Jesus’ victory over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15)

29 Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1118.
4. Satan thrown to the earth for a short time shortly before the return of Jesus (Revelation 12).
5. Satan bound in the pit for one thousand years at the return of Jesus (Rev 20:1–3).
6. Satan sent to the lake of fire forever after the one thousand year reign of Jesus (Rev 20:7–10).

These events above are separate but interrelated events in the cosmic war. But the binding of Satan described in Rev 20:1–3 occurs after Jesus returns to earth at His second coming, not before.

Two Physical Resurrections

Another evidence for a future understanding of the millennium is found in the two resurrections of Rev 20:4–5. The fulfillment of these two resurrections is future from our standpoint in history; this shows that the millennium is future as well.

In verse 4, John says that “the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus . . . came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This group of souls who were beheaded is the same group of martyrs that came out of the great tribulation described in Revelation 6. Thus, there is an inherent connection between the martyrs of Revelation 6 and the martyrs who are resurrected in Revelation 20.

Revelation 6:9–11 describes the fifth seal which is the martyrdom of God’s people who were slain because of their commitment to the Word of God and their testimony for Jesus (see Rev 6:9). This solemn passage tells of the condition of the souls of these martyred saints. Their state is not that of “reigning.” Instead, it is one of crying to the Lord for the avenging of their lives. These saints were killed for their testimony on the earth. And now their souls are in heaven and they are crying out, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10). Verse 11 then states that these martyrs were clothed in white and told to “rest for a little while longer” until the full number of martyred saints was completed. These saints are not involved in a kingdom reign; instead, they are eagerly calling on the Lord to deal with their enemies who killed them. The response given to them is to wait for awhile.

The frustration of these saints comes to an end, though, with the events of Revelation 19 and 20. Revelation 5:10 promised a coming day when the saints would reign upon the earth: “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” Now this day that the saints hoped for is coming true. The enemies of Jesus receive judgment. And with the Lord’s return, His saints will reign with him. This is the picture presented in Rev 20:4–6.

Revelation 19:11–21 tells of the return of Jesus and the vanquishing of His enemies. Revelation 20:1–3 details the complete cessation of the activities of Satan. Then verse 4 tells us that thrones are established, indicating a kingdom reign. Then we are told that the martyred saints “came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” These are the same people who lost their physical lives in Rev
6:9–11. But now these people come to life. The term for “came to life” is ezesan, a word used of Jesus’ bodily resurrection in Revelation 2:8. Here Jesus referred to himself as, “The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life (ezesan).” The coming to life that Jesus is talking about is not spiritual salvation since Jesus did not need to be saved. Instead, His was a physical resurrection, a physical coming to life. The Jesus who was killed physically is the same Jesus who was raised physically from the dead. Likewise, these martyrs for the cause of Jesus who had physically died (Rev 6:9–11) are now physically made alive (Rev 20:4).

Verse 5 then states, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.” We are introduced now to another group called “the rest of the dead.” This is a different and much broader group than the one mentioned in verse 4. It is said of this second group that they did not “come to life” until the thousand years were over.

Again, the term for “come to life,” ezesan, is used. Since ezesan referred to physical resurrection in verse 4 it is highly likely that ezesan refers to physical resurrection in verse 5. Such a conclusion is based on strong contextual and historical/grammatical considerations, for it is likely that the term ezesan would be used similarly in such close proximity. Thus, a thousand years after the first group was physically resurrected this second group experiences physical resurrection. For the second group, though, this physical resurrection is unto eternal judgment. Verse 6 states, “Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” This states that those who experience the first resurrection will not experience what is called “the second death.” But those who are part of the second resurrection after the thousand years are affected by “the second death.” This second death is linked with the lake of fire (20:14) that comes as a result of the great white throne judgment of Rev 20:11–15.

Amillennialists and postmillennialists have claimed that the first reference to ezesan (“came to life”) is a spiritual resurrection while the second reference to ezesan is a physical resurrection. The problem with this understanding is evident. That this term, ezesan, could be used in two different senses in such close proximity seems most improbable. Martyrs who have given their life to Christ are not in need of spiritual resurrection. They are already saved. That is why they gave their lives for Jesus in the first place. But martyrs who have lost their physical lives to God’s enemies are in need of a physical resurrection, and this is what Revelation 20:4 promises. Amillennialists and postmillennialists admit that the second resurrection of Rev 20:5 cannot be a spiritual resurrection for if it were, this would be teaching universalism, the view that all people will be saved. But if the second resurrection is a physical resurrection what contextual reasons are there for claiming that the first resurrection of 20:4 is spiritual as the amillennialists and postmillennialists affirm? To claim that the resurrection of verse 4 is spiritual but the resurrection of verse 5 is physical stretches the limits of credibility.

To avoid the obvious, some have asserted that when it comes to the two resurrections it is not chronology that is in view but the quality of the resurrections. Thus, the first resurrection is a kind of resurrection in which the focus is on spiritual salvation, while the second resurrection is in the category of physical resurrection.
Yet such a view does injustice to the immediate context which is very time-oriented. The eight “and I saw” (kai eidon) markers in Rev 19:11–21:8 indicate chronology. And even more striking is that the second resurrection is said to follow the first resurrection by a “thousand years,” showing that time is in view. So to deemphasize chronology here is a major violation of the context.

Thus, it is best to conclude that the martyrs who were killed for the sake of Jesus receive a physical resurrection while a thousand years later there will be a physical resurrection for another group. All of this argues for a future millennium. If the first resurrection of Rev 20:4–5 is a physical resurrection then the millennium of Revelation 20 must be future, following the second coming of Jesus in Revelation 19. Since physical resurrection of saints has not occurred in history, such a resurrection must be a future event and cannot be something fulfilled in the inter-advent age. Thus, Rev 20:4–5 is powerful evidence for the idea that there will be an intermediate age, a millennium, after the second coming of Jesus but before the final eternal state.

**Church History**

The last point to be made here is in regard to church history. I put this point last since the main arguments for a theological view should stem from Scripture. Yet there is an important point from history that should be considered by those evaluating the millennium issue. The point is this—for over two hundred years after the writing of Revelation by the apostle John, the strong consensus of the early church was that the millennium John spoke of was earthly and future. Or in other words, the church held to premillennialism. As the historian Philip Schaff declared:

The most striking point in the eschatology of the ante-Nicene age is the prominent chiliasm, or millenarianism, that is the belief of a visible reign of Christ in glory on earth with the risen saints for a thousand years, before the general resurrection and judgment. It was indeed not the doctrine of the church embodied in any creed or form of devotion, but a widely current opinion of distinguished teachers, such as Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius.30

After stating that “The Book of Revelation offers an example of a theology which is at the heart of earliest Christian conviction rather than being marginal to it,” Christopher Rowland points out, “Millennial beliefs were still widely held from the second century onward, as is evident in the writings of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, and Lactantius.”31

It is also helpful to look at the millennial beliefs of those who had some connection with the apostle John, the author of Revelation 20:1–10. In addition, it is

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beneficial to examine the beliefs of those in close geographical proximity to Asia Minor where the apostle John lived later in his life. We think it probable that those who had a close association with John would also have a correct understanding of what John meant by the millennium.

Papias (A.D. 60–130) was Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia, Asia Minor. He was a contemporary of Polycarp. According to Martin Erdmann, Papias “represented a chiliastic tradition which had its antecedents in Palestine.” Papias’s dependence on the oral teachings of the apostles and elders has been documented by both Irenaeus and Eusebius. Eusebius points out that Papias received “doctrines of the faith” that came from the “friends” of the twelve apostles. Eusebius also said of Papias, “It is worth while observing here that the name John is twice enumerated by him. The first one he mentions in connection with Peter and James and Matthew and the rest of the apostles, clearly meaning the evangelist.”

Papias, thus, saw himself as possessing the teachings of the apostles. As Eusebius notes, “And Papias, of whom we are now speaking, confesses that he received the words of the apostles from those that followed them.” Irenaeus also refers to Papias as “a hearer of John.”

It appears, therefore, that Papias had close connections with the apostles and John the apostle in particular. So did he hold a particular millennial view? He did—Papias was a premillennialist. Eusebius records that Papias believed things that “came to him from unwritten tradition” and “teachings of the Saviour.” Among these beliefs were “that there will be a millennium after the resurrection of the dead, when the kingdom of Christ will be set up in material form on this earth.” Thus, with Papias we have a case of a Christian who had close access to John the apostle and was convinced that the kingdom of Christ was future and earthly.

Next, Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 202) was born in Asia Minor and later became the Bishop of Lyons. As a youth Irenaeus listened to Polycarp, who probably had personal contact with John and other apostles. Irenaeus was not as directly associated with John as Papias, but the historical connection through Polycarp is still significant. Irenaeus knew someone who knew the apostle John. As with Papias, Irenaeus was also a strong believer in premillennialism. In fact, premillennialism was a major weapon in Irenaeus’s battle against Gnosticism.

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32 Polycarp (A.D. 70–155) was Bishop of Smyrna and most important for our purposes, was a disciple of John the apostle. Because of his connection to the apostle John, Polycarp was viewed as a protector of true doctrine. According to Irenaeus, Polycarp was converted to Christianity by the apostles. He was made a bishop and had communicated with many who testified that they had seen Jesus.

33 Erdmann, *The Millennial Controversy*, 107. For our purposes here, we are following the lead of Erdmann in viewing chiliasm and premillennialism as mostly synonymous.

34 Ibid.


36 Ibid., 39.5.

37 Ibid., 39.7.

38 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book V. 33.4.


40 Erdmann, 108.
its unbiblical dualism between matter and spirit. Irenaeus used premillennialism and the idea of an earthly kingdom to fight the gnostic view that matter was evil that and God was not interested in redeeming the earth. Erdmann points out that “The book *Adversus Haereses* is also one of the most important sources of millennial expositions in the ante–Nicene literature.”

So with the cases of Papias and Irenaeus we have two people who had a historical connection with John the apostle who affirmed premillennialism. Is it possible that these two men were simply wrong about the millennium? Did they misunderstand John? Of course it is possible, but is it likely? We think not. It is more likely that they held to premillennialism because John himself taught this view.

Those in geographical proximity to John also believed in premillennialism. John lived his later years at Ephesus in Asia Minor. Erdmann refers to the premillennialism of Asia Minor in the second century as “Asiatic millennialism.” He also notes that “the decisive authority of Asiatic millennialism is John, from whom the elders claimed to have obtained their information. Moreover, John, as again stated by Papias, ascribed the origin of millenarianism to Christ.” Thus, the evidence indicates that Christians of Asia Minor held to premillennialism. Others associated with Asiatic millennialism include Tertullian, Commodian, and Lactantius. If premillennialism was the intended view of John the apostle, it seems natural to think that those who knew him or had a close association with him would also affirm premillennialism. And, if John the apostle lived in Asia Minor, it appears likely that those Christians near his area of influence also would have similar views as John on the millennium. We cannot be absolutely certain of these estimations, but they do appear probable. On the other hand, for amillennialism or postmillennialism to be correct, we have to believe that those who had close connections with John, either personally or geographically, were woefully wrong with their views of the millennium. In our view, this is possible but not probable.

Scripture, not church history, determines the correctness of a theological view. But it seems to us that the historical argument is on the side of premillennialism since people close to John held premillennial views and premillennialism was the overwhelming view of those in Asia Minor and the church as a whole of the second century.

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41 For a detailed discussion of how Irenaeus used premillennialism as a weapon against Gnosticism see Erdmann, 107–29.
42 Ibid., 109.
43 Eusebius himself believed Papias was mistaken.
45 Erdmann, 111.
46 We are not saying that every single Christian of the second century was a premillennialist, but premillennialism was clearly the dominant view.
Conclusion

The testimony of Scripture is clear—the millennial kingdom of Jesus the Messiah is earthly and future from our standpoint in history. The Old Testament offers evidence for an intermediate kingdom, and this intermediate kingdom is explicitly stated to be one thousand years according to Rev 20:1–10. In addition, the consensus of the early church was that Jesus’ millennial reign was both earthly and future. The truth of premillennialism should cause all Christians to pray what Jesus taught us to pray in Matt 6:10: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”
THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE ETERNAL STATE

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History is heading toward a new heaven and new earth, which is often referred to as the eternal state. This is not a mystical realm but a real, tangible place where the people of God will dwell in the presence of the Triune God forever. Scholars debate whether the new earth is a renovation of the present planet or an entirely new entity. Whichever option chosen, the student of Scripture will be wise to remember that the eternal state has both continuities and discontinuities with our present planet. He should also draw upon the hope of knowing that the troubles of our world today will give way to the glorious world to come.

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As the Bible clearly reveals, the time will come when every facet of God’s reign will merge into one eternal kingdom, on a new earth, in which the Triune God will be gloriously present. His enemies will be everlastingly vanquished, and His people will serve Him perfectly and reign with Him victoriously forever. Christians refer to that future reality as the eternal state and the new earth, or to use the common vernacular, as heaven.¹

The eternal heaven (i.e. the new earth) is the future home of all who have savingly trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation. It is the blessed

¹ Throughout this article, the terms eternal state and heaven will be used interchangeably. The Bible uses the term heaven to refer to the abode of God (Ps 80:14; Heb 8:1). Thus, although the term heaven is not used in Scripture to refer to the eternal state, it is nonetheless an appropriate designation—since the Triune God will reside with redeemed humankind on the new earth. In that sense, it is important to differentiate between the intermediate heaven (where the souls of believers go immediately after death—cf. 2 Cor 5:8) and the eternal (or consummated) heaven—a reference to the new heavens and earth which are gloriously revealed in passages like Revelation 21–22. As Anthony Hoekema explains, “Since God will make the new earth his dwelling place, and since where God dwells there heaven is, we shall then continue to be in heaven while we are on the new earth. For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated as they are now, but will be one.” Anthony Hoekema, The Bible and the Future (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274.
hope that has ignited the hearts of believers throughout every generation of church history. As C. S. Lewis observed, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next . . . . It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.”

In writing about heaven, the Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, asked his readers, “Why are not our hearts continually there? Why dwell we not there in constant contemplation? . . . . Bend thy soul to study eternity; busy it about the life to come; habituate thyself to such contemplations, and let not these thoughts be seldom or cursory, but settle upon them; bathe thy soul in heavenly delights.” The American evangelist, D. L. Moody, similarly emphasized the importance of maintaining an eternal perspective:

Surely it is not wrong for us to think and talk about Heaven. I like to locate it, and find out all I can about it. I expect to live there through all eternity. If I were going to dwell in any place in this country, if I were going to make it my home, I would inquire about its climate, about the neighbors I would have, about everything, in fact, that I could learn concerning it. If soon you were going to emigrate, that is the way you would feel. Well, we are all going to emigrate in a very little while. We are going to spend eternity in another world, a grand and glorious world where God reigns. Is it not natural that we should look and listen and try to find out who is already there, and what is the route to take?

Focusing on the glories of one’s eternal future is a vital part of the life of faith (cf. Heb 11:16). But in an age of science fiction novels and near-death experiences, it is imperative that believers think rightly about heaven. True hope must be grounded in biblical reality, not in fairy tales or overactive imaginations.

Ask the average American what he thinks about “heaven,” and he will probably describe a state of existence in which the joys of this life (e.g. vivid color, good food, loud music, physical activity, and meaningful friendships) are largely absent. Popular stereotypes depict a place where everything is white, sanitized, and

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5 Recent books like the best-selling Heaven Is for Real (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010) and the lesser-known My Trip to Heaven (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011) have become increasingly popular in the evangelical world. Ironically, such books never agree on the details of what heaven is like. For example, Colton Burpo (who was featured in Heaven Is for Real) claims that the Holy Spirit is “bluish and transparent . . . and almost ghost-like,” and that He does not have wings (“Questions about Heaven,” Heaven Is For Real, Inc., http://hifrministries.org/index.php?id=17, accessed August 15, 2012). By contrast, David Taylor, author of My Trip to Heaven, states that the Holy Spirit is bright white, has a body, and “also had huge, beautiful, white wings as part of His form” (67). Such blatant contradictions expose the fact that these alleged trips to heaven have more to do with the author’s imagination than any actual celestial visit.
generally quiet—like a cosmic hospital or giant library in the sky. Heaven’s ethereal inhabitants float about like disembodied spirits, donning halos and endlessly strumming miniature harps atop clouds of cotton. Such a picture is understandably unappealing; it is also grossly inaccurate. Yet, far too often, evangelical Christians allow their understanding of heaven to be tainted by the culture around them, rather than looking to the Word of God.

The Scriptures reveal that the eternal heaven is anything but bland, boring, or quiet. The new earth is a place of brilliant color (Rev 21:19–21; cf. 4:3), delicious food (22:2; cf. 19:7–9), vibrant music (cf. 5:8–13), exuberant physical activity (21:24–26), and intimate fellowship with God Himself (22:3–4). The best this life has to offer cannot compare to the wonders and joys of the life to come. In light of that reality, the renown Reformer Martin Luther exclaimed, “I would not give one moment of heaven for the wealth and pleasure of all the world, although they were to last thousands upon thousands of years.”

The most detailed description of the eternal heaven in the Bible is found in Rev 21:1–22:5. As R. C. Sproul explains, “The most vivid and dramatic portrayal of heaven that we can find in Scripture is at the end of the Revelation of John. . . . The future of creation is found in the manifestation of a new heaven and a new earth.” The final two chapters of Revelation not only make up the last two chapters of inspired Scripture, they also present the climax of salvation history. Since the creation of the world, all of human history has been directed toward this final cosmic consummation—when God will reign with His redeemed on the new earth for all of eternity.

As throughout all of Scripture, the theme of God’s kingdom permeates the apostle John’s description of the new heavens and earth. Whereas Satan, sin, and death have attempted to challenge divine authority since the Fall, in the eternal state all such enemies have been destroyed. God’s sovereign reign will continue, uncontested, for all of eternity. In the words of one commentator:

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6 Such contemporary misconceptions stem from the dualism of Greek philosophy. As George E. Ladd explains, “In typical dualistic Greek thought, the universe was divided into two realms: the earthly or transitory, and the eternal spiritual world. Salvation consisted of the flight of the soul from the sphere of the transitory and ephemeral to the realm of eternal reality. However, biblical thought always places man on a redeemed earth, not in a heavenly realm removed from earthly existence” (A Commentary on Revelation [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 275).

7 As Jonathan Edwards exclaimed, “The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows, but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean” (Jonathan Edwards, “The Christian Pilgrim.” Cited in Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspectives [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012], 315).

8 Martin Luther, What Luther Says: An Anthology, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1959), 2:624.

9 In the words of Grant R. Osborne, “The only extended description of ‘heaven’ in the Bible is Rev. 21:1–22:5” (Revelation, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 742).

