

## PROMISES TO ISRAEL IN THE APOCALYPSE

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*Recent opinions that Israel's covenants and promises are missing in Rev 20:1-10 have rested on poor hermeneutical foundations. Three major OT covenants with Israel are prominent throughout the Apocalypse and therefore are foundational to what John writes in chapter 20. God promised Abraham a people who are quite visible in Revelation 7, 12, and 14, and in 2:9 and 3:9, where physical descendants of Abraham are in view. The geographical territory promised to Abraham comes into view in 11:1-13 as well as in 16:16 and 20:9. Close attention is given to the Davidic Covenant in 1:5 and 22:16 and many places between, such as 3:7, 5:5, and 11:15. The New Covenant comes into focus whenever the Lamb and His blood are mentioned in the book, and particularly in 21:3 which speaks of a new relationship with God. Obvious references to God's covenants with Israel are often ignored because of deviations from sound principles of interpretation by those who practice what has been called eclectic hermeneutics. According to Revelation, God will in the future be faithful in fulfilling His promises to Israel.*

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Bruce Waltke finds no textual linkage in Revelation 20 to Israel's OT promises regarding a kingdom. He writes, "In the former essay I argued among other things that if there is any tension in one's interpretation between the Old Testament and the New, priority must be given to the New; that Rev 20:1-10 cannot be linked textually with Israel's covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets the imagery of the Old Testament with reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne."<sup>1</sup> In supporting this claim, Waltke professes allegiance to

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce K. Waltke, "A Response," in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, eds. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 353. Waltke is referring to his earlier works "Kingdom Promises as Spiritual," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*:

the grammatical-historical approach, but adds certain rules of interpretation that “go beyond” that approach, rules such as the “priority of the Bible over other data,” “the priority of New Testament interpretation over the interpretation of theologians,” “the priority of clear texts over obscure ones,” and “the priority of spiritual illumination over scientific exegesis.”<sup>2</sup> He fails to notice, however, that in applying his rules beyond the grammatical-historical method, he violates time-honored principles of that method, such as interpreting a passage in its historical context<sup>3</sup> and the principle of single meaning.<sup>4</sup> Like others of a covenant theology persuasion, he interprets OT passages without adequate attention to their historical context, and in so doing, assigns them an additional meaning, one meaning being what the original author intended and the other being a meaning assigned by a NT writer.<sup>5</sup> He fails to grant NT writers the prerogative of assigning additional meanings through use of their

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*Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1988) 263-88; and “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Academie Books, 1990) 59-88.

<sup>2</sup>Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual” 263-65.

<sup>3</sup>M. S. Terry writes, “The interpreter should, therefore, endeavour to take himself from the present and to transport himself into the historical position of an author, look through his eyes, note his surroundings, feel with his heart, and catch his emotion. Herein we note the import of the term *grammatico-historical* interpretation” (*Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* [1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947] 231, emphasis in the original), and “Subject and predicate and subordinate clauses must be closely analyzed, and the whole document, book, or epistle, should be viewed, as far as possible from the *author's historical standpoint*” (*ibid.*, 205, emphasis added). B. Ramm adds, “Some interaction with the culture and history of a book of Holy Scripture is mandatory” (B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d. rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970] 150), and “The interpreter must know *Biblical history*. . . . Every event has its historical referent in that all Biblical events occur in a stream of history” (*ibid.*, 154, emphasis in the original).

<sup>4</sup>“A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture” (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 205); “But here we must remember the old adage: ‘Interpretation is one; application is many.’ This means that there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study” (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 113). Summit II of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy concurred with this principle: “We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed. We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application” (Article VII, “Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” adopted by the International Council in Biblical Inerrancy, 10–13 November 1982). For further discussion of the principle of single meaning, see Chapter Six in my *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The Old Versus the New* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 141-64.

<sup>5</sup>For an explanation of the NT use of the OT that does not violate either of these principles, see my discussion in Chapter Nine of *Evangelical Hermeneutics* 241-69.

revelatory gifts of apostleship and prophesy.<sup>6</sup>

Waltke deserves a response in light of his inability to find any reference to Israel's covenants and promises in Revelation in general and in Rev 20:1-10 in particular. Since Rev 20:1-10 cannot be divorced from the remainder of the Apocalypse, that passage will be viewed through the eyes of the whole book.

The OT describes four covenants that are most relevant to "perspectives on Israel and the church": the Abrahamic, the Palestinian or Land, the Davidic, and the New Covenants. Some consider the Land Covenant to be a part of the Abrahamic, so that covenant will be considered as part of the Abrahamic. The three major covenants of God with Israel are the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants.

This study will examine the Book of Revelation to see what kind of fulfillments of these covenants it records. Results yielded by differing hermeneutical approaches to the book will also come under scrutiny. The treatments selected for comparison will be three recent evangelical commentaries on Revelation by Greg Beale, David Aune, and Grant Osborne.

### **The Abrahamic Covenant**

God promised Abraham a people, the land, and an ability to be a source of blessing to all families of the earth (Gen 12:1-3, 7).

