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Understanding and Applying Eschatology

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Editorial: Thinking Biblically and Theologically about Eschatology

Stephen J. Wellum

Unfortunately, the very word "eschatology" often generates diverse perspectives and much heated discussion within the church, which results in a couple of tendencies. On the one hand, the tendency is to reduce all discussion of "eschatology" to a specific end times position—identified with some forms of dispensational theology (but certainly not all forms)—which presents eschatology as merely what will occur at the end of history identified with such events as the rapture of the church, the Great Tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ, and so on. This popular understanding of eschatology has been promoted in best-selling books, through movies, and through the use of elaborate charts that attempt to correlate precisely the book of Revelation with today's world events. This approach to eschatology is not entirely improper; the Bible does say a lot about the events surrounding the second coming of our Lord and proponents of this view are correct to desire that the Bible governs all of their thinking in every area of life, including the end times. However, given how often people's predictions have not materialized the way they have thought, one begins to wonder if our use of the book of Revelation is more than what God intended and if our understanding of eschatology is a bit skewed. One must be very careful that our study of eschatology does not degenerate into mere speculation, divorced from what Scripture actually teaches, which reveals more of the creativity of the teacher and one's theological system than the truth of the biblical text and an overall biblical understanding of eschatology.

On the other hand, there is a tendency today to go to the opposite extreme and not to preach and teach about eschatological matters at all. There are probably numerous reasons for this tendency. Some may tend in this direction as an overreaction to the first approach to eschatology so that, in their thinking any discussion of eschatology

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inevitably leads to predictions and charts, and thus it must be avoided entirely. However, there may be an additional reason which, if we are not careful, may reflect our sad state of being more conformed to this world and its thoroughly secular mindset, i.e., a "this-worldly" perspective, instead of being transformed by God's Word (see Rom 12:1-2). People such as David Wells, Os Guinness, and Peter Berger, have documented well the effects of secularization on the church where eternal matters are not only privatized but also pushed to the margins of our lives. Instead of viewing our lives *sub specie aeternitatis*—"from the perspective of eternity"—we often reflect our satisfaction with "this world" and "this age," even in all of its fallenness and depravity. We do not long for the consummation of the ages and the blessed appearing of our Lord Jesus and with him, the dawning of the new heavens and new earth where sin, death, and all that blights this world are finally and completely destroyed, and righteousness dwells. In truth, it may be this last tendency which is more dangerous, deceptive, and indicative of our spiritual state than the first one. In our hesitation to wrestle with eschatological matters we must make sure that it is not this last reason which dominates our thinking and captivates our hearts. We must never forget that our hope is not found in "this world" or in the things and affairs of this world, as attractive and important as they may be. Instead, our hope is only found in our great and glorious Triune God and his gracious redemptive work—a work which is the outworking of his eternal plan across the ages, now centered, accomplished, and fulfilled in the Lord of Glory.

What, then, is the solution to these two tendencies today? First, it is to acknowledge the danger and pitfalls of both of them and to avoid the extremes. Second, as in all of our doctrinal formulations and practical living, the best solution is to return to the Scripture again and again and make sure our understanding of eschatology is biblically and theologically faithful and grounded. The Reformation slogans of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") and *semper reformanda* ("always reforming") must be engraved on our hearts and minds in every generation as we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. As we return to the Scripture, we must guard against the temptation to divorce biblical eschatology from the gospel and thus our Lord Jesus Christ. After all, the purpose of biblical eschatology is always redemptive, ethical, and Christological. It is redemptive and ethical in the sense that, in the simplest of terms, biblical eschatology attempts to unfold God's eternal plan in history, beginning with creation and ending in the new creation, and as such, it always calls us to live in the present as God's obedient children in light of God's great redemptive work. In this way, eschatology exhorts us to faithfulness to Christ and the gospel, and it warns us of its opposite.

In addition and most important, biblical eschatology is also Christological and thus gospel-centered. In truth, eschatology, properly understood, is nothing more than a thorough study of God's great act of redemption in Jesus the Christ. Eschatology, then, not only presents us with the Bible's metanarrative, it also unpacks how that grand story is centered in Jesus. How our Lord was not only anticipated and predicted in the OT, but how, in our Lord's coming he has literally ushered in and inaugurated the "last days." By his incarnation and life, supremely his death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecost, God's promised plan of salvation has been accomplished, and now we await and anticipate the consummation of that plan in the glorious appearing of the King of kings and the Lord of lords (see Eph 1:9-10; Phil 2:6-11; Rev 4-5; 19:1-21). When eschatology is presented in this way, not only is it true to the Scripture, it is also able to move us to action, obedience, worship, and service. Such eschatology will never leave us merely satisfied with this world, but it will orient us towards the future where the church will rightly learn to cry afresh with the church of all ages, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev 22:20). May this issue of *SBJT,* even though diverse views are expressed and not all the contributors agree, lead us in some small way to this end.

The Kingdom that Comes with Jesus: Premillennialism and the Harmony of Scripture

Craig Blaising

Central to Christian faith and hope is the firm belief that Jesus is coming again. Jesus Himself predicted it before the cross ("I will come again," Jn. 14:3). Angels proclaimed it after his ascension ("This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven;" Acts 1:11). The earliest prayers of the church expressed the longing of *Maranatha*—"Our Lord, come" (1 Cor 16:22)!

When Jesus comes, the kingdom comes. Certainly, even now, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus (Matt 28:18). He is, presently, in His ascended position, seated at the right-hand of God (Acts 2:30-36; Eph 1:20-23) as the head of all rule and authority (Col 2:10), and we who have placed our faith in Christ have already been "transferred" into His kingdom (Col 1:13). Because of this, it is common to speak of Christ's kingdom as having been inaugurated at His ascension. However, the Scripture is quite clear that the prophesied restoration of all things awaits the future coming of Jesus (Acts 3:20-21). This is why, for the most part, the New Testament speaks of the kingdom as coming in the future. Its coming is correlated with Christ's future coming. When he comes, "He will sit on His glorious throne" and judge the nations (Matt 25:31). Our inheritance which is presently being kept in heaven (1 Pet 1:4) will be revealed at that time (1 Pet 1:7, 13), and in that future day, when he comes, he will welcome all who belong to Him into "the kingdom prepared ... from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34). This is the focus of all our hope (1 Pet 1:13), *the appearing of Jesus and His kingdom* (1 Tim 4:1).

Premillennialism, the subject of this essay, is the belief that the future kingdom that comes with Jesus will undergo a two-stage fulfillment: first, a millennial phase, a one-thousand year reign of

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Christ and his saints from the time of his coming to the time of the final judgment, and secondly, the final, eternal kingdom of God, extending from the time of the final judgment throughout all eternity, set within the conditions of God's new creation. The word *premillennial* refers to the order of Christ's coming in relation to the millennial phase of the kingdom: his coming is premillennial because he comes before the millennium.

The premillennial view can be contrasted with postmillennial and amillennial views regarding the three phases of the kingdom mentioned so far: the present inaugurated form of the kingdom, the millennial phase, and the final, eternal fulfillment. Amillennialists deny the existence of a future millennium, insisting that there are only two phases: the present inaugural phase and the final, eternal fulfillment.[1] Postmillennialists believe that the millennium is actually a part of the present inaugural form of the kingdom. They may see it as future or as already begun. But what makes them *postmillennial* is their belief that Jesus will come *after* rather than *before* the millennial kingdom.[2]

In what follows, I would like to summarize the primary biblical evidence for premillennialism.[3] We will see that in the Bible, the coming of Jesus and His kingdom is in fact a premillennial hope. Furthermore, it is a premillennial hope that was revealed to the church explicitly by Jesus Himself, a revelation that harmonizes earlier biblical teaching on the nature of the kingdom and the manner of its coming.

OLD TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS OF THE COMING KINGDOM

As the future kingdom of God was being revealed in Old Testament prophecy, descriptions of the kingdom were given that indicate its establishment prior to the final judgment. Isaiah 65:17-25 describes the kingdom as a future new creation.[4] The language is similar to what we find in Revelation 21 where a new heavens and new earth are foreseen. However, Revelation 21 places this new creation after the final judgment (Rev 20:11-15), after sin and death have been done away. Isaiah, on the other hand, foresees new creation conditions in which death is still present (Isa 65:17-20).

It is not the case that the language of Isaiah 65 is a general metaphorical description of the eternal state. Isaiah knew that eternal kingdom conditions excluded death, and prophesied, in Isaiah 25:7-9, a reign of God subsequent to the day of judgment in which death would be no more. Consequently, the mention of death in the Isaiah 65 new creation prophecy is striking, raising the question of how the two visions harmonize.

A similar anomaly can be seen in Isaiah's description of the future rule of the messiah in Isaiah 9 and 11. Both underscore the blessed condition of his kingdom. However, Isaiah 11 also speaks of punitive judgment in that he "strikes the earth with the rod of his mouth." The language echoes words from the second Psalm that warn kings of the earth to submit to the Lord's messiah.[5] It indicates the presence of rebellious activity not in keeping with the eternal kingdom order in which sin is absent. While it is possible that the use of the rod in Isaiah 11 refers to the definitive final judgment, more likely it is to be understood as a general feature within the overall description of the messianic reign, and the existence of parallel descriptions of coercive rule in the kingdom would seem to support this.

An explicit description of coercive kingdom rule is found in Zechariah 14. In this prophecy, Zechariah foresees the future day of the Lord in which God will judge all nations. Zechariah explicitly predicts that subsequent to this judgment, the Lord will reign over all nations on earth. Whereas Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 predict a peaceful kingdom scene in which all nations obediently submit to God's law and willingly come to worship the Lord in Zion, Zechariah prophesies a contrasting picture in which the nations are under compulsion to obey and worship him and are punished if they fail to come (Zech 14:16-19). A key difference between the two visions is the presence

of sin among the kingdom subjects in Zechariah's prophecy creating the necessity of coercive rule.

In summary, Old Testament prophecy describes the future kingdom of God as being in existence prior to the final judgment. At the final judgment, the conditions of sin and death cease so as to give way to conditions of everlasting peace and righteousness (e.g., Isa 9:7; Dan 9:24) in which there is "no death, no crying, no pain, for the first things have passed away" (Rev 21: 4). A number of OT prophecies speak directly of this final, eternal kingdom order. However, a number of prophecies, while highlighting conditions of blessedness in the future kingdom, also describe conditions of sin and death which can only precede the final judgment. This can only be true if the future, eschatological kingdom is first established some time prior to the final judgment, the final judgment, then, separating two phases of that kingdom, one temporary, the other eternal.

OLD TESTAMENT DESCRIPTIONS OF THE COMING DAY OF THE LORD

The description of the coming of the day of the Lord in Isaiah 24-25 indicates a two-stage judgment process preceding the final elimination of death. This two-stage judgment overlaps the beginning of the future kingdom yielding a temporary phase of that kingdom before eternal conditions are fully realized. The first stage of this judgment is described in Isaiah 24 as the coming day of the Lord. While that judgment is catastrophic, it results in an "imprisonment" of some who are subsequently "punished" after "many days" (Isa 24:21-22). It is subsequent to this latter punishment that death is done away (Isa 24:23; 25:6-9). The imprisonment for many days must be included in the "rule" of Isaiah 24:23, under whose authority the imprisonment takes place. The latter punishment, then, separates two phases of the coming rule. Since the removal of death is relegated to the latter phase, death is still present during the earlier phase, the time of the imprisonment.

STAGES OF RESURRECTION IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Paul's teaching of stages of resurrection supports the possibility that the kingdom coming with Jesus will unfold in two phases, the final judgment marking the transition between the two. In 1 Cor 15:20-28, Paul describes the resurrection of the dead as taking place in stages, τάγμα (15:23).[6] The stages are delineated in 15:23-24 by the grammatical structure ἔπειτα ... εἶτα: Christ, the first fruits, *then* (ἔπειτα) at his coming those who belong to Christ, *then* (εἶτα) the end (τὸ τέλος). The second *then* (εἶτα) does not transition to another subject, but is grammatically the third stage of the resurrection sequence, unfolding Paul's claim in 15:22 that "all will be made alive."[7] This is reinforced in 15:24-26 where the third stage, *the end* (τὸ τέλος), is coordinated with the conclusion of another sequence, a coercive reign of Christ subjugating all authorities and destroying all enemies.[8] The *end* (τέλος) of the resurrection sequence is consequent upon the destruction of the last (ἔσχατος) enemy. This last enemy to be destroyed is death (15:26). The destruction of death logically means two things: (1) no one dies after that point, and (2) any who had been dead up to that point must be raised. Elsewhere in biblical theology, this transition from a state of death to a state of no death is identified with the final judgment, and in this text it is also coordinated with a transition in the kingdom from the coercive subjugating rule of Christ to a situation in which God "will be all in all."

Paul's resurrection sequence does not specify a time period between the second and third stages (the resurrection of believers and the resurrection of the rest of the dead). However, due to the obvious temporal separation of the first and second stages (the resurrection of Christ in the past and the resurrection of believers in the future), it is not impossible that a period of time will intervene between the second and third stages as well. The coercive rule of Christ spoken of in this text would then be identified with the period that extends between Christ's coming and the final

resurrection, final judgment. Obviously, such a reign would be as distinct from the present inaugural phase of the kingdom as it would from the final, eternal form. Paul does not elaborate on this further in his writings. However, his structure contributes features to a growing pattern that will receive its explicit formulation in the Revelation from Christ to John.

Before leaving Paul, we should also note the distinction he makes between "resurrection of the dead" and "resurrection from the dead." The latter phrase implies a partial resurrection—a resurrection of some, leaving others in a state of death. Paul accentuates the distinction in Phil 3:11 by attaching ἐκ as a prefix to ἀνάστασις, coining a new word and thereby doubling the use of the preposition in the phrase: ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν, resurrection *out from* the dead. This indicates two stages of resurrection.[9] Since both of these stages of resurrection are future, whatever interval transpires between them must also be future. For more information about that interval, we turn to the book of Revelation.

THE COMING OF CHRIST AND THE FUTURE MILLENNIUM IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Two things must be kept in mind as we look into the book of Revelation. First, the book presents a "revelation from Jesus Christ" to the churches. This point is emphasized at both the beginning and the end of the book (Rev 1:1, 17-18; 22:16). It is a word from Jesus himself, in fact, the last communication from Jesus that we have. Secondly, the focus of this word from Jesus is on his future coming, highlighted thematically at both the beginning (Rev 1:7) and at the end of the book (22:7, 12-13, 20). The event of his coming is described in detail in Rev 19:11-16. It is the climax, the hinge, in the apocalyptic narrative, which makes possible a transition in world conditions to the future kingdom of God.

The millennial kingdom of Christ is explicitly revealed by Jesus in Revelation 20:1-10. It is part of the transition from the second coming of Christ to the final judgment and the eternal order. The transition is revealed in a sequence of visions beginning in Rev 19:11, all of which concern future events. Certainly, the first part of the sequence is the future, for it envisions the event complex of the second coming (19:11-16, 17-18, 19-21). Also, the last part of the sequence is future, for it reveals the final judgment and the eternal order (20:11, 12-15, 21:1f). The four millennial visions that appear in the middle of this sequence must also describe future conditions not only because they fit the sequence structurally, but also because of the features which they ascribe to that millennial order.[10] These features do not exist prior to the advent; rather, they constitute a significant change from pre-advent conditions.

One such feature is the binding, imprisonment, and final judgment of the devil. The first millennial vision (Rev 20:1-3) describes this binding and imprisonment at the beginning of the thousand years. The last vision in the sequence (Rev 20:7-10) speaks of the release of the devil and his punishment after the thousand years are over.

Amillennialists generally follow Augustine's interpretation of the devil's binding and imprisonment suggesting a correlation between Rev 20:1-3 and Mark 3:27, where the Lord speaks of binding the strong man so that "his house" can be plundered. Augustine suggested that both passages are speaking of a binding of the devil that takes place on an individual basis during the pre-advent era. The devil's authority over individual souls is broken, and he is "bound" with respect to them, when they are converted to Christ. The vision of Rev 20:1-3, then, would be looking back to the pre-advent era rather than describing post-advent conditions. Postmillennialists adopt this interpretation in general but typically view the binding in terms of a world-wide conversion that will precede Christ's coming. However, this interpretation, correlating Revelation 20 and Mark 3 is clearly incorrect.

First, it is an incorrect interpretation of Mark

3:27. That passage is not talking about regeneration or salvation generally but specifically about exorcism. The parallel passage in Luke 11:14-26 warns that after such an exorcism demons may return to "the house" in greater numbers than before making "the last state of that person worse than the first." Exorcism, like healing, was granted by Christ to those who sought him for it, but this was not the same thing as receiving salvation from him.

Secondly, Rev 20:1-3 is not describing the work of grace in an individual soul or even in many such souls. Rather, it is speaking of a complete cessation of the devil's influence in the world contrary to and in reversal of his pre-advent activity. Consider the following NT descriptions of the devil's present activity:

> Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Pet 5:8-9).
>
> Resist the devil and he will flee from you (Jas 4:7).
>
> The whole world lies in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19).
>
> You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:1-2).

Particularly of concern in Rev 20:1-3 is the world-wide deception empowered by the devil just before the second advent. Elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus and Paul had both warned of a time of great deception just before the second coming. Paul spoke of it as "the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception" working through a "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:9-10). This deception is brought to an end by the coming of the Lord (2 Thess 2:8). Revelation 12-18 deals with this deception, enacted by Satan through a "beast" and a "false prophet" for a limited time prior to the second advent. Revelation 12:7-12 speaks of a war in heaven which sends the devil to the earth "in great wrath." Knowing that "his time is short" (12:12), he is quite active making "war on ... those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). As "the deceiver of the whole world" (12:9), he empowers the "beast" and puts him in authority (13:2,4), and he speaks and acts through the false prophet (13:11-12). The deception of the devil, beast, and false prophet provokes the kings of the whole world to gather in opposition to Christ (16:13-16; 19:17-21).[11]

Revelation 20:1-3 gives us a picture in stark contrast to this activity. An angel comes down from heaven to earth with a key and a chain to shut the devil down. The reader is expecting something like this because 19:20-21 tells us that the beast and false prophet had been seized at the second advent and cast into hell. Accordingly, we are told in Rev 20:1-3 and 7-10 what will happen to the devil: first, he will be imprisoned, and then later, he will be cast into hell. With respect to his imprisonment, five verbs halt his activity: the angel *seized* him, *bound* him, *threw* him in the bottomless pit, *locked* the pit, and *sealed* the pit over him. Compare the imagery here to Revelation 9 where *key* is used to release "locusts" from the bottomless pit so that they can torment people on earth. Their activity is only possible when they are released. As long as they are *locked* in the *pit*, they cannot hurt anyone on earth. Similarly, in Revelation 20, the binding and locked imprisonment takes place "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (12:3). The phrase "any longer" indicates the cessation of previous activity, precisely the previous activity of deceiving the nations of the earth, highlighted in Revelation 12, 13, and 16, leading to the war against Christ in 19:17-21 at his second advent.[12]

The length of the devil's imprisonment is a

thousand years, repeated three times (20:2, 3, 7). Twice it is said that he will be released at the end of the thousand years (20:3, 7). The purpose of the release is "to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog." Some have tried to argue that this is the same battle as that depicted in Rev 19:22-21.[13] However, several differences can be noted in the descriptions of these two battles:

Revelation 12:7-19:21	Revelation 20:7-10
Devil expelled from heaven and cast down	Devil released from the bottomless pit.
Beast and false prophet active instruments of the devil's deception and present at the battle.	Beast and false prophet in hell; not involved in the deception or the battle.
All kings of the whole earth.	Gog and Magog at the four corners of the earth.
Armies gather to resist the descent of Christ.	Armies surround the camp of the saints, the beloved city.
Enemies slain; bodies fed to carrion birds.	Enemies consumed to by fire.
Beast and false prophet seized and thrown into hell.	Devil thorwn into hell a thousand years after the beast and false prophet are confined there.

Rather than recapitulating 19:11-21, the battle of 20:7-10 is a distinct event, a subsequent feature in an ongoing narrative, a feature which in fact resolves a problem left open in the earlier text. That problem is the punishment of the devil, the chief instigator of the conflict that comes to climax in 19:11-21. The seizure and punishment in hell of the beast and false prophet in 19:20 rightly demands the same for the devil. Accordingly, the devil is seized in 20:2, and punished by being cast into hell in 20:10. By placing the seizure, binding, and imprisonment of the devil at the beginning of the thousand years and his punishment in hell at the end, it is clear that the thousand years is a post-advent era, contributing to the transition between the advent and the new heavens and new earth.

Another distinctive feature of the millennium which definitely characterizes it as a post-advent era is that it begins and ends with bodily resurrection. In Rev 20:4, at the beginning of the millennium, John sees "the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands." The phrase "for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God" connects to similar phrases used earlier in Revelation indicating a plot development in the apocalyptic narrative. These are believers who have died for their faith. In Rev 5:10, it was prophesied that the redeemed would reign with Christ on the earth. In Rev 6:9-11, we see a group of believing dead in heaven told to wait for those who were yet to join their company. We see these later martyrs beginning in Revelation 12 where it is said that they would overcome the devil who sought their death (Rev 12:11). It is fitting that in Rev 20:1-4, as the devil is sent into the bottomless pit, the believing dead are raised to reign with Christ, the resurrected One.

In addition to these believers, John sees "the rest of the dead" (Rev 20:5), a phrase that extends to those apart from Christ. In the narrative of the book, unbelievers die in various judgments leading up to the second advent (6:8; 9:18; 14:17-20) or at the second advent when they stand to oppose Christ (19:15-21). The narrative logically requires an explanation regarding their future as well.

Both groups are said to *come to life* in Revelation 20:4-5, but at different times. The believers *come to life* at the beginning of the thousand years.

The "rest of the dead" *come to life* at the end of the millennium. For this latter group, the point is expressed negatively: they "did not come to life until the thousand years were completed." In the book of Revelation, the phrase "until ... were completed" (ἄχρι with a form of τελέω) always indicates a reversal of conditions (see 15:8; 17:17; 20:3 where the reversal is described in 20:7-8; 20:5 uses exactly the same phrase as 20:3), so that the meaning of "did not come to life until the thousand years were completed" is clearly *came to life when the thousand years were completed*.[14]

The verb translated "came to life," ζάω in the aorist tense (ἔζησαν) refers here to bodily resurrection. We know this because (1) the only other uses of ζάω in the aorist in Revelation refer to bodily resurrection, (2) this is consistent with the use of ζάω in the aorist elsewhere in Scripture, (3) it is confirmed by the parallel use of *resurrection*, ἀνάστασις interpreting "came to life," and (4) it is the only view that makes sense both in this context and in biblical theology.

On the first point, the only other uses of ζάω in the aorist in Revelation are found in 2:8, where Christ is identified as the one "who died and came to life again (ἔζησεν)," and in 13:14 where the Beast appeared to receive a fatal wound yet came to life again (ἔζησεν). The second point is demonstrated in Ezek 37:10 LXX and Luke 15:24, 32 (where ἀνέζησεν, came to life *again*, is used in parallel with ἔζησεν). In every case in Scripture where ἔζησεν or ἔζησαν is predicated of the dead, it refers to resurrection. It is never used to describe the existence of a disembodied soul. The third point observes the parallel between 20:4b and 20:5b-6 where *came to life* is interpreted by the word "resurrection," ἀνάστασις. Ἀνάστασις, used in reference to the dead, always means bodily resurrection. It is never used to describe the continuing existence of a disembodied soul after death.[15]

Finally, bodily resurrection is the only interpretation that makes sense in this context and in biblical theology. *Came to life* cannot refer to regeneration, as traditionally claimed by amillennialists and postmillennialists. Not only would this be odd lexically, as noted above, but it is nonsensical for both subjects of the verb. The martyrs who *came to life* in 20:4 were obviously already regenerate prior to their deaths. There is no subsequent regeneration for them either at the time of their deaths or afterwards. Furthermore, given the repetition of the verb in 20:5 and the logic of the syntax as noted above, interpreting *came to life* as regeneration in 20:4 would require that the rest of the dead in 20:5 be regenerated at the end of the millennium. However, since "the rest of the dead" is all inclusive, this would result in universalism, a view that is not only contradicted by Scripture generally, but also in the immediate context (Rev 20:11-15, where upon their resurrection, the dead are brought before the judgment and sentenced to the lake of fire).

As already noted, for lexical and literary reasons *came to life* cannot refer to the continuing existence of souls after death. This cannot be its meaning for the martyrs in 20:4, and it would be incoherent for the rest of the dead in 20:5. What would be the meaning of dead souls *not continuing to exist* until the thousand years were over?

Neither does *came to life* refer to some higher state of spiritual existence for the dead. There is no basis for such a notion in Scripture. It is foreign to the sense of ζάω used in this text, and it would be nonsensical for the rest of the dead in 20:5. In addition, such a view endangers the biblical doctrine of bodily resurrection by subverting the term ἀνάστασις in this passage.

In conclusion, the millennial kingdom transpires between two phases of bodily resurrection. It begins with the resurrection of the believing dead who are raised specifically to reign with Christ in that kingdom, and it ends with the resurrection of the rest of the dead for the purpose of judgment. Since the bodily resurrection of the believing dead will only take place at the time of the second advent, the millennial kingdom which begins with that resurrection must be a future, post-advent kingdom.

THE HARMONY OF SCRIPTURE

Jesus' explicit revelation of a post-advent millennial kingdom prior to the final judgment harmonizes the earlier revelation on the nature of the kingdom, the consequences of the day of the Lord, and the stages of resurrection. The Lord will come in the day of the Lord, executing judgment and establishing his kingdom. But Rev 20:1-10 explains the curious prediction of an imprisonment "in a pit" with punishment "after many days" in Isaiah 24:22. This imprisonment specifically involves the devil, one of the "hosts of heaven" and the "many days" of his confinement is revealed to be a thousand years. His punishment follows thereafter as Rev 20:10 foretells his expulsion into the lake of fire.

The time of the devil's imprisonment corresponds to a phase of the kingdom which still includes mortal conditions. Although the believing dead are raised to reign with the resurrected Jesus immediately after his advent, there is no indication of a change of state for mortal human beings who remain alive through the advent. Revelation 20:14-21:4 makes it clear that mortality as such ceases only after the thousand-year kingdom. This explains why some Old Testament texts, such as Isaiah 65, describe the kingdom in mortal conditions, while some, such as Isaiah 25, envision an immortal state. The continuance of mortality through the advent into a post-advent phase of the kingdom would also harmonize with the description in Matt 25:31-46 of a judgment on nations extant at the time of the advent. The "sheep" in that passage are nowhere said to be raised from the dead, but are gathered from the peoples alive at that time and received by the descended Lord into his kingdom. Such blessed conditions would lead to an eventual repopulation of the earth bringing in later generations who would be temptable in the manner described in Rev 20:7-10.

The mortal conditions of the millennial kingdom provide a harmonizing explanation for descriptions of a coercive, even punitive, kingdom rule in passages such as Isaiah 11 and Zechariah 14. Such descriptions pertain to the millennial phase of the kingdom which demonstrates yet again the truth that physical birth in itself does not lead to spiritual birth. With the devil imprisoned, outright rebellion would presumably be rather minimal within the expanding population. His release, however, will precipitate a crisis invoking swift judgment.

Finally, Paul's distinction of stages of resurrection (1 Cor 15:22-28; Phil 3:10-11), although silent on the duration of the interval separating them, is clearly harmonizable with the Lord's more specific revelation of a millennial kingdom separating the first resurrection and that of the rest of the dead.

ENDNOTES

[1]Amillennialists, consequently, interpret the millennium of Revelation 20 as a reference to the present era between Christ's ascension and his future return.

[2]For contemporary presentations of amillennial and postmillennial views, see *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* (ed. Darrell L. Bock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

[3]For a more expanded treatment of premillennialism, see Craig A. Blaising, "Premillennialism," in *Three Views*, 157-227, note also 72-80, 143-53.

[4]The prophecy of the new creation in Isaiah 65:17-25 is explicitly tied to the prophecy of Isaiah 11 regarding the future kingdom of a descendant of David by the repetition of language depicting the eschatological *shalom*: cf. 11:6-9 and 65:25.

[5]Compare Ps 2:9.

[6]On this passage, see Wilber B. Wallis, "The Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 18 (1975): 229-42; also D. Edmond Hiebert, "Evidence from 1 Corinthians 15," in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (ed. Donald K. Campbell and Jeffrey L. Townsend; Chicago: Moody, 1992), 225-34.

[7]The universal extent of "all" in 1 Cor 15:22 is disputed by some because of the phrase "in Christ shall all be made alive." Because of the frequent Pauline use of *in Christ* to refer to believers, some have argued that

Paul only envisions the resurrection of believers in 15:22-28. A restrictive use would also seem to be corroborated by the Adam / Christ parallel in Rom 5:12-21. However, ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ or ἐν αὐτῷ is sometimes used in a broader sense as seen in Col 1:16-17 and Eph 1:9-10. Furthermore, a restricted sense in 15:22 would leave the third stage of resurrection in 15:24 without a satisfactory explanation, since the resurrection of believers is explicitly stated to be at the second stage, 15:23.

[8]This sequence is seen in the two ὅταν clauses in 15:24. See the argument of Wallis, "Problem of an Intermediate Kingdom."

[9]Note the argument of Moltmann inferring a future millennial order from Philippians 3:11 in his *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (trans. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 195-99.

[10]The visions of 19:11-21:8 are connected together by means of the introductory phrase, καὶ εἶδον, *and I saw*, which, while not necessitating a chronological sequence, certainly lends itself to such. The repetitive *and I saw* together with the actual content of the visions clearly establishes the sequence. There is certainly no *structural* indication of any break in the midst of the sequence. See Blaising, "Premillennialism," 215. Robert Strimple's argument comparing Rev 12:1 to 20:1 is not valid since the introductory clause in 12:1, Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη, is distinctly different from that used in the preceding and following visions. See Robert Strimple, "An Amillennial Response," in *Three Views*, 271. Also, Strimple's argument that a sequential interpretation must interpret the visions in Rev 20:4 as a second thousand years subsequent to that revealed in 20:1-3 cannot be taken seriously (see ibid). Revelation 20:4 depicts an event subsequent to the seizure, binding, and "locking-up" of the devil, not to the conclusion of his imprisonment. This is made clear by the repetition in 20:5 of the phrase, "until the thousand years were ended" used in 20:3 indicating that the reign of the saints is co-extensive with the imprisonment of the devil. Revelation 20:7 then addresses itself to the conclusion of all three visions, Rev 20:1-3, 4a, 4b-6. Καὶ εἶδον in 20:4 signals a natural sequence from the devil's capture and "lock-up" to a resurrection of saints to reign with Christ, the reign and the confinement extending through the thousand years.