The consummated kingdom of God will be just that—the *kingdom of God*. Everything in the universe will be brought into conformity with God’s good and beneficent will. He will be king. He will be sovereign. He will exercise rule. He will have the dominion. He will be Lord. John expresses this truth by picturing God on the “throne” and saying that “his servants will serve him.”

A simple survey of Revelation 21–22 reveals several general characteristics of this divine kingdom. First, it will be a *geo-physical kingdom*—located on a new earth within a new universe (21:1). It has geographical features: the absence of a sea (21:1), the presence of a city (21:2), a high mountain (21:10), a river with banks (22:1–2), and a tree that produces fruit (22:1–2). It occupies physical space (21:16–17) and encompasses the physical activity of its inhabitants (21:24). The apostle John describes it as a land of bright color and exquisite beauty, like dazzling jewels (21:19–21). There is even a reference made to the marking of time (in terms of months and seasons) in eternity future (22:2).

It will also be a *socio-political kingdom*—complete with a capital city, the New Jerusalem (21:2). The city itself has gates, high walls, foundations, engraved names, and streets (cf. Isa 62:3–5). Its inhabitants communicate through speech and writing (21:3, 5). There is government hierarchy (21:24), an ongoing economic system (21:24), and some form of national distinctiveness (21:24, 26). But most importantly, the King’s throne is present on the new earth (22:1, 5). Though His people will reign with Him (22:5), they are also His bond slaves—with His name written on their foreheads designating that they belong to Him (22:4; cf. Isa 62:2).

Third, it will be a *spiritually-perfect kingdom*. Sin and its effects will be gone (21:4), thus, there will no longer be any separation between God and man (21:2–3). There will no longer be any spiritual thirst (21:6–7). Instead, the essence of life will revolve around face-to-face communion with God (22:4–5). No sinful influences or unregenerate people will be allowed inside its territories (21:8, 27), but only those who have been redeemed, and therefore love to worship and serve their Lord and Master (22:3).

Finally, it will be a *divinely-glorious kingdom*. The New Jerusalem will be the crown jewel of the new earth, radiating the glory of God (21:11). The Triune God—Father (21:22), Son (22:1, 5), and Holy Spirit (21:10)—will be present in the midst of His people. The Shekinah glory will permeate the entire world (22:5), such that there will be no need for the sun or the moon (21:23; cf. Isa 66:20–22), or even a lamp (v. 23). The redeemed will bask in radiance of His presence, as they worship Him in perfect purity (22:3–4). They will continually enjoy the essence of eternal...

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12 The presence of “nations” in 21:24 has resulted in a wide variety of interpretations by commentators. For a survey of ten proposed views, see Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 476–78. Thomas’ own conclusion is “that ‘the nations’ are composed of saved people who survive the millennial kingdom without dying and without joining Satan’s rebellion and who undergo some sort of transformation that suits them for life in the eternal state” (p. 478). Yet, Thomas is quick to add that any view is somewhat speculative, since “this is an issue on which the text of Revelation is silent.”
life—fellowship with God (cf. John 17:3)—as they drink the water of life (Rev 21:6) from the river of life (22:1) which flows from His heavenly throne.

With that as a backdrop, the final section of John’s apocalyptic vision (20:11–22:5) can now be considered in more detail. The apostle relates the grand consummation of salvation history by focusing on four major themes: the punishment of the King’s enemies (20:11–15), the perfection of the King’s territory (21:1–8), the physical properties of the King’s capital city (21:9–21), and the personal presence of the King Himself (21:22–22:5). Outlined another way, these four themes center around the great white throne (20:11–15), the new heavens and earth (21:1–8), the New Jerusalem (21:9–21), and within the New Jerusalem, the throne room of God (21:22–22:5).

The Punishment of the King’s Enemies (20:11–15)

In Revelation 20, the apostle John transitions from the millennial kingdom (20:1–10) to the eternal state by describing the final condemnation of God’s enemies. The setting is a royal one, with the Sovereign of the universe seated on His majestic throne of judgment—ready to issue an imperial sentence of guilt on all of His adversaries.13

At this final judgment, the first enemy to be condemned is Satan (cf. v. 10).14 With permanent finality, the true King and Judge will send the usurping god of this world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) into the lake of fire—never to oppose the purposes or people of God again. The prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2), whose defeat was accomplished at the cross, will be cast into everlasting punishment. In the lake of fire, he will join the beast and the false prophet who were already imprisoned there before the commencement of the millennial kingdom (Rev 19:20).

It is important to note that Satan will not be the king of hell; but rather its primary captive and most-tormented prisoner. According to Rev 14:9–11, the Lamb Himself is sovereign over the lake of fire. Holy angels administer the righteous wrath of God forever and ever.

Following Satan’s condemnation, the masses of unredeemed humanity throughout history will be raised from the dead (Dan 12:2; John 5:28–92) and

13 In the words of Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort: “[In ancient Israel] the throne chair itself was symbolic of the power which God, the King of the Universe, had vested in the office He created. The ‘throne’ (kisse’) was and continues to be a sign of authority, majesty and exalted rule by God's chosen rulers in Israel (Pss. 9:7; 45:6; 94:20; Prov. 16:12). God delegates His authority from His heavenly throne (Pss. 11:4; 45:6; 47:8; 132:12). In Isaiah, the Lord is the picture of Majesty, seated upon His throne high over the universe (Isa. 6). Heaven itself is the Lord’s throne and even it does not contain Him. . . . Daniel’s vision of the great white throne is reiterated in Revelation 20:11. After God's judgment from this eternal throne, the Lord God and His Lamb, Jesus Christ, will rule forever” (Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000], 189).

14 Though 20:10 is rightly grouped with 20:1–9 (in terms of literary structure), it nonetheless serves as the bridge event between the millennial reign of Christ and God’s judgment at the great white throne. Even non-premillennialists acknowledge that the final judgment of 20:11–15 “either begins with or is simultaneous with the definitive judgment in v 10” (G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 1032).
summoned to appear before the great white throne (Rev 20:11–15). As with the devil, the eternal destiny of all the unredeemed is the lake of fire—where God’s justice and righteous indignation will be everlastingly displayed in the punishment of the wicked.

Lastly, death itself will be destroyed (Rev 20:14). This is the final act of Christ’s millennial reign. As the apostle Paul explained in 1 Cor 15:25–26, “He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death.” Christ’s kingly dominion during the millennial age will culminate in the destruction of death itself. According to 1 Cor 15:28, after all of His enemies are defeated and His mediatorial role is fulfilled, Christ will then subject His kingdom to the Father “so that God may be all in all.” Though the millennial kingdom will have come to an end, the Son of God will continue to rule with His Father in Trinitarian glory for all of eternity (cf. Rev 22:3–5).

**The Perfection of the King’s Territory (21:1–8)**

With the enemies of the King permanently vanquished, the apostle John transitions to speak of the glorious perfection that will characterize His eternal kingdom. For believers, an everlasting future awaits, not in the lake of fire but in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1). When this sin-stained universe has passed away (cf. 20:11), God will create a new one that is both permanent and perfect.

> From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained

Whereas the original creation was corrupted by sin (Gen 3:1–24), the new creation will recapture and exceed the glory of the old (cf. Rom 8:19–22). It will never be contaminated or cursed. As Mark Dever explains:

> In Revelation, creation is re-finished, refurbished, and re-presented in a new heaven and a new earth, all of which tends toward the great end of the Bible and world history—the glory of God himself. . . . The holiness of God’s people will finally be complete, and we will dwell together with him. Really, Revelation presents the Garden of Eden restored, only better.

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15 Premillennialists understand the resurrection of the redeemed to have taken place before the great white throne judgment, at the outset of the millennial kingdom (cf. Rev 20:4).

16 The redeemed, in their resurrection bodies, will experience a life on the new earth that is not only spiritual but also physical. Hoekema explains: “One gets the impression from certain hymns that glorified believers will spend eternity in some ethereal heaven somewhere off in space, far away from earth. . . . On the contrary, the Bible assures us that God will create a new earth on which we shall live to God’s praise in glorified, resurrected bodies. On that new earth, therefore, we hope to spend eternity, enjoying its beauties, exploring its resources, and using its treasures to the glory of God” (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 274).

A comparison of the new created order in Revelation 21–22 with the old creation in Genesis 1–3 provides a number of intriguing similarities and differences. In Gen 1:1, God created the heavens and earth; in Rev 21:1, God creates the new heavens and new earth. In Gen 1:3, God created light; on the new earth, God’s glory is the light. In Gen 1:5, God created day and night; on the new earth, there is no more night. In Gen 1:10, God created the sea, and in Genesis 6–8, He used the sea to judge the world; on the new earth, there is no more sea. In Gen 1:14–18, God created the sun and moon to give light to the earth; on the new earth, there is no longer any need for the sun and the moon.

In Gen 1:28, God placed man as ruler over the earth. In Genesis 3, man abdicated that rule and Satan usurped that authority; on the new earth, redeemed mankind will reign together with God, and Satan will be forever defeated. In Gen 2:7, God created man’s body out of the dust of the earth; on the new earth, redeemed men will exist in perfect, resurrection bodies (cf. 1 Cor 15:42–58). In Gen 2:10, a river watered the Garden of Eden; on the new earth, a river nourishes the entire world. In Gen 2:17, God warned that the penalty for sin would be death; on the new earth both sin and death are absent. In Gen 2:21–24, God created a bride for the man, Adam. In the eternal state, believers remain unmarried (Matt 22:30). However, on the new earth, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride. And believers, corporately, are described as the bride of the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Gen 3:4, the devil tempted Eve to sin; on the new earth, Satan and his hosts will be absent. In Gen 3:8–10, we see that God walked in full fellowship with Adam and Eve; believers will again walk in full fellowship with God on the new earth. At the Fall (Gen 3), God’s perfect law was violated; on the new earth, His people will serve and worship Him perfectly. In Gen 3:15, God promised that the coming Messiah would trample the head of the serpent; on the new earth, the eternal benefits of that final victory over sin and Satan are fully realized. In Genesis 3:16, God explained that pain and suffering are one of the consequences of sin; on the new earth, pain and suffering are removed. In Gen 3:17, God cursed the ground; on the new earth, the curse on the earth is gone. In Gen 3:21, God killed an animal substitute in order to make coverings for Adam and Eve; on the new earth, all of the redeemed are there because they have been covered by the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Isa 61:10; Rev 7:9, 13–14). In Gen 3:22, God guarded the Tree of Life to prevent men from eating it; on the new earth, mankind freely partakes of its fruit and lives forever.

A Comparison of the New Earth to This Present World

In addition to the parallels that can be drawn between the new earth and God’s original creative work (in Genesis 1–3), it is also instructive to note comparisons and contrasts between this present world (after the Fall) and the perfect world that will exist in the eternal state.

One of the most striking features of Rev 21:1–22:5 is its prominent use of negatives. In describing the new earth, the apostle John spends a considerable
amount of time emphasizing the realities of this world that will not be part of the next. John MacArthur, in his commentary on Revelation, explains it like this: “Heaven will be so dramatically different from the present world that to describe it requires the use of negatives . . . . To describe what is totally beyond human understanding [necessarily] requires pointing out how it differs from present human experience.”

Consider the following two lists:

**Items That Will Be Present on the New Earth**

1. The New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2, 9 ff) which is the called “the Bride of Christ” because it consists of all whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (21:27)
2. The redeemed who inhabit the New Jerusalem. They are also called over-comers (in 21:7); heirs of God (in 21:7); peoples or nations (21:24); and His bond servants (22:3)
4. The water of life (21:6)
5. A high mountain (21:10)
6. The glory of God (21:11)
7. City walls made of jewels that radiate the light of His glory like a multi-faceted diadem projecting a spectrum of brilliant light and color (21:12, 18)
8. Pearly city gates (21:12, 21)
9. City foundation stones, also made of precious jewels (21:14, 19–20)
10. Streets of translucent gold (21:21)
11. Brilliant light that emanates from God Himself (21:23)
13. Continual worship and praise (21 26)
14. The river of life (22:1) that flows from the throne of God and the Lamb (22:1)
15. The tree of life (22:2) and fruit and leaves on the tree of life
16. Unending service to God (22:3) and face-to-face fellowship with Christ (22:4)
17. The name of God written on the foreheads of His servants (22:4)

**Items That Will Be Absent from the New Earth**

1. No sea (21:1)
2. No longer any separation between God and man (21:2–3)
3. No tears, mourning, or crying (21:4)
4. No pain (21:4)
5. No death (21:4)

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6. Nothing that will not be made new (21:5)
7. No spiritual thirst (21:6)
8. No unforgiven sinner—whom John lists as the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, immoral persons, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars (21:8); no one who practices abomination and lying (21:27)
9. No temple (21:22) because God is the temple
10. No need for the sun or moon (21:23; 22:5) because God is the light
11. No need for a lamp (21:23; 22:5)
12. No night (21:25; 22:5)
13. No closing of the gates (21:25)
15. No one whose name is not written in the Lamb’s book of life (21:27)
16. No curse (22:3)
17. No end to the eternal reign of Christ and His redeemed (22:5)

As these two lists demonstrate, John spends roughly the same amount of time delineating aspects of this world that will not be on the new earth as he does denoting the things that will. By including such striking contrasts, the apostle emphasizes the qualitative superiority of the new earth over this present world.

A detailed analysis of every item on these lists is beyond the scope of this article. But one item in particular bears further investigation. Why does the apostle John begin his description of the new earth (in 21:1) by telling his readers that there is no sea?

Commentators have offered a variety of opinions in response to this question. Part of the answer is probably found in the fact that the ocean is one of the most distinctive features of our planet. When one looks at pictures of the earth from space, the opal-blue sea is what immediately sets it apart from all other worlds. Perhaps John mentions that detail first because it represents such a dramatic geographical difference.

But, there is more to it than that. It may be that John wishes to emphasize how different the essence of life will be on the new earth. Whereas life here depends on physical water and the hydrological cycle, life on the new earth will be, as one commentator states, “based on a completely different life principle than the present universe. . . . Without a sea, there can be no hydrological cycle, so that every feature of life and climate will be dramatically different.”

There is also a spiritual point that the apostle John is making here. At times in Scripture, and even in the book of Revelation, the sea represents a principle of disorder, violence, unrest, and even wickedness. This principle is seen in passages like Isa 57:20; Ps 107:25–28; Ezek 28:8; Rev 12:18; 13:1; and 17:1–6. John is emphasizing that there will be nothing hostile or rebellious on the new earth.

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19 Ibid., 263.
20 Robert Thomas, commenting on the absence of the sea, explains that: “Most justifiably see this void as representing an archetypical connotation in the sea (cf. 13:1; 20:13), a principle of disorder, violence, unrest, and even wickedness. This principle is seen in passages like Isa 57:20; Ps 107:25–28; Ezek 28:8; Rev 12:18; 13:1; and 17:1–6. John is emphasizing that there will be nothing hostile or rebellious on the new earth.”
Finally, one other factor ought to be considered. In Revelation 21–22, the apostle John repeatedly highlights the reality that all judgment against the earth has been undone. The Fall has been canceled out, the curse eliminated, sin abolished, and death destroyed. Though God created the sea on the third day of the creation week (Gen 1:10), the ocean as it exists today (covering seventy-five percent of earth’s surface) is largely the result of God’s judgment in the flood (Genesis 6–8). Genesis 7:11 describes the dramatic ways in which the world was altered during that great deluge, as waters burst forth from the depths of the earth and crashed down from the firmament of the heavens. The sea is not only a spiritual symbol of disorder and unrest; it is also a vivid reminder of God’s wrath being poured out on this world during the flood. Its absence in the new earth not only represents the elimination of all wickedness, but also the undoing of divine judgment.21

Is the New Earth an Entirely New Planet?

One final issue regarding the general character of the new earth deserves consideration. In Rev 21:1, an exegetical issue arises as to whether the new earth is a completely new creation (being made out of nothing), or whether it is a restoration of this present world.22 R. C. Sproul summarizes the issue nicely:

We are told that the first earth and the first heaven pass away. What does this mean? Interpreters are divided on this question. Some view the passing away of the original creation as an act of divine judgment on a fallen world. The old order is destroyed, annihilated by God’s fury. Then the old is replaced by a new act of creation. Out of nothing God brings forth the new order. A second view of the matter . . . is that the new order involves not a new creation of out nothing, but rather renovation of the old order. Its newness is marked by the work of God’s redemption.23

Those who hold the renovation view look to passages like Matt 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom 8:19–22; 2 Pet 3:10–13; and Rev 21:5 which suggest a future renewal of this corrupted universe. Lexically, they emphasize that the word for “new” in Rev 21:1 is kainos which often indicates the idea of being renewed rather than starting that the sea is evil in itself, but that its aspect is one of hostility to mankind” (Thomas, Revelation 8-22, 440).

21 For an extended discussion on the absence of the sea in the new earth, see G. K. Beale, Revelation, 1050–51. As part of his argument, Beale draws a connection between the removal of the sea in the new earth and the threatening presence of the sea in both the Flood and at the Exodus.

22 Grant R. Osborne explains some of the history of this controversy. He writes, “There was considerable speculation regarding this new order in Jewish thinking. Two ideas predominated, one holding that there would be total destruction of the present world and virtually a creation de novo of a new heaven and earth (1 Enoch 72.1; 83:3 – 4; 91.16; 2 Bar. 44.12; Sib. Or. 3.75–90) and the other teaching a renovated or transfigured earth (Jub. 1.29; 4.26; 23.18; 1 Enoch 45.4–5; 2 Bar. 32.2–6; 57.1–3; T. Levi 18.5–10)” (Osborne, Revelation, 730).

