



The Evangelical Review
of Theology and Politics



Vol. 2, 2014
Thy Kingdom Come
Conference Papers
October 17-18, 2014

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

www.evangelicalreview.com



The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

ISSN: 2053-6763

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Typesetting :: Ash Design (UK)
Minion Pro 10.5pt on 14.5pt



The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

Volume 2
2014

Edited by
Calvin L. Smith
Stephen M. Vantassel

KING'S DIVINITY PRESS
(A DIVISION OF KING'S EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL)
UNITED KINGDOM

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The *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

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Abstracts

This journal is abstracted in Religious and Theological Abstracts, 100 West Park Ave (Box 215), Myerstown PA 17067, USA. <http://rtabstracts.org>

Thy Kingdom Come A Conference on the Bible, Theology and the Future

Westminster, London

held, 17-18 October 2014

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“Thy Kingdom Come” ~ Conference Programme: Westminster, London, October 17-18, 2014

PAPERS

Friday

19:30 ‘The Coming Kingdom and the Lord’s Prayer’
Dr Derek Tidball: Matthew 6

Saturday

10:30 ‘The Coming Kingdom and the Hope of Israel’
Dr Calvin Smith: Romans 11

11:15 ‘The Coming Kingdom and the Great Commission’
Dr Mitch Glaser: Matthew 28

12:15 LUNCH AND MARKETPLACE

13:15 ‘The Coming Kingdom and the Words of Jesus’
Dr Darrell Bock

14:15 ‘The Coming Kingdom and the Day of the Lord’
Mr Daniel Nessim: Joel 2

15:45 PARALLEL SESSIONS

Mike Moore, ‘The Coming Kingdom: Do we have to be Premillennial?’

Anthony Royle, ‘The Keys of the Kingdom:
Christian Halakhah for the Realised Eschaton’

Daniel Button, ‘Creation Care in the Context of Eschatology’

Stefan Bosman, ‘The “Israel of God” in Light of Comparative Jewish Texts’

Thomas Fretwell, ‘Assessing Socio-Political Arguments
in Support of Supersessionism’

PAPERS

17:00 The Coming Kingdom and Biblical Interpretation
Dr Craig Blaising

18:00 Panel Discussion, Q&A

18:45 Conference Ends

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Introduction to The Evangelical Review

Calvin L. Smith

About

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is an online journal. All articles and reviews are published online as PDF files, and are downloadable by subscribers.

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What you have here are the articles, review articles, and reviews from 2014 collected together in a single edition for subscribers to print-off, or consult in electronic mode on Kindle or an e-Book reader.

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The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is a peer-reviewed, online, subscription journal exploring God's revelation to humanity in the form of Jesus Christ. Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical Christian tradition are welcomed and invited from across the disciplinary spectrum: Evangelical theology, biblical studies, biblical theology, politics, society, economics, missiology, homiletics, discipleship, preaching, conversion, salvation, atonement, redemption, the Church et al.

About...

The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics and *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*, are international peer-reviewed journals exploring Evangelical issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The purpose of the journal is to bring an international and scholarly Evangelical analysis to bear upon various social and political issues of national and international interest. The Editors are committed to presenting the full spectrum of Evangelical thought to provide readers (whether Evangelical or those analysing Evangelical phenomena) with thoughtful, scholarly debate and original research that is biblically based and theologically sound.

Core Values

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and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

Submissions

Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical tradition are invited from across the disciplinary spectrum. Given the broad and interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter covered by the journal, contributors should refer to our core values and submission instructions, which provide further details of material suitable for inclusion.

Intending authors should see our guidance notes for articles, review articles, and reviews and use and electronic submission form:

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Thy Kingdom Come

A conference on the Bible,
Theology and the Future

Calvin L. Smith

In late 2012 Chosen People Ministries (New York, London) and King's Evangelical Divinity School (United Kingdom) agreed to co-host a conference to be held in London in November 2014 focusing on the subject of eschatology. The general aims of the conference were threefold:

1) To focus academically on an area of theology which, in recent years, has arguably fallen by the wayside among British scholarly Evangelicals (perhaps in large part because this vital area of Christian theology has been seized upon, sensationalised and become the exclusive domain of popular, fundamentalist Evangelicalism);

2) To offer a scholarly and broadly premillennial treatment of the Bible's teachings of the end times, thus bolstering and encouraging debate among a dwindling minority of UK premillennial scholars, as well as challenging narrow and/or erroneous stereotypes of premillennialism among the wider British Evangelical scholarly community; and

3) Given growing Evangelical engagement with these public square issues, to further the current theological debate and encourage a more theologically-nuanced treatment of issues such as whether or not God retains a plan for the

Jewish people, Christian responses to the situation in the Middle East, the impact of the current debate within Evangelicalism upon Jewish evangelism, and hermeneutical issues related to these questions.

