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EDITORIAL

Historically, evangelicalism has been defined by two foundational convictions—first, that the church’s final authority is Scripture alone, and second, that justification is by grace through faith alone. Those dual realities, known respectively as the formal and material principles of the Reformation, distinguish biblical Christianity from every other system of religion. For the Reformers, those two principles were inseparable and non-negotiable. They recognized that a high view of Scripture (sola Scriptura) demanded a biblically-accurate gospel (sola fide).

The evangelical church today finds itself in an identity crisis of its own making. By compromising on their commitment to the authority of Scripture, many evangelicals are subsequently confused about the gospel. Competing authorities to Scripture come in many forms: the teachings of evolutionary science, charismatic words of prophecy, market-driven church growth strategies, the ecumenical spirit of the age, and so on. But the point is this: believers cannot capitulate on their commitment to the authority of Scripture without simultaneously compromising their understanding of salvation. The two are intrinsically linked.

One vivid illustration of this is seen in the area of sanctification. The Lord Jesus addresses the connection between Scripture and sanctification in John 17:17, where He prays to the Father, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”

Broadly speaking, the veracity of Jesus’ statement is universally acknowledged within the parameters of evangelical Christianity. But there is a growing chorus of voices that are singing a different tune—a melody that some claim is harmony, while others contend it is dissonance and discord. What is this new tune? It is the conviction that in the pursuit of sanctification, scriptural truths may (or in some cases must) be augmented by “truths” discovered by human investigation and observation.

There is a watershed drift away from a sanctification rooted in the Scriptures to one that finds its nourishment in general revelation and human wisdom. General revelation has been endowed with a level of validity merited only by special revelation. Giving general revelation and the human wisdom derived from it equal (or even preeminent) footing with special revelation attributes an authority to it which it does not possess.

Some have attempted to undercut the authority of special revelation, suggesting that since man is finite and fallen, his conclusions derived from Scripture can be no more authoritative than those garnered from general revelation. But the perspicuity
of Scripture argues loudly otherwise. A book whose instructions are shrouded in ob-
scurity could not begin to do what it is asked to do or deliver what it promises.

The spiritual resources which believers often seek outside of Scripture are
something they already possess. The Word of God is not insufficient to equip us for
Christian living. Paul reminded the Colossians that in Christ “are hidden all the treas-
ures of wisdom and knowledge.” Christ alone is sufficient to provide the nourishment
necessary for spiritual growth. Peter concurs, declaring that the believer has been
“granted everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of
Him.”

By denying or redefining the inerrancy of the Scriptures, they fail to make a full
disclosure of the strong foundation and abundant resources available to the believer
in the pursuit of Christlikeness. And in doing so, a man-centered doctrine of sancti-
fication is propagated. It’s like Paul asked the Galatians, “Are you so foolish? Having
begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Underselling the Word of God in the pursuit of sanctification suggests the Scrip-
tures have some intrinsic inadequacy or imperfection. It intimates the need to aug-
ment these scriptural deficiencies with insights gained from human wisdom. Fraught
with the pervasive power of humanistic thinking, it is like rising flood waters, eroding
the authority of the Word and draining its effectiveness. Those seeking avenues of
godly living through means other than the Word of God are thereby forfeiting the
most valuable and only reliable source of spiritual provision and growth.

Believers today must guard against underselling the Word of God. We must
know, not only that our justification is by faith alone, but that God has provided for
our sanctification as well. As partakers of His divine grace, we have been blessed
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. Simply put, only an inerrant
Word can deliver what it promises.

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INTERPRETING AND APPLYING OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL NARRATIVE: A SURVEY OF THE EVANGELICAL LANDSCAPE

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A survey of the interpretive and application approaches toward Old Testament (OT) Narrative Literature advocated by Evangelicals is presented as a foundation for a discussion on how to preach 1 Samuel 17. Interpretive theory is examined before seven recent volumes on 1 Samuel 17 are described which demonstrate Evangelical exegetical practice. Two perspectives on application precede a summary of five works which show Evangelical exposition. Finally, three papers presented in 2014 on how to preach 1 Samuel 17 are evaluated as to their similarities and differences.

* * * *

Introduction

How to interpret (exegesis) and apply (exposition) Old Testament Narrative Literature has provoked a lively and continuing discussion during the past four decades. The existence of a Program Unit on OT Narrative Literature at the Evangelical Theological Society’s Annual Meeting is testimony to the current inquiry. The purpose of this article is to lay a foundation for the understanding of the three presentations which were given after this paper at the ETS Meeting in San Diego in November 2014. Each subsequent paper argued for a slightly different approach to interpreting and applying OT Historical Narrative, although all of them are solidly within the boundary of evangelicalism and each is identified with an institution that affirms biblical inerrancy. The three succeeding presenters, Dennis E. Johnson (Westminster Seminary, California), Abraham Kuruvilla (Dallas Theological Seminary), and Steve

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1 This article is adapted from a paper presented by the author at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, CA, November 19–21, 2014.
Mathewson (CrossLife Evangelical Free Church) have all written significant volumes on the interface between hermeneutics and homiletics which form the basis from which they argued their convictions as how to specifically preach the historical narrative of 1 Samuel.\textsuperscript{2} To set the stage for their presentations, I broadly surveyed the contemporary evangelical discussion on interpreting and applying OT Historical Narrative Literature.\textsuperscript{3} This survey will of necessity be selective. In both the interpretive and application sections below, I will first present a broad overview and then, second, describe and evaluate significant evangelical resources on 1 Samuel with a particular emphasis on chapter 17.

I acknowledge that this survey will of necessity contain broad generalizations. But I think that these generalizations can be supported as basically accurate.

### The Interpretation of OT Historical Narrative

The interpretation of any biblical text is based upon the “Hermeneutical Triad.”\textsuperscript{4} “Regardless of the passage of Scripture, the interpreter needs to study (1) the historical setting; (2) the literary context (including matters of canon, genre, and language); and (3) the theological message, that is, what the passage teaches regarding God, Christ, salvation, and the need to respond in faith to the Bible’s teaching.”\textsuperscript{5}


\textsuperscript{3} I am using the term “interpretation” to refer to the discovery of the original meaning of a biblical text [i.e., what the author sought to communicate to his original audience] and “application” to refer to the personal and/or corporate significance based on that original meaning of a biblical text in the present context. These definitions are consistent with Andreas J. Köstenberger & Richard D. Patterson, \textit{Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology} (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011) and William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, & Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., \textit{Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Revised & Updated} (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004). However, Grant R. Osborne (\textit{The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation, Revised & Expanded} [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 21–33) views “interpretation” as both original meaning (which he calls “exegesis”) and contemporary significance (which he calls “contextualization”), and Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart (\textit{How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth}, Third Ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2003], 17–31) view “interpretation” as both original meaning (which they also call “exegesis”) and contemporary significance (which they call “hermeneutics”). The important point is that all of these authors see a distinction between original meaning and contemporary relevance with the “application” of the biblical text always based on the original meaning of the text.

\textsuperscript{4} Köstenberger & Patterson, \textit{Invitation to Biblical Interpretation}, 57–80.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 78–79.
The Broad Interpretive Landscape

When ETS had its first Annual Meeting in 1949, Evangelicals approached the interpretation of OT Narrative Literature with the emphasis on the historical setting and language of a biblical passage. The focus was first on what was behind the text. The historical veracity of Scripture needed to be defended against critical attack. Thus, the historical personages and events described in the OT historical books were placed in their chronological, geographical, and cultural contexts. This continues to be advocated by Evangelicals into the present: “In order for the interpretation of Scripture to be properly grounded, it is vital to explore the historical setting of a scriptural passage, including any cultural background features.” A second focus was on what was within the text. This entailed a close reading of a biblical passage after determining the original text based upon the application of the principles of textual criticism. Lexical and general syntactical analysis of a passage ensued following the general principles of interpretation. This interpretive approach was known as the “historical-grammatical” method. Blomberg has recently written, “The grammatico-historical method . . . refers to studying the biblical text, or any other text, in its original context and seeking the meaning its author(s) most likely intended for its original audience(s) or addressees based on grammar and syntax. . . . Its purpose is not one of critique but of interpretation.” Thus as an evangelical, his last comment seeks to differentiate his grammatico-historical hermeneutic from the historical-critical method.

1981 was a landmark year in the interpretation of OT narrative. There had been a growing awareness in general OT studies of the limitations of the historical-critical method. In this environment Alter wrote, “Over the last few years there has been growing interest in literary approaches among the younger generation of biblical scholars . . . but, while useful explications of particular texts have begun to appear, there have been as yet no major works of criticism, and certainly no satisfying overview of the poetics of the Hebrew Bible.” It was this deficiency that Alter sought to rectify, “This book is intended to be a guide to the intelligent reading of biblical narrative. . . . The aim throughout is to illuminate the distinctive principles of the Bible’s narrative art. . . . The term Bible here will refer only to the Hebrew Bible.”

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6 Craig G. Bartholomew (“Hermeneutics,” in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books, eds. Bill T. Arnold & H. G. M. Williamson, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005], 392–407) gives a broad survey of how the OT Historical Books have been approached interpretively by the contemporary scholarly guild as the background to his own “canonical, kerygmatic hermeneutic.” Bartholomew’s article is helpful in giving insight into the recent discussion and has influenced my approach.


8 Köstenberger & Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 93.


10 See the further discussion in Ibid., 29–38.


12 Ibid., ix.
The book by Alter was the first of a number of significant works on biblical narrative by non-evangelical authors.13 The insights of Alter and other leaders of the “literary turn”14 were soon appropriated by Evangelicals. The components of scene, plot, point of view, characterization, setting, dialog, and rhetorical devices such as repetition, omission, inclusion, chiasm, and irony were added to the arsenal of OT narrative interpretation.15 This was augmented by the observation that OT narrative also exhibited grammatical patterns that enabled the interpreter to discover discourse structure. Chisholm explains,

The main line is essentially the story line—the sequence of actions that forms the backbone of the story. Stories can begin in a variety of ways, but the story line proper is typically initiated and then carried along by clauses introduced by wayyiqtol (or past tense) verbal forms (often called waw consecutive with the imperfect). . . . Offline clauses deviate from the wayyiqtol pattern. . . . The following list, though not exhaustive, identifies the primary functions of offline clauses: 1. Introductory or background . . . 2. Supplemental . . . 3. Circumstantial . . . 4. Contrastive . . . 5. Dramatic . . . 6. Concluding.16

Thus, the “literary turn” has enhanced the literary component by augmenting traditional lexical and grammatical analysis of the biblical narrative texts (within the text) which in addition to the historical setting (behind the text) has enabled Evangelicals to sharpen their interpretation of OT historical narrative.

The third component of the “Hermeneutic Triad” has also come more fully onto the evangelical radar in recent years. The theological message of the OT, including historical narrative, has come under closer scrutiny since Kaiser’s 1978 landmark volume.17 Therefore, “If we are not only grounded in the historical setting and well versed in the various literary dimensions of Scripture but develop a firm grasp of its theological message, we will indeed be workers who need not be ashamed but who correctly handle God’s Word.”18 However, although all Evangelicals agree that OT

15 Köstenberger & Patterson (Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 237–61) include a chapter devoted to the presentation of special principles of interpretation applicable to OT Historical Narrative.
17 Walter C. Kaiser, J., Toward an Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978). There were many OT Biblical Theologies before Kaiser, but his book sparked a renewed interest in the topic among broad Evangelicalism.
18 Köstenberger & Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 693.
Narrative Literature has a definite theological intent, there is a division between those who relate all of that intent generally to God with only a few direct or indirect references to Christ (Theocentric) and those who would relate every passage to Christ (Christocentric). According to Christocentric exponents, there is a definite “Redemptive-Historical” view of hermeneutics built upon, but distinct from, a merely historical-grammatical-theocentric hermeneutic.19

My evaluation of this distinction between a Theocentric and Christocentric hermeneutic is shaped by thinking of who is before the text. There seems to be general hermeneutical agreement by Evangelicals of what is behind the text (historical background) and in the text (literary structure and meaning). However, the Theocentric hermeneutic views ancient Israel, and ancient Israel alone, as being before the text in an interpretive sense. The hermeneutical question is, “What did this text mean to the original audience?” The contemporary hearer joins with ancient Israel in receiving the message and from the application to the first audience gains insight into the significance for himself.20 However, the Christocentric hermeneutic views the audience in front of the text to include ancient Israel and the new, true Israel, the Church. Greidanus writes, “All the foregoing presuppositions support the final principal presupposition of the New Testament writers in preaching Christ from the Old Testament, and that is to read the Old Testament from the perspective of the reality of Christ.”21 Goldsworthy states, “What went before Christ in the Old Testament . . . finds its meaning in him. So the Old Testament must be understood in its relationship to the gospel event.”22 It seems that for the Christ-centered interpreter, the exegetical process of OT narrative has not been completed until Christ is discovered in the specific OT text being studied.

19 Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The Redemptive-Historical View” in Porter & Stovell, Biblical Hermeneutics, 89–110. He describes his position as a “hermeneutical stance” (Ibid., 91). “Redemptive-Historical Interpretation” is also referred to as the “Christocentric method” in Sidney Greidanus, Preaching Christ from the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 227–28. Johnson (Him We Proclaim, 98–125) refers to his exegetical practice as “apostolic hermeneutics.” In comparing and contrasting “apostolic hermeneutics” with historical-grammatical hermeneutics he writes, “The issue is whether we seek interpretive accountability in a general grammatical-historical approach that in recent centuries has seemed intuitively cogent and appropriately self-critical or in an approach that (as well as attending to original linguistic, literary, and historical contexts) also takes the New Testament literally when the latter affirms an Old Testament pattern is ‘fulfilled’ in the redemptive work of Christ. I am arguing that if the New Testament affirms a symbolic-typological interpretation of an Old Testament feature (for example, that the multietnic church ‘is’ the Israel to whom God makes his new covenant), we are on safer ground to follow the New Testament’s lead rather than clinging to a different, ‘literal’ reading that might seem, in the abstract, to be more objectively verifiable” (Ibid., 139–40). Johnson, while affirming some strengths to the grammatical-historical hermeneutic, points out what he perceives is its weaknesses that lead to the need for an accountable, Christ-centered hermeneutic (Ibid., 151–64).

20 This is the approach which undergirds Mathewson, The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative. The preacher/exegete’s first task to understand the ancient situation of the OT narrative text and its theological principle (31–90). Only then can he move to a consideration of application to the modern situation (93–103). Kuruvilla (Privilege the Text! 39–43) avers that both original hearers and future readers inhabit the text’s projected world in front of the text. However, when speaking of facets of meaning, he still distinguishes the original textual sense from its transhistorical intention (Ibid., 43–48).

21 Greidanus, Preaching Christ from the Old Testament, 199.

The Specific Interpretation of 1 Samuel 17

This section describes the interpretive concerns and focus of seven major works on the book of Samuel. These volumes have all been written in the last thirty-one years, so they give some sense of the current evangelical landscape on the interpretation of OT Narrative Literature.


Klein states “I have used the tools and techniques of historical criticism to interpret the final deuteronomistic form of the book of 1 Samuel” (xxxii). This passage, the pericope of 17:1–18:5, is part of the greater section of “The History of David’s Rise,” which encompasses 16:4–2 Sam 5:10. Klein’s greatest concern in his discussion is to resolve the complication that the narrative of 16:1–23 seems to be unknown in 17:1–18:5. He resolves the complication by accepting the LXXb version, which has been expanded in the MT. His comment section retells the narrative from the MT with historical, lexical, and grammatical notes interspersed. Klein notes, “It would seem impossible for David to have brought Goliath’s head to Jerusalem since the city was still in the hands of the Jebusites (cf. 2 Sam 5:6–9; 1 Sam 17:57)” (181). Perhaps Jerusalem is where the trophy finally was brought. The story’s purpose is to strengthen David’s credentials for the kingship. Klein’s interpretive approach would be better characterized as historical-critical, even though the volume is a part of an Evangelical series.


Gordon writes that this commentary is principally about 1 & 2 Samuel “in its own literary, historical, cultural, and theological contexts” (9). He has followed the example of the text and not sought to censure or moralize, but he does compare and contrast David and Christ in his introduction (49–53). His conclusion is that though David is in some ways a type of Christ, “the New Testament does not indulge in wholesale typological comparisons between David and Christ” (50). Gordon actually spends more time discussing the differences between the two. As to 17:1–58, he makes abbreviated historical and lexical/grammatical notations on the text. The passage displays David’s zeal for the reputation of Israel’s God and his utter trust in God’s ability to preserve him against all odds.

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23 The idea for a brief evaluation of contemporary commentaries in exegetical and expositional categories came from the example of Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, KEG (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 101–105, 572–77.

Baldwin declares, “My aim has been to ‘set the scene’ in the Introduction by indicating the present state of Samuel studies, and in the Commentary to include what seems to me most important for an understanding of the text” (9). She was aware of “the literary turn,” but saw the new approach as the antithesis of historical criticism and stated that “the two methods have to be allowed to work separately for the time being, and maybe for a long time ahead” (32). As to theology, “The historical David, for all his faults, came to stand for the idealized king” (37).

Baldwin, like Klein, views the passage as 17:1–18:5. The story “provides an outstanding example of the Lord’s power to give victory against dramatically overwhelming odds in response to faith and courage” (124). She conjectures the possibility that chapters 16 and 17 can be reconciled by the fact that David had returned to his father’s house from serving Saul and had matured into a bearded adult when he left Bethlehem with provisions for his brothers. Her notes on the text tend to be geographical, lexical, and cultural.


With Youngblood, “the literary turn” begins to be seen in Evangelical Samuel commentaries. While he cautioned not to manufacture chiasms when none were present, he did affirm the author used the technique on many occasions (558–59). Youngblood sought to discover the literary structure of the text and then fill in the historical and grammatical details. The passage of 17:1–58 has a cycle of confrontation-challenge-consternation which was repeated three times (1–11, 12–39, 40–54) with a postlude (55–58). Youngblood effectively blends historical and literary aspects in his interpretation, but the insights are never summarized as to the purpose of the narrative.


Bergen views Samuel as history, literary art, apology, theology, and Scripture. He writes that “the primary theological purpose was to support the teachings of the Torah and thus . . . to provide guidance and hope for Israel’s exilic community” (43). As Scripture, Samuel is a major link in the Messianic tradition and so the NT rightfully sees it as pointing to Christ in addition to its providing instruction, encouragement, and hope to NT believers (Rom 15:4; Heb 11:32–34). The literary unit of 17:1–58 “is not primarily a story about human courage and effort; instead, it is about the awesome power of a life built around bold faith in the Lord” (187). Bergen also weaves historical background with lexical and grammatical comments as he retells the narrative while showing its literary artistry. He also answers those who see contradictions in vv. 55–58.

Tsumura incorporates literary discourse grammatical analysis into his commentary. “Thus, the discourse grammatical approach has become one of the standard methods of studying biblical Hebrew narrative. However, no commentary has appeared which applies this analysis thoroughly to the Hebrew text of 1–2 Samuel . . . the present volume pursues such an analysis” (50). He supplies the reader with an introduction to the interpretive techniques he will employ (46–65). This commentator also gives the strongest defense of the reliability of the MT as an accurate representation of the original autograph (2–10). The theology of Samuel centers on God’s kingship, God’s providential guidance, and God’s sovereign will and power. The David and Goliath passage is 17:1–54; 17:55–58 belongs with 18:1–5 as a new family relationship is established between Saul and David. Chapter 17:1–54 is, “in essence, a story of David trusting God and God delivering David” (434). Though emphasizing the literary analysis of the passage, Tsumura does not neglect to supply the necessary historical background. There is a robust exegesis of the passage, but to what end? Our commentator does not tell us, because that is not his ultimate purpose.

David G. Firth, 1 & 2 Samuel, AOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

The final and most recent work we will survey is the volume by Firth. The commentator avers that “attention to genre is essential for recognizing a work’s purpose” (20). Further, “a crucial hermeneutical issue for interpreting Samuel . . . is that if artistry is crucial for communicating the message, then exegesis cannot simply examine to which the text refers (vital as that is), but must also attend to the techniques employed in that telling” (22). The major theological themes Firth identifies are the reign of God [he retains the authority], the human kingship, and the prophetic authority. Firth’s analysis of 17:1–58 is not nearly as detailed as Tsumura’s, but he does emphasize the literary features of the text. He believes the events recounted in chapter 17 are chronologically prior to 16:14–23. “The material’s presentation has been shaped by the need to begin with David’s election by Yahweh, so this is seen separately from his military skills. It then concludes with his killing Goliath, and especially his speech to Goliath, so David’s perception of Israel is the highlight of his move towards the court” (195). This leads to Firth’s conclusion that the ultimate purpose of this narrative “transcends the issue of overcoming a powerful foe (though without removing it altogether) and develops the missiological impulse that runs through Israel’s story since Abram’s call (Gen 12:1–3)” (203). David’s knowledge of the purpose of Israel’s election that all the world might know Yahweh (17:46) transforms his actions. He is therefore a better king than Saul.

This survey of these major evangelical commentaries demonstrates how the exegesis of the OT historical narratives has moved from a general hermeneutical approach of historical background and traditional lexical and grammatical analysis to the adding of the special hermeneutics of genre of OT narrative which incorporates the insights of literary analysis.
The Application of OT Historical Narrative

The Broad Application Landscape

Once the original meaning of the biblical text has been established, the interpreter is challenged to move on to personal application. Yet, if we become experts at interpreting Scripture only, we lose the battle of glorifying Christ with our lives. We glorify Christ when we live out what we know. What is more, if we interpret 100 percent accurately and even stun our audience with our eloquence and skill in preaching and teaching the text but do not tell our people how to apply the truths we have taught, we have failed.

The two main ways that Evangelicals propose to apply the biblical text is by means of the principlizing approach or by a Christotelic approach.

The principlizing approach seeks to discover the basic principles in the OT Narrative Literature relevant to the first hearers, ancient Israel. Kaiser proposes the use of the “Ladder of Abstraction.” “The Ladder of Abstraction may be defined as ‘a continuous sequence of categorizations from a low level of specificity up to a high point of generality in a principal and down again to a specific application to the contemporary culture’”

Many expositors of OT historical narrative see the present application/relevance in the principles of godly behavior and leadership modeled by the key human characters in a passage. The NT also mines the OT for such examples (1 Cor 10:1–13; Heb 11:1–40; James 5:11), both positive and negative. Thus, as long as the character of God is foremost, principles undergirding the salvation and sanctification of a NT believer can be found and proclaimed from OT narrative texts.

The Christotelic approach seeks to discover how an OT historical narrative text points to Christ. Chapell writes,

Christ-centered preaching (whether it is referred to as preaching the cross, the message of grace, the gospel, God’s redemption, or a host of similar terms)
reflects Paul’s intention to preach nothing “except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Just as Paul’s preaching involved more than the message of the incarnation and atonement—and yet kept all subjects in proper relation to God’s redemption through Christ—so also Christ-centered preaching rightly understood does not seek to discover where Christ is mentioned in every text but to disclose where every text stands in relation to Christ. The grace of God culminating in the person and work of Jesus unfolds in many dimensions throughout the pages of Scripture. The goal of the preacher is not to find novel ways of identifying Christ in every text (or naming Christ in every sermon) but to show how each text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ.28

Chapell affirms that “texts that specifically mention Jesus or reveal him typologically are few relative to the thousands of passages that contain no direct reference to Christ.”29 However, Chapell continues, “When neither text nor type discloses the Savior’s work, a preacher must rely on context to develop the redemptive focus of a message. . . . In its context, every passage possesses one or more of four redemptive foci. The text may be:

- predictive of the work of Christ
- preparatory for the work of Christ
- reflective of the work of Christ and/or
- resultant of the work of Christ”30

According to Chapell, any message that highlights God’s nature that provides redemption and/or reflects human nature that requires redemption is to be considered “Christ-centered.”31 I would prefer the term “Christotelic,” the OT narrative points to Christ. The NT is clear that the OT speaks of Christ. This is evident from such passages as Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Acts 8:35; 17:2–3; Heb 1:5–13. The “Christ-centered” homiletic is a great reminder that the expositor should seek to discover where Christ is revealed in the OT and incorporate this truth into his exposition. It is possible to view David in his kingly role as a “type” of Christ. Also, such themes as exodus, law, and covenant point to the New Covenant, whose mediator is Christ.32 The theme of God’s faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant especially anticipates the Messiah who is the seed of Abraham (Gen 22:17b–18; 49:8–12; Luke 1:54–55, 68–75; Gal 3:6–18). Above all, as affirmed by Chapell, every message from the OT historical narrative should point to the faithful God and many will speak of the failure of man.

29 Ibid., 282.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 284.
32 Note the insightful discussion in Köstenberger & Patterson, Invitation to Biblical Interpretation, 151–201.
The Specific Application of 1 Samuel 17

The contemporary evangelical landscape concerning the application of OT historical narrative, particularly in preaching, can be demonstrated in five volumes on Samuel that have been published in the past quarter century.

Dale Ralph Davis, _1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart_, FOB (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000 [original publication 1988 & 1996]).

Davis is a master expositor who preached through and wrote expositional commentaries on all of the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) from 1988 to 2005. His commentary “concentrates on the literary quality of the narrative and, especially, on the theological witness of the text” (8). Davis is quite clear that the written expositions are not the sermons as he preached them, but he cast his commentary in homiletic form because he thought it helps digestion and coherence. When he comes to 17:1–58, Davis introduces the key phrase of the chapter, “to reproach, defy, mock, deride” (vv. 10, 25, 26 [twice], 36, 45), demonstrating that “Goliath’s blabbering dishonors Israel’s God” (179–80). Even though the exposition is developed around the theme of (David’s) faith, the driving concern of the narrative is the honor due to Israel’s God. Davis is a master of creatively weaving in interpretive details as he explains the meaning of the text. The primary application he makes in his conclusion is that his hearers (readers) like David must be concerned when God’s reputation is at stake. He gives a number of contemporary scenarios to illustrate his application. In the last paragraph, there is a pointing to Christ. “In 1 Samuel 17 the promised king defeats the enemy of his people. He had to do it, for the enemy derided Yahweh. Yahweh’s honor, his glory, must be upheld; if Yahweh is to have his glory his enemy must be silenced. It is the same in the reign of God’s greater Son; some refuse to ‘kiss the Son’ (Ps. 2:12) and so there must be a ‘rod of iron’ (Ps. 2:9)” (190).


The NIV Application Commentary series creates a clear distinction between interpretation (original meaning), principles of application (bridging contexts) and examples of specific applications (contemporary significance). According to Arnold, as interpreters our task is to consider what a text communicates in its canonical shape. In 1 Samuel 17, the ancient narrator was concerned with the theological significance of David’s rise to power. After detailing his understanding of the original meaning of the passage, Arnold turns to the general and specific significance of this passage to our own day. “Generally speaking, the narrative teaches about personal faith and the desire of God to accomplish mighty things through the simple faith and actions of his servant. But more specifically, the narrative also portrays David as the ideal shepherd leader for Israel; as such, it contributes to the larger body of texts that subsequently feed into the concept of the Messiah” (263). Thus, “David is an example of the faithful and brave servant of Yahweh, and through his faith and actions God wins a victory over his blasphemous enemies” (265). David illustrates how Christians can face God’s enemies. But the text also points to David’s greater son; Jesus of
Nazareth is God’s own Anointed, the Speaker of God’s word, and the Victor over sin and death.


Woodhouse states, “The commentary has been written out of three particular convictions about the wonderful task of expounding the Word of God” (13). First, attention is given to the details of the text. Sermons are enriched by the appropriate examination of details of the text. Second, the significance of any biblical text lies in seeing the text in its context. The context includes both the immediate book, but also all of Scripture. Therefore, these expositions not only relate to the major theme of Samuel, looking at the qualities necessary in God’s leader, but also see each passage in light of the fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Third, the proper purpose of biblical exposition is not simply to find relevant lessons for life from the text but to proclaim Christ. 1 Samuel 17 is divided into four expositions, 1–11, 12–30, 31–40, 41–58.

The first two expositions are applied primarily to the hearer’s experience. The first deals with facing fear. The text reminds the audience that there are real threats that intimidate us. However, because of Jesus, the Christian can look at whatever we fear in light of Romans 8:31–39. The second teaches “to trust God you must be prepared for the unexpected” (323). However, the final two expositions are related more directly to Jesus. David was committed to the gospel of deliverance from the Philistine menace. “The foolishness of thinking there was or could be some other way of deliverance from Goliath than David’s fighting the enemy is comparable to suggestions that people still entertain that human beings can live without the victory of Jesus Christ on the cross over our great enemies” (333). Woodhouse picks up this same application in the introduction to the fourth exposition. “As David defeated the terrible enemy of God’s people, we need to understand that God was doing (admittedly on a smaller scale and with limited ramifications) what he has now done in Jesus’ victory. Appreciate the victory of David over Goliath and you should be able to say with excitement: ‘But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’” (336). As David came in the name of Lord (17:45; cf. Psa 118:26), so did Jesus (Matt 21:9; 23:39). “Jesus is the one who has now ‘come in the name of the Lord.’ He has won a victory that outshines David’s, just as his kingship does. We have more in common with those Israelites in the Valley of Elah than we may have ever realized” (344).


The Reformed Expository Commentary series strives to be biblical, doctrinal, redemptive-historical, and practical. I included it under application because each author is to present his expositions first in the pulpit ministry of his church before putting them into print. Thus, these expositions on 1 Samuel were first preached where Phillips ministers. The expositions of 1 Samuel 17 are divided into 1–30, 31–40, 41–54, and 55–18:5. The commentator introduces David as a “type” of Christ at
the beginning of his first exposition. “We should realize that David’s victory does not primarily foretell triumphs that we will achieve by faith but rather the victory of Christ for our salvation” (279). However, David had received the Holy Spirit (16:13), “thus, David’s actions remind us that faith, godliness, and courage should always result from a Spirit-led life and that they will often be used by God against our spiritual foes today” (279). Although Phillips emphasizes application as it relates to what we learn about Christ and His salvation, he does not ignore lessons that can be learned by the Christians from David’s example as a Spirit-empowered believer.


This new series is designed to provide a ready reference for the exposition of the biblical text. The goal is to give clear and concise information about each biblical textual unit that can direct the pastor and teacher in their weekly preparation. Each passage is covered in six pages.

1 Samuel 17 is entitled “David’s Faith Ignites a Victory.” Chisholm states the big idea of the chapter as “Faith in the Lord’s power to save can be the catalyst for victory” (116). The first step is “Understanding the Text” (original meaning). Included in this section is the text in context, historical and cultural background, interpretive insights, and theological insights. God is affirmed in this passage as the living God, the delivering God, and a mighty warrior king. The commentator sums up the application for the first audience: “For the exiles, David’s example, in both word and deed, is an encouragement and inspiration. Though they had been defeated and are under authority of a foreign king, David’s experience is a reminder that faith in God’s power is rewarded, for he is the living God and is active in the life of his people. As the one who is sovereign over the battles and their outcome, he has allowed his people to experience defeat and exile, but he also has the capacity to rescue and save his people” (119–20). In teaching the text, the two principles to apply are: 1. The Lord’s power is determinative in battle, and faith in that power can be a catalyst for victory, and 2. Focusing on outward appearances rather than the Lord’s power can obscure reality, stifle faith, and produce paralyzing fear. Chisholm relates his application to “God” and never mentions Jesus Christ. 33

These examples show that contemporary evangelical expositors see application in OT historical narrative as including both principles for godly living and pointers to Christ.

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33 Dr. Chisholm was in attendance at ETS for the presentation on this paper. He commented to me that his discussion in his Samuel volume conformed to the guidelines given to him by the editors of the series. When he preaches, even from OT narrative texts, he always directs his hearers to Christ and the gospel in his conclusion.
Conclusion

After the above was read at ETS, Drs. Johnson, Kuruvilla, and Mathewson presented their papers on how they would preach 1 Samuel 17. Each man showed how he would preach through the text based on what he observed to be the underlying literary structure, stating lexical, grammatical, literary, and historical data from the immediate context. Each also noted the broader context of the book in which the chapter was found. Further, each referred to the broadest context, the canon of Scripture, though not to the same degree nor to the same passages, to give insight into the meaning of what was recorded in 1 Samuel 17. Kuruvilla and Mathewson gave fewer canonical references, concentrating more on the immediate passage, than Johnson, who linked the narrative to the great battle between God and Satan first announced in Gen 3:15 to its culmination recorded in Rev 12:9, 11. According to Johnson, 1 Samuel narrates a past battle in this long war, linked through Ps 118:25–26 to a future battle when Christ came (Mark 11:9–10) to conquer Satan at the cross (Heb 2:14–15); Jesus’ mission as the first-rejected-then-exalted Messiah is anticipated in the David and Goliath narrative.

From their interpretation of the text, the men stated the theological theme or principle found in the text in different ways. For Johnson the theological theme is that the king who comes in the name of the Lord has conquered our worst enemy. Kuruvilla views the theological thrust of the narrative to be that the outcome of all battles depends upon God, no matter what the stature, resources, or experience possessed by the warring entities. Mathewson concludes that the overall theological message of 1 Samuel 17 is that Yahweh wins victories through leaders who trust His power to save. Although stated in different ways, there is an underlying commonality of God, not man, as the victor over His enemies.

As expected from their previous writings, the men differed as to how Christ is reflected in their preaching proposals. Johnson’s Christocentric homiletic is clear. To him this text clearly displays that our victorious King, Jesus (anticipated in David), leads us His people in war and triumph. In his expositional proposal, Kuruvilla mentions God extensively, but never refers to Christ either in his interpretation or application. Kuruvilla proposes a Christiconic hermeneutic and homiletic. Although Mathewson labels his preaching approach as “Theocentric,” he is also compelled to ground OT narrative texts like 1 Samuel 17 into the larger story line of Scripture which finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the Christotelic homiletic.


35 Kuruvilla, Privilege the Text! 238–68. He sees all the pericopes (preaching units) of Scripture as pointing to facets of the image (icon) of Christ. When the pericope is accurately preached, the Holy Spirit is conforming the believing hearer to an aspect of the image of Christ, whether Christ is explicitly mentioned in the sermon or not.
Finally, all of the men point to applications for the hearers. Mathewson was the most detailed. The Christian who obediently trusts God like David because of His power to save will not be intimidated when facing crises, obstacles, of intimidating situations in his life. He then goes on to give some examples like refusing to perform a gay marriage ceremony. Kuruvilla more generally applies the text by calling God’s people to exercise faith to engage the enemies of God so that they might experience the deliverance of God. Both of these applications are based on the hearer appropriating the lesson learned through David to their lives. Johnson also makes application to his hearers, but they are pointed to the example of the men of Israel in this text. Just as Israel was emboldened when they saw David’s victory, so the Christian who trusts Jesus (the greater David) in his victory is called to follow Christ and put on the armor of God (Eph 6:10–17) so that he might be victorious in ongoing spiritual battle.

The interpretation and application of OT narrative is a continuing discussion among Evangelicals. As an expositor of God’s inerrant Word, I am thankful for this sharing of perspectives by three good expositors as I try to hone not only my homiletic understanding, but, more importantly, my ability to accurately preach OT historical narrative.
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THE BINDING OF SATAN IN REVELATION 20

Matt Waymeyer
Instructor of Bible Exposition and New Testament
The Master’s Seminary

Revelation 20 is generally viewed as a crux interpretum in the debate over the timing and nature of the millennium. In verses 1–3, the apostle John describes a vision in which Satan is bound and imprisoned in the abyss for a thousand years. Premillennialists consider this passage to be compelling evidence for a future millennium, because this restriction of Satan is clearly incompatible with his activity and influence in the present age. In contrast, amillennialists believe that Satan is currently bound in the abyss and therefore that the millennium of Revelation 20 is a present reality. As evidence for their view, amillennialists generally point to the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and parallel passages in the New Testament which are said to shed light on the meaning of John’s vision. But a careful evaluation of these three arguments demonstrates that the case for amillennial view cannot be sustained and therefore that the binding of Satan must be future, just as premillennialism teaches.

* * * * *

Introduction

Revelation 20 has long been considered one of the clearest arguments for the eschatology of premillennialism. But in describing his journey to amillennialism, former premillennialist Sam Storms explains that Revelation 20 served not as a hindrance to this conversion, but rather a catalyst. “Contrary to what I had been taught and long believed,” Storms writes, “I came to see Revelation 20 as a strong and immoveable support for the amillennial perspective.”¹ In fact, unlike many of his fellow

¹ Sam Storms, Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2013), 137.
amillennialists, Storms says he embraced amillennialism because of Revelation 20, not in spite of it.2

This kind of confidence among amillennialists regarding their view of Revelation 20 raises the question of whether premillennialists may have overstated the clarity of John’s teaching in this chapter.3 For example, premillennialists have often pointed to the binding of Satan in verses 1–3 as proof positive that the millennium of Revelation 20 is not a present reality, as amillennialism teaches. Instead, say premillennialists, Satan is very active and influential on earth during the present age and will not be bound in the abyss until after the Second Coming. But is this argument truly compelling? Isn’t it possible that amillennialists are able to explain Revelation 20:1–3 in a way that is not merely feasible, but actually more faithful to the divine intention of the text?

The purpose of this article is to reexamine this key passage in the millennial debate, with a focus on the amillennial explanation of Satan’s binding as a present reality. After setting forth the premillennial argument from Rev 20:1–3, this study will carefully consider the amillennial view of this passage, giving special attention to the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and the parallel passages often cited by amillennialists as evidence for their view. In the process, this examination will demonstrate not only that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 fails to provide strong and immovable support for the amillennial perspective, but also that it does indeed serve as a compelling argument for the view of premillennialism.

The Premillennial Argument

In Rev 20:1–3, the apostle John’s vision focuses on the status of Satan during the millennial reign of Christ:

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 (Rev 20:1–3).

The primary reason that Satan’s imprisonment cannot be considered a present reality is because Rev 20:1–3 is incompatible with the New Testament’s portrayal of his influence during the present age.4 According to this passage, Satan will be cut off

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3 This confidence is reflected in the statement of Kim Riddlebarger, who writes that amillennialists see Revelation 20 “as the weak link in any form of premillennialism” (Kim Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times, expanded ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013], 235).

4 On a more fundamental level, Satan’s imprisonment in Rev 20:1–3 must be future because it follows the Second Coming of Christ in Rev 19:11–21. But amillennialists dispute the chronological relationship between Rev 19 and 20, arguing instead that the thousand years in Revelation 20 represents the
The Binding of Satan in Revelation 20

from all earthly activity during the thousand-year reign of Christ. The imagery of Satan being bound with a great chain and cast into the abyss—which is then shut and sealed over him—provides a vivid picture of the total removal of his influence on earth.\(^5\) In fact, if a vision were intended to teach that Satan is rendered completely inactive during the thousand years, it is difficult to imagine how this could have been portrayed more clearly.\(^6\) As Beasley-Murray writes:

A seal on a prison door ensured that prisoners could not escape unobserved. Only he who authorized the imprisonment could authorize release from it (see Dan. 6:17; Mt. 27:66). Thus the incarceration of the Devil is trebly circumscribed. He is bound up, locked in, and sealed over. The writer could hardly have expressed more emphatically the inability of Satan to harm the race of man.\(^7\)

In contrast, the New Testament makes it abundantly clear that Satan—who is described as “the god of this age” (\(\tilde{\omega} \theta\epsilon\zeta\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\varsigma \alpha\iota\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\ou\) (2 Cor 4:4) and “the ruler of this world” (\(\tilde{\omega} \alpha\iota\rho\chi\omicron\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\omicron\upsilon\omicron\nu\tau\omicron\upsilon\omicron\ou\)) (John 12:31; cf. John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 4:4)—is extremely active on earth during the present age. He not only “prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8), but he is also involved in a host of other activities—he tells lies (John 8:44); he tempts believers to sin (1 Cor 7:5; Eph 4:27); he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13–15); he seeks to deceive the children of God (2 Cor 11:3; cf. 2 Cor 2:11); he snatches the gospel from unbelieving hearts (Matt 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12; cf. 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Tim 1:20; 4:1–2); he takes advantage of believers (2 Cor 2:11); he influences people to lie (Acts 5:3); he holds unbelievers under his power (1 John 5:19; Eph 2:2; Acts 26:18; 1 John 3:8–10); he torments the servants of God (2 Cor 12:7); he thwarts the progress of ministry (1 Thess 2:18); he seeks to destroy the faith of believers (Luke 22:31); he wages war against the church (Eph 6:11–17); and he traps and deceives unbelievers, holding them captive to do his will (2 Tim 2:26). It is impossible to reconcile this portrayal of Satan’s activities in the present age with the view that he is currently sealed in the abyss.

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\(^7\) G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, NCB (Greenwood, SC: The Attic Press, 1974), 285. Even some amillennialists recognize this, for example, G. C. Berkouwer who states that those who identify the millennium as the present age are forced to relativize the dimensions of Satan’s binding. Berkouwer writes, “I think it is pertinent to ask whether this sort of interpretation really does justice to the radical proportions of the binding of Satan” (G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ: Studies in Dogmatics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972], 305).
The location of the devil’s imprisonment makes it especially clear that the confinement of Rev 20:1–3 will prevent any satanic activity and influence on earth during the thousand years. The “abyss” (αβυσσίνιος) is a prison for evil spirits (Rev 20:7), and the New Testament indicates that when evil spirits are confined in this prison, they are prevented from participating in their normal demonic activities on earth (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1–3). For this reason, Satan can either be locked away in the abyss or he can be engaging in the various activities ascribed to him in the present age, but he cannot be both. The description of Satan’s imprisonment in Revelation 20 is incompatible with the New Testament’s portrayal of his influence during the church age, and therefore the binding of Satan cannot be understood as a present reality.

The difficulty that this presents for amillennialism is obvious: If the binding of Satan is not a present reality, the thousand years of Revelation 20 must represent a future reign of Christ which will take place between the present age and the eternal state. This intermediate phase of the coming kingdom is a key component in the eschatology of premillennialism, but it presents a significant problem for the view of amillennialism.

**The Amillennial View**

Amillennialist Kim Riddlebarger recognizes the challenge that Revelation 20:1–3 presents for his eschatology, conceding that this passage initially appears to be a formidable objection to the amillennial view. But according to Riddlebarger, “once we look closely at what John actually taught about the binding of Satan, the notion of Satan being bound in the present age becomes an argument in favor of the amillennial position.”

According to amillennialism, the binding of Satan in Rev 20:1–3 took place at the first coming of Christ, and his imprisonment in the abyss extends throughout the present age, concurrent with the millennial reign of Jesus. Rather than describing a future event that will occur at the Second Coming, then, Satan’s binding was accomplished by Christ when He conquered the devil through His death and resurrection during His earthly ministry. In this way, amillennialism asserts that the thousand-year binding of Satan extends from the time of the first coming of Christ to the time of His second coming and is therefore a present reality.

In contrast to the premillennial view that the incarceration of Satan renders him completely inactive on earth, amillennialism sees the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1–3 as a present reality, compatible with the New Testament’s depiction of Satan’s influence during the present age.

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The Binding of Satan in Revelation 20

20 as “a figurative description of the way in which Satan’s activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period.” More specifically, amillennialists believe that this binding does not eliminate the activities of Satan on earth, but merely limits them to some extent. As Riddlebarger explains:

What this binding of Satan means is that, after the coming of the long-expected Messiah, Satan lost certain authority that he possessed prior to the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of the Savior. It does not mean that all satanic operations cease during the millennial age, as many opponents of amillennialism mistakenly assume.

Amillennialists describe the restriction imposed upon Satan in Revelation 20 as the limiting, the curbing, the curtailing, the partial paralyzing, and the restraining of the devil’s influence on earth, but again, not the elimination of it. According to amillennialist William Cox, “Satan, though bound, still goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. The chain with which he is bound is a long one, allowing him much freedom of movement.” As Hendriksen illustrates, “A dog…bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment.”