23 R. C. Sproul, Surprised by Suffering, 152.
The Kingdom of God and the Eternal State | 265

over from nothing.24 From a philosophical standpoint, they contend that if this earth is annihilated, it would suggest that God’s original purpose for this earth was ultimately frustrated by sin. Finally, they draw a parallel between the resurrection bodies of the redeemed and the resurrection or renovation of the new earth. In the words of Simon J. Kistemaker:

God will not annihilate heaven and earth and then create them anew out of nothing. Instead he will transform them in a process that is the same as calling forth the lowly bodies of the saints to make them like the glorious body of the Lord (Phil. 3:21). Just as Jesus’ body was transformed at his resurrection, so at the coming of the Lord the bodies of his people will be not annihilated but completely changed and glorified.25

By contrast, those who argue for replacement (i.e. the annihilation of this earth) look to texts like Pss 97:5; 102:25–26; Isa 13:13; 34:4; 51:6; Matt 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 16:17; 21:33; 1 Cor 7:31; Heb 1:10–12; Heb 12:27; 2 Pet 3:10–12; 1 John 2:17 and Rev 20:11; 21:1. Lexically, they emphasize that the word apēlthan (passing away) expresses the concept of annihilation and total destruction. Commenting on the biblical evidence for both sides, Robert Thomas writes:

Evidence from other Scriptures on this issue is a standoff and therefore indecisive. The language of [Revelation] 20:11 which depicts an entire dissolving of the old, a vanishing into nothingness followed by a new creation in 21:1 without any sea is the decisive contextual feature that determines this to be a reference to an entirely new creation.”26

In response to philosophical arguments for the renovation view, advocates of the replacement view contend that God’s plans in history are not frustrated because His triumph over sin is demonstrated in the final stage of the present earth’s existence—the millennial kingdom. They further argue that our resurrection bodies do not consist of the same molecules that made up our earthly bodies. Rather, the earthly tent disintegrates and is replaced with a new permanent residence (cf. 2 Cor 5:1).27

A fuller discussion of the debate goes beyond the scope of this present article. Whichever view an interpreter takes, it is important to stress that there are elements of both continuity and discontinuity between this present world and the world to come. Those who argue for the renovation view must be especially careful not to

24 Simon J. Kistemaker, Revelation, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 555 explains that “This adjective conveys the meaning of something that is new but has its origin in the old.”
26 Robert Thomas, Revelation 8–22, 440.
27 As G. K. Beale (who sees merit in both positions though ultimately takes the renewal view) acknowledges, “Renewal does not mean that there will be no literal destruction of the old cosmos, just as the renewed resurrection body does not exclude a similar destruction of the old” (Beale, Revelation, 1040).
overemphasize elements of continuity. In particular, they ought to avoid the temptation to move the fulfillment of millennial prophecies into the eternal state—as if specific promises in this present world can go unfulfilled until the creation of the new earth.28

As the chart below demonstrates, the Bible reveals elements of discontinuity that clearly differentiate the present age, the millennial kingdom, and the eternal state from one another.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHART: Continuity &amp; Discontinuity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ physically reigning on the earth from Jerusalem (over both Israel and the Gentile nations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human governments are submissive to Christ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28 This is the error of many amillennialists, who assume that Old Testament millennial prophecies will be fulfilled in either the present age (for the church) or in the eternal state. As a proponent of that view, Anthony Hoekema writes: “Earlier we looked at a number of Old Testament prophecies which speak of a glorious future for the earth. . . . Prophecies of this nature should be understood as descriptions—in figurative language, to be sure—of the new earth which God will bring into existence after Christ comes again—a new earth which will last, not just for a thousand years, but forever” (Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 275–76).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Righteousness and justice characterize the age</strong></th>
<th><strong>No</strong></th>
<th><strong>Yes</strong></th>
<th><strong>No</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>But some people are righteous through faith</td>
<td>But there are still unbelievers. Isa 2:4; 11:3-5; 9; 12:3-4; Jer 31:33–34; Ps 72:7</td>
<td>But there are no more sinners. Rev 21:8, 27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>There will be a temple and memorial sacrifices will be performed in it</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A temple will be rebuilt during the tribulation period</td>
<td>Ezek 40:1–46</td>
<td>Ezek 40:1–46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The curse on the ground is lifted</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It will be a time of unprecedented prosperity for humanity</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sickness and death will be eliminated</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>No – but greatly reduced</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>There is childbirth and population growth</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The animal world is tamed</strong></td>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes—such that children can play with cobras Isa 11:6–8; cf. 65:25</td>
<td>Implied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem is the capital city of the world</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No; Zech 14:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jerusalem will be greatly enlarged</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No; But different in origin and size from the New Jerusalem</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes; Rev 21:16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 30:18b; 31:38–40; 37:13; Zech 14:10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of the sea</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes; Ps 72:8; Isa 11:11; 60:5; Ezek 47:10–20; 48:28; Zech 9:10; 14:8</td>
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<td>Sin and judgment are eliminated</td>
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<td>No; Ps 2:9; Zech 14:16–19; Ezek 44:25, 27; Rev 19:5; 20:7–10</td>
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<td>thousand years before the eternal state begins. The millennial kingdom</td>
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<td>will not be fulfilled in the new earth (Rev 21–22), as in the Millennium</td>
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<td>not found in heaven. The Millennium will be fulfilled in the present</td>
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<td>earth, even though some changes will be made in the earthly situation.”</td>
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30 Ibid.
The Physical Properties of the King’s Capital City (21:9–21)

Prominent attention is given in John’s account of the new earth to the New Jerusalem, the capital city of the eternal heaven. Nearly half of Revelation 21 is devoted to describing the physical properties of the city. This magnificent metropolis of staggering proportions will be the heart of the new earth, for it is here that God Himself dwells.

Christians rarely think of heaven as a city, and yet that is precisely how God describes it (Heb 11:16; cf. John 14:2). Cities have buildings, streets, houses, and citizens. They are places of political power, economic industry, higher learning, refined culture, and impressive architecture. These characteristics are true of the heavenly city as well, though the New Jerusalem will far outshine any earthly city in both its magnificence and its might.

The fact that every major society on earth organizes itself into cities is indicative of the way God designed human beings. He created them to function in community with other people. It is not surprising, then, to learn that life on the new earth will center on a great municipality. As one writer explains, “The concept of a city includes relationships, activity, responsibility, unity, socialization, communion, and cooperation. Unlike the evil cities of the present earth, the perfectly holy people in the new Jerusalem will live and work together in perfect harmony.”

In stark contrast to the harlot city of Babylon (destroyed in Rev 18), the holy city of the New Jerusalem is free from God’s judgment (21:9). It is the home of the redeemed and the bride of the Lamb (21:2). It is also a realm characterized by the glory and presence of God (v. 11). Throughout the Old Testament, God’s glory is often manifest as blazing light (cf. Exod 13:21; 19:18; 24:17; 34:29–30, 35; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10–11; Ps 104:2; Isa 4:5; Ezek 10:4; Hab 3:3–4; Luke 2:9). Like a giant prism illuminating God’s glory everywhere, the New Jerusalem will light up the entire new universe.

Unlike the dirty, smoggy cities of this world, the New Jerusalem glistens like a massive jewel as it descends from heaven. The Greek word translated “jasper” in verse 11 does not necessarily refer to the actual gem jasper, which possesses a reddish or brownish hue. Rather, it is a general term that can refer to any kind of precious gemstone. The further description, “clear as crystal,” suggests that John is describing a diamond. Thus, the New Jerusalem descends from heaven onto the new earth like a jewel-studded crown from heaven. The image of a heavenly crown is appropriate because, as Rev 22:2–5 describes, it is the very throne room of God himself.

According to Rev 21:15–17, the measurements of the New Jerusalem are immense: approximately 1,500 miles long on each side. By way of illustration, if one corner of the city were placed on Los Angeles, a second corner would sit on

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31 John MacArthur, Revelation 12–22, 264.
32 David Aune explains that, because the stadion varied in length (from 607 to 630 feet), the New Jerusalem measures between 1,416 and 1,566 miles in each direction. David Aune, Revelation 17–22, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1161.
Mexico City, a third corner on St. Louis, Missouri, and the final corner on Edmonton, Alberta. If the center of the New Jerusalem rested where the current Jerusalem stands, it would stretch across three continents from Greece to Iran to Saudi Arabia to Libya. The current city of Los Angeles has an area of 468 square miles. The state of California comprises roughly 164,000 square miles. But the New Jerusalem will encompass over 2 million square miles. That is the equivalent of 14 states of California put together; or 4,807 cities of Los Angeles combined.

But the New Jerusalem is not just a big square. It is a cube. The highest mountains on earth are about 5 miles tall; but the New Jerusalem will rise into the air 1,500 miles—with walls over 200 feet thick. The massive city houses a total volume of more than 3 billion cubic miles. In light of the city’s immensity, some commentators have speculated that the resurrection bodies of the redeemed may not be subject to gravity. If so, the residents of the New Jerusalem would be able to traverse through space not only horizontally, but also vertically, making every part of this glorious cube habitable and accessible to the citizens of the New Jerusalem.

But there is more going on than just information about its enormous dimensions. The specific arrangement of the three gates on each side of the city, in verses 13–14, points back to the way the twelve tribes of Israel camped around the tabernacle (cf. Num 2:1–31), and also the arrangement of the gates of the millennial Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 48:30–35). Furthermore, the cube-shaped dimensions of the New Jerusalem reflect the design of the Holy of Holies. As Mark Dever explains,

Any Christian who knows the Old Testament knows that John's vision harks back to the Most Holy Place. This special place within Israel's temple was itself a perfect cube and the most manifest location of God's presence on earth. Now, in this cube-shaped heavenly city, God’s full, unmediated presence is given to all his people. The whole world becomes the temple.

The Personal Presence of the King Himself (21:22–22:5)

In 21:22, the apostle John transitions from an external description of the New Jerusalem to an internal one. Having established the physical dimensions of the capital city, with significant parallels to the Most Holy Place, he begins to describe the worship and activity that characterizes those who are inside. Most importantly, he focuses his attention on the fact that the Triune God will be personally present there. As a result, there will be no need for a temple (v. 22) because God and the Lamb are the temple. The redeemed will live forever with the Lord in intimate worship and fellowship; they will not need a curtain to separate them from His holy presence, because they have been made perfect just as He is perfect (cf. 1 John 3:2).

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35 As Grant R. Osborne observes, “Revelation places considerable emphasis on the heavenly temple (7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5–6, 8; 16:1, 17). Now the heavenly temple descends from heaven to earth in the form of a city and becomes the eternal home of the saints.” Osborne, Revelation, 732.
Above all else, it is God’s personal presence that defines the new earth as heavenly (Rev 21:3). It is not heavenly because it is beautiful and glorious; or because the saints of all the ages are there; or because angels lift up their voices in magnificent hymns of praise. On the contrary, it is only heavenly because the Triune God will make it His dwelling place. In the words of D. L. Moody, “It is not the jasper walls and the pearly gates that are going to make heaven attractive. It is the being with God.”

In heaven, the redeemed shall be reunited with their Redeemer. Spending eternity with Him in perfect fellowship, worship, and service is what makes eternity so glorious. His presence is heaven’s essence. Charles Spurgeon poignantly expressed this reality with these words:

Oh, to think of heaven without Christ! It is the same thing as thinking of hell. Heaven without Christ! It is day without the sun, existing without life, feasting without food, seeing without light. It involves a contradiction in terms. Heaven without Christ! Absurd. It is the sea without water, the earth without its fields, the heavens without their stars. There cannot be a heaven without Christ. He is the sum total of bliss, the fountain from which heaven flows, the element of which heaven is composed. Christ is heaven and heaven is Christ.

In 22:1–5, the apostle John brings his description of the New Jerusalem to its climax. In these verses, in particular, the focus centers on the glorious presence of God and of the Lamb.

In John’s other writings, the concepts of life, light, and love are all intrinsically linked to God. In places like John 1:4 and 5:26, the apostle explains that God is Life, in the sense of being the Giver and Source of all life. In 1 John 1:5, he writes that God is Light, speaking of His glorious holiness and perfection. And in 1 John 4:8, John records that God is Love, meaning that He is characterized by the infinite love which He demonstrated through the cross of Christ. Appropriately, those three realities define the New Jerusalem as it is described in Rev 22:1–5.

First, the New Jerusalem is characterized by the life of God (vv. 1–2). The river of life, containing the water of life, flows out from His throne (v. 1). Its banks are populated with the tree of life (v. 2), the fruit of which gives everlasting life to all who eat. The source of this life is God Himself. In the New Jerusalem, every thirst is quenched by the water of life, and every hunger pain is satisfied by the tree of life. Though John is describing physical features, these elements also symbolize spiritual life. Jesus prayed in John 17:3, “This is eternal life, that they may know

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37 Charles Spurgeon, “Forever with the Lord,” Sermon 1136. Cited from Randy Alcorn, Eternal Perspectives (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 305.  
38 As Robert Thomas notes, commenting on Rev 22:2, “Though eating the fruit of the Tree of Life is unmentioned here, the implication is that this is what brings immortality, the same as was true for Adam and Eve originally (Gen. 3:22). Conditions of future bliss will mean a return to the original glories and privileges of God’s presence with man, before sin raised a barrier that prevented that direct contact” (Thomas, Revelation 8–22, 484).
You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” For all of eternity, the redeemed will never experience any shortage or lack of any kind, because they will be with the fountain of living water, in the presence of God and of the Lamb.

Second, the New Jerusalem is also characterized by the love of God (vv. 3–4). His judgment has been removed and His presence restored (v. 3). The separation between God and man that characterizes this sin-stained world no longer remains. For eternity, believers will enjoy intimate fellowship with the King of kings. Yet, their love will not only be manifest in deep communion and heartfelt worship, but also in a desire to serve—being able to do so without any reluctance or deficiency. In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” In heaven, those who love Him will keep His commandments perfectly.

Third, the New Jerusalem will be engulfed in the light of God (v. 5). In the final verse of his heavenly vision, John reiterates once more that the glory of heaven will shine with unsurpassed radiance and brilliance. The shadows of night have disappeared, and so has the need for a lamp. Even sunlight is no longer required. The radiance of God’s glory illumines everything and everyone. It is here—as they bathe in the wonder of His majesty—that the redeemed will “reign forever and ever” as the bond slaves of their heavenly Sovereign, worshiping Him in perfection for all of eternity.

What makes the New Jerusalem so marvelous? It is not its heavenly origin or its incredible dimensions. It is not the sparkling jewels or translucent gold. It is not the absence of night or the presence of angels. All of those things are amazing, but they are simply by-products of the fact that God Himself is at the center of it all. His life sustains it. His love makes it possible for us to enjoy, and His light illumines it with an indescribable radiance. The new Jerusalem is the centerpiece of the new earth because the Triune God dwells there; He is the centerpiece of all eternity.

Living as Citizens of the Kingdom

The Word of God is far from silent on the nature of God’s kingdom in the eternal state. But why has God seen fit to reveal these truths to His people? There are at least three reasons why the future reality of heaven ought to influence believers in the present. These might be summarized as: hope, holiness, and the honor of God.

Hope. The reality of heaven provides hope for the future, even in the face of trials or death. Thus, Paul could tell the Thessalonians that believers do not grieve “as the rest of the world who have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). As Charles Spurgeon observed:

The very happiest persons I have ever met with have been departing believers. The only people for whom I have felt any envy have been dying members of this very church, whose hands I have grasped in their passing away. Almost without exception I have seen in them holy delight and triumph. And in the
exceptions to this exceeding joy I have seen deep peace, exhibited in a calm and deliberate readiness to enter into the presence of their God.39

Writing about his trials, the apostle Paul similarly explained to the Corinthians, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:17). Because believers know what the future ultimately holds, they can face the temporal troubles of this life with confidence and courage.

Holiness. In addition to producing hope, the reality of heaven promotes holiness in the lives of the redeemed. In the words of one commentator, “The New Jerusalem is the reality that finalizes the hopes of God’s people and rewards them for all they have endured. It also is intended to spur the readers to greater faithfulness in the present, knowing what is at stake.”40 Recognizing that they will soon be in the presence of their heavenly King, those who belong to Christ desire to please Him and reflect His perfect character in every way possible. As the apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2b–3).

Believers understand that they will be rewarded by Christ for their faithfulness in this life (2 Tim 4:8). The reality of a heavenly future puts the priorities and pursuits of this life in proper perspective (cf. Matt 6:19–21). Such an eternal mindset motivated the nineteenth-century missionary Adoniram Judson, who said:

A few days and our work will be done. And when it is once done, it is done to all eternity. A life once spent is irrevocable. … Let us, then, each morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever. And at night let us reflect that one more day is irrevocably gone.41

Those words echo the heartbeat of the apostle Paul, whose entire ministry was motivated by eternal concerns. As he told the Corinthians, “Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:9–10).

The Honor of God. Finally, biblical eschatology provides a vivid reminder of the fact that the purpose behind all of salvation history is the glory of God. Ultimately the manifestation of that glory will culminate in the blazing light of the new heavens and earth. It will radiate throughout the New Jerusalem and engulf

40 Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, 727.
every one of heaven’s inhabitants. For all of eternity, believers will bask in the wonder of God’s grace and glorify Him for His infinite mercy and kindness.

The unmerited favor of God will thrill the hearts of the redeemed throughout all of eternity, and they will praise and exalt Him as a result. The awe of redemptive love will fuel their worship. As Richard Baxter so aptly expressed,

As we paid nothing for God’s eternal love and nothing for the Son of His love, and nothing for His Spirit and our grace and faith, and nothing for our eternal rest . . . what an astonishing thought it will be to think of the unmeasurable difference between our deservings and our receivings. O, how free was all this love, and how free is this enjoyed glory . . . So then let DESERVED be written on the floor of hell but on the door of heaven and life, THE FREE GIFT.42

With inexhaustible joy, believers from every age of human history will join together in unending adoration and thanksgiving to God for the unmerited kindness of His grace (cf. Rev 5:9–14).

Clearly, the reality of heaven ought to motivate believers in their homeward journey, as they navigate through this world as sojourners and citizens of another realm (Phil 3:20). To do that effectively, they must set their eyes on Him and the glorious future He has promised (Col 3:1–2; Heb 12:1–2). Focusing on God’s kingdom in eternity is not a hindrance to the life of faith; it is the essence of it (Heb 11:16). As one evangelical author rightly concludes:

Understanding Heaven doesn’t just tell us what to do, but why. What God tells us about our future lives enables us to interpret our past and serve him in our present. . . . We need to stop acting as if Heaven were a myth, an impossible dream, a relentlessly dull meeting, or an unimportant distraction from real life. We need to see Heaven for what it is: the realm we’re made for. If we do, we’ll embrace it with contagious joy, excitement, and anticipation.43

43 Randy Alcorn, Heaven (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 443.
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS ON THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Compiled by Dennis M. Swanson
Vice-President for Library and Educational Assessment

The 2012 Faculty Lecture Series at The Master’s Seminary dealt with the subject of “The Kingdom of God.” This subject is so expansive and pervasive in Scripture that an exhaustive bibliography would be a book by itself. The bibliography here contains the works cited from the individual contributors as well as some additional material and is designed to be suggestive and provide a starting point for further study.

The following should be supplemented by, “The Kingdom of God: A Selective Bibliography,” by Andrew D. Streett (Criswell Theology Review [Fall 2004], 91–101). This is available online by means of the seminary’s access to the ATLAS database (http://www.tms.edu/LibraryDatabases.aspx). Also the reader is encouraged to consult the articles from the Faculty Lecture Series of 1999 on “The Biblical Covenants” (MSJ 10, no. 2 (Fall 1999). The Bibliography is divided into three categories: (1) Reference and Lexical Works; (2) Monographs and Multi-Author Works; (3) Journal and Periodical Literature; and (4) Online and Other Sources.

Part One: Reference and Lexical Works


Part Two: Monographs and Multi-Author Works


Bruce, A. B. The Kingdom of God; or Christ’s Teaching According to the Synoptic Tradition. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904.