The conference, held at Emmanuel Centre, Westminster, featured speakers from across the Evangelical spectrum, each bringing their own unique contribution to the conversation. Dr Derek Tidball (formerly Principal of London School of Theology and Vice-President of the Evangelical Alliance) spoke from a non-premillennial perspective, highlighting the need for Evangelicals, regardless of their doctrinal position, to engage seriously with the issue of God’s plans for the future. Dr Calvin Smith spoke as a premillennial non-dispensational posttribulationist on the future hope of Israel. Uniquely Jewish-Christian papers were presented by Dr Mitch Glaser (President, Chosen People Ministries, New York) and Daniel Nessim (Director, Chosen People UK), exploring Jewish evangelism and Old Testament teachings on the Day of the Lord. Scholarly dispensational and progressive dispensational contributions were presented by Dr Craig Blaising (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) and Dr Darrell Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary). Finally, a Call for Papers yielded four perspectives related to the wider conference theme of Evangelical eschatology from across the Evangelical spectrum.

With the exception of Blaising’s excellent presentation (recently published in...) all the conference’s final publication versions of each paper are published in this edition of the *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*. Video recordings of the actual presentations are also available for purchase from Chosen People UK.

Video Recordings—

[http://shop.chosenpeople.org.uk/epages/es140432.sf/
en_GB/?ObjectPath=/Shops/es140432/Products/141001](http://shop.chosenpeople.org.uk/epages/es140432.sf/en_GB/?ObjectPath=/Shops/es140432/Products/141001)



Thy Kingdom Come

Derek Tidball

KEYWORDS:

| Kingdom of God | Prayer | Inaugurated | Present |
| Future | Fulfilment | Apocalyptic | The End |

ABSTRACT:

Starting with the prayer, ‘Your kingdom come’, this paper introduces the sources of the idea of the Kingdom of God which was central to the person, mission and teaching of Jesus. After some preliminary general comments about the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, the teaching of Jesus about its present and future dimensions are reviewed before the latter is more fully explored. Paul’s teaching on the coming kingdom is then surveyed and finally the perspective of apocalyptic is introduced. A brief discursive mentions the relationship between the kingdom and the cross. The paper concludes by referring to the implications of praying, ‘Your kingdom come’.

INTRODUCTION

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray ‘Your kingdom come’ he was doing nothing new. And yet, at the same time he was doing everything new.

The Lord’s Prayer is closely patterned on the Jewish Prayer, the Kaddish, an Aramaic prayer regularly used at the close of synagogue

worship and with which Jesus would have been familiar as a child. It began:

Exalted and hallowed by his great name
In the world which he created according to his will.
May he let his kingdom rule
in your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of
the whole house of Israel, speedily and soon.
Praise be his great name from eternity to eternity
And to this say: Amen.¹

As Jeremias, whose translation this is, says, ‘The Kaddish is an eschatological prayer. ...the ...end in view [is] God’s appearance as Lord’.² Either side of the petition, ‘your kingdom come’ or, in other words, ‘let his kingdom rule’, in the Lord’s prayer are the inseparable responses of homage ‘hallowed be your name’ and obedience, ‘your will be done’. This is why I say that from one viewpoint Jesus was doing nothing new. Jesus stands in continuity with Israel.

Two things, however, are new and suggest a measure of discontinuity. One, which does not concern us here, is the addition of the ‘we’ petitions in the Lord’s Prayer, which are not found in the Kaddish. The second, which does concern us, is the meaning invested in the phrase ‘your kingdom come’. Those in the synagogue were, to quote Jeremias, ‘still completely in the courts of waiting’³ – anticipating the coming rule of God as entirely future, to happen at the end of the age. Jesus’ disciples, however, were increasingly to realise that this prayer was already in the process of being fulfilled, since the kingdom had already broken in to the present world. The breath-taking newness was to affirm that with his coming, in his own person, God’s kingdom was being established in territory where Satan reigned through deception and evil currently seemed to triumph. When

1 Translation of Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 1, trans. John Bowden, (London: SCM, 1971) p. 198. Cited by R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2007, p. 243.