According to amillennialists, then, Satan is indeed bound in the present age, but his binding is partial rather than absolute. This view of Rev 20:1–3 allows the amillennialist to affirm both the binding of Satan as a current reality and the present-day activity of Satan as described in the New Testament. To argue for this view—and against the interpretation of premillennialism—amillennialists typically point to

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12 Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism, 237.
17 Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 190.
19 Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism, 239; Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 190.
20 Cox, Amillennialism Today, 139.
21 Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 190.
22 Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123.
three related aspects of the binding of Satan: the significance of the abyss, the purpose of the binding, and the parallels to Rev 20:1–3 elsewhere in the New Testament.

The Significance of the Abyss

During the thousand years of Rev 20:1–3, Satan is said to be bound and sealed specifically in the “abyss” (αβυσσὸς). When addressing the significance of the abyss in this vision, amillennialists typically emphasize the use of symbolism throughout the passage. For example, Dennis Johnson writes:

The multiplication of visual features—key, chain, hand, dragon, throwing, locking, and sealing—underscores the symbolic genre of the entire vision, since John’s audience knows well that Satan is not a literal dragon who can be bound with a physical chain or locked away in a physical pit. For this reason, amillennialists believe that the premillennial view of the abyss as a spatial location imposes “a rigidly wooden and artificial structure on symbolism that it simply isn’t designed to sustain.” As G. K. Beale states, understanding the abyss as an actual location is to interpret it “in an overly literalistic manner.”

Accordingly, Storms argues that “if the premillennialist insists on saying that Satan’s being cast into the abyss in Revelation 20 must be interpreted in a literal, spatial way,” he must also affirm the following in order to be consistent: (a) the angel was physically holding a literal key that could literally lock and unlock the pit; (b) the angel was holding a literal chain with material links that could be measured; (c) the angel literally grabbed the devil and wrestled him into submission and threw him into this pit; and (d) Satan was a literal, physical serpent as he is called in verse 2. In a similar way, amillennialist Jonathan Menn insists that consistency requires the premillennialist to affirm that the abyss in Revelation 20 “is an actual pit in the earth which has a physical lock and physical ‘seal.’”

In contrast to the literal interpretation of premillennialism, Beale says the abyss should be understood as representing a spiritual dimension which exists alongside—and in the midst of—the earthly dimension. According to Beale, “the abyss and the physical world are two different dimensions interpenetrating each other or existing alongside one another” (990), and elsewhere he refers to the abyss as “the realm of demons over which Satan rules” (493). In a similar way, Venema refers to the abyss as “the dwelling place of the demons” (Cornelis P. Venema, The Promise of the Future [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000], 316), and Storms refers to it as “the abode of demons.”

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24 Storms, Kingdom Come, 445.
25 G. K. Beale, The Book of Revelation, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 987. Storms also rejects the idea of “a localized geo-spatial place called the abyss” (Kingdom Come, 442), and according to Menn, the abyss in Rev 20 is “not spatial” but rather functions as a metaphor (Biblical Eschatology, 18).
26 Storms, Kingdom Come, 442–43.
27 Menn, Biblical Eschatology, 18, 357.
28 Beale, The Book of Revelation, 987. According to Beale, “the abyss and the physical world are two different dimensions interpenetrating each other or existing alongside one another” (990), and elsewhere he refers to the abyss as “the realm of demons over which Satan rules” (493). In a similar way, Venema refers to the abyss as “the dwelling place of the demons” (Cornelis P. Venema, The Promise of the Future [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2000], 316), and Storms refers to it as “the abode of demons.”
20:1–3 as “one of the various metaphors representing the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate.” For this reason, he rejects the idea that the abyss is spatially removed from the earth and that Satan’s confinement in the abyss requires a complete abolition of his activity on earth. This view of the abyss enables the amillennialist to affirm that Satan prowls about like a roaring lion, engaged in the various activities ascribed to him in the New Testament, while simultaneously being confined to the abyss as described in Revelation 20.

The immediate problem with this argument concerns the false alternative it establishes between a literal and figurative interpretation of the abyss. According to the amillennialist, the abyss must be understood as either (a) a literal reference to a physical, bottomless pit which extends endlessly into the depths of the earth, or (b) a symbolic metaphor signifying “the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate.” But this ignores the possibility that the abyss in Revelation 20 is a spirit prison for demonic beings, an actual location which imprisons them and prevents them from functioning outside of its confines. According to this third view, the abyss is neither a physical hole in the ground (the woodenly literal view) nor the spiritual sphere of demonic activity in general (the amillennial view), but rather an actual location in the spiritual realm where evil spirits are confined and prevented from roaming free on earth. A careful examination of ᾠδυσσός suggests that this is indeed the meaning of this word in Revelation 20.

The word ᾠδυσσός was originally an adjective meaning “bottomless” or “unfathomable,” and then a noun signifying a deep place. In the Septuagint, it usually translates אֵבִּיסוּן and most often refers to “the watery depths of the earth, whether oceans or springs, in contradistinction to the land” (e.g., Pss 77:16; 78:15; 106:9; Isa 55:10; Amos 7:4). In the Jewish writings, ᾠδυσσός predominantly referred to a prison where evil spirits were confined and punished (e.g., 1 En 10:4–16; 18:11–19:3; 21–22; 88:1–3; 90:24–27; 108:2–6; Jub 5:6–14; Tob 8:3; cf. Isa 24:20–23).

(Kingdom Come, 429) and “the source or abode of those demonic powers that are opposed to God” (478). But none of them emphasize the fact that the abyss is a “prison” (Rev 20:7). Other amillennialists are even less precise in their explanation of the abyss. For example, Hoekema says the abyss should “be thought of as a figurative description of the way in which Satan’s activities will be curbed during the thousand-year period” (The Bible and the Future, 228), but this explanation communicates the effect of confinement in the abyss without defining what the abyss actually is.

29 Beale, The Book of Revelation, 987. This same definition of the abyss is quoted and affirmed by Riddlebarger (A Case for Amillennialism, 237) and Menn (Biblical Eschatology, 357). In addition, Beale also identifies the abyss as “probably” a synonym for “death and Hades” (The Book of Revelation, 984, 987; also see Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism, 237).

30 Beale, The Book of Revelation, 990.
31 Ibid., 985–90.
In the New Testament, ὁβύσσος is used only nine times and has two basic usages, referring either to (a) the realm of the dead (Rom 10:7), or (b) a prison for evil spirits (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1–2, 11; 11:7; 17:8). Its use in Revelation 20 conveys this second nuance of meaning—a prison for evil spirits—which is clear from (1) the description of Satan being thrown into the abyss and having it “sealed” (ἐσφράγισεν) over him in verse 3, and (2) the description of Satan being released from his “prison” (φυλακή) in verse 7. Put simply, the abyss of Revelation 20 is a spirit prison.

The use of ὁβύσσος in Luke 8 and Revelation 9 demonstrates that confinement to this spirit prison entails the complete removal of demonic/satanic activity and influence upon the earth. In Luke 8, Jesus encountered a demon-possessed man and began conversing with the evil spirits indwelling him (vv. 26–30). These demons understood full well that Jesus was “Son of the Most High God” (v. 28), and recognizing His authority over them, they began “imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss” (v. 31). Instead, they asked if Jesus would permit them to enter a nearby herd of swine (v. 32)—which He did—and they proceeded to enter the swine and drive them into the lake where the herd drowned (v. 33).

This remarkable episode in Luke 8 reveals several significant truths about the abyss. First, the abyss in Luke 8:31 must be a specific spirit prison which was well-known to both Jesus and the demons. This is clear not merely from the articular use of ὁβύσσος, but primarily from the way the demons immediately refer to the abyss as a possible destination now that Jesus has commanded them to depart from their human victim. Here in Luke 8:31, the abyss is not some nebulous metaphor in an apocalyptic vision filled with symbolism—it is a technical term used in narrative literature to refer to a specific prison for evil spirits which was familiar to both Jesus and the demons.

Second, the spirit prison in Luke 8:31 must refer to an actual location. This can be seen in the way that Luke’s narrative sets the abyss alongside of the herd of swine as two possible destinations for the demons. Satan and demons are spiritual beings, but they are not omnipresent—they exist and function in a specific location at any given time. When Jesus first approached the demon-possessed man, these demons resided inside of this man (v. 27). But once they “came out of [ἐξελθὼν ἀπὸ] the

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4, no. 2 (Fall, 1994): 20. Beale acknowledges that whenever evil spirits are imprisoned in the abyss in the Jewish writings, they are always confined “in a complete way without any exception” (The Book of Revelation, 989). According to Beale, however, this does not necessitate that the same reality is depicted in Rev 20:1–3 because these Jewish writings refer to demons (rather than Satan) being imprisoned in the abyss (989–90). But it is difficult to understand why Beale would conclude that Satan is able to depart from the abyss if other demonic beings are not, especially in light of John’s description in Rev 20:3 that the abyss is sealed over him. Beale also makes the point that “the only apparently explicit Jewish references to the binding of Satan speak of a ‘binding’ that is not absolute” (989). But this fails to support the amillennial view, because it is Satan’s incarceration specifically in the abyss—not his binding per se—which securely eliminates his activity on earth during the thousand years of Rev 20.


36 The noun ὁβύσσος is articular every time it is used in the New Testament to refer to a spirit prison (Luke 8:31; Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8, 20:1, 3). In each case, it is most likely the “celebrity” or “familiar” use of the article “to point out an object that is well known” (Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996], 225).
man” (v. 29), two locations for their new place of residence were now possible—they could either “go away into ἐξ...ἀπελθεῖν] the abyss” (v. 31), or they could “enter into ἐξ...ἐισελθεῖν] the swine” (v. 32). In response to the permission of Jesus, these demons “entered into [εἰσῆλθαν εἰς] the swine” (v. 33). The use of proper and improper spatial prepositions throughout this narrative—ἐις, ἀπο, and ἐκ—highlights the possible and actual movements of the demons into (or out of) specific places and therefore makes it clear that the abyss should be understood as a location.

Third, the narrative in Luke 8 indicates that confinement in the abyss involves the complete removal of demonic activity and influence upon the earth. This can be seen in the request of the demons in verse 31. The reason for the demons’ request was not because they were so determined to kill the swine. The reason for their request was because imprisonment in the abyss would have cut them off from having any influence in this world—at least as long as they were in the abyss—whereas a departure into the swine would allow them to continue to roam free and wreak havoc on the earth.37 This indicates that these evil spirits could either be imprisoned in the abyss or they could be prowling about the earth—engaged in demonic activities—but they could not be both.38

The various uses of ἀβύσσος in the book of Revelation leads to a similar conclusion. For example, in John’s vision in Rev 9:1–6, a multitude of demons—pictured as a swarm of “locusts”—must first be released from the abyss before it is able to cause harm on the earth. The apostle writes:

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit [τῆς ἀβύσσου] was given to him. He opened the bottomless pit [τῆς ἀβύσσου], and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them (Rev 9:1–6).

37 If the demons’ earlier request that Jesus not “torment” them (v. 28) overlaps with their request not to be sent into the abyss (v. 31), this may imply that this spirit prison is also a place of torment and therefore that avoiding its torment was an additional reason for their request.

38 In discussing the incarceration of Satan in Revelation 20, most amillennialists do not even mention—much less comment on—the implications of Luke 8:31 for an accurate understanding of the abyss (e.g., Riddlebarger, A Case for Amillennialism; Venema, The Promise of the Future; Hoekema, The Bible and the Future; Storms, Kingdom Come).
As Blaising observes, the harm caused by these demonic locusts in this vision occurs only after the abyss is opened and they are released from its confines. According to Blaising:

The necessary implication is that their influence is not experienced by anyone as long as they are locked up in the pit. The graphic language about the key, opening the pit, subsequent instructions about harming, and coming on the earth (eis tēn gēn, v. 3) all converges to make the point that these “locusts” had no influence on earthly inhabitants prior to the time of their release.

According to Revelation 9, therefore, confinement of demons in the abyss entails the complete removal of activity and influence upon the earth.

The abyss, then, refers to an actual location in the spiritual realm where evil spirits are confined and prevented from roaming free on earth. As Powell observes:

In every reference to the abyss the being or beings in it must emerge from it in order to interact with humans. This suggests that the sphere of the abyss, like the realm of the dead, is separate from the realm of living humanity, and that those who dwell in the abyss have no contact with those outside that sphere.

This understanding of confinement in the abyss fits perfectly with John’s description of Satan’s imprisonment and release in Revelation 20. Not only is Satan thrown “into the abyss” (eijV th;n άβυσσον)—which is then “shut” (ἐκλείσεν) and “sealed over him” (ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ)—but he must first be “released from [λυθήσεται...ἐκ] his prison” (v. 7) before he can “come out [ἐξελέύσεται] to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth” (v. 8). But as long as he is

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40 Ibid., 218. According to Blaising, “This does not mean that evil was non-existent, but that these locusts themselves played no role prior to their release.”
41 Webb, “Revelation 20,” 20–21. In a similar way, in Rev 11:7 the satanically inspired beast must first “come up out of the abyss” (το άναβαινον ἐκ τής άβυσσου) before he is able to make war with the two witnesses on earth (cf., Rev 17:8, where the beast “is about to come up out of the abyss [ἀναβαινεν ἐκ τής άβυσσου] and go to destruction”). As Webb explains, the designation “those who dwell on the earth” (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς) is a key phrase for understanding the cosmology of Revelation (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8; 14; 17,2, 8):

The whole point of locking someone (an angel or the Devil) in the abyss...is so that they cannot bring any harm against those who dwell on the earth. The abyss is not simply a metaphorical “reduction in influence” as amillenialists suggest. Thus an amillennial perspective breaks down when the abyss is considered more broadly throughout the book of Revelation. Also, confinement in the abyss stands in direct contrast to the outcome of Satan being thrown out of heaven to the earth. [John] declares Satan’s arrival upon the earth as one of the three great “woes” to its inhabitants: “woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth (τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)” (8:13; cf. 12:12–13). Within Revelation demonic confinement in the abyss brings safety to the earthdwellers. In contrast, demonic beings thrown down to the earth (from heaven) or released to go up to the earth (from the abyss) brings harm to the earthdwellers (“Revelation 20,” 20–21).

42 Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 99.
confined in the abyss, the devil is not able to depart from his prison and therefore his activity on earth is completely non-existent.43

In contrast, the amillennial view that the abyss is a metaphor representing “the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate”44 is essentially nonsensical when assumed in the various passages where ἀβύσσος is used. For example, what sense does it make for the demons in Luke 8:31 to plead with Jesus not to cast them into the spiritual sphere where they normally function? Weren’t they already there prior to their encounter with Jesus? If the abyss is the spiritual realm in which demons operate, how is being confined in the abyss any different from indwelling the demon-possessed man or the herd of swine?

In Revelation 20, how can Satan be seized and thrown into the spiritual realm in which he normally functions (v. 3)? Wasn’t he already there prior to being seized? This would be similar to seizing a dangerous shark in the Pacific Ocean and locking it in a “prison,” only to then define that prison as the entirety of the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, what does it mean that Satan is “sealed” in this realm (v. 3), and what does it mean that he is “released” from it (v. 7)? How can Satan be either sealed in or released from the realm in which he usually operates?

By equating the abyss with the spiritual sphere of Satan’s activity, the amillennial definition of ἀβύσσος completely removes the idea of a spirit prison, in spite of the abyss being “sealed” (ἐσφράγισεν) over Satan in verse 3 and being designated his “prison” (φυλακή) in verse 7.45 The amillennial understanding of the abyss is

43 Some amillennialists dispute the absolute nature of Satan’s confinement by appealing to Jude 6. According to this argument, in the same way that demons are still actively involved on earth even though they are “kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day” according to Jude 6 (cf. 2 Pet 2:4), so Satan is simultaneously bound in the abyss (Rev 20:1–3) and yet still very active on earth (Beale, The Book of Revelation, 990; Stanley J. Grenz, The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 162; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 124). As Grenz writes, “Just as the demons in chains are not totally powerless, but restricted in activity, so also the binding of Satan entails restriction rather than total incapacitation” (The Millennial Maze, 162). The premillennial response to this argument depends on the identity of the fallen angels in Jude 6. Some interpreters see these demons as the “sons of God” in Gen 6:2 who “took wives for themselves” and were therefore imprisoned by God as described in Jude 6. If so, this presents no support for the amillennial argument, because Jude 6 would simply be saying that only some of the fallen angels are in eternal bonds, not all of them, and therefore demonic activity in the present age could simply be attributed to those fallen angels who are not confined. Other interpreters see Jude 6 as a reference to the original fall of the angels who defected with Satan. If this view is correct, then Jude 6 cannot refer to confinement in the abyss, because the confinement of Jude 6 is permanent (“kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day”), which would imply that every demon is permanently confined in the abyss until the final judgment. But Luke 8:31 and Rev 9:13 make it clear that not all demons are permanently confined to the abyss. Jude 6 and 2 Pet 2:4, therefore, present no support for this amillennial argument.


45 The amillennial reluctance to see the abyss as a prison is reflected not only in Beale’s reference to “prison” (φυλακή) in verse 7 as “a figurative word,” but also in his explanation of the seal in Rev 20:3. According to Beale, rather than connoting an absolute incarceration, the sealing of the abyss could just as easily convey the general idea of “authority over,” in keeping with its primary meaning in Dan 6:17 and Matt 27:66 (The Book of Revelation, 985–86). But in contrast to Beale’s claim, the act of sealing in these two verses was indeed designed to ensure absolute incarceration, namely by making sure that Daniel did not escape the lion’s den (Dan 6:17) and that Jesus’ body did not leave the tomb (Matt 27:66). As Osborne
based on neither the consistent use of the word in the New Testament nor the immediate context of its use in Rev 20:1–3. Rather than allowing for the kind of freedom that the amillennialist claims, imprisonment in the abyss eliminates the activity of the devil on earth and therefore the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 cannot be a present reality.46

The Purpose of the Binding

One of the primary arguments for the amillennial view focuses on the purpose of Satan’s binding in Revelation 20. In contrast to the premillennial view that this binding prevents Satan from engaging in any earthly activity whatsoever, amillennialists often point to the purpose clause in Rev 20:3, which is said to indicate that the devil is bound in one respect and one respect only: “so that [ιοντά] he should not deceive the nations any longer” (v. 3b).47 In the words of amillennialist William Hendriksen, “The devil can do much, indeed, during this present period of one thousand years. But there is one thing which, during this period, he cannot do. With respect to this one thing he is definitely and securely bound.”48

For this reason, because the binding of Satan only prevents him from deceiving the nations, amillennialists believe that he is still free to prowl about the earth like a roaring lion (1 Pet 5:8), partaking in the other activities attributed to him in the New Testament.49 As Riddlebarger explains:

The point of John’s vision was that the angel restrains Satan’s evil activities. His binding does not eliminate them. Even though Satan is presently bound and

writes, “This intensifies the idea of ‘locking’ the abyss and connotes an absolutely secure situation, guaranteed by sovereign authority. Satan is completely bound in the abyss and cannot escape” (Grant R. Osborne, Revelation, ECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 701).

46 In arguing that Satan’s present-day activities are not incompatible with his present-day imprisonment in Rev 20, Hendriksen uses the analogy that a dog “bound with a long and heavy chain can do great damage within the circle of his imprisonment” (More Than Conquerors, 190; cf. Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120). What this illustration seems to ignore is that Satan’s “circle of imprisonment” is identified in verse 3 as the abyss. If Satan is free to roam and do damage only in the abyss, then he is indeed cut off from activity on the earth. In a similar way, Cox affirms that Satan still prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, because “the chain with which he is bound is a long one, allowing him much freedom of movement” (Amillennialism Today, 139). Likewise, Cullman describes Satan as being “bound as to a rope, which can be more or less lengthened” (Oscar Cullman, Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History, transl. Floyd V. Filson [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949], 198). But rather than seeing the chain as the means by which Satan is bound (i.e., tied up), Cox and Cullman write as if the imagery were one of Satan on a leash. The length of the chain is not only unstated but irrelevant, for the imagery is one of Satan being bound by it and then locked and sealed in an escape-proof prison. Where in the language of Rev 20:1–3 is there any indication that Satan has “much freedom of movement”?


48 Hendriksen, More Than Conquerors, 190; also see Venema, The Promise of the Future, 319.

49 Storms, Kingdom Come, 439. According to Storms, “The premillennial interpretation errs in that it has attempted to universalize what John explicitly restricts.”
cannot deceive the nations, he remains a dangerous foe, the same way in which a mortally wounded animal is far more dangerous than a healthy one.\textsuperscript{50}

According to the amillennial view, then, the binding of Satan is a present reality which consists of a \textit{partial} restriction of his earthly influence, leaving him free to engage in the various activities ascribed to him throughout the New Testament. Satan’s activity in the present age is \textit{limited}, but not eliminated.

The initial problem with this argument is that it mistakenly assumes that the purpose clause in verse 3 limits the degree of Satan’s confinement.\textsuperscript{51} The purpose clause can only state why the action of imprisonment is taken, not the degree of restriction intended, which must be gleaned instead from the immediate context.\textsuperscript{52} To illustrate, if the warden of a prison puts a prisoner in solitary confinement for the primary purpose of preventing him from killing other prisoners, this does not mean that he is then free to steal from them and do other such activities. After all, the location of solitary confinement completely removes him from the rest of the prison and cuts him off entirely from the other prisoners. In the same way, the degree of Satan’s restriction in Revelation 20 is determined not by the purpose clause alone, but also by the location of his imprisonment, the abyss, which removes the devil from earth and cuts him off from any influence there.\textsuperscript{53}

A second problem with this argument is that the New Testament teaches that Satan \textit{is} in fact deceiving the nations during the present age. Therefore, even if the amillennialist were correct in his assertion that Satan is only prevented from deceiving the nations during the thousand years—remaining active on earth in every other way—the fact that he is currently engaged in such deception indicates that the millennium cannot be a present reality. This can be seen in a number of New Testament passages.

In 2 Cor 4:3–4, as Paul describes his apostolic ministry, he writes that “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.” According to this passage, the truth of the gospel is concealed from unbelievers because the deceptive influence of Satan has blinded their minds from understanding and embracing it.\textsuperscript{54} In a similar

\textsuperscript{50} Riddlebarger, \textit{A Case for Amillennialism}, 239. The irony here is that Riddlebarger seems to imply that Satan is more dangerous while sealed in the abyss than when he is not!

\textsuperscript{51} Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 98.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. In addition, the use of a purpose clause does not preclude the possibility that the stated action was taken with additional purposes in mind, even though those purposes are not specifically stated in the passage itself. For example, most amillennialists link the binding of Satan with Christ’s victory over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8), and yet none of them would argue that the only purpose of Christ’s work of redemption was to keep Satan from deceiving the nations during the thousand years.

\textsuperscript{53} This illustration is taken from Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 98.

\textsuperscript{54} The verb \textit{τυφλώνω} (“has blinded”) means “to blind” or “to deprive of sight” (\textit{BDAG}, 1021), and here in 2 Cor 4:4 it refers to spiritual blindness, just as in its other two uses in the New Testament (John 12:40; 1 John 2:11).
way, 2 Tim 2:26 describes unbelievers as being caught in the snare of the devil, having been deceived and held captive by Satan to do his will.\textsuperscript{55} In addition, 1 John 5:19 highlights Satan’s deceptive influence in the hearts of unbelievers by stating that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” As Townsend writes, “The New Testament makes it clear that Satan is now very much involved in the deception of the nations, for what is the deception of the nations if it is not the deception of individuals who make up the nations?”\textsuperscript{56}

Furthermore, the Book of Revelation teaches that Satan and his demons will continue to “deceive” (πλανάω) the nations right up until the time when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom and Satan is cast into the abyss (Rev 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 19:20).\textsuperscript{57} Amillennialists have a particularly difficult time explaining how Satan can be described as the one “who deceives the whole world” in Rev 12:9 while simultaneously being sealed in the abyss “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3). How can Satan deceive the whole world (Rev 12:9) and yet be unable to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:3) at the same time? If Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations during the millennium, and yet he is currently deceiving the nations—and will continue to do so until the Second Coming—the thousand years of Revelation 20 cannot be equated with the present age.

Some amillennialists respond to this difficulty by insisting that Satan’s inability to deceive during the thousand years is merely a matter of degree. According to Hendriksen, “If during the present N.T. era the devil ‘blinds the minds of unbelievers,’ II Cor. 4:4, that was true even more emphatically during the old dispensation.”\textsuperscript{58} But the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 teaches not that Satan will deceive the nations less emphatically than he previously did, but that he will deceive the nations no longer (μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι). In other words, Satan’s ability to deceive is not limited during the thousand years, but rather eliminated.

Other amillennialists respond to this difficulty by insisting that the binding of Satan does not prevent him from engaging in any kind of deception whatsoever, but rather from deceiving the nations in two specific ways. According to this argument, the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 means that the binding of Satan specifically precludes him from (a) deceiving the nations in such a way as to gather them for an all-out

\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Matt 13:19; 1 Tim 4:1–2. Paul says in 2 Tim 2:26 that these unbelievers are in need of repentance leading to knowledge of the truth so they can come to their senses and escape this deceptive satanic snare. As Fee observes, this metaphor “emphasizes the deceitful nature of the false teaching, which here... is depicted as ultimately demonic” (Gordon D. Fee, \textit{1 and 2 Timothy, Titus}, NIBC [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988], 266; also see George W. Knight, \textit{The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text}, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992], 425–26; William D. Mounce, \textit{Pastoral Epistles}, WBC vol. 46 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000], 537–39).

\textsuperscript{56} Jeffrey L. Townsend, “Is the Present Age the Millennium?,” \textit{BSac} 140, no. 559 (July 1983): 217.

\textsuperscript{57} The difficulty presented by these verses from Revelation is not alleviated by the amillennial view that they describe the present age (rather than the seven-year tribulation period, as some premillennialists believe), for this would mean that Satan is actively deceiving the nations throughout the present age, the very thing the amillennialist denies according to his interpretation of Rev 20:1–3.

\textsuperscript{58} Hendriksen, \textit{More Than Conquerors}, 186–87; emphasis added. Also see Venema, \textit{The Promise of the Future}, 319, and Storms, \textit{Kingdom Come}, 440.
assault against the people of God,\textsuperscript{59} and (b) preventing the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world.\textsuperscript{60}

In support of the first assertion—that Satan is restrained from gathering the nations for an all-out assault against the church—amillennialists point to the connection between verse 3 and verses 7–8.\textsuperscript{61} In verse 3, Satan is bound so that he would not deceive the nations until after the thousand years. In verses 7–8, after the thousand years are completed, Satan comes out of the abyss to deceive the nations and thereby gather them to wage war on the people of God. If Satan’s release results in an all-out effort to destroy the church, say amillennialists, this reveals something about the kind of deception he is prevented from engaging in during the thousand years—it is not simply deception \textit{per se}, but rather “deceiving the nations in such a way as to gather them together for an all-out assault against God’s saints.”\textsuperscript{62} As Storms writes:

Although Satan may and will do much in this present age (as the New Testament epistles clearly indicate), there is one thing of which John assures us: \textit{Satan will never be permitted to incite and organize the unbelieving nations of the world in a final, catastrophic assault against the Church, until such time as God in his providence so determines.}\textsuperscript{63}

According to amillennialists, the restriction of Satan during the present age prevents him from inciting the nations to destroy the church as a missionary institution.\textsuperscript{64}

In support of the second assertion—that Satan is restrained from preventing the spread of the gospel to the nations—amillennialists generally point to the broader landscape of redemptive history. According to this argument, the nations were left in darkness in the Old Testament era, but through His work of redemption, “Christ curtailed the forces of Satan and paved the way for the successful proclamation of the gospel throughout the world.”\textsuperscript{65} In this way,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Cox, \textit{Amillennialism Today}, 62; Hoekema, \textit{The Bible and the Future}, 228–29; Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120; Hendriksen, \textit{More Than Conquerors}, 188–90; Venema, \textit{The Promise of the Future}, 319; Storms, \textit{Kingdom Come}, 442; Beale, \textit{The Book of Revelation}, 988–89; Hamilton, \textit{The Basis of Millennial Faith}, 130; Davis, \textit{The High King of Heaven}, 469; Menn, \textit{Biblical Eschatology}, 290. As Hoekema summarizes, “the binding of Satan during the gospel age means that, first, he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel, and second, he cannot gather all the enemies of Christ together to attack the church” (\textit{The Bible and the Future}, 228). For some amillennialists (a) and (b) are inextricably linked, for they say it is precisely because Satan is unable to destroy the church as a missionary institution that the gospel is now able to go forth to the nations (e.g., Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 72; Hoekema, \textit{The Bible and the Future}, 229).
\item \textsuperscript{61} Strimple, “An Amillennial Response,” 273.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Storms, \textit{Kingdom Come}, 440; emphasis is in the original.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Hendriksen, \textit{More Than Conquerors}, 188.
\item \textsuperscript{65} Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120.
\end{itemize}
The binding of Satan described in Revelation 20:1–3...means that throughout the gospel age in which we now live the influence of Satan, though certainly not annihilated, is so curtailed that he cannot prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations of the world.66

As Strimple explains:

The age of salvation for the Gentiles has arrived. Prior to Christ’s ministry Israel was the one nation called out from all the nations of the world to know God’s blessings and to serve him. There were exceptions, of course—those who came to know God’s grace even though they were not of the children of Abraham after the flesh. But essentially all the nations on this earth were in darkness, under Satan’s deception. But then, praise God! Christ came and accomplished his redemptive work….The age of world missions had begun, and Satan’s deceptive work on that grand scale over so many centuries had come to an end.67

According to the amillennial view, then, even though Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers in the present age (2 Cor 4:4), he is unable to incite the unbelieving world to seek to destroy the church, and he is unable to prevent the spread of the gospel to the nations (Rev 20:1–3).68

The problem with the amillennial view of the nature of Satan’s deception concerns the purpose clause in verse 3. When John says that Satan will be sealed in the Abyss “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer [ἐτεί]” (Rev 20:3), this indicates the interruption of something that is already taking place.69 For this reason, the deception from which Satan is prevented in Rev 20:1–3 is a deception that was already taking place prior to his incarceration in the abyss.70 Therefore, when the amillennialist explains this deception as Satan inciting the nations into an all-out, catastrophic assault against the church, the question arises—when was this final catastrophic assault launched by Satan prior to the cross?71 The amillennialist’s inability

66 Hoekema, The Bible and the Future, 229.
69 Richard A. Ostella, “The Significance of Deception in Revelation 20:3,” WTJ 37, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 237–38. As Ostella explains, this is clear from John’s temporal use of ἐτεί with a negative particle (also see BDAG, 400).
70 For this reason, the deception from which Satan is prevented in Rev 20:1–3 is more directly identified with his deceptive activities prior to the thousand years than with what happens after his release (Ostella, “The Significance of Deception,” 238). But amillennialists take just the opposite approach: to defend their understanding of this deception, they typically ignore the satanic deception which takes place prior to the thousand years and focus instead on the deception which takes place in Rev 20:7–8.
The Binding of Satan in Revelation 20

35

to point to Satan leading the nations of the world in an all-out assault to destroy the people of God just prior to the cross proves to be an insurmountable difficulty for this view.  

Equally problematic is the amillennial view that the binding of Satan simply restrains him from preventing the spread of the Gospel to the nations. The weakness of this explanation is that the purpose clause in verse 3 concerns itself not with the freedom of the church to proclaim the Good News but with the inability of the nations to embrace it. Properly understood, satanic deception of the nations does not prevent believers from preaching the Gospel to the world—satanic deception is something that takes place in the hearts of the unbelievers who make up those nations. Put another way, satanic deception does not close the mouths of believers; it deludes the hearts of unbelievers. There is no indication in Rev 20:1–3 that the purpose of Satan’s binding was to allow the gospel to go forth to Gentiles who had been previously deprived of the Good News.

The New Testament Parallels

The most common amillennial argument that the binding of Satan is a present reality is found not in Revelation 20 itself but rather in other New Testament passages which are said to illuminate the meaning of John’s vision (e.g., Matt 12:29, Luke

72 According to Powell, Beale (The Book of Revelation, 983–90) “seems to interpret the deception in terms of its degree of success and failure, not in terms of its attempt” (“Progression versus Recapitulation,” 106). As Powell explains:

While admitting that Satan will ultimately fail in his objective of destroying the covenant community of believers, nevertheless Beale views Satan as continuously attempting such a goal, and only at the end will he succeed in mounting a worldwide lethal attack. However, the imprisonment imagery shows that Satan will be prevented from even making an attempt at deceiving the nations, while the purpose clause makes it clear that he will not have any success, not simply limited success (emphasis original).

73 An additional problem arises when one considers the question of whether Satan is currently able to keep the nations in darkness by preventing the spread of the Gospel. Strimple and other amillennialists claim that Satan is no longer successful in this endeavor because he is bound during the present age (Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 123–24), but the number of unreached people (and even nations) in the world would argue otherwise. In fact, as Powell explains, deception and persecution of the church have been widespread throughout the entirety of the present age:

Persecution was initiated under the reigns of Nero, Domitian, and Diocletian, the last of which was throughout the Roman Empire. The bastions of Christianity in Asia Minor and North Africa in the first six centuries have all been under Muslim control for the past several centuries. Three quarters of the earth’s population are still Islamic, Buddhist, or Hindu. Communism in the twentieth century threatened to stamp out Christianity. All this suggests that in the present age Satan is “deceiving the nations” and is having more success than failure (“Progression versus Recapitulation,” 106–7).
According to amillennialists, “These passages provide the biblical context within which the vision of Revelation 20 becomes clear.” More specifically, these passages are said to prove that the binding of Satan occurred at the time of the first coming of Christ and therefore that the thousand years of Revelation 20 is a present reality.

In these passages, Satan is bound (Matt 12:29); he falls from heaven (Luke 10:17–18); he is cast out (John 12:31–32); he is disarmed and conquered (Col 2:15); he is rendered powerless (Heb 2:14–15); his works are destroyed (1 John 3:8); and he is thrown down from heaven to earth (Rev 12:7–11). According to amillennialists, these descriptions of the victory of Jesus over the devil in the first century are parallel to the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 and therefore indicate that this binding took place at the start of the present age. As Waldron writes, “The biblical evidence proves conclusively that any interpretation of [Rev 20:1–3] that professes to interpret it in accord with the rest of Scripture must conclude that Satan was bound by the events of and at the time of Christ’s first advent.”

In making this argument, amillennialists appeal to the hermeneutical principle “that Scripture should interpret Scripture and that the more obscure passage should be interpreted in the light of the more clear passage.” In this case, amillennialists see Rev 20:1–3 as the more obscure passage and Matt 12:29, Luke 10:17–18, John 12:31–32, Col 2:15, Heb 2:14–15, 1 John 3:8, and Rev 12:7–12 as those clearer passages which should be used to interpret the binding of Satan. The problem is that none of these supposed parallels actually refer to what is described in Rev 20:1–3, and therefore this approach fails to bring clarity to the divinely intended meaning of John’s vision.

Matthew 12:29

The New Testament parallel most often cited by amillennialists is the statement of Jesus in Matt 12:29. In this verse, Jesus explains to the Pharisees that His ability to cast out demons is dependent on His prior act of having bound Satan: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matt 12:29). This verse is said to demonstrate that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 was accomplished by Jesus

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75 Venema, The Promise of the Future, 321.

76 Waldron, The End Times Made Simple, 95.


78 For some amillennialists, consulting these cross-references actually becomes a substitute for exegeting Rev 20:1–3 itself, e.g., Cox, who writes: “Since [Rev 20] itself gives no explanation of John’s meaning, its meaning must be garnered elsewhere in the Bible” (Amillennialism Today, 65).
during his first-century earthly ministry.\textsuperscript{79} As many amillennialists note, the very same Greek verb “to bind” (δέω) is used with reference to Satan in both Matt 12:29 and Rev 20:3, strengthening the case that these passages describe the same action taken against the devil.\textsuperscript{80}

The initial difficulty with this argument concerns the timing of this incident in the ministry of Christ. In Matt 12:29, Jesus specifically says He is not able to exorcise the demon “unless he first [πρῶτον] binds the strong man.” But most amillennialists believe that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 took place through the death and resurrection of Christ. Herein lies the problem: If Jesus had not yet bound Satan through His death and resurrection (Matthew 27–28), how was He able to cast out the demon in Matthew 12? The amillennial view that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus precludes the possibility that this same binding is described in Matt 12:29.\textsuperscript{81}

A second difficulty concerns the purpose of Satan’s binding in Revelation 20. As previously discussed, amillennialists often point to the purpose clause in verse 3 as indicating that Satan is bound in one respect and one respect only: “so that he should not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3).\textsuperscript{82} But in Matt 12:29, the purpose of Satan’s binding was to enable Jesus to heal the demon-possessed man. To the degree that amillennialists emphasize the purpose clause in Rev 20:3 as stating the sole purpose of Satan’s binding, they weaken their ability to equate that binding with the binding of the strong man in Matt 12:29.

But the most significant problem with this argument is found in a simple comparison between the two passages. In Matt 12:29, Jesus is continuing His response to accusations that He is casting out demons by the power Satan, and He does so with a parable. He has already shown that He is Satan’s enemy (vv. 25–28), and now He


\textsuperscript{81} A few amillennialists avoid this dilemma by claiming that Christ’s work of binding began earlier when the Lord triumphed over him by resisting his temptations in the wilderness back in Luke 4:1–13 (= Matt 4:1–11) (Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 91; Hoekema, \textit{The Bible and the Future}, 229; Hamilton, \textit{The Basis of Millennial Faith}, 129; Hendrikzen, \textit{More Than Conquerors}, 187). But Luke 4 specifically indicates that Satan left the temptation scene defeated but unbound by describing the devil as departing from Jesus “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13) (Townsend, “Is the Present Age the Millennium?,” 217). In addition, there is no indication in Rev 20 that the binding and incarceration of Satan is something that took place progressively, over the course of nearly two years.

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explains that He is also Satan’s master,83 saying: “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matt 12:29). The point of this parable is that the very exorcism for which Jesus was condemned is a demonstration of His power and superiority over Satan. For how could Jesus have plundered the strong man’s house—i.e., robbed Satan of his spiritual property by delivering the demoniac—unless He had first bound the strong man and rendered him powerless to prevent the exorcism.84 According to Jesus, rather than casting out demons by Satan’s power, He was demonstrating His own power over the devil when He performed exorcisms.85

In Matt 12:29, then, the binding of Satan broke the power he had to possess specific individuals and thereby enabled Jesus to deliver those people from Satan’s control. In contrast, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 involved sealing him in the abyss and preventing him from deceiving the nations.86 The two passages have more differences than similarities. In Matthew 12 Satan is bound in his own domain—his own “house,” according to the parable—but in Revelation 20 he is removed from that domain and cast into the abyss.87 The binding in Matthew 12 is a local reference to Satan’s inability to control a single individual through demon possession,88 but the binding in Revelation 20 is a universal reference to Satan’s inability to deceive the nations of the world. As one amillennialist acknowledges:

The binding of the strong man in the Synoptic Gospels...bears no recognizable relationship to the thrust of the amillennial view. That thrust is that the binding of Satan applies only to his ability to deceive the nations. But where are the nations in the pericopes that refer to the binding of the strong man? They are not to be seen. What is very much in view is the local sufferers from demon

84 John A. Broadus, Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 270; Louis A. Barbieri, “Matthew,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck ( Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 46; Craig Blomberg, Matthew, NAC vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 203. As Broadus writes, “Jesus was taking away from Satan a part of his property in delivering the demoniac, and this could not be unless he were at variance with Satan, and strong enough to bind him” (Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, 270).
85 As Barbieri writes, “By driving out demons, He was proving He was greater than Satan. He was able to go into Satan’s realm (the strong man’s house), the demonic world, and come away with the spoils of the victory (12:29). Since He could do this, He was able to institute the kingdom of God among them (v. 28). If He were driving out demons by Satan’s power, He certainly could not be offering the people God’s kingdom. That would be contradictory. The fact that He was coming to establish the kingdom clearly showed that He worked by the power of the Spirit of God, not by Satan’s power” (“Matthew,” 46).
87 Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 100.
88 As Gromacki explains, the episode in Matt 12 involved one demon being cast out of one person: “If Satan had been bound completely at that event, then all demon possessed individuals should have been delivered simultaneously. However, many remained demon possessed in the Gospel period, the time of apostolic ministry, and in our present day. Christ used that analogy to justify his miraculous action upon one man at one point of time” (Robert Gromacki, “Revelation 20: A Premillennial Analysis,” 14; accessed on July 20, 2014, http://www.pre-trib.org/data/pdf/Gromacki-Revelation20APremille.pdf.).
possession and Satan’s inability to prevent Jesus from healing them; what is not at all in view is the now blessedly undeceived nations.89

The inability of Satan to prevent Jesus from delivering demoniacs (Matt 12:29) is simply not the same as his inability to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:1–3).90 The two passages are not describing the same event, and therefore Matt 12:29 provides no support for the amillennial view of the binding of Satan.

Luke 10:18

A second passage often cited by amillennialists is Luke 10:17–20, which describes the return of the missionaries sent out by Jesus:

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven” (Luke 10:17–20).

The key is verse 18, where Jesus says, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” According to amillennialists, Satan’s fall from heaven coincides with the binding of Satan in Revelation 20, and therefore Luke 10:18 provides evidence that Satan’s binding took place in the first century.91 To use this verse as an argument, however, the amillennialist must be able to prove not only that the fall of Satan in Luke 10:18 took place during the first-century ministry of Jesus, but also that it can be equated with the binding of Satan in Revelation 20.

Because of the ambiguity of Jesus’s statement in Luke 10:18, commentators are divided on the timing and nature of Satan’s fall. According to most interpreters, the fall of Satan refers to either (1) the original fall of Satan (Isa 14:12), (2) the defeat of Satan when Jesus resisted his temptations (Luke 4:1–13), (3) the defeat of Satan evidenced by the exorcism of demons (cf. Luke 11:17–23), or (4) the ultimate judgment of Satan in the future (Rev 20:10).92 A fifth possibility combines views (3) and (4)

90 As Townsend writes, “When [Matt 12:29] is compared with the absolute terms used of Satan’s imprisonment in the abyss, it becomes apparent that any restriction on Satan in the Gospels is not to be equated with his binding in Revelation” (“Is the Present Age the Millennium?,” 217).
and asserts that the victory of Jesus over the devil—as evidenced by demons being cast out in His name—served as a preview of the final judgment of Satan, ultimately pointing ahead to his eventual demise in the lake of fire (Rev 20:10). 93

But regardless of which view is correct, Jesus simply does not define the fall of Satan clearly enough for the amillennialist to make his case. In fact, each of these five interpretations is consistent with the premillennial view and none of them requires the amillennial view. It is certainly possible to argue that the description of Satan in Luke 10:18 took place when Jesus spoke these words—that Satan fell from heaven when demons were cast out in the first century—but this does not demonstrate that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 occurred at the same time.

To prove that it did, amillennialists point out that the fall of Satan in Luke 10 is associated with the missionary activity of the seventy. 94 For this reason, it is argued that the fall of Satan curtailed the devil’s power and paved the way for the successful proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world, just like the binding of Satan in Revelation 20. 95 Therefore, it is said, both actions must have occurred in the first century. As noted above, however, Rev 20:3 does not say that the binding of Satan paved the way for the church to proclaim the Gospel to the nations. Furthermore, the fall of Satan in Luke 10:18 is presented as evidence that the seventy were given authority to cast out demons, not that the church was now able to preach the Good News throughout the world. For this reason, even if the authority of Jesus over demons indicated that Satan was defeated in some way during the first century (Luke 10:18), this does not mean that Satan was sealed in the abyss, unable to deceive the nations (Rev 20:1–3). 96 In the absence of any clear parallels between the two passages, Luke

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93 This appears to be the most likely view. In this way, the success of the seventy was viewed by Jesus as “a symbol and earnest” of the complete and future overthrow of Satan (Plummer, The Gospel according to S. Luke, 278). As Green notes, “The decisive fall of Satan is anticipated in the future, but it is already becoming manifest through the mission of Jesus and, by extension, through the ministry of his envoys” (The Gospel of Luke, 419).