**Part Three: Journal and Periodical Literature:**


Part Four: Online and Other Resources

The Darkness and the Glory
by: Greg Harris

“By examining the cross from Christ's perspective, The Darkness and the Glory provides a compelling behind-the-scenes look at the profound spiritual and theological realities of Calvary—realities that transcend the physical, as the wrath of man was surpassed by both the wrath of Satan and ultimately the wrath of God. With theological acumen and pastoral insight, Greg Harris invites readers to join him on a journey to the cross they will never forget. Doctrinally sound yet warmly devotional, this Christ-centered book is highly recommended to all who desire a better understanding of the glories of the cross.”

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REVIEW


Reviewed by Bryan Murphy, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

William Barrick is a gifted and stellar translator of the Bible. He spent fifteen years in Bangladesh translating the biblical text from both Hebrew and Greek into six different languages. He has published a number of essays related to OT studies, including: “Noah’s Flood and Its Geological Implications,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, ed. by Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Master Books, 2008), and “Psalm 130: A Plea for Grace,” in *Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching & Preaching* (Chalice Press, 2010). He is also the OT editor for the *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Logos). Add to this his more than twenty years of investment in seminarians coupled with his faithful pastoral ministry and eldership service throughout that period, and it becomes clear that he is imminently qualified to write an expositional commentary—not just on any OT book, but on one that addresses the significance and meaning of life under the sun.

Barrick’s latest work is an expositional commentary on Ecclesiastes. The exposition itself encompasses 211 pages of text. It contains a number of useful tables that portray textual comparatives, cross-references, or illustrate the text in ways that should assist both the reader and the teacher or preacher of Ecclesiastes (e.g., 11–13, 104, 161–62, 203–08). Barrick’s extensive time in the classroom shines forth via the provision of these kinds of visual teaching aids. There are lists throughout the exposition that summarize key interpretive issues or thematic teaching points that could readily be incorporated into a sermon outline or teaching notes (e.g., 24–25, 94–95). This, coupled with regular historical references typically beyond the scope of most expositional commentaries, should prove very beneficial to the expositor. The text also includes a substantial bibliography of works cited (221–29). This is a very helpful asset to the expositor that is rare in the *Focus on the Bible* series. There is an exhaustive “Scripture Index” referencing every text cited within the commentary. Most helpful for the preacher or Sunday School teacher is the five-page “Subject Index,” which points the reader back to key topics.
not only within the biblical text itself, but also the extra-biblical citations and references the author makes throughout the work (235–40). Finally, study questions are supplied at the end of each narrative chapter throughout the book, which make this a ready tool for use in a group study session (e.g., 27–28, 47).

Concerning the exposition itself, it must be kept in mind that this is an expositional rather than exegetical commentary. As such, it contains a paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of the entire book, rather than verse-by-verse. That said, the author does an admirable job of developing the Solomonic theme of the book throughout while at the same time interacting on both a practical and theological level. Within this basic framework, he addresses the key interpretive issues—often bringing significant historical, linguistic, comparative philological and grammatical arguments to the table in those discussions that even some exegetical commentaries lack. Barrick does not hesitate to enter into technical exegetical discussions, even in this format (see for example, 14–15, his explanation of the book’s title; or, 18–20, his discussion on the Aramaisms found in the text). In each case, the reader will find the author has supplied both the English word and the Greek or Hebrew transliteration. The author struck a nice balance in this commentary, adequately allowing many scholarly interactions to take place in a format that those less familiar with the original languages can follow and also benefit from the discussions.

As mentioned, the author rightly affirms and demonstrates Solomonic authorship of this Spirit-inspired book (17–23). He maintains this position and wonderfully develops it through the course of the exposition. Many of the insights he shares come directly from relating the exposition to key periods or challenges in Solomon’s life (e.g., the many wives discussion, 135–36). In this vein, Barrick identifies the primary purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes as “didactic” or instructive (13). In tandem with this, he takes an optimistic approach to the book’s lessons at large. This is evidenced in his exposition when he understands the chiastic poetry of Ecclesiastes 3 as a reflection on divine sovereignty and control that lays the foundation for the ultimate point Solomon will be making throughout (62–65). The carpe diem passages are likewise understood as thematic elements which reflect Solomon’s call to his readers to enjoy life as God’s gift while avoiding the pursuit of finding lasting satisfaction in this life (58–59, 99, 149–50). These passages then fit into the larger context of the book which calls for a life lived under the sun that maintains a focus on one’s ultimate accountability before God in eternity. The message of Ecclesiastes, then, is “Enjoy life ‘under the sun,’ but prepare for life beyond the sun” (220). The author does a consistent and faithful job of developing this theme throughout the exposition.

Overall, Barrick provides today’s expository preacher with a sound biblical exposition of an often neglected but very relevant OT book. He supplements the exposition with helpful key references to Rabbinic writings (15), ancient historical figures (50–52) and contexts (40, 80, 161–62) in ways that will both inform and arm today’s preacher for pulpit ministry. At the same time, there is consistent interaction (especially in the context of dealing with themes and problem solutions) with contemporary scholarship from the exegetical realm.

Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Professor of New Testament.

This book’s operating assumption is the promotion of the historical-critical distinction between the Christ of faith (Jesus as He is presented in the Gospels/geschichte) and that of the Jesus as He actually was in history (history/historie). Bock argues that you can abide by historical Jesus study rules and still move toward a better historical understanding of Jesus that also explains the faith of His earliest followers. There is no chasm between the historical Jesus and the Jesus we worship today.

This book grows out of a ten-year study where an international group of Jesus scholars met for one weekend each summer, taking a close look at twelve core events in the life of Jesus. These scholars argue that a person can play by many of the historical rules and still appreciate that the gist of these events has been rendered in our earliest sources. *Who is Jesus?* is a treatment of the technical study that can be appreciated by non-scholars.

Bock takes the reader through the rules of historical Jesus study and then states the key rules used in this study. He then takes us through twelve events of Jesus’ life with the following structure: considering the rules to see if they open the door for seeing the event as authentic, examining the objections, and considering how the relevant background opens up the event and what it means for understanding Jesus.

The events examined include John the Baptist and his baptism of Jesus, the choosing of the Twelve, Jesus’ association with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus and the Sabbath, Jesus and exorcism, Peter’s declaration at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus’ triumphal entry, Jesus’ temple act, the Last Supper, the examination by Jewish leadership, the examination by Pilate and crucifixion, and the women discovering the empty tomb.

After applying the rules of historical Jesus study to the twelve events, Bock concludes, “They affirm to us that the Jesus of history links to and discloses the Christ of faith” (214).

Several replies to this positive view draw a much more sober and startling reality. The reader is urged to search for further information including this reviewer’s two-part series in *The Master’s Seminary Journal* on “Evangelicals and the Search for the ‘Historical Jesus’” (22:2 [Spring 2012]; part two forthcoming, Spring 2013) for much greater scope of information. Some things, however, can be noted on this book. First, little to celebrate exists in this book. Instead, it is clear, demonstrable proof that *The Jesus Crisis* (Kregel, 1998; hereafter *TJC*) was prescient in its prediction that a horrific crisis regarding the inerrancy-reliability of the Gospel documents exists among European and British-trained evangelical scholars who differ little from New Testament critical scholarship as a whole. While Bock issued a scathing review against *TJC* (*BSac* 157 [April-June 2000], 232–36), this latest book demonstrates that the book was very accurate as to the state of vast sections of evangelical scholarship. Bock has now admitted that they use the same rules to “search” for Jesus as the critical scholars do. This is *proof*
The Master’s Seminary Journal

positive that the TJC sounded the correct warning. Evangelical scholars no longer accept the Gospels at face value; they now must apply rules of critical scholarship to demonstrate “probability” (i.e. post-modernistic historiography) that the Gospels might have a core of historicity in them (see also Bock/Webb, Twelve Key Events–2010).

Second, the term “historical Jesus” is an historical-critical fiction as well as aberration that is now being normalized among these evangelicals. It posits a heretical position that the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus of history are somehow different—they are not. It is best perhaps termed the “existential Jesus.” A close examination of the questing reveals that the “historical Jesus” is whatever the quester a priori determines Jesus to be or wants Him as somehow significantly in distinction from the biblical documents. After an arbitrary a priori decision has been made on a preconceived concept of Jesus, criteria of authenticity, stemming from tradition criticism, can be applied to the Gospels and that concept of Jesus affirmed. Since the criteria are subjective and conflicting, other criteria can be invented and applied to ensure the desired outcome. The critical weakness, as well as subjectivity, of these criteria lies in the fact that the same criteria can be applied or countered with different criteria to ensure whatever view has already been assumed.

Third, a close corollary is “questing” or searching for the historical Jesus and may be defined as a philosophically-motivated historical-critical construct that the Jesus as presented in the Gospels is not the same or is not to be identified fully with the Jesus who actually lived in history. Underlying the questing is the assumption that “scientific” research showed that the Jesus of history was different from the Christ of Scripture, the creeds, orthodox theology, and Christian piety. These evangelicals have bought into philosophical systems that are inherently hostile to God’s Word without due consideration of their destructive nature.

Fourth, one cannot overstress that the rise of modern philosophical ideologies inherent in historical criticism generates such distinctions between Jesus as He is presented in the canonical Gospels and conceptualizations of how He is alleged to have been actually in history. Hostile philosophical underpinnings of the ideology in terms of a virulent anti-supernaturalism create these hypothetical distinctions. The overarching intent in these searches is the destruction of the influence of the Gospels, as well as the church, over society. Evangelicals now are unwittingly participating in the Gospels’ destruction by normalizing such principles in research.

Fifth, critical scholarship can take these very same arguments or criteria of authenticity used by Bock and negate the Gospels. What is “probability” for Bock is not to critical scholarship who would merely say that Bock has in a priori fashion imposed his evangelical beliefs on the Gospel texts. The clear loser in this is now the Gospels. A simple question would be asked: Whom have these evangelicals convinced of the wisdom of their approach beyond themselves? I would doubt that any opponents of the Gospels are convinced. What has resulted is that the Gospels are now subject for their historicity or reliability upon the shifting sands of “one-up-man-ship” of who can beg the question in applying these principles, i.e. assume what they are trying to prove. In reality, these evangelicals have proved nothing. Somewhat like jujitsu, their critical counterparts can apply equally negating
arguments to fend off any evangelical assertions. The loser again, however, is the Gospels and their integrity.

Sixth, this book is in clear violation of the ICBI 1978 and 1982 inerrancy statements that affirm “grammatico-historical” rather than “historical-critical” hermeneutics employed by Bock in this work. If this continues, these British and European evangelicals involved in this endeavor will have effectively eviscerated these two hard won documents because they have forgotten history:

Article XVIII:
We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.

Bock and those involved in searching now imitate critical scholarship with their historical-critical, post-modernistic historiography. The loser is the Gospels.

This book is demonstrable proof that the Gospels are safer in the hands of lay people in church pews than in the hands of evangelical critical scholarship who diligently must search for the “historical Jesus” and contemplate “Who is Jesus?” This reviewer would urge these evangelicals to open up their Bibles to God’s record in the Gospels rather than concentrating on this Spinozan, philosophical tragedy purposely designed by the father of historical criticism to destroy them.

Finally, this book, as well as Key Events (2012) and the ten long years of their efforts, is all for naught. All the efforts of these evangelicals are now dubious. Recent British-influenced scholars are now calling for the rejection of these criteria so diligently used by Bock, Webb, et. al. Chris Keith, echoing the earlier warning of Morna Hooker, says about these criteria, “they cannot deliver” what they are designed to do (Theology 75 [1972], 570). Keith argues instead that scholars need “to set these particular tools down and find other means of searching” such as “memory” theories (Jesus, Criteria and the Demise of the Authenticity, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012. 48). Bottom line: all of these evangelical efforts are and will be futile, founded on the constantly shifting sands of the whim of scholarly arrogance. The scholarly whims have shifted. The losers will always be God’s Word as well as any evangelicals who subject the Word to these useless endeavors. Bottom line, this book accomplishes nothing except to add unnecessary doubt to the Gospels. It also serves to show how pathetically desperate these evangelicals are in portraying themselves as British-influenced critical scholars, all at the cost of the integrity of God’s Word.

Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible, *The Master’s College.*

Because of my age, there are few books anymore that really challenge my thinking. *The Jewish Gospels* by Daniel Boyarin is one that does. Boyarin is Professor of Talmud at the UC, Berkeley, and considered one of greatest rabbinic scholars in the world. Despite the title, this book has nothing at all to do with the apocryphal Gospels that emerged in the second and third centuries. Boyarin never explains the title, but what I think he means is that our canonical Gospels are far more Jewish in their theology than how Jewish scholars and laymen have viewed them for many centuries. So what does that mean? His main argument is that Jews in the time of Jesus were looking for a divine Messiah, who also would suffer for Israel’s sins. These ideas challenge some very basic assumptions that have prevailed in Jewish circles for centuries. He elaborates the following points:

- Jews in the time of Jesus were expecting a divine-man Messiah figure and many Jews already believed in something very much like what Christians call the Son and Father.
- The title “Son of God” originally meant the human Davidic ruler, while “Son of Man” originally was a divine figure equal with God though submitted to Him.
- There was a history of faith in a suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53 style) before Jesus, and the usual debate about whether Isaiah 53 concerns Israel or Messiah is a moot argument. The liberal Christian notion that the church developed the suffering Messiah idea by misinterpreting the Hebrew Bible is false.
- The root of Jesus’ saying “the Son of Man” must suffer is Dan 7:25–27, which Jesus read as the Son of Man (himself) suffering for Israel as the Ideal Israel, and this is true also about the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Boyarin is the first Talmudic scholar I have ever read who argues convincingly that Jews from ancient times until the last few centuries believed Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah.
- Early Messianic Jews (Jewish believers in Jesus) called Nazarenes were a sizable group even into the fourth century AD.

The radical implications of Boyarin’s proposals are that they remove some standard Jewish objections to Jesus, namely that He could not have been the Messiah because both His claim to deity and His suffering were foreign ideas to ancient (and modern) Judaism. Along with the “Son of God” and “suffering Messiah” texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls, this neglected literature (Daniel 7, Enoch, 4 Ezra) must now be considered afresh in studies of what first-century Jews thought about the Messiah.

*The Jewish Gospels* is a short, approachable book of 160 pages. Even people who don’t read academic literature can enjoy it and understand most of it, and
Boyarin goes out of his way to define terms in simple language. This book is a mind-opener worthy of being considered by both Jewish and Christian readers. I must say that not all of Boyarin’s ideas will set well with evangelical readers. It is the areas where he agrees with us that offer some ideas that we can use in our witness to Jewish people.


Reviewed by Matt Waymeyer, Instructor of New Testament and Bible Exposition.

C.S. Lewis once confessed that there was no doctrine he would more willingly remove from Christianity than the doctrine of eternal punishment. In *Erasing Hell*, author Francis Chan makes a similar confession, admitting that he would love to erase hell from the pages of Scripture because part of him simply doesn’t want to believe in it (14–15). But like Lewis before him, Chan recognizes that this increasingly unpopular doctrine has the clear support of Scripture and therefore must be embraced and proclaimed by the people of God. This is the subject of Chan’s latest book, subtitled *What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We Made Up*.

Chan, founder of Eternity Bible College in Simi Valley, California, explains in the preface to *Erasing Hell* that he recruited colleague Preston Sprinkle (Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at EBC) to co-author the book because of Sprinkle’s expertise in biblical history and the biblical languages. The unique blend of Chan’s writing and Sprinkle’s research results in a very readable yet scholarly work suitable for leader and layman alike.

One of the primary purposes of *Erasing Hell* is to respond to those who deny the biblical doctrine of divine punishment, most notably Rob Bell who promoted a form of self-styled universalism in his 2011 best-seller *Love Wins*. In this way, Chan provides a helpful and much-needed corrective to those who compromise the Bible’s teaching. But *Erasing Hell* is more than just an effective refutation of Rob Bell—it is a sensitively written biblical primer on the doctrine of hell, which consistently models both compassion for the lost and fidelity to Scripture.

In the introduction to *Erasing Hell*, Chan emphasizes the seriousness of the subject, reminding his readers that hell is not simply a *doctrine* but a *destiny* (16–17). This, says Chan, should purge the soul of complacency and move the heart to compassion (16–17). In chapter 1, Chan raises the foundational question of whether everyone goes to heaven. After defining universalism and providing a brief survey of its various forms (23–25), Chan addresses the biblical passages most often cited in favor of it, showing from the original contexts that these passages do not teach that everyone will be saved (25–35). He concludes the chapter by arguing from Luke 13:22-30 that there will be no post-mortem second chance for the one who dies apart from Christ (35–38).

Chan sets the historical context in chapter 2 by exploring the various beliefs common in first-century Judaism. According to Chan, the ancient Jews affirmed the
existence of hell as a place of divine punishment, describing it with the imagery of fire and darkness (49–54). Some of the first-century Jews believed that the wicked would be annihilated in hell, says Chan, whereas others believed that the punishment there was never-ending (54–56). Chan concludes the chapter by arguing persuasively against the commonly held belief that gehenna—the Greek word for “hell” in the Gospels—referred to a garbage dump where trash was burned outside the city, asserting instead that it was a common Old Testament metaphor for the fiery place of judgment in the end times (56–61).

In chapter 3, Chan focuses on the teaching of Jesus and confronts the view that hell is primarily the suffering experienced in the here-and-now. According to Chan, Jesus spoke of hell as a real place of divine punishment in the afterlife, “a horrifying place, characterized by suffering, fire, darkness, and lamentation” (86). Chan refutes the notion that the Greek word for “punishment” (kolasis) refers to a process of pruning designed to lead to the sinner’s post-mortem salvation (83–85), and he argues from Matthew 25:46 that the duration of punishment in hell is never-ending (85–86). Although one could quibble at times with Chan’s exegesis—for example, with his conclusion that the point of Jesus’ parable in Luke 16:19–30 was “to confront the social structures of the day” (90)—this chapter very effectively sets forth the teaching of Christ on the subject of hell.

Chapter 4 shows that the remainder of the New Testament reaffirms the teaching of Jesus by speaking boldly about the punishment of the wicked in hell, a practice that Christians must continue today (97–108). According to Chan, warning unbelievers of the coming judgment is not simply compatible with love for them but actually an expression of it (100).

Chapter 5 consists of a brief discussion of several passages describing those whose destiny is divine judgment. According to Chan, sinners are damned to hell by racism, greed, misplaced assurance, false teaching, misuse of wealth, and harsh words (118–24). For some reason, Chan omits, at least in this context, the ultimate dividing line between heaven and hell—whether or not someone has believed in Christ (John 3:18; Rev 20:15).