**A people.** Revelation depicts a number of times and a number of ways that God will fulfil His promises to Abraham. The people descended from Abram are in view several times in the book. Perhaps the most conspicuous instances are in chapter 7:1-8 and chapter 14:1-5 in which the 144,000 descended from the twelve sons of Abram's grandson Jacob are mentioned. These are not the total number of Abraham's descendants, but are a select group from among that number who will in later times have a special mission to fulfil.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, covenantalists do not accept the literal meaning of the words about the 144,000. Beale, in line with his eclectic approach to hermeneutics in the Apocalypse, concludes that "the group of 7:4-8 represents a remnant from the visible church, which professes to be true Israel"<sup>8</sup> or, in other words, "the totality of God's people throughout the ages, viewed as true Israelites."<sup>9</sup> He describes his eclecticism

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Others who interpret the book literally may see a different role for the 144,000 (e.g., John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1966] 140), but they all agree that the 144,000 are descendants of Abraham.

<sup>8</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, eds. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 423.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 733.

as a combination of the idealist and the futurist approaches to the book.<sup>10</sup> Eclectic hermeneutics allow a person to switch from literal to allegorical and from allegorical to literal in any given passage in order to support a preferred theological persuasion. In Revelation this most often happens under the cover of assuming that the book's apocalyptic genre allows for such vacillation. Eclecticism allows Beale to interpret idealistically in some places, such as in chapters 7 and 14, and futuristically in others such as in chapter 19.

Aune identifies the 144,000 as representing “*that particular group of Christians (including all ages and both genders) who have been specially protected by God from both divine plagues and human persecution just before the final eschatological tribulation begins and who consequently survive that tribulation and the great eschatological battle that is the culmination of that tribulation.*”<sup>11</sup> In contrast with Beale, Aune sees the 144,000 as future Christians, not believers of all ages.<sup>12</sup> He also differs from Beale when he differentiates the 144,000 from the innumerable multitude of 7:9-17.<sup>13</sup> A comparison of these two allegorists in their comments on this passage illustrates how interpretations of Revelation are uncontrolled and varied when exegetes forsake the use of grammatical-historical principles.

Aune reaches his conclusions after laboring hard to find a consensus definition of apocalyptic genre.<sup>14</sup> He eventually has to set down his own definitions of genre and apocalypse,<sup>15</sup> while admitting that some authorities disagree with his definitions.<sup>16</sup>

Hermeneutically, Osborne falls into the eclectic camp with Beale, but instead of combining just idealist and futurist, he combines futurist with preterist and idealist.<sup>17</sup> He too can vacillate from one approach to another to suit his own theological leanings. Yet he pleads for “hermeneutical humility” and caution, whatever principles of interpretation one adopts.<sup>18</sup>

He understands the 144,000 to be the church because of emphasis on the

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>11</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Word, 1998) 443 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 443-44.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 440.

<sup>14</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Word, 1997), lxxi-xc.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., lxxxi-lxxxii, lxxxii-lxxxviii.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., lxxxviii-lxxxix.

<sup>17</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 21-22.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 16.

church throughout Revelation.<sup>19</sup> He goes on to say, “[T]here is no mention of Jewish believers apart from the Gentile church elsewhere in Revelation,”<sup>20</sup> a statement that will be shown below to be fallacious. Osborne’s other reasons for his conclusion draw upon other NT passages, but in his cited passages, alleged references to the church as Israel are also debated.<sup>21</sup>

As I have pointed out in another place,<sup>22</sup> valid exegetical arguments for taking the designations in 7:4-8 in other than their literal meaning are nonexistent. The only reasons adduced for understanding them otherwise are theologically motivated. Without citing every weakness of Osborne’s conclusion, suffice it to say that “no clear-cut example of the church being called ‘Israel’ exists in the NT or in ancient church writings until A.D. 160.”<sup>23</sup> Walvoord’s point is also quite valid: “It would be rather ridiculous to carry the typology of Israel representing the church to the extent of dividing them up into twelve tribes as was done here, if it was the intent of the writer to describe the church.”<sup>24</sup> Add to these the difference in number and ethnicity between the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude of Rev 7:9-17, and identification of the 144,000 as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becomes quite evident.

Another reference to the descendants of Abraham comes in Revelation 12 when the text tells of a great sign in heaven that includes a woman with child. The term *σημείον* (12:1) is the contextual signal to understanding a figurative interpretation of the woman. The connection of the woman’s description with Gen 37:9 helps in identifying the woman as national Israel. God will in the future provide a place of refuge for the nation from the animosity of the dragon.

As part of a lengthy acknowledgment that the woman represents Israel, Beale makes the following exegetically unsubstantiated statements: “This then is another example of the church being equated with the twelve tribes of Israel (see on 7:4-8). Ch. 12 presents the woman as incorporating the people of God living both before and after Christ’s coming.”<sup>25</sup> As part of his discussion, he sees references to the OT community of faith that brought forth the Messiah.<sup>26</sup> Yet he notes, “It is too limiting to view the woman as representing only a remnant of Israelites living in trial

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 311.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 311-12.

<sup>22</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 473-78.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge U., 1969) 74-84, 206.

<sup>24</sup>Walvoord, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* 143.

<sup>25</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 627.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 629.

at the last stage of history,”<sup>27</sup> and adds the conclusion that “the woman in 12:1-2 represents the community of faith in both the Old and New Testament ages.”<sup>28</sup> Through some unexplained interpretive transition, he moves from a recognition that the woman is a symbol for Israel to making her a symbol for both believing Israel and the believing church.