95 Hamstra, “An Idealist View of Revelation,” 120.

96 According to Vlach, the cosmic war between God and Satan includes several battles which progressively lead to the devil’s ultimate defeat: (1) Satan is judged and cast down from heaven before the fall of man (Isa 14:12–15; Ezek 28:11–19); (2) Jesus demonstrates His power over Satan’s realm by casting out demons (Matt 12:28); (3) Jesus is victorious over Satan at the cross (Col 2:15); (4) Satan is thrown down to the earth for a short time before the Second Coming (Rev 12); (5) Satan is sealed in the abyss for one thousand years at the Second Coming (Rev 20:1–3); and (6) Satan is thrown into the lake of fire forever after the millennial reign of Christ (Rev 20:7–10) (Michael J. Vlach, “The Kingdom of God and the Millennium,” MSJ 23, no. 2 [Fall 2012]: 248–49). As Vlach explains, “These events above are separate but interrelated events in the cosmic war” (249).
10:18 falls short as an argument that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is a present reality.97


Several passages cited by amillennialists specifically refer to the victory that Jesus accomplished through His death and resurrection as He triumphed over Satan and redeemed from his control those who repent and believe in Christ:

- **John 12:31–32:** “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself.”98

- **Colossians 2:15:** “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”99

- **Hebrews 2:14–15:** “Since then 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; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.”100

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98 Cited by Lewis, *The Dark Side of the Millennium*, 52; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Cox, *Amillennialism Today*, 61; Hoekema, “Amillennialism,” 163; Waldron, *The End Times Made Simple*, 94; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 322–23; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Hamilton, *The Basis of Millennial Faith*, 132; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985; Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 188; Poythress, *The Returning King*, 181; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Davis, *The High King of Heaven*, 471–72; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288. In arguing for the connection between the John 12:31–32 and Rev 20:1–3, amillennialists point out that the verb “cast out” (*exekalētērion*) in John 12:31–32 is from the same root as the verb “threw” (*bāllō*) in Rev 20:1–3 (Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, 229; Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 70; Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, 323; Strimple, “Amillennialism,” 122; Menn, *Biblical Eschatology*, 288). But the mere use of similar words is insufficient to equate the events described in these two passages. In addition, as used in their own contexts, the two words are less similar than amillennialists seem to imply. John 12:31 pictures Satan being “cast out” (*exekalētērion*) in some way, whereas Rev 20:3 pictures him being “cast into” [*e’balen...eijV*] the abyss.” The difference between being “cast out” and “cast into” does not preclude the possibility that the two passages are describing the same event from different perspectives, but it should silence the claim that the equation can be made on the basis of the use of similar verbs.


• 1 John 3:8b: “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”¹⁰¹

According to the amillennialist, these descriptions of the victory of Jesus over Satan are parallel to the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 and therefore locate the timing of that binding in the first-century ministry of Christ.

The main problem with this argument is its inability to account for the release of Satan in Revelation 20, for whatever is accomplished in the incarceration of verses 1–3 is undone in the release of verse 7.¹⁰² As Ladd explains, the release of Satan is difficult to understand if it is applied to the Lord’s binding of Satan in His earthly ministry: “The victory he won over Satan was won once and for all. Satan will never be loosed from bondage to Christ won by his death and resurrection.”¹⁰³ In other words, if the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 refers to Christ’s work of redemption on the cross (John 12:31–32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8), the finished work of Christ turns out to be the unfinished work of Christ when Satan is released.¹⁰⁴

For example, according to 1 John 3:8 Jesus came to break the dominating power of sin in the lives of those who believe in Him. But if the victory over the devil in this verse is equated with the binding of Satan in Rev 20:3, what does it mean that Satan is released in Rev 20:7? How can the effects of this redemptive victory be reversed? Similarly, the victory of Christ over the devil in Heb 2:14–15 consists of Jesus redeeming sinners from the power of Satan and the fear of death. But if this victory is identified as the binding of Satan in Revelation 20, how can this act of deliverance be nullified when the devil is set free? Likewise, how can the casting out of Satan in John 12:31–32 be reversed, and how can Christ’s triumph over the rulers of darkness in Col 2:15 be overturned? These passages must not describe the same act of divine judgment against Satan as what John describes in Rev 20:1–3.

Revelation 12:7–11

A final passage often cited by amillennialists is found in Rev 12:7–11, which describes the casting down of Satan in terms very similar to those of Rev 20:1–6.¹⁰⁵ Although the details between the two passages are not identical at every point, the parallels are said to “suggest that they depict the same events and mutually interpret


¹⁰² As Thomas asks, “What restrictions currently placed on him will be removed at the end of this age? No credible answer to this question has ever been advanced” (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1995], 404).


one another.” The following seven parallels have been highlighted by various amillennialists:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 12:7–11</th>
<th>Revelation 20:1–6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) heavenly scene (v. 7)</td>
<td>(1) heavenly scene (v. 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) angelic battle against Satan and his host (vv. 7–8)</td>
<td>(2) presupposed angelic battle with Satan (v. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Satan cast to earth (v. 9)</td>
<td>(3) Satan cast into the abyss (v. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) the angels’ evil opponent called “the great dragon, ... that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (v. 9)</td>
<td>(4) the angels’ evil opponent called “the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan,” restrained from “deceiving the nations anymore” (vv. 2–3), to be released later “to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth” (vv. 3, 7–8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Satan “is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (v. 12)</td>
<td>(5) Satan to be “set free for a short time” after his imprisonment (v. 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Satan’s fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 10)</td>
<td>(6) Satan’s fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v. 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) the saints’ kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan and Christ’s victory but also on the saints’ faithfulness even to death in holding to “the word of their testimony” (v. 11)</td>
<td>(7) the saints’ kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan but also on their faithfulness even to death because of their “testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God” (v. 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1. Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism*, 229.

According to amillennialists, the obvious parallelism between Revelation 12 and 20—and especially the verbal connection in the fourfold identification of the dragon in 12:9 and 20:2–3—indicates that both passages are describing the present age. For this reason, the casting down of Satan in Rev 12:7–11 is seen as evidence for the present-day fulfillment of Rev 20:1–3.

The problem with this argument is that it focuses on superficial points of similarity between Rev 12:7–11 and 20:1–6 while ignoring differences between the two passages which make it impossible for them to be describing the same events or time

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107 Riddlebarger’s charted is adapted from Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 992.

period. Suppose a news magazine were to publish two separate articles about the president of the United States. The first article described how the president flew on Air Force One from Washington D.C. to London where he spent the day giving a number of public speeches. A subsequent article described how he flew on Air Force One from London to Hawaii where he spent two weeks vacationing with his family out of the public eye. The discerning reader would not assume that the two articles were describing the same flight simply because they both referred to how (a) the president of the United States (b) flew across the ocean (c) on Air Force One. After all, the point of departure is different, the destination is different, and the substance of the trip is different. The two accounts could not possibly be describing the same flight across the ocean.

So it is with the parallels between Revelation 12 and Revelation 20—even though both passages refer to a casting down of Satan, three critical differences preclude the possibility that they refer to the same casting down. First, the origin and the destination of the casting down of Satan are completely different in the two passages. In Revelation 12 Satan is cast down from heaven to earth, but in Revelation 20 he is cast down from earth into the abyss. In Revelation 12, Satan no longer has access to heaven because he is confined to earth, but in Revelation 20 he no longer has access to earth because he is confined in the abyss. Unless one is prepared to equate the abyss and the earth, this cannot be the same casting down of Satan. He is on earth in Revelation 12 and in the abyss in Revelation 20, but, as discussed above, he cannot be in both places at the same time.

A second major difference is that the expulsion of Satan from heaven in Revelation 12 has the opposite effect as the casting of Satan into the abyss in Revelation 20. When Satan is cast down to earth in chapter 12, it results in increased deception of the nations (Rev 12:9; cf. 13:14; 16:14; 18:23; 19:20), but when Satan is cast into the abyss in Revelation 20, it prevents him from deceiving the nations any longer (Rev 20:3). How can Satan be described as the one “who deceives the whole world” (Rev 12:9) while simultaneously being sealed in the abyss “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer” (Rev 20:3)? Satan cannot deceive the whole world (Rev 12:9) and yet be unable to deceive the nations of the world (Rev 20:3) at the same time, and therefore the two descriptions are incompatible.

A final difference involves the short amount of time given to Satan in both passages. At the end of Rev 12:12, John describes Satan being cast down to the earth, “having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” In Rev 20:3, John writes that after Satan is locked in the abyss for a thousand years, “he must be released for a short time.” As seen in #5 in the chart above, this parallel—“a short time” (οἷλίγον καιρόν) in 12:12 and “a short time” (μικρὸν χρόνον) in 20:3—is cited by those who argue for the amillennial view.

The problem is that these two brief periods of time do not line up chronologically. In Revelation 12, Satan is cast down to earth for “a short time,” but in Revelation 20 he is cast into the abyss for a long time (the thousand years), and then afterward he is released for “a short time.” If the amillennial view is correct, the short time in Revelation 12 coincides with the long time in Revelation 20 (the thousand years), which is then followed by a short time. The supposed parallel between the “short time” in Revelation 12 and the “short time” in Revelation 20 offers no support for the amillennial view and actually presents a significant difficulty for it.

Therefore, even though Satan is indeed cast down in both visions, the destination of Satan, the result of him being cast down, and the duration of his restriction (either on earth or in the abyss) are completely incompatible. For this reason, Rev 12:7–11 and 20:1–6 do not portray the same events or time period, and a comparison between the two passages provides no evidence for the amillennial view of Satan’s binding.

None of these New Testament passages, then, are truly parallel to the binding of Satan because none of them portray the kind of absolute confinement described in Rev 20:1–3. For this reason, these cross-references fail to bring any clarity to the meaning of John’s vision and therefore fail to provide evidence that the millennium began with the first-century ministry of Christ.

Conclusion

Hundreds of years before the first coming of Christ, Satan was “roaming about on the earth and walking around on it” (Job 1:7), and now, hundreds of years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan still “prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8). His ultimate fate is sealed, but the devil is not currently bound and sealed in the abyss as described in Rev 20:1–3. As Saucy explains:

All attempts to apply this picture to the present period, either as a limitation of Satan’s deceptive power on believers or his inability to prevent the spread of

112 More specifically, the “short time” in Rev 12:12 consists of the three and a half years in the second half of the Tribulation (Rev 11:2–3; 12:6, 14) (Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 104). Beale denies that the “short time” of Rev 12:12 and the “short time” of Rev 20:3 are identical or synchronous, arguing instead for a temporal overlap in which the “short time” of 20:3 is the final stage of the “short time” in 12:12 (The Book of Revelation, 993). The problem is that this makes the “short time” of three and a half years (12:12) much longer than the “long era” of a thousand years (Rev 20:1–6) (Powell, “Progression versus Recapitulation,” 104). As Powell notes, “This overly symbolic approach strips the designations of time of all temporal significance….Whatever the merits are of literal versus symbolic interpretation of numbers and periods of time, the designation for a brief period of time (three and a half years) should certainly not exceed the designation for a long period of time (one thousand years)” (104–5).

113 An additional problem with the amillennial argument is that the scene in Revelation 12 takes place during the tribulation period rather than the present age. But since amillennialists reject this broader reading of the book of Revelation, it is easier to simply demonstrate that Rev 12:7–11 does not describe the same event or time period as Rev 20:1–3.
the gospel in the world, are difficult to harmonize with the language of the pas-
sage and other teaching of the New Testament. The text gives no indication that
the limitation on Satan is one of degree.\textsuperscript{114}

To the contrary, the confinement of Revelation 20 is absolute and therefore the bind-
ing of Satan is not a present reality. Instead, the thousand years in John’s vision rep-
resents a millennial kingdom which will take place between the present age and the
eternal state (cf. Isa 24:21–23), just as premillennialism teaches.

\textsuperscript{114} Robert L. Saucy, \textit{Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and
INERRANCY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH: 
WHAT DOES THE DEBATE MEAN 
TO THE PEOPLE IN THE PEWS?

Dennis M. Swanson  
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Biblical inerrancy is not just a scholarly debate amongst academics. It is a debate that reaches down to every church in every pew each week. Absent the doctrine, why preach the Bible at all? Biblical inerrancy is a singular and vital doctrine, and the imperative for expository preaching.

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When discussing the definition of inerrancy, one is reminded of the dialogue between Alice and Humpty Dumpty,

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.” “The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.” “The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

In the theological literature, Erickson presents the issue succinctly, “the term ‘inerrancy’ means different things to different people, who contend over which position properly deserves to be called by that name.”

While some theological arguments or fads come and go, the debate on inerrancy returns with almost cosmic regularity. To some, defending inerrancy is the classic example of a fool’s errand. University of North Carolina professor and regular contributor to Christianity Today Molly Worthen, in a recent book on evangelicalism states, “The inerrant Bible was a symbol burdened with the centuries-old tangle of

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1 Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass: Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (Champaign, IL: Project Gutenberg e-book, 2001), 83.
faith and reason and was beginning to crack under the weight.”

3 For Worthen and those of her view, the divisions within evangelicalism would be solved if the whole notion of inerrancy, regardless of how it is defined, was discarded. Defining inerrancy has vexed evangelicalism for nearly 140 years. The Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), which in purpose has existed to discuss, study, and defend inerrancy for most of its existence, has only one point to its doctrinal statement, “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs.” As to the intent and meaning of inerrancy, members of ETS are referred to “the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978).”

ETS further states,

The case for biblical inerrancy rests on the absolute trustworthiness of God and Scripture’s testimony to itself. A proper understanding of inerrancy takes into account the language, genres, and intent of Scripture. We reject approaches to Scripture that deny that biblical truth claims are grounded in reality.

In the most recent edition of the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, the authors on the entry for “Evangelicalism,” state,

Reformists are dissatisfied with the traditional doctrine of inerrancy and would substitute “infallibility” (Scripture infallibly leads us to Christ), “final authority in what it teaches” (but nowhere else), or “final authority in faith and doctrine” (but not necessarily in matters of science or history).

Beale makes the point most forcefully,

There is an erosion of the traditional evangelical notion of what it means for the Bible to be true, as formulated, for example, in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. This slow process of weakening the traditional, biblical view of the Bible’s truth is nothing less than the very identity of evangelicalism.

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1 Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 54. Worthen’s antipathy to inerrancy (of any form) is evident throughout this book. She calls the doctrine of inerrancy, “a comforting gauze that concealed a great deal of ugliness. It disguised the compromise and confusion that are unavoidable when moderns try to live by an ancient and often obscure text” (198).


5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.

Inerrancy and the Local Church

Since 1950, there have been over 500 English titles published wherein “inerrancy” has either been in the main title or a chapter heading. There are as many listings in the ATLA Serials database for titles containing “inerrancy” in the title. And, if you search the “source of all knowledge,” Google Books, entering “inerrancy” will yield 121,000 results. The debate over the meaning and scope of inerrancy has continued unabated and is the theme of this year’s annual meeting of ETS.

What actually constitutes inerrancy? How is it to be defined: broadly or narrowly? Olson, perhaps overstating his point, notes,

By the 1990’s a rough consensus was emerging among evangelical theologians that Scripture must be considered inerrant in some meaningful sense, but that its inerrancy must not be defined using modern scientific standards of accuracy.\(^\text{10}\)

In many circles “inerrancy” became something of a “litmus test” as Packer states,

> Shibboleths—test words indicating identity and allegiance (cf. Judg. 12:5–6)—are always suspect as obstacles to real thought, which indeed they can become. “Infallible” and “inerrant” as descriptions of the Bible function as shibboleths in some circles and so come under this suspicion in others. Individual definitions of both terms—minimizing, maximizing, and depreciating—are not lacking; it would be idle and irresponsible to speak as if there were always clarity and unanimity here.\(^\text{11}\)

Those “tests” invariably make their way from the academic and scholarly debate into the local congregation. While the academic debates on inerrancy wax and wane, the categories we detail in the following chart have remained relatively static.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View of Scripture</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inerrantist</strong></td>
<td>Views Scripture as inspired by God and thus is entirely without error.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maximalist</strong></td>
<td>Views Scripture as entirely reliable on matters of faith and practice, and largely reliable on ancillary subjects such as history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimalist</strong></td>
<td>Views Scripture as generally reliable in matters of faith and practice; although even in these matters it can be culturally dated or biased. Scripture cannot be considered as a primary source in history or ancillary subjects.</td>
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\(^\text{10}\) Roger E. Olson, “Bible/Scripture,” in The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 155. The idea that there was even a “rough consensus” (whatever that might mean) among evangelical theologians on this issue seems rather far-fetched.

The main categories for evangelicals: Inerrantists and Maximalists, are occasionally hard to distinguish as the line between the two undulates and definitions occasionally become muddled. However, even within the Inerrantist position there is another spectrum or set of categories. We can illustrate Categories of inerrantists with the following chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Inerrantist</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classic</strong></td>
<td>Based on the arguments of A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, these are the classic statements of a “verbal plenary inspiration” position generally articulated in the Princeton tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidentialist</strong></td>
<td>Views inerrancy as defensible on the basis of “proof.” Opponents to inerrancy would collapse under the weight of evidence supporting biblical statements on history and science.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicagoan</strong></td>
<td>Beginning with the formation of ETS and culminating in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy; sought to define and affirm inerrancy in a manner that crossed theological and hermeneutical boundaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hermeneutical</strong></td>
<td>Views inerrancy as bound together with the Grammatical-Historical (or some close variation) method of hermeneutics. The overlay of any other method onto Scripture is a de facto denial of inerrancy. Ipsissima Verba, particularly in gospel studies, is usually affirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical</strong></td>
<td>Views inerrancy as independent of hermeneutical method. Literary critical methodologies are legitimate to assist in interpretation, but are illegitimate when employed to determine authenticity. Ipsissima Vox, particularly in gospel studies, is usually affirmed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The current debate within evangelical inerrantists is largely between those holding a “classic” position and those holding something closer to the “critical” position.

The modern debate about inerrancy really begins in the nineteenth century as the inroads of rationalism and new scientific theories related to the age of the earth and the origins of man—diametrically opposed to the biblical accounts—were being formed and articulated. These theories increasingly made holding to traditional biblical inspiration and inerrancy untenable for the increasingly liberal wing of theological thought.

The debates in a more formal setting were between the Princeton theologians A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield against mainly Charles Briggs. In the newly created journal The Presbyterian Review (a journal with joint editorial responsibility between
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Princeton and Union Theological Seminary’s and their opposing views on inerrancy). Hodge and Warfield, made the following declaration,

During the entire history of the Christian theology the word Inspiration has been used to express either some or all of the activities of God, cooperating with its human authors in the genesis of Holy Scripture. We prefer to use it in the single sense of God’s continued work of superintendence, by which, His providential, gracious, and supernatural contributions having been presupposed, He presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of rendering that writing an errorless record of the matters He designed them to communicate, and hence constituting the entire volume in all its parts the Word of God to us.12

Hodge and Warfield then proceed throughout their article to define and defend the concept that would be known as “verbal plenary inspiration.” They concluded by stating,

The legitimate proofs of the doctrine, resting primarily on the claims of the sacred writers, having not been rebutted by valid objections, that doctrine stands doubly proved. Gnosis gives place to epignosis—faith to rational conviction—and we rest in the joyful and unshaken certainty that we possess a Bible written by the hands of man indeed, but also graven with the finger of God.13

Within evangelicalism this classic position remains dominant, but increasingly is being challenged.14 In Five View on Biblical Inerrancy, R. Albert Mohler presented what he called the “Classic Position,” largely an updated presentation of the Hodge-Warfield construct and the Chicago Statement. He stated, particularly as inerrancy applies to the church,

The affirmation of biblical inerrancy is necessary for the health of the church and for our obedience to the Scriptures. Though necessary, it is not sufficient, taken by itself, to constitute an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Evangelicals must embrace a comprehensive affirmation of the Bible as the Word of God written. In the end, inspiration requires inerrancy, and inerrancy affirms the Bible’s plenary authority. The Bible is not inerrant, and thus the Word of God; it is the Word of God, and thus inerrant.15

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In responding to Mohler, Kevin J. Vanhoozer states,

The questions I’ve raised about Mohler’s “classic” doctrine of inerrancy are not questions about the truthfulness of Scripture. They are rather about the adequacy of the category “classic doctrine of inerrancy” and the overconfident conflation of affirming inerrancy with certain types of interpretation . . . I think we must do more than call people to hold onto inerrancy: we must first define it, and then distance ourselves from its interpretive abuses.16

Vanhoozer, an ETS member who affirms inerrancy, is one of a growing number of evangelical inerrantists who are dissatisfied with the declamation of the doctrine in the classic manner.

In the debate with A. A. Hodge and Warfield, when it was Briggs’s turn at the pen, he stated,

*Verbal* inspiration is doubtless a more precise and emphatic definition, than *plenary* inspiration; but this very emphasis and precision imperil the doctrine of Inspiration itself by bringing it into conflict with a vast array of objections along the whole line of Scripture and History, which must be met and overcome in incessant warfare, where both sides may count on doubtful victories, but where the weak, ignorant, and hesitating stumble and fall into divers temptations and may make shipwreck of their faith.17

In this, Briggs was more correct than even he probably realized as the debate continued well past his life. But what does the debate mean in the local church? What is at stake, and why is this discussion important?

**Inerrancy and the Local Church**

In recent years an entire denomination was essentially split apart and a new group was formed over the issue of inerrancy.

The “resurgence” within the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980’s, where conservatives18 and inerrantists coordinated their efforts to gain control of the denominational machinery, was enormously disruptive in the lives of many local churches. An entire new group, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, was formed. Extolling what they perceived to be their “moderate” and “historic” Baptist position, they stated as one of their key doctrinal tenants:

16 Vanhoozer, “Response” 75–76.

17 C. A. Briggs, “Critical Theories of the Sacred Scriptures in Relation to Their Inspiration.” *The Presbyterian Review*, 2, no. 7 (July 1881): 551–52 [emphasis in original].

18 Often these were “political” and “social” conservatives who were perhaps more concerned with agenda items in those arenas rather than the theological concerns. In many respects this was also the era when the “Moral Majority” conservative, Republican-leaning politics became increasingly identified with evangelicalism.
We want to be biblical—especially in our view of the Bible. That means we
dare not claim less for the Bible than the Bible claims for itself. The Bible nei-
ther claims nor reveals inerrancy as a Christian teaching. Bible claims must be
based on the Bible, not on human interpretations of the Bible.19

It is interesting to compare this statement (and the longer doctrinal statement of the
CBF) with Charles H. Spurgeon’s lamentation of the state of the Baptist church in
England as he was fighting the same battle about a century earlier. He summarized
his position on the theological trends in his day as he stated:

Look at the church of the present day; the advanced school, I mean. In its midst
we see preachers who have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof.
They talk of the Lord Jesus, but deny his Godhead, which is his power; they
speak of the Holy Spirit, but deny his personality, wherein lies his very exist-
ence. They take away the substance and power from all the doctrines of revela-
tion, though they pretend still to believe them. They talk of redemption, but they
deny substitution, which is the essence of it; they extol the Scriptures, but deny
their infallibility, wherein lies its value; they use the phrases of orthodoxy, and
believe nothing in common with the orthodox.20

It seems indisputable that evangelicalism is moving into a new phase of the
inerrancy debate. The discussion is moving away from various “objections along the
whole line of Scripture and History.”21 The emphasis is moving away from individual
problem or proof passages to issues of genre and hermeneutics.22 As these discus-
sions, definitions, and defenses continue at an increasing pace, D. A. Carson’s obser-
vation from the last major phase is worth remembering:

A high view of Scripture is of little value to us if we do not enthusiastically
embrace the Scripture’s authority. But today we multiply the means for circum-
venting or dissipating that authority. I am not here speaking of those who for-
mally deny the Scripture’s authority: it is only to be expected that they should
avoid the hard sayings and uncomfortable truths. But those of us who uphold
the thorough truthfulness of God’s Word have no excuse.23

19 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. “Frequently Asked Questions.” http://www.thefellow-

20 Charles H. Spurgeon. “The Form of Godliness without the Power,” in The Metropolitan Taber-
nacle Pulpit; Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon in the Year 1889. (reprint, Pasadena,

21 Ibid.

22 See Kevin J. Vanhoozer’s contribution “Augustinian Inerrancy: Literary Meaning, Literal Truth,
and Literate Interpretation in the Economy of Biblical Discourse,” in Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy, J.
Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, gen eds., Counterpoints in Bible and Theology Series, Stanley N. Gundry,

23 D. A. Carson, Collected Writings on Scripture. Compiled by Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton,
IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 106. This article first as “Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,”
Christian Smith in his *The Bible Made Impossible* laments a Biblicism and the promulgation of “how to” books based on the Bible. Some of Smith’s criticisms are certainly valid. Supercilious works purporting to teach a “biblical” truth can instead undermine a layperson’s trust in the Scripture, especially when those “how to” type of books fail. For example, does anyone really believe that Dan 1:8–13 is properly extrapolated into a comprehensive weight loss and healthy eating paradigm as Rick Warren does? Smith’s larger criticism of “Biblicism,” by which he means an affirmation of inerrancy, is more pointed, he states,

Christians, perhaps especially biblicist Christians, are “all over the map” on what the Bible teaches about most issues, topics, and questions. In this way, the actual functional outcome of the biblicist view of scripture belies biblicism’s theoretical claims about the Bible. Something is wrong in the biblicist picture that cannot be ignored.

What Smith postulates is that inerrancy, what he calls biblicism, cannot be true because there are so many diverse interpretations of the Bible, even among inerrantists, that this method of understanding the nature of Scripture is self-defeating. In this regard Smith asks a question that virtually every Christian asks at some point in his early exposure to biblical instruction, “Why do good men disagree?” He calls it the problem of “pervasive interpretive pluralism.” He states,

So the question is this: if the Bible is given by a truthful and omnipotent God as an internally consistent and perspicuous text precisely for the purpose of revealing to humans correct beliefs, practices, and morals, then why is it that the presumably sincere Christians to whom it has been given cannot read it and come to common agreement about what it teaches? I know of no good, honest answer to that question. If the Bible is all that biblicism claims it to be, then Christians—especially who share biblicist beliefs—ought to be able to come to solid consensus about what it teaches, or at least on most matters of importance. But they do not and apparently cannot.

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26 Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible*, 26 (italics in original).

27 Ibid., (italics in original). This is often an argument that Catholicism uses against Protestantism. That is, absent the church as a controlling factor in the interpretation and application of Scripture, or the *Magisterium*, then Protestantism splits and splinters and a person is left with no sure guide as to what to believe. Smith apparently accepted this apologetic and subsequent to the first edition of *The Bible Made Impossible*, converted to Catholicism.
Smith calls pervasive interpretive pluralism the factor that discredits biblicism, or better, inerrancy. 28 “The undeniable fact that entrenched, ubiquitous disagreements about what scripture teaches on most issues, large and small, represents a fatal blow to biblicism.” 29

However, disagreements over “issues” have continued through church history and are hardly unique to the Reformation and post-reformation era. For instance, regarding the mode of baptism even John Calvin stated,

But, whether the person being baptized should be wholly immersed, and whether thrice or once, whether he should only be sprinkled with poured water—these details are of no importance, but ought to be optional to churches according to the diversity of countries. Yet, the word “baptize” means to immerse, and it is clear that the rite of immersion was observed in the ancient church. 30

The problem of interpreting the Bible and then actually applying it to the modern situation is always challenging. As McDermott states, “Because evangelicals believe that God’s message for the church is applicable to every age, there has been a tendency to apply apparently time-bound passages by isolating the universally valid principle behind the text in order to find its equivalent present-day cultural clothing.” 31 As Krieder states,

Evangelicalism is not monolithic. It never has and never could be. It has always been diverse. There are a variety of ways people who respect the Bible read the Bible. Pervasive interpretative pluralism is evidence of the fallibility of biblical interpreters. The Bible is not self-interpreting; it must be read. It does not speak for itself; it must be read. It does not accomplish the purpose for which it was given unless it is read. And when it is read, it is read by human eyes within human bodies situated in a particular culture in time and space. 32

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28 While Smith states his position “does not question the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Bible” (viii), his definition of biblicism, by which he means, “a theory about the Bible that emphasizes together its exclusive authority, infallibility, perspicuity, self-sufficiency, internal consistency, self-evident meaning, and universal applicability” (ibid), makes it clear that the traditional doctrine of inspiration and inerrancy is exactly the target of his attack. His work, and Worthen’s Apostles of Reason, are currently bookends of the literature of the Maximalist position.

29 Ibid., 67.


If a text speaks to a situation or circumstance which no longer exists, how is that passage made “profitable” to the modern Christian? For instance, in Paul’s epistles he has several discussions of how slaves who are also Christians are to live. Since slavery has been essentially abolished, how are those passages to be applied today? After a rather impassioned discussion on the subject of slavery (and rather missing the point in the differences between the institution of slavery in the Roman empire vis a vis the race-based slavery of the American South, Daniel Akin then applies Titus 2:9–10 to the realm of the employer-employee relationships.33 While the “employer-employee” application may be a useful model, or “good and necessary inference,” it still is not the exact situation that the text is addressing.

When these issues are not precisely addressed, especially in preaching, the person in the pew can be confused by a lack of consistency in both interpretation and application of the Scripture.

This debate even touches the most basic issue facing the average Christian in the pew; that is, “What Bible version should I use?” In discussing Bible translation, Leland Ryken states, “The evangelical Protestant theology of inspiration has traditionally been espoused verbal or plenary (“complete, full”) inspiration of the Bible. This view holds that God inspired not only the thoughts of biblical writers but their words.”34 After quoting several notable adherents of the classic position, he then goes on to state,

The application of the doctrine of verbal inspiration to Bible translation should be obvious: If the words rather than just the thoughts of the Bible are inspired by God, it is the words that a translation should reproduce.35

And finally,

It is my belief that an essentially literal translation is congruent with the doctrine of verbal or plenary inspiration. Contrariwise, the preoccupation with dynamic equivalent Bibles is with the thoughts of Scripture, with no priority assigned to the words. I come to the unwelcome conclusions that many evangelicals who theoretically espouse the doctrine of verbal or plenary inspiration—who reject the position of theological liberalism that the Bible contains primarily the thoughts of God—are betrayed by their very choice of a dynamic equivalent translation into the position that they claim to reject.36

35 Ibid., 133.
36 Ibid., 134–35.
Conclusion

2014 is the one-hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of World War I, perhaps the worst war in terms of carnage and destruction in human history, while at the same time probably being the most preventable and unnecessary war in history. Most thought the war would be over within a few months, by Christmas 1914 at the latest. On Christmas 1914, unofficial “ceasefires” occurred and there was widespread fraternizing along the front lines.\(^{37}\) Soldiers of both sides got together to celebrate the season, play soccer (for the non-American, football), and generally enjoy camaraderie.

The commanding officers on both sides issued orders against this sort of activity in the future as it was viewed as “diminishing the fighting spirit” of the troops.

The inerrancy debate has seen significant “fighting spirit” and as an inerrantist I can appreciate both the need and necessity to “fight” for this vital doctrine; however, I also agree with Carson, who wrote:

While I fear that evangelicalism is heading for another severe conflict on the doctrine of Scripture, and while it is necessary to face these impending debates with humility and courage, what is far more alarming is the diminishing authority of the Scriptures in the churches. This is taking place not only among those who depreciate the consistent truthfulness of Scripture but also (if for different reasons) among those who most vociferously defend it. To some extent we are all part of the problem; and perhaps we can do most to salvage something of value from the growing fragmentation by pledging ourselves in repentance and faith to learning and obeying God’s most holy Word. Then we shall also be reminded that the challenge to preserve and articulate a fully self-consistent and orthodox doctrine of Scripture cannot be met by intellectual power alone, but only on our knees and by the power of God.\(^{38}\)

Biblical inerrancy is not just a scholarly debate amongst academics; it is that, but it is a debate that reaches down to every church and every pew each week; whether the preacher affirms, denies, or even ridicules the concept of inerrancy. Absent the doctrine of inerrancy, why preach the Bible at all?\(^{39}\) Biblical inerrancy is a singular and vital doctrine; it is, as MacArthur states, the imperative for expository preaching. In the first article of the first issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, he stated,

Inerrancy demands an exegetical process and an expository proclamation. Only the exegetical process preserves God’s Word entirely, guarding the treasure of


\(^{39}\) A recent op-ed piece in a local newspaper by a pastor who calls himself “Preacher Johnson” states this simply and most clearly, “An errorless scripture is essential to Christianity. If we can point to one verse and claim an error, then how can we point to any verse with a certainty of truth?” Middlesboro Daily News Online, http://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/thats-not-what-bible-says-294018.html (accessed 11 January 2015).
revelation and declaring the meaning exactly as He intended it to be proclaimed. Expository preaching is the result of the exegetical process. Thus, it is the essential link between inerrancy and proclamation. It is mandated to preserve the purity of God’s originally given inerrant Word and to proclaim the whole counsel of God’s redemptive truth.40

As Holland states, “This doctrine is not merely for scholastic conversation; rather it provides authority and integrity to our proclamation of the gospel.”41 Christian Smith and others who reject inerrancy often advocate a rather nebulous “viewing Scripture through the lens of Christ”42 or to use a phrase from the 1970’s, “salvational reliability.”43 However, if as a recent Newsweek article proclaimed the Gospel accounts only contain about 15 verses that reasonably reflect Christ’s words,44 what value is the “Christocentric lens” and how can the salvation plan detailed in the Scripture possibility be validated?

The inerrancy of Scripture: its declaration, defense, and demonstration is more than a scholarly debate; it is the central to the Christian life and the debate reverberates in the pew. As the concluding section of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy affirms:

We are conscious too that great and grave confusion results from ceasing to maintain the total truth of the Bible whose authority one professes to acknowledge. . . . If this is not seen and if for the time being basic evangelical doctrine are still held, persons denying the full truth of Scripture may claim an evangelical identity while methodologically they have moved away from the evangelical principle of knowledge to an unstable subjectivism, and will find it hard not to move further.45

42 Smith, The Bible Made Impossible, 98.
THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN PAUL’S EPISTLES

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The term “kingdom” is used sparingly by Paul, but there are important truths concerning the kingdom in his letters. For Paul, Jesus is the center of God’s kingdom plan and one must believe in Him to inherit the kingdom. As for its nature, the kingdom of Jesus the Messiah is future and earthly from Paul’s standpoint in history, yet there are kingdom truths that apply to Christians in this age before Jesus returns and the kingdom is established. Paul also explains the necessity of a kingdom reign of Jesus, the Last Adam, before the eternal state commences.

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Compared to the gospels, references to the kingdom in Paul’s letters are considerably less. As Douglas Moo points out, “Paul does not often refer to the kingdom of God.”¹ In Paul’s writing there are fourteen direct references to God’s “kingdom.”² This compares with 121 references to “kingdom” in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These Pauline references are Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5; and 2 Tim 4:1, 18. These few references, however, do not mean the kingdom is insignificant to Paul. Kingdom truths are located in his writings.

When Paul uses the term “kingdom” he does not define it, indicating that his audiences probably had prior knowledge about its meaning.³ Several of Paul’s references indicate who will not enter God’s kingdom. For example, Paul states that “the

² See Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim 4:1, 18.
³ In regard to Paul’s sole mention of “kingdom” in Romans with Rom 14:17, Yarbrough notes, “The fact that Paul can use the expression with no introduction or explanation suggests that both for him and
unjust will not inherit God’s kingdom” (1 Cor 6:9). Galatians 5:21 and Ephesians 5:5 declare that people who practice ungodly behavior will not have an inheritance in God’s kingdom. In addition, Paul says that those who worked with him were “co-workers for the kingdom of God” (Col 4:11). These verses reveal a strong connection between the kingdom and soteriology.4 One must be saved and evidence righteous behavior to enter the kingdom. On the other hand, those who are characterized by evil deeds show that the kingdom does not belong to them. These truths do not indicate that salvation or kingdom entrance is based on works, but they show that, by faith, kingdom citizens have the power of the New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives bringing forth righteous behavior.5

Also, for Paul, the heart of the kingdom program is the resurrected Jesus who is the “descendant of David” (Rom 1:3; cf. 2 Tim 2:8). Thus, any kingdom truths in Paul are ultimately tied to Jesus the Messiah who brings fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant (see 2 Sam 7:12–16) over the course of His two advents.

But is there anything in Paul’s letters that reveals his views on the nature and timing of the kingdom? Was his concept of the kingdom spiritual or physical, or both? Was the kingdom present or future? Much debate surrounds these questions. Our understanding is that Paul’s ideas on the kingdom are consistent with those found earlier in the gospels and Acts. The kingdom of God will come in the future after the return of Jesus.6 Christians are positionally related to the King and His kingdom and are to exhibit kingdom righteousness in their lives. In this sense Christians in this age are related to the kingdom. Yet the kingdom and reign of Jesus the Messiah await the future.

The futurity of the kingdom is stated explicitly on several occasions. For example, in 1 Thess 2:12 Paul stated, “We encouraged, comforted, and implored each one of you to walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”7 With 2 Thess 1:5 Paul declared, “It is a clear evidence of God’s righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God’s kingdom, for which you also are suffering.” The current experience of the Thessalonians was “suffering.” But it is this suffering that makes them worthy of the “kingdom” they will be entering. Kingdom follows suffering. As Furnish notes, Paul “focuses on the eschatological future, assuring believers that through their sufferings God is qualifying them to enter that coming kingdom.”8


5 Vickers aptly notes that the fruit of the Spirit is linked to the kingdom: “It could justly be called the ‘fruit of the kingdom’” (Ibid., 58). In my estimation this is true because of the close connection between the New Covenant and the kingdom.

6 See Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, 857, n.40.

7 According to Green, “Paul here speaks about the future of this kingdom, the time when God’s glory will be revealed.” Gene L. Green, The Letters to the Thessalonians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 138. Emphasis in original.

Second Timothy 2:12 also presents the kingdom as future. Paul does not mention the term, “kingdom,” but he does indicate that faithful endurance by Christians now will lead to a future reign in Jesus’ kingdom—“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.” This present age is characterized by trials, but for those who endure the kingdom is their reward. The future tense used here shows that a kingdom reign was not the current experience of his readers but, instead, will be a reward for enduring.9 This present age is one of enduring hardship for the sake of Jesus. If this occurs, then reigning with Jesus will result when His kingdom begins.10

Then, in 2 Tim 4:1, Paul says, “I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.” Here Paul links the “kingdom” with Jesus’ “appearing.” Since Jesus’ “appearing” is future, “His kingdom” is future as well. This is soon followed by: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever! Amen” (2 Tim 4:18). Paul refers to the Lord’s “heavenly kingdom” as future and something the Lord “will” (future) bring him to. Paul did not view himself as presently in the kingdom. He longed, though, for the day when the Lord would take him there. Farnell is correct that “in the epistles, the dominant teaching of the ‘kingdom of God’ centers on a future kingdom and not a present one.”11

The Future Reign of the Saints (1 Corinthians 4 and 6)

First Corinthians has the most kingdom information of any Pauline epistle.12 Our focus here is on chapters 4 and 6. In 1 Cor 4:8 Paul addressed the pride of the Corinthians: “You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.” The Corinthians were acting like they had arrived, that they were in God’s kingdom, reigning already. As Hughes, puts it, “In 4:8, the Corinthians were already reigning in a kingdom of their own making.”13 But Paul, with sarcasm, mocked their attitude. He played along and said that they had become “filled” and “rich.” He then said, “You have become kings without us.” Paul then switched back to reality by telling them, “I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.” He then contrasts this with his own experience of suffering. So contrary to how the Corinthians were acting, they were not kings and they were not

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9 Knight points out, “The future tense of συμβαλλόμενων refers to an end-time situation that comes after the responsibility of the present tense ὑπομίνημεν has ceased, since this state of existence for Christians has ended.” George W. Knight III, The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 405.


reigning already. It would be nice if they were reigning. In fact, Paul says he wishes that he and others were reigning too. As Knight observes, “Paul criticizes those who think and act as if they are already reigning with Christ. He wishes that it were so.”

This shows that Paul did not view himself or his readers as reigning in the kingdom. And this verse should be a warning to kingdom views that assert that this age involves a kingdom reign of the saints. That contradicts Paul’s message here.

Later in the chapter, Paul challenges and contrasts his ministry with those who were arrogant. All they had were words (1 Cor 4:19), but Paul had the power of the kingdom as his source: “For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20). While the reign of the Messiah and the saints had not begun yet, Paul possesses the power of the Holy Spirit that can transform lives. This is evident in what he said earlier in 1 Cor 2:4–5: “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” This kingdom power, no doubt, will manifest itself in the characteristics of “righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (see Rom 14:17).

In 1 Cor 6:1–11, Paul addressed lawsuits among Christians. He uses truths concerning the future kingdom of God and then applies them to a present situation. With verse 1 Paul rebukes those who “dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints.” Paul is disappointed that some Christians were going to the state with their problems instead of settling matters within the people of God. To counter this approach he says, “Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?” (1 Cor 6:2–3).

Here Paul appeals to a coming eschatological truth that the saints will judge the world and the angels. This should have practical implications for lawsuits among Christians. Paul’s point is this—since Christians are destined to judge the world and angels, certainly they should be able to solve personal issues among themselves. This is an opportunity for citizens of the kingdom to apply kingdom principles to their lives now. In this sense the future should impact the present. As Ciampa and Rosner rightly note, “From the perspective of the everlasting kingdom, the Corinthian litigation is ‘trifling’ . . . and totally insignificant.”

Also note that Paul views the activity of judging the world and angels as future—“the saints will judge the world.” The saints are not currently judging or reigning in Christ’s kingdom because that is a future event associated with Jesus’ second coming. Some theologians hold the view that the saints are already reigning with

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14 Knight, _The Pastoral Epistles_, 405.

15 This principle is found in other passages. Jesus explicitly promised positions of authority in Rev 2:26–27 and 3:21. When Christ returns to earth and establishes His kingdom Rev 20:4 states, “Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them.”


17 Ibid.
Christ now but this verse is evidence against that. If the saints are not ruling over angels then we can know that the kingdom awaits the future.

With 1 Cor 6:9 Paul states that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Then after giving a list of those who practice certain sinful activities, he states that these kinds of people will not inherit the kingdom of God (10–11). The concept of “inheritance” in the Bible often refers to future rewards for the people of God (Col 1:12; 1 Pet 1:4). As Yarbrough points out, “By connecting inheritance with the kingdom, Paul indicates that he is using ‘kingdom’ in its eschatological sense.”

Paul’s point is that when the kingdom of God comes in the future those who act wickedly will not enter or participate in it. Thus, 1 Cor 6:1–11 has important implications for the kingdom program. It tells us that (1) the kingdom is future; (2) the future kingdom should impact how we live today; and (3) unbelievers will not inherit the kingdom.

**The Kingdom of the Son (1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 50)**

The main topic of 1 Corinthians 15 is the resurrection. Yet, this chapter also intersects with the kingdom. Some view this chapter as evidence that Jesus’ kingdom reign is spiritual from heaven in this age, while others see it as evidence for a future kingdom reign of Jesus over the earth. Our view is the latter. First Corinthians 15 indicates an intermediate kingdom after the return of Jesus but before “the end” when Jesus presents the kingdom to God the Father and the eternal state beings. And this passage also tells us the Son’s role in regard to the kingdom program. The Son’s role, as commissioned by the Father, is to bring this wayward world back into conformity with God’s perfect will. When the Son completes His mission, which was originally tasked to Adam in Gen 1:26–28, He will hand over His successful kingdom to God the Father and the transition to the eternal state will commence.