2 Jeremias, p 198.

3 Jeremias, p. 199.

Jesus preached, he signalled that the revolution had begun. God was once more taking control of his world, a world that had for a time tragically and quite illegitimately come to be controlled by ‘the dominion of darkness’ (Col. 1:13).

Such blunt contrasts, however, need some qualifying.

1. WHERE DID THE IDEA OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD COME FROM?

The exact phrase is not found in the OT but it is introduced in the gospels as something that was already familiar. The OT background is complex⁴ but four OT streams might be said to flow into the river that make up the NT concept of the kingdom of God.

(a) First, there is *the eternal fact*, as France has called it, that God was king.⁵ Ps 95:3 speaks for many other texts in proclaiming, ‘For the Lord is a great God, the great King above all gods’. The Psalms are not alone in acknowledging God as king, in looking to his throne and celebrating his reign, both present and future.

(b) Secondly, there is *the covenant agreement* that clearly established God as Israel’s sovereign, which inherently points to the idea of the kingdom, or reign, of God. As the Lord their God he promised a multitude of blessings, providing they exclusively worshipped and wholeheartedly obeyed him. That is why the eventual quest for a human king was seen as a rejection of God as their king (1 Sam. 8:7). These covenants were imperfect in their operation and so the prophets looked forward to the coming of a new covenant, envisaged in Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 34, which is fulfilled in Jesus.⁶

(c) Thirdly, *the political reality* of Israel’s history was a further source

4 See Bruce Waltke, ‘The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: Definitions and Story’ in Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson (eds.), *The Kingdom of God*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2012, pp. 49–71.

5 R. T. France, ‘Kingdom of God’ in *DTIB*, p. 420.

6 See further, Waltke, ‘The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: The Covenants,’ in Morgan and Peterson (eds.), pp. 73–93.

that flowed into the concept of the kingdom of God. Positively, this is seen in the kingdom of David and Solomon, the golden or ideal age of peace and prosperity. Negatively, the OT frequently uses the phrase ‘kingdoms of the earth’, by way of contrast to the ‘kingdom of God’ even if it does not use the phrase. These kingdoms are seen to be in increasingly sharp conflict with God’s rule. This theme comes to a head in Daniel who puts the tribulations of the people of God at the hands of powerful rulers and earthly empires into perspective. Those kingdoms would come and go but ‘His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation’ (Dan. 4:34-35). A primary role in the revealing of that kingdom was assigned to ‘one like a son of man’ who was granted by the Ancient of Days, ‘authority, glory and sovereign power’ Of him, Daniel says, ‘all nations and people of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed’ (Dan. 7:13-14).

(d) To these streams, we must add that of a developing *messianic expectation*. When the hope of Israel did not seem to be realised in their own experience, and human rebellion against God seemed to maintain the upper hand, they increasingly looked into the future for the day when God would defeat their enemies and reign more completely. We could look to Daniel’s visions as seminal texts here, or to Is. 45:23. But let Zechariah speak for others as he envisages the coming day of the Lord, when ‘The Lord will be king over all the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name’ (Zech 14:9).

Israel strongly believed that God was king *de jure* (of right) but prayed for the day when he would also be king *de facto* (in fact, or in reality).

So, the idea was in the air during the time of Jesus. And we should not be surprised when Mark, without feeling the need to explain further, says, for example, that ‘Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, was … waiting for the kingdom of God (Mk 15:43).

2. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD?

We must ask more fully what the NT means in using the phrase ‘the kingdom of God’ which it does, if we include some variations, like kingdom of heaven – which I take to be a respectful Jewish way Matthew adopts to avoid using the divine name – on over 100 occasions, with at least 76 sayings in the Gospels.⁷

(a) It is the Kingdom of God.

We must emphasise, as Dick France has done in his writings on this topic, that it is overwhelmingly spoken of as the kingdom of God, not the kingdom. Acts 20:25 is the solitary exception, if you exclude some references in Matthew where adding ‘of heaven’ is made redundant by the context. It is about God being king. The emphasis is on God and to reduce it to ‘the kingdom’ puts the emphasis in the wrong place.⁸ It is about God’s dynamic rule, not a place, a land, or a territory (like the United Kingdom). Unless we do this we hijack the term to our own ends, as has often been done and apply it to human programmes or enterprises of one sort or another. So, the word ‘kingdom’ has been purloined to apply to a social gospel, to particular social programmes especially in terms of poverty, to feel-good therapies, or, at the other end of the spectrum, it has been appropriated to apply exclusively to charismatic experience and signs and wonders. It has also been expropriated to further the cause of businesses, so we can have our haircut at ‘Kingdom Hairdressers’, or bank at a ‘Kingdom Bank’, where money is, we hope, miraculously multiplied

7 Statistics all depend on how things are counted. Graeme Goldsworthy says, ‘There are about 100 references to the kingdom of God/heaven in the Synoptic’, three in John, six in Acts and eight in Paul. (‘Kingdom of God’ in *NDBT*, p. 615). The figure of 76 sayings in the Synoptics is calculated by Chris Caragounis in ‘Kingdom of God/Heaven’ in *DJG*, p. 425.