Aune analyzes the words about the woman as probably derived from the Greek Leto-Apollo-Python myth. With only one passing mention of Gen 37:9-11,<sup>29</sup> he allows that the myth about the woman can be read as a reference to Mary and her child from a Christian perspective, or as a reference to Israel, the persecuted people of God, from a Jewish perspective.<sup>30</sup> Aune seems to pursue a reader-response type of hermeneutic in this instance. He sees the catching up of the child to God and His throne as referring to the exaltation of the risen Jesus to the right hand of God, but rather than assigning an OT background to the story, he sees its source in Greek mythology.

Osborne correctly identifies the woman as Israel by referring to Gen 37:1-9 with the sun and the moon referring to Joseph’s parents and the stars his brothers, but inexplicably, he says that she represents the church in Rev 12:17.<sup>31</sup> He fails to explain how the church has the same parents as Joseph—i.e., Jacob and Leah,<sup>32</sup> but in Rev 12:6, he opts for a futurist explanation, identifying those persecuted during the “final terrible persecution” as the church.<sup>33</sup> How Israel, the people of God, suddenly becomes the church, the people of God, he does not explain. The transition appears to be quite arbitrary.

Again, the radical disagreement of allegorists in their handling of Revelation 12 illustrates the subjective nature of interpretation once the interpreter has forsaken grammatical-historical principles. A point that Beale and Aune have in common, however, is their failure to recognize the futurity of what chapter 12 reveals. This is the portion of the book that discloses “things that must happen after these things,” according to Rev 4:1. Osborne recognizes the futurity, but changes boats in the middle of the stream, beginning the chapter with the woman being Israel and ending the chapter with her representing the church.

The woman represents the faithful remnant of Israel of the future and the

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 631.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 680.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 712.

<sup>31</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 456.

<sup>32</sup>Osborne seemingly identifies Joseph’s mother as Leah, but actually Joseph’s mother was Rachel (Gen 30:22-24).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 464.

attempt of the devil to get rid of her.<sup>34</sup> Clearly, the sun and the moon in Gen 37:9-10 refer to Jacob and Rachel, the parents of Joseph. National Israel is the mother who begat the Messiah, a feat that cannot with any justification be attributed to the church. To claim that Revelation makes no distinction between the people of God in the OT and the church in the NT is without merit. Such a distinction has already been noted in comparing 7:1-8 with 7:9-17. Whatever the composition of the innumerable multitude in 7:9-17, they are explicitly distinct from the 144,000 in 7:1-8. This account in Revelation 12 furnishes another instance of God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to Abraham in raising up from him and preserving a people that become a nation.

Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 also furnish a recognition of the existence of national Israel, descendants of Abraham. Of course, not all of Abraham's physical seed belonged to his spiritual seed. These two passages, coming from the epistolary portion of the Apocalypse, describe cases where Abraham's physical seed were not among the faithful remnant of Israel, but the latter case (3:9) promises the future repentance of national Israel when it records, "Behold, I will cause [those] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you." The verse refers either to the exaltation of the Philadelphian church, without implying salvation of those who are forced to come and worship, or to an eschatological salvation of the Jews. The latter alternative has more in its favor because it aligns with biblical predictions of the future repentance of Israel (cf. Rom 9:26a) and is in line with the prediction of Christ's return in 3:10-11 when that national repentance will occur.<sup>35</sup> Here is another indication of God's fulfilling His promise of a people to Abraham.

Beale, Aune, and Osborne concur that these are references to national Israel, but reject any teaching of future national repentance, saying that the verse simply refers to vindication of the Philadelphian believers.<sup>36</sup> Yet vindication of the Philadelphian church is extremely difficult to separate from a future repentance of national Israel. Submission and homage depicted in the language of 3:9 can hardly be rendered by anyone who has not become Christ's follower.<sup>37</sup>

**The Land.** God also promised Abraham possession of the land to which He

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<sup>34</sup>For additional support for this decision, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 117-21.

<sup>35</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* 281-83.

<sup>36</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 240-41, 286-88; Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 162-65, 237-38; Osborne, *Revelation* 190-91.

<sup>37</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 1–7* 282.

was to lead him. This, of course, is the land that came to be known as Israel, “the promised land.” Revelation 11:1-13 tells of the measuring of the temple and two witnesses active in Jerusalem, a city in the heart of that promised land, and a revival that will take place in that city following a great earthquake.

The following chart that summarizes the differences between hermeneutical approaches to Rev 11:1-13. As noted earlier, Beale follows a double-eclectic philosophy of hermeneutics, varying between idealist and futurist. In his commentary on Revelation, Osborne follows a triple-eclectic approach when he switches between futurism, idealism, and preterism. The following chart reflects the results of their eclecticism compared with a literal or consistent grammatical-historical approach to the book:

***Three Views on Rev 11:1ff.***

(Note: page numbers in parentheses refer to Beale’s commentary, Osborne’s commentary, and Thomas’ commentary. On the chart, note the shaded blocks where Beale and Osborne essentially agree with each other. In the rest of the blocks they are in substantial disagreement with one another. They disagree with a literal understanding in every one of the fourteen areas.)