**The Kingdom after the Return of Jesus**

A proper interpretation 1 Cor 15:20–28 depends upon several things including an understanding of key terms and quotations of OT passages. Paul begins by saying that Christ’s resurrection is “the first fruits of those who are asleep” (15:20). Since Jesus is raised from the dead, so too will those who are in Him. Then in 1 Cor 15:22–24 Paul declares:

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

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Here Paul gives a timeline of the “order” of the resurrection by pointing out three events and their relation to the kingdom. First, he says that Christ is “the first fruits” (v. 23a). This is a reference to the bodily resurrection of Christ. Christ’s resurrection is the pattern and the guarantee that the resurrection of others will occur. Second, “after that” there is a resurrection of “those who are Christ’s at His coming” (v. 23b). This second stage is future. When Jesus returns those who belong to Him will be resurrected. At least two-thousand years separates these first and second phases of the resurrection program. Third, Paul states, “Then comes the end,” when Jesus “hands over the kingdom to the God the Father” (24a). This period of “the end” appears to be another stage, a third phase in the resurrection program. To summarize, there are three stages of the resurrection according to 1 Cor 15:23–24a:

1. “Christ the first fruits”
2. “after that those who are Christ’s at His coming”
3. “then comes the end . . . .”

While there is not much debate concerning the first two stages, there is considerable disagreement concerning the “end” and whether this is a third stage of resurrection or not. Those who hold that there is an intermediate kingdom after the return of Jesus but before the eternal state believe that Paul’s words (“then comes the end”) indicate a significant period of time between events 2 and 3. An era exists between the resurrection of those at Christ’s coming and the “end” when Jesus hands the kingdom over God the Father. The “end” does not occur immediately after Jesus returns but occurs after the kingdom reign of Jesus. As Craig Blaising argues, “Christ’s coming marks the second stage, not the third (in which the end occurs).”

Those who do not agree with an intermediate kingdom of Christ after His second coming assert that “the end” follows immediately after Jesus’ coming. For them, “the end” occurs as a result of the second coming of Christ. There is no third stage of the resurrection program. And, thus, there is no room for an intermediate kingdom or millennium after the return of Christ. When Jesus returns and His people are resurrected, the end comes at that time and the eternal state begins.

So which understanding is correct? Our view is that Paul is telling of a three-stage resurrection program that leaves room for a kingdom reign between Jesus’ return and the “end,” the kind of kingdom that John speaks of in Rev 20:1–6. Let us explain.

First, Paul’s use of “order” (tagma) seems to hint at a progression of more than two events. While an “order” of events could apply to only two resurrections, more than two is likely. Also, a considerable gap of time certainly exists between the first and second resurrections. From our standpoint in history, at least two thousand years separates these two events. Paul refers to Christ as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection program.

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and then uses the temporal adverb *epeita* (“afterward”) to then discuss the resurrection of those who belong to Christ as His coming. Then, in what D. Edmond Hiebert has referred to as “the crux of the millennial issue,” Paul begins verse 24 with the indefinite phrase, *eita to telos* (“then comes the end”). The temporal adverb *eita* “likely implies an interval time between the coming of Christ and the end.” Thus, just as there is a considerable time gap between Christ’s resurrection and the resurrection of those who belong to Jesus (events 1 and 2), there will be a time gap between the resurrection of the people of God and the end when Jesus hands the kingdom over to the Father (events 2 and 3).

That such a gap exists is implied from the *epeita . . . eita* construction in 23b–24a which shows one event being followed by another. It is also supported by a similar *epeita . . . eita* formula earlier in the chapter. In 1 Cor 15:5–8 Paul lays out a chronological order of events concerning Jesus’ resurrection appearances. After stating that Jesus was raised on the third day (v. 4) he says,

and that He appeared to Cephas, then [*eita*] to the twelve. After that [*epeita*] He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then [*epeita*] He appeared to James, then [*eita*] to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

No doubt exists that Paul is offering a chronological progression of resurrection appearances, and that uses of *epeita* and *eita* reveal a progression of appearances. Verse 7 is particularly significant since, like 1 Cor 15:23b–24a, this verse also offers the *epeita . . . eita* formula and shows chronological progression with a time gap. Jesus appeared to James and then appeared to all the apostles. And in both cases the formula indicates a similar time gap:

1 Cor 15:7: *epeita . . . eita* indicates a time gap of days

1 Cor 15:23b–24a: *epeita . . . eita* indicates a time gap of which we now know includes thousands of years (at least two thousand—one thousand)

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22 Ibid., 230. Leon Morris states that “*Then (eita)* does not necessarily mean ‘immediately after.’ It indicates that what follows takes place at some unspecified time after the preceding.” Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 211.


24 Ciampa and Rosner point out that Christ appears to two individuals who are leaders of two groups. Jesus appears to Peter and then the group that Peter is the leader of—the twelve. Likewise, Jesus appears to James and then the “slightly enlarged group of apostles” related to him in Jerusalem (749).

25 The “one thousand” is taking into account the thousand-year period mentioned several times in Rev 20:1–10.
The fact that the *epeita . . . eita* formula indicates a gap of similar time in 1 Cor 5:7 (days) reveals the likelihood that the formula in 1 Cor 15:23b–24a also indicates a gap of similar time (many years). Remember, the main issue is whether the *epeita . . . eita* formula allows or indicates a time gap between the resurrection of those at the time of Jesus’ coming and the “end.” The evidence indicates that it does, not only from the immediate context of 1 Cor 15:22–24, but from a similar grammatical construction in 1 Cor 15:5–8.

In sum, 1 Cor 15:22–24 reveals a three-stage resurrection program with a gap of time between the second and third stages that allows for a considerable period of time for a kingdom reign of Jesus before the “end” comes.

The Son’s Mission from the Father

Not only does Paul give significant information about the kingdom in regard to the resurrection program, he also states how the kingdom program relates to the Son. As 1 Cor 15:24b–28 shows, the Father has a mission for Jesus, and when Jesus fulfills this mission a transition takes place in the kingdom program:

then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

Verse 24 tells us that when “the end” comes Jesus will hand the kingdom over to God the Father. So there comes a point when the kingdom reign of Jesus is followed by a handing of His kingdom over to the Father. *Some transition occurs.* This transition only happens, though, after the Son has “abolished all rule and all authority and power.” So Jesus must reign and stamp out all opposition and then the eternal kingdom can begin. Any authority or power that is opposed to God must be fully and finally dealt with. Paul uses two OT passages—Psalm 110 and Psalm 8—to reveal that he is referring to a future earthly reign of Jesus.

With 15:25 Paul says, “He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (25). The “must” means it is necessary that Jesus reigns. Paul’s wording in verse 25 is a reference to Ps 110:1–2 which states:

The LORD says to my Lord:
“Sit at My right hand
Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”
The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,
“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”
This allusion to Ps 110:1–2 is evidence that the “reign” of Jesus is a future earthly reign. The context of Psalm 110 is David’s Lord, the Messiah, sitting at the right hand of God for a session in heaven “until” He begins His earthly reign over His enemies from “Zion” in Jerusalem. In reference to Ps 110:1, the author of Hebrews says that Jesus is “waiting” at the right hand of the Father (see Heb 10:12–13). When the heavenly session is over, God installs His Messiah on the earth to reign over it. From our current historical perspective, Jesus is currently at the right hand of God the Father but this will be followed by a reign upon the earth. Thus, Jesus “must” reign from earth because Psalm 110 says this must happen. In Acts 3:21, Peter also uses “must” in regard to Jesus and His heavenly session before He returns to earth to restore everything:

whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.26

Peter’s point is that heaven must receive Jesus “until” the “period of the restoration of all things” occurs. This restoration has not occurred yet, but it will when Jesus returns to earth (see Acts 3:20). What Peter speaks of is similar to Paul’s point in 1 Cor 15:25.

Note also that there is a “reign” of Jesus. This “reign” involves more than the second coming event (see Rev 19:11–21). The second coming is a swift event but a “reign” involves considerable period of time. Jesus the Son and Messiah must have a sustained reign in the realm where the first Adam failed (see Gen 1:26, 28; 1 Cor 15:45).

With 15:27, Paul quotes Ps 8:6: “For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” Paul is interpreting Ps 8:6 both literally and christologically. The psalm originally refers to man’s right to rule God’s creation. So how does this apply to both mankind and Jesus? Corporate personality is in view here. Psalm 8 is addressed to man in a general sense, but since Jesus is the ultimate Man and last Adam, He represents man. As Mark Stephen Kinzer notes, “The psalm is read in both an individual and a corporate sense.”27

The use of Psalm 8 is further evidence that Paul is thinking of a future earthly reign of Jesus. Psalm 8 explains and expands upon Gen 1:26–28 and its truth that God created man to rule successfully over the earth. Since the last Adam, Jesus, must succeed from and over the realm where the first Adam failed, Jesus must reign over the earth. The Last Adam’s destiny is not to rule from heaven in a spiritual kingdom. Instead, He is to rule from and over the earth just like first Adam was supposed to do. But unlike Adam, Jesus will succeed. Those who place Jesus’ kingdom reign in this age from heaven over a spiritual kingdom are not giving justice to an important part of God’s kingdom program—which is for man to reign over the earth as God originally tasked him to do. Jesus as the ultimate man and representative of mankind will fulfill this task. A spiritual reign from heaven does not complete what God requires

26 Emphases are mine.
in Gen 1:26–28 and Psalm 8. God expects a successful reign over the earth and Jesus the Son will accomplish this task.

With verse 28 Paul declares that all things will be subject to Jesus, yet he notes that there is one exception—God the Father. The Father is the One who commissioned the Son to reign over the earth, so the Father is not subject to the Son. Paul then states that when everything has been subjected to Jesus, Jesus then willingly subjects himself to the Father so that the Father can be “all in all.” The language here finds a cultural parallel in a Roman emperor who sends a trusted general with the task of squashing and fixing a rebellion in the empire. The emperor would grant the full authority and force of Rome to the general who would act on his behalf. When the trusted general succeeded in his mission and vanquished the enemies, he would then return to the emperor, not to challenge the emperor, but to show his submission to him. The general acted with the full authority of the emperor and when victory occurs, he returns in victorious yet humble submission to the one who commissioned him.

This is similar to what Jesus does on behalf of the Father. The Father commissions Jesus to conquer and restore this fallen world on His behalf, and when Jesus accomplishes this task He then will subject himself to the Father. Jesus’ mission is accomplished and the Father is pleased with His reign. Every square inch of the universe has been restored. At this point the reign of Jesus is followed by the universal reign of God the Father. This does not mean that Jesus ceases to reign. Revelation 11:15 says Jesus “will reign forever and ever.” So as McClain notes, “This does not mean the end of our Lord’s regal activity, but rather that from here onward in the unity of the Godhead He reigns with the Father as the eternal Son.”28 Messiah’s kingdom is then blended into the Father’s universal kingdom. Jesus’ prayer, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10) is fully accomplished. Jesus’ kingdom does not end like earthly kingdoms do by defeat but by fulfillment of its mission.

Let us look even more closely at the statements that the Son “hands over the kingdom to the God and Father” (v. 24), and “the Son himself also will be subjected to the One [the Father] who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all” (v. 28). These statements indicate a distinction between the Son’s kingdom and the Father’s kingdom. Of course, these two phases of the kingdom plan work in perfect harmony. It is the Father’s will that the Son’s kingdom happen and succeed. It is the Son’s desire to fulfill the Father’s mandate for man to rule and subdue the world for God’s glory. Yet there is a distinction. It is during the Son’s reign that Jesus, the ultimate man and king, fulfills all the prophecies, covenants, and promises concerning God’s mediatorial kingdom program. When this occurs then the eternal kingdom of the Father commences. This truth again indicates the need for an era that is distinct both from this present age and the eternal kingdom. One should not simply assume that unfulfilled promises awaiting fulfillment will be fulfilled in the eternal state. In

doing so this would put fulfillment outside of the reign of Jesus the Messiah to whom the task of fulfillment belongs.\(^29\)

In sum, 1 Cor 15:20–28 teaches us that there are three phases of the resurrection program and that Jesus’ kingdom occurs between His return and the “end.” At the time of the third phase of God’s resurrection plan, which comes after the intermediate kingdom, Jesus will hand the kingdom over to God the Father. The Son fulfills the kingdom mandate given to man to rule over the earth, and when this occurs the transition to the Father’s eternal kingdom begins.

The grammar of 1 Cor 15:20–28 indicates a future reign of Jesus after His second coming to earth. Yet the context of 1 Corinthians also strengthens this understanding. As we saw, Paul viewed the kingdom reign as future in 1 Corinthians 4 and 6. With 1 Cor 4:8 he chided the Corinthians for thinking they were reigning already when they were not (“I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you”). And in 1 Cor 6:2–3 he stated that the kingdom reign of the saints involves judging angels, something that clearly was not happening in the present. A close connection exists between the kingdom reign of Messiah and the reign of those who belong to Messiah. So if Paul clearly places the kingdom reign of the saints in the future (which he does), this makes it likely that the kingdom reign of the Son described in 1 Cor 15:20–28 is future as well. Thus, what Paul has revealed earlier in 1 Corinthians must help inform what he is claiming later. Hence, both grammar and context indicate a futuristic understanding of Jesus’ reign in 1 Corinthians 15.

Inheriting the Kingdom (1 Cor 15:50)

Paul spends much of his discussion after 1 Cor 15:20–28 on the nature and necessity of a physical resurrection of believers. He then returns to the topic of the kingdom in verse 50: “Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” This is not a claim that physical bodies do not exist in the kingdom of God or that believers are only spirits. He has already explicitly affirmed the resurrection of the body (see Rom 8:23). Instead, his point is that human beings in their fallen, perishable bodies cannot inherit God’s imperishable glorious kingdom.

How does this relate to the kingdom? Paul already discussed the kingdom earlier in the chapter (see 1 Cor 15:20–28). He referred to two phases of the kingdom plan. First, there is a kingdom of Jesus who must reign over the earth until all His enemies are defeated. After this, Jesus’ kingdom is handed over to the Father and

\(^{29}\) To offer an example, the amillennialist Anthony Hoekema rightly insisted that the promised harmony among nations promised in Isaiah 2:2–4 will occur in the future and is not being fulfilled in the church. See Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 205–06. But Hoekema put its fulfillment in the eternal state and not Jesus’ millennial kingdom. Yet the prophecies of Isaiah are linked with the “child” and “son” upon which “the government will rest on His shoulders” (Isa 9:6). This refers to Jesus. He is the one who will rule the nations. With Hoekema’s scenario the reign over the nations of Isa 2:2–4 would not take place under the direct reign of the Messiah in His millennial kingdom. But this goes against the message of Isaiah. It is better to view Isa 2:2–4 and other passages that are not fulfilled yet as coming to fulfillment in a coming intermediate kingdom under the direct rule of the Messiah.
merged into the Father’s kingdom. So what phase of the kingdom is Paul referring to in 15:50? The Father’s eternal kingdom is probably in view. Why? If the kingdom solely refers to Jesus’ kingdom, the conditions Paul offers in verse 50 do not fit with other biblical truths. This is true whether one holds a premillennial, amillennial, or postmillennial view of the kingdom. Premillennialism holds that there will be some people in non-glorified bodies who populate Jesus’ millennial kingdom that occurs after Jesus’ second coming. But Paul states that “flesh and blood” (i.e., non-glorified humans) cannot inherit the kingdom of God. On the other hand, both amillennialists and postmillennialists claim that Jesus’ messianic kingdom is in operation now. But Paul’s words do not fit their scheme either since non-glorified saints (whether dead saints in heaven or living saints on earth) are said to be part of Jesus’ kingdom today. But Paul says only glorified saints enter the kingdom of God. If he is referring to Jesus’ messianic/millennial kingdom then the amill/postmill view cannot be accurate since those camps claim that Christians currently participate in Jesus’ kingdom in a non-glorified state.

What does fit, though, is if Paul is referring to the Father’s eternal kingdom, or what we call the eternal state. When it comes to the Father’s eternal kingdom, everyone present must and will have glorified, imperishable bodies. With 1 Cor 15:51–57 Paul tells of how the resurrection plan relates to His readers. Since the believing Corinthians trusted in Christ, they will be part of the second phase of the resurrection plan—“those who are Christ’s at His coming” (1 Cor 15:23b). For them, the removal of death will take place and they “will be changed” (15:51b) and for them “this perishable must put on the imperishable” (15:53a).

While 1 Cor 15:50 offers all interpreters challenges, the kingdom Paul presents in this verse is a future kingdom, one in which all will have glorified bodies. Since no believers have been glorified yet, we can know that the kingdom Paul discusses is still future.

**Jesus’ Authority at the Right Hand of God (Ephesians 1:19–22)**

Ephesians 1:19–22 also has implications for the kingdom. Paul explains the authority that Jesus currently has at the right hand of God in heaven:

> and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.

Paul informs the Ephesians of the great power of God at work in them. This incredible power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at God’s right hand is the same power that God works “toward us who believe” (1:19). The “right hand” language in verse 20 is an allusion to Ps 110:1 which discusses God’s king as sitting at the right
hand of God. Jesus’ session at the right hand of God has certain ramifications according to Eph 1:20–22. First, it means that Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.” Hoehner asserts that the “all” is better translated “every” and means that “Christ’s position in the heavenlies is above every kind of power that exists.”30 The cluster of entities that Jesus is above involves every “rule,” “authority,” “power,” and “dominion.” There is debate as to whether these categories are human or angelic. If angelic, are they evil or good, or both? Hoehner claims that all four terms are in reference to evil angelic powers.31 If so, Jesus’ session at the right hand of God relates to evil spiritual forces. This view appears well supported by the context of Ephesians. Paul refers to “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). He also says that Christians struggle “against the rulers, against powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). So Paul is explicitly conscious of evil spiritual forces that oppose Christians in this age.

Second, Jesus’ session at the “right hand” of God means His name is above every other name for all time whether it is this present age or the age to come. There will never come a time where Jesus loses His position of authority. Third, Jesus being at the right hand of God means that God has subjected all things under Jesus. Paul relies on Ps 8:6 and man’s right to rule over the creation. With Jesus, the last Adam, there is nothing in creation that is outside His authority. And fourth, Jesus is “head” over all things related to the church.

With Eph 1:19–22 we see that Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of the Father where He shares the throne of deity with the Father in heaven. The Christian should be encouraged that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him with authority in heaven is the same power at work in his life.

**Relationship of the Kingdom to Today**

**(Romans 14:17 and Colossians 1:13)**

For Paul the kingdom is a future event. The Messiah who is exalted in heaven now will once again come to rule the world directly with His saints. But Paul also teaches present implications of the kingdom for Christians. For example, Rom 14:17 declares, “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” Also, Col 1:13 states: “For He has rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

At first glance, Rom 14:17 seems to contradict the connection between eating and drinking and the kingdom in the gospels.32 The context of Rom 14:17 concerns


31 “Hence, these powers most likely are angelic and evil and wish to rob us of our spiritual benefits.” Hoehner, 280.

32 For example, Smit observes, “At first sight, there can be no greater discrepancy, than between Paul’s claim in Rom 14:17, that the Kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but rather about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, and traditions found in the synoptic Gospels.” Peter-Ben Smit, “A Symposium in Rom. 14:17? A Note on Paul’s Terminology,” *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007): 43.
Christian liberty and instruction for Christians who disagree over matters like observance of days and eating unclean foods. Paul responds by highlighting the priority of “righteousness,” “peace,” and “joy” over observing days or which foods to eat. Spiritual characteristics are at the heart of the kingdom and it is these that the Corinthians should emphasize. But emphasizing these matters does not mean that the kingdom of God has nothing to do with the physical realm or that eating and drinking will not occur. Jesus stated that drinking from “the fruit of the vine” would take place in “the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:18). Paul wrote that the creation itself would one day be glorified (see Rom 8:19–23). So it is unlikely that Paul, in Rom 14:17, was promoting some Platonic understanding of the kingdom that is divorced from physical elements. Instead, he prioritizes the importance of righteousness, peace, and joy. If one gets these areas right, then the other issues will fall in line. So Paul is not discussing the nature of the kingdom as much as he is stressing what is most important in it. While food is necessary, the spiritual requirements of fellowship and harmony are what is most important. Paul’s readers should not act like Pagan hedonists who place physical pleasures and desires above love of others.

With Col 1:13 Paul teaches that Christians have been transferred from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God’s Son. Some say this indicates a present kingdom of Christ. Curtis Vaughan, for instance, claims that “kingdom” in this verse “is not to be interpreted eschatologically. It was for the Colossians a present reality.” Likewise, O’Brien claims that the “aorist tenses [ἵκανώσαντι, ἔρρυσατο, μετέστησεν] point to an eschatology that is truly realized.” Saucy, though, observes that the context of Col 1:13 “favors an eschatological meaning for the kingdom.” Verse 12 states, “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.” The term “inheritance” has eschatological overtones and may indicate that the kingdom reference in Col 1:13 is also future-oriented even though there are present implications. Thus, Saucy may be correct when he concludes, “Although the blessings of the salvation of the kingdom are present, it is difficult to see in Paul’s words any idea of a present kingdom of Christ in which believers share in his reign.” In response to O’Brien’s grammatical argument for Col 1:13, Farnell points out that the language of Colossian 1 is consistent with a futuristic understanding of the kingdom:

However, these verses may be easily understood as futuristic 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  

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36 Ibid., 105.
in the future kingdom, they also experience spiritual blessings while they await its appearance, as Col 1:14 goes on to stress. . . . 37

In sum, those who have believed in Jesus the King have been transferred from the realm of Satan to the authority of Jesus. They have a present relationship to His kingdom, even before it arrives. As McClain puts it, “We have been (aorist tense) transferred judicially into the Kingdom of our Lord even before its establishment.” 38

Paul does not view Christians as currently reigning with Jesus. In fact, Paul already chided the Corinthians for acting as if they already were reigning (see 1 Cor 4:8). Instead, Christians are positionally transferred to Christ’s kingdom but the actual establishment of the kingdom with the actual reign of Christ awaits His second coming. 39

The Kingdom and Israel (Romans 9–11)

Romans 9–11 is Paul’s treatise on God’s sovereignty and how this relates to the people of Israel. Paul emphatically denies that God has rejected His people Israel (see Rom 11:1). This cannot occur because of God’s “choice” and the fact that Israel is “beloved for the sake of the fathers” (11:28). Also God’s “calling” is “irrevocable.” There is coming a day when “all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). The timing of Paul’s words are important. Not only is Israel’s rejection of Jesus established but the church as an entity is well-established too. If there ever were a chance to declare that national Israel’s place in the plan of God has been forfeited or the church had replaced Israel, this was it. But instead Paul affirms Israel’s place in God’s plans.

Romans 9:4 is strategic as Paul declares certain truths concerning his “kinsmen” (v. 3). Even though Israel is in a state of unbelief Paul states that certain important things are still the present possession of Israel: “who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises.” Although Israel is not experiencing these things in their current state of unbelief, they have not been cut off from these matters. They still possess “adoption as sons” which shows that God’s fatherly relationship to them has not been forfeited. The “covenants” still belong to Israel. This must include the Abrahamic, Davidic, and New covenants. Israel is also related to the “temple service” and the “promises.” These issues such as Israel’s relationship with God, the covenants of promise, temple service, and the promises of God all have a direct relationship to the kingdom of God.

Romans 11:11–12 also has kingdom implications. After emphatically asserting that Israel has not stumbled permanently, he goes on to say that Israel’s stumbling and fulfillment have implications for the world:

38 McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, 435.
39 This would parallel what John said in Rev 5:9–10 where the people of God are said to be a “kingdom” even though the reign over the earth was still viewed as future. It would also parallel the truth that living Christians are citizens of heaven even though they currently are not in heaven yet (Phil 3:20).
I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

This reveals that this age is not the culmination of God’s plans. What has occurred is great but more is to come. Israel exists to bring blessings to the nations of the world (see Gen 12:2–3; Jer 4:1–2). And even with Israel’s “transgression” via unbelief, salvation has come to the Gentiles. But Paul also points out that Israel’s “fulfillment” leads to even greater blessings for the world. This “fulfillment” is linked with the salvation of all Israel and the return of Jesus the “Deliverer” (11:26).

So not only does Romans 11 speak of a future salvation of Israel at the time of Jesus’ second coming, it also indicates that national Israel’s salvation results in greater worldwide blessings. Paul affirms the truth that Israel’s restoration under the reign of the Messiah results in global blessings that go beyond what is taking place in the present age (see Isa 2:2–4; Amos 9:11–15). So while the term “kingdom” is not explicitly mentioned, this text affirms significant kingdom truths—namely God will restore Israel under Messiah and the world will be blessed to an even greater degree during that time.

**Conclusion**

While the kingdom theme is not as prominent in Paul’s letters as other sections of the NT, Paul still offers significant information about the kingdom program. For Paul the kingdom is future with present implications. Christians today are related to the kingdom and are to evidence kingdom righteousness in their lives even now. On the flip side, those who are characterized by wickedness are not qualified to enter it.40 Also, the kingdom reign of Jesus and His saints awaits His second coming. Jesus must reign in His kingdom over the earth. When He, as the Last Adam, succeeds in reigning from and over the earth, then His kingdom will transition to the kingdom of the Father and the eternal state will commence.

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40 Kee strikes the right balance between Paul’s view of a future kingdom with present implications: “The future kingdom of God . . . has a significant role in the thought of Paul. He asserts the qualities that characterize those who will share in the new circumstances when God’s rule takes on its encompassing role over God’s people and the world as a whole. That context will be characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. . . . Yet moral failures will result in disqualification for sharing in the kingdom.” Howard Clark Kee, *The Beginnings of Christianity: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Madison Square Park, NY: T&T Clark, 2005), 483.
Implications of the Kingdom in Acts 3:19–21

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The Messianic Kingdom is a subject which is given great importance in Scripture. Different theological systems debate the current status of this kingdom and its relationship to Israel. A neglected passage in this discussion is Acts 3:19–21. In order for a theological system to be accurate, it must incorporate Acts 3:19–21. This passage teaches that the Messiah’s kingdom is not present at this time, and awaits the future repentance of the nation of Israel, at which time Israel will turn to the Messiah and He will return to establish the kingdom.

Introduction

Acts 3:19–21 appears to teach that the end time events of the Messiah’s Second Coming and the establishment of His kingdom are in some way related to the national repentance and forgiveness of Israel. In addition, the context of Acts 3:19–21 seems to indicate that the promised kingdom will not come until that time. This understanding of Acts 3:19–21 also appears to match the expectations of both the Old Testament and non-canonical Jewish literature.

This article will begin by addressing Acts 3:19–21, examining its meaning in context. Then, the proposed interpretation of Acts 3:19–21 will be compared with the teaching of the Old Testament, as well as the common Jewish expectation of Peter’s day. Finally, this article will offer a reason for Luke’s authorial strategy in placing Acts 3:19–21 within the broad flow of Luke-Acts.

Peter’s Speech (Acts 3:19–21)

[19] Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; [20] and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, [21] whom heaven must receive until the
period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.¹

The passage in question belongs to the section which begins in verse 17.² In verses 17–18, after having rebuked his audience of Jews for killing the Author of life (v. 15), Peter acknowledges that it was out of ignorance that the Jews killed their Messiah. This act of ignorance was necessary to fulfill the Old Testament, which told of a suffering Messiah (cf. Luke 24:45–46; Acts 17:3; 26:22–23).³ This admission of the Jews’ ignorance was a considerable statement which, in the eyes of both Jew and Gentile, would have softened the accusation of guilt.⁴ Peter’s purpose in acknowledging the ignorance of the Jews and their leaders in killing their Messiah sets up his exhortation in verses 19–21.

“Therefore” (οὖν) in verse 19 provides a strong link to the preceding argument and points to verses 19–21 as the main application of Peter’s speech.⁵ In light of the fact that Israel crucified their Messiah in ignorance, they should “Therefore repent and return” (μετανοήσατε οὖν καὶ ἐπιστρέψατε). “Repent” (μετανοέω) is used in the Old Testament to refer to God relenting from an action,⁶ and in the New Testament it is used with more frequency to indicate human repentance, being especially popular in Luke’s writings.⁷ “Return” (ἐπιστρέφω) is a word which regularly occurs in relation to Israel’s repentance in the Old Testament (Deut 3:2; Isa 6:10; 31:6; Joel 2:12–13; Amos 4:6–11; Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7), and was also an idea linked with a Jewish understanding of the last days (Deut 4:30; Hos 3:5).⁸ Both words together function as a summary call for repentance.⁹ This summons to repentance is similar to Acts 2:38, where Peter also models the preaching of the Old Testament prophets by calling the nation to repent.

In Acts 2:38 and 3:19, Peter preaches repentance like the OT prophets calling Israel to return (see 3:19; cf. 5:31; 8:22). In the immediate context, the people of Israel must repent for their corporate responsibility for Jesus’ death (2:23); but in its fuller Lukan context, the summons to repentance is appropriate for all humanity, though, in the story world, Peter and his companions do not yet recognize this point (11:18).¹⁰

¹ All Scripture references used are from the NASB 1995 edition unless otherwise stated.
³ Ibid.
⁶ Amos 7:3; Jonah 3:9; Zech 8:14; Jer 38:19.
The call to repentance is followed by what is likely a purpose clause, “so that your sins may be wiped away” (εἰς τὸ ἐξαλειφθῆναι υμῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας). The word for “wiped away” (ἐξαλειφθῆναι) is used in Col 2:14 in reference to the wiping out of a debt or something owed. It was also used to refer to the washing off of ink upon papyri. What Peter has in mind here is a connection between repentance and the complete removal of sins. Although Israel had sinned in killing their Messiah, the removal of this sin was possible through repentance and turning to Him now as their King.

Not only would sins be erased, but Peter continues in verse 19, “in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (ὅπως ἂν ἐλθωσίν καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ κυρίου). “In order that” (ὅπως ἂν) is a common indicator of purpose in Acts. This is the second purpose given by Peter to persuade his Jewish brothers and sisters to repent. By using another purpose conjunction (ὅπως ἂν) instead of a καὶ + infinitive, this construction appears to be logically sequential to the forgiveness of sins.

The phrase “times of refreshing” (καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως) uses a unique word, “refreshing” (ἀνάψυξις), which in biblical literature occurs only here and in Exod 8:11 (LXX) with reference to the relief in Egypt after the cessation of the plague of frogs. This word can refer to relief of trouble, drying out a wound, or to cool by blowing. Conceptually, this idea of an eschatological age of relief has many parallels in Jewish thought. However, despite the Jewish tendency to equate this idea with the eschatological age, some argue that this phrase should be kept separate from eschatological considerations. Instead, it should be thought of as “moments of relief during the time men spend in waiting for that [final] blessed day,” thus communicating a spiritual refreshment in this age. Although this may be possible, in light of the Messianic context of the passage, it seems unlikely.

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11 Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 611. εἰς + τὸ often functions as an introduction to a purpose infinitive, however, it is also possible to see this as an infinitive of result. Either way, in this context the meaning is similar: repentance leads to the wiping out of sins.


13 Bock, *Acts*, 175. “In ancient times ink did not soak into the paper but remained on the surface, so removing writing was straightforward.”


15 Although there are no similar constructions in the NT, 1 Mac 12:35–36 and 4 Mac 8:12 have similar Greek constructions which seem to indicate a purpose which is linked to the main verb, yet logically dependent upon the preceding purpose. Therefore, here, it is likely the restoration is linked with repentance through the forgiveness of sins.


18 Ibid. 4 Ezra 7:75, 91, 95; 11:46; 13:26–29; 2 Bar 73–74; 1 En 45.5; 51.4; 96.3.

The context makes sense only if the ‘times of refreshing’ are the definitive age of salvation. The expression is undoubtedly apocalyptic in origin, as is the accompanying phrase ‘from the face of the Lord.’ The reference, then, is to the eschatological redemption which is promised to Israel if it repents. 

Additionally, an eschatological understanding matches the Jewish expectation found in 4 Ezra 11:46 which uses similar relief language to describe the Messianic Age. 

Further, contextual factors favor the phrase “times of refreshing” (καιροὶ ἀναψύξεως) to match the “the period of restoration” (χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως) in verse 21, which will be shown as readily identifiable as a description of the Messianic Age.

The second part of the purpose clause that began in verse 19 (ὅπως ἂν) continues in verse 20, “and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you” (καὶ ἀποστείλῃ τὸν προκεχειρισμένον υμῖν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν). The καὶ + subjunctive indicates an equal purpose, which is not to be separated in thought from the prior purpose in the latter part of verse 19. The sending of the Messiah and the “times of refreshing” are joined by one purpose conjunction, showing their mutual relationship. This provides further evidence for seeing the “times of relief” as connected to the future Messianic Age since the times of refreshment are connected with the coming of the Messiah.

The perfect passive participle “appointed” (τὸν προκεχειρισμένον) functions adjectivally here and emphasizes the status of being God’s choice. This word communicates special selection, and is later used of Paul’s special purpose in God’s plan (Acts 22:14; 26:16). The dative “you” (ὑμῖν) is likely a dative of possession and brings out the fact that this was the Jewish Messiah, He belonged to them. Thus, Peter’s argument focuses on the necessity of Jewish repentance so that their Messiah would be sent back. The contingency here is linked with the repentance and forgiveness of sins. Just as repentance leads to the erasing of sins, so repentance will lead to the return of the Messiah.

Peter continues in verse 21 by using a relative clause to describe the Messiah as the one “whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things” (ὅν δεῖ οὐρανὸν μὲν δέξασθαι ἄχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων). Many scholars have observed the conceptual ties found in this phrase with Ps 110:1, “Sit at My right

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25 Toussaint and Quine, “No, Not Yet,” 144.
hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” This connection is further bolstered by the fact that in Peter’s prior speech, where he previously called for the Jews to repent, he directly quoted Psalm 110 (see Acts 2:34–35). An allusion here in a similar context is not only permissible, but actually helps provide motivation for Jewish repentance. Peter’s allusion to Psalm 110 here seems to demonstrate that he understands the kingdom is not yet present, and is delayed until Christ comes back to rule.

The allusion to Psalm 110, as well as the grammar of this verse, imply that the Messiah will be in heaven “until the period of restoration of all things” (ἅχρι χρόνων ἀποκαταστάσεως πάντων), and then He will return. To what does “the period of restoration of all things” refer?

Some have argued for a cosmic restoration which is in process now and comes to an ultimate culmination when Christ returns. In this view, the refreshment of verse 19 is spiritual, and the restoration in v. 21 is currently in process, to be fully realized at Christ’s return. A similar idea during the New Testament era was the Stoic belief that a “golden age” would come through the purging of the universe by fire. Subsequent to this cataclysmic event would come the restoration. However, among the alternatives, it is far more likely that the meaning for “times of restoration” is found in the context of the Old Testament and Luke’s own writings.

Although the word here for “restoration” (ἀποκαταστάσεως) does not appear elsewhere in Scripture, the verbal cognate is used in Jer 16:15 in God’s promise to “restore” Israel to the land which was given to their fathers (cf. Jer 23:8; 24:6; Hos 11:11; Sir 48:10). Further, this verbal cognate appears in an interesting place—Acts 1:6, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” It is noteworthy that this question comes after forty days of being instructed concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). The disciples’ question demonstrates a belief that there remained a future restoration for the people of Israel, something that Jesus had apparently not corrected during the forty days of instruction. The question concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel uses the verbal form of the word for restoration in Acts 3:21 (ἀποκαθιστάνεις). In Luke’s writings, the rarity of these words prompts the reader of 3:19–21 to recall the question of 1:6, providing more insight into the answer of when the kingdom will come. Thus, Luke appears to tie 1:6 and 3:21 together through rare word use to help the reader understand that the “times of restoration” are equivalent to a kingdom for Israel.

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In view of the cognate usage in 1:6 and the text’s claim that the object of restoration is what all the prophets spoke about, the restoration of Israel is the likeliest interpretation. Israel’s restoration appears repeatedly in the biblical prophets (Amos 9:14; Ezek 39:25; Acts 1:6), a significant point here given that the restoration of what “the prophets” predicted (Acts 3:21).\textsuperscript{34}

Keener’s allusion to the prophets is an important point which necessitates discussion on the second half of verse 21. Peter explains that this restoration was something “about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time” (ὧν ἐλάλησεν ὁ θεὸς διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων ἀπ’ αἰῶνος αὐτοῦ προφητῶν). This phrase is unique to two places: here (3:21) and Luke 1:70.\textsuperscript{35} Luke 1:70 refers to the expectation of the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel through what was promised to David and Abraham. This will be covered in more detail in the next section, but for now it is sufficient to point out that Peter is claiming that what he says matches with what the prophets foretold. In other words, the Old Testament prophets are the basis for Peter’s eschatological understanding in Acts 3:19–21.

To summarize, Peter calls for corporate Jewish repentance so that the people would be forgiven and the Messiah would return and restore the kingdom to Israel. This is supported by the clear grammatical construction of 3:19–21, as well as Peter’s allusion to Psalm 110. Peter has likewise stated that his message aligns with what was taught by the Old Testament prophets. This article will now examine some of the prophetic writings upon which Peter based his theology, and examine if the prophetic understanding of the Messianic Kingdom corresponds to what Peter appears to promote here.

### The Old Testament Prophets

Acts 3:19–21 is similar to the calls to repentance found in the Old Testament. Peter calls for repentance so that the Lord would come for His people and restore them. This is quite similar to Hos 14:1–7, which calls for Israel to return to their God (v. 1) which will result in God’s healing and restoring His people (vv. 4–7). Similarly, Zech 1:3 petitions the people to turn to the Lord so that He would return to them. There seems to be an underlying notion in the prophets that for the Lord to prosper His people, Israel, there must be repentance which results in divine forgiveness (cf. Joel 2:12–13; Mal 3:7; cf. Tob 13:6). Due to space limitations, three passages will be discussed which particularly stress the eschatological repentance of Israel and the coming kingdom.

**Deuteronomy 4:30**

[30] When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice.

\textsuperscript{34} Keener, *Acts*, 2:1112.

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Although some commentators do not see this verse as eschatological,36 there is good reason to see the “latter days” (בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים) reference as picking up the eschatological theme found earlier in Gen 49:1 and Num 24:14.37 The distress in view here emphasizes the exile which would be caused by Israel’s future disobedience (v. 27). Deuteronomy 31:29 supports that this is what Moses had in mind by saying, “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”

What is most important in Deuteronomy 4, however, is that verse 30 includes an eschatological future for Israel which contains both exile as well as repentance. The word for “return” (שׁוב) carries the idea of repentance in this context.38 The LXX translates the Hebrew with the verb ἐπιστρέφω, the same verb which Luke records Peter using in Acts 3:19 in calling Israel to repentance.

Although this passage does not allude to a king or kingdom as such (not surprising since Israel did not even have a king at this point), it lays the foundation for an expectation of both exile as well as a national repentance in which the people would return to Yahweh their God.

Not to be overlooked here is the absence of any conditionality. The text is clear that it is not a matter of if Israel returns and obeys but when. Repentance is obviously a matter of free will, but the biblical witness is unanimous that the impetus to repent is something God himself will plant within his people in order to encourage and enable them to return to him and to the land (cf. Lev 26:40–45; Deut 30:1–10; Jer 31:27–34; Ezek 36:22–31).39

Hosea 3:4–5

[4] For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols. [5] Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days.

This section of Hosea speaks of a time that Israel will be without leadership and without sacrificial services. In the list of what will be missing from Israel, only “household idols” (רָפִים) are inherently evil. Everything else listed can be either good or bad depending on context. It seems proper then to interpret verses 4–5 in light of Gomer’s prohibition earlier in Hosea, meaning that Israel will be held back from both good and bad displays of religious affection (just like Gomer would be

39 Ibid., 128.
held back from any physical relationship with a man, even her husband). This period speaks of a time when Israel will have no temple and thus will be incapable of worshipping God or idols in it.

However, after this time of probation, Israel will “return” (וְשׁוּב) to Yahweh and to David their king. This passage includes the notion of end-time repentance of Israel, as well as adding a return to “David their king.” It would be wrong to assume that this is a general reference to submission to the Davidic monarchy. Rather, David is placed parallel with Yahweh, the object of Israel’s trembling. This has the markings of Messianic expectation, the one who will unite Israel (Hos 1:11) and bring peace to Israel’s authoritative structure.

Israel’s return to Yahweh will happen in the “last days,” which is the same expression found in Deut 4:30 (בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים). It is likely that Hosea is directly alluding to Deut 4:30. The combination of “return” (וְשׁוּב) and “latter days” (בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים) is unique to only these two passages, providing a strong intertextual link and a basis for the expectation of an Israelite repentance in the last days which will include a return to their king. This revival of the Davidic king appears to also be mentioned in Amos 9:11–15, where Amos says the Lord will restore the Israelite captives (v. 14) and return them to their land (v. 15). This restoration of the nation is clearly linked with the revivification of the king and kingdom (vv. 11–12).

Zechariah 12–14

The eschatological picture of Zechariah also argues for the expectation of a Jewish national repentance followed by the Messianic Kingdom. Zechariah 9–14 is especially instructive in this regard.

Zechariah 9–14 is commonly referred to the “pair” of burdens. Zechariah 9–11 deals primarily with the burden concerning the nations, while chapters 12–14 concern primarily Israel. A key component to Zechariah 12–14 is the significance of the Servant-Shepherd figure (12:10; 13:7). This article is primarily interested in the section which includes Israel’s repentance (12:10–13:1). This section is ordered in the following sequence: (1) the piercing of Yahweh’s servant, (2) national repentance and mourning, (3) the culmination of national and spiritual restoration.

The text states that God will pour out His Spirit upon David’s house and those who dwell in Jerusalem (Zech 12:10). This outpouring of the Spirit will result in the

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42 Garrett, Hosea, Joel, 104.
45 Klein, Zechariah, 362.
people looking to the divine Servant. This description of looking to the pierced Servant portrays Israel turning to the Messiah in faith.\textsuperscript{46} This repentance and turning to the Messiah will be accompanied by extraordinary mourning. Such mourning is referred to by Zechariah as similar to the mourning over the great King Josiah at the valley of Megiddo (2 Chron 35:22–25).\textsuperscript{47} The mourning will be so great, that each family will seclude itself to mourn in isolation (Zech 12:12–14).

This section concludes by stating that there will be a fountain of cleansing opened for David’s house and for Jerusalem (Zech 13:1). This will cleanse Israel of both their sin (Israel’s deviation from God’s commandments), as well as their impurity (Israel’s sanctified status before God).\textsuperscript{48} The restoration of Israel through Yahweh’s Servant envisioned in 12:10–13:1 is a theme brought out in Isaiah, where the individual Servant is said to be the one who brings back the corporate Servant (Isa 49:5).\textsuperscript{49} Zechariah explains that, God will pour out His Spirit upon Israel, they will turn to their Messiah in repentance, and a fountain of cleansing and atonement will be opened for them, resulting in their cleansing and restoration.\textsuperscript{50}

Zechariah 14 marks the climax of this restoration.\textsuperscript{51} This chapter draws together the immediate themes found in chapters 9–14 as well as the book at large. Zechariah 14 opens with a picture of turmoil surrounding Jerusalem, a picture which parallels the events found in Zech 12:1–9. After the nations come up against Jerusalem for battle, half of the city will be brought out of the exile amidst a terrible display of brutality which includes the raping of women, and the plundering of Israel’s possessions (Zech 14:2). However, Zechariah describes a shift of events in which the Messiah comes down to the Mount of Olives as Israel’s champion to save His people.\textsuperscript{52} The Savior’s arrival will result in a complete conquering of the peoples as well as a reinstatement of the kingdom. This kingdom, according to Zechariah, will involve the supremacy of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel, and the subjugation of the other nations such as Egypt (vv. 16–20).