In chapter 6, Chan returns to a theme that weaves its way through the entire book: letting God be God by submitting to the One who has the right to do whatever He pleases (Ps 115:3). According to Chan, it is arrogant for the clay to stand in judgment of the Potter’s actions (129–41); furthermore, the objection that hell is unfair should be attributed to “an underdeveloped sense of justice” (141). Chapter 7 emphasizes the implications of hell’s reality by urging the unbeliever to repent and exhorting the believer to rejoice in the salvation that comes through Christ. Chan writes: “Hell is the backdrop that reveals the profound and unbelievable grace of the cross. It brings to light the enormity of our sin and therefore portrays the undeserved favor of God in full color. Christ freely chose to bear the wrath that I deserve so that I can experience life in the presence of God. How can I keep from singing, crying, and proclaiming His indescribable love?” (148)

In the appendix, Chan answers a series of commonly asked questions, asserting that the imagery of fire is metaphorical rather than literal (153–55); that the Old Testament word sheol is a synonym for death rather than a reference to hell (157–
that there is no indication in Scripture of salvation apart from faith in Christ (158–61); and that the doctrine of hell is perfectly compatible with the love of God (162–63). The end result is a foundational presentation of what Scripture teaches about hell and a heartfelt explanation of why it matters.

Like any book, Erasing Hell is not without weaknesses. Its primary shortcoming is Chan’s occasional reluctance to be dogmatic about truths taught clearly in Scripture. For example, after interacting with biblical passages often cited in favor of universalism, Chan states that these passages “probably” do not mean that everyone will be saved (34). It is difficult to imagine that Chan’s certainty on the question of universalism extends no further than “probably”—especially in light of how strongly he argues against it—and yet he sees fit to qualify his conclusion.

Similarly, after stating that no passage of Scripture even hints at the possibility of a second chance to believe in Christ after death (35), Chan concludes his discussion of post-mortem salvation by writing that “the Bible doesn’t seem to hold out hope for a second chance” (38; emphasis added). But again, why the language of uncertainty? Why the need for a qualifier, which leaves open even the remotest possibility that everyone might be saved in the end? In light of the widespread compromise in the church—a compromise that Chan recognizes and addresses effectively in Erasing Hell—why dull the edge of Scripture’s clarity on a crucial issue like the doctrine of divine punishment?

This apparent reluctance to be dogmatic also shows up in Chan’s discussion of the duration of the punishment in hell, an issue Chan describes as “much more complex than I first assumed” (86). On one hand Chan argues strongly that the punishment of hell is everlasting (80–94, 104, 106–07, 110–13), and yet he also expresses openness to the possibility of annihilationism, the view that this punishment is finite in duration because unbelievers will eventually be annihilated (80–82, 86). “While I lean heavily on the side that says it is everlasting,” Chan writes, “I am not ready to claim that with complete certainty” (86). In contrast, many would argue that the Bible teaches everlasting punishment with a clarity not reflected in Chan’s conclusion, even though he argues well for the biblical position.

Chan cautions against letting the debate over hell’s duration distract Christians from “the main point” (104) and “the heart of Christ’s message” (86), and appropriately so. But from any perspective—whether a believer contemplating the death of a loved one or an unbeliever contemplating his own destiny—the eternality of hell is hardly a peripheral issue. One could even argue that annihilationism is a greater threat to the evangelical church than universalism because of how it offers an attractive half-step in that direction for those who would never consider embracing something as radical as the teaching of Rob Bell. Erasing Hell does not appear to share this concern.

A final weakness is the book’s failure to make a clearer connection between the doctrine of hell and the glory of God, perhaps in part because Chan views Paul’s question in Rom 9:22–23 as merely a hypothetical possibility (131). The existence of hell is indeed an emotionally difficult concept for the finite minds of fallen believers, but the righteous judgment of God will ultimately bring forth both praise from His people and glory to His name. A more explicit focus on how the doctrine of hell magnifies the various attributes of God—making Him praiseworthy for all that He does—would have made a good book even better.

Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia).

Paul Copan is the Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University. He has authored numerous books on apologetics and philosophy such as *That’s Just Your Interpretation* (Baker, 2001), *When God Goes to Starbucks* (Baker, 2008), and *True for You, but Not for Me* (Bethany House, 2009). Copan is also the current president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society.

In his Introduction, Copan describes the purpose of his book, “My chief point is this: I am basing my work on thoughtful, credible scholarship that offers plausible, sober-minded explanations and angles that present helpful resolutions and responses to perplexing Old Testament ethics questions” (11). In particular, he addresses criticisms of New Atheists such as Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. The author delivers his answers in four major sections. First, “Neo-Atheism” defines leading figures in the New Atheist movement and their charges against the God of the Old Testament. Second, “God: Gracious Master or Moral Monster?” attempts to defend God as loving, humble, and other-centered rather than egotistic. Third, “Life in the Ancient Near East and in Israel” describes the progressive nature of Israel’s laws in comparison with the surrounding culture. This is the most extensive chapter that deals with food laws, punishments, treatment of women, slavery, and ethnic cleansing. Fourth, the author concludes with thoughts on atheistic morality and Christian contributions to society.

The author gives many insightful and helpful explanations of difficult Old Testament texts. His discussion of broader ancient Near East laws helps in understanding that the Law of Moses was quite progressive in its time, particularly in its discussion of slaves, women, and punishment for crime. Also, examining the broader culture gives insight into why God caused the Israelites to be distinct by giving them kosher laws. At the end of the book, the author offers a helpful critique regarding the problem of morality in an atheistic worldview. While exposing some of the philosophical flaws of atheistic morality, the author may have further served his readers by discussing Romans 2 as a bridge for evangelism. Additional positive notes are that Copan writes in an accessible way, often defining difficult terms, and even offers study questions for small groups (it would have been helpful to have a Bible reference section to quickly locate passages of interest).

Despite the strengths of the book, there are significant weaknesses to address. In his attempt to describe the nature of the Trinity, he uses “the mythological three-headed dog Cerberus” as an analogy (32). This unfortunate picture has been used by anti-Trinitarians to mock the Trinity throughout history. Instead of providing a more theocentric foundation by defending the Triune God’s holiness, honor, and right to value that which is most valuable, Copan describes God as an “other-centered Being” (27). Furthermore, to deflect the charge that God is jealous for His own glory, the author claims, “Actually, in the Bible, God isn’t the one commanding us to praise him” (31). As for the charge of jealousy, Copan shifts the
biblical focus of God seeking His own glory to describing his actions as that of a “God who is a concerned lover” with his bride, Israel (35). In other words, “God is jealous for our best interests,” “to protect his creatures from profound self-harm,” because “God’s jealousy is other-centered” (39). In a statement of his anthropocentric approach, Copan cites Thomas Torrance, “God loves us more than he loves himself” (52).

Based upon this faulty foundation, the reader anticipates that the author will attempt to defend God from moral culpability as judged by contemporary Western standards. This is seen in the case of lex talionis where the author asserts that it was never taken literally, except in the case of murder (94). While a case can be made for this according to Exod 21:26–27, the reader may question why the author disallows a scenario which he states was common in the broader culture. While arguing against such mutilation, he does not mention cases in Scripture which do involve mutilation (Judg 1:6–7; 2 Sam 4:12). In the case of God’s command to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, Copan suggests that this was so difficult that Abraham could have rejected it without sin. He approvingly cites a commentator who states, “if Abraham couldn’t see God’s broader purposes and so couldn’t bring himself to [sacrifice Isaac], he wouldn’t ‘incur any guilt’ in declining God’s pleas” (48).

In his section that compares Israelite law with the broader culture, he draws upon the “redemptive movement” approach of William Webb’s, Slaves, Women & Homosexuals (InterVaristy, 2001). On the one hand, this discussion is very helpful to have historical perspective in order to avoid anachronistic judgments. On the other hand, the flaw with Copan’s approach, as was with Webb’s, is that there is no discussion of the deadness of the law from a New Testament perspective. Numerous times the author describes the law of Moses as morally inferior, temporary, and non-binding on all times and cultures, but gives no warrant for this claim. The closest answer given is that the “theocracy gave way to a new covenant community” which began in AD 70, “signaling the demise of national ethnic Israel as the people of God” (74). Moving this redemptive movement of slavery to the New Testament, the author will not allow for God to endorse slavery. In the case of Onesimus, the author suggests that Philemon and Onesimus were biological brothers, and that the slavery language implies estrangement among brothers. He writes, “Paul wanted to help heal the rift so that Onesimus (not an actual slave) would be received back as a beloved brother in the Lord, not even simply as a biological brother” (154).

Copan’s discussion of the killing of the Canaanites correctly focuses on their wickedness, but again states, “God’s call to battle was unique to Israel’s situation. Such a call, though, isn’t an enduring, universally binding standard for all time and all cultures” (161). When it comes to devoting certain cities to destruction (Jericho, Ai, and Hazor), the author inaccurately claims that “all the archaeological evidence indicates that no civilian populations existed at Jericho, Ai, and other cities mentioned in Joshua” (176). Concerning the mention of civilians in these contexts, Copan writes, “The use of “women” and “young and old” was merely stock ancient Near Eastern language that could be used even if women and young and old weren’t living there. . . . The text doesn’t require that women and young and old must have been in these cities” (176). Furthermore, “the biblical text gives no indication that the justified wars of Joshua were against noncombatants” (182).
Ultimately, the author ascribes harsh language of total destruction to hyperbole. He writes, "... clearly Moses himself didn’t intend a literal, comprehensive Canaanite destruction. He, like Joshua, was merely following the literary convention of the day" (182).

It is this use of selective evidence that leaves the reader open to being challenged by texts such as Ps 137:9, which speaks of God’s blessing for destroying noncombatant little ones against the rock. Also, 1 Samuel 15 is not compatible with Copan’s claims because Saul has his kingdom stripped from him for not destroying noncombatant sheep. If this was to be followed literally, then surely the other groups mentioned in the text were to be destroyed literally ("Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" [15:3]). Furthermore, one wonders how the author might explain the mass death that will occur in the future judgment on the earth.

Also of concern are some of the author’s interpretations concerning women. From the beginning of creation, he states, “Eve herself had a priestly role in Eden’s garden” (108). To justify the fact that women were not allowed to be priests, he posits that God prohibited this because of the example of the culture that allowed women prostitutes as priestesses. Disregarding the fact that there were also male prostitutes in Israel’s culture, Copan states, “It wasn’t a slam against women. It was a matter of preserving religious purity and the sanctity of sex within marriage” (109). Even God’s prohibition to have sex during a woman’s menstrual cycle “was to help give women a greater measure of independence” (85). As for punishing women by cutting off their hands for seizing a man’s genitals (Deut 25:11–12), the author argues from linguistic considerations, “A more plausible interpretation of this passage is the punishment of depilation (‘you shall shave [the hair of] her groin’), not mutilation” (121). According to the author, “no mercy was to be shown” in this trimming (122).

In his final three chapters, Copan turns to foundational issues such as God’s right as Creator over His creatures and the right of God to punish sinful humanity. At this point he deviates from his previous approach in making the Old Testament palatable to modern sensitivities, and he rightly blames Western culture for not accepting the hard sayings of Scripture concerning God’s wrath. However, God cannot be charged with punishing people in hell, according to Copan. As he writes, “Hell isn’t a torture chamber of everlasting fire. Hell is ultimately a realm of self-separation and quarantine from God’s presence (2 Thess 1:9)” (202).

In conclusion, the major flaws of the book are threefold. First, the most serious flaw is his characterization of the nature of God as an other-centered Being that is not zealous for His glory. Second, the book does not emphasize strongly enough the depravity of man, that none are innocent (49), and that all deserve death and hell. Third, Copan uses evidence selectively to support his view that God is other-centered, that mutilation did not occur, that noncombatants were not killed in the Conquest, that slavery was not forced, etc. For every claim, there are other passages of Scripture that provide counter arguments (some from other time periods), which could set up his readers for an embarrassing encounter with critics. Ultimately, these answers will not be satisfying to the atheist/agnostic, regardless of whether or
not Old Testament ethics were as bad as the atheists imagined. This is where the foundational theocentric answer is needed most, but absent. These deficiencies make the book difficult to recommend to a broader audience.


Reviewed by Dennis A. Hutchison, Professor of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College.

*The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* by Peter H. Davids is another volume in the Pillar New Testament Commentary series. Davids has served at a number of prestigious Christian institutions and is presently the Visiting Professor of Christianity at Houston Baptist University. He is also well known for his previous commentaries on James and 1 Peter. In addition, he was the co-editor of the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development* and one of the co-authors of the *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. More recently he has further contributed to the study of 2 Peter and Jude with *2 Peter and Jude: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament).

*The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* is a well-written and thorough commentary and Davids offers his reasoning as to why he wrote it:

A person could think of a number of reasons for writing a commentary on 2 Peter and Jude. One reason might be, to put it crassly, that they are there. That is, they are in the canon of the NT, for better or worse, so one must write on them if one is to have a commentary series on the NT. . . . A second reason might be to counterbalance Paul. The overwhelming focus in NT studies has clearly been on the four Gospels and Paul’s letters. For many since the Reformation Paul’s letters have been more central than the Gospels. They have been a canon within the canon. By focusing on 2 Peter and Jude (and along with them on James and perhaps 1 Peter) one shows that Paul was not the only voice in the earliest phases of the Jesus movement. There were other voices and other theologies, even if their output was not so prolific (or, perhaps, not so well preserved). . . . Thus a third reason for writing on these letters would be that they are so fascinating and make a significant contribution to the NT (1).

The strengths of the work are many, but this reviewer was impressed with how thoroughly Davids treats background information and the text. He is not afraid of interacting with the difficult issues, usually setting forth differing interpretive solutions and the “pros” and “cons” relating to them. In so doing, he deals not only with the vocabulary, grammar, and style of the New Testament text, but also interacts with material from the Old Testament, history, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, rabbinical thought, and church fathers.
Nevertheless, Davids will stir controversy among some evangelical scholars. First, he introduces into the discussion the concept of literary dependence. After considerable discussion he concludes that not only was Jude written prior to 2 Peter, but that Peter borrowed or copied from Jude much of the material found in 2 Peter 2–3. He states, “2 Peter has not simply patched Jude on, but rather has utilized Jude as part of an ongoing argument” (145). Davids admits that this conclusion does affect his interpretation of 2 Peter 2–3:

It is not that 2 Peter 2:1–3:3 is simply a copy of Jude, but that 2 Peter has taken Jude and adapted his material to the situation and the audience that 2 Peter is addressing (which is also the reason for his being able to divide the material and include it in two parts of his letter). This editorial work will become evident as we discuss the passage in detail (216).

Second, even after arguing for dating 2 Peter prior to the death of Nero, Davids still allows for the possibility that 2 Peter could have been written later, stating, “Thus we have the period A.D. 64–110 as the range within which the work was probably written, whatever one holds about its authorship” (131). With respect to some of the general issues set forth in the commentary, Davids argues for Petrine authorship of 2 Peter (although he does allow for the possibility of a later date and thus a different author), and that the author of Jude was the half-brother of our Lord. He points out that the change in verb tenses (future in 2 Peter and past in Jude) would only be significant to determining the times of writing if the epistles were addressed to the same audience. He argues that Jude most likely wrote from Palestine and to believers living east of the Mediterranean. He supports this conclusion by pointing out that there is little or no evidence that the relatives of Jesus were revered outside of Palestine and Jude’s use of pseudepigraphal literature would only be useful to people who were familiar with it. As to the destination of 2 Peter, Davids is somewhat agnostic. He rejects the idea that 2 Pet 3:1 is referring back to 1 Peter. However, he also rejects the position that holds that the epistle was addressed to the audience of Jude. He bases this conclusion on the facts that the recipients of Jude were Jewish believers, while those of Peter were Gentile believers.

As mentioned above, Davids is very thorough in his discussion of the style and vocabulary of the two epistles. He not only compares and contrasts the two, but goes into detail about the use of deliberative rhetoric by both authors. In addition, concerning the style of 2 Peter, he notes that it is “at root a speech” (145). He also deals with the biblical theology set forth in the two epistles. He lists and discusses the fact that both authors deal with theology as it relates to the Father, Son, and angels. In contrast to Jude, 2 Peter also deals with the Holy Spirit, eschatology, and the Scripture.

All in all, as previously stated, this is a well-written and thorough commentary that will provide much help and insight to the interpreter. This is certainly a valuable addition to the Pillar commentary series.
Reviews| 297


Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament.

I am always excited to see a book written by solid scholars that seeks to present the big picture of the Bible, especially one that includes the Old Testament in its consideration. Grudem, Collins, and Schreiner, the editors, have done a great service in putting this volume together. Two of the editors, Collins and Schreiner, join eleven other scholars in writing essays on different sections of the Bible.

Vern Poythress introduces the volume with an essay focusing on the big picture, an overview of the Bible’s storyline. The remaining essays are divided into three sections: Old Testament (56 pages; five essays), background to the New Testament (30 pages; three essays), and New Testament (40 pages; four essays). The volume concludes with three helpful timelines dealing with the periods covered by the major sections of the volume. The book has no index. Although the book has no preface that gives the purpose of the volume, the back cover states that the volume will help its readers to see the storyline of the Bible, understand the theology of both testaments, read the different sections of the Bible effectively, and know what happened between the testaments. The below review will not give attention to every essay, but select key issues for summary and evaluation.

Poythress effectively demonstrates that “God has a unified plan for all of history” (7). He correctly points out that Christ’s work on earth, especially His crucifixion and resurrection, provides the climax of history. Christ’s return in the future will serve as the consummation of Christ’s work. He introduces an important idea of his in the first section of his essay, that sometimes OT promises take *symbolic* form in their fulfillment (8; emphasis his). He points to the fact that animal sacrifices find their fulfillment in Christ’s “once for all” sacrifice at Calvary. I will come back to this later, but keep in mind that the animal sacrifices are not presented as promises or predictions. Their reality as requirements of the Mosaic covenant pave the way for the realization of God’s ultimate purposes in Christ’s redemptive death. Among Poythress’ helpful overview of numerous key themes that span the Bible, he never gives any attention to Old Testament promises concerning the nation of Israel or their promised restoration to the land of promise. Later, in his section on “Shadows, Prefigures, and Types,” he correctly points out that the Old Testament temple prefigured Christ’s role as the final dwelling place of God and as the high priest. Once again, no reference is made to the nine chapters in Ezekiel given over to a detailed, non-figurative prediction of a future temple (Ezekiel 40–48).

Both essays on biblical theology (Collins and Schreiner) provide a clear summary of key theological themes in the Old and New Testaments. Schreiner introduces the “already, not yet” theme that compares what happened in NT times with what is yet to find fulfillment. Schreiner’s essay concludes with a timeline showing the already, not yet of the last days. Both essays say nothing about any future for the nation of Israel or the Old Testament land promises.
All the essays on the various sections of both testaments offer numerous helpful observations as well as a clear overview of their content. Here are a few nuggets from those chapters (many others could be cited). In his essay on the historical books, Howard presents five overarching themes that pervade these books: God’s sovereignty—over Israel and the nations, God’s presence—near and far, God’s promises—present and future, God’s kingdom—both human and divine, and God’s covenant—reward and punishment. After providing a helpful overview of the Old Testament prophets, House ends his essay with a chart that places the Old Testament place in parallel with an Old Testament timeline (75). One drawback with the chart is its omission of the prophet Joel from its listing. Out of all the things that could receive attention in his essay on Old Testament prophetic books, it does seem odd that he focuses on the role of personal pronouns in prophetic passages. Although pronouns are an important part of interpreting a passage correctly, it would seem that numerous other important issues could have received attention.