[11]Considering the whole of the New Testament's teaching on the activity of the devil, one needs to note that the deception prior to the second advent is presented as an increase or escalation in activity, not as a contrast between activity then and inactivity at the present time. Both John and Paul underscore this by stressing the link between present and future activity: while the antichrist is coming in the future, many antichrists have already come (1 John 2:18-23). While the man of lawlessness is coming, the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (2 Thess 2:7-8). While there is a present restraint on that future full manifestation (2 Thess 2:6-7), it does not constitute the complete cessation of activity described in Rev 20:1-3. The latter is fittingly descriptive only of a post-advent situation.

[12]See Richard A. Ostella, "The Significance of Deception in Revelation 20:3," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 236-38.

[13]See Meredith G. Kline, "Har Magedon [Armageddon]: the End of the Millennium," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 207-22; and R. Fowler White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev. 20:1-10," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989): 319-44. I critiqued several aspects of White's argument in "Premillennialism," 215-17, n. 86, and 220, n. 92. Robert Strimple attempted to defend White's claim that the battle at the descent of Christ described in Rev 19:11-21 results in the destruction of all the inhabitants of the nations except the redeemed by appealing to "flesh of all men" in 19:18 (Strimple, "Response," 273-74). However, the reference to "all flesh" in the listing of 19:18 is most naturally read as indicating the totality of the armies gathered in opposition to Christ. After "kings," "captains," "mighty men," cavalry ("horses and their riders"), the final reference to "flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great" concludes what is obviously a reference to the totality of the opposition force. This interpretation is confirmed by the repeat listing in 19:19: the beast, the kings of

the earth, and their armies. To read into this a global judgment of all unbelievers everywhere on the planet beyond the gathering of these armies is without support in this text. However, even if all unbelievers were destroyed at the second advent, this still would not be a basis for identifying the battle of 19:11-21 with that of 20:7-10. There is certainly no basis in 19:18 for arguing that mortal believers are slain by Christ at his coming. In fact, on the basis of Matt 25:31-46, premillennialists typically argue that among the mortals on earth at the coming of Christ, only believers enter the millennial kingdom. Through them, the repopulation of the earth takes place in accordance with prophetic descriptions of that kingdom. Since regeneration does not follow automatically upon physical birth, it is not unreasonable to expect a mixed population by the end of the thousand years—a situation capable of being provoked by the release of the devil. Finally, one can hardly put any credence in Kline's [and Stimple's] argument for an identity between 19:11-21 and 20:7-10 on the basis of the use of the Greek article with the noun for battle in 20:8, ignoring all the textual features that clearly distinguish the two texts!

[14]This point was acknowledged by Stimple (see "Response," 275). Strimple considers this paradoxical and tries to counter its force by arguing that since *death* is used in two different senses in 20:5-6, it is therefore appropriate to understand *come to life* in 20:4b-5a in different senses as well. However, this is a *non sequitur*. The two uses of ζάω in 20:4b-5a are in relationship to two groups who are both dead in the same way, that is, physically dead. The first group are physically dead because they had been "beheaded" (20:4a) or otherwise physically dead for not worshipping the beast (as indicated by 13:15 and 14:13). The second group are called "the rest of the dead" in 20:5 using *dead* in this same sense of physical death, the continuity of the two groups underscored by the word "rest," remainder. *Come to life* in 20:4b-5a is applied to both groups of the physically dead indicating a reversal for each by resurrection. The *second death* in 20:6 is repeated in 20:11-15 where an explicit distinction is drawn between the two uses of the word *death*. No distinction is drawn for the phrases *come to life* or for the word *resurrection* in 20:4-6.

[15]The only place in Scripture where ἀνάστασις might not mean bodily resurrection is Luke 2:34. Two points need to be made, however: (1) neither in this passage nor anywhere else does ἀνάστασις refer to disembodied existence, and (2) bodily resurrection cannot be ruled out of the meaning of ἀνάστασις in this text. Certainly, in biblical theology, the claim "this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel" includes the bodily "rising" of many as recipients of the fulfillment of kingdom prophecies such as Ezek 37:1-28. To invest ἀνάστασις with a sense of disembodied existence in a text where it is applied to the physically dead, as it is in Rev 20:5-6, threatens to subvert its meaning everywhere else in Scripture, thereby constituting a threat to the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection generally.

Old Testament Restoration Prophecies Regarding the Nation of Israel: Literal or Symbolic?

Benjamin L. Merkle

Should Old Testament prophecies regarding God's promise to restore the nation of Israel be taken literally? Must our eschatology allow for an age in the future in which these prophecies are fulfilled? One of the major reasons why some insist on a future millennium where Jesus will reign as king over the nation of Israel is due to the belief that many Old Testament prophecies are not yet fulfilled.[1] In other words, a future reign of Jesus over the people of Israel (in fulfillment of OT prophecies) is one of the main reasons a millennial kingdom is needed.[2] For without such a kingdom, it is believed that God would have failed to deliver the promises given in His word. To spiritualize these promises, it is sometimes argued, does not do justice to the specific nature of these promises. For example, Wayne Grudem explains that a characteristic of pretribulational (or dispensational) premillennialism "is its insistence on interpreting biblical prophecies 'literally where possible.' This especially applies to prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Israel."[3]

One such prophecy is found in Amos 9:11–15:

> "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the LORD who does this. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and

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> they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the LORD your God.[4]

Does this prophecy refer to a time in the future when God will restore the nation of Israel and grant them unprecedented peace and prosperity? A time when their cities are restored, their enemies are defeated, and their lands yield abundant crops? Or, should this prophecy be interpreted symbolically referring to a time when God will bless his covenant people in ways that words cannot really describe. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that certain prophecies, especially Old Testament restoration prophecies regarding the nation of Israel, should be interpreted symbolically. The reasons for a symbol interpretation include (1) the true nature of biblical religion, (2) the unique genre of biblical prophecy, (3) the symbolic manner in which the New Testament interprets Old Testament prophecies, and (4) the central role of Jesus' death and resurrection in salvation history.

THE TRUE NATURE OF BIBLICAL RELIGION

The Christian faith is a religion of the heart. It is not primarily external but internal. Mere outward, external religion is never the goal of our faith. God is primarily interested in the deeper, inner faith of His people. This is true not only for the New Testament but is also clearly seen in the Old Testament.

Circumcision of the Heart

Circumcision was a significant part of both the Abrahamic and Mosiac covenants. It was the outward sign that separated God's chosen people from the other nations. And yet, according to the Old Testament, true circumcision was not the outward, physical act but the inward circumcision of the heart:

> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn (Deut 10:16).
>
> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deut 30:6).
>
> Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem (Jer 4:4a).

This emphasis on the inner circumcision of the heart is continued in the New Testament (Rom 2:25–29; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15; Phil 3:2–3; Col 2:11).

Sacrifice of an Obedient and Broken Heart

In the Old Testament God required daily sacrifices from His people. These sacrifices usually required the shedding of an animal's blood. But we know that such sacrifices were merely an outward sign that signified God's perfect standard and the need for atonement. God was always more interested in heart-felt obedience than He was in the mere shedding of an animal's blood.

> Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams (1 Sam 15:22b).
>
> Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required (Psalm 40:6).
>
> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17).
>
> For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hos 6:6).

A Different Kind of Fasting

The act of denying the body food or drink often signifies devotion to God. It demonstrates that God and His word are more important than satisfying the desires of the body. It is an outward act that reflects the inward commitment. But if the inward attitude does not accompany the external act, fasting becomes a mockery to God.

> Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress your workers.... Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Isa 58:3b, 5–7).

> Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them (Jer 14:12a).

Even with all of its external rituals and requirements, the old covenant was essentially about the heart. In the new covenant, this inward focus becomes more evident as many of the outward elements are stripped away.

The above comments and Scripture references do not prove that certain Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel must be taken symbolically. God is interested in the physical aspect—even in heaven. For instance, the Bible clearly teaches that believers will be given a physical, resurrected body. My point is simply this: If the new covenant, with its focus on the spiritual, is the fulfillment of God's plan, why should we go back to the shadows and images? (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5). By returning to shadows and images, are we guilty of reversing God's plan of redemptive history? The Jews of Jesus' day were expecting the Messiah to establish a tangible, earthly kingdom based on their (mis)understanding of the Old Testament. Thus, the messianic kingdom became primarily the political rule of Israel over all the nations—a time when there would be an abundance of wealth and prosperity. But they were mistaken. Could it be that we are guilty of the same? Could it be that we have mistaken the shell for the core?[5] Is it really God's intention for the nation of Israel to restore its cities, for them to defeat their enemies, or for their land to yield abundant crops (Amos 9:11–15)? Or do these promises have an even greater significance? Could it be that the prophets used metaphorical language to describe the nature in which God would fulfill His promises?

THE UNIQUE GENRE OF BIBLICAL PROPHECY

How do we know if a prophecy should be taken literally or symbolically? Certainly not all prophecy is symbolic or figurative. For example, the prophet Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14) and Micah informs us that He would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). These prophecies were fulfilled literally—why not the rest?[6] The answer to this question depends (1) on the nature of the prophecy and (2) the language used in the prophecy. Prophecy concerning the end of time or the coming of God's kingdom is often described using metaphorical language. The prophets often employed earthly imagery to describe a heavenly reality. The messianic kingdom was often pictured as a return from exile and often included a rebuilt temple (built on mount Zion which will become the highest mountain), resumed temple sacrifices, and wild animals dwelling together peacefully. The reason for this was simple. The prophets spoke and wrote in terms that both they and their audience would understand. They described the messianic kingdom in terms of concepts and imagery that was meaningful to the people of that day. Amos

describes the future in terms that communicate the highest blessings of God. Their cities would be rebuilt, their enemies would be conquered, their land would produce more than seemed possible, and they would dwell in the land forever.

The prophets often employed figurative or cosmic language to describe the great works of God in history. For example, the prophet Isaiah declares,

> Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light.... Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place at the wrath of the LORD of hosts in the day of his fierce anger (Isa 13:9–10, 13).

At first glace one might surmise that this prophecy must pertain to the day of the great judgment of God. But the first verse of the chapter reads, "The oracle concerning Babylon which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw" (Isa 13:1). In verse 19 we again read that this judgment prophecy relates to the nation of Babylon: "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the splendor and pomp of the Chaldeans, will be like Sodom and Gomorrah when God overthrew them." It was common for the prophets to use figurative, cosmic language to describe God's intervention in history and His sovereign rule of all nations. Robert Stein explains,

> Such imagery was not meant to be interpreted literally. The sun was not actually going to be darkened; the moon would not stop giving its light; the stars would not stop showing their light. "What" the author willed to communicate by this imagery, that God was going to bring judgment upon Babylon, was to be understood "literally." And that willed meaning, God's judgment upon Babylon, did take place.... Babylon had been judged just as the prophecy proclaimed, and it was God's doing just as the cosmic imagery described. The imagery itself, however, was understood by the prophet and his audience as part of the stock terminology used in this kind of literature to describe God's intervention into history.[7]

We also find examples of this type of metaphorical language in the New Testament. John the Baptist came to prepare the way of the Lord, a role that was foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'" (Luke 3:3). Although both Matthew and Mark quote from Isa 40:3, only Luke adds verses 4 and 5 which state, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." If we take these verses literally, then the landscape and geography of the land of Israel would have been dramatically altered. By quoting these verses Luke sees them as being fulfilled in the ministry of John the Baptist.[8] Luke was not bothered by the fact that these events did not take place in a literal fashion. He understood that the meaning behind these verses was that God was going to sovereignly move in history by sending a prophet who would prepare the way for the Messiah. "It is clear that Luke understood this imagery figuratively as referring to the humbling of the proud and the exaltation of the repentant through the preaching of John the Baptist."[9]

We are not at liberty to change the meaning of the Bible according to our whims. We must base our exegesis and interpretation on sound principles. If a literal meaning was intended then we should simply trust God and follow a literal interpretation. But certain parts of the Bible (especially poetry, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature) are not meant to be interpreted literally.[10] The prophets often communicated a divine message using earthly language. That is, the prophets used

earthly language to describe a more profound heavenly reality—a reality that finds its fulfillment in Christ. Graeme Goldsworthy correctly insists that we should not interpret prophecies literally "if by literal is meant that fulfilment must be in the precise terms of the promise, and that the reality is only a future repetition of the foreshadowing."[11] He continues,

> The New Testament knows nothing of this kind of literalism. It repeatedly maintains that Christ is the fulfilment of these terms, images, promises and foreshadowings in the Old Testament which were presented in a way that is different from the fulfilment. For the New Testament the interpretation of the Old Testament is not 'literal' but 'Christological'. That is to say that the coming of the Christ transforms all the Kingdom terms of the Old Testament into gospel reality.[12]

THE SYMBOLIC MANNER IN WHICH THE NT INTERPRETS OT PROPHECIES

One of the principles of sound hermeneutics is that we should let Scripture interpret Scripture. We might be inclined to interpret a passage one way but we must give precedence to the wisdom of God. How do the New Testament writers interpret Old Testament prophecies and promises to the nation of Israel?

Acts 2:14–21 (Joel 2:28–32)

After the Spirit came at Pentecost, Jewish pilgrims from all over the world began to hear the disciples of Jesus speak their languages. Many were amazed at this phenomenon, but others mocked and said those speaking were merely drunk with wine. At this point, Peter stood up and declared to the large crowd that these people were not drunk but rather what was taking place was spoken through the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Acts 2:17). Peter quoted from Joel 2 because he believed that with the coming of the Spirit, this text was being fulfilled. Furthermore, he applied Joel's vision not to the nation of Israel, but to the church. John Stott offers a powerful warning:

> It is the unanimous conviction of the New Testament authors that Jesus inaugurated the last days or Messianic age, and that the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit, since this was the Old Testament promise of promises for the end-time. This being so, we must be careful not to re-quote Joel's prophecy as if we are still awaiting fulfilment, or even as if its fulfilment has been only partial, and we await some future and complete fulfilment. For this is not how Peter understood and applied the text.[13]

Another interesting feature is that this prophecy also includes cosmic language similar to other Old Testament apocalyptic prophecies. In Acts 2:19–20 Peter, quoting from Joel 2:30–31, states,

> And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.

Some might respond by claiming that this prophecy clearly has not yet been fulfilled. The sun has not turned to darkness and the moon has not turned to blood. But we must be careful not to force the text to mean something it was never intended to mean. Peter (and Luke) had no difficulty in affirming that the prophecy given by Joel was fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit. Peter knew that such cosmic language should not be interpreted literally. Rather, he knew that such language meant that God would sovereignly intervene in history and do something miraculous. Stein rightly comments, "These cosmic signs did not literally take place at Pentecost, even though what the author willed to convey by those signs did…. The conventional cosmic imagery used

in this prophecy of Joel was understood by both Peter and Luke as being fulfilled in the events of Pentecost."[14] If we interpret this passage literally we are forced to say this text (and many other texts) has not yet been fulfilled. The text pointed to a literal reality (that God would miraculously intervene in history), but that reality was described using figurative language.

Acts 15:16–17 (Amos 9:11–12)

In Acts 15 Luke recounts the proceedings of the so-called Jerusalem Council. In seeking to refute the notion that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1), Peter declared his conviction that God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas also related all that God had done among them with the Gentiles. Finally, James stood up and quoted Amos 9:11–12 as proof that God had made the Gentiles His own people, just as was foretold by the prophets.

> After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. (Acts 15:16–17)[15]

Interestingly, James does not apply this text to some future millennium kingdom when the people of Israel regain their independence and rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Instead, it is used as justification for accepting the Gentiles into the people of God without needing to be circumcised. "James is saying that the wonderful thing which is now happening, namely, that the Gentiles are now coming into the fellowship of God's people, is a fulfillment of the words of the prophet Amos about the building up again of the fallen tabernacle of David."[16] Some might respond by stating that James is not claiming this text is fulfilled but is merely drawing attention to the fact that Amos mentions the Gentiles (or nations) seeking the Lord. But James could have simply quoted verse 12 and left out verse 11. The reason James includes verse 11 is that he sees the salvation of Gentiles as part of the restoration processes of Israel. The house of David is being rebuilt—not just out of physical Jews but also out of spiritual Jews. John Polhill rightly comments,

> In the Gentiles, God was choosing a people for himself, a new *restored* people of God, Jew and Gentile in Christ, the true Israel. In the total message of Acts it is clear that the rebuilt house of David occurred in the Messiah. Christ was the scion of David who fulfilled the covenant of David and established a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam 7:12f.; cf. Acts 13:32–34). From the beginning the Jewish Christians had realized that the promises to David were fulfilled in Christ. What they were now beginning to see, and what James saw foretold in Amos, was that these promises included the Gentiles.[17]

Based on the interpretation given by James and recorded by Luke, we have another clear example of the New Testament interpreting an Old Testament restoration passage in a nonliteral or symbolical manner.

Hebrews 8:8–12 (Jeremiah 31:31–34)

In seeking to demonstrate that the new covenant is superior to the old covenant, the author of Hebrews quotes several verses from Jeremiah 31. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises, "I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Heb 8:8). The point to be made here is that this covenant is said to be made with people of Israel and Judah. Does this covenant include Gentile Christians? Or is this a special covenant made only with the Jewish people? Although it is true that this particular letter was written to a primarily (or perhaps even exclusively) Jewish audience, there is no New Testament evidence that God makes one covenant

with the Jews and then a separate covenant with the Gentiles. Rather, the mentioning of Israel and Judah indicates that God's people will again be reunited. "The promise of the reunion of Israel and Judah was symbolic of the healing of every human breach and the reconciliation of all nations and persons in Christ, the seed of Abraham in whom all the peoples of the earth are blessed and united."[18] For, as we are taught in the New Testament, what makes someone a real Jew is not physical birth, but spiritual birth. Paul boldly declares, "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God" (Rom 2:28–29). Abraham is the father of all believers, not just those from the physical people of Israel. He is also the father of those Gentiles who believe in the Messiah and, consequently, are grafted into the covenant that God made with Abraham (Rom 4:11; 11:17). In Galatians Paul affirms that "it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7). Similarly, he later adds, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29). He labels the churches in Galatia (which consisted of both Jews and Gentiles) "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16).

The new covenant is not a covenant that merely applies to those who are physical descendents of Abraham. It is offered to all those who place their trust and hope in the Messiah, who was a physical descendent of Abraham. To claim that the promises of Jeremiah 31:31–34 (or Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27) do not apply to the church, seems to ignore how the New Testament writers themselves applied such promises.[19]

1 Peter 2:9–10 (Exodus 6:7; 19:5–6; Isaiah 43:20–21)

To the elect exiles scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, the Apostle Peter writes,

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Pet 2:9–10).

These verses echo several Old Testament references describing the nation of Israel. Peter claims that Christians are a "chosen race" (Isa 43:20), a "royal priesthood" and a "holy nation" (Exod 19:6; cf. 23:22, LXX), "a people for his own possession" (Exod 19:5; Isa 43:21; Mal 3:17), and once they were "not a people" who had "not received mercy" but now they are "God's people" who have "received mercy" (Exod 6:7; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22; Ezek 37:23; Hos 1:6, 9; 2:1, 23). Originally, these verses signified God's covenant with the people of Israel. And yet, Peter applies these verses to the church. "Peter saw these promises as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and God's elect nation is no longer coterminous with Israel but embraces the church of Jesus Christ, which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles."[20]

Some may argue that Peter was writing only to Jewish Christians so that these verses cannot be used as evidence. After all, it is thought, Peter was the apostle to the Jews. There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that Peter's audience consisted primarily of Gentile Christians. In the first chapter Peter states, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (v. 14). Later in the same chapter he adds, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers" (v. 18). They formerly carried out the desires of the Gentiles (1 Pet 4:3–4) but now have been "called out of darkness" (1 Pet 2:9). These verses indicate that Peter is not writing to a Jewish audience.

What is crucial for our argument, then, is that Peter unashamedly applies the well-known Old Testament covenant terminology to the church.

Gentile believers are "being built up as a spiritual house"; they are God's "holy" or "royal priesthood"; they are a "chosen race"; they are a "holy nation"; they are "God's people" who have received mercy (1 Pet 2:5, 9–10). God has bestowed on the church the blessings promised to Israel in the Old Testament.

The New Testament writers do not seem to expect the Old Testament prophecies about the nation of Israel to be fulfilled literally. Some might object and claim that in Romans 11 Paul expects Israel as a nation to someday turn to Christ in faith. Although there is doubt as to whether Paul teaches a future mass conversion of the nation of Israel in Romans 11:26,[21] Bavinck rightly notes that "even if Paul expected a national conversion of Israel at the end, he does not say a word about the return of the Jews to Palestine, about a rebuilding of the city and a temple, about a visible rule of Christ: in his picture of the future there simply is no room for all this."[22] A literal fulfillment was not expected but rather New Testament writers correctly saw fulfillment in Christ and in the gospel. They correctly understood John the Baptist to be Elijah (Mal 4:5–6; Matt 17:11–13). They correctly understood the promise to David—that his son would someday establish an eternal kingdom—was fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (2 Sam 7:12–16; Acts 2:29–36; also see Acts 13:29–32). There was no hesitation to say Christians have already come to "Mount Zion," which is also called "the heavenly Jerusalem" and "the city of the living God" (Heb 12:22). The main issue then is not how we think the Old Testament should be interpreted and consequently impose an overly literalistic hermeneutic on the texts. Rather, we must learn from how the New Testament writers themselves interpreted the Old Testament. When we do this, we will see that the Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel are fulfilled in Christ and in the gospel.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION IN SALVATION HISTORY

One of the problems with interpreting Old Testament prophecies regarding the nation of Israel in a literal manner is that it tends to minimize the work of Christ, especially His suffering, death, and resurrection. How is this so? The New Testament teaches that the death and resurrection of Christ are the climax of God's work in redemptive history. But if we interpret the many Old Testament restoration prophecies regarding the nation of Israel literally, then we are forced to say that such prophecies do not find their fulfillment in God's greatest work. Instead, the first coming of Christ becomes ignored and all attention shifts to Christ's second coming and the millennial kingdom.[23]

Another problem with a literal interpretation is that the Old Testament consistently pictures a messianic kingdom that includes the restoration of the temple, the priesthood, and the temple sacrifices. Bavinck explains, "All the prophets, with equal vigor and force, announce not only the conversion of Israel and the nations but also the return to Palestine, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the restoration of the temple, the priesthood, and sacrificial worship."[24] If we maintain that the prophet's picture of the future must be literal, then we must take all the aspects literally.[25] In other words, if we insist that the nation of Israel will someday return to the Promised Land, rebuild the cities of Israel, and have Christ rule as their King, then we are also forced to include the notion that the Jews will again have a priesthood and offer sacrifices in the temple.[26]

Listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes the restoration of Israel:

> And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants…these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings

> and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Isa 56:6–7)
>
> All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house. (Isa 60:7)
>
> And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD. For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. (Isa 66:20–22)

A similar picture is given by Jeremiah (3:16–17; 30:18; 31:21, 38), Ezekiel (36:28–38; 37:21–28; 39:25–29; chs. 40–48), Joel (3:17–20), Amos (9:11–15), Obadiah (17, 21), Micah (4:1–2; 7:11), Haggai (2:6–10), and Zechariah (1:17; 2:1–5; 3:1–8; 6:9–15; 8:3–23).

Yet, couched in the midst of these prophesies is also the expectation that what awaits Israel will be something that far exceeds any earthly fulfillment. There will be no need for the ark of the covenant because "Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD" (Jer 3:17). There will be no sin, sickness, or death: "He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth" (Isa 25:8). There will be a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17; 66:22) which have no need for the sun or the moon because the Lord himself will be the everlasting light (Isa 60:19–20). Thus, "although it is true that Old Testament prophecy cannot conceive the future kingdom of God without a temple and sacrifice, over and over it *transcends* all national and earthly conditions."[27]

If we insist on an overly literal interpretation we end up with Jewish believers who return to Jerusalem and reinstate the Old Testament sacrificial system as Christ reigns over them. Instead, we must see the prophets as using earthly language to describe a greater reality. At times, the prophets are forced to picture the future kingdom in terms that transcend the earthly or physical. Therefore, we must not interpret their earthly, physical descriptions in a literal manner. To do so minimizes the work of Christ. Christ is the only true prophet, priest, and king. His sacrifice was alone able to make atonement for the sins of the world. He is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament predicted. To still be looking for the fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies is to minimize the significance of the Messiah. All the benefits of our salvation that were promised and foreshadowed in the Old Testament have become a reality in Christ. Or, as Paul put it, all the promises of God are "yes" and "amen" in Christ (2 Cor 1:20).

CONCLUSION

The Old Testament presents a vivid and detailed picture of Israel's future restoration. We have seen, however, that these descriptions are not meant to be taken literally. Although it is true that these predictions and promises have a real meaning, the meaning is not expressed *in* the actual language, but *through* the actual language. By insisting on a literal interpretation, we are in danger of forcing the text to mean something that God did not intend. The new covenant is characterized by the inner transformation of a person. This core was found in the old covenant but it was wrapped in an external shell. Now that the external shell has been shed, is it really God's plan to reinstitute it? In addition, a literal interpretation does not do justice to the genre of biblical prophecy. There is no virtue in claiming to consistently apply a literal interpretation to texts that were not designed to be interpreted as such. The Old Testament prophets used metaphorical language to describe truths that otherwise would not

have been intelligible to their audience. Furthermore, the New Testament itself teaches us that we should not insist on a literal interpretation. There are abundant examples where New Testament authors offer a symbolic interpretation of Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation of Israel. Finally, affirming that the restored people of Israel will rebuild the temple, reinstate the priesthood, and restore animal sacrifices, minimizes the complete and perfect work of Christ. His death and resurrection is the focal point of God's great work in redemptive history. To go back to the shadows and images of the Old Testament is to neglect the centrality of Christ's finished work on the cross.

ENDNOTES

[1]Grenz explains one of the major tenets of dispensationalism: "The millennium is the occasion for God to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies to bless the nation" (Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 99).

[2]Ryrie states, "The literal interpretation of Scripture leads naturally to … the literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. If the yet unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament made in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants are to be literally fulfilled, there must be a future period, the Millennium, in which they can be fulfilled, for the church is not now fulfilling them. In other words, the literal picture of Old Testament prophecies demands either a future fulfillment or a nonliteral fulfillment. If they are to be fulfilled in the future, then the only time left for that fulfillment is the Millennium" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* [rev. and exp.; Chicago: Moody, 1995], 147).

[3]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1113–14.

[4]All Scripture texts are from the English Standard Version.

[5]I am borrowing this terminology from Herman Bavinck, *The Last Things: Hope for This World and the Next* (ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 90. He writes, "In Jesus' day Israel expected a tangible, earthly, messianic kingdom whose conditions were depicted in the forms and images of the Old Testament prophecy. But now these forms and images were taken literally. The shell was mistaken for the core, the image of it for the thing itself, and the form for the essence. The messianic kingdom became the political rule of Israel over the nations—a period of external prosperity and growth."

[6]Ryrie, for example, argues that a literal interpretation should always be used because "the prophecies in the Old Testament concerning the first coming of Christ—His birth, His rearing, His ministry, His death, His resurrection—were all fulfilled literally" (*Dispensationalism*, 81).

[7]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 92.

[8]Marshall notes that Luke's introductory "as" (Greek, *hōs*; *"As* it is written…") "suggests that a prophecy here finds its deliberate fulfillment rather than that a general pattern is being followed" (I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [New International Greek Testament Commentary; Exeter: Paternoster, 1978], 136).

[9]Stein, *Basic Guide*, 95. Bock likewise suggests that the reference to the physical geography has ethical overtones. He states that "the way is cleared for a humble and righteous people; the imagery has ethical dimensions" (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 293). He later adds, "The images call the hearer of John's message to realize that God is coming in judgment and that only the humble who rely on him will be spared…. The point is … that this leveling imagery has ethical overtones. The physical imagery conveys ethical realities" (294).

[10]For example, all must admit that Amos 9:11–15 uses nonliteral language when the prophet says, "the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it" (v. 13). Figurative language is used to communicate a reality: God will abundantly bless

His people by supplying all their needs. The issue, then, is whether the physical blessing is as a metaphor for the greater spiritual blessings we receive in Christ and His kingdom.

[11]Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), 88. Also see his more recent work *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 169–71.

[12]Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 88.

[13]John R. W. Stott, The *Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, and the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1994) 73.

[14]Stein, *Basic Guide*, 93.

[15]There are notable differences between the Masoretic text and the LXX (which was recorded by Luke). The former speaks of Israel regaining its own land and possessing "the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name." The LXX speaks of the remnant of "mankind" seeking the Lord.

[16]Anthony A. Hoekema, "An Amillennial Response," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977], 110). He continues, "In other words, the fallen tabernacle of David is being built up not in a material way (by means of a restored earthly kingdom) but in a spiritual way (as Gentiles are coming into the kingdom of God)." Grenz likewise comments, "The prophet anticipated an eschatological re-emergence of Israel as a dominant nation under the reign of David's greater son, the Messiah. But the leader of the Jerusalem church claimed that the fulfillment of this text was the coming of the Gentiles to faith in Jesus" (*Millennial Maze*, 109).

[17]John B. Polhill, *Acts* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 330. I. Howard Marshall suggests that "the rebuilding of the tabernacle is to be understood as a reference to the raising up of the church as the new place of divine worship which replaced the temple" (*Acts* [Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 252). John Stott maintains that Christians see this passage "as a prophecy of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ, the seed of David, and the establishment of his people" (*The Message of Acts*, 247). This is also the position of Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard who state that in Acts 15:16–17, "James says the fulfillment of Amos 9 is the admission of non-Jewish believers to the company of Jesus' followers. He does so by interpreting Amos' prediction of David's future political rule as representing Christ's spiritual rule over non-Jewish Christians" (William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Dallas: Word, 1993], 308).