Although much more could be said concerning Zechariah’s overall message, what concerns this article primarily is the link between the coming kingdom of Zechariah 14 and Israel’s repentance. Zechariah 12–13 supports the fact that Israel will initially reject their Messiah (12:10; 13:7–9a). However, God will pour out His Spirit upon Israel in a sovereign act and they will repent with great mourning and turn to Yahweh’s Servant and call upon the name of the Lord (12:10–14; 13:9).

The sequence depicted in Zech 13:7–9 shows Israel will suffer greatly, with a majority being cut off and perishing (v. 8). However, after this time they will turn


\textsuperscript{47} Fruchtenbaum, “The Little Apocalypse of Zechariah,” 258.

\textsuperscript{48} Klein, Zechariah, 373–74.

\textsuperscript{49} Robert L. Thomas, “The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God,” The Master’s Seminary Journal 8, no. 2 (Fall 1997):212.

\textsuperscript{50} Fruchtenbaum, “The Little Apocalypse of Zechariah,” 257.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 396.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 402. Klein observes that it is likely Luke is referring to Zech 14:4 in his record of the angelic statement in Acts 1:11.
and repent, and they will be called the Lord’s people (v. 9). This sequence matches what is found in Zechariah 14, where Jerusalem is devastated by enemy armies, after which time the Lord comes and saves His people. It is at this time they are declared dedicated to the Lord (vv. 20–21). Zechariah 14 appears to understand 12:10 and 13:9 as the impetus for the fountain of cleansing (13:1) and the return of the Lord to fight for His people and establish the kingdom. Therefore, according to Zechariah, repentance will result in a cleansing of sin and uncleanness that will prepare Israel for the culmination of God’s plan in Zechariah 14, God’s kingdom.

Although there are more Old Testament passages which could be examined, these passages are sufficient to demonstrate that, according to the Old Testament, the kingdom of God will follow a national repentance of the nation of Israel. It is very likely that in Peter’s reading of the Old Testament, he understood this need for national repentance before the Messiah’s kingdom could be established. To further examine this assertion, this article will now inspect the Jewish Second Temple literature and understanding of the relationship between repentance and the Messianic Age.

**Jewish Kingdom Expectations**

Peter’s logic in Acts 3:19–21 relies on the belief that the Messiah’s return, along with the coming kingdom, is at least in some way dependent upon the “latter day” repentance of the nation of Israel. By briefly examining the Old Testament one can see that the idea of a Jewish national repen- tance is essential to the Old Testament’s portrayal of eschatological events. Now this article will look at Jewish literature to see if the understanding of end time repentance in this article is in any way similar to the Jewish eschatological understanding.

In *Jubilees*, a second century source composed between 170–140 B.C.,54 the author writes the following:

> And after this they will turn to Me from amongst the Gentiles with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength, and I shall gather them from amongst all the Gentiles, and they will seek Me, so that I shall be found of them, when they seek Me with all their heart and with all their soul. And I shall disclose to them abounding peace with righteousness, and I shall remove them the plant of uprightness, with all My heart and with all My soul, and they will be for a blessing and not for a curse, and they will be the head and not the tail. And I shall build My sanctuary in their midst, and I shall dwell with them, and I shall be their God and they will be My people in truth and righteousness. And I shall not forsake them nor fail them; for I am the Lord their God (*Jubilees*, 1:15–18, emphasis added).

This message parallels Deut 30:1–5 very closely:

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53 Toussaint and Quine, “No, Not Yet,” 136.

“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. The Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers” (Deut 30:1–5, emphasis added).

VanderKam summarizes the theology of this first chapter of Jubilees as follows:

After Israel’s apostasy in the land (vv. 7–12) and subsequent captivity (vv. 13–14) are predicted, the Lord informs Moses that the exiles will repent (v. 15) and that he will shower his favors upon them—including the building of his eternal sanctuary among them (vv. 16–18). Moses intercedes for the people unsuccessfully (vv. 19–21), but God reiterates that only after confession of sin and repentance will a new time dawn—a time when they shall never again turn from the Lord (vv. 22–25). Some future generation, presumably that of the author, must receive this message of God’s faithfulness, Israel’s infidelity, and the power of confession, repentance, and obedience to the covenantal stipulations to open a new day in the covenantal relationship between the Lord and his holy people.55

Additionally, later in Jubilees, the author appears to indicate a link between repentance and the Messianic Age.56

And in those days the children shall begin to study the laws, And to seek the commandments, And to return to the path of righteousness. And the days shall begin to grow many and increase amongst those children of men Till their days draw nigh to one thousand years. And to a greater number of years than (before) was the number of the days (Jubilees, 23:26–27).

In the Testament of Moses, dated between 4 B.C. and 30 A.D.,57 there is reference to an eschatological time of repentance for the Jews: “That His name should be called upon until the day of repentance in the visitation where-with the Lord shall

visit them in the consummation of the end of the days” (Testament of Moses, 1:18). Commenting on this passage, R. H. Charles states:

Taken in connection with the following words, this phrase refers to the great national repentance that was to precede the establishment of the Messianic or, as here, the theocratic kingdom. This national repentance was a precondition of the coming kingdom . . . So strongly were the Rabbis impressed with the value of this repentance, that in Pesikta 163b it is said: “If all Israel together repented for a single day, redemption through the Messiah would follow.”

In the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, dating before 200 A.D., there is an interpretive expansion of the words given to the twelve sons of Jacob in Genesis 49—a text which has reference to the eschatological “latter days.” Within this writing, there is a heavy emphasis on eschatological times, involving the rebellion of Israel, their repentance, and ultimate restoration. For example:

I know, my children, that in the last times your sons will forsake simplicity, and will cleave unto avarice, and leaving guilelessness will draw near to malice, and forsaking the commandments of the Lord will cleave unto Beliar, and leaving husbandry will follow after their wicked devices, and shall be dispersed among the Gentiles, and shall serve their enemies. And do you therefore command these things to your children, that if they sin they may the more quickly return to the Lord; for He is merciful, and will deliver them even to bring them back into their land (Testament of Issachar, 6:1–4, emphasis added).

I have learnt by the writing of my fathers, that in the last days ye will depart from the Lord, and be divided in Israel, and ye will follow two kings, and will work every abomination, and every idol will ye worship, and your enemies shall lead you captive, and ye shall dwell among the nations with all infirmities and tribulations and anguish of soul. And after these things ye will remember the Lord, and will repent, and He will lead you back; for He is merciful and full of compassion, not imputing evil to the sons of men, because they are flesh, and the spirits of error deceive them in all their doings. And after these things shall the Lord Himself arise to you (Testament of Zebulon, 9:4–8).

Similar to these two passages, Testament of Benjamin states, “But if ye walk in holiness in the presence of the Lord, ye shall dwell in hope again in me, and all Israel

61 9:9 goes on to speak of a return to wickedness by the sons of Zebulon after repenting and being restored. It is unclear upon what basis the author postulates this return to wickedness, though it is said to occur in the “time of consummation.”
shall be gathered unto the Lord” (10:11). Again, the connection between returning to the Lord and being restored is clear.

The evidence of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* can be summarized as follows: In all testaments except *T. Reuben*, *T. Simeon*, and *T. Joseph* we find passages announcing the future sins of the sons of the patriarch, followed by exile, (repentance) and return. They represent an eschatological variant of the Deuteronomistic view of the history of Israel. It is eminently suited to describe the entire period from the patriarchs to the present time. It also brings out clearly the intrinsic connection between the exhortations and the predictions of the future. The Sin-Exile-Return pattern allows for repetition.  

*T. 12 P.* are clearly concerned with the final destiny of Israel. The descendants of the sons of Jacob should realize that the savior of the world has come, they should realize “that the Lord will judge Israel first for the unrighteousness done to him, because they did not believe that God appeared in the flesh as deliverer” (*T. Benj.* 10:8). At the same time they may be convinced that, if it lives in holiness and believes in Jesus Christ, “all Israel will be gathered unto the Lord” (*T. Benj.* 10:11).  

This survey of literature around the time of the New Testament demonstrates that the Jewish understanding of the end times included a national repentance that would lead to a kingdom. This coincides broadly with the Old Testament’s picture of exile, repentance, and restoration.

In light of the common Jewish expectation of end time repentance, concerning Peter’s statements in Acts 3:19–21, Keener aptly concludes, “Because Peter nowhere qualifies the Jewish expectation that this restoration would occur at the end of the age, it seems likely that this is what he has in mind.”

This article has examined the text of Acts 3:19–21 itself along with providing an appropriate Old Testament background. Further, additional Jewish literature has been examined which has shown that eschatological repentance for Israel was the common expectation before the coming Kingdom of Yahweh. What remains for this article is to trace the broad argument of Luke and his purpose for using Acts 3:19–21 the way he does.

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63 Ibid.

64 The literature surveyed above is only a small portion of support for a Jewish expectation that aligns with Peter’s message in Acts 3:19–21. For much more detail, see Lennartsson, *Refreshing & Restoration*, 149–258.


Many scholars rightfully view the books of Luke and Acts as being a unified work consisting of two volumes referred to as Luke-Acts. Acts is not to be seen as an afterthought, an attempt to ride the literary acceptance of Luke. Rather, it is a planned continuation of the story begun in Luke.

This is demonstrated by the link between Luke and Acts in Acts 1:1–2. Here Luke writes that his first volume was concerning “about all that Jesus began to do and teach.” This is an unusual way of describing Jesus’ past actions, and is likely indicative of Jesus’ continued work in Acts through His Apostles. The works of Luke and Acts blend together. Luke emphasizes the person and work of Christ as the Son of David, the hope of Israel. That purpose is carried on in Acts by further emphasizing the expansion of the church to the Gentiles.

In viewing Luke-Acts as a whole, one is immediately struck by the Messianic emphasis at the beginning. Luke 1–2 provides the theological foundation for seeing Jesus as the fulfillment of the hope that resides in the Jewish faithful. The characters of Zechariah (Luke 1:5–23, 57–79), Elizabeth (1:24–25, 41–45), Mary (1:26–38, 46–56), Simeon (2:22–35), and Anna (2:36–38) paint a vivid portrait of the Jewish longings which begin to be fulfilled at the birth of John the Baptist and the Messiah. This intentional emphasis on Jesus as the hope for the people of Israel is echoed at the very end of Luke’s work in Acts 28:20 where Paul states he is in chains because of the “hope of Israel.” Therefore, Luke provides book ends of sorts with an emphasis on the hope for the people of Israel.

The emphasis upon Jerusalem is also important to note. Interestingly, more than seventy percent of the New Testament’s references to Jerusalem occur in Luke-Acts. The structure of Luke-Acts also puts heavy emphasis on Jerusalem. Luke’s geographical account in Luke 1–19 focuses exclusively on Israel. The next section in Luke’s account, Luke 19–Acts 8 (14 chapters), is emphatically Jerusalem-oriented. This is the section in Luke’s account which includes the triumphal entry, the arrest and crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection, Pentecost, the initial growth of the church, and the initial persecution. All of these events transpire in Jerusalem, God’s chosen city. Acts 8–28 shifts away from Jerusalem to the nations because of Israel rejecting their Messiah. This is notably demonstrated in chapter 8, which speaks of expansion

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67 Polhill, Acts, 79.

68 With Lennartsson, Refreshing & Restoration, 36–37.


70 Ibid., 471.


72 Ibid., 9. There is no reference to Egypt (Matt 2:13–15), no reference to the Syrophoenician woman (Matt 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30). Even Peter’s confession (Luke 9:20) is not labeled as occurring in Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27). Literarily then, Luke avoids mention of Jesus in Gentile territory to emphasize the fact that the ministry is to the Jews first.
to Samaria, chapter 9 to Damascus, chapter 10 to Caesarea, and chapter 11 to Antioch. The expansion continues until eventually the gospel message reaches Rome in Acts 28, the zenith of Gentile power.

The following table summarizes an outline of Luke’s literary strategy:

| Luke 1–19 | Focus on Israel, promoting Christ as the Son of David, the answer to all of Israel’s hopes and expectations of the kingdom. |
| Luke 19–Acts 8 | Focus on Jerusalem, the divine location which stages both the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the affirmation of Gentiles in the plan of God. |
| Acts 8–Acts 28 | Focus on Gentiles, the spread of the gospel from its inception in Jerusalem to the center of the Gentile world, Rome. |

From this we may safely conclude that the geography of Luke-Acts shows it is one story. The story begins in Israel, moves to Jerusalem as the heart of Israel, and from there it moves into the Gentile world. In the Gospel of Luke the story moves to Jerusalem. In Acts the story moves away from Jerusalem and on to Rome. The story moves out from Jerusalem in ever widening circles, but it always returns to Jerusalem either to confirm Jerusalem’s rejection of the Gospel or to confirm the mission to the Gentiles.\(^73\)

In light of Luke-Acts’ purpose and literary flow, this article now looks at the placement of Peter’s speech in Acts 3 within the overall flow of this work. The early portion of Luke plays off the hope of the Old Testament and paints a picture of high and exciting expectation for the city of Jerusalem.\(^74\) However, as Jesus begins His public ministry, having been identified as the rightful king in the line of David (3:23–38), it comes as a shock that Jesus suffers rejection at the very outset of His ministry (4:16–30). During Jesus’ sermon He tells the people of the deliverance of Zarephath and Naaman, two Gentiles, who were the only ones that Elijah and Elisha could bless because of the stubborn wickedness of the people of Israel. The people understand what Jesus is implying and demonstrate by their reaction that they reject Jesus’ assessment of their spiritual condition.\(^75\)

Sadly, this rejection is characteristic of the Jews throughout the story in Luke. Luke brings out a strong contrast between the rejection of Jesus by His own people, and the faith of a Gentile living in the land of Israel (Luke 7:9). The people for whom the Messiah has come reject their king, but the Gentiles show openness.\(^76\)

The rejection begins to approach its climax as Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). In Luke 13:34–35 Jesus raises a compassionate lament over Jeru-

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\(^73\) Ibid., 11.
\(^76\) Ibid.
salem’s rejection of their Messiah. This lament is filled with allusions to Old Testament passages, particularly the reference to Israel’s house becoming a desolation. Jeremiah 12:7 and 22:5 both refer to Israel’s desolate house. Jeremiah 22 particularly notes that if the people continue in wickedness, they will go into exile. By alluding to this prophecy in Luke 13, Jesus appears to be saying that their abandonment in exile will continue.77

Implicit within this note of rejection is also an implied restoration. The desolation of Israel will exist until they proclaim “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Luke 13:35). The nation will be under judgment until they acknowledge Jesus as the one blessed by God.78

After arriving in Jerusalem, Luke includes a similar lament over Jerusalem in 19:41–44. This lament is prompted by seeing the city as Jesus approaches it. Because Jerusalem had rejected Him as their king, not knowing it was their time of visitation, destruction would come upon the city in 70 A.D.79 This passage may have direct implications for Acts 3, for Jesus states that the Jews were ignorant that their time of visitation was present (Luke 19:44). Interestingly, in Acts 3:17 Peter proclaims repentance and restoration is possible for the Jewish people because they acted in ignorance.

In Luke 21:20–24, Jesus for the third time alludes to the coming judgment upon Jerusalem. In prophesying this judgment, Jesus states, “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (v. 24c). Helyer sees this phrase, which is unique to Luke, as an allusion to Zech 12:3 and Dan 9:26.80 This emphasis on a time limit for the judgment of Israel also fits with Dan 8:13–14, which teaches a limitation of the Gentile dominion over the Jews.81 The reference to “times” (καιροὶ) in Luke 21:24 draws upon a common theme in Luke’s writings which emphasizes special seasons in God’s program and also provides a link between important eschatological passages in Luke-Acts which mention the various seasons in God’s plan (cf. Luke 21:24; Acts 1:6–7; 3:19–21).82


the context which emphasizes the judgment upon the city of Jerusalem, by stating the judgment will come to an end, there appears to be an implication of liberation and restoration inherent in the context. Thus, the time limit for the exile in these passages leaves open a future restoration for Israel.

The climax of rejection by the Jewish people is the crucifixion of their own Messiah. However, even in the midst of this rejection of their king and the travesty that the Jewish nation has committed, Luke keeps open the hope for a coming kingdom (Luke 23:51; 24:21). This hope survives into Acts where the focus of this article has been (cf. Acts 1:6–7; 3:19–21).


Luke’s literary shift from Acts 2–3 to Acts 7 helps one understand the overall flow of his narrative. Acts 2–3 includes significant apostolic speeches which call for Israel to repent. Acts 3:19–21 fits into this category, including a genuine offer of a contingent kingdom based on Israel’s repentance. Sadly, the Jews reject this offer as well as the One from whom their salvation would come—their Messiah.

There is a stark contrast when the next major speech is recorded by Luke in Acts 7. Stephen’s speech is not focused on an offer of salvation to the Jews but a stringent rebuke for having hard, unrepentant hearts. This transition in Acts 7 to Acts 8 marks a turning point with an emphasis on Israel’s rejection of everything that has to do with their Messiah. In fact, from this point on in the narrative, there is special note made of the opposition from the Jewish people in Pisidian Antioch (13:50), Iconium (14:6), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonica (17:5), Corinth (18:6), and Ephesus (19:8–9).85 The narratives from Acts 8–28 highlight a progression which carries over from Luke—the nation of Israel rejecting the Messiah as well as the joy of the Gentiles in receiving salvation.

The rejection of the Jews continues into Acts 28 where Paul gives testimony concerning the same kingdom of God that has been present throughout Luke-Acts (28:23).86 Being rejected by his fellow Jews, Paul quotes Isa 6:9–10 to indicate that Israel’s idolatrous, unrepentant hearts are still stubborn and unresponsive. However,

86 Lennartsson, Refreshing & Restoration, 135–36. Lennartsson gives good evidence that, although some might think the quoting of Isaiah 6 indicates a final rejection of Israel, this reasoning would attribute something foreign to the context of Isaiah 6:9, 10.
this rejection of the kingdom by the Jews has made possible the time of salvation to the Gentiles (28:28).  

Following the flow of Luke-Acts one is faced with a sad conclusion: “There has been a turn in the plot, a reversal of fortunes. Expectations of happiness for Israel as a people, expressed at the beginning of the story, are not realized, for the plot turns in the opposite direction.” And further,

We must recognize where the emphasis falls as the story in Acts progresses. We must recognize that, from the story of Stephen on, we find repeated emphasis on Jewish rejection, that this is portrayed in major dramatic scenes designed to make an impression on the reader, and that the final statement of Paul in Acts highlights Jewish blindness and deafness, in contrast to the openness of the Gentiles to God's salvation through Jesus.  

Within this broad literary purpose of Luke-Acts, Peter’s speech in Acts 3:19–21 is positioned for an important purpose. Acts 3:19–21 is part of the pivotal swing from Jerusalem to the world. Although Acts never gives up hope for Israel’s restoration (cf. 28:20), the picture from the beginning of Acts shows why the mission to the Gentiles becomes so prominent. Acts 1–7 provides a reason for the transition to Acts 8–28 and the continuation of the times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24). By quoting Peter in Acts 3, Luke shows agreement with the Old Testament that Israel’s end time repentance would lead to the coming of the kingdom promised. However, their rejection leads to a prolonged opportunity of salvation to the Gentiles.  


Conclusion

A close reading of Acts 3:19–21 points toward a national call to repentance for the nation of Israel, so that they would be forgiven and their Messiah would come and establish the Messianic Kingdom. An understanding of the Messianic Kingdom being contingent on Jewish repentance would have been familiar to those who knew the Old Testament. Peter himself claims this, and it is further evidenced by the Jewish

87 This is almost identical to the argument of Paul in Romans 11:11–25.
89 Ibid., 74.
91 In this way, Luke’s theology is very similar to Paul. Paul argues that the gospel belongs first to the Jew (Rom 1:16), and that due to the Jewish rejection the Gentiles have received a prolonged time of salvation (Rom 11:11–12).
92 Although there are other traces of it throughout Acts, this is the last detailed mention.
literature which existed during that time. Because there was no correction to what would have been the most likely Jewish understanding of that time, it is best to let Peter’s words stand as a genuine offer of the kingdom contingent on Israel’s repentance.

This article has argued that by viewing Luke-Acts as a two-volume work, one can see Luke’s primary purpose for including Acts 3:19–21. This purpose is to help provide a transition from a focus on the Jews to the Gentiles. The Jews and their leaders in Jerusalem reject their Messiah in Luke and their Messiah’s work in Acts. This rejection provides the catalyst for the gospel’s expansion to Samaria and ultimately to Rome, the zenith of Gentile existence.

What are the implications of Acts 3:19–21 to one’s understanding of God’s kingdom? Having looked at Acts 3:19–21 exegetically, and having examined the Old Testament and Jewish literature, the apparent implication is that in some sense the timing of God’s coming kingdom is contingent upon Israel’s repentance. This hope for Israel’s repentance is found throughout Luke-Acts and continues on even into the last chapter, Acts 28. It is best to conclude that, like Peter (Acts 3) and Paul (Acts 28), believers continue to await the kingdom which will coincide with a national repentance and restoration of Israel.
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ABRAHAM AS “HEIR OF THE WORLD”: DOES ROMANS 4:13 EXPAND THE OLD TESTAMENT ABRAHAMIC LAND PROMISES?

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The future of Israel continues to be an area of intense debate, but recent non-dispensationalists have moved away from the language of “replacement” to the language of “expansion,” viz., the church does not replace Israel; rather the church is an expansion of Israel. Or put another way, the promises originally made to Israel in the OT are not nullified, but “expanded” to include the church. Recent scholars insist that this expansion applies to the OT land promises and that several NT texts explicitly teach this expansion, e.g. Matt 5:5, Rom 4:13, Eph 6:3, Heb 4:1–11; 11:8–16. This article will critically examine Rom 4:13 and argue that this text does not expand the OT land promises but rather describes Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations.

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Introduction

Since the formation of the modern-state of Israel in 1948, many Christians have become fascinated with what the Bible says about the restoration of Israel and the events that will precede Christ’s second coming. American Dispensationalists have been largely responsible for this revived interest in eschatology. Popular-level Dispensational writers like Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and John Hagee have argued for Christian Zionism, which is hard to define because it is more a popular notion rather than a well-defined, carefully argued theological system. But the broad strokes are:

1 Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970); Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1995); John Hagee, In Defense of Israel: The Bible’s Mandate for Supporting the Jewish State (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2007).
(1) the birth of the modern-nation of Israel in 1948 is the beginning of the end, that is, the land promises to Abraham are being fulfilled and the OT restoration prophecies are now in motion, thus (2) Christians should be expecting the return of Christ, the appearance of the Antichrist, and the rapture of the church at any moment. (3) Christians have a biblical obligation to support the modern-state of Israel since Israel has been and always will be God’s chosen people.

There are many cautious Dispensationalists who disagree with Lindsey, LaHaye, and Hagee and yet still affirm a future for the nation of Israel. It is unfortunate that Dispensationalists (even the cautious ones) are automatically caricatured as blind supporters of the modern nation of Israel and fanatical about biblical prophecy. Scholars who wish to understand Dispensationalism should not consider Lindsey, LaHaye, and Hagee as representatives of Dispensationalism as a whole. Caricatures of Dispensationalism can be avoided if biblical scholars come to recognize the varieties within Dispensationalism.

In response to Christian Zionism, and in rejection of Dispensationalism, many biblical scholars have argued against the idea of a future restoration of Jews to the land of Israel. They insist that to believe in Christian Zionism is to interpret the Bible “literalistically” and is a return to the Jewish nationalism of the OT, which Christ has abolished by including Gentiles in the people of God and by promising a worldwide inheritance for all of God’s people rather than a localized inheritance for Jews only. Further, these scholars have pointed out the grave injustices that the modern-state of Israel has committed against the Palestinian Arabs and thus urge Christians not to blindly support an oppressive, violent, and largely unbelieving nation of Israel.

In making their arguments, recent non-dispensational scholars have largely discarded the idea that Israel forfeited her land promises by her disobedience since that would make God seem unfaithful to His promises. They have also largely abandoned the idea of the church “replacing” Israel in favor of the language of Israel and her covenant promises being “expanded.” This means that non-dispensational scholars

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2 See footnote 12 below.

3 To combat misunderstandings of Dispensationalism, Michael J. Vlach has written a brief, helpful work that defines and dispels numerous myths/misconceptions surrounding Dispensationalism; see his Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2008).


7 Stephen Motyer and others dislike the language of replacement: “For many ‘replacement’ has become a loaded word, indeed a test of ‘orthodoxy’: does the church ‘replace’ Israel in the purposes of God? But this question crudely oversimplifies the issues. As far as the NT is concerned, the only candidate
have moved towards newer arguments against Dispensationalism: the OT land promises have not been nullified but expanded to now encompass the whole world (Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13; Eph 6:3); the OT land promises were a promise of rest and the true “rest” is now found in Christ (Heb 4:1–11); the OT land promises pointed back to paradise in Eden and will be ultimately fulfilled when paradise is regained in the new heavens and new earth. These are serious biblical-theological arguments that do not resort to naïve spiritualizing or allegorizing, but employ typology (land as “rest” and land as “paradise”) and cite specific texts to justify their claims. Thus, the critique of older Dispensationalists that such scholars abandon literal interpretation is no longer compelling or accurate. The difference between the hermeneutics of Dispensationalists and the hermeneutics of non-dispensationalists “is not literalism v. non-literalism, but different understandings of what constitutes literal hermeneutics.”

The issues are complex and center on: (1) whether the NT can have priority over the OT, i.e. what OT institutions and promises do the NT modify by nullification or expansion; (2) the understanding of how the NT uses the OT, i.e., whether the NT can assign new or fuller meanings to OT texts, which the original readers of the OT texts could not have comprehended during their time; and (3) the definition of and use of typology, especially whether or not it is legitimate to consider Israel as a type and the land of Canaan as a type.

The three areas of hermeneutical disagreement are rich areas for further discussion and debate, but in this article I will focus on whether or not the NT modifies/expand the OT land promise. The Dispensationalist answer is that God’s OT land promises remain unchanged by the NT, thus we should expect a future restoration of ethnic Jews to the land promised to Abraham, i.e. the land of Canaan. In fact, some Dispensationalists would even assert that the New Testament reaffirms the restoration of Israel to her land.


These descriptions of the three areas of hermeneutical disagreement between Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists come from Feinberg, “Systems of Discontinuity,” 74–75.

In contrast, non-dispensationalists argue that the OT land promises have been changed—not nullified, but expanded by the NT to now encompass the whole world, and this inheritance is given to all of Abraham’s spiritual descendants, both Jews and Gentiles. This claim is justified by typology (Canaan is a type of “paradise” and a type of “rest”) and also by specific texts: Matt 5:5, Rom 4:13, and Eph 6:3. Each of these texts and the issue of typology deserve an in-depth treatment that is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, this article will focus on Rom 4:13 and argue that Rom 4:13 does not expand the OT land promises but rather describes Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations. I will prove this by first, setting the literary context of Rom 4:13; second, giving arguments for the “expansion of the land” view of Rom 4:13; third, evaluating the arguments of the “expansion of the land” view; and fourth, giving arguments for another interpretation of Rom 4:13 that can be labeled the “inheritance of many nations” view.

The Literary Context of Romans 4:13

While there is great debate over the purpose of Romans, many agree that there is at least a pastoral purpose: Jews and Gentiles are in conflict with each other in Rome (see esp. 14:1–15:13), thus Paul writes to unify the Jews and Gentiles in Rome. Paul does this by reminding them of essential gospel truths: both Jews and Gentiles are all “under sin” (3:9), thus the only hope for both Jews and Gentiles alike is the gospel of Jesus Christ—all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, so all must believe in Christ to be justified (3:21–26). This means that no one can boast in his works (3:27), since both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith (3:28–30). Having explained his understanding of the gospel, Paul’s main concern in Romans 4 is to establish the fact that his understanding of justification by faith is not something new, but was already taught in the Old Testament. His argument falls into five parts:


Justin Brown has written an incisive treatment of typology that compares and contrasts different notions of typology between Dispensationalists and non-dispensationalists. See his “Is Typology an Interpretive Method?” (Th.M Thesis, The Master’s Seminary, May 2014).


The book of Romans was written c. 57 AD and prior events in Rome help us to understand the situation for the Roman house churches. Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in 49 AD but they were allowed to return to Rome after Claudius’ death in 54 AD. Claudius’ “edict must have had a profound impact on the church in Rome. In the absence of Jewish Christians, those Gentiles who had been attracted to Christianity would have taken over the church, and Jewish Christians who then returned would probably be in a minority and perhaps be viewed with some condescension by the now-dominant Gentile wing” (D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” in An Introduction to the New Testament, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005], 396).
1. Abraham was justified by faith not by works (vv. 1–3), which Paul states in a general theological principle (vv. 4–5) and which is confirmed by David in Psalm 32 (vv. 6–8)
2. Abraham was justified by faith not by circumcision, therefore, the blessing of justification by faith extends to the uncircumcised (Gentiles) since chronologically Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (vv. 9–12)
3. “The promise” made to Abraham and his seed is realized by faith, not by law (vv. 13–17)
4. Abraham was justified by faith not by law because Abraham believed “the promise” even in his seemingly hopeless situation (vv. 18–22)
5. Therefore, post-Abraham and post-Law believers are also justified by faith (vv. 23–25)

While there is a noticeable shift in emphasis from discussing justification/rightness in verses 1–12 to discussing “promise” in verses 13–22, the fact that verse 13 begins with “for” (γὰρ) cautions us from seeing too sharp a shift. While verses 23–25 apply Abraham’s example to NT believers, the flow from verses 1–22 is one continuous emphasis on justification by faith—not by works (vv. 1–8), not by circumcision (vv. 9–12), and not by law (vv. 13–22). However, Paul does not explain the content of Abraham’s faith until verses 13–22. The content of Abraham’s faith is framed in terms of God’s “promise”—Abraham believed God’s “promise,” hundreds of years prior to the giving of the Law, therefore Abraham was justified by faith. This flow of thought will be extremely important for understanding Rom 4:13 because the content of the promise that Abraham believed must be truth that was revealed to him. Those who argue that the “promise” in Romans 4 is an expanded worldwide land inheritance (which was never promised to Abraham in the OT) thus have an immediate problem: How can Abraham have believed in a truth that was never revealed to him?

Having set the context, let us look directly at Rom 4:13: “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith” (ESV). Paul’s main point in verse 13 is clear: just as justification is not by works but by faith, in the same way, “the promise” to Abraham is not obtained by law but by faith. However, a difficulty arises in the phrase, τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμον (“that he would be heir of the world”). This phrase explains the “promise” given to Abraham, but it is strange since nowhere in the OT does God give Abraham or his descendants such a promise; the land promises were always localized to the land of Canaan. So what does this phrase mean?

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16 This shift is evident simply by the sheer repetition of key words: in verses 1–12, the noun “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is used six times (vv. 3, 5, 6, 9, 11 [2x]), the verb “to justify” (δικαιόω) is used twice (vv. 2, 5) while the noun or verb form of “promise” is not used at all. In verses 13–22, the noun “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) is used four times (vv. 13, 14, 16, 20), the verb “to promise” (ἐπαγγέλλω) is used once (v. 21), while the noun “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) is used only twice (vv. 13, 22).
Arguments for the Expansion of the Land View

Romans 4:13 is a key text for those who claim that the NT expands the Abrahamic land promises of the OT to now encompass the whole world. Many scholars reference this verse as justifying their claim that the NT expands the OT land promise, but they merely reference it in passing or only offer a brief defense.17 Kenneth Bailey is the only scholar I could find who has offered a moderate-length defense of this view.18 Perhaps scholars do not find it necessary to defend this view in detail since “Paul’s statement here is a straightforward universalization of the Abrahamic land promises.”19 Since no scholar has given an in-depth defense of this view (Bailey comes the closest), I have constructed the following four-part argument:

(1) Second Temple Judaism, expressed in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, came to understand the land promise to Abraham as expanded to encompass the whole world and “Paul’s own thinking reflects ideas which were widespread in other strands of Jewish theology at the time.”20 Thus, in Rom 4:13, Paul is only mirroring the expansion of the Abrahamic land promise found in Second Temple Jewish literature. For example, Sirach 44:21 declares, “the Lord assured [Abraham] with an oath . . . that he would make him as numerous as the dust of the earth and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.”21 In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham blesses Jacob and says, “May [God] strengthen thee, and bless thee, and mayest thou inherit the whole earth” (cf. Jubilees 17:3; 32:19). Proponents of the expansion of the land view also cite 1 Enoch 5:7; 4 Ezra 6:59; 2 Baruch 14:13; 51:3 as supporting their view. Proponents of this view also point to Philo, a Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar, and Josephus, a Jewish historian, both of whom allegedly viewed the Abrahamic land promise

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20 Dunn, Romans 1–8, 213. Fitzmyer writes: “This generic promise is not found in Genesis, but the Jewish tradition embellished the promises made to Abraham, and Paul echoes that tradition” (384).
Abraham as “Heir of the World”

This appeal to Second Temple Jewish literature seems to be the primary argument given to defend this view—this is apparent by reading the Romans commentators cited in footnote 17 and by recognizing that Kenneth Bailey’s sole argument (in the only moderate-length defense of this view) is an appeal to Second Temple Jewish texts.

But other arguments are given as well: (2) Some cite Matt 5:5 (“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”) as support for their view, which is another text that deserves in-depth treatment but is beyond the scope of this article. Jesus, like Paul, allegedly expanded the OT land promise to now include the whole earth.

(3) The use of “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” in Rom 8:17 could also support the expansion of the land view. Romans 8:17 is the only other reference to “heir(s)” in Romans. While Rom 8:17 does not define the inheritance, the subsequent paragraph hints at it: believers will inherit a creation that “will be set free from its bondage to corruption” (v. 21) and believers will inherit “redeemed” bodies (v. 23). These verses surely refer to the new heavens and new earth and to glorified, resurrected human bodies. Thus, Rom 4:13 could parallel Rom 8:17 and could refer to inheriting the whole world, that is, the new heavens and the new earth.

(4) Beyond Rom 4:13 and 8:17, Paul uses inheritance language fifteen other times. The inheritance is unclear in some of these passages (Eph 1:11, 14, 18; Col 1:12; 3:24). Titus 3:7 probably refers to inheriting eternal life. Other passages either refer to inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5) or to the inheritance of the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30). Since the kingdom of God is a worldwide kingdom, inheriting of the “world” in Rom 4:13 would be consistent with inheriting the worldwide kingdom of God. In Galatians 3–4, the inheritance is related to the Abrahamic covenant but it is not specifically defined. We could probably assume the inheritance is the land of Canaan, but there is no verse in Galatians that expands the land promise like what Rom 4:13 seems to do. However, one of Paul’s main points in Galatians 3–4 is that Gentiles are now included as the offspring of Abraham (Gal 3:7–9, 29) and thus they too share in the Abrahamic inheritance (Gal 3:29)—since Paul argues that the “offspring” of Abraham has expanded to include Gentiles, maybe Paul is implicitly hinting at an enlarged, worldwide territorial inheritance as well.

Evaluation of the Expansion of the Land View

This view is appealing and seems to arise from a straightforward reading of Rom 4:13. To be honest, I was initially convinced by this view but after reading

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22 Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, 274; Dunn, Romans 1–8, 213; Bailey, 64. However, Moo admits that this cross-reference is shaky since γῆ, not κόσμος, is used in Matthews 5:5 (p. 274 fn 19).

23 1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 3:18, 29; 4:1, 7, 30; 5:21; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5; Col 1:12; 3:24; Titus 3:7.

24 Personal conversations with NT scholar Thomas Schreiner initially convinced me of this view. Schreiner has read an earlier form of this article and I am thankful to him for his gracious and helpful comments.
Rom 4:13 repeatedly in context, after lexical study of κόσμος and κληρονόμος, after examining the Second Temple Jewish literature cited to support this view, and after surveying additional Second Temple Jewish literature, I think there are weaknesses in its arguments and I think that there is another view that better explains Rom 4:13. I respond to this view as follows:

(1) The references to Second Temple Jewish literature are extremely limited and selective. The references are limited since only a handful of texts are chosen among the vast amount of Second Temple Jewish literature found in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran documents, rabbinic texts, synagogue liturgies, Jewish biblical scholars, and Jewish historians. The texts cited are found in one book of the Apocrypha (Sirach), four books of the Pseudepigrapha (Jubilees, 4 Ezra; 2 Baruch; 1 Enoch), one Jewish philosopher and biblical scholar (Philo) and one Jewish historian (Josephus). Such limited amount of literature could hardly reflect the entirety of Second Temple Judaism’s view of the Abrahamic land promise. This is an exegetical fallacy that D. A. Carson calls “appeal to selective evidence” and explains as follows: “as a general rule, the more complex and/or emotional the issue, the greater tendency to select only part of the evidence, prematurely construct a grid, and so filter the rest of the evidence through the grid that it is robbed of any substance. What is needed is evenhandedness.”

A more thorough survey of the Second Temple Jewish literature is needed.

W. D. Davies has done a very comprehensive survey of Second Temple Jewish literature and its theology of the land. Davies argues that there is “an undeniable historical diversity” and that “the term ‘Judaism’ itself cannot be understood as representing a monolithic faith in which there has been a simplistic uniformity of doctrine—whether demanded, imposed, or recognized—about The Land, as about other elements of belief.” Davies surveys literature from the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran documents, rabbinic texts, synagogue liturgies, Jewish biblical scholars, and Jewish historians. In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Davies sees “a continuity between these sources and the Old Testament.”

There are texts like the Psalms of Solomon 17 speaking of a Son of David whom the Lord will raise up: “And he shall gather together a holy people . . . And he shall judge the tribes of the people . . . And he shall divide them according to their tribes upon the land, and neither sojourner nor alien shall sojourn with them any more . . . And he shall purge Jerusalem, making it holy as of old” (vv. 28, 30, 33). This speaks of a restoration of Israel similar to the OT prophets, as do other texts like Tobit:

God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God . . . they will all return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor . . . All the Israelites who are

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27 Davies, The Territorial Dimension of Judaism, 54.

saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them (Tobit 14:5, 7).

Tobit was probably written between 225 and 175 BC, after the return from exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, yet Tobit still looks forward to another return from exile and restoration of Israel.

Other texts teach that eschatological salvation during the final judgment of God will be found by being in the land of Israel, which God will preserve for Himself: “Everyone shall survive from the perils aforesaid and shall see salvation in my land, and within my borders which I have sanctified for myself eternally” (4 Ezra 9:8). Davies shows that the Qumran community understood its purpose as atoning the land from wickedness so that Israel could be restored and the Qumran War Scroll (1QM) taught that their community, as the true remnant of Israel, would occupy the land according to their tribes and, at the dawn of the age to come, would begin an offensive war against those outside the land to drive them out and restore Israel. Davies also surveys the rabbinic literature and shows that the land was extremely important since so much of the OT law can only be obeyed in the land of Israel, thus one-third of the Mishnah (the Pharasaic legal code) is concerned with the land of Israel. If a Jew did not live in the land of Israel, they could not obey Torah fully, so clearly the rabbis desired to live in Israel and looked forward to a restoration of Israel. Some rabbis taught that those who died outside the land of Israel would not participate in the resurrection but that even a Gentile slave girl who lives in Israel might share in the resurrection (Gen. Rabbah 96:5; T. B. Ketuboth 111a). Other rabbinic texts also expected a restoration of Israel: “‘I shall,’ said the Holy One, blessed be He, ‘bring Israel, who are precious to Me, into the Land that is precious to Me’” (Num. Rabbah 23:7 commenting on Num 34:2). Clearly, numerous Second Temple Jewish texts did not view the Abrahamic land promise as being expanded but as still promising a future return to the land of Canaan.

(2) The Second Temple Jewish texts that support the expansion of land view actually are more nuanced and complicated. We can look at the book of Jubilees. Jubilees was “written in Hebrew by a Pharisee between 135 and 105 B.C.E. [and is] a midrashic rewriting of Genesis-Exodus . . . Whereas the author believes that God will be gracious and forgiving towards Israel, he entertains no hope for the Gentiles.”

This background should be kept in mind. In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham does bless Jacob by saying, “Mayest thou inherit the whole earth.” But a close reading of Jubilees 22 shows that its theology of the land conforms to the localized OT land promises. In Jubilees 22, Abraham says to Jacob, “May nations serve thee, and all the nations bow themselves before thy seed” (v. 11), which gives the nation of Israel a prominence among the nations of the earth in line with the OT prophets. Abraham also says, “may He renew His covenant with thee that thou mayest be to Him a nation


30 Davies, *the Gospel and the Land*, 52–53.

for His inheritance for all ages” (v. 15), thus Abraham envisions a future for the nation of Israel, not merely the salvation of Israelites. In verse 16, Abraham instructs Jacob: “separate thyself from the nations, and eat not with them . . . for their works are unclean.” Paul argued strongly for the unity of Jews and Gentiles, especially in Romans and Galatians and even rebuked Peter for refusing to eat with the Gentiles (Gal 2:11–14). Contrary to Paul’s emphasis on Jew/Gentile unity, Jubilees 22:16 is advocating a separation of Jews and Gentiles. And after Abraham finishes blessing Jacob, Abraham praises God by saying, “The Most High God, the God of all, and Creator of all, who brought me forth from Ur of the Chaldees that he might give me this land to inherit it forever, and that I might establish a holy seed—blessed be the Most High forever” (v. 27, emphasis added). Thus, Abraham, who told Jacob, “mayest thou inherit the whole earth” (v. 14), still understands his inheritance to be the land that he travelled to after leaving Ur of the Chaldees, which is clearly the land of Canaan, and Abraham believes that he will inherit it forever. All of these additional verses in Jubilees 22 agree with the OT land promises, which envision a restored nation of Israel that returns to the land of Israel and has a prominence among the nations as the nations serve and bow down to Israel. So even if Abraham’s statement in Jubilees 22:14 is taken as expanding the OT land promises, such a statement must be reconciled with the rest of Jubilees 22, which affirms the localized OT land promises and affirms a prominent place for the nation of Israel in the future.

(3) The Second Temple Jewish texts that support the expansion of land view use specific language that clearly communicate that they understood the land to be expanded, but Paul in Rom 4:13 does not use such specific language. Paul says, “that he should be heir of the world,” but notice the expansive and detailed language that the Second Temple Jewish texts use:

- Sirach 44:21 says that Abraham’s descendants would be given “an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth.”
- In Jubilees 22:14, Abraham says to Jacob, “mayest thou inherit the whole world.”
- Jubilees 32:19 recalls Jacob’s stay at Bethel and God’s promise to him: “I will give to thy seed all the earth which is under heaven, and they shall judge all the nations according to their desires, and after that they shall get possession of the whole earth.”