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
[1] “measure” (11:1)	“the infallible promise of God’s future presence”; “the protection of God’s eschatological community” (559) “until the parousia” (566)	“preservation of the saints spiritually in the coming great persecution” (410; cf. 411); “a ‘prophetic anticipation’ of the final victory of the church” (412)	“a mark of God’s favor” (80-81)
[2] “the temple (naon)” (11:1)	“the temple of the church” (561); “Christians” (562); “the whole covenant community” (562); “the community of believers undergoing persecution yet protected by God” (566)	heavenly temple depicting “the church, primarily the saints of this final period but secondarily the church of all ages” (410)	“a future temple in Jerusalem during the period just before Christ returns” (81-82)

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
<b>[3]</b> “the altar” (11:1)	“the suffering covenant community” (563)	“the [heavenly] altar of incense” (410)	“the brazen altar of sacrifice in the court outside the sanctuary” (82)
<b>[4]</b> “the worshipers” (11:1)	“believers worshipping together in the temple community” (564)	“individual believers” (411)	“a future godly remnant in Israel” (82)
<b>[5]</b> “in it” (11:1)	“it” referring to the temple or the altar (571)	“in the church” (411)	“in the rebuilt temple” (82)
<b>[6]</b> “the court that is outside the temple ( <i>naou</i> )” (11:2)	“God’s true people,” including Gentiles (560)	“the saints who are persecuted” (412)	“the wicked without God” (83)
<b>[7]</b> “cast outside” (11:2)	“not protected from various forms of earthly harm (physical, economic, social, etc.)” (569)	not protected from the Gentiles/nations (412); God delivers his followers into the hands of sinners (413)	“exclusion from God’s favor” (83)
<b>[8]</b> “the Gentiles” (11:2)	“unbelieving Gentiles and Jews” (569)	“the church handed over to the Gentiles/nations for a time” (412)	“a group [of non-Jews] in rebellion against God who will oppress the Jewish remnant” (83-84)
<b>[9]</b> “the holy city” (11:2)	“the initial form of the heavenly city, part of which is identified with believers living on earth” (568)	“the people of God” (413)	“the literal city of Jerusalem on earth” (84)

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
<b>[10]</b> “forty-two months” (11:2)	“figurative for the eschatological period of tribulation” (565); “attack on the community of faith throughout the church age” (566)	“a limited period that is strictly under God’s control”; “a time of martyrdom but also a time of preservation and witness” (415)	“the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week” (85)
<b>[11]</b> “they will trample on” (11:2)	persecution of the church from Christ’s resurrection until His final coming (567)	“the saints will suffer incredibly” in a physical sense (413)	“future defilement and domination of Jerusalem” (86)
<b>[12]</b> “the two witnesses” (11:3)	the church; “the whole community of faith” (573)	“two major eschatological figures . . . [and a symbol for] the witnessing church” (418)	two future prophets, probably Moses and Elijah (87-89)
<b>[13]</b> “the great city” (11:8)	“Babylon” = “Rome” = “the ungodly world” (591-92)	Jerusalem and Rome; secondarily, all cities that oppose God (426-27)	Jerusalem (93-94)
<b>[14]</b> the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses (11:11-12)	“divine legitimation of a prophetic call” (599)	“A proleptic anticipation of the ‘rapture’ of the church” (432)	the resurrection of the two witnesses (97)

Of special interest for this study are rows 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, and 13. All pertain to a geographical location within the land that God promised to Abraham. Following a futurist, literal approach to the book, one learns that these are part of the future fulfillment of His promise to Abraham.

Turning attention to Aune, one sees that he agrees with Osborne that the temple refers to the heavenly temple, not the earthly one, but he does so under the assumption that the earthly temple will not be rebuilt.<sup>38</sup> Yet he later acknowledges that the temple described in 11:1-2 is most definitely the earthly temple in

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<sup>38</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 596-97.

Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> He also believes that “the holy city” is a clear reference to the earthly city Jerusalem that is referred to again in 11:8.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, he agrees with Osborne that the worshipers are a divinely protected remnant of Christians who will survive until the arrival of the eschaton.<sup>41</sup> Through a combination of source and form critical explanations of the passage, Aune is able to combine literal-futuristic interpretations of the passage with allegorical-idealistic explanations.

For those whose hermeneutical principles accord with literal interpretation, however, the land promises to Abraham keep resounding through the Apocalypse. Other references in Revelation to the land promised to Abraham include Rev 16:16 and 20:9. The former refers to a place called Harmagedon or Armageddon, where a future battle will be fought. The “Har” prefix probably refers to the hill country around a town called Megiddo. Megiddo was a city on the Great Road linking Gaza and Damascus, connecting the coastal plain and the Plain of Esdraelon or Megiddo. That the kings from the east must cross the Euphrates River to get to the land of Israel and Megiddo is another indication of the geographical connotation of Armageddon and of the fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham (Rev 16:12).<sup>42</sup> The reference in 20:9 speaks of “the camp of the saints and the beloved city,” most clearly a reference to the city of Jerusalem.

In Beale’s system “Armageddon” is a figurative way of referring to the place where the final battle against the saints and Christ will be fought. He sees that place as being the whole world.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, he opts for another allegorical interpretation when he sees “the camp of the saints and the beloved city” as the church.<sup>44</sup>

Aune calls Armageddon “the mythical apocalyptic-world mountain where the forces hostile to God, assembled by demonic spirits, will gather for a final battle against God and his people.”<sup>45</sup> Regarding “the beloved city” he comments, “Since the heavenly Jerusalem does not make its appearance until 21:10 (aside from 3:12), ‘the beloved city’ cannot be the New Jerusalem but must be the earthly Jerusalem.”<sup>46</sup> Yet one should not conclude that Aune handles Revelation’s prophecies as a futurist. Because of his source and redaction critical assumptions, he simply assumes that the final editor of the Apocalypse incorporated earlier traditions and/or myths into the

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 605.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 608, 619.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 630.