[18]Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 300. Similarly, Kistemaker suggests that "because the ten tribes of Israel failed to return after the exile, the phrases ought to be understood in a more universalistic sense to include both Jews and Gentiles" (Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 225). Also see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, 308.

[19]Interestingly, the promises of the new covenant often include restoration promises for Israel. For example, after Jeremiah describes the blessings of the new covenant (Jer 31:31–34), he states, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate" (Jer 31:38; also see Ezek 36:26–38). If the new covenant is given to the church, then the restoration promises to Israel should also seen as being fulfilled in the church.

[20]Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 114.

[21]See my earlier article, Ben L. Merkle, "Romans 11 and the Future of Ethnic Israel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 709–21.

[22]Bavinck, *Last Things,* 107. Similarly, Berkhof comments, "It is remarkable that the New Testament, which is the fulfillment of the Old, contains no indication whatsoever of the re-establishment of the Old Testament theocracy by Jesus, nor a single undisputed positive prediction of its restoration, while it does contain abundant indications of the spiritual

fulfilment of the promises given to Israel (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941], 713). Along the same lines, Goldsworthy notes, "Many people in effect regard the second coming of Christ as involving a whole new work of God. This conclusion is forced upon them because they do not accept that all promise is fulfilled in the gospel. Thus, despite the scriptural evidence … to the contrary, they see the return of Israel, the rebuilding of the Temple, the restoration of Davidic kingship as unrelated to the gospel and requiring separate fulfilment on some future occasion." (*Gospel and Kingdom,* 95). He later writes, "The New Testament seems to be completely indifferent to the restoration referred to [in the Old Testament]" (*Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 170). Also see Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard who state that "the NT assumes that such prophecies have already achieved literal fulfillment through Christ and the Church. It leaves no reason to anticipate a second, later fulfillment" (*Biblical Interpretation,* 308).

[23]Bavinck affirms that a literal interpretation "attributes a temporary, passing value to Christianity, the historical person of Christ, and his suffering and death, and only first expects real salvation from Christ's second coming, his appearance in glory" (*Last Things,* 98). Perhaps Goldsworthy is even stronger: "I want to assert categorically that ALL prophecy was fulfilled in the gospel event at the first coming of Jesus…. There is a tendency to try to differentiate Old Testament prophecies of the end into two groups, those applying to the first coming and those applying to the second coming. This is a mistake. A more biblical perspective is one that recognizes that the distinction between the first and second coming is not what happens but in how it happens. Nothing will happen at the return of Christ that has not already happened in him at his first coming" (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 93).

[24]Ibid., 94.

[25]In Bavinck's words, "[I]t is nothing but caprice to take one feature of this picture literally and another 'spiritually'" (ibid.).

[26]Hoyt, for example, insists that the restoration of Israel will be a literal kingdom: "The actual place of its central location will be Jerusalem and vicinity (Obad. 12–21). A real King will sit on a material throne (Is. 33:17). Nations of mankind will participate in its ministry of welfare and deliverance (Is. 52:10). The wicked kingdoms of this world will be brought to a sudden and catastrophic end at the coming of Christ, and his kingdom will supplant them (Dan. 2:31–45). This kingdom will be a revival and continuation of the historical Davidic kingdom (Amos 9:11; see Acts 15:16–18). A faithful and regenerated remnant of Israel will be restored and made the nucleus of this kingdom, and thus the covenant with David will be fulfilled (Mic. 4:7–8; Jer. 33:15–22; Ps. 89:3–4, 34–37). Jerusalem will become the capital city of the great King, from which he will govern the world (Is. 2:3; 24:23)" (Herman A. Hoyt, "Dispensational Premillennialism" in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977], 78–79). Hoyt seems intentionally to ignore the prophetic references of restoration of the priesthood and the temple sacrifices. Some maintain that the temple sacrifices will resume but not for purpose of atonement. Rather, they will serve as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice. But are such sacrifices appropriate? Has not God already given His people a memorial in the Lord's Supper?

[27]Bavinck, *Last Things,* 95.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus[1]

Peter J. Gentry

INTRODUCTION

Daniel 9 is famous for the Vision of the "Seventy Weeks." Unfortunately, interpretation of this text has been difficult not only for average readers, but for scholars as well. We must not only pay attention to (1) the cultural and historical setting, and (2) the linguistic and textual data, but also carefully analyze and consider (3) the literary structures, (4) the apocalyptic genre of the text, (5) the relation of Daniel 9 to other prophetic texts in the Old Testament, and above all (6) the metanarrative or biblical-theological framework crucial for making sense of any individual text. Lack of understanding as to how apocalyptic and prophetic literature communicates has hindered the church especially in the last hundred years. In addition, a failure to grasp the larger story that alone makes sense of the details in this text have resulted in imposing on it a framework of understanding foreign to it.

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OVERVIEW OF DANIEL

The Stories and Visions of Daniel[2]

Part 1:	Six Stories (Chapters 1-6)
1	Daniel and Friends in the Court of Babylon
2	King's Dream: A Huge Statue / Small Stone
3	Daniel's Friends Rescued from the Furnace
4	King's Dream: A Huge Tree
5	Belshazzar and the Writing on the Wall
6	Daniel Rescued from the Lion's Den
Part 2:	Four Visions (Chapters 7-12)
7	A Vision of Daniel: Awful Beasts / Son of Man
8	A Vision of Daniel: The Ram and The Goat
9	A Prayer of Daniel and Vision of 70 Weeks
10-12	A Vision of Daniel: The Writing of Truth

The book of Daniel consists of twelve chapters which divide equally into six narrative (1-6) and six visionary chapters (7-12). In the Hebrew canon, Daniel follows the poetic section which ends with Lamentations—a book focused on the theme of exile. The narratives of chapters 1-6 of Daniel take up this theme of exile and describe

how faith in the God of Israel, the one true and living God, is to be maintained in the face of defilement, idolatry, and prohibitions of prayer backed up by wild beasts and fire and great persecution. The dreams and visions of chapters 7-12, apocalyptic in nature, give hope to the people of God by showing God in control of history through four periods of domination by foreign nations until a decisive end is made to rebellion and sin, with a renewal of the broken covenant and restoration of the temple and establishment of God's kingdom as eternal and final.

GRASPING THE LITERARY STRUCTURE

Grasping the literary structures of Daniel is crucial for a proper understanding of Chapter 9. Literary structures also aid in dating the work to the sixth century B.C. and seeing it as a unity. Part of the literary artistry of Daniel can be seen in chiastic structures. The word *chiasm* comes from the letter in the Greek alphabet known as *chi* (χ), which is shaped like an X. The top half of the letter has a mirror image in the bottom half. If, for example, a literary piece has four distinct units and the first matches the last while the second matches the third, the same kind of mirror image is created in the literary structure and is called a chiasm. The literary structure of Daniel is complex and rich and only partly revealed in the following two charts:[3]

Chiastic Structures in Daniel – Chart I

Prologue	1
Image of Four Metals: Triumph of God's Kingdom	2
Persecution of Daniel's Friends	3
Humbling of Nebuchadnezzar before God	4
Humbling of Belshazzar before God	5
Persecution of Daniel	6
Vision of Four Beasts: Triumph of God's Kingdom	7
Vision of Future History	8
Daniel's Prayer and God's Response	9
Daniel's Grief and God's Response	10
Vision of Future History	11:1-12:4
Epilogue	12:5-13

Note that chiastic structures mark chapters 2-7 and 8:1-12:4 as main sub-units.[4] Thus chiasm firmly links the visions to the stories.

Chiastic Structures in Daniel - Chart II

DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS	DANIEL'S FAITHFULNESS
Ch 1 – Refusal to eat the king's food. Daniel is vindicated.	Ch 6 – Refusal to obey king's command. Daniel is vindicated.
TWO IMAGES	TWO VISIONS OF BEASTS
Ch 2 – Nebuchadnezzar's Dream-Image	Ch 7 – The Four Beasts
Ch 3 – Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image	Ch 8 – The Two Beasts
TWO KINGS DISCIPLINED	TWO WRITINGS EXPLAINED
Ch 4 – Discipline of Nebuchadnezzar	Ch 9 – The Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah
Ch 5 – Writing on the Wall and Destruction of Belshazzar	Chs 10-12 – The Writing of Truth and Destruction of the King

Again, note that parallel literary structures mark chapters 1-5 and 6-12 as main sub-units. Thus literary parallelism firmly links the visions to the stories. The chiasms and parallel structures may be simultaneously valid.

In summary, the literary structure divides the book into halves both between chapters 5 and 6 and between chapters 7 and 8, linking chapters 2 and 7 as dreams referring to the same thing. This interlocks the two halves of the book as determined by stories and visions. What is the significance of this unity? It is just this: the first half of the book establishes and proves that Daniel has a gift of interpreting dreams and visions of events which could be independently verified by the contemporaries of Daniel. Therefore, we must believe and trust the interpretation of the visions in the second half of the book, which deal with the distant future and hence were not open to verification by the audience of Daniel's time.

The literary structures are the key to interpretation. We need a clear view of the whole in order to understand the parts and their relationship to each other.

The dream of Chapter 2 and the vision of Chapter 7 are at the center of the book and communicate in different ways the same thing. In Chapter 2 a gigantic image of man is front and center in the Babylonian king's dream. Its head consists of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. It is struck down by a rock—cut without hands from a mountain—which then grows to fill the entire earth. This dream foretells four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God which will endure forever.

Chapter 7 begins the second half of the book in which the Babylonian king's dream is expanded in a series of visions presented like maps provided with blowup inserts. Each successive vision is an enlargement of part of the previous vision, each provides greater and greater detail of the same scene. Daniel replaces the king as dreamer and sees four beasts coming out of the chaotic sea. Then in a picture of the court of heaven, one like a Son of Man is given the kingdom. This vision again foretells four successive human kingdoms succeeded by the kingdom of God. The vision of chapter 8 expands upon the second and third kingdoms; the vision of chapters 10-12 provides an expanded view of events in the third and fourth kingdoms.[5] We now have a detailed road map through the maze of forces arrayed against the people of God throughout successive human kingdoms.

DETAILED OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 9

Outline of Daniel 9

1. The Motivation for Prayer	9:1-4a
2. Daniel's Prayer for Favor	9:4b-19
A. Invocation and Confession	9:4b-14
B. Appeal for Favor and Mercy	9:15-19
3. Revelation Through Divine Messenger	9:20-27
A. Occasion for Angelic Message	9:20-23
B. Vision of the Seventy Weeks	9:24-27

Setting of the Vision of the Seventy Weeks (9:1)

Chapter 9 begins in the typical way by giving a chronological notice. The date is the first year of Darius "who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom" (v. 1). This is significant for this was the year in which the Persians conquered the Babylonians, whose empire, under Nebuchadnezzar, had defeated and exiled Judah some decades earlier. This was also the first year of Cyrus the Great, who gave the decree which permitted the exiles of Judah to return to their homeland.

Nonetheless, Chapter 9 is different in many ways. It begins with an extensive prayer by Daniel—the only major prayer recorded by him in the book (aside from 2:20-23). And although the section includes a vision like chapters 7, 8, and 10-12, this vision is obviously not part of these other "roadmap" visions that proclaim a sequence of four human kingdoms followed by the kingdom

of God. So intepretation of the Vision of Seventy Weeks must show how this is related to the other visions.

Prayer Motivated By Scripture (9:2-4a)

Daniel's prayer is motivated by Scripture and based upon Scripture. In verses 2 and 3 Daniel indicates that he understood by the word of the Lord given through the prophet Jeremiah that the length of time to complete and end the divine judgment of the exile is seventy years. Although Daniel could not give a particular reference as to the passage(s) he had in mind as we would do today, clearly he is thinking of Jer 25:1-15 and 29:1-23.

His prayer is also based upon 1 Kgs 8:33-34, 46-51 where Solomon outlines the necessity and possibility of praying towards the Temple when the people sin, and then God will hear and forgive and bring the people back to the land.

The prayer of Solomon is based in turn upon Deut 30:1-10 where Moses promises a restoration after the application of the covenant curse of exile, a restoration contingent upon repentance for sin.

Addressing God (9:4b)

Daniel's prayer does not begin by requesting something. It begins by addressing God properly and by acknowledging his character and person. Daniel speaks of God as "the great and awesome God who keeps the covenant and loyal love (*hesed*) for those who obey the requirements and terms of the covenant." The focus here is upon God's loyal love within the covenant relationship. He does not quickly punish his people, and he stands ready to bless them when they obey his laws.

Confessing Sin (9:5-10)

The next part of the prayer is devoted to confession of sin. Daniel is not concerned to demonstrate his own personal innocence and piety. Instead, he completely and fully identifies with his people and acknowledges their sin. He confesses that God's people have not obeyed his commands, but have rebelled against him instead. They have not listened to the warnings of the prophets who were sent to God's people to get them to change their attitudes and behavior to conform to the directions and instructions given by God in the covenant for their lifestyle. The prophets are like the lawyers of the covenant. When the covenant is broken, they appear in order to accuse the people with the ultimate intention of restoring their love and faithfulness to God. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many others were used by God to carry the message of warning and repentance, but they went largely unheeded.

The prophets were sent, according to Daniel, to all strata of society—from kings to common people. None of them, however, responded. Rather, they persisted in their foolish and dangerous rebellion.

Next Daniel marks a contrast between the sin of the people and the mercy of God: God is faithful; his people are rebellious. The prophet is brutally honest in his acknowledgement of the responsibility of God's people for their present dire condition. They are in exile because they have rebelled against the covenant God made with them through Moses.

God's Punishment (9:11-14)

Then, in verses 11-14 of his prayer, Daniel draws a direct connection between the sin of the people and their present suffering (cf. Lam 2:2-5). The present suffering is due to the curses promised to those who violated the covenant (Deut 28:15-68).

Appealing for Compassion and Mercy (9:15-19)

Finally, Daniel calls upon God as the one who delivered his people out of Egypt to lift the covenantal curse and to restore the city of Jerusalem and its sanctuary. The exodus was a pivotal event in the life of God's people. It defined them as a nation. Through it, God freed them from slavery

and brought them into the Promised Land. The prophets before Daniel saw an analogy between the exodus and the future deliverance that would free them from the shackles of the exile (cf. Isa 40:3-5; Hos 2:14-15). In essence, the return from the exile would be a second exodus, a new exodus.

God's Response: The Vision of Seventy Weeks (9:20-27)

As verses 20-23 show, the brief message supplied by vision in verses 24-27 constitute a direct divine response via an angelic messenger to the appeal and request raised by Daniel on the basis of Jeremiah's prophecy. What follows is a fairly literal translation of the Hebrew text to show how the numerous problems in the text have been understood. Space does not allow all of the exegetical issues to be given full treatment.

> 20 And I was still speaking and interceding in prayer and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and making my pleading before the LORD my God fall upon the Holy Mountain of my God.
> 21 I was still speaking in the petition, when the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning—while I was made weary by fatigue—was touching me about the time of the evening offering.
> 22 And he explained and spoke with me and said, "Daniel, I have now come to give you clear insight.
> 23 At the beginning of your supplications a word went out and I came to declare [it] for you are beloved. So pay attention to the word and consider the vision:
> 24 Seventy sevens are determined for your people and your holy city, to end wrongdoing, and to finish with sin, and to atone for guilt / iniquity, and to bring in eternal righteousness, and to seal up prophetic vision, and to anoint a most holy place,
> 25 so you must know and understand, from the issuing of a word to rebuild Jerusalem until an Anointed One, a Leader, are seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It will be rebuilt in square and trench and in distressing times.
> 26 And after the sixty-two sevens, an Anointed One will be cut off, but not for himself, and the people of the coming Leader will ruin / spoil the city and the sanctuary, and its end will come with the flood. And until the end war—desolations are what is decided.
> 27 And he will uphold a covenant with the many for one seven, and at the half of the seven he will cause sacrifice and offering to cease, and upon a wing of abominations is one bringing desolation and until an end and what is decided gushes out on the one being desolated."

Among many difficulties encountered in lexical and syntactic issues facing the translator, the most problematic is the clause division in v. 25. According to the accents in the Masoretic Text, "seven weeks" belongs to the first sentence, while "sixty-two weeks" along with the conjunction preceding this noun phrase (i.e. "and sixty-two weeks") begins a new clause. One could argue that beginning a new sentence with the conjunction and noun phrase before the imperfect verb *tāšûb* (from the hendiadys for "it will be rebuilt") is a natural reading according to the rules of syntax in Hebrew. Moreover, if the author desired to delineate sixty-nine weeks, why not just say so specifically? Why divide the period into seven and sixty-two weeks? On the other hand, according to the rules of macrosyntax, beginning a clause by *tāšûb* without a conjunction (asyndeton) would signal a comment or explanation on the previous sentence rather than supply new information.[6] An explanation for dividing the period into 7 and 62 can be given (see below), but problems of interpretation arising from following the accents in the Masoretic Text are insurmountable. Who is to be identified as the Anointed One after seven weeks? Further, the most natural reading is to identify "Anointed One" and "Leader" in v. 25 with the same terms in v. 26, but this identification is not

possible according to the division in the Masoretic Text. In a detailed historical study Roger Beckwith has demonstrated that the clause division represented by the Masoretic Text represents a reaction against messianic interpretation of the text while the clause division accepted in the translation above follows the Septuagint, Theodotion, Symmachus, and the Syriac Peshitta.[7] Thus the clause division adopted here is both strongly and widely supported early in the text tradition.

UNDERSTANDING THE END OF EXILE

In order to grasp properly the request as raised by Daniel and the answer as provided through the Vision of the Seventy Weeks, we need to understand the prophetic teaching concerning the end of the Exile.

According to the context, Daniel is concerned about the end of the exile. God's people had broken the Covenant (Exodus 19-24 / Deuteronomy), and as a result, the covenant curses had fallen upon them. The final curse or judgment was exile (Deut 28:63-68). Nonetheless, exile was not the last word; God had a plan *from the start* for his people to return (Deut 30:1-10). Isaiah indicates that the return from exile entails two separate stages: (1) return from Babylon to the land of Israel, and (2) return from covenant violation to a right relationship to God so that the covenant relationship is renewed and restored (see Isa 42:18-43:21 and 43:22-44:23 respectively). The first stage is the physical return from exile. But as is often said, "You can get the people out of Babylon, but how do you get Babylon out of the people?" The physical return from exile gets the people out of Babylon, but the problem of getting Babylon out of the people must be dealt with by a second stage. The second stage is the spiritual return from exile: it deals with the problem of sin and brings about forgiveness and reconciliation in a renewed covenant between Yahweh and His people. According to the structure of Isaiah's message, Cyrus is the agent for the return from Babylon, and the Servant of the Lord is the agent for the return from sin. Thus there are two distinct agents and they correspond to the two distinct parts of the redemption which brings about the end of the exile. This can be clearly seen in the structure of Isaiah 38 - 55 as follows:[8]

Overview of Isaiah 38 - 55:
The Book of the Servant

A.	Historical Prologue – Hezekiah's Fatal Choice	38:1-39:8
B^1.	Universal Consolation	40:1-42:17
	1. The Consolation of Israel	40:1-41:20
	2. The Consolation of the Gentiles	41:21-42:17
C^1.	Promises of Redemption	42:18-44:23
	1. Release	42:18-43:21
	2. Forgiveness	43:22-44:23
C^2.	Agents of Redemption	44:24-53:12
	1. Cyrus: Liberation	44:24-48:22
	2. Servant: Atonement	49:1-53:12
B^2.	Universal Proclamation	54:1-55:13
	1. The Call to Zion	54:1-17
	2. The Call to the World	55:1-13

Daniel's prayer is focused upon the physical return from Babylon—the first stage in redemption, but the angelic message and vision of the Seventy Weeks is focused upon the forgiveness of sins and renewal of covenant and righteousness—the second stage in return from exile. Note the six purposes of the message and vision:

Three Negative Purposes
1. to end the rebellion
2. to do away with sin
3. to atone for guilt/iniquity

Three Positive Purposes
4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
5. to seal up prophetic vision
6. to anoint the most holy place

When one considers the plan of redemption as outlined by Isaiah, clearly the angelic message is concerned principally not with the first stage, but especially with the second stage of return: the forgiveness of sins and renewal of a right relationship to God.

The end of the exile is frequently portrayed in terms of the exodus. Just as God brought his people out of Egypt in that great event known as the exodus, so He will now bring about a new exodus in bringing his people back from exile. In fact, many aspects of the return from exile parallel the original exodus. In Ezek 4:4-6, for example, the prophet is instructed to lie on one side for 390 days for the sin of Israel and on the other side for 40 days for the sin of Judah: in each case a day for each year. The sum of 390 and 40 is 430—exactly the length of the period of bondage in Egypt. What is being portrayed by the drama of Ezekiel is that just as there was a period of bondage in Egypt before God brought about the exodus, so now there will be a long period of foreign overlords before He brings about the new exodus. Outside of Daniel 9, this longer period of subjugation before the new exodus is referred to in 8:19 as the "time of wrath."[9]

The vision of Daniel 9 communicates the same truth. From the prophecy of Jeremiah, Daniel expects a literal period of seventy years for the Exile to be completed. This seventy-year period apparently begins with the death of Josiah in 608 B.C. and extends to the fall of Babylon to Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C. When Daniel brings this issue to God in prayer, the answer is that this seventy year period only deals with the first stage of the return from exile. Before the new exodus, there will be a longer period of exile. Thus the real return from exile, a return including the forgiveness of sins, renewal of the covenant, and consecration of the temple, will not take just seventy years, but rather seventy "sevens," i.e. a much longer time. This *fundamental point* of the vision has unfortunately escaped the attention of proponents of both dispensational and non-dispensational treatments in the last one hundred years.

Although the focus of the message is on the city and the people (Jerusalem and Israel), there are broader implications for the nations. This passage must be seen in the light of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. The Abrahamic Covenant promised blessings for the nations through the family of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). The Mosaic Covenant directed and instructed the family of Abraham how to live in a right relationship with God, a right relationship with one another in covenant community, and a right relationship to the earth (as stewards of the creation), so that they could be the blessing to the nations (Exodus 19-24). With the Mosaic Covenant broken, Israel now needs the forgiveness of sins so that the covenant is renewed and the blessings can flow to the nations. Thus, the final and real return from exile is achieved by dealing effectively with Israel's rebellion: the first objective in the list of six is to end "the rebellion," i.e., of Israel. Then the blessing can flow to the nations, and this blessing finds fulfillment in the apostolic preaching of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ when each one turns from their wicked ways (Acts 3:26). In this way, the second stage of return from exile has implications specifically for Israel, but also universally for the nations.

THE ROLE OF THE DAVIDIC KING IN ENDING THE EXILE

The angelic message of Daniel 9 refers to an "anointed one" (*māšîaḥ*) / "leader" or "ruler" (*nāgîd*). Various proposals have been made for the identification of this person or persons. The grammar of the apposition in v. 25 requires that both terms refer to one and the same person. And without any grammatical or literary signals to indicate otherwise, the simplest solution is that the same two terms in v. 26 also refer to one and the same person—the same individual referred to in v. 25. Although many scholars identify the "anointed one" as the High Priest Onias III whose murder in 171 B.C. is reported in 2 Macc 4:33-38, Daniel I. Block provides four cogent reasons to reject this

identification: [10] (1) It depends upon dating the composition of the book of Daniel to the second century B.C., a position that is not tenable according to the chronological, linguistic, and literary data.[11] (2) The arrival of this person is associated with the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem, so that one naturally thinks of a Davidic figure. (3) Although *nāgîd*, "leader, ruler," is used elsewhere of cultic officials, *nāgîd* and *māšîaḥ* are conjoined elsewhere only with reference to an anointed king (1 Sam 9:16; 10:1; 1 Chron 29:22). (4) While the Old Testament speaks of a coming king who will function as a priest, it never speaks of a coming priest in royal terms. In this way the Old Testament consistently distinguishes the Aaronic / Zadokite priesthood from Davidic royalty. As John Oswalt notes, the reference in Daniel 9 is the only unambiguous reference to *māšîaḥ* (the Messiah) as the eschatological Anointed One, in the entire Old Testament.[12]

There is a good reason why the future king is referred to in vv. 25 and 26 by the term *nāgîd*, "ruler," rather than by the term *melek*, the standard word in Hebrew for king. This is revealed by Donald F. Murray, who has provided the most recent and thorough treatment of *nāgîd*, particularly in the context of 2 Sam 5:17-7:29. His conclusion is worth citing:

> In our texts the *melek* is one who sees his power from Yahweh as susceptible to his own arbitrary manipulation, who obtrudes himself inappropriately and disproportionately between Yahweh and Israel, and who treats Israel as little more than the subjects of his monarchic power. The *nāgîd*, on the other hand, is positively portrayed as one who sees his power as a sovereign and inviolable devolvement from Yahweh, who acts strictly under the orders of Yahweh for the benefit of Yahweh's people, and holds himself as no more than the willing subject of the divine monarch.[13]

In short, *nāgîd* communicates kingship according to God's plan and standards whereas *melek* communicates kingship according to the Canaanite model of absolute despotism and self-aggrandisement. That is why the term *nāgîd* dominates in the passage on the Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7) and is also the term used here.

The Davidic king ruling in Jerusalem was removed from the throne by the exile in 586 B.C. Yet according to the eternal and irrevocable promises of Yahweh to David, the prophets spoke of a coming king from David's line. The message and vision given to Daniel associates the king's return with the end of exile and the climactic purposes for Israel and Jerusalem, but with great personal tragedy: he will be cut off, *but not for himself*. The coming king will give his life to deliver his people.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

The Hebrew word translated "weeks" is *šāvûa'*. It may refer to a period of seven days, like the English word for week (Gen 29:27, 28 [cf. Judges 14:12, Tob 11:19]; Deut 16:9 (x 2); Lev 12:5; Jer 5:24; Dan 10:2, 3; Ezek 45:21[14]). Still referring to a period of seven days, it occurs in the phrase "Feast of Weeks" (Exod 34:22; Deut 16:10, 16; 2 Chron 8:13; and, without the head-word "feast," Num 28:26). It also occurs in Dan 9:24, 25 (x 2), 26, 27 (x 2), apparently referring to a period of seven, but not seven days. This is clear from the occurrences in Dan 10:2, 3 where we find the phrase "week of days" because the author wants to return to the literal and normal use of the word "week." Daniel 10:2 and 3 are the only instances of the phrase "week of days" in the OT, a phrase required by the context in proximity to chapter 9 where the word has a different sense.

The number seventy is clearly connected by the context (9:2) to Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the end of exile (Jer 25:1-15 and 29:1-23). Chronicles explains the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years as lasting "until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths" (2 Chron 36:20-22).

Chronicles explicitly connects the seventy years of exile to the principle of sabbatical years, although this is not spelled out by Jeremiah. The explanation given in Chronicles is based squarely on Lev 26:34-35: "Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your sabbaths when you were dwelling in it" (cf. Lev 26:40-45).

Paul Williamson is therefore right on target when he correlates the "seventy sevens" with sabbatical years and the Jubilee:

> The "seventy sevens" chronography is probably best understood against the background of Jewish sabbatical years, and the Jubilee year in particular (cf. Lev. 24:8, 25:1-4; 26:43; cf. 2 Chr. 36:21). Thus understood, the seventy sevens constitutes ten jubilee years, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the ultimate Jubilee (cf. Isa. 61:2). Given the Jeremianic context that prompted this revelation (Dan. 9:2; cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), some explicit association between this climactic Jubilee and the anticipated new covenant is not unexpected.[15]

Thus the "sevens" or "weeks" are periods or units of seven years, i.e., sabbaticals. Understood this way, the "seventy sevens" constitutes ten jubilees, the last (the seventieth seven) signifying the Ultimate Jubilee. In Luke 4 when Jesus reads from the Scroll of Isaiah, he sees the Ultimate Jubilee in 61:2 as fulfilled in his own life and ministry.

Retributive justice, the foundation of divine righteousness in the Mosaic Covenant, requires a symmetry to the experience and history of the nation of Israel. The period of time from the beginning of the Israelite Kingdom to the fall of Jerusalem is essentially seventy sabbaticals. Then come seventy years of exile, a period when the land enjoyed its sabbath rests. This is followed by seventy sabbaticals before the exile is finally over:[16]

Seventy Sabbaticals	Seventy Years of Exile	Seventy Sabbaticals
= Causes of Exile	= Sabbaths for the Land	= Solution to Exile

Thus the time required to resolve the problem of Israel's sin is precisely the same time it took to create the problem in the first place.

The Division of the Weeks and the Starting Point

A chronology of seventy sabbaticals is required that answers appropriately to the divisions of the seventy "weeks" specified in the text and also allows the details concerning the events and persons predicted for these times to be easily identified. According to verses 25-27, the period of seventy sabbaticals is divided into three parts: seven sabbaticals in which the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt (v. 25), sixty-two sabbaticals in which nothing noteworthy or remarkable happens in relation to the purposes specified in this vision, and the climactic seventieth sabbatical when a covenant is upheld, offerings and sacrifices are ended, somehow in connection with extreme sacrilege to the temple and someone who causes desolation (v. 27). As D. I. Block similarly notes,

> despite the textual problems raised by these verses, the focus of attention in this seventieth week of years is on an Anointed One, who is "cut off, but not for himself." Ironically, within the very week that the root problem of Israel's exile (sin) is solved through the death of the Messiah, the city of Jerusalem is destroyed.[17]

In the history of interpretation, four possible dates for the beginning of the period of seventy weeks have been proposed: [18]

> (1) 586 BC = God's Word at the Fall of Jerusalem (Jer 25:11-12, 29:10)
> (2) 537 BC = Cyrus's Word allowing the Return from Exile (2 Chron 36:23, Ezra 1:1-4)
> (3) 457 BC = Artaxerxes's Commission to Ezra (Ezra 7:11-26)[19]
> (4) 444 BC = Artaxerxes's Commission to Nehemiah (Neh 2:1-6)[20]

The first proposal is the least likely. The "word" coming from Jeremiah is actually dated by 25:1 to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, i.e. 605 B.C., and predicts the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Beginning the seventy sabbaticals at either date does not yield a satisfactory solution for the three periods of time or the events occurring in them and the identity of the Anointed One.