If Paul were going to make such an important and massive change to the OT land promises, why would he not make his meaning clearer by using more detailed language like that found in the above texts? The New Living Translation (NLT) adds the word “whole” to its translation of Rom 4:13 (“God’s promise to give the whole earth to Abraham…”), but “whole” is not found in the Greek text of Rom 4:13. If Paul read those Second Temple Jewish texts and had those texts in mind as he wrote Romans 4, he could have easily quoted from those texts and expanded Rom 4:13 to say, “that he would be heir of the whole world,” or “that he would be heir of all the earth,” etc. This point should at least cast some doubt on whether Paul was influenced by the Second Temple Jewish texts that expanded the OT land promises.
This discussion of the Second Temple Jewish literature has been brief (see Davies for more), but it shows that the best way to understand Second Temple Judaism’s theology of land is in a variegated or mixed way—while some texts expanded the land promise to include the whole world, other texts expected a restoration of Israel and return to Jerusalem; while some texts expanded the land, other texts expressed a strong desire to live in the land of Israel in order to obey the commandments in Torah that can only be obeyed in the land and in order to participate in the resurrection. Ultimately, it seems that Second Temple Judaism’s theology of land is similar to Second Temple Judaism’s theology of justification and the Law—it is complex and it is variegated or mixed. The New Perspective on Paul (represented by scholars like E. P. Sanders, James Dunn, N. T. Wright) views Second Temple Judaism as not legalistic but rather a religion of covenantal nomism, where a person enters into the covenant community by grace but must obey the Law to remain in the covenant community. In addition, the New Perspective on Paul understands the fundamental problem that Paul combats to be Jewish exclusivism (i.e. excluding Gentiles by requiring Jewish identity markers such as circumcision, Sabbath keeping, food laws, in order to become part of the covenant community); in other words, the problem was not legalism but exclusivism. NT scholars have responded by pointing out that the New Perspective on Paul is selective in its evidence and that Second Temple Judaism was ultimately a mixture of legalism and covenantal nomism, a mixture of exclusivism and legalism. I am arguing the same with regard to Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land. Some texts expanded the land promise while other texts expected a future return to the land and a restoration of Israel. Therefore, to say that Paul mirrored Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land really proves nothing—did Paul mirror the theology of those who expanded the land promise, or did Paul mirror the theology of those who expected a return to the land and a restoration of Israel? It could be either. However, it would not be right to say that Second Temple Jewish texts were 50/50, equally split between expanding the land promise and reaffirming a return to the land of Canaan. It is more accurate to say that while there was a minority of Second Temple Jewish texts that spoke of an expansion of the Abrahamic land promise, the vast majority of Second Temple Jewish texts made no change to the OT land promises and still expected God to fulfill his promise of giving the land of Canaan to the Jews. The literary evidence presented above seems to justify such a claim—yet even such a claim is ultimately irrelevant with regards to the interpretation of Rom 4:13. Ultimately, we should recognize that Second Temple Jewish literature neither argues for nor against an expansion of the OT land promises because Second Temple Judaism was mixed and variegated in its understanding of the OT land promises. We are thus thrown back to an exegetical analysis of Rom 4:13.

(4) My final response to the expansion of the land view of Rom 4:13 is to say that Paul’s other inheritance texts are also inconclusive in explaining Rom 4:13. While the inheritance in Rom 8:17 is the new creation, the context is different—in Romans 4, Paul is proving that his understanding of justification by faith is not new, but is taught in the OT in the example of Abraham; in Romans 8, Paul is describing the New Covenant blessings of the Holy Spirit given to believers, adoption as God’s

children, and the final victory of God in restoring the cursed creation and in defeating sin and death. Other Pauline passages that speak of inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5) also do not argue conclusively for an expansion of the land promise. It all depends on how one understands the “kingdom of God.” Most Dispensationalists understand the kingdom of God in the NT as identical to the kingdom proclaimed in the OT prophets—yes, it will be a worldwide kingdom, but this worldwide kingdom will have its capitol in Jerusalem where the ultimate king of David will reign over both a restored nation of Israel and over all the other nations of earth, who will stream to Jerusalem in order to learn about God and worship God (Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3). Of course, not all agree with this definition of the kingdom of God, but my point is that there is a universality and a particularity to the kingdom of God—it is a worldwide kingdom that all of God’s people will be a part of, yet it is centered in (i.e. its capitol city is in) Jerusalem where a Davidic king reigns. Others obviously disagree and view the kingdom of God to be Christ’s present reign and/or as the future new heavens and new earth. Thus, one would have to resolve the definition of the kingdom of God before one could apply Paul’s other inheritance texts to Rom 4:13. Ultimately, we still must deal with the text of Rom 4:13 rather than citing biblical parallels about inheritance. Biblical parallels suggest various meanings for “inheritance,” but one must prove that those parallels define the meaning of inheritance in Rom 4:13.

**Arguments for the Inheritance of Many Nations View**

I will now argue for an alternative view, a view that understands Rom 4:13 as describing Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of a multitude of descendants from all nations. In order to argue for this view, what follows are four observations about Rom 4:13 that note some important contextual, grammatical, and lexical issues:

1. The phrase “that he would be heir of the world” (τὸ κληρονόμον αὐτὸν εἶναι κόσμου) has the singular pronoun “he,” not the plural pronoun “they.” Thus, the phrase “that he would be heir of the world” is describing the inheritance of a single individual, not an inheritance for Abraham’s descendants. The key question is, Who is the antecedent of “he”? It is possible that Paul’s phrase “to his seed” (τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ) refers to a single individual, namely Christ (like Paul does in Gal 3:16, 19), in which case Christ would be “heir of the world.” This would be in line with Ps 2:7–8: “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD. He said to Me, ‘You are my Son, Today

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33 This view is argued well by Saucy, “The Kingdom” and “The Old Testament Prophecies about Israel,” in The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism, 81–110, 221–45.

34 The following commentators/scholars hold this view: Everett F. Harrison, “Romans” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 10, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 51; Craig A. Blaising, “A Premillennial Response,” in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 144–45. Leon Morris sees this view as a possibility, but is not confident of it—see Morris’ The Epistle to the Romans, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 206. Jack Cottrell takes “heir of the world” as referring to both people (i.e. innumerable physical and spiritual descendants) and land, not the land of Israel but the new earth. See Cottrell’s Romans, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), 295.
I have begotten you. ‘Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession’” (NASB). But this view is unlikely since Gal 3:16 explicitly identifies the “offspring” as Christ whereas Rom 4:13 does not. Such a shift from Abraham to Christ would also be quite jarring in the context since there is no mention of Christ until verse 24 of Romans 4. Since this Christological interpretation does not work, the only other possibility is Abraham. Thus, it is not the descendants of Abraham who are “heirs of the world,” but Abraham himself is “heir of the world.”

(2) The surrounding context of Romans 4 defines “the promise” not in terms of Abraham inheriting land, but in terms of Abraham becoming the father of many nations and having innumerable descendants (vv. 17–18). This is an extremely important point. We must allow verses 17–18 (which are clear) to define “the promise” in verse 13 (which is strange and unclear). Most interpreters assume the meaning of “the promise” in verse 13 rather than allow the surrounding context to define it. In Romans 4, Paul is drawing upon the chronological order of Genesis 15 to make his point about Abraham’s justification. In Genesis 15, Abraham is worried since he still has no children and Eliezer of Damascus will be his heir (vv. 2–3). In response, God says that Eliezer will not be Abraham’s heir (v. 4); rather God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (v. 5). Abraham believed that promise (v. 6a), therefore Abraham was justified by his faith in that promise (v. 6b). Paul’s point is exactly the same in Rom 4:13–22—Abraham’s justification was not by law, but by faith in God’s promise of innumerable descendants. Thus, the phrase “that he would be heir of the world” should be related to the promises quoted in Rom 4:17–18. In Romans 4, Paul makes clear that Abraham’s justification was based on his faith in two promises: the promise that he would be the “father of many nations” (v. 17, where Paul quotes Gen 17:5) and the promise that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (v. 18, where Paul quotes Gen 15:5). These promises were made to Abraham in the OT, so they give Abraham concrete revealed truth to believe—and because Abraham believed these promises (vv. 20–21), he was justified by faith (v. 22, where Paul quotes Gen 15:6). Therefore the main problem with the expansion of the land view is that it makes no sense for Abraham to be justified through faith in a promise never revealed to him. The expansion of the land view leaves Abraham with no concrete revealed truth to have believed since God did not reveal to him that he would inherit the entire physical territory of the world. Put another way, faith is certainly more than intellectual assent, but faith must have concrete intellectual content that is to be affirmed and trusted. If the promise given to Abraham is the promise of becoming the father of many nations and having innumerable descendants, then Abraham had concrete promises to believe. But if the promise that Abraham must believe is the promise of inheriting the entire physical world, it would have been impossible for him to believe since such a promise was never revealed to him in the OT. Thus, it would be impossible for Abraham to be justified by faith, undermining Paul’s entire point in Romans 4. A person can only believe truth that God has revealed. Thus, we should correlate the promise of Rom 4:13 with the promises of Rom 4:17–18:

- Rom 4:13: Abraham was promised to be “heir of the world” (unclear)
Rom 4:17: Abraham was promised to be the “father of many nations” (quoting Gen 17:5)
Rom 4:18: Abraham was promised to have descendants as numerous as the stars (quoting Gen 15:5)
RESULT in Rom 4:22: Abraham’s faith in these promises led to his justification

If Paul had quoted from OT passages that promised an inheritance of the land of Israel (e.g. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:8), then “heir of world” in verse 13 would refer to inheriting land. But Paul quotes from OT passages that promised worldwide descendants (Gen 15:5; 17:5). Thus, “heir of the world” describes the fact that Abraham, though initially childless, would eventually inherit the world in the sense of becoming the father of innumerable persons from all the nations of the world. Though initially childless, Abraham would beget a worldwide family that he could truly call his own, i.e. his inheritance. But if Rom 4:13 does not refer to the inheritance of land, is it lexically possible for it to refer to the inheritance of people? Since inheritance usually refers to land, how can Abraham be “inheriting” people? The next two points attempt to answer these questions.

(3) We must be careful how we understand the meaning of κόσμος in Rom 4:13. It would be a lexical fallacy to import the meaning of the English word “cosmos” into the Greek word κόσμος.35 In English, cosmos describes the universe—the sun, stars, planets, etc. But the Greek word κόσμος is far more limited in its meaning. Unlike its related word γῆ (“earth” or “land”), κόσμος is a flexible word that does not always denote the physical world. γῆ, which is used in Matt 5:5, always refers to some aspect of the physical earth: soil for crops, the ground humans walk upon, a geographical region, the whole earth as a planet, etc. In contrast, κόσμος can refer to the physical earth, but it can also refer to the people who inhabit the world, i.e. “humanity in general,”36 thus κόσμος has a wider range of meaning than γῆ. Paul uses κόσμος 41 times in his writings and his usage of κόσμος illustrates these two possible meanings: sometimes the physical world is in view—“[God’s] eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived since the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20). “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). But at other times the people who live in this present world are in view, not physical land: “whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God” (Rom 3:19). “Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” (1 Cor 6:2) “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19). Other NT passages also show that κόσμος has a flexible range of meaning: sometimes the physical world is in view—“I came from the Father and have come

35 D. A. Carson calls this “semantic anachronism” when “a late use of a word is read back into earlier literature” (Carson, Exegetical Fallacies, 33).
into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father” (John 16:28). But at other times people are in view: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). My point is that if Paul had used γῆ in Rom 4:13, he would clearly be referring to the inheriting of land. But because he uses κόσμος, his meaning is open to interpretation and we cannot immediately assume that κόσμος refers to land. Abraham’s inheritance could be land, but it could also be people. The context of Romans 4 is determinative and I have shown that Rom 4:17–18 indicates that the promise in verse 13 relates to people (i.e. Abraham’s worldwide descendants) not to land.

(4) We must also be careful how we understand the meaning of the word κληρονόμος (“heir”) in Rom 4:13. Because the OT joins together inheritance and land so often,37 we can unconsciously begin to always associate inheritance with land, even in the NT. But we cannot define κληρονόμος so narrowly as only referring to the inheriting of land. κληρονόμος is a flexible word. An heir “receives something as a possession, [he is a] beneficiary.”38 Christ is “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2), not simply heir of land. Noah “became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb 11:7), not an heir of land. Titus 3:7 seems to refer to believers as heirs of eternal life, not heirs of land (cf. Matt 19:29, also inheriting eternal life). Even though the OT usually relates inheritance with land, there are places where someone is said to have people as an inheritance: God speaks to His anointed and says, “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance” (Ps 2:8). In Isa 19:25, God says, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.” Psalm 33:12 says, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LOR D, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance.” Psalm 94:14 says, “the LOR D will not abandon His people, nor will He forsake His inheritance.” Joel 2:17 says, “Spare Your people, O LOR D, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.” These passages show that in the OT, Israel is often considered to be God’s “inheritance.”39 So it is well attested that inheritance does not always refer to inheriting land; it can also refer to inheriting righteousness, eternal life, persons, etc. It is thus lexically plausible that Abraham’s inheritance in Rom 4:13 is not land, but people, namely, a worldwide group of descendants, which Paul explicitly describes in Rom 4:17–18.

Summary and Conclusion

In this article, I have argued against the expansion of the land view of Rom 4:13 by showing that Second Temple Jewish literature is inconclusive regarding its view of the land, thus Second Temple Jewish literature neither argues for nor against an expansion of the OT Abrahamic land promises. I have shown that the context of Rom 4:13 is focused upon the OT promises of descendants (vv. 17–18, quoting Gen 17:5

37 This is particularly true in Genesis–2 Chronicles where the land of promise is prominent. But in the Psalms and the Prophets, inheritance is often not correlated with land, but with people.

38 BDAG, 548 (heading 1 of κληρονόμος).

39 Also see Psalms 28:9; 78:71; 106:5, 40; Jer 10:16; 12:7–9; Joel 3:2.
and 15:5), not the OT promises of land (e.g. Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:8). Finally, I have shown that κόσμος can refer to persons as well as land, and that κληρονόμος does not always refer to inheriting land, but can also refer to inheriting righteousness, life, persons, etc.

This understanding of Rom 4:13 is appropriately called the “inheritance of many nations” view. Abraham is not inheriting land, but inheriting people—namely, his innumerable spiritual descendants from all the nations of the world. According to this view, Rom 4:13 has nothing to do with the OT land promises and thus neither affirms nor expands the OT land promises. It is about the worldwide nature of Abraham’s descendants; it is not about the worldwide nature of Abraham’s land promise. Thus, Rom 4:13 simply has nothing to say about the land promise. If this view is correct, then the debate about the Abrahamic land promises moves to other texts and other issues. Matthew 5:5, Ephesians 6:2–3, Hebrews 4:1–11 and 11:8–16 still need careful analysis. And there also remains the question of whether or not the land of Canaan should be considered a type of “rest” and a type of “paradise” that finds its fulfillment in the new earth. Careful analysis of these additional texts and issues is necessary in order to build a biblical theology of the land.

While there are many more issues to address (as noted above), my hope is that this article has shown that Rom 4:13 is not a straightforward and obvious expansion of the OT Abrahamic land promises. Those who still advocate such a view need to reckon with the literary context of Rom 4:13 (esp. verses 17–18) and should realize that they cannot appeal to Second Temple Jewish literature to support their view since Second Temple Judaism’s theology of the land is much more complex and variegated than is often assumed.
A CRITIQUE OF GENTRY AND WELLUM’S,
KINGDOM THROUGH COVENANT: 
A HERMENEUTICAL-THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

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In November 2014, the Dispensational Study Group met at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting to interact with scholars Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum concerning their book, Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants. The responders to this book were Craig Blaising, Michael Grisanti, and Darrell Bock. The final three articles in this issue of the journal contain the written responses of these three men as presented at the meeting.

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Overview of the Book

Kingdom through Covenant [KTC] presents itself as a work of biblical theology under the label, Progressive Covenantalism. Progressive Covenantalism sees itself as a version of New Covenant Theology, and New Covenant Theology itself is a revision, reformulation, of traditional Covenant Theology, one that refocuses the covenant concept away from the traditional theological covenants of Covenant Theology to biblical covenants, away from the idea of one (or two or three) overarching canon-

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1 This is a revised version of the paper presented at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Diego, CA, November 2014.

ical covenant theme(s) to a progressive development of covenants from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Progressive Covenantalism believes that in this way it can present a biblical theology that better expresses NT ecclesiology.

The title of the work, *Kingdom through Covenant*, expresses the authors’ view that the kingdom of God comes into existence through progressive covenantal change from OT to NT.

The book is structured in three parts:

**Part 1: Prolegomena** (authored by Steve Wellum): This consists of three chapters:

1. **On the Importance of Covenants for Biblical Theology.** The canonical narrative is structured by a string of biblical covenants climaxing in the New Covenant which brings into existence the realities of a Baptist/baptistic ecclesiology.

2. **Covenants in Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology.** Descriptions are given of the varieties of Dispensationalism (following the categories of the book *Progressive Dispensationalism*) and then a description of Covenantalism ending with a focus on the Covenantal View of the church as a mixed assembly with the practice of paedobaptism.

3. **Hermeneutical Issues in “Putting Together” the Covenants.** Several matters are presented here on how to interpret Scripture which relate to the overall argument of the book. These matters will be taken up in this review as a vantage point from which to assess the book as a whole.

**Part 2: Exposition of the Biblical Covenants** (authored by Peter Gentry). Part 2 constitutes the majority of the book. It consists of 12 chapters on what the authors identify as the key biblical covenants. After a preliminary chapter on the biblical and ANE context, the remaining 11 chapters are structured as follows:

- 1 chapter on the covenant with Noah
- 1 chapter arguing a covenant with Creation
- 2 chapters on the Abrahamic covenant
- 2 chapters on the Mosaic or Israelite covenant
- 1 chapter on the Davidic covenant
- 2 chapters on the New covenant
- 1 chapter on Ephesians 4:15 as expressive of the New covenant community

[Mike Grisanti and Darrell Bock will offer a brief response to the biblical treatment of covenants and implications drawn from them, Grisanti evaluating it from an OT perspective and Bock from a NT perspective.]

**Part 3: Theological Integration** (authored by Steve Wellum). This final section consists of two chapters:
1. “Kingdom through Covenant”: A Biblical-Theological Summary. Here Wellum gives a summary of how to read the canon on the basis of Gentry’s chapters.

2. “Kingdom through Covenant”: Some Theological Implications. Here Wellum takes up again some of the issues raised in the Prolegomena and adds further theological reflection. Progressive Covenantalism is presented specifically as a Reformed Baptist reading of Scripture.

**Positive Features**

*KTC* sets excellent hermeneutical goals and offers a number of focused exegetical studies that advance biblical scholarship.

The authors state that in order to understand the Scripture, one needs to understand the biblical covenants (12–13). Furthermore, each covenant should be interpreted in context and “then viewed intertextually and canonically” (14). The goal is to understand each covenant, how the covenants relate to each other, and how they inform the canonical narrative.

In the initial chapters, Wellum states that the goal is to be “more biblical” than alternative interpretations (81). We can certainly applaud this goal. The more biblical one is, the better. Additionally, he argues that Scripture must be read canonically in a “thick,” not a “thin,” manner. I would completely agree with this. My criticism, for reasons stated below, is that *KTC* does not succeed in this goal measured against a holistic interpretation of Scripture such as that given in Progressive Dispensationalism.

Again, Wellum states that *KTC* seeks a “more accurate way to understand the relationship of the biblical covenants which makes better sense of the overall presentation of Scripture and will help us resolve some of our theological differences” (23). He speaks of the importance of knowing where one is in the biblical narrative for one’s understanding of God, the blessings of salvation, and the church (97 n. 34).

*KTC* argues that the kingdom of God is based on covenant promises and that New Covenant fulfillment is the means by which the kingdom comes into fulfillment. Also, the authors argue that fulfillment comes through Jesus Christ, that the canonical narrative reaches its culmination in and through Him. Progressive Dispensationalism, the perspective from which this review is given, would and has affirmed all these things. However, as will be seen below, there are differences in the ways in which this fulfillment is understood. And it is precisely here that the claims about a thick and more biblical reading of Scripture will be tested.

The book does offer a wealth of exegetical analysis and interacts with a select range of scholarly interpretations of biblical texts treating the divine covenants. While we do differ on some exegetical conclusions, it is more often the implications that are drawn from them, the broader hermeneutical claims made for the canonical narrative, and the omission of key elements of the biblical text in making those broad claims where one finds problems.
Critique

Structural Problems

*KTC* attempts to give a biblical theological reading of Scripture without any direct treatment of the NT (except for a chapter on Ephesians 4). However, the authors’ claim that OT covenant promises are fulfilled in a “heightened” reality in the NT that differs in meaning from what was literally promised in the OT really depends on proof from the NT that such is the case—proof which I would argue is non-existent. Although they include references to the NT while analyzing OT covenant texts, the book is weakened by the absence of focused attention on the NT itself.

Hermeneutical and Theological Problems

Overall criticism

While *KTC* offers a “thick” exegetical analysis of some features of the biblical covenants in several OT texts, with respect to the overall canonical narrative, contrary to its claim, it offers a “thin” reading. Its construal of the canonical narrative is not fully informed by crucial textual details, which when taken into account lead one, I believe, to a rich, holistic understanding of Scripture. The specific criticisms offered below will justify this overall criticism.

Inadequate Hermeneutical Tools

The authors’ perception of these textual details may be blurred somewhat by some hermeneutical tools that would best be abandoned (in the case of *continuity or discontinuity*) or reformulated (in the case of *typology*).

**Continuity and Discontinuity:** Steve Wellum frames the hermeneutical options for reading the canonical narrative using terminology borrowed from John Feinberg, expressed in the title of Feinberg’s edited volume: *Continuity and Discontinuity.* This might seem to be useful since (1) Feinberg contrasts Covenantal and Dispensational readings of Scripture using these conceptual tools and since (2) Wellum and Gentry want to offer a via media between the two systems. However, in light of much that has been written on the interpretation of narrative, it does not seem that *continuity* and *discontinuity* are helpful or even suitable for narrative analysis. It would be better to avoid these abstractions and refocus the issue on plot development and resolution. A plot may develop with the addition of new features. It may develop with twists and turns. The challenge is to understand the story as a coherent narrative, to understand how all its different features, wherever in the story line they are introduced, come together to make the overall story.

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3 The discussion of Feinberg’s work begins on p. 109. But, the conceptual framework of continuity and discontinuity is used elsewhere by Wellum as well. It appears to be a key conceptual tool for him in explaining the movement of the canonical narrative.
Focusing on plot development and narrative resolution offers a better conceptual framework for accomplishing the authors’ goal of evaluating covenantal and dispensational readings of the Bible, especially Progressive Dispensationalism.

The Function of Typology in KTC: The authors argue that the series of covenants in the Bible constitute the skeletal structure of the canonical narrative. But they also claim that typology is a crucial means by which the canonical narrative unfolds. Typology is the progressive movement which directs the narrative from promise to fulfillment.4

Wellum constructs the following definition of typology from Davidson: “typology as a NT hermeneutical endeavor is the study of the OT salvation-historical realities or “types” (persons, events, institutions) which God has specifically designed to correspond to and predictively prefigure their intensified antitypical fulfillment aspects (inaugurated and consummated) in NT salvation history” (103).

The definition is elaborated by an explanation of how types are believed to “work in Scripture.” First, they are to be construed within a pre-understood “promise-fulfillment” pattern of redemptive-history in which “all types find their fulfillment in Christ” (105). Secondly, typology has an “a fortiori (lesser to greater) quality” which is to say that there is an “escalation as the type is fulfilled in the antitype” (106).

The definition, based on Richard Davidson, is not really defended. It is simply employed. The problem is there is no agreed definition of typology as various authors on the subject admit.5 At the very least, typology has to do with repeated patterns which form a correspondence in the biblical narrative between some earlier and later events, persons, and institutions. Interpreters of Scripture who take the canonical narrative seriously can agree on this. As evangelicals, we can agree that this pattern repetition is providential because we believe in providence and in inspiration. Certainly we can agree as well that Christ himself is the greater historical reality in the canonical narrative. Consequently, He is himself an escalated feature in the story of the Bible, because He, unlike any of the human persons in preceding history is God Incarnate. Because of that fact alone, types applied to Christ in the NT have an “intensified antitypical fulfillment.” They are part of a narrative intensification due to the progression of the story line to the appearance and activity of the Christ in whom and by whom the divine plan moves toward culmination. However, KTC, like traditional Covenantal treatments of typology, focuses its attention almost exclusively on this issue—the NT application of OT patterns to Christ. It is with reference to this that such works speak of prefiguration, prediction, and escalation.6

4 “In fact, one of the crucial means by which God’s redemptive-historical plan unfolds, indeed how the “promise-fulfillment” motif is developed in Scripture, is by the use of God-given “typology” (101).


6 Doug Moo warns against “a certain circularity of procedure [which] is often evident at this point, as scholars—according to the definition they have established—select what they think are genuine instances of New Testament typology” (Douglas Moo, “The Problem of Sensus Plenior,” in Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986]), 196.
But typology is not limited to the NT narrative of Christ, nor, as David Baker has noted, does it always involve escalation. In some cases, patterns are repeated from the “greater” to the “lessor.” Even Wellum admits that types are repeated through the narrative without any “escalation” until one comes to Christ. Understanding the greater function of typology may help to temper exaggerated claims about the significance of typological escalation.

One would think that in order to defend our authors’ notion of typological escalation to “heightened realities” which are supposedly in the NT, that they would have to go to the NT to show that they are in fact there. But KTC takes the peculiar approach of wanting to base itself on OT plot development and to indicate from the trajectory of that development what must be the nature and character of type escalation in the NT. One really needs to go to the NT to see how the patterns are actually applied to Christ in conjunction with what is said there in the story line. Failing to do this may very well lead to exaggerated claims about the nature of escalation in the NT, about the resolution of the story line, and about how biblical typology functions with respect to it.

Some Problematic Claims about Typology in KTC

1. Typology is the means of “establishing” the divine plan. The problem here is the word *establish*. It would be better to say that the divine plan is *established* in the story of the Bible by the words of explicit divine declaration in the language of the covenant promises—promises which Gentry and Wellum see as the skeletal structure of the canonical narrative. It is reasonable to assume that if there were to be any change in God’s plan, it would be revealed verbally by explicit divine declaration, in like manner as the plan was originally revealed. Types enhance the narrative presentation

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7 Baker, 183.
8 Wellum writes, “. . . in order to discern properly how Old Testament types/patterns are brought to fulfillment in God’s plan, we must first observe not only how those types are intertextually developed *within* the Old Testament but also how they are applied and developed under the new covenant. In other words, Jesus and the new covenant becomes the hermeneutical lens by which we interpret the fulfillment of the types/patterns of the Old Testament” (606). He also states that “typological patterns are discovered exegetically” (105 n.53), and that “given the indirect nature of it, not only does typology require carefully [sic] discernment; it also requires the passing of time in order to determine how the ‘type’ is fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ” (104). Progressive dispensationalists do not disagree with any of this. The issue is, what exactly does the NT teach about type fulfillment? What is the best way to read biblical typology within the entire biblical narrative? However, before one can even address these things, extended treatment of NT theology and NT typology is needed. However, extended exegetical and biblical theological analysis of NT employment of type patterns is precisely what is missing in KTC.

9 The importance of typology for reading the biblical narrative is succinctly stated by Wellum as follows: “Not only does the *a fortiori* quality of typology serve as the crucial means by which Scripture unpacks the unique identity of Christ, it is also the *way* in which Scripture grounds the uniqueness of the entire era of fulfillment associated with the dawning of the new covenant. In other words, it is the means by which a legitimate discontinuity between the old and new in God’s unified plan is *established*. When the antitype arrives in history, or better, when it is inaugurated, not only are the previous types brought to their *telos* but the entire era introduced entails massive changes in many areas” (107, underlining and bold font added). See also footnote 10 below. It is this understanding of typology, or rather the typological reading of the covenant promises such that their fulfillment takes place in a different antitypical reality from what was explicitly promised that is the focus of this criticism.
of the plan. They signal divine action in the narrative. But it is an exaggerated claim to say that they establish the divine plan. The critic is right to be suspicious of a claim like this (that types are the means of establishing the divine plan) when the claim is employed to contravene, suppress, or subvert the meaning of explicit covenant promise, and even more so when the NT explicitly repeats and reaffirms the same promise as declared in the covenants of the OT. This leads to the second point:

2. Typology “establishes” a major discontinuity in the divine plan which explicitly or implicitly changes the meaning of OT promises. Gentry and Wellum believe that a major change occurs in the plot line of the Bible (Wellum speaks of “massive changes” [107, 598, 649]) whereby NT “higher” realities replace OT “lower realities” thereby constituting a change in the meaning of divine promises. The “fulfillment” of the promise thereby differs in meaning from the “promise” itself. And, they claim that typology establishes this reality shift. But, this expects too much from narrative pattern repetition. A shift in meaning of this magnitude is not likely to be based on pattern repetition. Greater attention to textual detail is necessary to establish the claim. Actually, in my opinion, greater attention to textual detail demonstrates that the claim is superficial at best and actually wrong.

3. The Covenants relate to each other typically with all covenants being fulfilled in the New Covenant as their antitype. But the covenants are not related to each other as types. Rather, they are successive promises in the narrative of Scripture revealing and advancing the divine plan. They are best read as declaratory speeches in the narrative not as type patterns that function to shift narrative reality. Furthermore, reading the New Covenant as a mechanism for shifting the entire promise-fulfillment process to a “higher reality” which in effect changes the meaning of “promise” in that process

10 Wellum argues for a change in meaning from promise to fulfillment in his dispute with John Feinberg on pp. 122–24. And this meaning shift is crucial to the way Progressive Covenantalism reads the biblical metanarrative. Wellum notes, on 122–23, that “Feinberg acknowledges that a common way to view typology, such as we [ie. Wellum and Gentry] maintain, is . . . that the meaning of the antitype supersedes and cancels the meaning of the type in its own context” (underlining added). In a footnote to this statement, Wellum writes, “we strongly agree that types must be given their due meanings in their own context, but we disagree that types are not predictive/prophetic, and that that to which they point arrives (i.e. the antitype), they have reached their terminus. Further, we know God’s intention regarding the type by tracing the intertextual development of it, eventually culminating in its fulfillment in Christ” (123 n.89, underlining added). This last sentence is important. Wellum is saying that God’s intention is not to be found in the type itself but in its alleged antitype. Given the fact that in this discussion the word type refers to covenant promise, the distinction between the meaning of the type (promise) in its own context and the meaning of the antitype (fulfillment of the promise) in its context needs to be noted. The issue at dispute is precisely the predictive meaning of the promises. Accordingly, Wellum quotes Feinberg as saying that a proper typology “does not allow us to ignore or cancel the meaning of the type or substitute the meaning of the antitype (fulfillment of the promise) in its context needs to be noted. The issue at dispute is precisely the predictive meaning of the promises. Accordingly, Wellum quotes Feinberg as saying that a proper typology “does not allow us to ignore or cancel the meaning of the type or substitute the meaning of the antitype for it. . . . NT antitypes neither explicitly nor implicitly cancel the meaning of OT types” (123). To this statement, Wellum responds, “it should be obvious that we differ with Feinberg on typology and that we are working with different understandings of it” (ibid.).

11 Wellum’s chapter which summarizes the argument of the book begins the section on the New Covenant in this way: “It is the new covenant which all of the previous covenants anticipate and typify, and it is in this way [ie. anticipation and typification] that the new covenant supersedes all the previous covenants” (644–45, underlining mine). The summary explanation on pp. 644–52 of how the New Covenant works in the biblical metanarrative upnots this typological and supersessionist view of the New Covenant as Wellum understands it.
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is not only highly exaggerated but misreads the carefully detailed presentation of the New Covenant in Scripture, both OT and NT. It misses the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant promise of land and nation are foundational to New Covenant promise and remain unchanged as the soteriological blessings of the New Covenant are revealed.

Hermeneutical Concerns and Textual Details Calling for a “Thicker” and “More Biblical” Reading of the Canonical Narrative than KTC.

1. Performative Language Interpretation of Divine Promise.

Performative language, or speech-act analysis is mentioned in KTC but not employed in its study of the covenants. The key insight of speech-act analysis is that language has a performative force. By language, people not only refer to things, they also do things. And, the paradigmatic example of a speech-act, which J. L. Austin (the formative thinker on performative language) himself cited, is a promise.12

A promise entails an obligation. When somebody makes a promise, they’re not just stating something, they are doing something. They are forming a relationship and creating an expectation that carries moral obligation. Failure to complete a promise is a violation of one’s word. It is a serious matter. Certainly, we can make promises with conditions. The language of promise will make that clear. But once the promise is made, a relationship has been enacted and an expectation has been grounded in personal integrity.

Compare for example, the performative language of a wedding ceremony. As Richard Briggs has noted, when one says in a wedding ceremony “I do”, there is no convention by which one can turn around an hour later and say “well, really, I didn’t”.13 To say “I do” in the wedding ceremony is a performative speech act by which one formally accepts the marriage relationship. By those words one forms a relationship with another person which carries expectations and obligations.

A speech-act occurs in God’s communication to Abraham in Genesis 12—a promise is given concerning a land, a people, a nation, and blessing to all nations. In Genesis 15, Abraham questions God about this promise of a land asking, “How shall I know that I will inherit it?” (Gen 15:8). So God adds the convention of a covenant ceremony so that Abraham would know that his descendants would inherit the promised land. Gentry gives an extended analysis of the Abrahamic Covenant but fails to consider it from a performative language perspective.

When God takes the covenant upon Himself in Genesis 15, a relationship of expectation is grounded in the integrity of God Himself. Divine intention and resolve could not be more clear. Later, God adds to the ceremonially reinforced promissory word the further convention of a solemn oath (Gen 22:15–18). God swears that He will accomplish that which He has explicitly promised. The writer to Hebrews says


that “when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (Heb 6:17). The promise and the oath are “two unchangeable things” (Heb 6:18) given to the recipients as “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19). God’s word is certain, which means His people can confidently rely on what He promises. And the fact that Hebrews speaks of these things as “unchangeable” should caution one from assuming that shadowy type correspondences mentioned elsewhere in that book somehow mean that the Lord’s explicit speech acts promising a nation and a land have somehow been dissolved, replaced, or transformed in their meaning.

Not only are the promises made and reiterated in performative language early in canonical narrative, but in the later narrative they are reinforced by additional prophetic speech acts of swearing, reaffirming, and emphatically restating God’s resolve to fulfill them as promised. The resolve is further underscored in several texts by sweeping rhetorical features like Isaiah’s posing impossible odds, unsurmountable obstacles only to dismiss them as trifles to the powerful Creator of all things, and by dramatic scenes, such as Hosea’s depiction of the anguish and sorrow of adultery or the pain of parental rejection which in spite of punishment, hurt, and suffering is nevertheless overcome by an unquenchable, triumphant love. The dramatic presentation in Hosea is particularly strong. Gentry’s remark that God “divorced” Israel (442) is simply wrong. Hosea explicitly teaches that in spite of hardened and repeated adultery on Israel’s part, he will not divorce her. Separation—yes, even for a long time. Awful pain and suffering—yes, but no divorce! (This is the God, after all, who in Mal 2 condemns divorce [some readings of 2:16: “I hate divorce!”] and who then says a few lines later, “I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O Israel, are not consumed!” [3:6].) Instead, an inscrutable love will restore her to himself in a loving and faithful relationship!

Interpreting the canonical narrative to say that Israel is redefined and that God’s promise of the land is substantively changed is not congruent with this line of prophetic reaffirmation and restated divine resolve. It is a thin, superficial, and actually

14 Speaking of Isa 54:4–10, Gentry writes, “this marriage relationship was broken by Israel’s unfaithfulness, and God brought the curse of exile upon Israel, and so he forsook (i.e., divorced) his unfaithful wife” (442). However, it should be noted that Gentry goes on to speak of a future renewing of the marriage: “The marriage relationship was broken, the wife forsaken/widowed, but now reconciliation brings about renewing of the marriage . . . . Israel may feel like a woman who was married . . . . and then rejected. This, however, is only a momentary turning away. . . . The marriage relationship will be restored. There will be a new covenant. . . .” (442–43). The problem might be considered an unfortunate word choice (“divorced”) to explain the “separation” language used to illustrate the divine wrath. However, given the fact that Gentry believes that Israel is redefined in the New Covenant such that the meaning content of the covenant promise establishing Israel’s particular identity—the identity of the partner in the marriage covenant—is changed, would seem to justify his use of the word divorce in the divine separation from Israel prior to the establishment of the new covenant. When the New Covenant is established, it is established with a “new [that is, different] Israel.” Since Gentry sees the marriage being “renewed” to a different Israel, it would seem appropriate for him to speak of the Lord having “divorced” the old Israel. But the point being made in this review is not only that the language of divorce is unsuitable to explain the rejection, abandonment, separation language of the prophets, but also that the renewal of the marriage relationship in the prophets is to the same Israel—that is, Israel considered as a particular ethnic, national entity—that had received the covenant promises. While Gentry appears to include ethnic Jews within this “new Israel,” Israel itself is no longer the particular, national entity that was the recipient of the covenant promises. That Israel has been rejected and discarded.
subversive reading of the text. But even more, it creates a major theological problem for Progressive Covenantalism because it calls into question the integrity of God. In spite of recognition in *KTC* that divine integrity, divine *emet* and *hesed*, is tied to covenant promise fulfillment, they downplay the seriousness of the divine word of resolve expressed in the performative language of covenant promise and restate-ment.\(^{15}\)

2. Holistic Anthropology

*KTC* fails to account for the national, tribal, ethnic dimensions of biblical anthropology. They miss the national, ethnic, aspects of humanity as a key feature of the biblical narrative from its appearance in Genesis 10–11 to the final eschatological scene in Revelation 22. This accounts in part for an inadequate understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant (which promises blessings for *nations*) and the role of ethnic, national Israel in the plan of God from the promise covenanted to Abraham to the eschatological consummation. This tribal, national dimension of human life is a creation-based design that formed as humanity multiplied. Paul positively affirms this design rooted in creation when he says in Acts 17:26, “And he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place.” These anthropological dimensions do not just characterize the story up to the inauguration and consummation of the New Covenant. They do not disappear when the New Covenant is established. The national and territorial aspects of human reality continue into the new earth at the end of the book of Revelation where the kings of the earth (the whole territory of the new earth) bring the glory of the nations (the multi-national dimension of human life in the eschaton) into the City (that is, from their various locations on the new earth outside the City into it).

Related to this is a misuse of a quotation from D. A. Carson (*Showing the Spirit*, 152–53; *KTC* 686–87). Even if Carson’s point was that giving the Spirit eradicates the corporate “tribal” structures of humanity, the claim could hardly be considered as a credible interpretation of Jer 31:31 (“they will all know me, from the least to the greatest”). Rather, his point seems to be that the gift of the Spirit to all changes the nature of instruction from a situation in which only tribal leaders in Israel were gifted by the Spirit (although even that exaggerates the text) to one in which all know the

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\(^{15}\) The connection of covenant promise to divine integrity is addressed in *KTC* within the discussion of the conditionality of the covenants (608–11). Wellum notes the emphasis in Scripture on divine *emet* and *hesed* and states, “He always remains true to himself, his own character, and his promises, and it is on this basis alone that we can hope, trust, and find all our confidence in him” (609). He cites Heb 6:17–18, and states that the Lord “keeps his promises—and as such they can never be thwarted” (610). All of this is applied to maintaining an “unconditional” force in the covenant structure until its fulfillment by Christ (611). But Wellum does not connect divine integrity to the meaning content of the promises as originally given! *KTC* does not see that changing the meaning content of promise in the supposed move from the giving of the promise to its fulfillment calls divine integrity into account. Simply affirming divine integrity and citing Heb 6:17–18 does not address the problem.
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Lord.\(^{16}\) However, they then turn the point to argue for a de-tribalization on the anthropological level. Certainly, there is no logical reason why giving the Spirit to all creates “massive changes” to the anthropological reality of genetic tribal structures. Even the text which Carson as well as Gentry and Wellum cite—Jer 31:31—explicitly states that the New Covenant blessing of “they will all know me” will be given to “the House of Israel and the House of Judah.” The reference is to a tribal reality which in context is continued and blessed as such with the blessing of all members knowing the Lord.

Nevertheless, this obscure argument is put forward to try to de-tribalize, and de-nationalize the promise in Jer 31:31–37 which speaks of Israel “being a nation forever before me (31:36)” set in the context of the well-known section of Jeremiah whose theme is “I will restore your fortunes” (Jeremiah 30–33).

A deficient anthropology will almost certainly leave one unprepared to grasp the holistic nature of the eschatological kingdom, since that kingdom is a presented in Scripture as a multi-national not just multi-personal reality. And this deficiency in turn cripples the attempt to explain the significance of the inaugurated aspects of that kingdom in relation to its consummation.

Understanding that national, tribal features remain as part of biblical anthropology even into the eschatological consummation (whether that consummation is pictured in the OT [Isa 11:19 is just one text] or in the NT [Matt 19:28; Rev 21:24–26; 22:2]) enables one to grasp the significance of the promise repeated in both the OT and the NT of the restoration of national Israel. The NT repetition of a future for national Israel, in texts such as Acts 1, 3, and Romans 11, is not to be dismissed as

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\(^{16}\) Gentry and Wellum both emphasize this point in contrast to traditional covenantal interpretations of the New Covenant community today as a mixed body of believers and unbelievers. Progressive dispensationalists would completely agree that the church is not a mixed body. The authors’ stated intention, as is Carson’s, is to stress the giving of the Holy Spirit to every member in the New Covenant relationship. However, they also relate this “structural” change in the tribal condition of Israel to what they claim is its reconstitution as a multi-ethnic reality. Gentry’s treatment of the matter can be found on pp. 508–13 which concludes the de-tribalization process with “a restored Israel, in which Jew and Gentile are created to be the new humanity” (512). Wellum, making the argument again from the Carson quotation about the Spirit given to each one in the New Covenant community, concludes: “Yet, the covenant community that he mediates is not structurally the same as the previous covenant communities. Those who come under his mediatorial rule and reign include both believing Jews and believing Gentiles” (647). Progressive dispensationalists agree that the rule and reign of Christ includes both believing Jews and believing Gentiles, but Wellum’s point on pages 644–52 is that in the process of creating the New Covenant community and extending the blessings of the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, a new non-ethnic, non-tribal reality, the church, has come into existence as the new Israel: “The New Testament is clear: what the Old Testament anticipated and promised has now arrived in Christ . . . . The benefits of his work are now applied to the church—a new international community—joined to him by faith by the work of the Spirit” (652). Since he sees no ethnic, national Israel receiving what was “anticipated and promised” in the Old Testament but rather sees the church—“a new international community”—as the recipient of those promises, he has effectively de-tribalized the promise. The problem here appears to be a failure to consider the possibility of an eschatological outcome in which believing Jews and believing Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit in and through Christ—thus each and every one directly related to Him by the Spirit—and yet at the same time the national, tribal anthropological dimensions of divine promise and prophecy are also fulfilled. Progressive Covenantalism does not (apparently it conceptually cannot) maintain both of these together. Progressive Dispensationalism affirms both.
an anomaly needing hermeneutical correction. Rather, it fits harmoniously in a holistic reading of the entire biblical story. It is a thin reading of the canonical narrative that misses these details. It is an unreliable reading that deliberately subverts them.

3. Land, Earth, and the Holistic New Creation

In the past couple of decades, many theologians have come to embrace what I call New Creation eschatology. New Creation Eschatology believes that the eternal state is not a heavenly, timeless, non-material reality but a new heavens and new earth, such as in Isaiah 65, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21 and 22. The dwelling place of the redeemed in that new creation is not in heaven but on the new earth. *KTC* says that it affirms this idea of the new creation. However, it fails to draw the logical consequences of this view for its understanding of the land promised to Israel. And that failure raises questions about the conceptual clarity of the new creation in Progressive Covenantalism.

The imagery of refinement in new earth prophecies extending from Isaiah to 2 Peter points to the fact that the new earth will not be an utterly new creation from nothing but a refinement and renovation of the present earth. God’s plan for His creation is not to destroy it and start over from nothing but to redeem, cleanse, and renew it. Paul’s comments about the liberation of creation in Romans 8 harmonize with this. In light of this, it is clear that New Creation Eschatology envisions not a non-material eternity nor an alternate material reality but the redemption of this earth and heavens fit for an everlasting glorious manifestation of the presence of God.

In light of this, is it not important to ask about the territorial promises to Israel? The land and nation promises to Israel were repeatedly stated to be everlasting. In Isa 65:18, 25, the promise of the new earth is linked to the promise of a restored Jerusalem, the chief part of the land of promise. The blessings of the new earth parallel the promised blessings of the land of Israel in many texts so that the land becomes an example of what is intended for the whole earth.