The three essays that deal with the inter-testamental period are concise and clear, providing any reader an accessible overview of key events, people, and groups that pave the way for the New Testament. Bock’s and Schreiner’s essays on the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles provide a brief, but solid synthesis of those sections of NT books. At the end of his essay, Schreiner includes a beneficial chart showing the author, date, recipients, and place of writing for each epistle.

In the last essay, Dennis Johnson considers Revelation and provides an accessible survey of four common interpretive approaches to the book: historicism, futurism, preterism, and idealism. He also summarizes the three major millennial views: premillennialism (classic and pre-trib), postmillennialism, and amillennialism. He cites a few passages from Revelation to illustrate the different ways each approach or eschatological position might explain those verses, but does not ever advocate a given position or approach.

This relatively short volume provides a nice, accessible, and clear overview of the storyline of the Bible. It does not offer innovative or new insights, but provides a beneficial overview of the biblical message. In light of the widespread lack of biblical literacy, i.e., the prevalence of only knowing a passage here or there, this volume serves a useful purpose. Since only one of the authors approaches their assignment with dispensational lenses, any attention to God’s future plan for the nation of Israel or the land of promise is lacking. That reality does not, however, take away the value of this book. It does make me long for a clear overview of the biblical storyline that includes a future for the nation of Israel in the land of promise.
The issues dealt with in this book, *A Vision for the Aging Church* are that American churches need to be more involved in the caring and planning process of making decisions for seniors. The question is, “Are the churches today meeting the growing needs of seniors and their caregivers?” The book states the reasons why the church is not more involved in helping the aging and why the church thinks that older persons can be a burden. The book also investigates the historical, cultural, and biblical roots behind the loss of status for elders and discusses the consequences of these themes. The book desires to answer, “How do we as Christians respond to late life issues associated with caregiving, poverty, disability, chronic disease, immobility, isolation, depression, dementia, and death?” Also, “Are we acting as salt in preserving the value of all older persons irrespective of their health status?” The book tries to explain what part today’s churches should play in trying to meet the demands and embrace the opportunities of senior living. The book is not about what is wrong with the methods of our churches today but to be thankful that our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are living twenty years longer than those at the beginning of the twentieth century. This book seeks to help by presenting practical guidelines that will attract and engage our seniors on a local level.

The authors are James M. Houston, who is the founding Chancellor and Emeritus Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Colombia, and Michael Parker, a Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Retired who is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work and at the Center for Mental Health and Aging at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Adjunct Professor in the Division of Geriatric Medicine & Palliative Care and Center for Aging, also at the University of Alabama. Dr. Houston is a man who lives out his age with grace and love and is still active and writing books at the age of eighty-eight. Dr. Houston and Michael Parker probe the most pressing and vital dilemmas facing today’s church: how to encourage and use the elderly population. They draw out from the latest research from scholars past and present and what the Scriptures have to say about how the church has arrived at the current stage of her development with regard to older persons. They believe that the church must avail itself of information about seniors both from the biblical and scientific approach that can be used by church leaders to challenge seniors to greater ministry and health. Michael Parker, while serving in white and African-American churches in the South, became connected with elderly mentors and underserved elderly men and women who helped face the collective challenges associated with developing religious-academic partnerships. As he experienced the love and mentorship of many senior saints, he came to see their great needs and the exciting potential for today’s elders. The writers’ desire in this book is that the seniors should minister to those who are younger. This is because these older saints of the faith have years of experiencing the love of Christ and can share and teach what that is like. These authors hope this book will help all senior saints to rediscover the adventurous spirit.
that can define their final season of life and that the church will place value in their older saints and give them opportunities to serve.

The book is divided up into five parts. The first part, “An Ageist Zeitgeist,” talks of how we live in a world that is aging and living longer. It discusses the fact we live in a selfish society and we need to get back to loving and caring for one another as the Bible commands (45–46).

Part Two in the book, “The Biblical and Historical Themes of Aging,” talks of what the Bible has to say about the senior population. We also learn about the roles the elderly had in biblical times and how seniors in our church have a lived-out life of wisdom and experience that we can learn from.

Part Three, “Solutions for An Aging Church,” talks of ways the church can minister to their seniors. We learn six myths or false stereotypes of the aging population. The six are: (1) they are sick; (2) they can’t learn anymore; (3) it is too late for them to improve their health; (4) genetics play too large a part on becoming old; (5) older people suffer from inadequate physical and mental capacities; and (6) seniors can’t work and serve in society (112–19). Part Three also tells us of the importance of spiritually encouraging the elderly as well as coming alongside to help in the caregiving process. Family caregivers, a majority of them women, can experience adverse physical, mental, and financial burdens. The authors feel that the military parent-care program is a great model to follow. All who enter the military are required to complete a family care plan which helps to provide medical, legal, and spiritual welfare for surviving family members. Lastly, in Part Three, Parker feels it is important that churches work with outside organizations for support and help, and he believes that using technology can help connect with the community (150–52). Small group Bible studies can be a great help in getting to know these special people better (156–57).

Part Four, “Late Life Significant Living,” addresses the problem of depression with seniors. Loneliness and sadness can be a pervasive problem. Part Four also talks about dementia and Alzheimer’s and how we, the church, can minister to those who are suffering with this as well as their families. Statistics tell us that one of two people will suffer from dementia. Two-thirds of those with dementia will suffer from Alzheimer’s (193–94). The church has a great opportunity to help its members lovingly prepare for the care of aging parents, rather than simply reacting in crisis. Five basic needs are discussed: the need for comfort, attachment; a bonding among the seniors in the church, inclusion; as a sense of belonging; occupation; seniors need to find things to do; and lastly identity—when those with dementia lose or forget their identity, that they need to know they won’t be forgotten. We need to know their stories and history (197–200).

Lastly, Part Five is “Finishing Well.” We live in a world that is afraid of dying and many refuse to even talk about it. Discussion here includes protecting the elderly from medically assisted suicides and mercy killings. We can learn much from those who have faithfully served the Lord till the end. The Bible talks much about how to finish well.

The authors, James Houston and Michael Parker, have written a book which challenges and encourages the church leaders today to minister to their seniors. They share a fact that older people are living longer to where this population is
exploding. This book brings a renewed attitude toward our elderly and a much-needed insight how to provide help and care for these special people. This book gives us the biblical mandate to not exclude our seniors but to value them as treasures who have much wisdom and knowledge to give to the church. The authors give us up to date research on aging as well as a detailed indictment of the Western culture and the church for their lack of care, respect, and overall concern for our seniors. This book drives home the importance the church has much more to offer than the secular world, and that it can come alongside to help the elderly grow spiritually. The authors state, “Strong spirituality will cause improvement in their psychological well-being, reduced depression, more freedom, less dependence, and a greater sense of meaning and purpose” (121–22). This is not a book that is filled with Scripture. It is not a deep theological book. It is a practical book with the purpose to challenge and encourage the church to be more proactive in its approach and ministry to our senior saints. This book can be a good resource for pastors as well as laypersons.


Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Vice-President for Library and Educational Assessment.

One of the single most fascinating Christian apologists in the modern era, like C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), was not a trained theologian, but rather a man of letters, or as Gilbert Keith (G. K.) Chesterton (1874–1936), often referred to himself, “a journalist.” His chief secular antagonist (and good friend) George Bernard Shaw called him an individual of “colossal genius.” Known as a Roman Catholic apologist (although he did not convert to Catholicism until 1922), his works have been reprinted by several evangelical publishers and perhaps his most influential work, *The Everlasting Man* (1925), was identified by C. S. Lewis as a significant contribution to his own conversion, and one of the books that shaped his “vocational attitude and philosophy of life” (*Christian Century*, 79, no. 23 [6 June 1962], 719).

Although interest in Chesterton and his works never really waned since his death in 1936, in recent years interest in “GK” has steadily risen. In the last ten years there have been over 50 books produced with Chesterton as the central subject. Of all of these new volumes, the subject of this review stands out as a singular contribution.

Ian Ker is Senior Research Fellow in Theology at St. Benet’s Hall, Oxford University. He states in the preface that his goal is to “help establish his [Chesterton’s] rightful position as the successor of the great Victorian ‘sages’, and particularly [John Henry] Newman” (xi). For Ker to seek to place Chesterton alongside Cardinal Newman is no flight of fancy, as he is one of the most noted living authorities on Newman and author of the formidable biography, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford University Press, 2009).
This volume is “the first full-length intellectual and literary life of Chesterton” (viii, xi) incorporating many heretofore little-known or unpublished letters and other materials. The final product is a singular accomplishment, integrating insights into Chesterton’s contributions to multiple genres as well as his theological, socio-economic, and philosophic thoughts into a biographic tour de force.

Ker follows chronological style with allowances for the thematic approach he mentions in the preface. Straying from pure chronology was also somewhat forced upon Ker by his subject since Chesterton “never dated” (viii) letters which he personally wrote. Ker devotes entire chapters to *Orthodoxy* (195–232) and *The Everlasting Man* (487–538). There is a listing of plates (xxi) and an abbreviation key to Chesterton’s works (xvii–xx). The index (731–47) is largely a name index, with subjects only being listed in relation to Chesterton himself and his wife Frances (née Blogg) Chesterton (1871–1938). The index is adequate, but only barely so, and with a book that runs to nearly 800 pages, one could have wished that the publisher had expended a little more effort toward the exhaustive index which this volume deserves.

In exploring this “literary life of Chesterton” (xi), Ker examines the creation of Chesterton’s major polemic and apologetic works, detailing the background and the personal context of Chesterton’s personal life at the time of writing. Ker also spends a good deal of time on his major novels, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (127ff) and his most enduring novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (187ff). *The Man Who Was Thursday* is the Chesterton novel Ker states, “will continue to be read” (125, 127). *Thursday* was Chesterton’s reaction against the pessimism of the 1890s. Chesterton later contrasted this pessimism with the societal pessimism that enveloped England after World War I, as “the sad souls of the nineties lost hope because they had taken to much absinthe; our young men lost hope because a friend died with a bullet in his head” (192). It was a typical contrastive device of Chesterton, viewing the pessimism caused by dwelling in self-induced unreality as opposed to the pessimism caused by the tragedies of real life. This reviewer would take some issue with the assertion by Ker that only these two novels will continue to be read. Both *The Flying Inn* (345–47) and *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (487) are novels that readers continue to enjoy.

Chesterton’s most “remembered” books are, of course, the Father Brown mysteries. The stories were highly profitable. When his bank account would run low, he was reported to have said, “Oh well, we must write another Father Brown story” (283). Ker’s discussion of the origination and development of Father Brown (282–90) is excellent. The examination and solving of crimes by an otherwise non-descript Roman Catholic priest combines Chesterton’s twin passions of the common man and the singular importance of Christian theology in everyday life.

*Orthodoxy* and *The Everlasting Man* are Chesterton’s two main theological works and they, perhaps as clearly as anything written, detail his view of Christianity and Catholicism. In *Orthodoxy*, which was actually published 14 years before he entered the Catholic Church, he stated, “Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags. The mere mention of the Church would be a deadly ultimatum to the world” (London: Bogley Head, 1908), 218–19). Ker’s analysis of these volumes is worth the price of the entire book. For
Chesterton, Christianity, and the visible church, was a living and vital reality. He stated, “Plato has told you a truth, but Plato is dead. Shakespeare has startled you with an image; but Shakespeare will not startle you any more” (228). “The Christian Church in its practical relation to my soul is a living teacher, not a dead one. It not only taught me yesterday, but will almost certainly teach me tomorrow” (ibid). In *The Everlasting Man*, Chesterton was dealing with a “post-Christian” society. Ker helpfully notes:

> By pointing out that in a post-Christian age it is very difficult to see Christianity for what it is: post-Christians ‘still live in the shadow of the faith and have lost the light of the faith.’ They are in a state of ‘reaction’: ‘They cannot be Christians and they cannot leave off being Anti-Christians.’ They are not ‘far enough away not to hate’ Christianity, nor are they near enough to love it’ (516).

Ker develops the theme of Chesterton’s humor in greater depth than any other biographical work and makes significant use of Chesterton’s *Autobiography* (published shortly after his death in 1936). Ker states:

> The unfailing humour that was so significant an aspect of Chesterton’s personal life has its parallel in the enormous importance he attached in his writings to humour as a medium for comprehending and interpreting life, regarding comedy as he did as an art form at least as serious as tragedy (xi).

In this approach Ker demonstrates the singular skein that runs through Chesterton’s life and works, the difference from being serious about life, yet approaching it with humor and being solemnly humorless whereby one loses the joy of living life (506–07). Humor was so thoroughly entwined in his writings Chesterton remarked that he feared, “his humorous books were taken seriously and his serious books humorously” (550).

The literary device Chesterton is best known for is the use of paradox. Chesterton himself came to believe when he saw that “the paradoxes of Christianity are true to life” (150). Ker’s discussion of Chesterton and paradox is woven throughout the work, as it was in Chesterton’s life itself. Ker notes that Chesterton explained every aspect of Christianity and the Christian life by means of paradox. He summarizes Chesterton’s view of the pagan and Christian view of self by stating:

> The pagans had set out to enjoy themselves but in the end made ‘the great psychological discovery’ that ‘a man cannot enjoy himself and continue to enjoy anything else’, and that, ‘whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to the infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero’ (151).
Chesterton remains one of the most fascinating Christian apologists/philosophers of the modern era. He straddled the eras between Queen Victorian and the opening curtain of World War II. He wrote significant critiques of poets like Robert Browning and Robert Lewis Stevenson and also warned the world about the horrors that, left unchecked, Hitler and Nazism would certainly unleash on the world. He was a giant in the English literary world when Fleet Street was in its golden age. He saw the introduction of the telephone (which he personally was averse to using) and in 1932 became a successful radio personality for the BBC. His radio success foreshadowed the broadcasts of C. S. Lewis during World War II, from whence *Mere Christianity* (1945) would derive.

For evangelicals, of whom Chesterton was often critical, he is a writer, apologist, and thinker of the first rank who remains vital to interact with today. While one may be disappointed that the final destination in his spiritual journal was the Catholic Church, if one reads Chesterton without profit it is not the fault of the writer. Ker has produced one of those rare biographies that is full of detailed information and personal anecdotes while never losing the author’s original goal. We cannot recommend this volume too highly.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Leder holds the position of Martin J. Wyngaarden Senior Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, where he has been teaching Old Testament studies since 1987. His career began as a pastor in Ontario, Canada. For eight years he served as a missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in Puerto Rico and Costa Rica. He edited *Reading and Hearing the Word from Text to Sermon: Essays in Honor of John H. Stek* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary and CBC Publications, 1998) and *For God So Loved the World: Missiological Reflections in Honor of Roger S. Greenway* (La Vergne, TN: Lightning Source, 2006).

*Waiting for the Land* provides Leder’s view of the Pentateuch’s meta-narrative. He introduces his analysis with a twofold retelling of the Pentateuch’s narrative: (1) employing the Pentateuch’s own vocabulary (6–16) and (2) using the typical vocabulary of the Christian church (19–20). Throughout the Pentateuch Leder observes a theme of waiting for the land in God’s presence (22).

Following this overview, Leder embarks upon a description of the plot, scope, and structure of the Pentateuch (23–41). His conclusion is that “Exile from the presence of God, then, forms the boundaries of the entire biblical narrative, as well as of its various subunits” (25). Mankind and Israel’s histories focus on narrating how disobedience distances people from the presence of God (27). The Pentateuch merely transports its readers “from the expulsion from one place to the waiting for entry into another” (28). For the Pentateuch’s structure Leder posits a chiastic arrangement (35, Table 2.2) whereby Genesis and Deuteronomy comprise the outer
framework focusing on separation from the nations, blessing, seeing the land, and descendants in the land. Exodus and Numbers then present Israel’s desert journeys, apostasy and plagues, key protagonists (Pharaoh and the magicians in Exodus; Balak and Balaam in Numbers), and the first-born/Levites. At the center of this chiastic structure sits the book of Leviticus with its emphasis on sacrifices, cleanliness, and holiness. The author proposes that Bible scholars have obscured the central role of Leviticus because of over-attention to the mighty acts of God in history and a dislike for ritual (36). Since God chose Israel to be essentially a priestly people, Leviticus provides a focus on the necessity of being holy in order to abide in God’s presence.

Next, Leder delves into the Pentateuch’s narrative coherence and conceptual pattern (43–58). He perceives a pervasive royal metaphor depicting a king who seeks out the cause of disorder in his kingdom, defeats the enemy, and then returns to his capital to construct a commemorative structure of his victory (43–44). Without arguing for material literary dependence, Leder surveys the epics of Enuma Elish and Baal vs. Yamm to identify the elements of such a royal metaphor (45). Then he fits the Pentateuch’s narrative into that framework of key elements (47). As part of his examination, he compares key texts within the Genesis creation narrative and the Exodus tabernacle narrative (55), concluding that Exodus “cannot be properly understood without its antecedent, Genesis” (56).

The bulk of the volume treats each of the five books of Moses separately in order to develop these observations regarding theme, structure, and royal metaphor: Genesis (59–91), Exodus (93–114), Leviticus (115–39), Numbers (141–64), and Deuteronomy (165–84). This core continues Leder’s analysis and filling out the overall picture regarding each book’s contribution and relationship to the other four. Boxed mini-excurses, outlines, and tables make his presentation easy to grasp (e.g., 63, 81, 100). The reader comes away with a better understanding of the Pentateuch, its unity, and its message, no matter the level of agreement or disagreement with Leder’s views.

The closing chapter (“Waiting for the Land Today: The Church as a Desert People,” 185–212) returns to the second telling of the narrative with which Leder began this volume. First, he contrasts two land-centered theological constructs: classical dispensationalism (187–89) and materialist-liberationism (189–93). Second, he presents his own Reformed approach (193–209), which he later terms “desert theology” (210). This comes as no surprise to the discerning reader, since the author drops clues all along the way that his main purpose in writing this volume is really not about the land at all, but about the spiritual presence of God with His people. In other words, the message of the Pentateuch for the Reformed theologian (at least in Leder’s depiction) is “that this world is not the church’s home, that she is waiting for the fullness of Christ’s presence and the descent of the heavenly Jerusalem” (210).