Many scholars opt for the fourth proposal because Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah specifically entails building the walls and this accounts for the word to rebuild Jerusalem. Yet this proposal faces many problems. It requires that the Messiah be cut off *in* the sixty-ninth sabbatical and leaves the seventieth sabbatical in v. 27 unexplained. This option also simply does not work if we are counting sabbaticals and years in a literal sense. To make this proposal work, H. Hoehner, one of its most able proponents, uses so-called "prophetic years" of 360 days, but with scant support for such a calendrical definition or evidence that this is typical in prophetic predictions.[21] Scholars who argue that the death of the Messiah occurs in the sixty-ninth sabbatical explain that "*after* sixty-nine weeks" really means "*in* the sixty-ninth week" in ordinary language or reckoning of the time.[22] Such an argument constitutes special pleading.

According to Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chron 36:23, the "word" of Cyrus in 537 is focused on building a house for the Lord at Jerusalem. This word matches perfectly the prophecies of Isa 44:28 and 45:13 which predict Cyrus giving leadership to rebuild the city and temple of Jerusalem. Cyrus's divinely appointed purpose (Ezra 1:2) led him to allow the people to return to accomplish this task (Ezra 1:3). After the altar was rebuilt and foundations were laid for the new temple, opposition brought the work to a halt. A decree of Darius allowed it to be finished (Ezra 6) spurred on by the ministries of Haggai and Zechariah. In Ezra 7, the "word" of Artaxerxes (c. 457) is focused on support for the new temple. Yet Ezra 6:14 speaks of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes as though they issued a single decree. Darius's decree (Ezra 6) was based upon the fact that Cyrus had *already* issued the decree to permit the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem (see Ezra 5:17-6:7). Darius's decree was therefore a renewal (6:6-7) and an expansion (6:8-12) of Cyrus's original decree (6:3-5). Ezra 6:14 shows that Artaxerxes's decree to Ezra (in Ezra 7) is also an extension of Cyrus's original decree. So the decree which Cyrus drafted in 537 to restore the temple is not completed until 457 B.C. under Artaxerxes, which is therefore the date of the "word to rebuild Jerusalem" starting with its sanctuary. Artaxerxes's commission to Nehemiah in 444 B.C. is not connected to Cyrus's decree in Ezra 6:14 because the decree of 6:14 has to do specifically with rebuilding the *temple*, not the walls of Jerusalem. No doubt the rebuilding of the city was not complete until Nehemiah restored the walls, but rebuilding the city and rebuilding the temple were one and the same thing to the Jewish people (cf. Isa 44:28).[23]

457 B.C., then, is the correct date to begin marking off the seventy sabbaticals because this

"word" to rebuild the city is associated with the return of Ezra and the re-establishing of the judiciary, central to the concept of a city (Ezra 7:25, 26). Ezra is a central figure in the return. (As already noted, the commission of Artaxerxes to Ezra connects with the earlier contributions of Cyrus and Darius.) In addition, the book of Nehemiah (not separate from Ezra in the Hebrew Canon) is about rebuilding and restoring the city of God. While chapters 1-6 focus on restoring the city in physical terms, chapters 7-13 focus on restoring the city as a group of people devoted to the service and worship of their God. So rebuilding the city for Nehemiah is not merely about bricks and mortar. Daniel had computed the first year of Cyrus (537) as the end of the Exile according to 9:1-2. Ezra 1:1-4 acknowledges Cyrus as the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy. But it seems that the point of the vision of Seventy Weeks is to mark a beginning *after* the word of Cyrus in 537. Thus, Ezra's return commissioned by Artaxerxes is the next possible point. More importantly, the command in 457 is actually at the beginning of a sabbatical cycle.[24] When one begins the computation from this point, the three periods of the Seventy Weeks and the events and personae associated with them fit both precisely and simply. First, the literary structure of the text must be observed; then the explanation of the chronology and events is straightforward.

THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF VERSES 25-27

Verses 25-27 are not to be read in a linear manner according to the logic of prose in the western world based upon a Greek and Roman heritage. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and start anew, taking up the same theme again from another point of view. This approach is kaleidoscopic and recursive. It is like hearing music from stereo system speakers sequentially instead of simultaneously. First comes the music of the right speaker; then comes the music of the left speaker. Then the person hearing (i.e., reading) puts the two together into a three-dimensional stereo whole.

First, v. 25 introduces the first period of seven weeks and the gap of sixty-two weeks to the climactic seventieth week. This last week is described twice in verses 26 and 27. Verses 26a and 27a describe the work of the Messiah in dying vicariously to uphold a covenant with many and deal decisively with sin, thus ending the sacrificial system. Verses 26b and 27b show that ironically, supreme sacrilege against the temple at this time will result in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Thus verses 26-27 have an A-B-A′-B′ structure.[25] This fits the normal patterns in Hebrew literature to deal with a topic recursively. The literary structure can be diagrammed as follows:

A 26a the beneficial work of the Messiah
B 26b ruin / spoliation of the city by his people and its desolation by war
A′ 27a the beneficial work of the Messiah
B′ 27b abominations resulting in destruction of the city by one causing desolation

Observing this literary structure is crucial because one can explain difficulties in one section using the parallel section. For example, "the people of the coming leader" in v. 26b bring ruin to the reconstructed Jerusalem. Verse 27b provides further details showing that the "one causing desolation" does so in association with abominations. Below we will see how this makes perfect sense of the role played by both Jewish and Roman people in the fall of the temple. The literary structure also clarifies how the terms *māšîaḥ* and *nāgîd* in 25 and 26 refer to one and the same individual and moreover makes perfect sense of the "strengthening of a covenant" in v. 27a.

THE FULFILMENT OF THE PROPHECY

Verse 25 speaks of the issuing of a word to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah, the

Ruler, as seven and sixty-two sevens. During the seven weeks, the city is rebuilt fully with plaza and town-moat. The sentence "It will be rebuilt with plaza and trench and in distressing times" has no sentence-connector (asyndeton) and according to discourse grammar markers indicates a comment on the previous statement that specifies the time. This clause adds the comment that the city will be fully restored and the restoration will occur during distressing times. The seven sabbaticals cover the period roughly 457-407 B.C. and include the efforts of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. If one employs either the command of Cyrus in 537 or Artaxerxes in 444, the period of approximately fifty years does not correspond well to our records of the history of Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Then for sixty-two sevens, there is nothing significant to record as far as God's plan is concerned. There is a *good* reason, then, for dividing the sixty-nine weeks into seven and sixty-two weeks: in the sixty-nine weeks to the time of the Messiah, active reconstruction of the city and temple occupies only the first seven weeks.

Sixty-nine sabbaticals or weeks of years bring the time to 27 A.D. when the "word to restore Jerusalem" is understood to refer to the decree of Artaxerxes in 457 B.C. The calculation of sabbatical years in Israel for antiquity is based upon evidence from Maccabees, Josephus, inscriptions, the Talmud, and Maimonides. The standard treatment derives from Benedict Zuckermann in 1866.[26] More recently Ben Zion Wacholder has analysed the data differently and provided a table of sabbatical years from 519 B.C. to 441 A.D.[27] Here I follow the standard view of Zuckermann according to the critique of Ben Zion Wacholder by Bob Pickle, although the difference between the chronologies reconstructed by these two scholars is only one year. [28] Thus, the seventieth sabbatical is from 27-34 A.D. following Zuckermann or 28-35 A.D. following Ben Zion Wacholder.

Half way through this time, i.e., 31 A.D., the Messiah is cut off, but not for himself. Astonishingly he dies, but his death is vicarious. The phrase ואין לו, commonly rendered "and he will have nothing" is better translated "but not for himself." The quasi-verbal אין in Late Biblical Hebrew can function precisely as the Standard Biblical Hebrew negative לא.[29] The point in the vision is that the coming king dies vicariously for his people.

Serious students of scripture have not always agreed on the date of the crucifixion. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch have an excellent response for this issue:

> In any case, if the traditional scheme for the location of the sabbatical cycles is followed instead of Wacholder's, the 69th cycle shifts by only one year, to AD 27–34, which still fits equally well. Likewise an error by a year or two on either end—for Artaxerxes's 20th year or the date of the crucifixion—would not change the result. The prediction fits Jesus even allowing for the largest possible uncertainties in chronology.[30]

Thus, by employing sabbaticals, the prophecy remains an astounding prediction finding fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth and yet allows for differences as well in calculating the crucifixion. The crucifixion is almost always dated between A.D. 27 and 34.

If we put verses 26a and 27a together, the vicarious death of the coming king brings about a confirming / strengthening / upholding of a covenant with "the many," almost certainly "the many" referred to in Isa 53:10-12.[31] Without doubt, Isaiah 53, describing a future Davidic Servant of the Lord, who is also both priest and sacrifice, laying down his life for the many, is the background to the brief comment in Daniel's vision. His death brings an end to the sacrificial system because it is a final solution to the problem of sin. The expression "he will strengthen a covenant" occurs only here in the entire Old Testament. Careful analysis of all constructions involving the term "covenant"

shows that the closest expression to "*higbîr berît*" in Dan 9:27 is "*hêqîm berît*", i.e., to confirm or uphold a covenant, an expression which refers to a covenant partner fulfilling the obligation or promise previously enshrined in a covenant so that the other partner experiences in historical reality the fulfilling of this promise, i.e., one comes good on one's promise.[32] In Genesis 15 God's promises to Abraham of land and seed are formalized in a covenant. The expression used is *kārat berît* (15:18). Later in Genesis 17 God upholds his promise and says Sarah will have a baby within a year. The expression consistently used there is *heqîm berît* (17:7, 19, 21).

In Dan 9:27a the statement "he will uphold a covenant with the many" refers to the work of the Anointed King in effecting the new covenant described by the prophets at different times and in a variety of ways. It is important to note that there are different perspectives in the prophets on the new covenant. Their contributions are *not monolithic*, but view the gem of God's future covenant renewal from many different facets. Usually the expression is *kārat berît*—to cut a covenant—to indicate a covenant that did not exist previously and is being initiated now between partners for the first time. Excellent examples are Isa 55:3, Jer 31:31, and Ezek 34:25 and 37:26. Yet Ezek 16:60, 62 employs *heqîm berît* for the new covenant. We should not assume here, against the linguistic use in general, that the expression is now equivalent to *kārat berît*, but rather looks at the making of the new covenant from a different point of view. Verse 60 speaks of Israel breaking the covenant of Sinai and of God subsequently establishing an everlasting covenant with them. Ezekiel's language indicates that there is a link between the Sinai covenant and the new. He employs the expression "confirm or uphold a covenant" to show that the new covenant establishes effectively what God intended in the Sinai covenant. The point is supported by the fact that the new covenant is called here an everlasting covenant whereas the term "everlasting" is never used of the Sinai covenant.[33] Something similar is probably the thrust of Dan 9:27a. The expression "uphold a covenant" is chosen and used here because the context entails the return from exile and the "renewing" of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

Notwithstanding the above explanation, the expression *higbîr berît* in Dan 9:27, unique in the Old Testament, is difficult. An alternative explanation proposed by Jason Parry may be more satisfactory. He notes that the construction *higbîr berît* in 9:27 is similar to the Aramaic expression *tqp* (Pa"el = "strengthen") plus *'ĕsār* (injunction or prohibition), i.e., "to put in force an injunction." This Aramaic expression occurs in Dan 6:7 (6:8 Heb) when the enemies of Daniel want the king to create a new law that they wish to use to trap Daniel and is parallel to the expression "enact a statute." A cognate adjective of *tqp* in Imperial Aramaic and Nabataean has the meaning "lawful" or "legitimate." Thus, though the basic meaning of *tqp* in the Pa"el is "strengthen," a meaning like "make lawful" is appropriate, especially when the object is "injunction." The Hebrew expression *higbîr berît* in 9:27 could be viewed, therefore, as a calque of the Aramaic expression in Dan 6:7 and as a result, would be equivalent in meaning to *kārat berît*, i.e., initiating a covenant rather than upholding an existing commitment or promise. Whichever explanation of *higbîr berît* is adopted, there is no doubt that the covenant of 9:27 is the new covenant which was effected by the sacrificial death of the Messiah in order to restore the broken covenantal relationship between God and his people

Strangely, at the same time that the Messiah comes and effects a final solution for sin, v. 26b states that the people of the coming ruler will destroy the city and the sanctuary. There is no grammatical issue in identifying object and subject in this sentence. The meaning of the sentence is also straightforward. The coming ruler must be the Messiah of v. 25 according to the context and normal rules of literature. Therefore "the people of the coming ruler" are the Jewish peo-

ple.[34] The statement is telling us that it is the Jewish people who will ruin / spoil the restored city and temple at the arrival of their coming King. Historical records confirm that this is precisely right. We have firsthand accounts of the Fall of Jerusalem from the first century in *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus. Anyone who has read and studied these texts will understand the author's point. Although the Roman army actually put the torch to Jerusalem, the destruction of the city was blamed squarely on the Jewish people themselves. Josephus wrote his work to try to exonerate the *masses* by blaming the *few*, i.e., the Zealots. Thus, he wanted people to believe that the fall of Jerusalem was not the fault of the people as a whole, but rather due to a few extreme rebels who brought down the wrath of Rome upon them. So Josephus is adequate historical proof that the destruction of Jerusalem was entirely the fault of the Jewish people, just as Dan 9:26b predicts. Since few interpreters find it possible to accept the straightforward statement of the text, ingenious alternative proposals are multiplied. These cannot be detailed here except to say that many of them assume rather unnaturally that the "ruler" in v. 26 is different from the one in v. 25, when v. 25 clearly connects the "ruler" with the "anointed one" and no contextual clues exist that this is a different person.

Moreover, the literary structure of verses 26-27 helps to explain the cryptic phrase in v. 26b, since v. 27b returns to the topic of the ruin of the restored Jerusalem and elaborates, providing further details and information. The "people of the coming ruler" who ruin the city and sanctuary (26b) are responsible for the "abominations" (27b), and the "one causing desolation" (27b) is responsible for the "war" in 26b since there it is the war which brings about "desolations," and "desolations" in Daniel's prayer (9:17-18) are the result of a foreign nation brought against Israel for breaking the covenant (e.g., Lev 26:31-35). The "abominations" refer to the sacrilege which resulted from the struggle between John, Simon, and Eleazar ("people of the coming ruler") for control of Jerusalem, and the "war" to refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and Temple by Vespasian / Titus (the "one causing desolation"). The "one causing desolation" (Titus) comes "on the wing of," i.e., in connection with, those causing "abominations" (Jews), the one (i.e., people) being desolated. Jesus' mention of the "abomination of desolation" in the Olivet Discourse supports this understanding since he is probably speaking of the sacrilege of John of Gischala as the "abomination" which forewarns of the impending "desolation" of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans.[35]

Verse 27b speaks of the "one causing desolation on the wing of abominations." The term "wing" can mean "edge" or "extremity." The phrase refers to one causing desolation in association with extreme abominations. A similar expression, but not exactly the same, is used to predict the act of Antiochus Epiphanes in Dan 11:31 and 12:11 in desecrating the temple. Here in 9:27b, however, the agent of the abominations is the Jewish people, not a foreign ruler. The Gospels present Jesus as both genuine Messiah and true Temple. The paralytic lowered through the roof by four friends, for example, was not only healed, but forgiven his sins.[36] This angered the leaders because Jesus was claiming to do something that could only happen at the Temple; thus he was claiming to be the true Temple (John 2:18-22). So when the Jewish people rejected Jesus as Anointed One / Messiah and the High Priest blasphemed Jesus, the true Temple, the Herodian temple supported by the Jewish people had to fall and the city had to be destroyed.

According to v. 26b this destruction is something that would happen *after* the sixty-ninth sabbatical. In v. 27b, there is nothing stated that actually requires the desolation of Jerusalem to happen precisely *in* the seventieth week, although this event is associated with the events happening at that time. Thus, the fall of Jerusalem some time later does fit suitably because it is the final working

out of the Jewish response to Jesus in the seventieth week. This situation is similar to God telling Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit, he would die. In one sense this did happen on the very day, but took time to be worked out. Just so, when the Jewish people rejected the Messiah and the High Priest blasphemed Jesus, the true Temple, the Herodian temple had to fall and the city had to be destroyed. The coming destruction, symbolized by the curtain protecting the Holy of Holies torn in two at the crucifixion, finally came to pass in A.D. 70, i.e., within the time of that generation which committed this sacrilege.

The notion of a person who is both King and true Temple is hinted at by the last of the six purposes in 9:24: "to anoint the Holy of Holies." The verb "to anoint" is normally used of consecrating persons for offices, e.g., priest (Lev 4:3), prophet (Ps 105:15), and most often king (1 Sam 2:35). It can also be used to refer to the consecration of the Mosaic Tabernacle and its holy objects (Ex 29:36; 30:26; 40:9, 10, 11; Lev 8:10, 11). Only in Dan 9:24 do we have the "Holy of Holies" being anointed. This phrase could be construed as "the most holy place" or "the most holy person." The latter meaning would be most unusual. Thus we have a verb that is normally used of a person and an object normally used of the temple. It may suggest that both future king and temple are one and the same. It finds fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth as both Messiah and true Temple.

Some interpreters have opted for a proposal that views *nāgîd* in v. 26b as referring to an evil prince,[37] perhaps even the Antichrist, and different from v. 25 where the *nāgîd* refers to the Messiah. This is bolstered by interpreting v. 27a as referring to this evil ruler making a false covenant which disrupts sacrifice in a way similar to the abomination causing desolation in 8:12-14, 11:31, and 12:11. A supporting connection may even be drawn between the fact that several texts in Daniel appear to speak of a three and one-half year period (7:25, 12:7, 11, 12; cf. 8:14, 26). All of these texts are fraught with interpretive problems and associated with them is the identification of the four kingdoms portrayed symbolically in the dream of chapter 2 and the vision of chapter 7 followed by the expansions on these themes in chapters 8 and 10-12.

Space does not permit addressing the difficult exegetical issues pertaining to the connections just outlined. Some good reasons, however, can be provided to show in a general way that these connections are both superficial and leading to faulty interpretation. First, as already pointed out, the context strongly suggests that *nāgîd* in vv. 25 and 26 refers to the same individual. Second, the literary structure of the text does not suggest connecting v. 27a to v. 26b. Third, the larger literary structure is against this view. Chapter 7 entails a vision of four successive kingdoms that is followed by the Kingdom of God. In the fourth kingdom there is a ruler who is boastful against God (7:8) and oppresses the saints (7:25). In the "blowup maps" of chapters 8 and 10-12 that expand upon the basic vision of chapter 7 there is a ruler who sets himself against the Prince of the Host (8:12-14). This ruler is clearly in the Greek kingdom according to 8:21. The last vision of chapters 10-12 expand further upon 8:12-14 and speak of the abomination causing desolation (11:31 and 12:11), ultimately fulfilled in Antiochus Epiphanes, a ruler within the Greek kingdom. Since I would identify the fourth kingdom as Roman and the third as Greek, it is problematic to relate 7:8, which belongs to the fourth empire, to 11:31 and 12:11 which belong to the third.[38] That consideration aside, we can see from the literary structure of the book that the vision of the Seventy Weeks is by virtue of its content not directly related at all to the three visions portraying the sequence of foreign overlords in 7, 8, and 10-12.[39] The fact, then, that the vision in chapter 9 is not related to the other three is a powerful reason against connecting 9:26b and 9:27a with 8:12-14, 11:31, and 12:11. The literary structure of the book prevents the reader from connecting them in spite of some superficial similarities.

THE PLACE OF DANIEL 9 WITHIN CHAPTERS 7-12

The question may be raised, quite legitimately: what *is* the relationship of the vision of Seventy Weeks to the other visions? How does it fit into the larger literary structure of the book as a whole? This question urgently needs to be addressed.

As already noted, the visions in chapters 7, 8, and 10-12 focus on a series of four gentile / human kingdoms succeeded finally by the Kingdom of God. I attempted to show in an earlier examination of the issue of the "son of man" in Daniel 7 that the "son of man" represents at the same time a divine figure, a human king, and the constituent people of his kingdom: in the end, the saints of the Most High receive the Kingdom of God (7:18, 22, 27).[40] These three visions, then, focus on the question: what is happening to God's Kingdom now that Israel is in exile, without an earthly king, and subject to foreign powers? Chapter 9, nicely sandwiched between the second and third of the three visions, deals with a different but closely related issue: how long will Israel be in exile? How long will the kingdom of God suffer at the hands of the foreign nations? The final or real return from exile, equivalent to the forgiveness of sins, is *prerequisite* to the saints receiving a kingdom, and so the vision of the Seventy Weeks reveals how and when the ultimate jubilee is ushered in.

CONCLUSION

The vision of Daniel's Seventy Weeks, then, can be explained simply. It refers to a period of seventy sabbaticals or periods of seven years required to bring in the ultimate jubilee: release from sin, the establishment of everlasting righteousness and consecration of the temple. During the first seven sabbaticals the city of Jerusalem is restored. Then for sixty-two sabbaticals there is nothing to report. In the climactic seventieth week, Israel's King arrives and dies vicariously for his people. Strangely, desecration of the temple similar to that by Antiochus Epiphanes in the Greek Empire is perpetrated by the Jewish people themselves resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem. These events are fufilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the coming king. His crucifixion is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices and the basis of the New Covenant with the many. His death is "not for himself," but rather vicarious. The rejection of Jesus as Messiah and desecration of him as the true Temple at his trial by the High Priest result in judgment upon the Herodian Temple carried out eventually in A.D. 70. The notion of a gap between the sixty-ninth and seventieth week is contrary to a vision of chronological sequence. The prophecy is remarkable both for its precision and imprecision as it fits the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth.

ENDNOTES

[1]I am grateful to the following for constructive criticism and proofing of my work: Barbara Gentry, Stephen Kempf, and especially Jason T. Parry.

[2]The "Overview of Daniel" and "Grasping the Literary Structure" are adapted and summarized from Peter J. Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?" in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, (Toronto: Joshua Press, 2003), 59-75.

[3]The first is adapted from course notes produced for "Introduction to the Old Testament: Part II, 2003" at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary by Daniel I. Block. The second is adapted from David W. Gooding, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and its Implications," *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 43-79.

[4]Instead of D. I. Block's four-part chiastic structure in chapters 8:1-12:4, the analysis of A. Kuen offers an A –B –A' structure with A = chapter 8, B = chapter 9 and A' = chapters 10-12. Thus A and A' are the "Expansion Visions" on the Basic Vision of chapter 7 with the different "Vision of the Seventy Weeks" sandwiched in between. This is more persuasive and may well give chapter 9 greater prominence. See Alfred Kuen, *Soixante-six en un: Introduction aux 66 livres de la Bible* (St-Légier: Editions Emmaüs, 2005), 121. I am indebted to Stephen Kempf for drawing my

attention to this.

[5]To be more specific, 11:1-2 provides new details on the second kingdom and 12:1-3 provides new details on the kingdom of God. Thus the vision of 10-12 technically spans all of the still-future kingdoms. Nonetheless, the focus is largely on the Greek Kingdom (11:3-35) with some space devoted to the Roman Kingdom (11:36-45).

[6]Stephen G. Dempster, "Linguistic Features of Hebrew Narrative: A Discourse Analysis of Narrative from the Classical Period" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1985). As an example, see Gen 1:27 where the second and third clauses are asyndetic because they are epexegetical to the first.

[7]Roger T. Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumrân* 40 (1981): 521-42.

[8]Adapted from J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 289.

[9]Cf. Zech 1:12 where the seventy years under Babylonian rule is described as a time of wrath.

[10]Adapted in part and cited in part from D. I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic to a New Testament Church," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (2006): 17-52.

[11]I have argued this in Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7."

[12]J. Oswalt, "משׁח," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; 5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2.1126.

[13]Donald F. Murray, *Divine Prerogative and Royal Pretension: Pragmatics, Poetics and Polemics in a Narrative Sequence about David (2 Samuel 5.17-7.29)* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 264; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 299.

[14]There is a problem in the text at Ezek 45:21.

[15]Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 174-75.

[16]D. I. Block, "Preaching Old Testament Apocalyptic to a New Testament Church," 49.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence that Counts for the Biblical World View," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no. 1 (2003): 79-110, esp. 104.

[19]Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 458 B.C. The Fall of 457 B.C. is adopted here based upon the chronological work of Bob Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors Regarding Daniel 9's First 69 Weeks" [cited 30 Nov 2009]. Online: http://www.pickle-publishing.com/papers/sir-robert-anderson.htm. Newman, Bloom, and Gauch also erroneously provide Ezra 4:11-12 and 23 as references to Artaxerxes's commission to Ezra.

[20]Newman, Bloom, and Gauch employ the conventional date of 445 B.C. Again, the date adopted here is based on the work of Pickle, "An Examination of Anderson's Chronological Errors."

[21]Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

[22]Newman, Bloom, and Gauch, "Public Theology and Prophecy Data," 104.

[23]I acknowledge help from Jason Parry for the argument at this point.

[24]For the calculation of sabbatical years, I follow Benedict Zuckermann rather than Ben Zion Wacholder (see below).

[25]Williamson acknowledges this A-B-A′-B′ structure although he interprets "leader" or "prince" differently; see Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 175.

[26]Benedict Zuckermann, *Über Sabbathjahrcyclus und Jubelperiode* (Breslau: W. G. Korn, 1866).

[27]Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44 (1973): 153-96.

[28]For the calculation of sabbatical years I follow Benedict Zuckermann rather than Ben Zion Wacholder. See Bob Pickle, "Daniel 9's Seventy Weeks and the Sabbatical Cycle: When Were the Sabbatical

Years" [cited 9 Nov 2009]. Online: http://www.picklepublishing.com/papers/sabbatical-years.htm. Pickle offers a critical evaluation of all the evidence employed by Wacholder in setting up the table of sabbatical years. In any case the seventieth sabbatical is from A.D. 27-34 (Zuckermann) or 28-35 (Wacholder) and one can find satisfaction in either A.D. 31 or 33 for a crucifixion date.

[29]See Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 15; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 218. On the use of *'ên* functioning as a simple negation, see HALOT, 42. If expressed by the normal negative, possible aural confusion could and would have resulted: *lō' lô*.

[30]Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr., "Public Theology and Prophecy Data: Factual Evidence that Counts for the Biblical World View," 105.

[31]Meredith Kline, "The Covenant of the Seventieth Week," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Oswald T. Allis* (ed. by J. H. Skilton; Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 452-69.

[32]The difference between the expressions *kārat berît* and *hêqîm berît* was already recognized by Cassuto; see U. Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypo*thesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1941 [Hebrew], 1961 [English]); and idem, *La Questione della Genesi* (Pubblicazioni della R. Università degli Studi di Firenze, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofica, 3 Serie, Vol. 1, Florence, 1934). Recently, Paul Williamson and Jeffrey J. Niehaus have reacted to the way in which the difference was described by William J. Dumbrell. This is partly due to the inadequate description of Dumbrell and partly to inadequate lexical study on the part of Niehaus and Williamson. See Peter J. Gentry, "Kingdom Through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 16-42. Exhaustive analysis of *berît* and constructions therewith will be provided in a forthcoming volume *Kingdom through Covenant* by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum (Crossway, 2011).

[33]It is noteworthy that the term "everlasting covenant" occurs sixteen times in the Hebrew Old Testament: two times of the covenant with Noah (Gen 9:16, Isa 24:5), four times of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17:7, 19, Ps 105:10, 1 Chr 16:17), one time of the covenant with David (2 Sam 23:5, cf. 2 Chr 13:5), six times of the new covenant (Isa 55:3, 61:8, Jer 32:40, 50:5, Ezek 16:60, 37:26) and three times of covenant signs (Gen 17:13, Exod 31:16, Lev 24:8). Nowhere is the Sinai covenant called a "permanent" covenant.

[34]In the Bound Phrase עמ משיה הבא, the attributive relative participle הבא modifies משיה. Normally, the attributive participle and noun would agree in definiteness, but exceptions are found. See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O'Connor, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 621-22. The participle "who is to come" does not indicate, then, that another person is intended. The phrase means "the people of the ruler who is to come" and the subject of the verb in the sentence in v. 26b is the leader's own kin; the leader is the Anointed One of v. 26a.

[35]I acknowledge here the helpful analysis of Jason Parry.

[36]For more examples, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 432-37.

[37]Cf. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel* (New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 271, and Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath*, 175.

[38]This does not preclude a typical / anti-typical relationship between the two. A typology between Antiochus Epiphanes and the oppressive ruler of 7:8, 25, however, does not necessarily imply that the *nāgîd* of 9:26b refers to the same individual as described in 7:8, 25.

[39]See paper by Jason Parry, "Desolation of the Temple and Messianic Enthronement in Daniel 11:36-12:3" (Paper presented to Prof. James M. Hamilton in Ph.D. Seminar on Daniel, November, 2009 at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary). He argues that there are allusions in 11:36-45 to 9:26-27 showing that 11:36-45 is the fulfillment of v. 26b and v. 27b, and he shows how 11:36-45 can be understood

as a reference to the events of A.D. 67-70. Nonetheless, chapter 9 does not present a vision showing a sequence of kingdoms followed by the kingdom of God as do the visions in chapters 7, 8, and 10-12.

[40]See Peter J. Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?"

The Hermeneutics of Symbolism: How to Interpret the Symbols of John's Apocalypse

Alan Bandy

INTRODUCTION

Revelation presents the reader with an exhilarating visual experience full of numinous sights and sounds replete with dazzling colors and thunderous roars. There are images of the glorified Christ, the heavenly throne and its surrounding attendants, a standing slain lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, a beautiful sky woman crowned with twelve stars, a ferocious red dragon, a seven-headed tyrannical beast, a great prostitute, and a host of angelic beings that inspire awe, fear, and bewilderment. These highly symbolic images make Revelation a truly unique book in the NT, and it is precisely this reason it is also the most misunderstood book. How one approaches the interpretation of these symbols impacts the entire reading of John's vision. This article posits a methodology for interpreting the symbols in the Book of Revelation. Our task, however, is complicated by the fact that not everyone agrees on the nature of symbolism. The result is at least two competing hermeneutical approaches that pits the literal versus symbolic. Therefore, before we arrive at a methodology for interpreting symbols, we must first demonstrate that a proper hermeneutic for interpreting the Apocalypse must give primacy to the symbolic nature of the text.