Given these considerations, a key argument in *KTC* can be seen to be flawed. The argument is that the land promise is taken up in the biblical story in a type escalation from Eden to the Land of Israel to the New Earth, such that the land comes to be replaced by (fulfilled by) the new earth. The new earth, then, takes the place of the land promised to Israel in the consummation.

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17 “It must be emphasized that the final state is not heaven, but rather life in a new creation” (467, cf. 626, 629).

18 This argument appears at crucial points in the book. See pp. 114 n.75, 607, but especially 703–13. Much of the language of the land being typological of the new creation would not be objectionable if it were not for this supersessionist, replacement aspect to the argument. Wellum, supposedly speaking for Gentry as well, states that “there is little evidence that the land promise finds its Christological fulfilment in terms of a specific piece of land given to national Israel. The story line of Scripture simply does not move back in this direction” (714). He seems unable to conceptualize the story line moving *forward* in that direction with a renewed land of Israel given to a renewed Israel as part of a renewed earth given to renewed nations all enjoying consummated blessing in Christ! Unable to see how a holistic consummation fits with the expressed promises covenanted by God, he postulates a consummation which changes the meanings of the promises contrary to their performative force, regardless of the theological problems that such a move introduces.
This argument suffers from a logical fallacy that often appears in Covenantal readings of the story of the Bible. The whole, the universal (in this case, the new creation) replaces the part, the particular (the land promised to Israel). Accordingly, our authors say that the biblical narrative moves from a particular land to the whole of the new earth. While it is certainly true that the narrative moves from an expressed plan for the entire creation to God’s specific dealings with Israel in OT narrative and then to gospel proclamation to all nations with a culminating vision of a new creation (also predicted by the prophets of Israel), our authors draw the conclusion that the land of Israel somehow disappears and is replaced by the eschatological reality of the new earth. However, in this movement from the part to the whole, unless the so-called “whole” is a completely different reality (which our authors want to deny) the statement is nonsense. A whole logically includes all of its parts. If a part is removed from a whole, then it is a different “whole” from what it was before. Such a new whole does not replace a part in the old whole, rather, it replaces the whole. However, if the new whole is the old whole renewed, then all the parts of the old whole would be renewed as well. The particular part must be in the whole, renewed along with all the other parts, for the whole to be the whole that it is.

Since the new earth is the present earth renovated and renewed, the lands that constitute it must likewise be renovated and renewed. That includes the land promised to Israel along with all the other lands that make up the earth. It is the blessings promised for the land of Israel that are extended to the whole earth not the land itself that is extended. The fact that the land serves as a type of blessing to be extended to the earth does not logically call for the elimination or annihilation of that land in the renewal process! The renewal of the land and the renewal of the whole earth go together in biblical thought!

But, if the renewed earth includes the renewed Promised Land together with all other lands likewise renewed and blessed to the level of the land promised to Israel, then a key argument of KTC against Progressive Dispensationalism fails. The claim that there will be no future fulfillment of the territorial promise given to Israel is sometimes supported by the old refrain that the NT never mentions the land per se. KTC repeats this claim (112). But, this too is false. Paul’s statement in Acts 13:19 is too often overlooked: “After destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them [‘this people Israel—v.17] their land as an inheritance.” The phrase he gave them their land as an inheritance is taken from covenant language in Deuteronomy (Deut 4:21, 38; 12:10; 15:4; 19:10, 14; 21:23; 24:4; 25:19). Deuteronomy 4 is a crucial text speaking of a future exile and restoration of Israel (parallel to Deuteronomy 30). It is instructive that the repeated reference of the gift of the land as an inheritance is linked to the everlasting covenant promise in Ps 105:7–11:

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19 It is misleading to say that “the borders” of the land “are expanded to encompass the entire creation” (712). While Scripture is clear that the blessing is not confined to the land of Israel alone, the expansion of the blessing does not mean that the land in its territorial reality somehow in and of itself expands physically into a whole new world or that it no longer constitutes a “place” in the larger world.
He is the Lord our God;  
his judgments are in all the earth.  
He remembers his covenant forever,  
the word that he commanded,  
for a thousand generations,  
the covenant that he made with Abraham  
his sworn promise to Isaac,  
which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,  
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,  
saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan  
as your portion for an inheritance.

Note that Paul who says that God gave them their land as an inheritance is the same Paul who says in Rom 11:29 that “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” (note: in addition to the phrase ‘gave . . . as an inheritance,’ the land is repeatedly spoken of in the OT simply as a gift of the Lord to Israel—the land which the Lord gave you). In this same context (Romans 11) Paul speaks of the restoration of Israel in accordance with Covenant promise. The NT does not dwell on the land promise because it was not a matter of dispute. Jews were living in the land. Jewish believers in Jesus and Jewish non-believers both agreed on the land promise to Israel. The matter of dispute in NT writings was whether Jesus was the Christ. That was the main point in Paul’s synagogue speech in Acts 13 where he does mention the gift of the land to Israel as an inheritance.

4. Christology

*KTC* does say that the narrative of Scripture converges on Jesus Christ. He is the central focus of the divine plan. All the covenant promises find their fulfillment in and through Him. Our authors particularly emphasize the fulfillment of promise “in Him.” Actually, “in Him” is a thick concept in Scripture that includes “through Him.” It includes multiple aspects of the relationship of Christ to the redeemed creation. However, *KTC tends* to read “in Him” in a reductive, mystical manner rather than in the thick, holistic political, material, and spiritual interconnectivity that Scripture ascribes to the kingdom of God, the inheritance of Christ. *KTC, at times,* reads the Person of Christ as Himself the mystical consummation of the whole narrative. He personally is the fulfillment of Israel, the land, the nation, the church, the creation. The result is a vague mysticism that looks somewhat like a variant of metaphysical Personalism.20

20 “In the New Testament, it is our contention that the land promise does not find its fulfillment in the future in terms of a specific piece of real estate given to the ethnic nation of Israel; rather it is fulfilled in Jesus, who is the true Israel and the last Adam, who by his triumphant work wins for us the new creation. That new creation has ‘already’ arrived in the dawning of the new covenant in individual Christians (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:8–10) and the church (Eph 2:11–21) and it will be consummated when Christ returns and ushers in the new creation in its fullness (Revelation 21–22)” (607). Likewise, Wellum writes, “we enter the ‘land,’ so to speak, but now enjoying what the land pointed forward to: participating in new creation realities now as the people of God . . . . All of these themes [tabernacle, temple, new Jerusalem] are intimately associated with the land, and all of them are viewed as fulfilled typologically in Christ” (715).
While this may seem to exalt the Person of Christ, it actually diminishes Him, because it threatens the integrity of the communion of attributes that gives Him a distinguishable identity within and among His creatures while at the same time affirming His divine transcendence and immanence. It diminishes His Person because it deprives Him of the rich, thick inheritance that Scripture predicts for Him, an inheritance that retains the integrity of its created reality as the earth and the heavens, land and lands, people and peoples as individuals and as nations, including Israel and all the Gentiles, all worshipful of Him and in service to Him, not mystically dissolved into the reality of His person.

5. Ecclesiology

Progressive Covenantalism is, as the authors describe it, a variant of New Covenant Theology which is suspicious of the way traditional Covenant theology has been used to support paedobaptism and a “mixed assembly” view of the church. New Covenant theology has learned from Dispensationalism to read the OT covenants in relation to Israel not the church. But they differ from Dispensationalism in refusing to see any eschatological fulfillment of those covenant promises for a national Israel in the future. Instead, they see the New Covenant shifting the entire canonical narrative from Israel to the church, so that the meaning of the former is changed to be fulfilled in the higher reality of the latter. In this, they are more radical than traditional covenantalists who try to preserve a sense of unity in the Bible by projecting the church backwards into the OT. New Covenant Theology makes a distinction between Israel and the church which preserves the former in its integrity in the past but completely replaces and supersedes it in the present and the future. The unity of the Bible in this view appears to be in a hermeneutical “mechanism” which they believe is the New Covenant supposedly shifting the meaning of the entire covenantal promise structure so that the two Testaments connect only as type and antitype. By this means they dismiss traditional Covenantalism’s appeal to a “genealogical principle” to support what PC considers to be an ecclesiological error.

Progressive Covenantalism argues that traditional Covenantalism fails to see how the genealogical structure of the Covenant has been fulfilled in the heightened reality of Christ, not only in the consummation of the kingdom but in the inaugurated reality of the kingdom which is the church today. It has been superseded by a heightened typological fulfillment just as KTC claims that the territorial structure and land promise of the old covenantal arrangement has likewise been superseded in the heightened reality of Christ and the church.

Wellum cites as “helpful discussions of ‘land’ in biblical and systematic theology” a number of works which mostly take as their point of reference the seminal study (also cited by Wellum) of W. D. Davies, The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974). Davies argued that in the NT, the land promises were “Christified,” meaning that their fulfillment takes place in the Person of Christ. Gentry and Wellum do not use the term christification but the way in which land fulfillment is described as presently taking place in Christ suggests this kind of conceptuality. Personalism is the term used of a philosophy that construes ultimate reality as essentially personal. In American philosophy, it was advocated by the so-called Boston School of which Borden Parker Bowne was a foremost representative.
Interestingly, KTC acknowledges that Dispensationalism already offers a critique of Covenantalism’s use of the genealogical principle (eg. 64–65, 70, 683–84). That principle, in the OT wording of the covenants, refers to Israel, not the church. The church is a different reality in the NT not to be confused with the nation of Israel in the OT.21 So far, so good. But, PC insists on making the New Covenant dissolve and mystically transform the meaning of the entire string of covenant promises in order to move the entire canonical narrative from OT to NT. What an incredible loss to the richness of the biblical story, the complexity of the plot line, and the thick dimensions of created and redeemed reality just to carry out an ecclesiological agenda, especially when the theological concerns have already been addressed without this incredible loss!

This is not the place to set forth an alternative doctrine of the believers’ church and credo- as opposed to paedobaptism. However, a more satisfying biblical theology would be one which positions the church in its distinctiveness (distinctive in its constitution and its ordinances) within a holistic redemption in which all the promises find their fulfillment in integrity, one in which the rich texture of the work(s) of God come together in a stable, harmonious pattern, an eschatological reality which constitutes the wealth of Christ’s inheritance.

**Conclusion**

*KTC* offers a wealth of exegetical studies on OT covenant texts. It is also the key text for understanding the variant of New Covenant Theology which is presenting itself as Progressive Covenantalism. However, it offers a thin reading of the overall canonical plot structure. It ignores, overlooks, or leaves out key features of the biblical story (both OT and NT) such as God’s plan for nations, including explicitly Israel, and the place of land, including explicitly the land given to Israel, as a feature of the earth that He redeems. It misses the performative force of covenant promises to Israel which fit coherently with the national and territorial features of the narrative and fails to see the coherence of those promises with the restoration theme which also runs through the entire canon, from OT to NT. It fails to set the church distinctly within the narrative without subverting or reducing the complexity of the biblical

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21 In spite of its reference to various forms of Dispensationalism (40–56), *KTC* does not consider the ecclesiological difference between Progressive Dispensationalism and earlier varieties of Dispensationalism. Consequently, Wellum makes the summary statement that in Dispensationalism, “Israel is ontologically different than the church and thus still has privileges distinct from Christ and the church” (685). In Progressive Dispensationalism, the church is the inaugural kingdom reality now being manifest among the nations. It reaches its consummation and fulfillment when the kingdom is consummated. In the consummation, contrary to earlier forms of Dispensationalism, there is no “church” separate from the redeemed Jews and Gentiles who also constitute the eschatological nations. The redeemed of all the nations and as all the nations (Israel and Gentile), is the fulfillment of the entire plan and work of God with Israel and Gentiles in the OT economy and with those same nations and peoples in forming the church today. Consequently, while church is historically new and distinct in the outworking of the plan of God, and while it is categorically distinct from the tribal, national, ethnic categories of Israel and Gentile Nations and Jew and Gentile, it is not ontologically distinct as a different class of created beings. See Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, eds. *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 383–84; and Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993), 49–51.
story. Overall, it fails to present the convergence of the canonical narrative on Christ in a manner which relates all these things to Him in the integrity of their reality and in the integrity of His Person so that they come together to form the rich, thick eschatological inheritance of the Son of God. These features call for a “thicker,” “more biblical,” in fact, a more holistic reading of the canon of Scripture than that given in *KTC*. 
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A CRITIQUE OF GENTRY AND WELLUM’S, KINGSDOM THROUGH COVENANT: 
AN OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE

Michael Grisanti
Professor of Old Testament Studies
The Master’s Seminary

* * * * *

I am honored to respond to the work of two scholars I respect, Peter Gentry and Steve Wellum. I offer this response in accordance with the best possible understanding of “iron sharpens iron.” Here are my key “structural” or “big picture” concerns. As you would expect from a dispensationalist, my concerns focus on various issues concerning Israel as a nation, land promise, and typology.

First Issue

As a result of their typological approach and belief that all covenants find primary fulfillment through the first coming of Christ, I believe that Gentry and Wellum overlook the fact that the OT presentation of the promise of a restored nation to the land of promise receives repeated emphasis as a concrete reality in numerous OT passages. The OT does not present the land of promise as a typological issue pointing to a less concrete reality.

Broadly speaking, the noun “land” occurs almost 200 times in the book of Deuteronomy that directly connects the terms of the covenant with life in the land of promise (cf. 4:1, 5, 14, 40; 5:16; 6:1, 18, 20–25; et al.). Two biblical prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, also spend a lot of time addressing the nation of Israel’s past, present, and future where the term “land” (הָרְשָׁע) occurs well over 400 times in over 400 verses. Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel present the concept of land as a concrete reality that God promised His chosen nation, threatened to take away from them because of covenant treachery, and promised to restore to as a nation after they experienced covenant curse, repent of their sin, and embrace a relationship with Yahweh by faith.
Beyond that, numerous passages that deal with the New Covenant age intermingle what the OT covenants promise relating to a future restoration of the *redeemed* nation to the land along with rule over this domain by a Davidic king. Deuteronomy 29:22–28 envisions a future time when God will bring covenant curse upon the nation because of their penchant for covenant treachery. However, God’s scattering His covenant nation throughout pagan nations is *not the end* of God’s intentions for His people. Deuteronomy 30:1–10 describes their experience of redemption—individual salvation—as well as national restoration to the land of promise. Right before His promise to circumcise their hearts, we read that “the LORD your God will bring you into the land your fathers possessed, and you will take possession of it. He will cause you to prosper and multiply you more than He did your fathers” (Deut 30:5). This passage (30:1–10) describes God’s regenerating His chosen people *in conjunction with* restoring them to the Promised Land. Both realities do not typologically point to something different.

In Jer 16:10–15 and 29:4–28, the Lord connects His promise to bring covenant curse upon His chosen nation—eviction from the land of promise—with His promise to return this now spiritually vibrant nation to “their land that I gave to their ancestors” (Jer. 16:15; cf. Jer. 29:12–14). The prophet connects this Promised Land to the land that Yahweh had given Israel in history. Building on that argument, a few verses later, Yahweh declares: “I will restore them to the land I gave to their ancestors and they will possess it” (Jer 30:3). Before and after Jeremiah’s presentation of the New Covenant, the Lord connects His intention to remove Israel from the land of promise to His plan to build and plant them in that land in the future (Jer 31:27–28; 32:40–41). The clear prophetic connection of these two divine intentions clearly suggests that each one must be as concrete or as metaphorical as the other. How is it that one happened tangibly in human history in accordance with God’s stated intentions while Gentry and Wellum affirm that the promised restoration finds typological fulfillment through Christ’s death? The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly connects the promise of the New Covenant with God’s promise to reinstall the nation into the land of promise as a redeemed people.

Ezekiel 11:16–21 describes Israel’s transition from being scattered among the nations (because of covenant curse) to Yahweh reinstalling them in the land of promise. Those who wholehearted embrace Yahweh as their God will enjoy this, but those who reject this relationship will face divine judgment. Ezekiel 36:24–30 connects God restoring the nation of Israel to the land of promise (that will be abundantly fruitful) with their experience of salvation. Ezekiel 37:20–28 describes Israel’s future restoration to the land of promise as a redeemed people, with “David” ruling over them as their king. I would suggest the Gentry and Wellum undervalue or misinterpret the OT’s presentation of land as a concrete reality by means of their typology scheme.

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2. This emphasis on the fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promise to the nation of Israel is not primarily about land, but about God receiving great glory by bringing His plan to pass on earth, in time and space, in accordance to what He promised He would do.
Second Issue

Gentry and Wellum seem to believe that the presence of “international” or “worldwide” elements points to the intended non-literal fulfillment of land or nation promises that occur in the near context.

First, Gentry and Wellum point to various “textual clues” that the “land” promise in the Abrahamic Covenant refers to something greater than a concrete section of land in the Middle East. They contend that the international dimensions of that covenant (Gen 12:3) represent the main reason for the covenant. They write: “The climax of God’s plan through Abraham is not merely the establishment of the nation of Israel but rather that, through Israel, the nations will be blessed, which ultimately is fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:16).”3 Based on that understanding, they conclude that Abraham’s spiritual seed, whether Jew or Gentile, inherit the promises of this covenant.4 Drawing on the work of Paul Williamson5, they posit that God’s programmatic agenda to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham’s seed (cf. Gal 3:6–9; Rev 7:9) is clearly non-territorial (i.e., not restricted to any one geographical location). Again, this larger agenda requires a spiritual or typological fulfillment of the land promise to the entire people of God and not just to the nation of Israel.6

Second they also affirm that various passages that delineate the geographical boundaries of the Promised Land (Gen 15:18–21; Exod 23:31ff.; Deut 1:7; 11:24) are “not consistent and precise”7 Gentry and Wellum agree with Williamson that this imprecision indicates that the Promised Land boundaries was subject to “at least some degree of expansion and redefinition.”8 Gentry and Wellum conclude that “this textual ambiguity regarding the land provides clues that the land promise cannot be reduced merely to a particular piece of land but rather hints at a more ideal land which will be far greater, and that this promise will not be fulfilled until Abraham’s seed fills and occupies the world.”9 They believe that Paul’s statement in Rom 4:13a, “for the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world” demonstrates that “Abraham did not understand the land promise as referring only to a specific geographic location; rather he viewed the promise as that which ultimately would encompass the entire created order.”10 They agree with Williamson that “Ca-naan was simply the preliminary stage in the ultimate unfolding of God’s programmatic agenda—an agenda which not only involves all peoples of the earth but also encompasses all regions of the earth.”11

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3 Gentry and Wellum, KTC, 707.
4 Ibid.
6 Gentry and Wellum, KTC, 707–08.
7 Ibid., 708.
9 Gentry and Wellum, KTC, 708 (emphasis mine).
10 Ibid.
Let me respond to this idea that Abraham did not intend to refer to a concrete section of land through the wording of this covenant with three lines of thought. First, God’s intention to bless all peoples on earth through the descendants of Abraham as an important part of the Abrahamic Covenant does not legitimize a typological interpretation of the land promise made there. Genesis 1:26–28 make it clear that God created mankind to serve as His image-bearers to all creation. God intends to impact all humanity with His rule. Adam and Eve’s fall into sin interrupted the accomplishment of that divine agenda. God’s introduction of a “he” (Gen 3:15) who will provide resolution for mankind’s sin serves as the first step of God’s intentions to bring His will to pass—the establishment of His rule over creation. The Abrahamic Covenant, including the promise of land to Israel, is another part of those divine intentions. God’s relationship with Abraham and His descendants, that results in the formation of Israel and placing them in the land of promise, provides a microcosm of His intentions for the entire world. God will bless all humanity through His chosen people. God’s fulfillment of making use of Israel to demonstrate His glory to the world on the land of promise in the future will demonstrate to the world that God brings to pass what He promises in time and space. Israel as a nation in the land of promise is a significant part of the biblical metanarrative.

Second, Gentry and Wellum make use of God’s “programmatic agenda” or the biblical metanarrative to conclude that the promise of land for Israel is not really what God intended, but rather blessing for all peoples in the future. As stated above, God’s promise to install Israel in the land of promise as a believing nation is a clear part of His intentions for the world. Rather than an either-or choice, it is a both-and choice. The “international” dimensions of the Abrahamic Covenant do not preclude a future fulfillment of land promises to Israel or require that those land promises find spiritual fulfillment in a non-national Jew/Gentile people of God. Through the Abrahamic Covenant Yahweh reveals that He has intentions for Israel as a nation and for the nations of the world. God’s establishing His chosen people in the land of promise (initially in Joshua’s day and fully in the millennium) serves as a microcosm of what He intends to do for all Gentile nations—establish His concrete, tangible rule over all the earth.

Third, Gentry and Wellum overstate the “imprecision” of the boundaries of the land of promise as an indication that these land references were always meant to envision an ideal reality enjoyed by all of creation. All of the passages they cite as evidence for the “imprecision” (Gen 15:18–21; Exod 23:31–35; Deut 1:7; 11:24; cf. Gen 26:3–4; Exod 34:24; Num 24:17–18; Deut 19:8–9) refer to actual land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants in the Abrahamic Covenant. Also, the passages cited by Gentry and Wellum contain common boundary elements that include the brook of Egypt, Wilderness area, Red Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Euphrates River. Even though it is true that the boundaries are not given with the exactitude of a land surveyor (a relatively common way of describing land in the ANE world), the general picture of the land encompassed by these boundaries is relatively clear rather than being as imprecise and varied as to suggest an ideal or metaphorical reality.
Third Issue

The biblical metanarrative embraced by Gentry and Wellum excludes the nation of Israel from having a significant role in God’s plan for the world. In their response to interaction with Bock, Moo, and Horton on the Gospel Coalition website, they write:

The metanarrative we bring to these texts determines our exegetical outcomes, and we are questioning DT’s storyline. . . . The people of Israel, as God’s chosen people, serve as the privileged means by which God brings about his redemptive purposes to the nations. Even now, God is not finished with them, as Romans 9–11 makes plain. At the same time, the meaning of Israel and Jerusalem is being transformed to speak of the people of God, which will include both ethnic Jews and Gentiles.12

In their volume, they refer to the fact that various OT themes have been transposed and transformed due to Christ’s coming.13 They recognize that Israel plays a key role in OT revelation, but God’s ultimate intentions for the world have nothing to do with the nation of Israel since all promises related to the nation find typological fulfillment in the Church as part of the New Creation.

According to Gentry and Wellum, NT statements provide the correct interpretation or understanding for OT concepts in a way that does not sound anything like what the OT presented. However, we are not talking about a set of concepts that is presented in metaphorical terms or ones only rarely presented in the OT. The consistent paradigm from the Pentateuch through the Prophets is that God’s intention to establish His rule over the world includes His formation of Israel, judging them for their covenant treachery (as a nation that included only some believers), but also the intention to restore that nation to the land of promise after that nation “will look on me, the one they have pierced” (Zech 12:10) and “all Israel is saved” (Rom 11:26). Along with many others, Gentry and Wellum believe that NT statements about New Covenant realities replace the repeated tangible and objective statements about nation and land also being part of God’s plan to bring Himself glory.

I contend that the glorious truths that become realities through the inauguration of the New Covenant are indeed the intangible aspects of God’s covenant program. However, the Church’s experience of these blessings does not replace or transform the tangible promises that relate to Christ ruling over the entire earth during the millennium. That millennial reign of Christ includes a redeemed nation of Israel being installed in the land of promise. On earth, in time and space, God brings to fulfillment His promise to His covenant people as part of bringing His rule to pass over the entire world.

13 Gentry and Wellum, KTC, 598.
Isaiah 2:2–4 and Micah 4:1–5 correctly depict nations as a huge part of that future kingdom. However, it also depicts them streaming to Zion, established in the land of promise, from which Christ will rule in justice and equity. These nations stream to Jerusalem to worship God, as Gentile nations, not as part of transformed Israel. The reference to the role Gentiles will play in that future kingdom does not rule out God bringing to fulfillment His promises to the nation of Israel as part of that future reign. Israel as a nation does play a role in the biblical metanarrative that also embraces the entire world and all peoples.

Related to that conclusion, let me affirm an important point. The restoration of the nation of Israel to the land of promise is only part of God bringing to pass His intention to establish His rule over all creation. His plan involves Gentiles throughout the world as well. During the millennium, believing Gentiles will rule and reign under Christ’s authority throughout the world. God’s plan to establish His rule on earth (millennium) does involve individual redemption, i.e., His rule over the hearts of mankind, in addition to a concrete, tangible rule over the world that involves a concrete presence of Israel in the land of promise and Jerusalem reestablished as the place from which He will rule.

Fourth Issue

According to Gentry and Wellum, the OT Land promises must be understood typologically. They write that “the land itself is a type and pattern of Eden and thus the entire creation, which reaches its fulfillment in the dawning of a new creation. Christ, then, as the antitype of Israel, receives the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new covenant which is organically linked to the new creation.” They also affirm that “‘land,’ when placed within the biblical covenants and viewed diachronically, was intended by God to function as a ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ of something greater, i.e. creation, which is precisely how it is understood in light of the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant.” According to them, Jesus is the antitype of Israel who fulfills what the OT promised about land and the nation of Israel. I raise this issue because its foundation is in the OT. However, I will leave it to my NT counterpart, Darrell Bock, to address NT texts that refer to land issues and my theology counterpart, Craig, to address the hermeneutical question of typology.

First, the connection between the OT land promise and Eden is often mentioned, but is not connected with the actual occurrence of “Eden” in the OT. This term occurs fourteen times in the OT, six times in Genesis 1–4 as a location name (2:8, 10, 15; 3:23, 24; 4:16). “Eden” occurs as part of God’s metaphorical description of the King of Tyre (Ezek 28:13) and is part of the description of Assyrian (like a beautiful tree = the trees of Eden—Ezek 31:9). As part of his pronouncement of judgment on Assyria, Ezekiel refers to the trees of Eden in the underworld/Sheol, chopped down by some previous arrogant rulers (Ezek 31:16, 18 [2x]). The prophet, Joel, compares the

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15 Gentry and Wellum, KTC, 122.
16 Ibid., 706.
coming Day of the Lord to a vast consuming fire. Before the raging fire hits, the land is compared to the Garden of Eden and behind the fire the land is a desert wilderness (Joel 2:3). Two passages describe God changing the land of Israel from a desert wilderness to a beautiful garden, like the Garden of Eden (Isa 51:3; Ezek 36:35). In Ezekiel 36, the prophet uses this term, Garden of Eden, to describe His restoration of Israel to the actual land of promise (from which He had evicted them through covenant curse). All of the occurrences of “Eden” either signify the actual Garden of Eden or serve as a metaphorical descriptive term. None of them provide the textual foundation for understanding the land promised in the Abrahamic Covenant as a typological reference to Eden, the epitome of bliss and beauty (but not actual land).

On the one hand, to say that God intends to bring all of creation to an Edenic condition is appropriate based on a large number of passages. Another way of saying that is God will one day establish His perfect rule over all creation where there is no sin—the Eternal State. However, there is no textual evidence that supports the idea that the OT clearly or implicitly presents the land of promise as a non-literal, typological reference to Eden, describing a condition rather than an actual land.

**Fifth Issue**

Gentry and Wellum argue that OT and NT passages demonstrate that the “meaning of Israel and Jerusalem is being transformed to speak of the people of God, which will include both ethnic Jews and Gentiles.”17 They also point to various OT passages that describe Gentiles coming to Jerusalem, enjoying salvation, and called “my people” as indications that in the OT God Himself is redefining the nation of Israel in totally non-ethnic terms (Isaiah 19, 56; Jeremiah 12, 16).

The term “people” often occurs in the OT to describe God’s covenant nation (Exod 3:7, 10; 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 2:11, 13, 31–32; Micah 6:2, 3, 5) and does more rarely occur to describe Gentiles (e.g., Isa 19:25; Zech 2:11). Regardless, the reality of Gentiles being part of “God’s people” is evident in the lives of Rahab, Ruth, and Naaman (among others). Numerous NT texts give fuller attention to the ethnic breadth of the “people of God.”

Nevertheless, I would argue that the passages cited by Gentry and Wellum are not redefining Israel into a Jew-Gentile entity, but looking forward to the broad inclusion of Gentiles as part of the people of God (a broader term than Israel). God’s purposes have always been to include people from every tongue and nation in the redeemed family (Gen 12:3; Isa 2:2–4; 45:20–25; Micah 4:1–5; Zech 14:16). Isaiah 19 describes how Egypt and Assyria, devoted enemies of Israel embrace salvation and are referred to by God as His handiwork and calls Egypt “my people.” It is interesting to note that Isaiah still refers to Egypt, Assyria, and Israel as distinct peoples (Isa 19:25), but not merged into one people called “Israel.” The prophet Jeremiah describes the fate of those nations in which God had scattered Israelites because of covenant curse. He will destroy those who keep worshipping their false gods and show compassion on those who “diligently learn the ways of My people” (Jer

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12:16a). These ones “will be built up among My people” (Jer 12:16c). In this passage “my people” refers to Israel but is not equated with Gentile nations. Its main point is that rather than being inveterate enemies, believing Gentiles will enjoy fellowship with Israelites because they share the same salvation. Finally, Jer 16:31 demonstrates that God’s plan to extend His rule over all creation includes the salvation of Gentiles. None of these passages clearly teach a redefinition of Israel into a believing people made up of Jews and Gentiles. Praise God! That is exactly what the people of God as an umbrella term signifies, but there is no OT evidence for the kind of redefinition and transformation of concept suggested by Gentry and Wellum. The alleged evidence for a transformation of the designation Israel to encompass Jews and Gentiles is absent from the OT. “Israel” always means God’s servant nation (ethnic Israel) throughout the OT.18

They also turn to Amos 9:11–15 and James’ use of that passage as part of his argument to the leaders of the early church in Acts 15. They contend that “Acts 15 is central in showing that the rebuilt house of David, in both OT senses—royal dynasty and temple—includes the nations.”19 The prophet Amos does refer to the restoration of David’s fallen tent (Amos 9:11). He also refers to bringing back the nation of Israel to the land of promise, from which land they will never be uprooted (Amos 9:14–15). Amos also describes that future day when Gentiles will be included in that salvation Israel would enjoy (Amos 9:12). It seems that James’ primary point in quoting this passage is to affirm that God Himself authorized this humanity-wide enjoyment of salvation. The widespread salvation of Gentiles accompanies God’s restoration of “David’s fallen tent” but does not redefine the nation of Israel. As Vlach helpfully points out, “these passages do not teach a transformed Israel. These passages teach that the people of God will be expanded to include believing Gentiles alongside Israel, but they do not teach that Israel has been expanded to include Gentiles. The ‘people of God’ is a broad concept that can encompass both believing Jews and Gentiles.”20

Summary/Conclusion

I am grateful for the hard work Gentry and Wellum have invested in producing this major work on biblical theology. My key disagreements with their views in the OT does not diminish my respect for them as colleagues and conversation partners. Here are the fundamental concerns I have sought to raise:

18 That nation will not cease to exist. According to Jer 31:35–37, the prophet anchors Israel’s continuation as a nation in the order of the universe: “35 This is what the LORD says: The One who gives the sun for light by day, the fixed order of moon and stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea and makes its waves roar—Yahweh of Hosts is His name: 36 If this fixed order departs from My presence—this is the LORD’s declaration—then also Israel’s descendants will cease to be a nation before Me forever. 37 This is what the LORD says: If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below explored, I will reject all of Israel’s descendants because of all they have done—this is the LORD’s declaration.” As Vlach points out: “God explicitly links Israel’s existence as a nation with the functioning of the cosmic bodies as part of His new covenant promises. What stronger language could God use to convey His commitment to Israel as a nation?” Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 14.

19 Ibid.

20 Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way?,” 19.
1. The OT consistently presents the land of promise as a concrete reality in several settings: where it appears as a covenant promise, when Israel enjoys the initial fulfillment of that promise, when the Lord evicts them from that land through covenant curse, and in the statement of his intention to reinstall the nation of Israel as a redeemed nation in that land in the future millennium ruled by “David.”

2. God’s intentions for Israel and for the nations are not exclusive of one another but a both/and set of promised realities. God will bring glory to Himself by restoring the redeemed nation of Israel to the land of promise as well as ruling and reigning with Gentile believers throughout the world in the millennium.

3. Throughout the OT, Israel is the nation of Israel and is not expanded to include Gentiles. The people of God is a broader identity that does include believing Jews and Gentiles.

4. The OT does not present the land promised in the Abrahamic Covenant in imprecise terms. It does not present the Promised Land as part of an “Eden trajectory.”

5. My main point is that the OT presents a clear picture: Israel is Israel and the Promised Land is a concrete land rather than something presented with a typological trajectory. Whether the NT authorizes a reinterpretation of those realities is an issue my friend Darrell Bock will pursue.
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Let me begin by saying for the most part I like this book. Its treatment of covenants is thorough and for the most part on target. But this response is mostly about critique, so my response will be out of balance in terms of largely bypassing so much of what I like about the book.

My critique is like what I see in so many books of its type. They are not alone. The Hall of Fame includes John Stott, Tom Wright, Christopher Wright, and Gary Burge. You are in good company and will show myself to be an equal opportunity critic. I respond not so much as a dispensationalist, but as one who thinks covenants are a key to making sense of the Bible as a whole. I say this in the hope that my critique is not dismissed because I hold to Dispensationalism but because it is the logic of the covenant theme we are concerned with in the book Kingdom through Covenant. I accept that path as important in how we look at things, while taking a different fork in the road as we hit Jesus and the New Testament.

What their book ignored when it came to discussing Israel and the church was the contribution of Luke-Acts and a careful engagement with Romans 9–11. So I want to fill that gap by mentioning the Luke-Acts texts they ignore that are a central feature of this conversation when it comes to how Scripture handles Israel.¹

**Luke 13:34–35**

When substantial rejection comes out of Israel, Jesus warns the nation about the risk. In Luke 13:6–9, Jesus says that the vine that does not produce fruit will be cut

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¹ I limit my focus to Luke-Acts, as it is all I have time for here. I will make some side remarks about Romans 9–11 that show how it contributes as well to the synthetic biblical theological issues that Wellum and Gentry claim are what they are doing with the material in their book.
down. Again the question surfaces, is this a permanent judgment against Israel?

This leads us into Luke 13:34–35, a crucial text. Luke 13 details the nature of the penalty Israel faces for “missing the time of her visitation” (see Luke 19:41–44). In Luke 13:34, Jesus speaks as a prophet of the Lord’s repeated longing to gather the nation as a hen gather her brood. The image of God as a bird is common in the Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish texts (Deut. 32:11; Ruth 2:12; Ps 17:8; 36:7 [36:8 MT]; 57:1 [57:2 MT]; 61:4 [61:5 MT]; 63:7 [63:8 MT]; 91:4; Isa 31:5; 2 Bar 41.3–4; 2 Esd [= 4 Ezra] 1:30). The God of Israel’s desire is to care for, nurture, and protect His people. The reference to repeated attempts to gather the nation might allude to the many prophets He sent throughout Israel’s history. Only one thing stopped God from exercising His parental care: the people did not wish Him to do so. As a result, the gathering and its protection could not take place. The same risk applies now to Jesus’ offer.

In Luke 13:35, Jesus underscores the situation. Israel is in peril. The language of the empty, desolate house recalls Jer 12:7 and 22:5 (cf. Ps 69:25 [69:26 MT]; Ezek 8:6; 11:23). The parallel in Matt 23:39 mentions that the house is desolate (ermos), but Luke lacks this term. The Old Testament declared the possibility of exile for the nation if it did not respond to God’s call about exercising justice (Jer 22:5–6). As such, Jesus’ use of “house” (oikos) does not allude just to the Temple. Jesus is more emphatic than Jeremiah’s statement of the nation’s potential rejection; a time of abandoning exile has come. Rather than being gathered under God’s wings, their house is empty and exposed (Luke 13:6–9).

But for how long? Jesus adds a note about the judgment’s duration: Israel will not see God’s messenger until they recognize “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (heōs . . . eipē eulогēmenos ho erchomenos en onomati kyriou), from Ps 117:26 LXX [118:26 Eng.] (quoted from the NASB). Luke already made clear that the key term “one who comes” (ho erchomenos) means Messiah (Luke 3:15–16; 7:19). Israel is to accept Jesus as sent from God. Until the nation accepts Him, it stands alone, exposed to the world’s dangers. The quotation from Psalm 118 is positive, not negative. It suggests that Israel’s judgment is for a time.

Luke 21:24

Luke 21:24 pictures a turnaround in Israel’s fate. Near the end of the eschatological discourse, Luke describes Jerusalem being trodden down for a time and refers to this period as the “times of the Gentiles.” What does this verse mean? It refers to a period of Gentile domination (Dan 8:13–14; 12:5–13), while alluding to a subsequent hope for Israel (Ezek 39:24–29; Zech 12:4–9). There are three reasons to maintain this reading.

First, the city’s fall is of limited duration. Why else mention a time limit? Second, there is a period in God’s plan when Gentiles dominate, which implies that the subsequent period will be characterized by Israel’s role. Jesus’ initial coming and His future eschatological return represent turning points in God’s plan. Third, this view of Israel’s judgment now but vindication later suggests what Paul also contends

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in Rom 11:25–26: Israel has a future, grafted back in when the fullness of the Gentiles leads her to respond (see also Rom 11:11–12, 15, 30–32). These chapters certainly have ethnic Israel in view, not any concept of a spiritual Israel. Romans 9–11 develops the temporary period of judgment noted in Luke 13:34–35.

**Acts 1:4–7**

On a literary level, the remark in Acts 1:4–5 points back to Luke 24:49. Jesus commands the disciples not to depart from Jerusalem but to begin the mission from there, waiting for the “promise of the Father” (tēn epangelian tou patros). The disciples perceive this event as an indication of the end’s full arrival, which leads to their question in verse 6 about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel. Many Jewish texts expected that Israel would be restored to a place of great blessing (Jer 16:15; 23:8; 31:27–34 [where the New Covenant is mentioned]; Ezekiel 34–37; Isa 2:2–4; 49:6; Amos 9:11–15; Sir 48:10; Pss Sol. 17–18; 1 En 24–25; Tob 13–14; Eighteen Benedictions 14). The question is a natural one for Jews. Luke 1–2 expressed this hope vividly (Luke 1:69–74; 2:25, 38). What was debated in Judaism is whether the centrality of Israel would be positive or negative for Gentiles. Would it come with salvation or judgment for the nations? The disciples are not even thinking in mission terms here. Their question reflects a nationalistic concern for vindication. Nothing Jesus did or said in the forty days he was with them after the resurrection dissuaded them from this expectation. Neither does Jesus’ answer.

Nothing in Luke’s story also should dissuade us from holding onto this hope for Israel. Neither does Jesus’ reply in Acts 1:7–8 reject the question’s restoration premise. This reading following the Luke-Acts story line stands in contrast to interpretations such as that of Stott, who sees the question as full of errors. In Stott’s view, they should not have asked about restoration, since that implied a political kingdom; nor about Israel, since that anticipated a national kingdom; nor about “at this time,” since that implied the kingdom’s immediate establishment. Jesus’ reply does not suggest that anything they asked was wrong except that they are excessively concerned about exactly when this will happen, something that is the Father’s business. The other major argument Stott makes is that there is no mention of the land in the New Testament. However, the land is not mentioned, since (1) Israel is in its land when most of the New Testament is written, and (2) the rule of Jesus is anticipated to extend over the entire earth, so why focus on the land? I will return to this issue later.

In fact, neither the definition of Israel nor the expectation for Israel changes.

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4 On apokathistēmi (“restore”), see Mal 3:23 LXX (4:6 Eng.), where it is an eschatological technical term, and Dan 4:36 LXX. Acts 3:21 will return to this idea.


6 Hilary LeCornu and Joseph Shulam, A Commentary on the Jewish Roots of Acts (vol. 1; Jerusalem: Academon, 2003), 15.

Rather, God’s eschatological work is now centered in Jesus. Throughout Acts, Jesus is the blessing’s mediator. Throughout Acts, Israel’s role remains central to the hope of salvation, including the expectation of national restoration. Acts 10–15 works out this story as it extends into all the world.

Jesus does not answer the question about the timing of Israel’s restoration but neither does He reject the premise of the question that assumes this is where things are headed. Nor is His response a renunciation of an imminent end. It makes no commitment at all as to when the end comes. These verses show that the disciples are still thinking in terms of Israel’s story. Nothing Jesus did or said in these key days when He taught them altered their ultimate hope for the nation. What was changing was the scope of their assignment and concern. They were to take Messiah’s message to the entire world. A global perspective was becoming more important as a reflection of Israel’s story.

Acts 3:18–21

In his speech in Acts 3:18–21 Peter puts everything together and speaks of Jesus’ return. The “times of refreshing” (kairoi anapsyxeōs) refers to a future refreshment. Anapsyxeōs refers to a “cooling” to relieve trouble or to dry out a wound. In the LXX the only use of refreshment is in Exodus 8:11 LXX (= 8:15 Eng.), where it refers to relief from the plague of frogs. The verb anapsychō (“to refresh”) is used of the Sabbath rest of slaves and animals and the soothing of Saul by David’s music (Exod 23:12; 1 Sam 16:23). Peter prophesies a messianic refreshment, the “definitive age of salvation.” The idea has parallels in Second Temple Judaism (2 Esd [4 Ezra] 7:75, 91, 95; 11:46; 13:26–29; 2 Bar 73–74; 1 En. 45.5; 51.4; 96.3). Peter urges his audience to read what God has already said through the prophets. He refers specifically in v. 21 to the restoration of all things mentioned often in the prophets. The noun for restore (apokatastasis) is related to the verb used for Israel’s restoration in Acts 1:6. As we noted above, texts such as Isaiah 65–66 are in view, where Israel is restored to fullness (also Isa 34:4; 51:6; Jer 15:18–19; 16:15; 23:8; 24:6; chaps. 30–33; Ezek 17:23; Amos 9:11–12). Nothing in any of this says that the story already revealed has been changed. Let’s be clear, this involves Israel at the center of the Lord’s return with texts such as Isa 2:2–4 and 19:18–25. Isaiah 19 is important because Gentiles also are in view. This is nation and land as the central place of rule.

In our narrative sequence, this is a crucial text. It tells us that what is to come was already disclosed. Whatever the expansion of the promise to Gentiles entails, it does not remove nor redefine Israel’s story.

There is one more text. Paul in Acts 26:7 says he is on trial for the hope of the

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twelve tribes (that INCLUDES restoration) when the 12 tribes is invoked. He discusses resurrection in detail by what follows in the speech, but it is the package of 12-tribe hope Paul is describing here. That hope would be expounded on in the Hebrew Scripture. The fact this appears at the end of Acts tells us we are not dealing with a theme that has changed as we move through the book to a “better” understanding.

What about the Land?

It is true that much less of this national role for Israel is made in the New Testament than in the Old. There is no explicit mention of land as part of the future in the New Testament. Why? There are three reasons for this shift of emphasis.

First, Israel’s role is assumed as a given, having already been revealed and treated in detail in the Hebrew Scriptures, which the church embraced. Acts 3:19–21 points back to Moses and the prophets for “the rest of the story.” So the New Testament does affirm that the story about the future has details in it from the Old Testament.

Second, the more comprehensive New Testament concern is the eventual total victory that Jesus brings to the whole of humanity and the creation. This relativizes to a degree the importance of national Israel’s role in the plan. This point also helps to explain why the land is less emphasized in the New Testament. A salvation that in the end time encompasses an earth now existing in peace, means that borders mean less than they do when national sovereignty needs protection. It is the difference between Europe in the midst of World War II versus the Europe of a European Union where moving between nations no longer requires a passport check at the border. Where there is peace, there is reconciliation and brotherhood, not hostility.

Third, another reason the land is less of a concern is that Israel is in the land when the New Testament is written, so there is nothing to be reclaimed when the gospels and epistles are penned.