Throughout the volume Leder stretches the royal metaphor to the point of jeopardizing the reader’s confidence. Yes, there is a royal theme or thread in the Pentateuch, as Sailhamer has noted in his The Meaning of the Pentateuch (IVP, 2009). But, Leder takes it to a more comprehensive level that seems an imposition on the text. His choices of scholarly works with which to interact are very limited, even in his attempted representations of both the classical dispensationalist and
materialist-liberationist views. The only Genesis commentary he cites is that of Gerhard von Rad; for Exodus he cites only Terence Fretheim and Brevard Childs; only Gordon Wenham and Rolf Rendtorff’s commentaries gain mention for Leviticus; the sole commentary he mentions for Numbers is by Gordon Wenham; and Deuteronomy commentaries by Peter Craigie and Patrick Miller make brief appearances. The bulk of the author’s sources consist of specialized and theological studies rather than being more dependent upon exegetical sources. This lack of exegetical foundation lends itself to a more spiritualized, metaphorical, and nuanced treatment of the Pentateuchal narratives.


Reviewed by Andy Snider, Associate Professor of Theology.

Robert Letham is a familiar name in the field of Reformed theology, having written a number of significant books from that perspective, including works on *The Holy Trinity, The Lord’s Supper,* and *Eastern Orthodoxy.* This work on the doctrine of union with Christ picks up the theme of Christology, which he addressed more broadly in book-length form in his 1993 contribution to the Contours of Christian Theology series, *The Work of Christ.* In view of the recent broader discussions on union with Christ, Letham’s work is a welcome contribution with a seasoned and knowledgeable quality.

The book is not as exhaustive as its subtitle might suggest; this appears to be Letham’s effort to “hit the highlights” of this key doctrine of the Christian faith. As such, it is both a hit and a miss, although perhaps more of the former than the latter.

The author begins with a broad summary of the biblical centrality of union with Christ, setting his trajectory against, for example, the new perspective on Paul, and aligning it squarely with classical Reformed theology. He proceeds in successive chapters to consider union with Christ and its relationship to creation, incarnation, and Pentecost, then focuses on the soteriology of union with Christ specifically in relation to representation, transformation, and death/resurrection. The book ends with a thorough bibliography, a Scripture index, and a topical index.

Key positive traits of the book include Letham’s explicit allegiance to Scripture and its authority for formulating this doctrine precisely. His theological arguments are interwoven with exegetical information that (often, though not always) drives the point home convincingly. Also on the helpful side is his insightful discussion of the incarnation—specifically, the hypostatic union—which shows how union with Christ (in soteriology) depends greatly on a prior understanding of the incarnation (in Christology). We can be one with Christ, first of all because he became one with us in taking on human nature. This element is sometimes missed in discussions of union with Christ.

Letham’s discussion of the Holy Spirit’s role in union with Christ is also most helpful and is probably the best chapter in the book. A close second is the deeply edifying conclusion to the book, explaining the believer’s union with Christ in...
relation to his death, resurrection, and ascension. It is appropriate that such a book should end with lifting the reader’s eyes and heart in hope toward the return of Christ and the everlasting union that Christ’s people will enjoy with him in the

eschaton.

There are however several drawbacks to the book, especially for one not as embedded in the Reformed Scholastic tradition. Most of Letham’s historical arguments emphasize Calvin and his scholastic heirs, although there are periodic appeals to the patristic period. This makes the book feel rather narrow at times and may serve to limit its appeal. Also, there are certain sections of the book that feel like long digressions. For example, in chapter 2 there is a 12-page excursus on early Christological developments leading to the Second Council of Constantinople that is not well connected to the argument of the book (this happens also in chapter 4 where discussions of justification by faith seem to overshadow the topic of union with Christ). Certain exegetical objections could also be raised against portions of Letham’s doctrine as well, particularly the near-dominating emphasis on the Reformed principle that all of Christ’s life was substitutionary, particularly His obedience to the Law which forms the righteousness which is imputed to the believer (see summary, 82). This principle of the “active obedience” of Christ as comprising the righteousness of justification is exegetically dubious and yet plays an overly weighty role in Letham’s discussion.

All things considered, Letham’s book is an important contribution to the discussion of union with Christ, and it should take its place as an able statement of the Reformed tradition. It is recommended for pastors or students of theology that are studying the topic, but its helpfulness to others may be limited because of some of the more technical historical discussions, as well as frequent quotations of Scripture and various early Christian writers in Latin and Greek (transliterated).


Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia).

On May 5, 2007, Dr. Francis Beckwith resigned from the presidency of the *Evangelical Theological Society* to be received back into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. This caused a firestorm of controversy within evangelicalism, which caused many to ask, “How could this happen?” Because such a theological and confessional movement is not an isolated incident, Robert Plummer (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides testimonials of conversions to Orthodoxy (Wilbur Ellsworth), Catholicism (Francis Beckwith), evangelicalism (Chris Castaldo), and Anglicanism (Lyle W. Dorsett). Following each testimony is a response and then a brief rejoinder.

As the former pastor of First Baptist Church in Wheaton (IL), Wilbur Ellsworth explains that his disenchantment with evangelicalism began with irreverence in worship. Influenced by the “seeker sensitive,” “market driven”
message of Willow Creek Community Church, Ellsworth’s dissatisfaction led him and his wife to sense that they “needed to discover and grow into something more, something greater, richer, and more compelling” (24). Through a series of events, the author was introduced to the Eastern Orthodox Church (EOC) where he was eventually ordained as priest. Although the article is a testimonial, the author gives little attention to distinctive EOC doctrines such as icons (one sentence), and he does not address the priority of the pope, clerical marriage, theosis, or the filioque. In an ecumenical tone, he regards evangelicals as “beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord,” but describes his decision to leave the movement because “the history of the Church has convinced me of the place of the Orthodox Church in the world” (45).

Craig Blaising (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) responds to Ellsworth by noting the typical EOC understanding (and persecution) of evangelicalism, the downsides to scripted liturgy, and the dangers of giving tradition priority over Scripture. Blaising then provides a critique of the history of the liturgy, icons, Eucharist, the atonement, and Mariology. A significant element omitted from Blaising’s response, however, is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Ellsworth’s rejoinder shows sympathy toward EOC persecution of non-EOC. He affirms, “I vigorously affirm that both Evangelicals and the Orthodox embrace and proclaim what Saint Paul called the core of the gospel . . .” (68). He then answers the following questions: “Does Orthodoxy Tradition Oppose the Authority of Scripture?”, “Is the Orthodox Church Idolatrous in Its Use of Material Things in Worship?”, and “Is There Any Relationship between Worship on Earth and Worship in Heaven?”

“What if someone reads your book and converts to Catholicism?” is the question that Plummer recalls from his wife in the Conclusion of the book (223). This concern is not without warrant when one reads Francis J. Beckwith’s journey from Catholicism to evangelicalism, and back to Catholicism. In what is the best written and most scholarly of the testimonials, the author focuses on evangelical concerns and attempts to support his beliefs with Scripture and tradition. The turning point of Beckwith’s conversion occurred when he gave a paper on the importance of tradition and someone asked, based upon Beckwith’s own conclusions, why he was not Catholic (87). This caused Beckwith to return to reevaluate fundamental doctrines in which he discusses at length: “The Doctrine of Justification,” “The Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist,” “The Sacrament of Penance,” and “Apostolic Succession.”

The response by Gregg Allison (Southern Theological Seminary) does not mention Beckwith or his article (except in two endnotes); rather, Allison focuses on general commonalities and divergences between Catholicism and evangelicalism. Regarding divergences, he discusses the role of Scripture and tradition, justification by faith alone, the role of Mary, and purgatory. In Beckwith’s rejoinder, he further supports the Catholic view of the development of doctrine, justification, the perspicuity of Scripture, tradition, and the scope of the canon.

Chris Castaldo (Director of Ministry for Gospel Renewal at the Billy Graham Center) chronicles his journey to evangelicalism from Catholicism. Although he was a cradle Catholic, Castaldo explains he lacked hope and certainty in his
Catholic faith. Not finding answers in various religions or philosophies, the turning point came when he heard an evangelical sermon from John 15:5–6. Castaldo writes, “I finally understood the meaning of Jesus’ cross and resurrection . . . not simply as an offering for ‘sin’ in a general sense but for me personally. Not Christ accruing superabundant merits to be stored in a heavenly treasury and dispensed to me as I participated in religious rites but the complete satisfaction of God’s wrath and forgiveness of my sins” (143). In the remainder of his article, the author explains the main reasons why people leave Catholicism: (1) clerical elitism, (2) legalistic rules, (3) the Church as the dispenser of grace, (4) veneration of saints, and (5) religious guilt. In a helpful section, he anticipates the following Catholic objections: (1) Protestantism leads to chaotic sectarianism; (2) the Church canonized the Scripture and thus has authority to interpret them; (3) Sola scriptura separates faith from reason; and (4) Sola scriptura neglects the contributions of church history. Although the author has a helpful section on hope in salvation, which includes an explanation of the nature of the atonement in Catholic theology, he never explains the foundational doctrine of the Reformation: justification by faith alone.

The response by Brad S. Gregory (University of Notre Dame), which provides an extensive footnote section, heavily depends upon the authority of church tradition. For this reason, it is understandable he cares little for “tit-for-tat biblical prooftexts [which] were all well-known centuries ago . . . .” (165). Attempting “to be not only civil but also friendly, and indeed to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ despite ecclesial divisions” (166), Gregory focuses on the amorphous, confused nature of Protestantism to show the need for trusting the Church’s teachings. This state of affairs, according to the author, creates the confusion where no one recognizes primary and secondary doctrines. Castaldo’s rejoinder focuses on attacking Gregory’s confidence in the stability of Catholic tradition over the testimony of Scripture. It is disappointing, however, that Castaldo does not appeal to the doctrine of justification by faith alone in response to Gregory’s challenge for the essence of the gospel.

Lyle W. Dorsett (Pastor of Christ the King Anglican Church [Birmingham, AL] and Professor of Evangelism at Beeson Divinity School) begins his article by expressing admiration for Malcolm Muggeridge’s explanation of the various religious traditions of his family (Brethren, Dutch Reformed, Anglican, and Catholic): “They serve in different regiments of the same army, my man” (187). Dismayed over the fact that these regiments have often fought one another, Dorsett gives the disclaimer, “we neither think we are in the only true room nor think we are necessarily in the best one. Instead we are in the room where we find fellowship that best suits us” (188). Similar to Ellsworth’s sentiments, the author expresses, “folks like me are longing for something more and are finding it in the Anglican tradition . . . .” (188). Having been baptized in the Lutheran church as an infant, he was converted at the age of fifteen by the preaching of a Baptist revivalist during a tent meeting and committed himself to preach the gospel. Following the rigors and challenges of university studies, he became agnostic and fell into alcoholism. Dorsett describes what happened next: “I cried out while awakening from a drinking binge, ‘God, if you are there, will you help me?’ A presence came to me . . . . I knew that the Lord Jesus was with me and that he loved me” (193). It is
interesting to note how the author describes this experience: “Gradually, in the aftermath of this conversion experience or explosive understanding of what God had done for me through infant baptism, confirmation, and the mystical experience under the Baptist big-tent revival meeting, the Lord gracefully restored the call to preach” (194). Following the study of various evangelical traditions, he served at College Church in Wheaton, IL for twelve years. Yet, he and his wife “longed for ‘something more’” (200). In particular, “Much of our longing found fulfillment in the ‘real presence’ of Holy Communion as taught and celebrated by Anglicans” (206). They were attracted to the Anglican Church because they “saw themselves in apostolic succession and as part of one, holy, catholic, or universal, church” (201). Furthermore, “I feel at home in the Anglican tradition because historically it has been the via media [middle road] that emerged from the English Reformation” (208).

Robert A. Peterson (Covenant Theological Seminary) has many positive things to say about Anglicanism but primarily critiques its doctrinal latitudinarianism for allowing heretical bishops that deny the resurrection (David Jenkins and John Shelby Spong) and the ordination of women. Also of concern for Peterson is the exclusivity of the Anglican bishopric to serve the Eucharist. Dorsett’s answer is the most brief of all rejoinders, which simply exposes similar heresies in the variegated forms of Presbyterianism.

*Journeys of Faith* provides an interesting narrative of conversion to alternative Christian traditions. The reader senses the *Anfechtungen* involved in making these decisions, which evokes sympathy for each man. Responders had the difficult task of critiquing these testimonies but did so in charity. The genre of the book purposely emphasizes “the journey,” which naturally involves less of an emphasis on in-depth exegetical, theological, and historical distinctions. Who, for example, has the rightful claim to tradition since the Orthodox, Catholic, and Anglican authors appeal to tradition as the basis for their conversions (Beckwith briefly mentions this [111–12])? Since justification by faith alone was absent from most discussions, is the doctrine that important? Combining the general treatment of these profound issues, an irenic tone that avoids anathemas, and emotional empathy for the authors, results in making this book a subtle, but potent tool for ecumenism. This is even more significant when one considers that the editor is from the conservative Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. When explaining the goals of his book, Plummer states that he seeks to produce sympathy among each tradition and to give caution among those who wish to leave their tradition He encourages his readers to be “a model of peaceable ecumenical dialogue.”

“People who claim Jesus as Lord should be able to disagree before a non-believing world without denying the love for others we profess marks us as Christians (John 13:34–35)” (224). While Plummer is not explicit that he believes all contributors are brothers in Christ, the idea is confirmed by many of the authors and denied by none. Also of concern is how this book will affect the evangelical understanding of evangelism among Catholics and Orthodox. Although this genre of testimonials has its place, the history of Christianity has taught us that this debate demands more substance. As a result, this book is only recommended for those who have strong biblical discernment.

Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Eric D. Reymond is a lector in Hebrew Bible, Dead Sea Scrolls, Judaism, and Jewish History at Yale Divinity School. He is the author of *Innovations in Hebrew Poetry: Parallelism and the Poems of Sirach* (SBL, 2004). In this volume, the author explores the linguistic and literary idioms and structures of the seven non-Masoretic poems preserved in the Dead Sea Scroll labeled 11Q5 (or 11QPs*), and first published by James A. Sanders in *The Psalms Scroll of Qumrân Cave 11 (11QPs*)*, DJD 4 (Clarendon, 1965). Sanders also published a popular edition, *The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1967). The seven poems consist of Sirach 51:13–30, Psalm 151A, Psalm 154, Psalm 155, Apostrophe to Zion, Plea for Deliverance, and Hymn to the Creator—all linking wisdom to praise of God. Brill has simultaneously published a more expensive ($135) hardback edition of *New Idioms Within Old*.

Reymond introduces the volume by describing the scroll (which also contains portions of biblical texts such as Pss 93, 101–5, 109, 118, 119, 121–50, and 2 Sam 23:1–7), previous scholarly studies of the scroll, as well as explaining his goals and methodology (1–20). In the body of the book (21–183), he stresses the poems’ structural and conceptual coherence and incorporates insights obtained from the scholarship of recent decades. Each chapter addresses a single poem and discusses its interpretational difficulties, a detailed chart of its parallelistic structures, a translation, philological notes, explanation of the poem’s theme, and then a summary of line length, parallelistic patterns, and allusions or echoes to Scripture. Reymond’s work provides readers with the best commentary currently available.

In the concluding chapter (185–98), Reymond considers these poems in relation to what they reveal about the development of Hebrew poetry in the late Second Temple period. He commences with a summary of the seven poems’ relationships to one another with regard to line length, parallelism, allusion to Scripture, and other features. Then he compares the poems with biblical poetry. Finally, he examines the poems’ theological ideas and their bearing on the structural and rhetorical features of the poems. The volume closes with a thorough bibliography (199–214) and functional indexes for modern authors (215–17) and passages from ancient texts (219–28).

Students of Psalms, Hebrew poetry, and the Dead Sea Scrolls will gain much from this volume. Reymond makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discussions involved with these areas of study and the debates over parallelism and literary structures.

Reviewed by Gregory H. Harris, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The Temple occurs so much in Scripture, yet it is often neglected or misunderstood by many Christians because much of it seems to be so alien to our culture. Yet you cannot study the Bible much without having to study things related to God’s Temple. Randall Price has written a superb work on the Temple in the *Rose Guide to the Temple* that is easy to read, full of wonderfully colored pictures, and includes timelines and helpful asides on related topics in each chapter. The book begins with an excellent foldout from National Geographic that shows the development of the Temple from its start up to the present day. There are occasions where an overlay is provided so that the reader can see what the outside looked like, pull back the overlay, and see inside the Temple in relation to its outside. This is very helpful in seeing the big picture and the smaller picture. As before, anytime we can drop down into the world of the biblical narrative to “see it as they saw it,” we are better for it. *Rose Guide to the Temple* does just that and does so beautifully. Also, this book is spiral bound, which makes it particularly useful as a study text.

The book divides into five sections with each section having subsequent subheadings. Section 1 is “God’s Sanctuary Before the Temple,” and includes such subheadings as “What Does ‘Temple’ Mean?” and “How Do We Know About the Temple?” Section 2: “God’s Permanent Sanctuary: The First Temple” shows a very detailed layout of the Temple that Solomon built and gives helpful insights into how the Temple played such an important part in the lives of the Jews. This section goes up through the destruction of the first Temple. Contained within in this section is an explanation of the various priestly and Levitical roles and functions, as well as a calendar of the feasts of the Jewish year.

Section 3: “God’s Permanent Sanctuary Rebuilt: The Second Temple,” goes from the rebuilding of the Temple up through the life of Jesus and concluding with the destruction of the second Temple by the Romans. As with the other chapters, very clear timelines are used, along with very clear writing of the text. For those who may not be as conversant with history, Price leads the readers through so that what is going on historically and biblically can be easily comprehended. This section concludes with a subheading noting some of the archaeological discoveries (including pictures) that support the biblical claims regarding the Temple. Also, as with the other sections, the book presents ample footnotes of the sources used.

The fourth and final section, “The Modern Temple Mount and the Future Temple,” traces its history up through the Crusades. The second subheading in this section is “The Temple Mount Today.” The Crusades and what is currently transpiring on the Temple Mount are two extremely important sections because this helps to explain much of what is happening in the Muslim world politically as it relates to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The section “Islamic Denial of the Temple’s Existence” traces the relatively new teaching by some Muslims that in spite of the multitude of evidence to the contrary, some Islamic teachers teach that no such Temple of God ever existed in Jerusalem (116–17). The far-reaching
ramifications of this are tremendous, and as before, these two sections offer sound insights into the development of the problem of whose holy ground is this, with Jews and Muslims, and to a degree Christians, and all laying claim to it.

The final subheading of the fourth section is “The Future Temple.” Price offers a chart of reasons for those who see Ezekiel 40–48 as symbolic as well as a column on why some people understand a literal temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom (132). Fittingly, Price concludes the book with a reference to New Jerusalem and shows some of its connections with the previous temple designs.