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THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF JOHN'S APOCALYPSE

It is undeniable that John's Apocalypse contains a legion of symbolic and metaphorical images. When it comes to interpreting these symbols two divergent hermeneutical approaches surface: (1) *primarily literal and secondarily symbolic*; or (2) *primarily symbolic and secondarily literal.*

SBJT 14.1 (2010): 46-58.

The first approach advocates interpreting Revelation primarily in a literal manner unless it is impossible to do so. This view is encapsulated in the hermeneutical dictum, "[w]hen the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense."[1] While still recognizing the presence of symbols, this view restricts the identification of a symbol to something that is incomprehensible if understood literally (e.g., Jesus does not have a literal sword protruding from his mouth).[2] One popular proponent of this approach, Tim Lahaye, maintains that we must "take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate text, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, clearly indicate otherwise."[3] These interpreters, usually classic dispensationalists,[4] argue that non-literal interpretations result in an unchecked polyvalence based on human imagination.[5] Charles Ryrie warned, "If one does not use the plain, normal, or literal method of interpretation, all objectivity is lost."[6]

Advocates of this approach maintain that they are guarding against subjectivism which is defined as "the view that knowledge comes by one's own experience, or that the supreme good is the realizing of a subjective experience or feeling."[7] E. D. Hirsch reasoned that because the literary text does not have a special ontological status that absolves the reader from the demands universally imposed by all linguistic texts, it is possible to construe both correct and incorrect interpretations.[8] He therefore posited, "If criticism is to be objective in any significant sense, it must be founded on a self-critical construction of textual meaning, which is to say, on objective interpretation."[9] Objective interpretation, as advocated by many classic dispensationalists, implies that one can study a text as a scientist who simply acquires the facts of an object free from any biases. The problem is that one who claims to "suppress his own viewpoints regarding what he thinks the passage should mean, so as to allow the exegetical evidence from the passage under investigation to speak for itself," appears to ignore the indelible impact that worldview, preunderstanding and presupposition has on an interpreter.[10]

Epistemologically, there are three things that critical awareness reveals about the process of knowing: (1) the observer only looks from one point of view; (2) all humans inevitably and naturally interpret the information received from their senses through a grid of expectations, memories, stories and psychological states; and (3) the lenses through which one looks is greatly influenced by the communities to which he belongs.[11] This is not to say that one cannot know something with certainty, but all knowledge is filtered through one's relationship with reality. An interpreter must realize, recognize, and acknowledge that one bring his or her own set of baggage to the text of Scripture.

As a result, we find that the tendency of these interpreters is to look for the meaning of these symbols through the lenses of current events as if they were intended to refer to aspects unique to our modern setting. Literal interpreters typically maintain that the figures of speech (i.e., symbols) result from John's attempt to describe future objects and scenarios from the limited framework of his ancient conceptions and language. They posit that John experienced some sort of spiritual time travel thrusting him into the modern world with its technologically advanced weaponry, banking, and satellite communications. The goal for interpreting these symbols, then, is to identify the one-to-one correspondence between his image and a modern parallel (e.g., the locusts are Apache attack helicopters, the mark of the beast is an implanted micro-chip, and the European Union is the revived Roman empire). The merits of this approach are that it takes the text at face value, avoids reducing it to an extended allegory, and often renders a simple straightforward interpretation. While this principle may sufficiently work in narrative and didactic genres, its application to highly figurative genres like apocalyptic proves to be problematic.

The problem with this approach is rooted in

the principle that the literary genre establishes the rules for how one interprets a specific text. Meaning is intrinsically bound up in genre.[12] The ensuing implication is that genre provides a context, assigned by the author, to communicate meaning. Because the book begins with the word Ἀποκάλυψις (Rev 1:1), many scholars have maintained that it suggests an immediate genre classification especially given the use of apocalyptic language and imagery.[13] The book of Revelation belongs to the apocalyptic/prophetic genre and the apocalyptic genre by definition is highly symbolic. It is not intended to be interpreted in a literal manner.

The identification of the apocalyptic genre pertains to its form, content, and function.[14] The apocalyptic genre exhibits several *formal* features including visionary accounts, otherworldly mediators, and symbolic language. The book of Revelation is a visionary account involving heavenly mediators and resounds with symbolic imagery. The apocalyptic genre also expresses *content* depicting dualism between the temporal and spatial realities as a way to emphasize the heavenly realities in such a way as to devalue earthly circumstances. John presents a vision of a future vindication comprised of eternal rewards in a blissful paradise for faithful Christians in contrast to their present sufferings in the midst of an unbelieving society. Finally, the apocalyptic genre *functions* to encourage piety and faithfulness in the midst of suffering or during times of crisis. The book of Revelation functions in the same way as evidenced by the promised rewards to the overcomers, the repeated exhortations for patient endurance, and the depiction of the reward for faithful Christians in the New Jerusalem. Any hermeneutic that fails to take these genre features into consideration will not interpret the symbolism properly because it assumes a literalism incompatible with the apocalyptic genre.

A rigid literal interpretation or *literalism* may inadvertently obscure the author's intended meaning. Kevin Vanhoozer correctly posed a distinction between the literal sense and literalism.[15] If the interpreter is concerned with authorial intention, the literal sense must not be reduced merely to letters, *langue*, or locutions. He argued that "literalistic reading is less than fully 'literal'—that it is insufficiently and only 'thinly' literal—insofar as it ignores the role of authorial intentions and communicative acts."[16] The literal sense relates to what the author intended for the meaning of the text and this is especially true for figurative and symbolic images. In other words, if Revelation is prophetic or apocalyptic, ascribing literalism to its numbers, proper nouns, and other images may prevent adjudicating John's intended meaning—the literal sense.[17] A more profitable hermeneutical approach is to reverse the interpretive order by placing the symbolic in the foreground while shifting the literal into the background.

Greg Beale makes an outstanding case for the primacy of the symbolic instead of looking for a straight one-to-one literal correspondence.[18] He argues that σημαίνω in Rev 1:1 conveys the idea of "communicate by symbols."[19] The basic glosses for σημαίνω are "to make known," "to report," or "to signify,"[20] but Beale convincingly demonstrates that Rev 1:1 alludes to Dan 2:28–30, 45 (LXX) where the word translated "signified" denotes a symbolic communication by means of a dream or vision. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the colossal statue, then, is clearly visual, but it is a picture with symbolic meaning embedded in it. Although σημαίνω occurs with the general sense of "make known," its normal usage in Scripture typically implies some type of "symbolic communication."[21] In Rev 1:1, the connotation of "communicate by symbols" is not only confirmed by the allusion to Daniel 2, but also by its use in conjunction with δείκνυμι ("show") indicating the visual nature of the revelation. Since the book of Revelation is a symbolic means of communication, the literal approach for interpreting the "plain sense" of the image may actually distort the intended meaning of the text. Beale qualifies his approach by averring, "Of course, some parts

are not symbolic, but the essence of the book is figurative. *Where there is lack of clarity about whether something is symbolic, the scales of judgment should be tilted in the direction of a nonliteral analysis*."[22] Therefore, we would commend this second approach elevating the primacy of the symbolic while wanting to avoid reducing symbols to something totally spiritual by seeking to identify the theological and/or physical realities of the historical and/or future referents.

INTERPRETING SYMBOLS IN REVELATION

The symbols of Revelation, although enigmatic, are intended to reveal meaning rather than conceal it.[23] The interpreter's task is to determine how the symbol functions in its context and what it signifies. To grasp the meaning of a symbol one must recognize both the mental or conceptual idea and the image that it represents.[24] Visionary accounts represent a genre of biblical literature employing the full arsenal of figurative language (similes, metaphors, and symbols) intended to communicate through the medium of symbolic images that burst with meaning. Symbols represent a type of metaphor in which a visual or linguistic sign (i.e., vehicle) of a known object or concept is used to express an unknown object or concept (i.e., tenor).[25] A symbol may be defined as "a relatively stable and repeatable element of perceptual experience, standing for some larger meaning or set of meanings which cannot be given, or not fully given, in perceptual experience itself."[26]

The symbols in the Apocalypse derive from John's visual experience as a means to express *in* words what cannot be necessarily expressed *with* words. As such, Edith M. Humphrey accurately remarks, "Visions are, after all, visions, and to 'decode' them into a proposition or method is to change not only the form but also the meaning."[27] This is quite unlike a historical narrative where the primary theological meaning corresponds rather straightforwardly to the events narrated. The symbolism in Revelation dominates in such a way that the passage expresses directly the theological significance and only indirectly points to the underlying event.[28] John communicates through symbolic imagery so as to recreate the details of his vision, but the symbols point beyond the text to spiritual, theological, and also physical realities.

Determining the denotation of a symbol is muddled by the possibility for polyvalence (i.e., "multiple meanings"). Norman Perrin attempted to resolve the tension between the single and multiple meanings of a symbol by dividing them into the categories of "steno symbols" and "tensive symbols."[29] Some symbols may have a one-to-one correspondence denoting a single referent ("steno symbols") and others may have a multiple range of correspondences that cannot be restricted to a single referent ("tensive symbol"). For an example of a steno symbol, in Rev 1:12–13, John sees Jesus standing among seven lampstands. These seven lampstands are identified as the seven churches of Asia (Rev 1:20). The lampstands may evoke the image of a menorah, but its meaning is restricted by the direct one-to-one correspondence to the churches.[30] One may detect the tensive nature of symbols in Rev 17:9–10 where the seven heads of the beast represent "seven hills" and also "seven kings." In this case, one symbol has two different referents and yet both are equally true for the meaning of the vision. This second example, however, does not completely capture the idea of a tensive symbol, because its denotation is still explicitly stated in the text.

Symbols function in such a way as to ring a bell of recognition, but they may set off a variety of bells beyond what is intended in the text. While some symbols potentially trigger a plethora of connotations, we recommend the judicious use of interpretive steps to arrive at the most probable intended meaning for a given symbol.

(1) Recognize the symbolic imagery associated with the description of people or beings, colors, numbers, institutions, places, and events.

The first step is to recognize the presence of symbolic imagery in the text. This should seem simple enough, but all too often interpreters fail to recognize that almost everything in the book of Revelation resonates with symbolic connotations. Think of the book of Revelation as an impressionistic painting instead of a video recording of the future world. John paints verbal pictures depicting the contents of his vision with symbolic hues and shades. His descriptions are intended to evoke a sense of wonder, awe, and worship as well as communicate prophetic eschatological expectations. This implies that most descriptions of people or beings, colors, numbers, institutions, places, and events carry a metaphorical or symbolic connotation.

This is especially true if a person, number, color, or anything else recurs throughout the book. For example, the number seven not only occurs explicitly, but it also occurs implicitly with the sevenfold repetition of certain words or phrases.[31] The symbolic weight of the number seven as representative of completion or perfection can hardly be overstated. Much of the imagery in the Apocalypse, however, is not symbolism, but merely designed to heighten the coloring of the picture adding vividness and movement to its scenes so a careful reading of the text will avoid making everything a symbol for something else.[32] Therefore, read the book of Revelation with an informed sensitivity to the symbolic nature of its language and imagery.

(2) Look for interpretations of those symbols within the vision. The second step is to look for an interpretation of symbols within the context of the vision narrative. Many times the intended meaning of a symbol is explicitly provided by John or a heavenly being. These are fairly easy to identify because of the formula: *symbol + "they are," "these are," "which are" = identification.* The following chart briefly demonstrates some of the occurrences of the self-interpreted symbols in Revelation:[33]

While these self-interpreted symbols do help to narrow the range of referents for a given symbol, they may also create a whole new set of ques-

Self-Interpreting Symbols

Reference	Symbol	Interpretative signal	Symbol Identified
Rev 1:20	Seven stars	"they are"	the seven angels of the churches
Rev 1:20	Seven lampstands	"they are"	the seven churches
Rev 4:5	Seven lamps before God's Throne	"which are"	the seven spirits of God
Rev 5:6	The seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb	"which are"	The seven spirits of God sent into all the earth
Rev 5:8	Gold bowls full of incense	"which are"	The prayers of the saints
Rev 7:14	The multitude in white robes	"these are"	The saints coming out of the tribulation
Rev 11:4	The two witnesses	"these are"	the two olive trees and two lampstands standing before the Lord
Rev 14:4	The 144,000	"these are"	Those who did not defile themselves and they followed the Lamb
Rev 17:9	The seven heads of the beast	"they are"	They are seven hills (Rome) and also seven kings (emperors?)
Rev 19:8	The pure white robes of fine linen	"for ... is"	The righteous deeds of the saints

tions. They sometimes interpret the symbol with another symbol. The seven lamps represent the seven spirits of God and the seven spirits of God figuratively represents the Holy Spirit. The two witnesses are identified as the two olive trees and two lampstands. The olive trees and lampstands are symbolic representations borrowed from Zechariah 4 to denote the spirit empowered people of God. Although potential confusion exists from the interpretation of a symbol with a symbol, this does helpfully limit the intended meaning of a symbol in the text. Once the referent is identified within the text it typically becomes the fixed meaning for that particular symbol in the book of Revelation.

(3) Determine if the symbol stems from an allusion to the Old Testament. A third step for adjudicating the meaning of a symbol relates to the use of the OT. The entire text of John's vision is saturated with allusions to the OT. John frequently employs the language and imagery of the OT to provide his readers with a framework for understanding the significance of what he saw. This does not imply that John was performing an exegesis of the OT, but rather he borrows the wording, images, themes, and eschatological expectations from the OT. These allusions are pressed into the service of the textual imagery. The interpreter must first determine if the text alludes to an OT subtext. After the allusion is verified, the interpreter should seek to understand the meaning of the OT passage in its context. Next, one needs to compare carefully the similarities and differences between the OT and its allusion in Revelation. Once the texts are compared one may see how John ascribes a particular meaning to the OT language and imagery by using and reworking it into the account of his vision.

For example, in Rev 11:4, John states that these two witnesses are the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the Earth. The positive assertion that "these are" followed by the two plural nouns with the article suggest that John expected his readers to figure out their identity.[34] This verse constitutes a direct allusion to Zech 4:1–14 regarding Joshua (the post-exilic high priest) and Zerubbabel (the post-exilic Davidic descendent).[35] Zechariah sees one lampstand with seven lamps sitting upon it and seven oil channels keeping the lamps supplied with olive oil. An olive tree stood flanked on the left and right side of the lampstand. The trees provide the olives to keep the bowl of the lampstand supplied with oil. The interpreting angel explicated the meaning of the image that it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes the task of rebuilding the temple. Zechariah inquires as to the exact identity of the two olive trees and discovers that they are the two anointed ones (Zerubbabel and Joshua) who serve the Lord of all the earth.

Despite the obvious lexical parallels between Zech 4:1–14 and Rev 11:4, John diverges from Zechariah's vision in that he sees two lampstands instead of one. John also equates the trees *with* the lampstands, but in Zechariah they are kept distinct.[36] This suggests John modified the imagery so as not to equate his vision as simply a rehashing of Zechariah's. The alteration from one lampstand into two comprises the most striking differences between Rev 11:4 and Zech 4:2. The reason for this shift probably rests with the fact that the symbol of lampstands in the Apocalypse is used to denote the churches (Rev 1:20). The symbol of the two witnesses is best understood as referring to the spirit empowering his people with prophetic authority as a testimony against the nations.[37]

(4) Compare the symbol with other apocalyptic writings to determine if it is a common symbol with a relatively standard meaning. John primarily uses OT imagery, but he may occasionally employ imagery belonging to the common stock of apocalyptic writings.[38] Some images have no parallels in the text of the biblical canon.[39] A comparative reading of other apocalyptic texts and Jewish writings may shed light on the book of Revelation. Before launching into these texts, a few caveats are in order.

First, any existing parallels between Revelation and these writings do not necessitate, demand, or imply any form of literary dependence on the part of the author of the book of Revelation.[40] What it does indicate is that the authors of these writings all had access to certain traditions circulating independently of the apocalypses existing in either oral or written form.[41]

Second, these are not exact parallels in that they rarely share identical wording. When examining a potential apocalyptic parallel, it is very important to observe the distinctions and understand how the variations affect the meaning of the symbol when used in the book of Revelation.

Third, the date of a given writing deserves serious consideration because the symbolic parallel may derive from the book of Revelation if the work appeared later. Nevertheless, this may provide a glimpse into the tradition history of the imagery by seeing how other writings employed similar imagery. An awareness of these traditional apocalyptic images helps to clarify some of the symbolic imagery in the book of Revelation.

Richard Bauckham demonstrates the exegetical and hermeneutical value of this comparative analysis by examining four images in the book of Revelation. These are the blood up to the horses bridle (Rev 14:20b); the completion of the number of martyrs (Rev 6:9–11); the giving up of the dead (Rev 20:13); and the silence in heaven (Rev 8:1).[42] The chart below summarizes his findings.

The interpretation of these symbols in Revelation is possible without the additional parallels in apocalyptic literature. These parallels, however, help establish a more nuanced and stable understanding of the imagery employed.

(5) Look for any possible connections between the symbol and the cultural-historical context. The fifth step looks beyond the text in an attempt to set the imagery within the cultural and historical context of first-century Asia Minor. Two thousand years of history separates modern readers of the book of Revelation from the social, cultural, and political environment of the original recipients. Some of the confusion regarding the imagery of the Apocalypse derives directly from the fact that John wrote to people that all shared a common understanding of their surrounding culture within the Roman Empire. Images of beasts, kings, and cities wielding enormous military and political power over its citizens may seem strange and foreign to the modern reader living in North America. To

Apocalyptic Parallels

Symbol in Revelation	Apocalyptic Parallels	The Essential Symbolic Connotation
The blood up to the horse's bridle (Rev 14:20b)	1 Enoch 100:3; 4 Ezra 15:35–36; y. Prayer of Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai 9; Greek Tiburtine Sybil 183–184; Greek Apocalypse of Daniel 4:6–8=6:1–3	Ta'an. 4:8; Lam. R. 2:2:4; b. Gitt. 57a; All these texts use this imagery to express the massive slaughter of a battle.
The completion of the number of martyrs	1 Enoch 47:1–4; 4 Ezra 4:35–37; 2 Baruch 23:4–5a	All these texts involve the idea that a certain number of people are necessary to complete (Rev 6:9–11)an eschatological moment.
The giving up of the dead (Rev 20:13)	1 Enoch 51:1; 4 Ezra 4:41b–43a; 7:32; Pseudo-Philo, LAB 3:10; 33:3; 2 Baruch 21:23; 42:8; 50:2; Apocalypse of Peter 4:3–4, 10–12.	All these texts use this as imagery for the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age. The person returns to life from the place of the dead.
The silence in heaven (Rev 8:1)	Testament of Adam (Syriac I; II; III; Greek, Armenian); and other rabbinic writings.	All these texts suggest that silence occurs in heaven corresponding with the time of prayer in the earthly temple. The relationship between prayer and silence is maintained by Rev 8:3–5.

the readers of John's vision in Asia Minor, however, they would have picked up on the cultural connotations associated with these images.

This would be equivalent if someone writing in the year 2009 refers to "smoke ascending from the twin towers." People would instantly recall the dreadful events of September 11, 2001, and the World Trade Center. Fast forward two thousand years into the future, someone in China reads the reference to "twin towers" and he or she may completely miss the allusion to those events. A historically informed reading of the text will often clear up the haze of certain symbols. The mark of the beast in Rev 13:18 provides an example of how some symbols are wedded to the historical context.

A beast rises to power and persecutes the Christians while imposing an economic form of allegiance by requiring all people to receive a mark on their heads or right hands (Rev 13:16–17). According to Rev 13:17, this mark corresponds to the name of the beast as it is represented by a numerical value (i.e., "the number of his name"). John proceeds to provide the specific number for the beast's name as six hundred sixty six. That one can arrive at some definite identification of this number is evidenced when John avers "here is wisdom" and calls for an intelligent mind to calculate the number.[43] The term "calculate" indicates that one could use some sort of mathematical solution to solve this riddle. Consequently, most interpreters have turned to the practice of gematria for answers.

Gematria refers to the practice of ascribing numerical values to Greek or Hebrew letters. This practice was widely adopted by ordinary citizens, rabbinic exegetes, and apocalypticists. One famous example, cited by Adolf Deissmann, of a graffito in Pompeii reads, "I love the girl whose number is 545."[44] Jewish rabbis also accepted and employed gematria as a hermeneutical principle (rule 29 of the 32 *middot*).[45] The *Epistle of Barnabas* follows this principle when reading Gen 14:14:

> For it says, "And Abraham circumcised from his household eighteen men and three hundred." What then was the knowledge that was given to him? Notice that he first mentions the eighteen, and after a pause the three hundred. The eighteen is I [= ten] and H [= 8]—you have Jesus [IH = the first two initials of Ἰησοῦ]—and because the cross was destined to have grace in the T [Greek symbol for 300] he says "and three hundred."[46]

The Sibylline oracles frequently exhibit the propensity for using gematria in prophetic utterances.[47] One notable example of a Christian redaction using gematria in the Sibylline oracles gives the numerical value of Jesus' name (Ἰησοῦ) as 888:

> Then indeed the son of the great God will come, incarnate, likened to mortal men on earth, bearing four vowels, and the consonants in him are two. I will state explicitly the entire number for you. For eight units, and equal number of tens in addition to these, and eight hundred will reveal the name.[48]

It is not surprising, then, that scholars believe John may have employed this tactic when he gives the number of the beast's name.

If the number of the beast (666) corresponds to the practice of gematria, then the arduous task of assigning the proper name remains. In the earliest extant exegesis of Rev 13:18, Irenaeus assumes John's use of gematria.[49] Irenaeus cautions his readers regarding attempts at naming the beast by his number because if too many names are found adding up to the number, then how will they know which one pertains to the antichrist?[50] He then proceeds to discuss the names *Evanthas* (ΕΥΑΝΘΑΣ), *Lateinos* (ΛΑΤΕΙΝΟΣ), and *Teitan* (TEITAN) as three possibilities having been suggested in his day.[51] He admits that they all add up to 666, but he carefully avoids positing any of those names as candidates for the beast.[52] Remarkably, Irenaeus completely fails to entertain the notion that the number identifies any

past Roman emperors. In his view, the beast is someone who has yet to come to power. Most modern commentators, however, maintain that the beast must have referred to someone identifiable to John's audience so they look to well known historical figures.

Among the multitude of names that have been suggested for the mark of the beast, Nero Caesar seems the most viable of all the candidates. Although this suggestion was virtually unknown prior to 1831, it is widely accepted on reasonable grounds.[53] Transliterating the name Nero Caesar from Greek into Hebrew renders נרון קסר, which when added up equals 666.[54] Incidentally, transliterating the name from Latin into Hebrew would omit the final *nun* (!) and arrive at the variant reading of 616.[55] The name Nero Caesar could feasibly account for both the accepted and variant readings. What is more, John may have intended to identify the beast as Nero by means of isopsephism.[56] Isopsephism is a technique whereby the two different names or phrases refer to the same thing because the numerical value is identical.[57] John intimates the number of the beast (θηρίον) is the number of his name. Interestingly, the numerical value of "beast" (θηρίον) when transliterated into Hebrew (תריון) is 666.[58] Bauckham suggests, "Thus John is saying that the number of the *word* beast (תריון) is also the number of a man (נרון קסר)."

Another reason why Nero might be the name relates to Rev 17:9 and the Nero *redivius* myth. Rev 13:18 and 17:9 are verbally and thematically linked by the appeal for a mind with wisdom.[59] The purpose of this, then, is to link the beast of chapter 13 with the eighth king of 17:11 who is also "the beast which once was, but now is not." This association corresponds to the expectation of a coming king who is either Nero or like Nero in his savagery.[60] Despite the apparent plausibility of this identification it cannot be afforded absolute certainty because the overall symbolic nature of numbers in the Apocalypse.[61] Therefore, Ireneaus' caution regarding attempts at positive identification still remains relevant in any discussion of this mysterious number.

(6) Consult scholarly treatments of the symbol in commentaries and other works. The sixth step is to see how scholars have interpreted the symbols. This step may actually occur in tandem with steps one through five. The complex nature of symbolism requires the mature insights of seasoned experts who have devoted serious time and study to the text of Revelation. Keep in mind, however, that serious time and study does not guarantee that their interpretation is plausible or probable. Avoid depending on any one commentator. Each scholar brings his or her own set of presuppositions to the text that may produce radically differing interpretations. One commentator may say that a symbol has a multiple range of meanings and another may posit a very particular referent with astounding confidence. While scholars may not have all the answers, they have certainly thought through the issues and their years of reading the text will, more often than not, provide a very helpful understanding for the meaning of Revelation's imagery.

(7) Remain humble in your conclusions. Interpreting the book of Revelation requires a massive amount of humility and an openness to return to the text again and again. Once you have completely studied the text, avoid thinking that you have now unlocked all the mysteries of the Apocalypse. Continue to research. Repeat steps one through six on a regular basis. This will prevent us from falling into the temptation of thinking that we alone have the right interpretation of this mysterious and complex book. No one except Jesus has the final answer on the meaning of the book of Revelation. While this may seem a bit discouraging, it is actually intended to encourage a life-time of Bible study.

CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation has rightly earned a reputation for posing a legion of varying interpretations. These interpretations typically reflect a person's presuppositions, theological positions,

agendas, and imagination. To be sure, this is part and parcel of biblical interpretation as a whole, but we must try to adjudicate the validity of these interpretations. In this article, I have argued that, due to its genre, interpreters of the book of Revelation should recognize the primacy of symbolism. This will avoid the excessive tendency among some interpreters to read newspaper eschatology into the Apocalypse. I also have provided seven steps that maximizes one's ability to adjudicate the meaning of the symbolic imagery. I do not suppose that the methodology proposed in this article will resolve all the difficulties or answer all questions. The method advocated does, however, offer a hermeneutically informed framework for approaching the symbols in John's Apocalypse.

ENDNOTES

[1]David L. Cooper, "An Exposition of the Book of Revelation: The Great Parenthesis," *Biblical Research Monthly* (1954): 84.

[2]John F. Walvoord, "The Theological Context of Premillennialism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1993): 390; Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 146. Zuck offers six guidelines for interpreting figurative language: (1) always take a passage in the literal sense unless there is good reason to do so otherwise; (2) the figurative sense is the intended if the literal would involve an impossibility; (3) the figurative is intended if the literal meaning is an absurdity; (4) take the figurative sense if the literal would demand immoral action; (5) note whether a figurative expression is followed by an explanatory literal statement; and (6) sometimes a figure is marked by a qualifying adjective, as in "Heavenly Father" (Matt 6:14).

[3]Tim LaHaye, *Revelation Unveiled* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 17.

[4]Dispensational futurism, associated with dispensational premillennialism, began with the teachings of J. N. Darby that were popularized in America by C. Larkin, D. L. Moody, C. I. Scofield, and L. S. Chafer. The twentieth century witnessed the development of dispensationalism into three distinct expressions: (1) *classic* dispensationalism (Darby, Scofield, Chafer); (2) *revised* dispensationalism (J. Walvoord, C. Ryrie, D. Pentecost, T. LaHaye, and R. Thomas); and (3) *progressive* dispensationalism (D. Bock, C. Blaising, R. Saucy, and M. Pate). The distinguishing difference between classic, revised, and progressive dispensationalism is hermeneutical. The hermeneutical hallmark of classic dispensationalism is a consistent and insistent commitment to the literal interpretation of prophetic Scripture. This hermeneutical approach has resulted in a particular theological system that makes a strict and consistent distinction between Israel and the church. The church is merely a parenthesis inserted between God's dealings with Israel, and thus the Book of Revelation focuses on the future of ethnic and national Israel.

[5]John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 30.

[6]Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 29.

[7]Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 52.

[8]E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967), 210.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Robert L. Thomas, "A Critique of Progressive Dispensational Hermeneutics," in *When the Trumpet Sounds: Today's Foremost Authorities Speak Out on End-Time Controversies* (ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy; Eugene: Harvest House, 1995), 417.

[11]N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 36.

[12]Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 236.

[13]On the genre of apocalypse see John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 9; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 7. In 1979, John J. Collins, in conjunction with a group of noted scholars, authored the first standardized definition for the apocalyptic genre. This definition emphasized the form as a narrative framework involving an otherworldly mediator and the content as containing both temporal (eschatological salvation) and spatial (supernatural world)

elements. It lacked, however, any reference to the function of an Apocalypse. As such, a subsequent study group lead by A. Y. Collins, David Hellholm, and David E. Aune added an amendment in 1986 stating that an apocalypse is "intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence the understanding and behavior of the audience by means of divine authority."

[14]Lars Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 332–36. So David E. Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 65–96.

[15]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 310.

[16]Ibid., 311.

[17]D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 90.

[18]G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 50–55.

[19]Ibid., 52.

[20]BDAG, 920.

[21]Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 51.

[22]Ibid., 52 (emphasis added)

[23]Contra M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1989), 54.

[24]Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 228.

[25]Ian Paul, "The Book of Revelation: Image, Symbol and Metaphor," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 135.

[26]Philip Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1962), 92.

[27]Edith M. Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice: The Rhetoric of Vision in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 21.

[28]Vern S. Poythress, "Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1–6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 42. Poythress also suggests that proper interpretation of the symbols in Revelation must take account of the distinction of at least four levels of communication: (1) the *linguistic* level, consisting of the textual record itself; (2) the *visionary* level, consisting of the visual experience that John had; (3) the *referential* level, consisting of the historical reference; and (4) a *symbolic* level, consisting of the interpretation of what the symbolic imagery actually connotes about its historical referent.