So it makes more hermeneutical sense for the theological unity of Scripture that the New Testament complements what God already has committed himself to in the Old. Maintaining a role for national Israel within the kingdom program seems to make the most coherent sense of Paul’s argument in Romans 11, where Israel is not a reference to the church, but is treated in distinction from the current structure through which blessing is preached. This approach, known as premillennialism, sees a hope for national Israel (as well as for the nations), with Christ functioning as Israel’s Messiah in the future kingdom program. Fulfillment is in Christ for all of this, so a christocentric perspective stands at the hermeneutical center of promise, but so do covenantal commitments made by God and carried out by the fulfillment that comes in Christ. Jesus declares such hope and so as fulfiller guarantees its taking place. This approach also affirms the fundamental unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

This comprehensive approach to promise and realization solves the difficult unity-diversity question that plagues debates about eschatology. There is soteriological unity (all are one in Christ and share in one unified plan), while there is structural distinction in the different dispensations of God’s administration (period of Israel ≠ period of the church ≠ period of the consummated kingdom moving to the new heaven and earth). Such an approach is a better synthesis than merging Israel and the
church, as much contemporary New Testament theology does. The result of such a merged reading means that the promises made to national and ethnic Israel do cease to operate for these original recipients of God’s covenantal promise of grace. This raises questions about the commitments coming from God’s Word and promises. Such a covenantal merger conflicts with God’s faithfulness, which Paul wishes to defend in Rom. 9–11. Instead of reading the text with such a merger in mind, the apostle maintains hope that one day all Israel will be saved, in contrast to Israel’s current rejection of Jesus. The current blessing of many more Gentiles one day will also contain the blessing of many from Israel also returning to the fold. To use Paul’s imagery from Romans 11, those original branches having been cut out from the vine will be grafted back in so all Israel can be saved. What God has started in bringing Jew and Gentile together, He will complete one day for both groups.

A Reply to the Claim My Critique Involves Metanarrative Assumptions

When I published a much shorter critique of the book for the Gospel Coalition, the authors replied with the following:

As expected, Bock centers on our understanding of the land. He laments the omission of detailed treatments of Romans 9–11 and Luke-Acts because to him these texts affirm a future for ethnic Israel in the land of Israel alongside the church during the millennium. However, these texts do not prove his point. For example, where is the mention of the future role of Israel in Jerusalem during the millennium in Romans 9–11? In order to appeal to these texts the way he does, Bock must first assume the truthfulness of the dispensational storyline. The same may be said about his appeal to Acts 1:6–8. No doubt our book could be strengthened by a full treatment of all of these texts, but Bock never engages our argument that DT’s understanding of the Abrahamic covenant, the land, and the future for ethnic Israel is not how Scripture presents it.

Bock knows we cannot determine the meaning of Romans 9–11 and Luke-Acts from exegesis based on cultural setting, linguistic data, and literary structure alone. The metanarrative we bring to these texts determines our exegetical outcomes, and we are questioning DT’s storyline. Furthermore, we argue that already in the OT, especially in the prophets, the land is viewed as a type that looks back to Eden and forward to the new creation. The people of Israel, as God’s chosen peo-

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11 This paragraph outlines my view on a major debate in eschatology that has been a part of the evangelical scene for a long time. See the discussion between Craig Blaising (premillennialism), Robert Strimple (amillennialism), and Ken Gentry (postmillennialism) in Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999). For more on this question, see Darrell L. Bock, “Why I Am a Dispensationalist with a Small ‘d,’” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 41 (1998): 383–96.

12 http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/kingdom-through-covenant-a-review-by-darrell-bock/
ple, serve as the privileged means by which God brings about his redemptive purposes to the nations. Even now, God is not finished with them, as Romans 9–11 makes plain. At the same time, the meaning of Israel and Jerusalem is being transformed to speak of the people of God, which will include both ethnic Jews and Gentiles.13

My response to this retort is simply this, that there is a coherent way to put together the texts I am noting that does not assume a metanarrative at all, but contends that the only way to put together what Peter says in Acts 3 or Paul in Romans 9–11 is to see he is affirming the Old Testament metanarrative while being aware what it is Jesus has now brought to the promise. My critique is not about missing texts that could have strengthened the arguments of Wellum and Gentry, as they claim, but about missing texts that nullify or qualify some of their core contentions. I am simply flummoxed that the claim is that my engagement of these texts does not address how Scripture handles these promises because that is exactly what raising these texts does. I am questioning directly that the land is merely a type, even as they nuance it to claim it is realized by the expanded way they read the material. There is a non sequitur here. This involves a term-concept fallacy where only a specific mention of a specific term is said to evoke a topic. That is not the case, as associations can exist that evoke a theme. To expand does not entail to exclude what is included within the expansion. Expansion complements, it does not or need not cancel, which is what the Wellum and Gentry reading assumes. Nothing in the apostles’ expectation or Jesus’ teaching takes us in that more rhetorical direction or suggests that expansion takes removal along with it. I agree with their later point that Zion is both a people and a place, but the moment it becomes a place in a restored earth, we see Israel as a nation in a reconciled and realized promise, not at the expense of Gentiles (which is what many assume a restored national Israel means for those who hold it), nor as a replacement for national Israel (which is what their model argues for) but as part of the wondrous accomplished reconciliation that allows Jews and Gentiles to share in the same worship of the same king in the era to come because they each remain Jew and Gentile reconciled into one new entity, an idea we all share about where the promises went.

Conclusion

So where does this leave us in terms of the book? It means that their proposal for another way has a major hole that needs filling before it can be a way forward. That hole involves how Israel is handled as a theme in Scripture. Provided a future can be found for national Israel, then a way forward is possible. Without it, it would seem that God’s program is left with a hole about how He fulfills his commitments that is better filled than left as a bump in the road of eschatological fulfillment.

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13 http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews
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REVIEWS


Reviewed by Mark A. Hassler, Adjunct Professor of Old Testament Studies.

“Music [is] rarely associated with worship in the New Testament” (xi). “In the Bible the Spirit is never the object of worship” (50). “Evangelism should include . . . a call to be baptized” (151). “Contrary to pervasive practice today, the First Testament rarely associates ‘raising the hands’ with praise” (196). “While I would not forbid others from telling God, ‘I love you,’ I myself cannot” (238–39). Thought-provoking quotes such as these populate Daniel Block’s new book on worship.

Block serves as the Gunther H. Knoedler Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College. His many publications include the recent commentary, *Obadiah: The Kingship Belongs to YHWH* (Zondervan, 2013).

Chapters 1–2 explore God and mankind as the object and subjects of worship, respectively. Subsequent chapters deal with worship in relation to daily life, family, work, the ordinances, Scripture, prayer, music, sacrifices, offerings, sacred space, redemptive history, and leaders. The back matter includes three appendices, three indices, and a select bibliography.

Each chapter begins with Block’s description of true worship: “True worship involves reverential human acts of submission and homage before the divine Sovereign in response to his gracious revelation of himself and in accord with his will” (e.g., 29). Of course, this description excludes worship by angels.

Usually the discussions maintain universal appeal, unfettered by cultural or denominational idiosyncrasies. Admittedly the author’s Mennonite and Anabaptistic roots color his view of the ordinances (142n6, 153).

An assortment of noteworthy considerations stand out. For instance, the biblical support for formal family worship is “embarrassingly limited” (109). At times Christians ought to prostrate themselves in worship, since “the dominant physical gesture of worship in the Scriptures is prostration” (17). In addition, “doulos does not mean primarily ‘slave’ or ‘bondslave’ but functions as an honorific designation referring to ‘a specially appointed and commissioned agent’ of God” (20; cf. 356). Psalm 1
“associates the blessed person with counselors and seats of authority, suggesting that the real addressee is the king or a prince who aspires to the throne, and that the purpose of this psalm is to orient a royal reader on reading the Torah” (182). Moreover, “Although the New Testament distinguishes between preaching and teaching . . . , the difference seemed to depend on the nature of the audience rather than the passion or energy with which the message was delivered” (189). We should refer to Solomon’s temple as David’s temple (306 n19).

By way of constructive criticism, the author states that the widow of Mark 12:41–44 “embodied authentic piety by donating to the temple treasury all she owned” (270). Alternatively, the gospel narrative does not commend the widow, but demonstrates that the apostate Jewish religious system needed to be destroyed because it victimized impoverished widows (John MacArthur, *Luke 18–24*, MacNTC, [Moody, 2014], 168–70).

Block claims that males and females share equal status before God because “God created ‘woman’ from the man’s rib (near his heart!) rather than from his head or his feet” (124 n34). Exegetically, it remains to be seen why God’s choice of a rib indicates equal status. What other bone could God have removed from the man that would not have crippled or disfigured him? Without support the author assumes that “the book of Job does not come from the patriarchal period” (112). The elemental things of Gal 4:8–10 “probably refer to earth, air, fire, and water, or to the heavenly bodies of astrology” (294). For fuller coverage, the volume could have addressed Jesus’ intercessory role in heaven (Heb 7:25).

The topic of worship intersects with one’s views concerning the eschaton and Israel’s relation to the church. The author takes a spiritual (non-physical and non-geographical) view of Ezekiel 40–48 (312). Antiochus VI Epiphanes commits the abomination of desolation in Daniel 11–12 and Mark 13:14 (314). Moreover, “Jesus Christ established the church as the new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16)” (153).

Block offers six reasons why weekly Sabbath-keeping applies to the church today (282). He concludes, “recognizing that the seventh-day Sabbath was grounded in creation and disconnected from sanctuary worship, and in the absence of explicit New Testament termination of the institution, we assume that it continues” (294).

As the opening pages explain (xiii–xiv, 3–4), the book complements Allen Ross’ *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Kregel, 2006). Both writers arrive at similar conclusions regarding worship, but Block organizes the material topically, while Ross, serially. Additionally, Block’s volume compares to David Peterson’s *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (IVP, 1992). Block elevates the role of the OT in forming a theology of worship for the contemporary church (a primary objective of the book), whereas Peterson marginalizes the OT by downplaying its relevance for the church and by treating it briefly (56 pp.) in relation to the NT (about 200 pp.).

The intended audience encompasses churches, clergy, collegians, and seminarians (xiv). The author sets forth this work as a corrective to the shallow, pragmatic, and atheological worship that dilutes many local churches today (xii). For that purpose I recommend the book warmly. As a course textbook, the thirteen chapters allow for balanced coverage during a fifteen-week semester.

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

In this volume the author pursues the issue of how to read the historical books of the Old Testament well. She seeks to explore the artistry and form of the biblical text as well as the world behind the text that shaped the writing of this part of the Old Testament (xv). The volume’s basic approach is to take the text of Scripture seriously (xvi). The author provides an important clarification of her intentions when she writes: “The book also does not take a particular stand on the extent to which the events recorded in the biblical books happened the way they are described. Rather, our focus is on how the texts themselves remembered and recorded an account of the past that was important for the communities and people who wrote the historical books” (xvii).

The author provides five main chapters that go from examining the context indicated by historical stories, hints on how to interpret narrative texts, as well as considering the role of “history” in these accounts. The book concludes with a summary of what she believes is essential for reading historical accounts well, followed by subject and Scripture indices.

Some common features of the book include the regular provision of examples of an issue the author cites that are also found in modern and ANE literature (to illustrate the point). She also provides a couple of maps, a timeline, as well as providing a text box that includes “questions for careful readers.” A handful of text boxes with a few paragraphs addressing an issue related to the subject covered by the chapter (e.g., dramatic use of repetition, writing materials in the Ancient Near East). Each chapter ends with suggested reading as well as discussion questions.

The chapter on context seeks to consider the background of the event itself, the writing of the events, as well as the context of the reader. The author’s desire is to delineate these circles of context based on clear statements in the accounts themselves. She gives attention to geographical, political, religious, and social circles of context. She refers to the patriarchal accounts as “remembered foundation traditions” (10). The author provides a timeline that provides an example of her view of the timing of events in Israelite history and their relationship to key international realities (20).

To this reviewer, the second chapter provided the best content of the volume. In these pages Dutcher-Walls a helpful explanation of several common features of narrative literature: plot, characterization, point of view, and time flow. She gives helpful biblical examples for each concept covered.

The third chapter examines the biased nature of biblical historical narratives. Biblical authors selected certain events and chose specific parts of those events with a desire to emphasize certain ideas. The point is that biblical writers do not just present a sterile summary of historical facts, but write historical accounts to make a point—a theological point. Dutcher-Walls does not set this choice of features or as-
pects of a biblical story against the backdrop of inspiration or emphasize the theological agenda being presented by biblical writers. Regardless, she clearly demonstrates ways in which biblical writers emphasize features they wanted the readers to see clearly.

The last two chapters address issues related to history. The author points out two understandings of history (104). First, history can mean actual past events from a standpoint later in time. Second, history can refer to the retelling of the past in oral or written form. The author places her focus on the second understanding. That seems to leave open the question of whether or not these events actually happened or happened like the historical texts describe them. The author is correct that ancient history writing is more like history writing in the ANE than modern history writing. However, she finds more similarities between biblical history writing and ANE practices than this reviewer would accept.

The author of this volume is a clear writer. She is committed to providing illustrations for important concepts and gives helpful conclusions for each section. Her connecting a given concept to a modern and ancient analogy often clarifies her point. She demonstrates a clear understanding of common elements of biblical narrative literature. The chapter on these features (chapter two) is the most valuable chapter of the volume.

In addition to these points of commendation, this reviewer offers the following concerns. First, it is unclear how an interpreter can determine the context of the reader or how knowing that impacts the meaning of an historical account. Second, Dutcher-Walls clearly accepts a late date of the Exodus (1300 BC). Third, she suggests that even after the Temple was built, Israelite priests led worship (including sacrifice) on various hilltops throughout Israel. For an example, she cites the instance of Elkanah going to Shiloh each year to worship (1 Sam. 1:3). Of course, the problem with this example is that it predated the building of the Temple by 300 years. Fourth, she affirms that polygamy was a “socially and religiously acceptable cultural pattern throughout Old Testament texts” (29). Although the historical narratives provide several examples where polygamy was allowed and not condemned, it seems an overstatement to say that it was religiously acceptable—implying that it was embraced as a common custom. Fifth, she commonly uses language like “the history writers remembered the event” a certain way rather than the event happened this way. That seems to leave the door open to biblical history presenting events or individuals that never happened or existed. Sixth, in her discussion of the biblical presentation of military conquest of Canaan, the author suggests that the reality presented in Judges 1–2 indicates that Israel emerged in the land of Canaan rather than actually conducting a military conquest of Canaan by all twelve tribes (132–33). Her timeline suggests that there was no Exodus from Egypt or wilderness pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land by all twelve tribes.

This volume provides an overview of various aspects of biblical history. Unfortunately, the best parts of the volume are accompanied by an understanding of history that allows for inaccurate recording of biblical history. This would not be the first volume to consider in order to discover helpful guidelines for interpreting historical literature.
This volume is among the first of the complete revision IVP is pursuing for the entire Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries set edited by David G. Firth, with Tremper Longman III as consulting editor. The editors propose to offer “an up-to-date reading of the text” (7). Expanded materials from the Ancient Near East and the change in emphases regarding exegesis indicate a need for the new volumes (7). Longman’s single volume on Psalms replaces the original two-volume commentary by Derek Kidner (IVP, 1973). Longman has authored or co-authored more than twenty books, including commentaries on Ecclesiastes (NICOT; Eerdmans, 1997), Daniel (NIVAC; Zondervan, 1999), the Song of Songs (NICOT, Eerdmans 2001), Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Tyndale 2006), and Jeremiah and Lamentations (NIBC; Hendrickson, 2008). He also published How to Read the Psalms (IVP, 1988), a popular introduction to the Psalter. Together with Peter Enns, he edited the Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings (IVP Academic, 2008). He is currently Robert H. Gundry Professor of Biblical Studies at Westmont College (Santa Barbara, CA). Longman reveals that his wife Alice has memorized the entire Psalter (10), a feat to be applauded and appreciated. Such an example challenges all of us to spend more effort on Scripture memorization.

This series divides the commentary on each psalm into three sections: Context (involving the psalm’s literary setting and any historical issues involved with the text), Comment (offering the exegesis), and Meaning (the message communicated by the psalm and its key theological themes). Like its predecessor by Kidner, the commentary is concise, though dependent upon exegetical analysis of the Hebrew text of the Psalter.

The “Introduction” (23–54) provides readers with a brief, but pertinent series of discussions regarding the title of the book (23), the titles for the individual psalms (23–31), a treatment of composition, collection, organization, and use (31–38), a description and discussion of genre and types of psalms (38–42), a section on poetic style (42–47), a concise description of the theology of the book of Psalms (47–50), an examination of how the Psalms acts as a mirror of the soul, including an excursus on imprecations (50–52), a discussion of its contribution to worship (52–53), and a brief instruction in how to read the commentary itself (53–54). In regard to the psalm titles, Longman fails to mention James Thistle’s seminal work, but at least refers to the more recent study by Bruce Waltke (25). Longman does regards the psalm titles as ancient editorial additions, holds them as canonical, and believes the editors intended the titles to identify the authorship of most psalms with such titles. For readers interested in greater depth regarding the theology of the Psalter, this reviewer recommends Geoffrey W. Grogan’s Psalms in the Two Horizons OT Commentary (Eerdmans, 2008).

Throughout the commentary Longman demonstrates his interest in the literary aspects of the psalms. When pertinent to the structure, development, exegesis, or meaning of the text, he refers to poetic entities like parallelism, tricolon, inclusio,
chiasm, metaphor, assonance, repetition, and other literary devices. He also identifies and defends messianic references and usage of the Psalter, as exhibited most clearly in the NT (e.g., 63–64 concerning Psalm 2). However, when it comes to Psalm 22, Longman refuses to take it as prophecy (133).

In Ps 8:5 Longman argues convincingly for taking the meaning as “a little lower than God,” rather than lower than the angels or any supernatural beings (80–81). He correctly points out that texts like Ps 16:8–11 seem to “point to something beyond the grave” (106). He notes another glimpse of the afterlife in Psalm 49 as well (215). A spiritual birth appears to him to be the probable reference in Ps 87:3–7 (319), which he understands to be a reference to the nations in the future (318).

In this reviewer’s opinion, Longman sometimes goes too far in attempting to tie the text of a psalm with specific Ancient Near Eastern materials (e.g., Psalm 29 [155–57] and Psalm 104 [359–62]). While he does not argue strongly for dependence or borrowing, he does insist on a fair amount of influence, which might imply that Israelite authors did not possess a distinctly different worldview from the pagan peoples surrounding them.

A “Select Bibliography” opens the commentary (15–22). It contains no indexes of any kind. The absence of an index to authors makes it difficult to access some of the references Longman makes to key studies, viewpoints, and exegetical contributions from a variety of commentators and scholars.

This commentary does not have the depth of commentaries by Allen P. Ross (3 vols., Kregel Exegetical Library, 2011–2015) or John Goldingay (3 vols., BCOTWP, Baker, 2006–2008). It is as solidly evangelical as Ross’ and more dependable theologically than Goldingay’s. Students of Psalms will find the volume a welcome addition to their libraries.


Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Vice President for Library, Accreditation, and Operations.

As the saying in the field goes, “absolute truth in archaeology is generally good for about five years.” That being the case it is often difficult for reference works, given their generally long production cycle, to maintain currency (xiii). This was illustrated a few years ago when Zondervan rather disastrously produced, *The Archaeological Study Bible* (2006), a volume that was significantly dated before it was even released. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that there is often a considerable delay from the discovery of an artifact to its publication. This reviewer is currently aware of three significant discoveries that directly impact Biblical studies, which probably will not be published until the middle of 2014.

This set is part of the larger *Oxford Encyclopedia of The Bible* series that is being published in conjunction with the publishers, Oxford Biblical Studies Online.
The total series will number 12 volumes. It also represents a move beyond their respected print volumes and “more and more, in digital format” (xiv).

The editor-in-chief of this set is Daniel M. Master, an Associate Professor of Archaeology at Wheaton College and research associate of the Harvard Semitic Museum. He is co-Principal Investigator and Field Director of the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon, Israel and co-editor of the final publication reports on Ashkelon (2008) and Tell Dothan (2005). He has assembled an impressive set of contributors, all experts in the field. In his rather brief introduction Master discusses the development of the field of “biblical archaeology” (xv) and the contribution of William Foxwell Albright. One could have wished that either his introduction were longer, or there was an actual entry discussing the concept and history of Biblical archaeology as a discipline.

The thrust of these volumes is to move beyond a discipline dominated by physical artefacts to “pursue an approach in which geographic and social patterns are explored as a way of enhancing the reading of biblical texts” (xvii). Again, however, given the brevity of the introduction, Master does not elaborate on this and one is left wondering how this “approach” is uniquely archaeological as opposed to the study of cultural geography.

The first volume contains a list of entries, while the second volume contains a “Chronology of the Southern Levant” (2:455–62); A Topical Index of Entries (2:463–66); a Directory of Contributors (2:467–74); and an extensive index (2:475–579). Each volume also contains the same listing of abbreviations in the front matter (which seems superfluous to repeat in Volume 2). Structurally Master’s Levant Chronology, where he also discusses the standard archaeological eras, would have been much better placed in the front matter of the first volume. The article authors are all named and each entry, for the typical reference work, has an extensive bibliography. For two volumes there aren’t that many articles, only 122 with an average length of nearly nine pages. One significant criticism is the relative limited number and poor quality of the pictures and scarcity of useful charts. The pictures are greyscale, but often lack clarity and detail is obscured (e.g. 1:383; 1:222; 2:108; 2:420). The pictures from Todd Bolen and Bibleplaces.org (a long time instructor at the IBEX Extension Campus of The Master’s College) are generally superior. Interestingly enough, a reference work centering on the Bible, adopts the neutral “Common Era” (CE) and “Before Common Era” (BCE) phrases for dating.

Because of limitations of space we cannot comment on all or even a significant number of articles. But several are noteworthy. Thomas Davis’ entry on “Ethnoarchaeology” (1:381–85) explains that field well and notes that Albright, “flatly dismissed” (1:383) this as a valid study model. The lengthy article on Galilee by Alexandre (1:423–34) is well written and balanced, keeping the perspectives of the maximalist and minimalist schools fairly presented. There is an excellent article on “Numismatics” (2:173–78), a key source of artefactual information. Oddly enough, there is no separate entry for pottery, still one the most significant and developed form of dating sites. We wish that Yigal Levin had been allocated more space to expand his excellent article on “Bible and Historical Geography” (1:139–46).

Some of the articles are decidedly “soft” on archaeological material and heavier on cultural geography or cultural anthropology. The overall “feel” of these volumes is that it is a work in progress. The number of entries is small and there are many
holes (e.g., no entry on Ai, where significant work by Bryant Wood and his team is currently taking place). No entry for Athens or Mars Hill is to be found. Given the current events in the world of archaeology it is surprising that Hershal Shanks and Biblical Archaeology Review receives no mention. Articles on methodologies would have strengthened the work as well. An article on forgeries and the current debate on publishing artefacts with weak provenance or which have gone into private collections would also have been quite timely and helpful.

All in all these are rather disappointing volumes in terms of actual archaeological studies. There are other significant options that are more thorough, included Oxford Press’ own Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East (1998). The nearly $300 is an excessive investment for the return in that field. If the volumes were the Bible and “Cultural Anthropology” it would be more appropriately titles. The Oxford name will naturally drive libraries to purchase this set for their reference collections and some specialized researchers will benefit from the material, but pastors and students more seeking detailed archaeological reference, particularly from a traditional perspective, will likely be disappointed.


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

Ronald E. Osborn is a 2014–2016 Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Peace and Justice Studies Program at Wellesley College, and a 2015 Fulbright scholar to Burma/Myanmar. Previously he taught as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of International Relations at the University of Southern California and in the Honors Program at the University of California Los Angeles. Osborn’s teaching, research, and writing focus on questions of violence, human rights, political ethics, and the intersection of religion and conflict. He attributes his thinking to important influences from Fyodor Dostoevsky, Charles Taylor, Wendell Berry, Abraham Heschel, Jacques Ellul, Noam Chomsky, N. T. Wright, Martin Luther King Jr., Elie Wiesel, William Cavanaugh, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Osborn grew up in Thailand, Taiwan, and Zimbabwe, which helps him adapt to diverse cultural settings and challenging environments. He has worked with human rights and development NGOs in Kosovo and in Guinea, West Africa. He also published Anarchy and Apocalypse: Essays on Faith, Violence, and Theodicy (Wipf and Stock, 2010).

This volume arose out of Osborn’s series of articles published by Spectrum Magazine online in 2010. The author attacks what he calls “biblical literalism” and attempts to show how such a hermeneutic can be and has been abused by interpreters with other agendas. He argues that the existence of violent death in the animal kingdom does not comprise an aspect of the curse on creation, but was very good (13). Osborn puts the case this way:
This world is one in which the harrowing suffering of innocent creatures through the violence of other creatures appears at once fraught with terrible savageness and at the same time part of an order that is delicately balanced, achingly beautiful and finely tuned to sustain tremendous diversity of life (14).

This book is his response to the Seventh Day Adventist support for “creation science” and the church’s tendency to marginalize any who do not accept their strict Biblicism or literalism in regard to the early chapters of Genesis (18).

Osborn’s main purpose rests in his desire to deal with “the topic of animal predation as a distinctive theodicy problem” due to the questions that issue raises concerning the character of the Creator (19). He hopes that his contribution to the discussion will provoke further conversation and will “demonstrate to literalists that one can be a thoroughly orthodox Christian and embrace evolutionary concepts without contradiction” (20).

Part One (“On Literalism,” 23–121) begins with a chapter on “The Creation: A Plain Reading” (25–38). Osborn argues that the divine command to “subdue” (Gen 1:28) hedges” (32). In addition, he argues that “very good” (Gen 1:31) does not mean “perfect” (29). He admits that Gen 1:30 (God gives every green plant as food for the animals) seems to indicate a lack of predation, but insists that the text is silent on the matter of animal mortality (33). The only animal God changes by the curse at the fall of man is the serpent, and that curse does not speak of animal mortality (35). In addition, human pain existed prior to the fall, otherwise it could not be “increased” (Gen 3:16) at least for the woman (36).

In the second chapter (“What’s Eating Biblical Literalists?: Creationism and the Enlightenment Project,” 39–48) Osborn turns to the topics of concordism and foundationalism which he charges with both the rise in recent history of “creation science” (40). He also accuses literalists of replicating and perpetuating the same hubris that motivates much of modernism (43), when they are prepared to reject “the overwhelming consensus of historical, scientific and archaeological scholarship” (47).

“Unwholesome Complexity: Literalism as Scientist’s Pale Mimetic Rival” (49–58) continues Osborn’s ridiculing of biblical literalism and creationism. He first seeks to destroy the association of yom with a literal day by debunking creationists’ citing of a letter supposedly written by James Barr (48–51). Then he insists that Gen 2 must be taken as a different creation account than Gen 1, rather than being harmonious with the former (52–53). Returning to the length of a yom, Osborn notes that forced conflations of the two chapters depends upon the unreasonable and irrational concept that all the events of Gen 2 took place within one 24-hour period (54).

The remaining chapters of Part One continue to attack what Osborn considers to be the irrationality of biblical literalism and “creation science.” Chapter titles include “Progressive Versus Degenerating Science: Weighing Incommensurable Paradigms” (59–67), “Does Your God Need Stage Props?: On the Theological Necessity of Methodological Atheism” (68–75), “The Enclave Mentality: Identity Foreclosure and the Fundamentalist Mind” (76–85), “The Gnostic Syndrome: When Literalism Becomes a Heresy” (86–95), “Four Witnesses on the Literal Meaning of Genesis: Barth, Calvin, Augustine and Maimonides” (96–112), and “If Not Foundationalism, What Then?: From Tower Building to Net Mending” (113–21). The contents of these chapters, like some of the titles, are not an irenic discussion, but a purposeful intense
ridiculing of biblical literalism. At times the author’s depictions border on theological satire, rather than serious theological interaction.

Part Two (“On Animal Suffering,” 123–75) arrives at the primary topic that Osborn purposed to address—animal predation in a good world of a moral God’s creation. The chapters in this part deal with “Stasis, Deception, Curse: Three Literalist Dilemmas” (126–39), “A Midrash: C. S. Lewis’s Cosmic Conflict Theodicy Revisited” (140–49), “God of the Whirlwind: Animal Ferocity in the Book of Job” (150–56), “Creation & Kenosis: Evolution and Christ’s Self-Emptying Way of the Cross” (157–65), “Animal Ethics, Sabbath Rest” (166–75). The author complains that the biblical literalists look so intently at divine omnipotence and sovereignty in creation that they fail to even consider the “christological” implications (159). His lowercase spelling soon becomes apparent as he ultimately brings everything around to that of which his own theological foundation consists:

They [biblical literalists] fail to see (or refuse to acknowledge) that strictly penal-substitutionary readings of Christ’s death and resurrection rest upon a relatively late and individualistic turn in Christian thinking, replacing a more ancient tradition of “ransom” or Christus Victor theology that emphasized not human “genetic” sinfulness but rather Christ’s cosuffering and copresence with all of creation, and his battling against and gaining victory over powers holding all finite creatures in bondage to decay. Such a ransom theology is clearly amenable to evolutionary frameworks in ways the individualistic legal-forensic model is not (161).

In his “Conclusion” (177–79), Osborn confirms that the real issue about which he writes does not consist of animal predation or death before the fall. It is all about what he considers to be a barren, prideful, and ignorant reading of the Scriptures. The book actually has as its primary task the unveiling, debunking, and public ridicule of anyone who claims to stand upon the plain reading of the Bible—whether about the historicity of Adam, the fiat creation of the universe and of life, or the penal-substitutionary atonement of Christ. The value of the book is its demonstration of the mindset of self-proclaimed evangelicals who really have another theological agenda far beyond the literality of the Genesis account of creation. Readers will find it a great manual illustrating the critical and ridiculing methodology and argumentation of those opposed to biblical literalism. Osborn rightly accuses some biblical literalists and creation scientists of a critical and demeaning spirit (177), but weakens himself and his own theological beliefs by adopting the same tactics.

Reviewed by Mark A. Hassler, Faculty Associate in Old Testament Studies.

This popular, premillennial, and pretribulational commentary expounds the capstone book of Scripture. Paige Patterson is the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

Patterson lists ten reasons why he advocates premillennialism (36–39), eight reasons why he espouses pretribulationism (41–45), five reasons why expositors should preach the book of Revelation (47), and eight tips on how to interpret the book carefully (47–48). The seals, trumpets, and bowls transpire sequentially with a little overlapping (176, 223). The seven churches of Revelation 2–3 were seven historical congregations contemporaneous with John (70).

Readers will appreciate Patterson’s winsome style, graciousness to opposing viewpoints, and desire to see Christians receive a blessing by obeying Revelation. Instead of belaboring my numerous agreements with the commentary, this review will address some of the downsides and disagreements.

Representing the redeemed, the twenty-four elders consist of glorified humans, namely, the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles, Paul being the twelfth apostle (171–72). For other interpreters, however, angels better fit the profile of the twenty-four elders. In Revelation, only angels offer incense and intercede for saints in the manner depicted (5:8; 8:3). These are not human priests mediating for fellow humans. Further, they do not sing about their own salvation, but the salvation of others (5:8–10). The issue of their clothing and crowns (4:4) is a moot point, since angels can also wear white garments (Acts 1:10) and golden crowns (Rev 9:7). Their designation as “elders” speaks to their old age, not their species. Perhaps the twenty-four thrones in 4:4 refer to the angelic thrones in Col 1:16.

Numerals sometimes receive questionable treatment. The “five” months in Rev 9:5 probably symbolize humanity, and lack numerical significance (218–19). Some numerals, Patterson contends, possess numerical and symbolic value, such as the ten days of 2:10, the two beasts of chapter 13, and the thousand years of chapter 20 (35).


Sometimes Patterson adopts a particular interpretation of a debated OT prophecy without adequately supporting that interpretation. Three examples will suffice. First, while discussing the church at Sardis, Patterson assumes that some ancient Jews were deported to Sepharad on the basis of Obad 20 (119). But according to other scholars, the exile in Obad 20 does not occur until the eschaton, as argued by William Barrick, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament,” *MSJ* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 191–92. Second, Patterson supposes that the two olive trees who “stand in the presence of the Lord of the whole earth” (Zech 4:14) are Zerubbabel and Joshua, an identification that deters him from equating them with the two olive trees in Rev 11:4 who “stand in the presence of the Lord of the earth” (245). He concludes that the olive trees of Revelation 11 emerge as anonymous Jews of the tribulation period, individuals unknown in past history. One could make a case that Zechariah and John
envision the same pair of olive trees—probably Moses and Elijah. Third, the commentator presumes that the defeat of Gog from Magog in Ezekiel 38–39 depicts the battle at Armageddon and unfolds at the culmination of the tribulation (356–57). Other prophecy scholars place the demise of Gog in Ezekiel 38–39 near the middle of the tribulation.

According to Patterson, the star in Rev 9:1 signifies Satan, who descends from heaven with the key to the abyss (215, 220). But in 20:1–3 an angel descends from heaven with the key to the abyss and incarcerates Satan. That reduces the likelihood that the star in 9:1 represents Satan. Moreover, Satan becomes an inmate of the abyss, not its trustee. And demons exercise authority over this world (cf. 2 Cor 4:4), not over the abyss. Throughout Scripture stars can symbolize rulers—regardless of their species, whether divine or human. In this instance, the ruler appears to be a holy angel.

The “Excursus on the Fall of Satan” (264–65) evokes Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, but fails to identify or clarify the issues involved in interpreting those texts. The commentator merely quotes four church fathers and one modern author who see Satan in those passages.

A controversial interpretation surfaces in the author’s timeline of events in Rev 12:7–17. Patterson places the dragon’s battle with Michael and his subsequent fall to earth near the time of creation (267). The dragon’s persecution of the woman (the Jews) plays out during the church age, which explains the “contemporary malaise” of the Jews (270). However, the seer ties these events to the tribulation period by means of chronological markers, namely, the 1,260 days (v. 6) and the “time and times and half a time” (v. 14).

The harlot in Revelation 17 symbolizes a religious system, according to Patterson (321). For other readers, however, the angel who explains John’s vision provides the inspired interpretation: the harlot represents the great city of Babylon (17:18; 18:10). Patterson supplies only one reason why the harlot cannot denote the actual city of Babylon: “Babylon exists today only as a relatively small town” (292). But as Patterson points out elsewhere, believers ought to be wary of interpreting the text in light of the current global scene: “Too often interpreters of Revelation and of all apocalyptic/prophetic literature read modernity back into the text in a way totally unanticipated by the author and inevitably incorrectly” (249; cf. 212). Along these lines, before 1948 some Bible interpreters scoffed at the idea that Israel could have a future. Similarly, one would be ill-advised to deny Babylon a future on the basis of its current population and prestige. Given the right manpower, motivation, money, and mastermind, a city can arise rather quickly.

Noticeably absent in the discussion of Revelation 17–18 are the OT predictions that arguably anticipate the existence and doom of end-time Babylon or Shinar (e.g., Isa 11:11; 13:1–14:27; 47:1–15; Jer 25:12–38; 50:1–51:64; Mic 4:10; Zech 2:7–13; 5:1–11). One would do well to follow Patterson’s advice: “Watch closely for Old Testament parallels and allusions, and allow them considerable weight as guides to understanding the book” (47). This reviewer recommends the series of six articles in Bibliotheca Sacra (2012–13) by Andrew Woods, “Have the Prophecies in Revelation 17–18 about Babylon Been Fulfilled?”
The “Scripture Index” omits references from Revelation (411). Only books appear in the “Bibliography” (387–98), with the exception of Patterson’s articles and essays. The volume lacks visual aids, with one exception (“Comparison Chart of the Cherubim,” 155). Surely a map would have complemented the description of the locations of the seven churches in Revelation 2–3 (77). The many substantive footnotes impede the readability, some of which are only marginally pertinent (e.g., 350 n263). The commentary employs transliteration rather than the Greek text.

Errors and inconsistencies need correcting. “Manor” should be “manner” (152). “Confirm” should be “conform” (42). “Underestimated” should be “overestimated” (233). The critique of the “second view” is actually a critique of the first view (194). One statement refers to “the aorist active indicative tense” (249). Page 35 reports that the ten days in 2:10 “probably” possess numerical and symbolic value, but page 98 deems the symbolic views of the ten days “unlikely” and “speculative at best.” Words with an umlaut appear in a random font (e.g., 338 n248).

Despite the drawbacks, this commentary will stimulate the Bible student or expositor who mines the treasures of Revelation. One can also profit from the standard premillennial commentary on Revelation by Robert Thomas (2 vols., Moody, 1992, 1995).


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


In this volume Smith performs a comparative analysis of some of the ancient stories from Ugarit (Aqhat, Baal Cycle, and Rephaim texts), Mesopotamia (Gilgamesh), Greece (the Iliad), and Israel (Judg 5 and 2 Sam 1:19–27). Within these poetic materials the author finds evidence of the cultural practices and philosophical views of warfare and warriors. Part I “The Literary Commemoration of Warriors and Warrior Culture” (13–47) considers the matters of evidence and method involved in an examination of warrior culture by means of its commemorative poetry. Part II “Three
Warrior Pairs in Mesopotamia, Greece, and Israel” (49–95) contrasts three great pairs of warriors from Mesopotamia (Gilgamesh and Enkidu), Greece (Achilles and Patroklos), and Israel (David and Jonathan) in order to introduce some of themes dealing with the interactions of fellow warriors, the issues of gender involvement, and the role of goddesses. Part III “Human and Divine Warriors in the Ugaritic Texts” (97–208) examines the Ugaritic texts containing such heroic poetry. Part IV “Israelite Warrior Poetry in the Early Iron Age” (209–332) moves on to the two major biblical texts to evaluate them and their significance in comparison to the other Ancient Near Eastern poetic traditions.

Smith’s extensive and detailed analysis intrigues this reviewer on three major points of scholarly discussion and debate. First, this volume demonstrates that poetic texts can be trusted to provide valuable historical and cultural evidence for reconstructing both ancient history and ancient societies. Scholars who denigrate the historical value of poetic texts do so in direct denial of the voluminous evidence available in both ancient and modern poetry. Second, poetic style and linguistic evidence do not provide a definitive set of data for dating the composition of individual poetic texts. Finally, ancient poems became instruments by which ancient leaders and societies instructed citizenry and formed desirable attitudes to promote the preservation of history, the propagation of proper theology, and the preparation for kingdom building. Throughout the volume, Smith touches upon these specific issues and identifies his selected texts’ contribution to all three areas of discussion.

Voluminous end notes (333–576) present significant added information, illustrative evidences, and supporting documentation. A series of indexes conclude the volume, providing readers with the means to access information easily (an art and aid which many current publications are abandoning, apparently with the intent that the materials would be better searched and culled in digital editions rather than print editions): “Index of Subjects” (577–90), “Index of Texts” (591–616), “Index of West Semitic Key Words, Grammatical Features, and Poetic Terms” (617–19), “Index of Select Iconography” (620–21), and “Index of Modern Authors” (622–36).


Reviewed by Michael J. Vlach, Professor of Theological Studies.

Brian S. Rosner is Principal of Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College. His book’s purpose is clear from the title—it is an examination of how the Apostle Paul viewed the Mosaic Law. Rosner examines key Law texts in Paul’s writings, including the usual ones from Romans and Galatians. But Rosner also brings in his expertise on Paul’s other writings to help solve the complex puzzle of how Paul viewed the Law and its relationship to Christians. He notes, as many others have done, that Paul’s understanding of the Law is very challenging. At times, Paul makes strong statements that the Law has been abolished (see Eph 2:15) and yet at other times Paul quotes the Law as having relevance to Christians today (see Eph 6:2–3).
Rosner summarizes how three theological camps have understood the Law (Lutheran, Reformed, and New Perspective) and attempts to keep the best of what each has offered on this topic while pressing on to a more complete understanding. He shows awareness of each camp, but his main focus is on Bible texts and what they mean, not defending any particular prior view.

In sum, Rosner believes Paul’s view of the Law is best understood from three elements, of which the third has two parts. The three elements are “repudiation,” “replacement,” and “reappropriation.” First, on several occasions Paul repudiates the Mosaic Law as a binding set of laws for Christians in light of Jesus’ coming and work. Repudiations of the Law can be found in such passages as Rom 6:15; 8:1–2; 1 Cor 9:20; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 3:23–35; 5:18; Eph 2:15; and Col 2:14. Second, Paul speaks of a replacement of the Mosaic Law with the New Covenant, Law of Christ, Holy Spirit, etc. (Rom 6:15; 8:1–2; 1 Cor 9:21; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 5:18; 6:2; Phil 3:9). Thus, it is not simply the case that the Mosaic Law has been repudiated, it has been replaced by something better. This better thing is the New Covenant with all of its realities including the role of the Holy Spirit.

Yet Rosner says Paul’s understanding of the Law does not end with repudiation and replacement. And it is not the case that there is no value of the Mosaic Law for today. Instead, there is a third element—reappropriation. Rosner asserts that Paul reappropriates the role of the Law to two areas—prophecy and wisdom. In regard to “prophecy,” the Law has a prophetic witness in that it points to Jesus and the Gospel. It is “prophecy of the new age in which both Jews and Gentiles will be justified by grace through faith” (154). Passages that support this idea of reappropriation as prophetic witness include Rom 4:1–3; 1 Cor 8:5–6; 15:45; Gal 4:21–31; Eph 5:31–32; Col 2:8–23.

Rosner believes this prophetic witness of the Law is what Paul has in mind in Rom 3:31: “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.” This verse has puzzled many since on other occasions in Romans Paul seems to be saying that believers are no longer under the Law and have died to the Law (see Rom 6:14–15; 7:1–6). Plus, in Eph 2:15 Paul says that Jesus abolished in His flesh the Ten Commandments. Rosner argues that Paul is not contradicting himself with Rom 3:31. While the other passages are saying that the Mosaic Law is no longer operative as a binding set of laws for the Christian, Rom 3:31 is emphasizing the Law’s prophetic witness to what has now transpired with the coming of Jesus.

The second element of reappropriation, according to Rosner, is wisdom in regard to ethics. In sum, Paul treats statements from the Mosaic Law as wisdom literature for ethics and living. He states: “The key to understanding Paul’s use of the law for ethics is hermeneutical. If the law as law-covenant has been abolished, the law is still of value for Christian conduct as Scripture and as wisdom” (160) (emphases in original). Passages where Rosner believes Paul is reappropriating the Law as wisdom include Rom 12:19; 1 Cor 5:13b; 9:9; 10:11; 2 Cor 8:15; 13:1; Gal 5:14; Eph 6:1–3; Col 3:9–10; and 2 Tim 3:16–17.

This reviewer found Rosner’s insights to be helpful. Rosner is accurate that the Mosaic Law is a unit that cannot be divided into parts that are no longer operative (civil and ceremonial) while others are in effect (moral). And he is correct that the
Mosaic Law is no longer binding on the Christian. Yet Rosner offers a helpful understanding on how there is still positive value of the Mosaic Law as Scripture for today. The Law does prophesy and predict the coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant (see Gen 49:8–10; Deut 30:6). In that sense the Mosaic Law is established. Also, Paul quotes the Mosaic Law for ethics, and in doing so emphasizes the wisdom of the Law that is still applicable. It seems that Rosner’s position does justice to both the discontinuity aspects of the Mosaic Law (i.e. believers are not under the Law) and the continuity aspects (i.e. the Law is instructive for the Christian).

From this reviewer’s perspective, Rosner’s book is insightful, and, thus, recommended. Those interested in the topic of Paul’s use of the Law would do well to consult Rosner’s book and take D.A. Carson’s (series editor) instruction to read it slowly (12).
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