<sup>42</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 261–62.

<sup>43</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 838–39.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1027.

<sup>45</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 898.

<sup>46</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas, 1998) 1098–99.

passage.

After briefly examining eight possible meanings, Osborne understands Armageddon to speak of a broadening of apostate Israel to depict all nations in their final war against God.<sup>47</sup> This too is an obvious allegorical interpretation of the term. After acknowledging the geographical connotation of the term,<sup>48</sup> he opts for a symbolic rather than geographical meaning. From OT times, the plain and the hill country around Megiddo were a well-known battleground, and is a suitable location for Christ's final victory over His enemies. The plains of Megiddo are not large enough to contain armies from all over the world, but furnish an assembly area for a larger deployment that covers two hundred miles from north to south and the width of Palestine from east to west (cf. Rev 14:20).<sup>49</sup>

In agreement with literal interpretation, Osborne reverts to his literal-futurist mode in identifying "the beloved city" of Rev 20:9 with Jerusalem which will have been reinstated as the capital of Christ's kingdom during the millennium.<sup>50</sup> That refreshing conclusion adds fuel to the case for the fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham by locating activities of the millennium geographically within the boundaries of territory promised to Abraham. This will be the location of Israel's Messiah in ruling the world kingdom on earth.<sup>51</sup>

Among Abraham's descendants will be the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16). His conquest will free the righteous of the earth from the deceptions, tyranny, and injustice of the beast and the false prophet (19:20). This great battle will eventuate in the imprisonment of the deceiver of the nations (20:3), a great blessing to all the families of the earth.

### **The Davidic Covenant**

God's promises to David included the following: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, "I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and **I will establish his kingdom. . . . I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever . . . and your house and your kingdom shall endure before me forever; your throne shall be established forever**" (1 Sam. 7:12, 13, 16; emphasis added).

Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant is a major theme of Revelation, from beginning to end. In Rev 1:5 the titles chosen for Christ come from Psalm 89, an inspired commentary on the Davidic Covenant. Those titles are "the faithful witness,

<sup>47</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 596.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 594.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 270-71.

<sup>50</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 714.

<sup>51</sup>Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 425.

the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The source of all three is Psalm 89. “The firstborn of the dead” comes from “My firstborn” in verse 27 of the psalm. “The highest of the kings of the earth” refers again to verse 27 where the psalmist wrote “the highest of the kings of the earth.” “The faithful witness” derives from “the witness in the sky is faithful” in verse 37 of the psalm.

David is prominent at the book’s end too. Rev 22:16 reads, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.” Jesus is both the ancestor (the root) and the descendant (the offspring) of David. He is the beginning and end of the economy associated with David’s family. In the words of 2 Sam 7:12, He is the descendant whom God promised to raise up after David. He will inaugurate the kingdom promised to David. Just as David founded the first Jerusalem, Jesus will found the new Jerusalem. Paul refers to Jesus in a similar way in Rom 15:12, calling Him “the root of Jesse.”

In Rev 5:5 one of the twenty-four elders assures John that “the lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” has conquered and will open the seven-sealed book. “Root” has the sense of “offspring” here and points to Christ’s headship in the final Davidic kingdom. The title alludes to the Messianic prophecy of Isa 11:1, 10.

Beale agrees in connecting these titles of 1:5 with Psalm 89, but concludes that John views David as “the ideal Davidic king on an escalated eschatological level.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, he sees an allegorical fulfillment of the promise to David, not a literal understanding as the promise would have been understood by David. He takes Christ’s death and resurrection to be the time when He assumed His sovereign position over the cosmos, a reign being fulfilled during the present age, not in the future in a literal sense.

As for 22:16, Beale does the same. Here he sees David’s kingdom as both already inaugurated and future.<sup>53</sup> A literal understanding of the Davidic Covenant, however, would limit that kingdom to the future only. Note Beale’s combination of idealist and futurist hermeneutics in this instance, allegorical in seeing a present fulfillment and literal in seeing a future fulfillment. He violates the principle of single meaning once again.

At 5:5, Beale has little to say about Jesus’ connection to David. Regarding the two titles, he notes that “both concern the prophecy of a messianic figure who will overcome his enemy through judgment.”<sup>54</sup> Those words fall into an idealist mold, which theoretically can be fulfilled at any time.

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<sup>52</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 190-91.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1146-47.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 349.

Aune notes the connection of Rev 1:5 with Ps 89:27, 37,<sup>55</sup> but fails to connect the psalm with the Davidic Covenant on which the psalm furnishes a commentary. In 22:16 he notes the Messianic connotation of the title, but again does not mention the Davidic Covenant and its fulfillment in Revelation.