[29]Norman Perrin, "Eschatology and Hermeneutics: Reflections on Method in the Interpretation of the New Testament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93 (1974): 10–11. These terms were first used by Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*, 555. Perrin's contribution to this subject is very helpful, but it is not without its criticisms. His bifurcated categories run the risk of over simplifying the way a symbol is used in the text. To determine that a symbol is either steno or tensive often does not do justice to the way that some symbols retain both steno and tensive elements. It does not always take account of the evocative impact of the so-called steno symbols. What is more, it fails to provide a method for adjudicating the meaning of a symbol in a given text. See also the critiques of John J. Collins, "The Symbolism of Transcendence in Jewish Apocalyptic," *Papers of the Chicago Society of Biblical Research* 19 (1974): 5–22; and Humphrey, *And I Turned to See the Voice*, 21 n. 10.

[30]Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 56. He argues that once the lampstands are identified as the seven churches, then all other appearances of lampstands in the Book of Revelation refer to the churches unless specified otherwise.

[31]Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 28–37.

[32]Henry Barclay Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), cxxxiii.

[33]For examples of the interpretation of other symbols in the text, see Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2007), cxxxiv; and Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 29–30.

[34]Marko Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah in Revelation*

(WUNT 199; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 91.

[35]Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1964), 65; R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (International Critical Commentary; 2 vols.; New York: Scribner's, 1920), 1.283; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 576–79; David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16* (Word Biblical Commentary; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 612–13; Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 277; Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah*, 89–92.

[36]Jauhianen, *The Use of Zechariah*, 91.

[37]See Alan S. Bandy, "The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation: An Analysis of the Lawsuit Motif in Revelation with Reference to the Use of the Old Testament" (Ph.D. diss. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 295–302.

[38]Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, cxxxiii.

[39]Ibid.

[40]Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 88–91.

[41]Ibid., 88.

[42]Ibid., 38–83.

[43]This appeal is paralleled in Rev 17:9 with a slight variation and most likely links the beast of Revelation 13 with the beast of Rev 17:9–14. This appeal alludes to Dan 12:10.

[44]Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; New York: Harper, 1922), 276–78.

[45]H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. Markus Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 29. So Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 771.

[46]*Barn*. 9.8.

[47]*Sib. Or.* 1.137–46; 3.24–26; 5.12–51. The later oracles exhibit an increased tendency for gematria (e.g., *Sib. Or.* 11:29–30, 92, 114, 189–90, 208, 256, 266). Cf. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 772; Craig S. Keener, *Revelation* (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 355 n. 26.

[48]*Sib. Or.* 1.324–25 (Collins, OTP). So *3 Baruch* 4:3–7, 10; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 389; G. Bohak, "Greek-Hebrew Gematrias in *3 Baruch* and in Revelation," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 7 (1990): 119–21.

[49]Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.30.1. He also addresses the variant reading of 616, but concluded that it must be a scribal error.

[50]Ibid., 5.30.3.

[51]Ibid. See also the text critical analysis of J. Neville Birdsall, "Irenaeus and the Number of the Beast: Revelation 13:18," in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel*, BETL 161 (ed. A. Denaux; Leuven: Leuven University, 2002), 349–59.

[52]Of the possibilities he seems to dismiss *Evanthas*, but is more inclined to accept *Lateinos* (Romans) and *Teitan* (Titan). He sees a probable correlation between the Roman empire and the last kingdom represented in Daniel's vision. Irenaeus, however, favors the term *titian* because it has six letters; the titans were figures from pagan mythology. There has never been a ruler with the name Titan.

[53]Bauckham notes that "it was apparently suggested independently by four German scholars in 1831 (O. F. Fritsche), 1836 (F. Benary), and 1837 (F. Hitzig, E. Reuss). Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 387 n. 10. See also Arthur S. Peake, *Commentary on Revelation* (London: 1920), 323; D. Brady, *The Contributions of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16–18 (The Number of the Beast)*, BGBE 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 292.

[54]ר = 200 + ס = 60 + ק = 100 + ן = 50 + ו = 6 + ר = 200 + נ = 50 = 666. The usual Hebrew form of Caesar Nero (קיסר נרון) adds up to 676. Evidence supporting the shorter form without the *yod* has been confirmed by a document found at Wadi Murabba'at. See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 770; D. R. Hillers, "Revelation 13:18 and a Scroll from Murabba'at," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 170 (1963): 65.

[55]Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 387; J. Christian Wilson, "The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation," *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 598.

[56]Franz Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1922), 96–97; Bauckham,

Climax of Prophecy, 386.

[57]For examples of this method see Seutonius, *Nero* 39; Y. Ber. 5a; Lam. R. 1:15.

[58]Backham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 389.

[59]Ibid., 394.

[60]Bauckham confirms this identification of Nero as the eighth king who was one of the seven by the use of triangular numbers. In short, he demonstrates that 666 is a doubly triangular number. It is a triangle of 36, which is a triangle of 8. The relationship of 666 with the number 8 is significant for Bauckham because the antichrist will be the eighth king, who was also one of the seven. Thus, Nero who was one of the seven will also be the eighth. Since his number is a triangle of 36 and a triangle of 8 the beast must be Nero. Although complex and convoluted, Bauckham presents a fascinating argument. See *Climax of Prophecy*, 390–404.

[61]Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 725–26.

The SBJT Forum

Editor's Note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. Brian Vickers, Keith A. Mathison, A. B. Candy, Todd Miles, Thomas R. Schreiner, David Mathewson and Hershael W. York have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

***SBJT:* What is a practical application of biblical eschatology?**

Brian Vickers: Biblical eschatology is by design entirely practical. (I am using the word "eschatology" in the popular sense as typically applied to texts associated with "end times." Eschatology proper, as it applies to the entire Bible, is not limited to texts about the end of the age.) If there is one thing that eschatological texts have in common, it is this: living today in light of tomorrow. The surprising thing is that even though this common thread runs through all these sorts of texts, the practical impact the future is meant to have on our lives today gets comparatively little attention—compared, that is, to topics such as the millennium, the rapture, and the identification of particular times, characters, and events such as those found in Revelation. Perhaps this is because the practical application found in eschatological texts cannot match the thrill of debating the millennium or the rapture. Though such issues have their place, we should not allow them to eclipse more biblically prominent themes. The fact is that we too often miss one of the main reasons the biblical authors have so much to say about the future—they want us to know how, and why, we should live today. A great example is 1 Corinthians 15.

In 1 Cor 15:58 Paul draws an inference—a "here's why this is important for you" conclusion—from verses 50-57 in particular and the entire chapter in general. Christians are familiar with this chapter for Paul's summary of the gospel (vv. 3-4); his memorable, and quotable, comments: "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men" (v. 19) and, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (v. 32); perhaps for the Adam-Christ parallel (vv. 21-22, 45); and certainly for his discussion of perishable and imperishable, natural and spiritual, and mortal and immortal bodies (see vv. 42-54). There are images and ideas in this

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chapter that simultaneously fuel and exhaust our imaginations. What will a heavenly body look like? How old is an immortal body? What is a spiritual body? When, exactly, will we hear the trumpet sound of verse 52? The ultimate answer to these and other similar questions raised from this chapter is, "We don't know for certain." The point of this chapter is that we know for certain that these things *will* happen. The *what, when, and how* of chapter fifteen is not the issue; it's the *is* and *will* that should get our attention.

At the beginning of the chapter Paul rehearses the gospel, the apostolic message that Christ died for sins, was buried, and rose again. The resurrection, like Christ's death and burial, is grounded in Scripture (vv. 3-4). The recitation of the gospel—which must include the resurrection— is the prelude to Paul's response to one of the several questions raised in Corinth. Apparently there were some in Corinth claiming that there is no bodily resurrection. For Paul, this is nothing less than a denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ, and if Christ was not raised then faith in him is useless, sins are not forgiven, those already dead are lost, and if hope only extends to this life then the whole thing is a sad joke (vv. 17-18). In other words, without the resurrection there is no gospel. Just as Christ was raised, so believers must know that they will be raised. He is the "first-fruits" of the resurrection—the guarantee of what is to come (v. 20). Paul presents Christ, the second Adam, as the king who rose from the dead and who will destroy death once for all (v. 26). In the meantime, Paul wants his readers to understand that their earthly bodies, like seeds planted in the ground, will be raised, transformed from perishable to imperishable, from natural to spiritual in the image of the Christ (vv. 42-29). Then, in apocalyptic style, he describes the dramatic events of the final resurrection. The message of the gospel will be fulfilled, the dead will be raised and transformed. What was mortal will become immortal (vv. 50-54). Not only *will* this happen, it *must* happen. Paul begins the chapter by showing that Scripture was fulfilled in the cross and resurrection, and he ends the chapter by showing that the final resurrection is also the fulfillment of Scripture. The words of Isaiah, "Death as been swallowed up in victory" (Isa 25:8), will come true, and the exultation of Hosea, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (Hos 13:14), confirmed (vv. 54-55). Through the victory believers have in union with Christ, death brought on by sin empowered by the law will finally be defeated (vv. 56-57). Because Christ died and rose again in fulfillment of Scripture, so those united to him will die and rise again in fulfillment of Scripture.

The rhetorical pace of the paragraph, building up to the powerful crescendo of verse 57 (try reading the paragraph out loud and the effect will be evident) may leave us reading verse 58 as a kind of after-thought. In comparison to what proceeds it, verse 58 may seem a bit anti-climactic. If it does, that may be a sign that we are not plugged into the main thrust of such texts in the Bible. In light of everything he says in chapter 15, Paul brings his readers down to earth to transform and give meaning to life in the present. We are not meant to think merely about the future; we are meant to believe the future guaranteed by the past, so that we can live today. "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

The Christian lives at an intersection of past, present, and future. Though we often tend either to the past or the future, Paul, like the other biblical writers, is concerned for today *in connection with* the past and future. Here he tells believers that, because their future is guaranteed by Christ's resurrection, they can be like a rock standing in the midst of a storm, living with the light of the resurrection shining upon them. Their work, in this light, is not meaningless toil but is done "in the Lord." Though we use the phrase, "the work or the Lord" typically to mean some specific Christian ministry this is not what Paul means. If Paul is speaking here only to ministers then this verse

is significant for perhaps 1 percent of the entire church from Pentecost to the last day. Besides, 1 Corinthians is not a letter addressed to a minister's conference. Nor is it likely that "work" means only things such as preaching, evangelism, and missions. Certainly those things are included, but "work" here is inclusive of all the work believers do.

When Adam sinned, God cursed both him and the earth so that rather than freely eating the fruit of Eden, Adam would provide for himself only through toil and sweat until he died and returned to the ground from which he was made (Gen 1:17-19). Christ, the second Adam, defeated the curse so that those who are made in the dusty image of Adam would "bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49). In the meantime work is transformed from futility to significance "in the Lord." Not, of course, that the effects of the Fall are now wiped away; but because we are in union with the second Adam and will one day rise from the earth as he did, our work is not meaningless toil. In this light, the mundane "dailyness" of life takes on new meaning. The reality of what is to come is manifested as we go about the work the Lord has given us to do while we await the resurrection.

The Christian working five or six days a week for years on end to make ends meet is not chasing wind but is working "in the Lord." The Christian mother raising her children with all the routine of everyday life can be encouraged to know that her work matters in the sight of God. The missionary working for years with seemingly no fruit for his work can labor on as the glorious light of the resurrection penetrates even the darkest corner of the world.

Space does not permit a full treatment of similar texts, but the same basic theme is found in virtually all passages that direct our thoughts to the consummation of the age. In 1 Thessalonians 4, a text often associated with various views of a "rapture," Paul bookends the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the gathering of living Christians who "will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (v. 17) with encouragement for the present. He begins in verse 13 with, "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope," then ends with, "Therefore encourage each other with these words" (v. 18). The Thessalonians had questions about the state of believers who had died, and Paul writes to them so that they might be comforted in the present as they look forward to a certain resurrection when Christ returns. Certainly the meaning of the verses between verses 13 and 18 is vital, but we should not let our fascination cause us to miss Paul's pastoral concern.

In 2 Thessalonians Paul writes to comfort persecuted believers. He promises that God "will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well" (1:6-7). He goes on to affirm the judgment of those who reject the gospel "on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you" (v. 10). Again, Paul's concern is pastoral and focused on what the future means for the Thessalonians. In view of what is to come, he prays "that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith" (v.11). This present concern for the future continues as Paul speaks of the coming of "the lawless one" in chapter 2. The identity of the "lawless one" is, to say the least, difficult to discern. Added to this difficulty is the meaning of restraining power that holds back lawlessness (vv. 6-7). The multitude of interpretations of this text attest to the difficulties found here. And while we must strive to understand this text, and however many the interpretations may be, we should be able to agree on what is clear: Paul tells the Thessalonians about this future event so that they will persevere in the present. The chapter begins with Paul exhorting them not to be "alarmed" by

prophecies or messages or letters that claim to be written by him and his companions (v. 2). He reminds them of what they have already heard from him regarding these things, and he warns them not to "let anyone deceive you in any way" (v. 3). The chapter ends with Paul giving thanks to God for his choice of the Thessalonians and the saving work of the Spirit through believing the gospel (v. 13). God called them through the gospel so " that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," and therefore Paul exhorts them "stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (vv. 14-15). The saving work of God in election, through the gift of his Spirit, to the final defeat of evil at the coming of Jesus is their anchor in the present.

2 Peter is filled with apocalyptic language concerning the second coming of Jesus and the simultaneous defeat of evil. False prophets and false teaching will come just as they did in the past, but God will judge and destroy them. Peter describes the great day of the Lord when "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare" (3:10). Then he brings it down to a present, earthly application: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (vv.11-12a). The hope of a new heaven and earth "in which righteousness dwells" (v.13), should lead to transformed lives on this earth, and since believers have this hope before them they are to "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (v.14). By facing the future, reminded of God's actions on their behalf, Christian lives are changed today.

If we go back and read the Old Testament prophets we will find that the idea of the future, grounded in the past, and changing the present is not an invention of the New Testament authors. This down-to-earth eschatology permeates the whole Bible. This same perspective pervades those parts of the New Testament so closely associated with eschatology—namely Revelation, and the Olivet Discourse of the Synoptic Gospels. Persecution, opposition, and evil will not have the last word. God will act decisively in Christ and save his people. However much speculation surrounds biblical eschatology, one thing is clear: the future applies today.

***SBJT:* Many people associate eschatology with events occurring only at the end of history. What is a more balanced way of thinking of eschatology?**

Keith A. Mathison: Like many Christians, I became interested in eschatology soon after my conversion to Christ. The first church I attended was a Southern Baptist church where the pastor happened also to be a dispensationalist with a fascination for the end times. He regularly preached through the Book of Revelation, and I fed on a steady diet of Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and Dwight Pentecost. When I attended Dallas Theological Seminary during the first Gulf War, talk of the second coming of Christ was heard continually. Although my interest in the subject has continued, my study of it has convinced me that we do not do justice to the biblical doctrine of eschatology if we believe it is related only to the end of history.

The theological term "eschatology" is derived from a combination of two Greek words: *eschatos* ("last") and *logos* ("word"). It has been traditionally defined, then, as the "doctrine of the last things" as that relates both to the individual human being (e.g., death, the intermediate state) and to cosmic history (e.g., the return of Christ, the general resurrection, the final judgment, heaven, and hell). Based on this etymological definition,

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most studies of eschatology have tended to focus on future events at the end of the individual's life or at the end of history.

Such an understanding of eschatology, however, presents a truncated view of the subject. The events that occur at the end of history are the culmination of God's redemptive plan, but the culmination of God's plan is inseparable from the preceding stages in the unfolding of that plan. We cannot fully understand the second coming of Christ apart from the first coming of Christ. We cannot fully understand the first coming of Christ if we do not understand God's preparations throughout history for that first coming. Eschatology is an unfolding revelation of God's promises and their fulfillments from Eden to the New Heavens and Earth.

In order to understand biblical eschatology, we must begin not with the Book of Revelation, but with the Book of Genesis. In Genesis, we are first introduced to the major eschatological themes of kingdom and covenant, blessing and cursing, promise and fulfillment. From the earliest chapters of Genesis we are given glimpses of a coming Messiah who will crush the head of the Serpent and redeem his people. We see the spread of sin and death throughout God's creation, but with the call of Abraham we are introduced to God's plan for the restoration of blessing to mankind.

In the remainder of the Pentateuch, we not only see the beginning of the fulfillment of some of the promises to Abraham as God redeems Israel from slavery in Egypt, we also see additional promises concerning "the latter days" (Num 24:14; Deut 31:28–29; cf. Gen 49:1), a time when God will send a king from the tribe of Judah. On a less explicit level, the ceremonial laws concerning the priesthood and the sacrifices are also eschatological in that they are a shadow of the priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

The historical books provide a narrative of Israel's conquest of the land, possession of it, exile from it, and eventual restoration to it. These books reveal God moving his redemptive plan forward with the establishment of an earthly king and kingdom that foreshadows the kingdom of Christ. Central to the eschatological thrust of these books is the establishment of the Davidic covenant. When we turn to biblical poetry, we notice that many of the Psalms express the eschatological hopes of Israel for the coming Messianic king who will fulfill the Davidic covenant perfectly (e.g., Psalm 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 61, 72, 89, 110, 132).

Turning to the prophetic books, we see pre-exilic prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah warning of impending judgment to come upon Israel due to her breaking of God's covenant, but these prophets also look beyond judgment to a coming time of restoration. The exilic prophets, such as Ezekiel and Daniel, continue this theme, focusing even more intently on the coming time of restoration. The post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi make it clear to the people of Israel that although restoration has come to a certain degree, it has not come in the fullest. There is more and greater to come.

It is on this note that we open the pages of the New Testament and read of the birth of Jesus, the Son of Abraham and the Son of David. Immediately, we see the connection to what has gone before. Jesus is identified as the one who fulfills the Old Testament promises to Abraham and David. He is the one who will bring blessing to the nations of the earth. He is the one who will establish God's kingdom on earth. The way he will do this, however, is something that the people of Israel did not quite understand.

Israel's entire history was an almost unbroken story of rebellion, and when Christ came that rebellion culminated in the rejection of the Messiah. God used Israel's hardness to send His only-begotten Son to the cross, where through death Jesus crushed the head of the serpent. Here he offered himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of his people. Here he was crushed for our iniquities. Then, three days later, he rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of God the Father, inaugurating the long-awaited kingdom. Like the

establishment of David's kingdom, however, the establishment of Christ's kingdom would involve more than one decisive event.

Christ inaugurated his kingdom at the time of his first advent. During the present age, the kingdom gradually expands like a mustard seed growing into a tree, but its expansion is not without suffering. It is bloody hand-to-hand spiritual warfare as the defeated forces of evil fight tooth and nail against the inevitable. At the second coming, the kingdom will be consummated in its fullness with the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. With the establishment of the new heavens and earth, sin and its curse will finally be wiped away, and we shall worship our Lord forever. Biblical eschatology, as we see, takes into account *all* of the stages in God's forward-looking work of redemption.

SBJT: **There is a lot of confusion regarding the meaning of the expression, "the last days." What does the New Testament teach about "the last days" and about how we should live in light of them?**

A. B. Caneday: Confusion persists concerning what it means to *live in the last days*. As with Christ's first followers until after his resurrection, many today hold misdirected fascination concerning the "last days." Not until Jesus' resurrection from the dead did his first disciples have the proper bearings for living in the last days. Previously they drew a tight correlation between the end of life as they knew it and the end of all things. They supposed that destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would signal the end of all things (Mark 13:1-4; Luke 21:5-7). Likewise, today, despite Jesus' corrective responses to questions his first disciples asked—"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?"—many remain preoccupied with looking for signs that the end is imminent. This is because many Christians suppose that living in the "last days" is determined by proximity or nearness to Christ's second coming. This confusion persists despite several uses of "last days" or synonyms in the New Testament to indicate that Christ's first coming, not nearness to his second advent, signals that we are living in the last days.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of *the last days* as lying in the dim and distant future (Jer 23:20; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Hos 3:5; Micah 4:1). New Testament writers, however, portray *the last days* as already commenced. Several New Testament passages use the expression, "the last days" or an equivalent (e.g., Acts 2:17; 2 Tim 3:1; Jas 5:3). Perhaps no passage provides more definitional significance for "the last days" than Heb 1:1-2. This passage unambiguously indicates that Christ's incarnate revelatory word inaugurates "these last days" by contrasting two time periods in which God spoke: *of old* by the prophets and *in these last days* by his Son. Likewise, other similar expressions—whether "the last hour" (1 John 2:18), "the end of the ages" (1 Pet 1:20); "latter times" (1 Tim 4:1); or "last time" (Jude 18)—all have Christ's first advent as their beginning point of reference. So, it is evident that because Jesus' advent fulfills Scripture's expectation of the coming Messiah his advent also marks the end of one era governed by the old covenant and the inauguration of the new era with the arrival of the new covenant.

It is noteworthy that the New Testament distinguishes between the *last days* (plural) and the *last day* (singular). The *last days* entail the expansive timeframe inaugurated by Christ's first coming that comes to a conclusion on the *last day*. The *last day* is the day of resurrection and of judgment, conceived of as the *final day* of the last days according to John's Gospel (John 6:39, 40, 54; 11:24; 12:48).

This, then, is the New Testament's eschatological frame of reference. This inaugurated last days frame of reference enables us to understand how

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the present and future dimensions of salvation are two distinguishable aspects of one indivisible whole. Scripture requires that we view salvation as eschatological, as belonging to the last day which commences the age to come (cf. Rom 13:8; 1 Thess 5:9; Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 1:5). The same is true of eternal life (cf. Mark 10:29-30; 10:17; Rom 2:6-7; Gal 6:8).

So, in a singular statement Jesus assures all who look to the Son and believe in him that he will raise them up "on the last day" (resurrection unto life eternal), and he underscores eternal life as a present possession (John 6:54; cf. 6:39, 40, 44, 46). Eternal life is our present possession because resurrection, which properly belongs to the last day and to the powers of the coming age (Heb 6:5), is already at work in this present age. Jesus makes this clear when he announces, "whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.... He has passed from death to life" (5:24). To pass from death to life means that resurrection power belonging to the coming age has already invaded the present. Jesus further explains when he says, "Indeed, truly, I say to you, the hour *is coming* and *now is* when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live" (5:25). Present resurrection unto life is but a foretaste of resurrection unto life in the last day, as Jesus goes on to explain, "Do not be amazed at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil unto the resurrection of condemnation" (5:28-29).

But how has resurrection and judgment already invaded this present evil age? Jesus clarifies the indivisible and unitary relationship between the *not yet* but future resurrection and the *already* present resurrection in his riddle: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even though he dies, shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (11:25-26). Likewise, Jesus underscores the indivisible and unitary relationship between the *not yet* but future judgment and the *already* present judgment when he says, "The one who believes in him [the Son] is not condemned, but the one who does not believe already stands condemned because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. This is the judgment: Light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil" (3:18-19). As resurrection properly belongs to the last day, so does judgment. Nevertheless, just as Jesus Christ *already* gives life to the dead who hear his voice ahead of the day of resurrection, so also, ahead of the day of judgment Jesus announces the verdict of the last day, that those who do not believe in the Son *already* stand condemned while those who believe in him *already* stand not condemned (i.e, justified; 3:18).

Rightly understood then, the gospel is God's gracious proclamation of his last day verdict in the present era ahead of the last day. The cross of Christ Jesus is the advance portrayal of judgment's condemnation on the last day. Likewise, the tomb, vacated by the resurrected Christ, is the advance portrayal of resurrection's justification unto life on the last day. Christ Jesus already stood condemned for others, not for himself, and he was raised from the dead which constitutes his justification and appointment to be Son of God (1 Tim 3:16; Rom 1:4). Therefore, justification and resurrection unto life *already* belong to all who believe in the Son of God. Thus, all the blessings and powers of the *coming age* that we *already* know and enjoy are anchored in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Judgment, condemning Christ upon the cross, and resurrection, vindicating him by raising him from the tomb, constitute the invasion of God's last day acts into the present age, and he makes us partakers of these.

Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection establish the frame of reference for the *last days* in which we live as we await the dawn of the *last day*. He who appeared once for all time at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself will appear a second time to save all who eagerly

await his coming (Heb 9:26-28). Here is the frame of reference, then, that enables us, in concert with New Testament writers, to affirm the immanence of the imminent, the presence of the future, or the *already* possession of what is *not yet* fully ours. Because of his first coming we already live in the *last days* as we eagerly await Christ's appearing on the *last day*.

***SBJT:* What ought to be the priority in teaching or preaching on eschatology?**

Todd Miles: One would think, based on the popular literature, that the priority of teaching or preaching eschatological issues in the church ought to be to confuse and concern the Christian, embarrass the church of Jesus Christ, and generate book and merchandise sales to those caught up in end-times speculation and hysteria. Of course, that which is descriptive ought not to be confused with that which is prescriptive. Scripture presents a priority in teaching and preaching on the end-times that provides a much needed correction.

At the outset, let me emphasize that I recognize that one can hardly separate prediction of the future from eschatology. Further, these predictive elements were revealed by Spirit-inspired prophets for the good of the church. Revelation 1:3 is clear: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near." That which blesses includes the prophecies of the future, even though their interpretation often leads to confusion and misinterpretation. It is not for the faithful preacher to pick and choose only those portions of Scripture with which he is comfortable, but he must preach the whole counsel of God and that includes those same Scriptures that have been abused in the past. Nevertheless, too often the teaching of eschatology misses the point for which it was given, devolving into an exercise in imaginative speculation that does not feed the soul or prepare the Christian (or unbeliever) for those things "that must soon take place." To that end, I offer the following four priorities in teaching and preaching on eschatology.

(1) Jesus Christ is to be the center of biblical eschatology. Eschatology is grounded in the biblical-theological understanding of the Kingdom of God. There are three strands to the Old Testament prophetic anticipation of the Kingdom. First, God would one day reestablish his recognized rule over the entire world (Isa 2:2-4; Amos 5:18-20; Mic 4:1-8; Zech 14:9). Second, the Spirit would one day be poured out in an unprecedented way (Isa 32:15-18; Ezek 36:26-30). Third, the Davidic heir would one day rule over the eschatological kingdom (Amos 9:11; Isa 9:7). The wonder of Jesus Christ is that he brings all three strands of the Kingdom cord together in his one person. Jesus is the Spirit-anointed Davidic heir who brings the saving rule of God to earth and pours out his Spirit on his people (Isa 9:1-8; Luke 4:17-18; Joel 2:28-32). All the eschatological promises of God, including the judgment of the living and the dead and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth are centered in the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of which Christ is the King (Col 1:13).

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Because of the inaugurated nature of the Kingdom, biblical eschatology does not describe events that are all in the future. Rather, the new covenant believer has his feet simultaneously planted in the "present evil age" (Gal 1:4), and in the "last days" (Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 1:20). The eschatological age was inaugurated with the first advent of Christ and will be consummated at his return. As such, speculation over such things as the timing and nature of the millennium and rapture must give pride of place to the centrality of Jesus Christ. Due attention must be given to Jesus as Creator (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:3), Jesus as King, Jesus as the one who raises the dead, and Jesus as the judge of both the living and the dead (John 5:25-29). The focus of biblical eschatology must be the pre-

eminence of Jesus as the hinge upon which all of human history turns.

(2) Eschatology ought to encourage the Christian to persevere. Whereas the purpose of the Old Testament prophets was often to castigate the people of Israel and call them back to the covenant, the apocalyptic literature is much different. The illocutionary point of much end times biblical literature is to give hope to the Christian and call him to perseverance. This is evident from the concluding paragraph of the book of Revelation which ends with an invitation to life and an assertion of the certain return of Christ (Rev 22:6-21). Too often, eschatological teaching results not in a renewed confidence in the certain victory of Christ over all of his foes and the vindication of his people, but a confusion and fear of the horrible events that the apocalyptic literature portrays.

When I was a junior high student during the late 1970s, my Sunday School teacher presented a series on interpreting the end times in light of current events. This was at the height of the Cold War between the USA and the USSR. My teacher, armed with his copy of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, other material available to him (including a video tape of *A Thief in the Night*), proceeded to tell me of an immanent colossal battle between the forces of good (USA) and evil (USSR), to take place in Israel, which was all part of the Great Tribulation and the persecuting work of the Anti-Christ. I learned that the biblical references to Gog and Magog (Ezek 38; Rev 20) would find their fulfillment in Russia and was even taught precisely what kind of Soviet helicopters John was describing in Revelation 9 with his imagery of scorpion-like locusts. I remember nothing else, other than that I was terrified and dreaded the return of Jesus. Here is the problem: I was a Christian! Obviously, Christians who are dreading the return of Jesus are not thinking rightly. My well-meaning Sunday School teacher had taken the word of God and taught it in such a way that I walked away with a completely wrong lesson learned. If you teach on eschatology and the result is anything other than that the Christian is encouraged to persevere and the unbeliever is warned to repent, then you have not rightly taught the Word of God.

(3) Do not forget personal eschatology. Eschatology covers material that is more than just the cosmic events that will usher in the consummated state. Most believers throughout church history have not and will not live to see those times. But save those relative few who are alive at the return of Christ, all people, both saved and unsaved, will die and stand before Jesus Christ and be judged. The pastoral value of teaching on what happens when a loved one dies, the intermediate state, eternal rewards, the final judgments, the horrors of hell, and the wonder of the new heavens and the new earth is inestimable. When faced with his own mortality or the death of a loved one, questions on the timing and nature of the rapture and the timing and nature of the millennium tend to slide down the scale of relative value, while questions like, "Is my mother in heaven now?" "Is she able to see me?" and "Will I ever see her again?" rise to the top. These are theological questions that require a truthful response. The pastor can prepare his congregation to minister the gospel to others during such times if he teaches and preaches faithfully on matters of personal eschatology.

(4) Preach with conviction those things that are clear and with humility those things that are less clear. The apocalyptic books contain descriptions of events that are yet future. Christ has yet to return to consummate his Kingdom, and one reason that there is biblical information on the end times is so that the saints might recognize the events for what they are. It is imperative that the Christian be taught on the certainty and nature of the return of Christ. These things are clearly taught in the Bible and we must be equally clear in our teaching and preaching. But the timing of the return of Christ is not so clear. In fact, there has never been a generation of Christians who did not believe that they were going to live to see

the return of Christ. All of them that are now dead were wrong. We ought to remember this and preach with great conviction on the triumphant return of Jesus to judge the living and the dead and to consummate his kingdom. We would be wise to preach with humility our convictions regarding the timing of that certain return.