This was an enjoyable book to go through. For those who have never studied the Temple of God in detail, this is a very good place to start and to continue. For those who have not been able to visit Jerusalem, this should be very beneficial because you certainly see the layout of the land. You should be able to follow somewhat as a tour guide leads one along the study. This resource would be helpful for pastors or other teachers within the church. Although not set up this way, the book would be a rich study for adult or college age Sunday School classes to go through. I highly recommend this God-honoring book for anyone who wants to drop down into the biblical world and not only read—but even clearly see—God’s design for His very own abode, until the new heavens and earth come in.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.


Although associated in his early background with Baptist and Presbyterian churches, since 1979 Ross has been active in the Episcopal Church.

This first of three projected volumes provides the reader with a clear idea of what this commentary on Psalms will accomplish. Ross identifies his purpose in writing the commentary as “the chief aim of exegesis, the exposition of the text” (11). He successfully achieves that purpose in this volume. He covers the entirety of each psalm, explaining each verse, and demonstrates how each psalm’s message unfolds section-by-section. Ross promises that the third volume will contain a lengthy bibliography keyed to relevant psalms (12). The commentary reads with ease and includes technical material in a user-friendly fashion. Selected technical discussions avoid bogging the reader down in matters which do not materially
The Master’s Seminary Journal

314

affect the exposition of the text. The author provides his own conservative translation in modernized English. Textually, he resists rewriting the text to make better sense to himself (14)—something this reviewer applauds.

A key element this commentary represents better than any other Psalms commentary consists of its word studies. Ross relegates such studies to the footnotes and cross-references the same Hebrew word elsewhere to the occurrence of its discussion. For example, the study of הָשָׁה (ḥāsâ), meaning “to take refuge,” appears in footnote 26 on page 279. Where the same word occurs in Psalms 2:12 and 16:1, a parenthetical reference to the word says “s.v. Ps. 7:1” (213, 402). An index to these word studies will occur at the end of the third volume.

Unfortunately, Ross does not consider the psalm inscriptions to be original, even though he admits that the traditions that the inscriptions provide “cannot simply be discarded” (16). Such a view results in Ross questioning the Davidic authorship of some psalms despite inscriptive attribution (17). Perhaps the greatest gap in the coverage of Psalms involves ignoring the theory proposed by James Thirtle in The Titles of the Psalms: Their Nature and Meaning Explained (Henry Frowde, 1904), even though Ross does list Bruce K. Waltke’s “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” Journal of Biblical Literature 110, no. 4 (1991): 583–96 in his “Selected Bibliography” (77).


Each individual psalm commentary commences with an “Introduction” containing an annotated translation with footnotes regarding textual variants, a brief discussion of the psalm’s composition and context, and Ross’s “Exegetical Analysis” with a concise summary and a full-sentence exegetical outline. The “Exposition in Commentary Form” follows a section-by-section homiletical outline. The third and final section of the individual psalm commentary is “Message and Application” with the expository idea printed in italics to highlight it. Throughout this first volume, Ross displays a conservative evangelical treatment of the text. There are occasional inconsistencies (e.g., translating only the first of the continuous participles in Ps 19:1 [Heb., 2] as continuous, but the second as a characteristic present along with the two imperfects of 19:2 [Heb., 3]; 465, cp. 473), omissions (ignoring the tricolon and their contribution to the structure of Ps 19), and mistakes (“verse 2” should be “Psalm 18:2”; 485). Readers, however, will be satisfied with the commentary’s solid contribution to the study and exposition of the Psalter.

This commentary does not provide an extensive theological excursus like that which Geoffrey Grogan supplies in the Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2008), but far exceeds Grogan’s work in expositional value due to its
much greater length and depth. His treatment of expository application surpasses the selected applications of Gerald Wilson in the NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan, 2002), because Wilson’s purpose was to provide one or two key applications to illustrate how to derive applications from the text. Ross provides a much more conservative and less questionable translation than John Goldingay’s three-volume commentary in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Baker, 2006, 2007, 2008). In addition, Ross’s theological interpretation is more conservative.

In short, if God allows the next two volumes to be published, Ross’s *A Commentary on the Psalms* will become the commentary of evangelicals’ choice when preaching and teaching the Psalms. Even though this commentary is part of *Kregel Exegetical Library*, it most certainly exhibits the expository result of exegesis, not the full exegetical analysis itself. One can only hope that someday someone will publish an equally conservative, detailed exegetical commentary on the Psalms.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Founder and president of *Reasons To Believe*, astronomer, and pastor, Hugh Ross, has authored a number of books including *The Fingerprint of God* (rev. ed., Whitaker House, 2000), *The Genesis Question*, 2nd ed. (Navpress, 2001), *Creation as Science: A Testable Model Approach to End the Creation/Evolution Wars* (Navpress, 2006), *Why the Universe Is the Way It Is* (Baker, 2008), *More Than a Theory: Revealing a Testable Model for Creation* (Baker, 2009), and *Beyond the Cosmos*, 3rd ed. (Signalman, 2010). In the current volume the author defends intelligent design by surveying the contributions of the book of Job to the believer’s understanding of science and creation. He claims that Job, as perhaps the Bible’s most ancient book, provides more information on the topics of both science and creation than any other biblical book (18–19). He argues “believers need never be fearful of ‘irreconcilable differences’ between the book of nature and the book of Scripture” (13).

After dating the book of Job to the patriarchal period, Ross concludes that the discussion of creation and evolution must begin with Job, rather than Genesis (33). The author of the book of Job is anonymous, but Ross suggests several details that support the identification of Elihu as “recorder-in-chief” (29–30), an intriguing possibility. He believes that Job 38–39 helps to fill in gaps in the Genesis 1 account of creation (72). Elsewhere in Job, Ross indicates that Job 9:8 reveals what God was doing between the beginning of the universe and the foundation of the earth: “Instead of napping, God was carefully, exquisitely, and patiently ‘engineering’ the universe. . . . Meanwhile, the angelic host looks on and learns (Job 38:4–7)” (75). In fact, he says that laws of physics and space-time dimensions “explain why God took so much time between creating the cosmos and laying down Earth’s foundations” (76), appearing to question God’s omnipotent capability of
establishing such laws instantaneously. None of the creation miracles that he lists from Job 37–39 requires millions or billions of years for God to produce (85). If God could not produce these miracles instantaneously, Ross’s definition of miracle raises questions.

One of the major issues involved in this volume rests with Ross’s dates for the earth and for the universe. Without a shred of biblical evidence he claims “angels have existed for the past 3.8 billion years or more” (48). He identifies a sudden leap from nonlife to life at that point in time, with a second leap occurring 150 million years ago (at the end of the fifth and sixth days of creation), and a third leap 50,000–90,000 years ago at the end of the sixth day (123). In addition, he cites scientists who believe that “an explosive appearance of abundant photosynthetic communities on the continents approximately 850 million years ago” (79). In regard to the universe, Ross declares “God has crafted and shaped the universe on our behalf for some 13.7 billion years” (189). Therefore, his interpretation of the six days of creation in Genesis 1 amounts to a direct denial of texts like Exod 20:8–11 and 31:15–17, which reveal that God created both the heavens and earth, as well as all of their occupants, in six literal days. With such a prolonged dating for the creation of the first heavens and earth, readers might well ask how many billions of years God will take to produce the new creation of which Ross writes (92, 100, 193). If God can and will create the new heavens and new earth instantaneously, why could He not do so with the first heavens and first earth?

Death before mankind’s existence occupies Ross’s discussion when he appeals to descriptions of animal life in Job 38–39 as referring to creation on the fifth day, rather than being observations of animal life in Job’s own day (101). No indication appears in the text to cause the reader to think that God is limiting His statements to the days of creation. Ross argues that pre-Adamic carnivores require a benevolent occurrence of death prior to God’s creation of mankind (101–02).

The author rejects the Scripture’s depiction of the Flood of Noah’s day being global, supposedly on the basis of Job 38:8, 10–11, since he believes that those verses describe a permanent boundary for the waters that God established at creation (93). He also argues that the ungodly (2 Pet 2:5) had not yet inhabited Antarctica, Greenland, Australia, and North and South America, so a global flood was not necessary to wipe out all mankind (94, 96). An additional argument arises in Ross’s refusal to accept “all the surface of the earth,” “under the entire heavens,” and “the whole world” as literal phrases to be taken at face value. Instead, he believes that “earth” and “world” carry meaning related to the context of people rather than the planet and “under the entire heavens” merely means “from one horizon to the other” (94). Repeated references to the annihilation of all birds (Gen 6:7; 7:21, 23) and the necessity of bringing birds onto the ark for preservation (Gen 6:20; 7:3, 8, 14, 17, 19) provide a strong counter-argument to Ross’s limited flood view, since birds can escape flood waters to find land that has not been inundated. The reader is left to wonder what kind of physics Ross teaches that would allow the waters of the Flood to cover the highest mountains, surpassing their height by over twenty-two feet (Gen 7:19–20) without spreading out over the whole surface of the earth. His conclusion is that the “flood is both biblically and scientifically defensible as an inundation much larger than Mesopotamia, as some have proposed,
and yet significantly more limited than global in extent” (97). His conclusion requires a special hermeneutic for interpreting Scripture as well as a suspension of the laws of physics, making his view neither biblical nor scientific.

In spite of his old universe-old earth viewpoint, Ross does manage to bring out a large number of fascinating facts regarding intelligent (divine) design. He itemizes the benefits which the earth’s environment gains from hurricanes (51), the fact that the human heart efficiently sustains nearly three billion beats in a person’s lifetime (more than any other creature; 115), and the functional superiority the human body possesses for hot climates (143). A fascinating study of the “top ten nephesh” as described in the book of Job provides a look at God’s design in providing animals that minister to mankind’s many needs (149–65). Interestingly, Ross claims that global warming can actually be a good thing designed by God and related to natural, created processes pre-dating the Industrial Revolution or even mankind (63–68; see also, 158–59).

Occasionally, Ross gives evidence of an incomplete knowledge of biblical studies. For example, he speaks of the book of Job as being the oldest of the poetic books because it is placed first in the poetry section (30). He must be referring to the English Bible, which is based upon the Latin Vulgate. In the Hebrew Bible Job comes after Psalms, which appears to have been the first book of the Writings, thus representing that third section of the Hebrew canon even in the time of Christ (cp. Luke 24:44). He also lacks an adequate grasp of biblical Hebrew. The Hebrew participle can be either characteristic or continuous. Its use in Job 9:8 for God “stretching out the heavens” does not necessarily imply “an ongoing, continual expansion” (56). Indeed, the uses of the surrounding participles indicate that the usage actually equates with the typical hymnic use of the characteristic participle. Likewise, he demonstrates an inaccurate understanding of Hebrew verb forms in his brief discussion of Gen 1:16 (82). In making the meanings of the Hebrew verbs bārā’ and ʿāšâ distinct (123), Ross ignores the synonymous parallel usages as in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 as well as the syntactical realities of Hebrew sentences like the one in Genesis 2:3 which includes “making” within the scope of “create.”

While this book certainly fails to provide a sound biblical view of either creation or the Flood, Ross’s salvific intent for agnostics and atheists results in a viable set of arguments from the book of Job that give reason to believe the Word of God in its message of salvation from sin and forgiveness. His charts depicting “Job’s Discernment of God’s Redemptive Plan” (206–07) and “Elihu’s Discernment of God’s Redemptive Offer” (210–11) merit careful consideration. However, just as the reader thinks that Ross has finally yielded to the superior authority of Scripture over science, he reveals an over-dependence upon human experience and logic in his view of the message of Scripture (213).

In the final analysis, Ross gives evidence of an elevation of human reasoning, human experience, and human science over Scripture. This is the ultimate debate: Which authority should determine what we believe about creation and the Flood? The authority of God and His inerrant Word? The authority of the church and her “infallible pope(s)”? Or, man’s reason and its self-styled sovereignty? When the last contradicts the first, Ross appears all too ready and willing to go with the last, rather than the first. Thus, in his opinion, believers need never fear irreconcilable differences between the book of nature and the book of Scripture, because all they
need do is reinterpret and revise Scripture by means of the book of nature, which he assumes that he and other scientists have correctly interpreted.


Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia).

Diana Lynn Severance has a Ph.D. from Rice University and is promoted by the publisher as a historian with a rich background of teaching in various universities and seminaries. She has written, *A Cord of Three Strands* (Xulon, 2004) and co-authored *Against the Gates of Hell: The Life & Times of Henry Perry* (UPA, 2003) with her husband, Gordon. In this volume, she has ambitiously assumed the task of examining the contributions of women through the church’s history. In the Preface, the author identifies her objective: “While primarily being a narrative history of women in the church, this work also aims to equip the reader to refute the distortions of women in Christian history which are often being made in academia and the wider culture” (12).

In her treatment of the New Testament, Severance elaborates upon the roles and contributions of women in the early church. She addresses controversial topics such as the Protevangelium of James, Junia’s name, and head-coverings; yet, the author does not discuss the debated nature of Mary Magdalene’s relationship to Jesus as suggested by Dan Brown’s, *The DaVinci Code*. Contrary to feminist critiques of the New Testament, the author identifies the high honor biblical authors bestowed upon women, which would have been revolutionary in antiquity. Examples of such honor are the instruction regarding singleness, commands for husbands to honor their wives, and the admonition for women to be educated in the faith. It would have been helpful at this point, however, for the author to have interacted with works such as William Webb’s, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals* (IVP, 2001) in defending the complementarian view.

Beginning with the early church, Severance chronicles the role of women, particularly as martyrs. Of the 950 known martyrs before Constantine’s reign, 170 were women such as Blandina and Perpetua (38). The author’s treatment of the role of virgins, widows, and deaconesses was very helpful, as well as the author’s critical analysis of Gnostic writings which have influenced the modern feminist movement. Moreover, Severance celebrates the contributions of Constantine’s and Augustine’s mothers in addition to lesser known women of the Medieval period. Furthermore, the author elucidates upon the vital role played by several Christian women of high position in exposing their husbands to Christianity, which, by consequence, changed the courses of countries. The author also discusses several women in this period that contributed to the mystical movement, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Siena, and Joan of Arc.

Speaking of sixteenth-century influences upon women, Severance writes, “Nowhere did the Reformation produce greater societal change than in the position
of women” (135). Describing the renewed understanding of women, sex, and gender roles, the author supports her claim that the Reformers not only produced theological change but also brought about cultural change. Societal changes in the lives of Anna Zwingli, Katharina Luther, Anna Bullinger, and Idelette Calvin are treated as well as many Anabaptist women and their writings. While much attention is given to the English Reformation, Severance surprisingly provides little information pertaining to the personal life and reign of Elizabeth I.

Furthermore, Severance addresses numerous developments occurring between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Women were further educated, and they began to assume greater responsibility in the ministry of the church. The author exposes the reader to many women involved in publishing, education, missions, and social societies. In keeping with her book’s objective, Severance chronicles the history of the feminist movement and provides a trenchant critique of the movement’s presuppositions, hermeneutics, and rejection of the inerrancy of Scripture. Speaking of the relationship between the Bible and the feminist mindset, the author writes, “As seen from earlier times, the different perspectives on women’s roles were in part determined by one’s attitude towards Scripture” (286).

Diana Severance is to be commended for writing a thorough yet concise narrative of women in Christian history that is both engaging and readable. It is written in a popular style that includes website addresses for many references and has helpful highlight boxes with interesting topics such as “Mary Magdalene—Fact and Fiction” (20–21), “Was Perpetua a Montanist?” (41), “Were Women Priests?” (62–64), “Did Helena Discover the True Cross?” (68), and “Those Salem Witches” (193).

Though the author’s survey has much to be commended, there are significant lapses in scholarship that should be addressed. First, appropriate citation for others’ scholarship is missing. For example, the author employs detailed statistics concerning Jonathan Edwards’ descendants but provides no credit for this research. These statistics were originally compiled by Albert E. Winship in 1900 and have been cited in various works on Edwards (Jukes-Edwards: A Study in Education and Heredity [Myers and Co.]). Second, there are numerous factual errors: Phillis Wheatley as “America’s first published black poet” (227), Charles Finney originating the altar call (244), King Uzziah keeping the ark from falling in 2 Chronicles 26 (276), Antoinette Brown as the “first ordained woman minister in the United States” (284), and Jonathan Edwards becoming “pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts, in the 1730s” (221). Third, there are imprecise statements needing clarification. For example, the only description that is given of Arianism is that it was a “tradition that denied Jesus as the Son of God as equal with God” (93). Moreover, Severance states that “the rise of nation states” occurred during the Middle Ages (113; cf. Trueman, Histories and Fallacies [Crossway, 2010], 111). Fourth, while citing online sources may be helpful to the popular culture of 2011, websites quickly become dated. As a result, citing original, hardcopy resources is necessary. Additionally, the author cites secondary resources when the originals are readily available.

It is doubtful that there is another volume that so clearly, concisely, and comprehensively describes the contributions of women throughout church history. The reader is left with a wonderful picture of how God has used women in mighty
ways for His kingdom. However, the lapses in scholarship will cause the reader to question the veracity of what is written. This volume is recommended with proviso that all facts be compared to original resource material.


Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Executive Vice President and Dean.

William Varner, Professor of Bible and Greek at The Master’s College, has produced a superb devotional guide through the entire Psalter. All 150 psalms receive attention, using three different Bible translations:

- Psalms 1–50 use the English Standard Version (ESV)
- Psalms 51–100 use the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)
- Psalms 101–150 use the New American Standard Bible (NASB)

Each psalm receives a section with psalms being extended to two sections each (Pss 22, 27, 37, 39, 40, 42–43, 100, 105, 118). As might be expected, he treats Psalm 119 in sections. Being devotional, each section contains an appropriate concluding prayer.

A significant number of helpful features enrich this well-crafted volume.

- Messianic References to Christ in the Psalms (3)
- Helpful Resources (8–10)
- How to Use This Commentary (10)
- Theme of the Psalms (162–63)
- Introduction to the Psalms of Ascent (321)
- What I’ve Learned (386–87)

While the author’s Introduction (1–10) is brief, it is both spiritual and instructional in nature. Spiritual in that it outlines five major personal lessons to be learned and practiced from the Psalms that will cause a Christian to be more like Christ (1–4). Instructional in that it summarizes Types of Psalms, Title, Authorship, Divisions, Superscriptions, Selah Psalms, and Types of Poetry (4–8).

Dr. Varner’s devotional guide is for both young and mature believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. As the “medicine chest” of the Bible, the Psalms are opened in such a way that they minister to a wide range of life’s issues. This reviewer plans to use it as a helpful guide to journey through the Psalms twice a year.

By the way, if you are still wondering about the title, you will have to get the book. The background to *Awake O Harp* will be found on page 10 of this most interesting and readable spiritual tool. If you are a preacher looking for excellent expositional “grist for the mill” to provoke your thinking about the Psalms, this book is a “must buy.”
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