8 E.g., R. T. France, *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark*, London: SPCK, 1990, pp. 12-13.

as were the loaves and fish, or we can enjoy an opulent kingdom life-style where nothing is too good for the sons and daughters of the king. The good news of the kingdom of God is that ‘God rules’.⁹

(b) *The kingdom of God is inextricably bound up with the person of Jesus.*

Mark 1:15, Jesus’ first public pronouncement says, ‘The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’ The word *engiken* may either mean is ‘fast approaching’ or ‘has arrived’.¹⁰ Tom Wright’s translation prefers ‘is arriving’,¹¹ but others more confidently assert it is a declaration of what has already happened. The arrival of the kingdom coincides with the arrival of Jesus. With his coming, the revolution has begun and God is reclaiming a world that for too long has looked to Satan as its ruler rather than to him.

(c) *The kingdom is a present, if an unimagined, reality.*

Jesus presents himself as the fulfilment of OT prophecies, like those of Isaiah 61:1-2 (Lk. 4:21) and Is 35:5-6 (Mt. 11:2-6), which look forward to the coming of the new age when God will defeat evil in all the varied forms it manifests itself, including the evils of sin, disease, barrenness and disability. His miracles and his exorcisms were, as John calls them, ‘signs’ of the kingdom. Here is God’s ‘saving sovereignty’ at work in the totality of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.¹² The signs demonstrated what it would be like to live in a kingdom where God truly ruled. In Tom Wright’s words,

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 8-25.

10 *Ibid.*, p 24.

11 Tom Wright, *The New Testament for Everyone*, London, SPCK, 2011.

12 G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986, p. 339.

The whole point of what Jesus was up to was that he was doing, close up, in the present, what he was promising long-term, in the future. And what he was promising in the future, and doing in that present, was not about saving souls for a disembodied eternity, but rescuing people from the corruption and decay of the way the world presently is so that they could enjoy, already in the present, the renewal of creation which is God’s ultimate purpose...¹³

When challenged about ‘when the kingdom of God would come’, Jesus replied that it was already ‘in your midst’ (Lk. 17:21).

The presence of the kingdom meant Jesus could speak of ‘entering it’ in the here and now, that is of voluntarily placing oneself under the rule of the king. Such a step was no light step and required commitment (Mk. 9:47), humility (Mk. 10:13-15), poverty of spirit (Mk 10:23). It also meant adopting the lifestyle of God’s kingdom, as set out in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). It was a kingdom where the last people you’d expect, the disreputable and unclean, would find a home (Mt. 20:16; Lk. 5:31-32; 14:15-24) that is, ‘the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame’, the very ones excludes in the Qumran rules as ineligible to sit at the table of the Messianic banquet, because of their disabilities which rendered them unclean.

Impressive though these signs were, they were only partial. And impressive as the invitation to enter was, it was only anticipatory on a fuller experience to come. They were ‘signs’, perhaps even signposts, not the reality itself. People knew there was more to come. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, on what we call Palm Sunday, the crowd not only greeted him as the expected king who was heir to David’s throne, but clearly thought that David’s restored kingdom was to be inaugurated there and then. Wright translates Mark’s version of the greeting (Mk. 11:9) as ‘Welcome to the kingdom of our father David, the kingdom coming right now’.¹⁴ Yet the kingdom did not dawn as they had hoped and were still hoping for as ‘he was taken up before their eyes’ (Acts 1:6). It was never

13 Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, London: SPCK, 2007, p. 204.

14 *Ibid.*

this king’s mission to re-establish the nationalistic kingdom of Israel, but rather to fulfil the covenant to Israel in a new unimagined way. His mission was to bring the story of Israel to fulfilment and let God be true to his word by establishing ‘a new Israel’ (Gal. 6:6). It would include those who had previously been ‘excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world’ (Eph 2:12). So Paul explains, ‘This mystery [of Christ] is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus’ (Eph. 3:6).