***SBJT:* What are some of the major themes in Revelation that we should preach for our congregations?**

Thomas R. Schreiner: Too often Revelation is either preached as a prophecy chart, or, if preachers are not satisfied with the prophecy chart view, they ignore it altogether. The prophecy chart view does not fit with what Revelation actually teaches, leading to all kinds of subjective and outlandish interpretations. But neglecting Revelation is scarcely an improvement, for the Lord inspired the book for our learning and edification. Four major themes of the book will be sketched in here.

First, Revelation teaches us that God is sovereign over all things. When John wrote the book, the Roman empire was persecuting Christians and some were even being put to death. Babylon, which stands for the city of Rome, was drunk from the blood of the saints (16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Some were beheaded because of their faithfulness to Jesus (20:4). The beast, representing the Roman empire, was conducting war against the saints (11:7; 13:7; cf. 2:13). Those martyred were crying out to God for justice, asking him when he would make all things right (6:9-11). Surely in dark moments they must have wondered if God was in control, if the evil being inflicted upon them indicated that history had spun out of his hands. In response to this situation, John reminds his readers that God is the creator of all (4:1-11). One of the key words in the book is "throne" (1:4; 3:21; 4:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10; 5:6, 7, 11, 13; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 11, 15, 17; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:4, 5; 20:11-12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3), showing that the Lord rules and reigns over all. God is the alpha and omega (1:8). Indeed, believers need not fear, for Jesus rules over the kings of the earth (1:5). It may seem as if evil reigns supreme, but even the reign of the beast has been given to it by God (13:5, 7). Indeed, God will turn evil against itself so that the beast and his friends destroy Babylon (17:15-18). Ultimately a new heavens and a new earth will dawn where God will reign in the new Jerusalem (21:1-22:5). The righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. The judgments represented by the seals (6:1-17; 8:1-5), the trumpets (8:1-9:21; 11:15-19), and the bowls (16:1-21), and the final judgment of Babylon (17:1-19:5) and the beast and the false prophet (19:11-21) demonstrate that evil does not have the last word.

Since the Lord reigns over all and will bring in his kingdom when Jesus returns (19:11-21), we see, secondly, that believers must persevere to the end to be saved. This life is a time of testing in which believers are called upon to be faithful. Only those who overcome will partake from the tree of life in paradise (2:7). Those who are faithful till death will receive the crown of eternal life (2:10), and those who persevere will not be harmed by the second death (2:11), which is the lake of fire (20:14; 21:8). Again and again the need to overcome and persevere to receive the final reward is emphasized (2:17, 25-26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 21:7-8). The Lord reigns and rules over evil, and he will finally triumph. Believers are, therefore, exhorted to trust him and to refuse to compromise with the beast. Those who give their allegiance to the beast will face judgment and torment forever and ever (14:9-11).

Third, Revelation features the glory of Christ. He is the glorious Son of Man whom John sees in a vision (1:12-20). He is fully divine, for he is the first and the last (1:7; 2:8; 22:13). The beast does not rule over death and Hades, for Jesus holds the keys of both of these terrifying realities (1:18).

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The deity of Christ and his equality with God are highlighted, for John gives glory and honor to both God and the Lamb: salvation is ascribed to God and the Lamb (7:10); there is no temple in the new heavens and the new earth, for the Lord and the Lamb are the temple (21:22); the light of the new Jerusalem stems from the Lord and the Lamb (21:23; 22:5); the throne of God and the Lamb are in the heavenly city (22:5). Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16). He will rule the world with a rod of iron (12:15) and will reign forever and ever (11:15-19). He opens the seals of the book and so reigns over all of history (5:1-14).

The glory of Christ in Revelation is featured particularly in his death. He opens the seven sealed book because he is not only the Lion of the tribe of Judah but he is also the Lamb who was slain (5:5, 6, 9, 12). Believers are freed from their sins by Jesus' blood (1:5). Jesus, by virtue of his death, has purchased some from every people group for salvation (5:9). Human beings are defiled by their sin and deserve final judgment, but those who have trusted in Christ have had their robes washed in the blood of Christ, and now they stand before God in white robes (7:14). Satan has been evicted from heaven on the basis of the death of Christ (12:7-9), and believers have overcome the accusations of Satan because Jesus' blood has cleansed them from sin (12:11).

Fourth and finally, Revelation is full of worship and praise. In Revelation 4 the four living creatures and the twenty four elders worship God as the creator and sovereign of all things. In chapter 5 they give praise to the Lamb who was slain and who has accomplished a great redemption (cf. 7:10-12). Hence, believers sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb (15:2-4). God is praised for making all things right in bringing in his kingdom by judging evil and rewarding the righteous (11:15-19). Those belonging to the Lord exclaim Hallelujah for his judgment of Babylon (19:1, 3, 4) and for the commencement of God's reign over all (19:5-6).

The message of Revelation is profound and deep. In the midst of suffering we are reminded that God is sovereign over all things, watching over and caring for his own. The Lord Jesus Christ is the glorious Son of Man. He is the Lamb who was slain for our sins, and he shares the same status and dignity and honor as the Father. In light of the certain victory of God and the Lamb over all evil and the great redemption purchased for us, believers are called upon to endure and persevere to the end. Only those who continue to believe and resist the allurements of this world will obtain the final prize. These great truths cause believers to break forth in praise and in worship of God and the Lamb. God will dwell with us forever and wipe every tear from our eyes (21:3-4), and then all things will be new (21:5).

***SBJT:* What does the bible teach in regard to the Christian's future hope?**

David Mathewson: When most Christians contemplate the final destiny of God's people, they probably think in terms of escaping this world in exchange for "going to heaven." While not entirely inappropriate, such language may reflect a very unbiblical conception of the Christian's future hope. The book that treats this topic in the most detail should cause us to revise how we think about our ultimate destiny. The book of Revelation concludes with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, with a new Jerusalem at its center (21:1-2). More than just a stirring climax to the book, this vision should profoundly shape our understanding of our hope. One of the functions of apocalyptic visions such as Revelation is to shape the readers' perception of reality, both present and future. Revelation 21-22 provides us with a glimpse of a reality that transcends our present world, of a world that is distinctly "new." By drawing on language from the Old Testament that expressed the hopes of the prophets (Isa

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65.17-20; Isa 54.13-14; Ezek 40-48), John shapes our perception of this reality. However, though it is a reality that transcends our present experience, it is *physical* and *earthly* nonetheless. Thus the long process of establishing God's kingdom on earth and redeeming humanity from the kingdom of this world and of Satan in Revelation ends up with God's people inhabiting a new *earth*, not a new heaven. Therefore, the first thing that John encounters in this climactic vision is a new heaven and *earth* ("I saw a new heaven and a new earth"), which replace the present order (21:1). It is also the last thing that he sees (22:1-2), where this new state is described with language reminiscent of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). On the one hand, there is discontinuity with this present world and existence. Our hope is something "new" and it eclipses the old order of things (21:1: "for the first heaven and earth passed away"). Yet, on the other hand, there is continuity with this present world. It is still a new *earth*.

John anchors his vision of the future destiny of God's people in the prophetic expectations of the renewal of the world and God's people from the Old Testament. The vision of the new heaven and new earth in 21:1 itself recalls the original creative act of God from Genesis 1-2, where God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). Furthermore, John's language draws on Isa 65:17 for his vision of this new heaven and earth. The prophet Isaiah anticipates a time when God will restore his people to their land in a new creative act. Death will be mitigated, and God's people will enjoy true life and prosperity in the land. The prophet's own conception, upon which John draws, of God's ultimate redemption of his people is thoroughly earthly and corporeal. John also relies upon the prophetic model of a new exodus for his conception of eschatological salvation. The goal of the exodus from Egypt was to lead Israel into the land of their inheritance. John picks this up in his own vision of salvation (Rev 21:1-2). In fulfillment of the prophets' hope that God will act to deliver his people in an exodus-like event, John envisions God acting to redeem and deliver his people in a new exodus where they enter their inheritance, the promised land, which is now the new earth.

Furthermore, John's vision also recalls the language of Ezekiel (40-48). Towards the end of his vision in 22:1-2 John, like Ezekiel, presents the ultimate destiny of the redeemed as a restored Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 47). The tree of life from the Garden (Gen 2:9) even grows there (Rev 22:2). The new creation/Jerusalem is even a place where the redeemed nations bring their accomplishments and achievements into it (21:23-4; Isa 60). So John draws on the most physical, earthly portraits from his OT predecessors for his own vision of the ultimate destiny of God's people. In line with them, John roots his vision of eschatological salvation in a restored, physical creation in order to shape his readers' perception of their ultimate destiny. The final destiny of God's redeemed people, though more than, is not less than a material, earthly one.

Yet Christians are still prone to talk about the goal of redemption as "going to heaven." The language is unobjectionable if it does not carry overtones of some purely spiritual, disembodied existence. But sometimes our language reflects and affects our thinking. Heaven is a place where we go to escape the disappointments and pain of life in this world. We will exchange one type of existence for a completely different one. Perhaps we carry around in our mind images, fueled by popular media, of what that purely spiritual, heavenly existence will be like (disembodied spirits whose landscape is the clouds). However, personally I cannot think of a more uninspiring or boring existence! But Revelation reminds us otherwise by reshaping our understanding of our ultimate destiny. By landing the perfected community of God's people on a new earth, John reminds us that "heaven is not our home." In his book *The God I Don't Understand* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) Christopher J. H. Wright said that if he were asked the typical evangelistic lead-in question, "If you were to die tonight, are you sure you will go to heaven?" he would respond, "Yes. But

I don't expect to stay there." God created us as physical beings who long for physical existence, but one shorn of all the disappointment and pain and sin that plague this present world (Rev 21:4).

So the long history of God's purpose for redeeming his people culminates the way it began: life as a physical, earthly existence, albeit a transformed and renewed one, with God and the Lamb dwelling in the midst of their people (21:3, 22). If we as Christians are called upon to refuse to place our hope in this world, its structures, wealth and pleasures, then we need an attractive alternative. Revelation's vision of a new *earth* provides Christians just that. But this vision should not only shape our view of the future, but our perspective on the present. Revelation's vision of a new creation does not call us to abandon the present world. Rather, in anticipation of God's purposes for creation it calls us to be about transforming this present world for the good. In line with God's intention to bring about a new creation, our lives and activities in the present should offer a foretaste in a world gone wrong of the new creation that God will one day establish, a hope truly worth waiting for.

***SBJT:* As a pastor, what do you think is most important to remember about eschatology, especially when it come to the reality of death?**

Hershael W. York: I am seated beside a bed in a nursing home. They call it a rehabilitation center, and for a few fortunate residents, it might be, but for most this is clearly their last stop on earth. They require constant care, far more than exhausted family members can give them. They must be stretched and turned, bathed and diapered between doses of medicine and regular feedings, not very much unlike the way their lives began years earlier.

Perched vigilantly in my chair, I gaze into the face of the man lying in the bed beside me. Though he is sleeping, his trembling hands flail about violently, as if he is beating back some unseen enemy. His constant motion wakes himself every thirty seconds or so, so that he cannot rest. He jerks and snorts, and when his eyes open he searches for me, to see if I am still there. Sleep itself is wearing him out, sucking his body deeper into a quicksand from which he cannot extricate himself. He hardly looks anymore like the man who mentored me, discipled me, baptized me, taught me Bible stories, carried me on his shoulders, fathered me.

He has been brought here after a perforated ulcer, after surgery, after his system has gone septic, after the hospital can no longer help. The unwelcome agent in his blood stream is overwhelming his body. For seventy-nine years he had never been admitted to a hospital, but the healthy man I knew six weeks earlier has been replaced by this shriveled, featherless bird who cannot stretch a naked wing and fly.

We had rehearsed this moment. Many times through the years, we talked about eschatology. He was a convinced dispensationalist; I was and am a historic premilliennialist. I would tease him about the inconsistency of his rejection of a gap in Genesis 1:1 on hermeneutical grounds, but his insistence on placing one between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth week. He would respond that I didn't know what to do with Israel and the Jews and Romans 11. Banter like this between us was never tense, never uneasy, always joyful and light. He was glad that I was my own man and didn't believe something just because he did, that I was able to think through issues and not feel obligated to land where he was.

The eschatology that mattered the most to us, however, and from which we took the greatest comfort was *personal* eschatology, the biblical teaching on what happens to us at the end of our earthly lives. Repeatedly our phone conversations and discussions turned to what awaits us at and beyond death, especially as he grew older. My father had a rock solid confidence in his Savior's ability to see him through the valley of death's

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shadow. With no hint of fear or remorse he would speak of the end of life and tell me that once death was both inevitable and imminent, he did not want his physical life to be prolonged. To be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord, so, he would say, "Don't deny me my promotion." Christ had turned what for most is the object of fear into a promotion for my father! As a result he made me give him my word that I would not artificially prolong his life and keep him out of heaven when the end was near and unavoidable.

Sitting by his bed, all those prior conversations comforted my sisters, my mother, and me. When, a few days later, he became incommunicative, I watched my mother caress his arm with her slender, elegant fingers and whisper in his ear, "It looks like the Lord is not going to raise you up again to preach His Word. You go on home, and I'll meet you later." Though the nurse told us that it would be days before he died, he was in the presence of his Savior within ninety minutes of my mother's unselfish release.

Many times I have been with other families at that moment. Nothing in life compares to the sacredness of death. But never did the verses I had shared, the doctrines I had taught, and the prayers I had prayed mean as much or feel as real or as relevant as at the moment when I saw my father breathe for the last time. Because of Christ's promises and the reality of heaven, the resurrection, and eternal glory our sorrow was overwhelmed by our confidence and joy. Jesus had done for my father what He promised him He would do. He took him home at the end of a faithful life.

Whenever I have been with a family in the holy hush of a loved one leaving, I have seen how the promises of God minister to them and to the one who is dying. The comfort deepens and matures *after* the loved one dies, too, as the promise that Jesus will return and bring with him those who are asleep (1 Thess 4:14) becomes a treasured truth and future hope.

I often think we have missed the purpose of eschatology. We are not encouraged to be *convinced* of a system but to be *comforted* by a promise. Paul told the Thessalonians that he didn't want them to be uninformed so they wouldn't grieve like those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13), and they were to use his words to comfort and encourage one another (1 Thess 4:18). The reason Paul explains the resurrection of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15 is because it ensures *our* resurrection. The entire book of Revelation was written to a persecuted and suffering church to hearten and cheer her with the good news that the Bridegroom is returning. In spite of whatever trouble we may be enduring, we have the assurance that Jesus reigns and will vanquish all enemies—especially *death*!

When I, as a pastor, hold the hand of a parent whose child cannot breathe and is dying in an incubator, eschatology matters desperately—but not necessarily a system or school of eschatology as we often debate and discuss. That grieving mother needs to know that Jesus has taken the sting out of death, that He is one day returning and is going to right the wrongs and defeat our enemy. That father beside her needs to have confidence in a big God who is absolutely in control and will one day send His Son to gather to Himself the very people He has redeemed from the sin that escorted death into this world.

Eschatological investigation and systemization has its place. We might find profit in studying the way events surrounding Christ's return will unfold or the nature of the tribulation period. But when everything in life but life itself has been stripped away, when believing families huddle in grief beside a dying father, the reality of the resurrection of Christ matters far more than the identity of the 144,000. The things that the Scriptures most plainly teach are the very things we most urgently need. I do not know if my historic premillenial beliefs are more correct than my father's dispensationalism, but this I know: my Redeemer lives!

Book Reviews

Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church rather than the State. By Daniel M. Bell, Jr. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009, 267 pp., $21.99 paper.

Back in the 1990s, Notre Dame philosophy professor Tom Morris wrote *If Aristotle Ran General Motors: The New Soul of Business*. Now, Methodist elder and Lutheran seminary professor Daniel Bell has given us what amounts to *If Jesus Ran the Pentagon: The New Soul of War.* And the results are surprising. We're conditioned to think that Jesus would counsel non-violent love for all, but Bell will have none of that. Following Augustine, he is persuaded that true love entails some "harsh kindness" in the form of war making. And he has no patience for those who would deem all combat the "lesser of two evils."

After reviewing the development of just war thinking, he draws a line between the secular/secularized approach, which he labels the Public Policy Checklist (PPC), and his own position, that of Christian Discipleship (CD). He argues that his take on the matter is truer to the classic thought of Augustine and Aquinas and that modernity has drained just-war thinking of its wisdom and virtue. In this connection, he turns conventional judgment on its head, claiming that the Thirty-Years' War (1618-1648) was not a war of religion but a war of incipient irreligion as the old, consecrated thinking evaporated.

The book has much to commend it. It's a fascinating thought experiment, and it's clearly written. I may well use it as one of my texts in a future course on war and peace. It starts with a helpful survey of just war thought through the centuries and then, chapter by chapter, treats the seven main criteria common to the literature—legitimate authority, just cause, right intent, last resort, reasonable chance of success, discrimination, and proportionality.

In each instance, he takes pains to distinguish CD from PPC thinking, and his standards are generally gratifying and bracing, e.g., scrupulous attention to the well being of non-combatants. He is merciless toward those who pay mere lip service to the rules, but he stands against those who are so finicky that no war could ever qualify. He teaches a self-forgetful, sacrificial approach to military service and lifts up such virtues as hope, courage, temperance, and patience, showing that the character of the rule-follower is as crucial as the framing of the rules.

Yet, for all that, his application and execution are wanting. First, it would have been a better book had Bell spent less time denigrating the "Public Policy Checklist," beginning with this snide label. He could well have given it due honor as a basic

statement of principles, uniting the lost and the saved in essential, common tasks of war. Romans 2:14-15 says that even the pagans, who lack the Torah, have its work written on their hearts, with their consciences testifying to what is right and wrong. (Thus, for example, it is not surprising that ancient Greeks, in Book V of Plato's *Republic,* insist that "barbarian" non-combatants not be harmed, their lands not ravaged.) If Bell had spent some time in Romans 2, he might have been less inclined to repeatedly (and tediously) typify the noblest wartime efforts of non-Christians as simply a matter of rule-memorization and will power. Surely, many "heathens" work from heartfelt conviction, thanks to their innate, God-given conscience, not to mention some discernment of the creation order pictured in Romans 1.

I think Bell would have been better served by an Aquila-Priscilla-Apollos approach (Acts 18:24-28), whereby he could show his readers "a more excellent way." On this model, he could counsel the believer serving alongside the agnostic and Jew in a just cause to fight with love for the enemy, a Spirit-filled love beyond the capability of his unbelieving comrades. Perhaps the Christian infantryman would be more inclined to throw himself on a grenade to save his buddies and more fastidious (or at least heartfelt) in his regard for the safety of civilians, but acts of conspicuous virtue in war are well-distributed among believers and non-believers alike.

By severing PPC from God-ordained natural law, and showing scant appreciation for natural law itself, Bell says that PPC "suits the kind of people and politics that believe there is nothing but the force of their arms, the numbers of their chariots, and the speed of their horses that stand between them and oblivion." This is like saying that freedom of speech is unsavory because it "suits the kind of people who publish pornography" and freedom of assembly is toxic because it "lets anarchists and Marxists caucus."

Throughout the book, a kind of false dichotomy is in play—choose either the horrors of PPC or the high-country of CD. Unfortunately, this sort of this thinking would encourage believers to say that only Christian marriage is worthy of the name. Jewish neighbors may call their 40-years-and-counting of monogamous fidelity and mutual care "marriage," but they've just learned some rules and stuck to them by force of will. Why not, instead, give thanks for the marriage they have nurtured and pray that they will come to a fuller understanding of its role in the Kingdom, even as a picture of Christ and his bride, the church?

Another problem is reader whiplash. Though he is good at nuance, it seems that Bell justifies crusades but then renounces them, justifies war-as-punishment but then insists on far-reaching leniency, denounces unconditional surrender but then allows for comprehensive reordering of the defeated state. To put it otherwise, he has a tendency to have it both ways at a number of points.

As the treatments of detail proliferate, so do the questions: When you say the voice of the church should be heard loud and clear in public policy, do you mean the voice of combat-ready Southern Baptists or that of combat-averse Mennonites? How are small Christian minorities in India and Indonesia to pick up on the public policy implications of CD warfare? Why should war be so limited as to refrain from attacking ideologies? Wasn't it a good thing that the Allies essentially and intentionally erased the cultures of "Aryan" Nazism and Japanese emperor worship? Is killing really "the business of armies," or might it equally be the force of intimidation, which largely won the Cold War? Must the enemy currently be using a bridge to attack you before you may take it out to protect your flank? Do you have any historical examples of enemies, who on the eve of war, "repented, turned, and sought justice and reconciliation"? (Alas, the book is virtually devoid of instructive examples.)

So yes, there are problems and puzzles, but, again, Bell's work is a fascinating read, well worth

the purchase for those wondering, "How does just war mesh with the Christian life?"

—Mark T. Coppenger
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Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain. By William M. Struthers. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009, 196pp., $16.00 paper.

William Struthers, an associate professor of psychology at Wheaton College, draws from his research in the area of the neurosciences and neuroethics to contribute to the understanding of the long-term impact of exposure to pornographic materials. Citing current evidence in the fields of neuroanatomy and neurotransmitters, he develops the contention that viewing pornography causes actual physical and physiological changes to the pathways within the brain. These difficult-to-reverse changes in the "hard wiring" of the brain result in significant impairment to the pursuit of holiness.

After outlining the grim statistics regarding the availability and accessibility of pornographic material, Struthers argues for a disordered view of masculinity with the objectification of females in general and the female form in particular. By using an analogy of consuming food to illustrate taking in pornography—eating a meal which is then digested, metabolized and distributed throughout the body, causing alterations in the physiology and anatomy of the consumer—Struthers points out that "consuming" porn changes the brain anatomy by stimulating new neural pathways to form. Another effective analogy is that of comparing a new walking path in the woods, widened and deepened by frequent use, leading ultimately to a "super highway" or Grand Canyon. Repetitive intake of pornography similarly creates a widening path, easily traversed such that every visual stimulus moves rapidly in the direction of arousal, lust, and pressure to act out sexually. For this "consumer," sex is not an intimate marital expression as God intended, but rather an escape—not unlike addictive drug use.

The distinctive chapters on neuroanatomy and neurotransmitters are surrounded by a biblical theology of marriage, with a focus on masculinity and progressive sanctification. Struthers argues that our sexuality, a good gift from God, should be part of the process of sanctification. The book suggests that sanctification and biblical thinking leads to the development of different pathways, a "superhighway" that leads to Christlikeness and community rather than self indulgence, shame, and despair.

This volume contributes significantly to the counselor's deeper understanding when dealing with sexual sin issues in their clients and the gravity and impact of visual stimulation. Thus, treatment and recovery are neither easy nor quick. Confession of the problem, safeguards, and accountability are all helpful but not sufficient. A biblical understanding of masculinity and femininity, of sexuality and community, can begin to build the right pathway to Christ—and ultimately put a "road closed" sign in the brain, to hinder any further mental traffic.

Contrary to the book's title, the author's training in Christian psychology yields a perspective that emphasizes thought, reason, and emotion over empiric research. However, the unique sections of this volume, describing the physical and functional brain changes resulting from sensory stimuli, make this book a valuable resource for those who counsel.

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Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth. By John R. Franke. Nashville: Abingdon, 2009, xvi + 152 pp., $18.00 paper.

This book represents an attempt by the "emerging village" movement to provide a theological framework for its ministry. Since the death of Stanley Grenz, to whom this book is dedicated, John Franke has emerged as the movement's principal professional theologian.

Early in the book Franke states his thesis: "the expression of biblical and orthodox Christian faith is inherently and irreducibly pluralistic. The diversity of the Christian faith is not, as some approaches to church and theology might seem to suggest, a problem that needs to be overcome." Franke goes on to offer a theological rationale for this thesis: "Instead, this diversity is part of the divine design and intention for the church as the image of God and the body of Christ in the world."

Franke offers several types of evidence for this thesis: the fact that there are four different Gospels, each with a different perspective and emphasis; the variety of forms that "the historic Christian faith" has taken during the centuries of the church; the different cultures in which Christianity is expressed and practiced at the present time; and even the fact that the Trinity is a plurality of persons. He also cites the familiar postmodern emphasis on perspectivalism, in view of the historically and socially conditioned settings that influence how we perceive and judge. Yet he is emphatic that this does not lead to the kind of relativism in which "anything goes." What preserves Christianity from such a relativism is that there is a God for whom there is Truth. For all other persons, however, there is only truth.

There is much to commend in this book from a conservative evangelical perspective. Its tone is irenic and courteous, which is conducive to dialogue with more traditional Christians. Those accustomed to the emotive and pejorative language found in some postmodern thinkers will appreciate this. The book does contain some samples of such language, but from other authors: "freezing if not fossilizing in a kind of theological retrenchment" (Brian McLaren, xii) and "a spectrum that runs from mildly allergic to wildly apoplectic" (Merold Westphal, 14). Franke properly points out that third world Christians may have a different perspective on some beliefs and practices, and their approach may be just as valid for them as others are for Western Christians. He cautions against too quickly identifying our interpretations with "what the Bible teaches." He rightly emphasizes that there should be agreement on the cardinal matters of Christian faith, but that there should be room for differences on secondary and tertiary matters.

Having said this, however, a number of features of this book will trouble many evangelicals. Just a few of these problems can be mentioned here. One is the lack of criteria for how we identify the nonnegotiable essentials. This in turn is part of a larger problem found in a number of other postmodern or postconservative evangelicals. There is vagueness and at times even ambiguity on a number of issues. Some postmodernists exploit this ambiguity, using the more radical interpretation to gain rhetorical leverage, but shifting to a softer interpretation to deflect criticism. Franke seems impatient with those who want him to be more specific, but those insistences should serve as clues to him that he is unclear. It would be helpful to know, for example, what Franke means by "the one faith." While he says that not all expressions of the faith are appropriate (129), he offers no concrete criteria of appropriateness. His description of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit (77) and the dynamic nature of revelation sound strongly reminiscent of neo-orthodoxy's view. The truth is a person, Jesus Christ (9), but there have been widely varying conceptions of who Jesus was and is. In short, while insisting that his view does not mean that "anything goes," he seems reluctant to tell us what does not go, and why. He cites with approval James Cone's critique of white religion,

but fails to note that Cone's version of black theology is not typical of the faith of the vast majority of African-American Christians, and has even been criticized by his brother, Cecil Cone.

Further, at some points (such as the discussion of foundationalism), the discourse seems seriously out of date. Franke tends, as do many postmodernists, to identify objectivism with the Enlightenment, whereas what he is opposing is a whole Western tradition going back into premodern times. And, although this is intended to be a popular, rather than a technical theological treatise, there are issues and other perspectives that are touched on but not adequately dealt with. For example, when discussing the historic Christian faith, it would not be unreasonable to expect Franke to interact with the study done jointly by Thomas Oden and J. I. Packer. Although Franke insists that all thought is conditioned, and there is no neutral point from which to think, he does not raise the question of how those of different cultures and paradigms can communicate with one another, or what paradigm he is employing in the discussion of paradigms. He gives no indication of awareness of the issues. While he cites with approval John Caputo's view of deconstruction, he fails to note that Caputo ruled out the deconstruction of deconstruction itself. Why should not Franke's emergent village and its contentions be deconstructed?

Terminologically, Franke uses "plurality" and "pluralism" indiscriminately. He cites the same types of phenomena that pluralists like John Hick do, but without giving an adequate rationale for rejecting that more extreme form. In light of the topic Franke has adopted, it is surprising that he makes no mention of one of the Church's most pressing issues: what is the relationship between the God of Islam and that of Christianity? Are the Christian and the Muslim simply worshipping the same God, but under different names?

Sometimes Franke offers a paraphrase that actually adds to the original statement without argumentation. The reader should be watchful of expressions such as, "in other words." Regarding style, both the writer of the foreword and the series editor's introduction commend the lack of technical theological jargon, but emergent village jargon—such as "God gives, receives, and shares love from all eternity in self-differentiated unity and unified self-differentiation" (56)—is liberally sprinkled throughout the book.

Readers should note that this is a very Western book, and rather upper middle class, educated, and suburban in orientation. Franke makes much of the diversity of perspectives from non-North Americans (or those whose first language is not English). I agree that Christians in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia are indeed conscious of Christian doctrinal provincialism and even imperialism. I have found, however, that many of them have little sympathy for the kind of "generous orthodoxy" that Franke and others of the emergent village espouse. Their vision of Christianity is more conservative, more sharply defined, and more conscious of antithesis to the prevailing culture than the type of approach Franke follows.

Evangelicals can benefit from considering the issues Franke raises in this book, but need to read it with a critical and discerning approach.

—Millard J. Erickson
Author, *Christian Theology*

Puritan Papers, Volume 4: 1965–1967. Edited by J. I. Packer. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004, viii + 305 pp., $16.99 paper.

One the key stimuli behind the resurgence of interest in the Puritans and their theology has to have been the Puritan Studies Conference, co-founded by Martyn Lloyd-Jones and J. I. Packer in the 1950s. Under God, it has introduced a number of generations to the riches of Puritanism and those Puritan-style movements and communities that are the Puritans' theological heirs.

The organization of the conference was fairly simple. Six papers would be given, the last of which was normally by Lloyd-Jones, and each would be followed by extensive and edifying discussion. This pattern is still continued in the December Westminster Conference, which originated in 1970 after significant disagreements between Lloyd-Jones and Packer.

This is the fourth volume in a series of reprints of the papers given at Puritan Studies Conference. In this case, it contains the papers given between 1965 and 1967, momentous years in the history of Western culture. Here we find timeless studies of the Reformers—the subject of the 1965 conference—and papers from the 1966 conference that range from reflections on Henry Jacob (by Lloyd-Jones)—a relatively obscure figure, but one with great importance for the emergence of the Calvinistic Baptists—to a study of Charles Finney by Paul Cook.