Regarding Rev 5:5 Aune writes,

The emphases on the tribe of Judah and on Davidic descent together underline one of the crucial qualifications of the Jewish royal Messiah; he must be a descendant of the royal house of David (Pss. Sol. 17:21; Mark 12:35-37; John 7:42), sometimes conceived as David *redividus* (Jer 23:5; 30:9). Descent from the tribe of Judah (Heb. 7:14) and more specifically the Davidic descent of Jesus, is frequently mentioned in the NT and early Christian literature (Matt 1:1, 6; Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 3:31; Acts 2:30-32; 13:22-23; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8; Ignatius *Eph.* 18:2; 20:2; *Rom.* 17:3; *Smyrn.* 1:1), and he is frequently called “son of David (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; Mark 10:47-48; 12:35; Luke 18:38-39; *Barn.* 12:10).<sup>56</sup>

Aune correctly ties the titles of 5:5 with OT prophecies of the Messiah who was coming to reign, but he does not take the next step and tie them specifically to fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant of 2 Samuel 7. He does refer to the reign of David’s house in the 2 Samuel passage in connection with Rev 11:15, “He shall reign forever and ever,” but that is the only place in his three volumes that he does so.

Osborne prefers not to connect “the faithful witness” of 1:5 with Ps 89:27, but he does connect the other two titles of 1:5 with Psalm 89.<sup>57</sup> Yet he makes no direct connection with Israel’s fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.<sup>58</sup> At 22:16, he relates “the Root and Offspring of David” to “the fulfillment of the Davidic messianic hope,” and calls Jesus “the Davidic Messiah.”<sup>59</sup> Still he refrains from noting how such a fulfillment contributes to the hope of national Israel.

In 5:5, Osborne notes the connection of “the root of David” with Isa 11:1, a military passage, and admits that the military side of the Davidic imagery predominates in Revelation.<sup>60</sup> Yet he backs off from seeing Him as the returning Christ to accomplish His victory. Rather he identifies the cross as Jesus’ major weapon in warfare with God’s enemies.<sup>61</sup> That hardly does justice to a literal

<sup>55</sup>David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, vol. 52A of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1997) 37-40.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>57</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 62-63.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 792-93 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

interpretation of Revelation and to fulfillment of Israel's Davidic Covenant in the future.

In Rev 3:7, in addressing the church at Philadelphia, Jesus refers to Himself as the one who holds "the key of David." Possession of that key means that He has the right to admit to or exclude from the city of David, Jerusalem both old and new. That key pertains to the prerogative of determining who will have a part in the kingdom of David over which He as the Messiah will rule. Again, this remark would be impossible without His fulfillment of the promise made to David.

Regarding "the key of David" (3:7), Aune concludes, "The phrase refers to the key to the Davidic or messianic kingdom, i.e., to the true Israel,"<sup>62</sup> but Aune erroneously equates "the true Israel with the church," not with a future kingdom promised to David and Israel in 2 Samuel 7.

For Beale, "the key of David" is an amplification of a similar phrase in 1:18 and equates to Jesus' power over salvation and judgment.<sup>63</sup> He correctly notes the stress of the Lord's sovereignty over those entering the kingdom, but he defines the kingdom as the church in the present era. He justifies this conclusion in part by noting allusions to prophetic "servant" passages (Isa 43:4; 45:14; 49:23) in Rev 3:9. Then he writes, "But there the allusions are applied to the church, though the rationale for the application lies in an understanding of the church's corporate identification with Jesus as God's servant and true Israel (e.g., Isa. 49:3-6 and the use of 49:6 in Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23; note how Christ and the church fulfill what is prophesied of Israel in the OT)."<sup>64</sup> Beale has consistently spiritualized references to Israel in the OT, and he does the same in Revelation, a book which so clearly points to a kingdom in the future, not in the present.<sup>65</sup>

Osborne equates "the key of David" in 3:7 with "the keys of the kingdom" in Matt 16:18-19, keys which Christ holds and passes on to His followers.<sup>66</sup> In the Revelation context, he sees a reference to Jesus as the Davidic Messiah "who controls entrance to God's kingdom, the 'New Jerusalem' (3:12)."<sup>67</sup> Christ "alone can 'open' and 'shut' the gates to heaven," says Osborne.<sup>68</sup> Why Osborne speaks of access to the eternal kingdom rather than the millennial kingdom remains a mystery. The millennial kingdom pertains most specifically to the present earth where Israel's

<sup>62</sup>Aune, *Revelation 1-5* 235 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>63</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 284.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 284-85.

<sup>65</sup>See my article, "The Kingdom of Christ in the Apocalypse," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3.2 (Fall 1992): 117-40.

<sup>66</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 187.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 187-88.

hopes will be fulfilled. The “keys” promise to the Philadelphian church shows that the resurrected church will share in the blessings of the future kingdom in which mortal Israelites will be most prominent.

In addition to specific references to David in the Apocalypse are a number of references to David’s kingdom. In fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, Revelation speaks often of a future kingdom on earth, prophecies that correspond to OT prophecies of that kingdom. Revelation 11:15 records, “And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’” What other kingdom could that be than the Messiah’s future kingdom? The language of this proleptic song by the heavenly voices echoes Ps 2:2, a psalm that speaks of the transference of power from heathen nations to God and His Messiah. Incidentally, Revelation alludes to Psalm 2 at least seven other times in addition to this reference in 11:15. That psalm will receive its final fulfillment when the Davidic King reigns over all the earth.

Elsewhere in instances too numerous to discuss here, I have pointed out the dominant focus of Revelation on the futurity of the kingdom.<sup>69</sup> Discussion about the kingdom in the book should not be limited to Rev 19:11–20:10. The teaching of the book as a whole needs to be considered. Anticipation of the future kingdom is an integral part of motivation for present Christian experience.<sup>70</sup> Whatever meaning “kingdom” may have for the corporate Christian church of today, that meaning does not eradicate the fact that a future kingdom on earth is still ahead, and Revelation connects that future kingdom with God’s covenants with David and Abraham.<sup>71</sup> Proleptic songs about the initiation of the kingdom also occur in Rev 12:10 and 19:6.