The final set of papers, from 1967, has a similar breadth: from the Puritans to Abraham Kuyper. Of importance is the topic of Lloyd-Jones's 1967 paper, which was "Sandemanianism," in which he analyzed what some might have considered an esoteric topic, namely, the teachings of Sandemanianism. Ever the one to apply church history, Lloyd-Jones argued that the errors of this eighteenth-century movement had much to teach his hearers, for he felt that there were far too many in contemporary evangelical circles who were replicating the central Sandemanian error, namely that true faith can be held without deeply-felt affection. Now, in the course of his lecture Lloyd-Jones gave a brief historical overview of the early years of this movement. He noted especially that it was in the late 1780s and 1790s that Sandemanian teaching truly became something of a menace to English and Welsh Evangelicalism. Moreover, he stated that the key theologian who was raised up to refute the errors of this movement was "the famous Andrew Fuller" who "more or less demolished Sandemanianism" in his 1812 work, *Strictures on Sandemanianism* (272-73).

In brief, Lloyd-Jones's paper—though this is true of all the papers in the volume—demonstrates an important reason for the study of church history: the edification of the church. While those studying the history of God's people must do so with academic rigor, the academy is not the final justification for such study. Rather, it is that the people of God, through recollection of their identity from the past, might better understand their calling in the present and for the future.

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This Mortal Flesh: Incarnation and Bioethics. By Brent Waters. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009, 205 pp., $21.99 paper.

I rarely have been challenged to think so deeply as by Brent Waters in this work. Waters is associate professor of Christian Social Ethics at Garrett-Evangelical (not used as in referring to evangelical Christians) Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, where Rosemary Radford Ruther served 22 years; and Waters has two graduate degrees from Claremont where Ruther was taught to think Christians should become pagan. Because of these associations, it is both welcome and quite unexpected to find this author developing a level of moral analysis truly helpful to biblically faithful Christians.

Though one finds points in this book worth disputing, I will not do so here because none discomfits the book's thesis, which is that postmodern thought turns biomedical research and healthcare into a false religion inimical to humanity and essential Christianity, and that this false religious ethic can be exposed and resisted only by explicating the biblical doctrine of the Word made flesh in order to vindicate and redeem the lives of human beings made to bear the divine image in mortal

bodies. After analyzing the way postmodernism is affecting a range of bioethical issues, Waters offers a Christological response that relies heavily on the work of Oliver O'Donovan, professor of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh, and John Kilner, professor of Bioethics and Contemporary Culture and director of Bioethics Programs at Trinity International University.

Chapter 1 describes how the convergence of biotechnology, nanotechnology, robotics, and medicine extends the promise of ever longer, healthier, and happier lives, but in a way that now bypasses healing and curing to favor loathing of natural human finitude and even mortality. Chapters 2-5 go on to analyze how postmodernism has affected moral thinking on a range of issues and in ways that treat advances in biotechnology and healthcare as a proxy for salvation—one promising self-perfection and hope of eternal life at the cost of devaluing and ultimately destroying essential human nature. And chapters 6-9 suggest how Christians should respond.

Chapter 2 shows how advances in reproductive technology are affecting the way people think about parents and children, transforming parents into commissioners and children into artifacts. Chapter 3 examines how developments in human genetics are changing moral attitudes toward human finitude, now aiming not only to cure wounds and diseases but also relegating any human finitude to the category of evil to be challenged and overcome. Chapter 4 addresses embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning and the way advances in these fields are changing regard for the moral status of human embryos. Chapter 5 looks at developments in regenerative medicine, which are beginning to treat aging more as a disease than a common denominator of humanity. On this Waters observes that research in this field is becoming tantamount to a war on mortality—one hoping ultimately to escape human mortality by reaching a "posthuman" state.

Chapters 6 and 7 criticize the posthuman lure of postmodern biotechnology, and argues that the only hope for addressing the ultimate human condition comes not from trying to immortalize our bodies through science but through the Creator's offer of redemption and resurrection achieved by the Word made flesh in order to free humanity from death both mortal and moral.

Chapter 8 analyzes the core fallacies of postmodern bioethics by explaining how it resurrects ancient heresies combining a will to self-deifying power with a will for self-achieved immortal perfection. The way to address human finitude without devaluing or destroying humanity in the process is by receiving the promise of eternal life as a gift of grace from God, not by trying to make ourselves posthuman. Finally, in chapter 9, Waters widens analysis beyond biotechnology and healthcare to warn against the morally destructive trend of postmodernism to rely on information processes over the spoken word. Christians, he insists, must defend the centrality of words (not processes) to assess the moral value of human lives, and so also to conform life in the flesh to the Word made flesh.

That is indeed a worthy project.

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A Peaceable Psychology: Christian Therapy in a World of Many Cultures. By Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009, 288 pp., $24.99 paper.

Christ blessed peacemaking (Matt 5:9), and with the obvious need for peace in the world, in the church, and even in the Christian counseling world, any book that sees peacemaking as one of the highest priorities of the Christian counselor is intriguing. This well-written and thought-provoking book, however, is even more

distinctive in the Christian counseling literature on two counts: first, because of its faithful adherence to a specific Christian tradition—the pacifist, Anabaptist orientation (13, 166-68)—and second, because of its significantly postmodern and multicultural sensibilities. Consequently, there is unusual interest in and understanding of cultural differences and tradition distinctives. Perhaps its most important positive contribution is a thorough rejection of the modern secular values that currently dominate mainstream psychotherapy. Dueck and Reimer argue that the requirement in the field today that all therapists speak in "secularese" constitutes an unjust, totalizing, and universalizing imposition by modernists on people of faith. They argue instead for a pluralist mental health field where the voices of particular religious and ethnic traditions are allowed to be heard. I thoroughly agree.

However, secular postmodernists could make the same point. What makes the therapy developed in this book particularly *Christian*? This is reflected in its use of aspects of contemporary Anabaptist thought. Suffering would seem to be the primary concern of this therapy—so, social-cultural sin is often discussed, while personal sin is rarely addressed. Preference is also shown to the *Christus Victor*, exemplary, and suffering God models of the atonement over satisfaction theories. The use of explicit Christian content in counseling is not promoted; the focus is instead on the life of Christ, particularly its self-sacrificial nature, so that the Christian influence is largely limited to the ethical sphere—demonstrated in how the Christian therapist treats the counselee. Postmodern and pacifist frameworks unite in the authors' advocacy of therapy that accepts and works within the faith perspective of one's counselees. The Christian therapist, for example, "draws on the counselee's tradition and holds the client accountable to his or her professed convictions" (167). There is an admirable consistency in this model, but it resembles postmodernism more than historic Christianity (including the Anabaptist tradition!), for in such an approach, the self is ultimate, rather than the Creator, who Christians believe has established a specific way of healing the soul, through Christ—a universalizing claim, to be sure, but issued by the Lord of the universe for the good of all humanity.

The peace of Christ, both objective and subjective, is not like the world's (John 14:27), for it was purchased by his blood (Eph 2:14-18; Col 1:20)—a death necessary because of personal sin and social-cultural sin, both of which flow from our original universal alienation from God—and it spreads through the verbalized gospel that offers peace with God to all through repentance from sin and faith in Christ who died on behalf of a world that is tragically, but deeply opposed to this kind of particularity. Yet this has been at the heart of the tradition of genuine Christian therapy since Pentecost.

The authors rightly object to counsel that would "force" others to believe as the counselor does, but one can avoid this error without resorting to its near opposite. Christians, for example, may work towards a genuinely pluralistic mental health system that would recognize that all therapies have their own goals and means for realizing them and that therapists ought to be full participants in the therapeutic dialogue, along with counselees, and therefore all therapists, including Christians, ought to be free to share fully (and Christians could add lovingly, patiently, and gently [Gal 5:22, 23]) their way of healing the soul.

By so embracing the postmodern ethicism of Levinas and others, Dueck and Reimer have made a case for a Christian therapy that should not offend postmoderns nearly as much as the Father's demand that we find peace in the love of his Son. But as a result, this book is less peaceable than the authors suppose, since it unwittingly does a kind of violence to God. For by encouraging Christian therapists to "recognize God's presence in religious confessions other than one's own" (185) in

their therapy, it formally trivializes the blood of Christ and the gospel of his peace (Eph 6:15).

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Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar. By William D. Mounce. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 419 pp., $49.99.
Basics of Biblical Greek Workbook. By William D. Mounce. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 223 pp., $22.99 paper.

Introduced seventeen years ago, William D. Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek* is now is in its third edition. The primary distinctive of *BBG* is to "reduce the essentials to a minimum so the language can be learned and retained as easily as possible, so that the Word of God can be preached in all its power and conviction" (x). This practical approach has helped to make *BBG* popular among different kinds of students.

The first thing one notices about the new edition of *BBG* is its appearance. The new edition's increased space surrounding the text provides needed space for taking notes, and the binding is such that this edition will now lay open on a desk. Layout, design, and color have been improved, and the effect is pleasing to the eye. An exception might be the entrance of "The Professor," a cartoonish figure who appears in the margins, sharing helpful information at times, while at other times providing information that ranges from the funny to the bizarre (e.g., 133, 135, 138, 161).

Concerning the book's substance, minor changes have been made. There are now 36 chapters instead of 35; the increase is due to splitting the old chapter 35 into two chapters. The old chapter 35 attempted to cover too much material, so this is a welcomed change. The grammar is still broken down into six sections, yet now each section begins with an overview so students will know what to expect. Missing from the new edition is the lecture summary CD, the content of which has been moved to the improved Teknia website.

Two other changes are worth noting. First is the "halftime review" within each chapter, which is designed to distill the key points of the lesson up to that point. Second is the addition of an exegesis section at the end of many chapters (e.g., 52-54, 138, 255-56) which shows the student how a particular chapter's topic is important in the ultimate goal of exegesis. This latter addition will encourage some beginning students while overwhelming others.

The *BBG Workbook* is very helpful for putting into practice what is learned in the grammar, and changes to this edition are minimal. There are six sections for each chapter that include parsing practice and extensive translation exercises. Added are two concluding chapters designed to show the student how much he has learned by translating 2 John and a significant portion of Mark 2-3.

Mounce's approach has much to commend it, blending vocabulary, morphology, phonology, inductive vs. deductive learning, and paradigm memorization. The morphology recalls the earlier approach of Goetchius's *Language of the New Testament*, while the practical nature of *BBG* brings to mind S. M. Baugh's *New Testament Greek Primer* and D. A. Black's *Learn to Read New Testament Greek*—though both of these mix the verb and noun systems whereas *BBG* provides an option to keep them separate.

This new edition gives every indication that the book's popularity will not wane in the near future. Its practical approach and innovative learning methods will continue to make it a good choice for self-learners, homeschoolers, Bible college, and seminary students.

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The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking. By John Howard Yoder. Edited by Glen Stassen, Mark Thiessen Nation, and Matt Hamsher. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009, 230 pp., $24.99 paper.

John Howard Yoder was one of the most influential theological critics of war, and coercive force in general, in the twentieth century, both through his writing and teaching—including two decades at the University of Notre Dame—and through his impact on scholars such as Stanley Hauerwas and Glen Stassen. *The War of the Lamb*, therefore, is worthy of serious engagement, especially by those who will resist Yoder's critique of war. According to Stassen, in his introduction, Yoder planned the book before his death in 1997. Thanks to the work of the editors, and Yoder's own memos, this collection of lectures and articles is now available.

Readers familiar with Yoder may not find anything principally new in this collection, yet he considered it necessary to publish in order to emphasize aspects of his work that he thought had not been taken seriously enough by his critics. He seeks to present a robust Christian pacifism that does not merely condemn war and violence and resist corrupt power and authority, but also seeks to effect change through *nonviolent direct action*. Yoder also challenges those who would marginalize Christian pacifism by portraying it simply as a minority, sectarian tradition in church history that embraces passive suffering in order to avoid violence.

After an introduction from Stassen, which highlights Yoder's concerns and the themes that will follow, the book consists of three sections. The first seeks to establish the case for nonviolence, a perspective which, Yoder asserts, is not simply an alternative system of ethics to those that defend war, but a way of envisioning the world, grounded in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second section interacts with Just War thinking. Yoder argues that if it is strictly applied, Just War doctrine has certain common commitments with pacifism, such as a presumption against violence in its principle of last resort that should lead Just War advocates to stand with pacifists in seeking alternatives to violence, which will actively oppose evil. Such alternatives, and the principles that sustain them, make up the third section of the book, which may be the area with which casual readers of Yoder will be least familiar, and for that reason it deserves a bit more attention.

Yoder is ambitious in the third section, not only seeking to defend pacifism against what he sees as fundamentally utilitarian arguments for war, but also arguing that in the big picture nonviolent direct action is more effective, "because it goes with the grain of the universe, and that is why *in the long run* nothing else will work" (62). Suffering love is not merely passive, for followers of Jesus must resist violence in the double sense of being willing to suffer rather than resorting to violence and of being actively opposed to violence. When harmed, our instinct, which is defended with rational arguments, is to respond with force. Yoder seeks to cultivate a different instinct, which resists violence when wronged. Against those who argue that his view is passive and ineffective in the face of evil, he suggests that the problem is not that nonviolent action has been tried and found wanting, but that it has not been attempted with a seriousness that approaches the effort put into war. To be effective, it requires discipline, training, and fortitude, just as force does (162). He points out that in war, loss of life is considered an unfortunate but expected cost, and yet in considering nonviolence, the predictable losses are seen as evidence of failure and reason enough to reject the strategy from the outset (163).

I am grateful to the editors for bringing Yoder's work together in this volume. There is much here to challenge a thoughtful reader. While I am not persuaded by some key points, I do agree with much of Yoder's critique of war and violence. He is right to insist that Just War doctrine is presump-

tive against war, placing the burden of proof on those who seek to justify war; that Christians should—but too often do not—speak prophetically and hold their political leaders accountable for the decision to wage war; and that it is easy for Christians to adopt a sense of nationalism that overshadows deep Christian convictions, using Just War criteria to defend whatever war one's nation happens to be waging. Yoder offers an important reminder that for Christians, a priority should be placed on peacemaking, and rather than seeing reasoned pacifists simply as antagonists, Just War advocates ought to join them in pressing for peaceful resolutions to conflict wherever possible. The third section of the book, on nonviolent direct action, draws attention to the need for more careful thinking and greater effort on peacemaking initiatives, though, in my view, it is not strong in terms of concrete strategies of nonviolence. Stassen's work on *Just Peacemaking* is a more concrete extension of what Yoder is pressing here, the specifics of which ought to be seriously discussed and evaluated.

I do have significant differences with Yoder. Space does not allow a defense of Just War doctrine here, so I will simply indicate a point or two of contention. First, while Yoder seeks to summarize Just War thinking fairly, he doesn't engage significantly with particular advocates and arguments. Further, while Yoder does differentiate in places between Just War doctrine and other views on war, in the end he tends to conflate all positions that allow for the use of lethal force, presenting all war as utilitarian, and a Constantianian compromise with worldly authority (47). Just War doctrine can be defended against such charges. To be sure, Just War principles are sometimes—perhaps often—misapplied or ignored in order to defend an unjust aggression. Yet Just War thinking at its best is principled rather than utilitarian, driven by a mandate for justice against tyranny and oppression. Further, it lays claim to one of Yoder's themes, that Jesus is Lord over all. Yoder argues that God can defend justice without our help (47), which has a pietistic appeal, but what does that mean? It could be argued that God can feed the poor or defend the oppressed without our help, but God has chosen to use people, through appointed "offices," to serve His purposes. Similarly, Just War advocates argue that God defends justice through his appointment of human agents, and that may include the just use of force.

Yoder and others rightly insist on reading Romans 13, with its description of government and its power to punish wrongdoing, in light of Romans 12, with its insistence on not repaying evil for evil but leaving vengeance to the Lord. However, often government is thus depicted merely as a secular power that makes use of ungodly means that cannot be affirmed by Christians. For Christians to advocate using the sword for a just cause is understood to be a Constantinian compromise. In response, Just War advocates agree that Romans 12 teaches that Christians are not to repay evil for evil but are to leave vengeance to God. But it is precisely in that context that Romans 13 teaches that in this age God has made provision to restrain evil in part by appointing government to avenge wrongdoers. To be sure, the power of the sword is easily abused, and it is right to challenge abuses, to seek to restrain the power of government and direct its efforts in the service of justice, and to remind magistrates that they do not possess power for their own interests, for they too will be judged for wrongdoing.

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James. By Dan G. McCartney. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, xxi + 335 pp., $39.99.

Dan G. McCartney, professor of New Testament interpretation at Redeemer Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, was previously professor of New

Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary for over 25 years. The thesis of this latest addition to the BECNT series is that the book of James is "about true faith as opposed to a false one" (2; cf. xi, 1, 56–57, 63, 267–71). Contra Peter H. Davids, the book's controlling theme is not the problem of suffering (56–57). "James is interested primarily in practical Christianity. He assumes the content and saving power of the Christian gospel ... but his interest is on how that is worked out in life, and he denounces a kind of faith that does not act accordingly" (3).

James focuses on works, argues McCartney, because faith is so important. The most well known section of the letter, James 2:14–26 (esp. v. 24), superficially appears to contradict Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone in passages like Rom 3:28 (154–75; 272–79). But Paul and James use "justification" in different ways because they have "different concerns, different backgrounds, and different audiences with different problems" (154). Paul means "to declare righteous" in a forensic sense, and James refers "either to the eschatological confirmation of righteousness at the last judgment (as in Matt 12:37; Rom 2:13) or to the effectual proving of righteousness." Douglas J. Moo argues that James means the former, while McCartney argues for the latter, though noting, "It also may be that James implicitly includes both meanings." For James, to justify means to *vindicate* in the same way that Jesus uses the verb in Luke 7:35: "wisdom is justified by all her children" (276–77). Nevertheless, the main point of James 2:14–26 is clear: "that which distinguishes living faith from dead faith is works of faith" (172).

McCartney's main conversation partners include commentators Joseph B. Mayor (1897 commentary), James Hardy Ropes (1916, ICC), Martin Dibelius (1975, Hermeneia), Peter H. Davids (1982, NICNT), Luke Timothy Johnson (1995, Anchor Bible), Richard Bauckham (1999), Douglas J. Moo (2000, Pillar NT Commentary), and Patrick J. Hartin (2003, Sacra Pagina). The format is like other BECNT volumes. James is not conducive to a linear outline, but since it has many logically organized units, the shaded-box-feature—my favorite distinctive of the BECNT series—at the beginning of each passage of Scripture could be extraordinarily useful. The shaded boxes in this volume, however, are disappointing because they do not trace the argument logically and grammatically with the care that other BECNT volumes do (e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner on Romans). McCartney concludes the book with four valuable excurses: "Faith as the Central Concern of James"; "Faith, Works, and Justification in James and Paul"; "James and Wisdom"; and "James and Suffering" (267–300).

McCartney evidences a firm handling of the text as well as the secondary literature, and he writes clearly and thoughtfully. His book joins Moo, Bauckham, George H. Guthrie (2006, revised EBC), and Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell (2008, ZECNT) as one of the volumes that preachers, teachers, and students will consult first and with most profit when studying the book of James.

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Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church. Edited by Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008, 300 pp., $20.00 paper.

In *Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, editors Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason have assembled a cadre of scholars and pastors tasked with defining, assessing, and critiquing various aspects of the post-conservative and emergent church movements within evangelicalism. Johnson, senior pastor of Church of the Redeemer in Mesa, Arizona, and Gleason, senior pastor of

Grace Presbyterian Church in Yorba Linda, California, each contribute chapters, as do others such as Paul Helm, R. Scott Clark, Guy Prentiss Waters, and Phil Johnson. They cover topics as diverse as Cornelius Van Til's epistemology to cultural engagement to an examination of Brian McLaren's doctrine (or lack thereof) of hell.

Each of the contributors to the volume comes at the task from a confessionally Reformed perspective. As David Wells asserts in his foreword to the book, "The Reformed have always been uneasy about the post-World War II evangelical alliance that brought together so many ministries and viewpoints into a working relationship around a small core of commonly held beliefs" (11). What's needed in today's evangelical climate, according to Wells, is a reaffirmation of the supremacy of the truthful Scriptures—and a proper Christian engagement of the culture will follow.

Gary L. W. Johnson sounds the doctrinal warning bell in his introduction to the book, paralleling Friedrich Schleiermacher's theological project with the proposals put forth by post-conservatives and emergent church adherents in the contemporary era—proposals that, if followed, will likely lead these evangelicals to accommodate their theology to today's "cultured despisers of religion." In his chapter on the doctrine of Scripture, Paul Wells assesses contemporary proposals on the humanity of the Bible from Donald Bloesch, Clark Pinnock, and Peter Enns—proposals he finds lacking, ultimately—and instead argues for four axes for "reimagineering" the humanity of the Bible.

John Bolt pens a chapter on evangelical theological method in which he argues that the best theology today will not only be characterized by the content of the biblical data, but also by "an explicit metaphysic that though it cannot arise directly from the biblical data—the Bible is not a book of metaphysics—is nonetheless consistent with Scripture and perhaps even coinheres with it" (62). Such a proposal is, according to Bolt, in the "great tradition" of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Francis Turretin, and even Herman Bavinck, and will counter post-conservatives and those within the emergent church who "are extremely nervous about truth claims in general" (89).

Helm's essay provides an in-depth examination of the work of post-conservative theologian John R. Franke. Helm maintains that Franke ultimately argues merely for "a seriously deficient form of foundational theology" that "concedes too much to the culture and downplays the importance of truth" (93). Franke's overemphasis on the role of culture in the theological task leaves him with sociology triumphing over theology, Helm asserts, and a kind of epistemological uncertainty that makes the theological task much more difficult than it ought to be.

Clark argues that, contrary to assertions made by some within the emergent church—and most especially Brian McLaren—"there are objective, divinely revealed theological boundaries inherent and essential to Christianity" (112). Paul Kjoss Helseth argues that post-conservative evangelicals have misunderstood those in the Old Princeton tradition. He asserts "that the Princetonians were neither naïve theological realists nor rigid, uncompromising dogmatists, but that they weren't rigid, uncompromising dogmatists precisely because they weren't naïve theological realists" (129-30). Jeffrey C. Waddington argues that Cornelius Van Til was *not* a foundationalist, at least not in terms of the way that foundationalism is typically defined.

In his chapter, "Church and Community or Community and Church?", Gleason finds commonality between the emergent church and the Federal Vision and the New Perspective on Paul, for all three movements have shifted away from an emphasis on soteriology and toward a greater focus on ecclesiology. More specifically, he contends that the emergent church is focused on community at the expense of doctrine, and "is rushing headlong down the path of classic liberalism and/or the Social Gospel" (181). Gleason's lumping of Dan Kimball in with such emergent church adher-

ents as Doug Pagitt and Brian McLaren (172) may strike some readers as imprecise.

Waters compares New Testament theologian N. T. Wright with Brian McLaren, arguing that McLaren is dependent on Wright—especially when it comes to his views on Jesus and the Gospel accounts—though not always explicitly so. Phil Johnson argues that while the emergent church movement seeks theological diversity, Christians are instead to seek theological unity. He also argues that the emergent church movement is drifting toward disaster due to its participants' embrace of postmodernism, their doctrinal indifference, and their unwillingness to receive criticism. Martin Downes contends that several leaders in the emergent church, like Protestant liberals before them, have become entrapped doctrinally within the culture.

Greg D. Gilbert writes an incisive essay examining Brian McLaren's doctrine of hell. He roots McLaren's deficient doctrine of hell in his deficient view of the gospel. Gilbert examines also, somewhat tangentially, McLaren's view of the atonement of Christ and his approach to non-Christian religions. And Gary Gilley's concluding chapter examines postmodernism and how it is applied within the context of the emergent church movement, providing essentially his own survey of the entire movement. Gilley's description of medieval Catholicism as an "apostate religion" may distract some readers.

Anyone concerned about the doctrinal aberrations within post-conservative evangelicalism and the emergent church will benefit from this book. The essays are thoroughly footnoted, and positive proposals are often given in addition to negative critiques. As may be evident even from this brief survey, many of the essays in *Reforming or Conforming?* only loosely hold together, as the topics with which they deal are somewhat eclectic. Though the emergent church movement is itself quite diverse and varied, Brian McLaren is a common recipient of critique in many of the essays. Perhaps a clearer delineation of the various wings of the emerging church movement could have been helpful in several of the chapters, lest the reader receive the impression that someone like McLaren represents all.

In the months since these essays were first published, the emergent church movement has been in sharp decline—perhaps reflecting the vacuous nature of some of what came along with it. As the essays in *Reforming or Conforming?* point out, the theological foundations upon which much of post-conservatism and the emergent church are built are precarious. Given the movement's decline, then, perhaps the challenge going forward for conservative evangelicals is whether they will hear discerningly the good and right critiques of contemporary evangelicalism that the emergent church has had to offer.

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God's Battalions: The Case for the Crusades. By Rodney Stark. New York: HarperOne, 2009, 276 pp., $24.99.

Baylor University sociologist Rodney Stark's books on religion are usually interesting and provocative, and *God's Battalions* is no exception. Stark argues that modern historians typically misconstrue the crusades. They commonly portray the crusades as a decadent Western imperialist assault on a morally and intellectually superior Islamic culture—an effort to despoil Muslims of land and wealth aided by religious bigotry, fanaticism, and superstition. Stark persuasively refutes this interpretation, and at the same time provides a compelling, attractive, and readable history of the crusades.

Stark's account of the violent Arab conquest of predominantly Christian lands beginning in the seventh century—Syria, Persia, Palestine, Egypt,

North Africa, Spain, Sicily, and southern Italy—is gripping. The claim that Islamic culture was superior, Stark demonstrates, is deeply flawed. He also refutes claims of Muslim tolerance. Muslim rulers in fact imposed severe religious, social, and civil restrictions, as well as onerous taxation, upon Christians and Jews, and massacres of Christians and Jews were not uncommon. Stark acknowledges that so-called Christian rulers often acted no less reprehensibly. He argues only that historians are mistaken to portray Muslim rule as tolerant and enlightened. Efforts to valorize medieval Muslim culture at the expense of Christian Europe are driven by politics, not by historical evidence.

Stark documents well the destruction of churches and the attacks on Christian pilgrims that prompted the Byzantine emperor to invite the Latin nations to come to his aid to free Jerusalem and make it safe for Christian pilgrims. Pope Urban II enlisted the nobility of Europe and urged upon them their duty before God to free Jerusalem, and he promised release from penance to all who fought from spiritual motives. Stark rightly concludes that the popes and other Europeans supported the crusades because Muslims had invaded lands that once belonged to Christians, and because they abused Christians under their rule and raided neighboring Christian lands. His account of the course of the crusades is helpful and interesting.

Starke's specialty is not the crusades or the medieval era, but he makes excellent use of the best scholarship available, and quotes frequently from medieval Christian and Muslim sources. More detailed volumes by medievalists are available—see the fine books by Jonathan Riley-Smith for example—but for a clear understanding of the crusades, this is a superb book.

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An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism. By John D. Hannah. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 399 pp., $24.99.

Accomplished church historian John Hannah tells the story of Dallas Theological Seminary, an institution that has stood for evangelical conservatism, dispensational theology, and expository preaching. Along the way Hannah provides rich insights in American fundamentalism, evangelicalism, and the challenges of theological education. Hannah has taught at Dallas Seminary for many years and has an insider's sensitivities. He also made good use of the manuscript collections necessary for telling much of the story. Lewis Sperry Chafer established the seminary in 1924 at the height of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and was its president until 1952. Chafer was an evangelical's evangelical. An itinerant evangelist who lived in Northfield, Massachusetts, the site of D. L. Moody's summer conferences, Chafer became friends with the leaders the early twentieth century fundamentalism. Cyrus I. Scofield especially impressed him. Scofield mentored Chafer, and in 1911 put Chafer in charge of Scofield's expanding Bible teaching ministry. Chafer ran Scofield's itinerant Bible conferences, correspondence courses, and night schools in New York and Philadelphia. When Scofield died in 1921, Chafer took up his mantle and established Dallas Theological Seminary to advance Scofield's vision of effective Bible teaching.

Chafer designed the curriculum around Calvinism, Keswick holiness teaching, and dispensational premillennialism, which, due in part to Scofield's own interpretive notes in his popular reference Bible, had become the main features of the era's evangelicalism. Dispensationalism's recognition of Scripture's "right divisions" was the key to correct interpretation of the Bible. Chafer wanted to produce men who were skilled especially in expository preaching. Chafer wanted a premillennial Princeton.

From the beginning Dallas's relationship with

other fundamentalists was difficult. Chafer was disgusted by the aggressive, sensationalist, and dictatorial methods of fellow fundamentalists J. Frank Norris and William B. Riley. Fundamentalist Baptist leader John R. Rice attacked Chafer's views of evangelism, apparently because they were too Calvinistic. Harry Ironside and Moody Press defended Chafer's views. Bob Jones privately supported Rice but refused to criticize Chafer publicly. Westminster Seminary protested strongly Dallas's dispensationalism. Wheaton College president J. Oliver Buswell and Biola president John MacInnis criticized the seminary's exclusive insistence on dispensationalist interpretation.

Hannah's narrative illuminates Dallas's late twentieth century movement toward a broader evangelical identity. The school eschewed both strict Calvinism and strict dispensationalism. In 1977 the seminary released S. Lewis Johnson because of "his agreement with Dordtian Calvinism." The Board of Regents objected to his belief that Christ died for the elect alone and that regeneration preceded faith. President John Walvoord initially held that Johnson's views were compatible with the seminary's creed, but changed his mind, perhaps because he believed that Johnson had become strident and critical of the seminary's official position.

In the "Lordship salvation" controversy of the 1980s, New Testament professor Zane Hodges felt that there was still too much Calvinism, since many professors taught that acceptance of Jesus' Lordship was a necessary element of saving faith. John MacArthur and John Gerstner published refutations of Hodges's position, and some faculty sympathized more with MacArthur than with Hodges. The administration maintained that there was room for both views on the faculty.

This tolerance represented a trend in which some faculty in the 1980s and 1990s developed revisions of dispensational theology known as "progressive dispensationalism." John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and others felt that progressive dispensationalism was erroneous and destructive, but the administration believed that it was acceptably within the bounds of the school's creed and tradition. Dallas was still located on the most conservative wing of evangelicalism (three faculty had to leave in 1987 for affirming John Wimber's views on the charismatic gifts), but now identified more with broad evangelicalism.

Hannah has made a fine contribution to the history of American evangelicalism.

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