Beale in commenting on 11:15 says, “God now takes to himself the rule that formerly he permitted Satan to have over the world.”<sup>72</sup> Yet two paragraphs later he comments,

Vv. 16-17 show that it is the Lord whose eternal reign is focused on here. . . . The consummated fulfillment of the long-awaited messianic kingdom prophesied in the OT finally has come to pass. . . . It is difficult to say how Christ’s delivering up the kingdom to the Father and subjecting himself to the Father at the consummation in 1 Cor. 15:24-28 relates to the present text. Perhaps Christ gives up the redemptive historical phase of his rule and then assumes an eternal rule alongside but in subjection to his Father.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Thomas, *Revelation* 8-22 546-50.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 546.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 550-58.

<sup>72</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 611.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

Beale has at least two difficulties with 11:15. (1) At one point he says the verse looks forward to a change of rulership over *the world*, but a little later he contradicts himself by referring to a change of rule from that over *this world* to a rule over the new heavens and the new earth in the eternal state. (2) His second difficulty, which he admits, is in understanding how Christ could at the time of the consummation deliver up the kingdom to the Father as 1 Corinthians 15 requires, since Christ will only be starting His rule over the kingdoms of this world at that time.

The response to both of Beale's dilemmas is an acknowledgment that the future kingdom will have a temporal phase relating to the present earth, followed by an eternal kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. From its own statement, 11:15 speaks of a future temporal kingdom on this earth, a transference of power from heathen nations to God and His Messiah. At the end of that future temporal kingdom the Messiah will deliver up that kingdom to the Father as 1 Corinthians 15 requires.

Aune creates for himself the same dilemma as Beale in first defining "the kingdom of the world" of 11:15b as either the totality of creation or the human world in opposition to God and in conflict with His purposes, and then identifying the eternal reign of 11:15c as the eternal reign of God.<sup>74</sup> In so doing, he anticipates a future kingdom *on this earth* that will be eternal in duration, leaving no room for a new heaven and a new earth that he allows for elsewhere.

Osborne locates the replacement of the kingdom of the world with the kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah at the second coming of Christ, and sees it as the fulfillment of Jewish and NT expectations.<sup>75</sup> He has the same dilemma as Beale and Aune, however, because he sees this as the beginning of Christ's eternal kingdom,<sup>76</sup> even though 11:15 specifically locates this kingdom in *this world*, not in the new creation. He makes no allowance for the millennial kingdom, whose location will be the present earth.<sup>77</sup>

Of course, at this point neither Beale, Aune, nor Osborne says anything about a fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. That is because Rev 11:15 creates an impossible situation for those who interpret the book nonliterally, but for those who interpret it literally, it marks the fulfillment by God of the promises He made to David, and ultimately to Abraham too.

The Apocalypse has much more to say about the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant and the prominent role of Israel in the kingdom, but it has much to say

<sup>74</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 638-39.

<sup>75</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 440-41.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>77</sup>For further verification on the location of the millennial kingdom, cf. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 550-52.

about the New Covenant also.

### **The New Covenant**

Jeremiah 31:31-34 records God's New Covenant with Israel. Among its other provisions are two that relate to the present discussion. When God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more," that was partly how Abraham would be a source of blessing to all people, and when He said, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people," He provided for Israel and all other peoples a new relationship with Himself, another source of universal blessing.

**Forgiveness of sins.** Much in Revelation deals with the forgiveness of sins. A heavenly voice sings about the following in Rev 12:11: "They [referring to the martyrs among the Israelites] overcame him [referring to the devil] through the blood of the Lamb." Anywhere the book refers to the blood of the Lamb or simply to the Lamb, it alludes to His death at Calvary to provide forgiveness of sins (cf. 5:6; 7:14; 13:8). Revelation refers to the Lamb twenty-five times. The Lamb did not die sacrificially for Israel alone, of course—redemption is among benefits extended to the body of Christ<sup>78</sup>—but His death happened for Israel's sins especially as the Servant Song of Isa 52:13–53:12 emphasizes. The 144,000 special servants from among Israel were "redeemed from the earth" according to Rev 14:3. They are seen on Mount Zion standing with the Lamb in 14:1. Their redemption must be the redemption provided by the suffering Messiah. According to 5:9 the redemption came through the blood of the Lamb.

Since Beale, Aune, and Osborne do not connect the woman of chapter 12 with Israel specifically, that they do not connect the blood of the Lamb in 12:11 with God's New Covenant promise to Israel is no surprise. Beale identifies the woman as "all believers, past, present and future."<sup>79</sup> Aune says, "The passage deals with the proleptic victory of Christian martyrs."<sup>80</sup> Osborne identifies the overcomers in 12:11 with overcomers in the seven churches in Revelation 2–3.<sup>81</sup>

Part of God's promise to Abraham was that he would be a source of worldwide blessing. Obviously, forgiveness of sins was part of a fulfillment of that promise, but the New Covenant spoke of more than that. Jeremiah 31:33b-34a promises, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will

<sup>78</sup>Because of Israel's rejection of her Messiah at His first advent, Jesus extended the benefit of forgiveness of sins beyond the boundaries of Israel (Matt 26:28; cf. Mark 14:24). That is why Revelation also speaks of forgiveness when the objects are not limited to Israel (cf. Rev 1:5; 7:9, 14, 17).

<sup>79</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 663.

<sup>80</sup>Aune, *Revelation 6–16* 702-3.

<sup>81</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 475-76.

be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." Such a condition as this can only exist after the binding of Satan spoken of in Rev 20:1-3. Satan will no longer have freedom to deceive the nations (20:3). Until that time, he will continue his leadership as "the prince of the power of the air, or the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2b) and as "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31). He has been judged already in a potential sense through the crucifixion of Christ, but the implementation of that judgment awaits the future kingdom on earth and the complete fulfillment of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Control of the world in that future day will be in the hands of the descendant of David, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), and those who rule with Him (Rev 20:4). He will raise the dead, including those who have been martyred during Daniel's seventieth week immediately before the millennial kingdom, and they will rule with Him. It will be a rule of righteousness and equity, and thus Abraham and his descendants will be a source of blessing to all people.

**A New Relationship with God.** Clearly, in the New Jerusalem phase of David's future kingdom, Israel and all others who have received the forgiveness benefit of the New Covenant will enjoy a relationship with God that will be unparalleled. John writes in Rev 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them." This promise comes in conjunction with the descent of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, from heaven (21:2). It recalls God's New Covenant promise to Israel, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer 31:33d; cf. 32:38; Ezek 37:27).

Aune recognizes the covenant formula, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33[LXX 38:33]), in 21:3c, but sees it here as referring to all people. He recognizes that it is limited to the righteous in Israel throughout the OT.<sup>82</sup> He, of course, would not recognize God's dealings with Israel in particular in Revelation 7, 12, and 14 in order to bring them to this point.

Beale sees fulfillment of Jer 31:33 by all people who trust in Jesus, "the true seed of Abraham and the only authentic Israelite, who died and rose for both Jew and Gentile."<sup>83</sup> He writes, "Everyone represented by Jesus, the ideal king and Israelite, is considered part of true Israel and therefore shares in the blessings that he receives. . . ."<sup>84</sup> Thereby, he shuns the literal fulfillment of the New Covenant with

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<sup>82</sup>Aune, *Revelation 17–22* 1123.

<sup>83</sup>Beale, *Book of Revelation* 1047. Cf. *ibid.*, 1048 where Jer 31:33 appears.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*

Israel in the future kingdom.

Osborne connects 21:3 with the promise of Ezek 37:27 as well as Jer 31:33b, but interprets the verses as pointing to a fulfillment spiritually by Christians today, but by all people in the new heaven and new earth.<sup>85</sup> He omits any reference to the original recipients of the promises in Ezekiel and Jeremiah and their unique role. Ethnic Israel is the reason for this previously non-existent, close relationship between God and not only Israel but all peoples. All the families of the earth will be blessed through God's promise to Abraham.

The promise of Rev 21:3 does extend beyond the boundaries of Israel, but to deny its special relevance to Israel and her New Covenant is to ignore the clearly distinctive role of national Israel through earlier portions of the Book of Revelation and even in producing this new closeness to God. Revelation 21:12, 14 shows that Israel will have a role distinct from the church even in the new Jerusalem, the eternal state. As the special object of God's choice, she will ever be distinctive.

### **Summary of Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse**

The Book of Revelation is full of references to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to national Israel, specifically the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants. For Him to turn away from Israel to fulfil them with other peoples, as those who interpret the book in an eclectic, nonliteral, or allegorical manner suggest, would violate His faithfulness to His promises.

The means used by Beale, Aune, and Osborne to avoid finding references to Israel in the Apocalypse vary. Beale and Osborne generally resort to an eclectic hermeneutic, choosing an idealist or allegorical meaning whenever the text refers to Israel. Any reference to Israel for them becomes a reference to the church, which they call the "New Israel." Aune does not describe his hermeneutics as "eclectic," but his method of interpreting the Apocalypse easily falls into that category. He labors to find definitions for "apocalyptic" and for "genre," ending with his own definition that he admits will not be acceptable to some others. He then uses apocalyptic genre as justification for combining a literal-futuristic-mystical method in some passages with an allegorical-idealist-historical method in others. He and Osborne nibble at literal fulfillment here and there, but explain it away by a species of genre principles used to override normal grammatical-historical principles, by reader-response hermeneutics, or by historical criticism.

All three men take negative references to Jewish people literally in 2:9 and 3:9, but revert to figurative meanings for Israel and the sons of Israel in chapters 7 and 14. The frequent disagreements between the three graphically portray how uncontrolled interpretation can be when one forsakes a literal method of understanding Revelation. With a literal approach to the book, references to Israel are plentiful.

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<sup>85</sup>Osborne, *Revelation* 734-35.

With this characteristic of the book as a whole in mind, for someone to say “that Revelation 20:1-10 cannot be linked textually with Israel’s covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets the imagery of the Old Testament with reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne” is a denial of what is obvious because of adopting meanings other than what words have in their normal usage. It is to view those verses as completely divorced from their context, an exegetically unacceptable decision. God will fulfil in a literal manner all the promises He has made to national Israel and will retain His eternal attribute of faithfulness. The Apocalypse interpreted literally verifies His compliance with His promises to the nation.