(d) *This kingdom is yet to be consummated*

That’s why we still pray, ‘Your kingdom come’. George Eldon Ladd describes Jesus’ mission on earth as ‘fulfillment without consummation’.¹⁵ The mission of Jesus is a crucial stage in the final establishment of the kingdom of God. As Ladd says elsewhere, ‘The whole mission of Jesus including his words, deeds, death, and resurrection constituted an initial defeat of satanic power that makes the final outcome and triumph of God’s kingdom certain’.¹⁶ And it is to that future kingdom we turn.

3. THE COMING KINGDOM EXPLORED MORE FULLY

(a) *The coming kingdom in the teaching of Jesus*

i. The direct teaching of Jesus

Jesus spoke explicitly of the kingdom as something future on more than one occasion, such as when he spoke about ‘the Son of Man coming into

15 George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 105-21.

16 George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Guildford: Lutterworth Press, 1974, p. 66.

his kingdom’, in Matthew 16:28, or at the last supper in Mark 14:25, or when he sought to dampen expectation about its imminent arrival, in Luke. 19:11. But it is in the parables that the future dimension of the kingdom becomes most evident.

ii. The parables of Jesus

Several parables are collected in Matthew’s neat way, in chapter 13 of his gospel. The parable of the sower (vs 1-23) emphasizes the present reality of God’s kingdom where we sow ‘the message of the kingdom’ and encounter various responses as a result. There is no particular stress on the harvest here. In the parable of the weeds (vs 24-30), however, there is an emphasis on the harvesters who separate weeds from wheat, burning the first and storing the second. According to the interpretation Jesus gives (13:36-43), this is not a parable about belonging to a mixed church but a description of the way the kingdom of God operates in the world. Ladd succinctly captures it in a sentence: ‘The Kingdom has come, but society is not uprooted’.¹⁷ The parable points to the future, to a final judgment and banishment of all evil and the full future vindication of the righteous who, ‘will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father’ (v 43, cf. Dan 12:3). While other parables like that of the mustard seed and yeast (vs 31-35) deal with the enigmatic nature of the spread of the kingdom, and the parables of the hidden treasure and fine pearls (vs 44-46) stresses the joy of discovering the kingdom, the final parable in the series, that of the net, returns to the theme of judgment ‘at the end of the age’ (vs 47-52). The kingdom may have arrived in Jesus but it has not yet reached its culmination.

iii. The Signs of The ‘End’

Understandably, much attention has been paid to the apocalyptic discourses, which occur in Matthew 24, and the parallels of Mark 13 and Luke 21.

17 Ladd, *Presence of the Future*, p. 233.

The whole discourse is traditionally interpreted as about the ultimate coming of Christ into his kingdom. Consequently, people have been fascinated by the signs of his coming and noted the catastrophic changes which will herald that coming. The signs of the approaching end, are false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution, increase of wickedness, declining love, and the preaching of the gospel to the whole world (Mt. 24:4-14). The catastrophe involves the abomination of the Holy Place, days of great distress, people fleeing their homes and cosmic signs of a darkened sun and moon and stars falling from the sky (vs. 15-29). All this immediately heralds the ‘the coming of the Son of Man’ like lightening (v 27), ‘with power and great glory’ (v 30), when he gathers ‘his elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other’ (v 31).

The introduction, which explains the context of the discourse, links the coming of the Son of Man closely to the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple (vs 1-3) which occurred in AD 70. Many of the details fit with that time which brought about ‘the end of the age’ as far as Israel was concerned. It was a judgement of God, provoked by their refusal to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. So, an increasing number, like Tom Wright, argue this is not about the Second Coming¹⁸

Others including Dick France, rightly I think, see the disciples, following Jesus prediction of the destruction of the Temple, as posing a double question in verse 3, ‘Tell us...when will this happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age.’ The first question relates to the more immediate situation and the other to ‘the end of the age’. They argue that a change takes place in verse 36. So, verses 34-35 sum up the first section and include the promise that ‘this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened’. Verse 36, then, begins with a contrast, ‘but concerning that day’, and speaks

18 N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996, pp. 339-68. In private correspondence on 27/10/2000, Wright said, ‘I believe with cheerful delight in the second coming of Jesus, as taught by Acts and Paul for a start, but I don’t think Jesus himself taught it [the disciples hadn’t even grasped the fact that he was going to die.]

of a time in the future which is unknown. The new emphasis is on being ready at any time for the final arrival of the Son of Man rather than living as people did in the days of Noah when they were distracted and totally unaware of what is about to happen. The call, then, is to be always prepared ‘because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him’ (v 44).

The third and traditional position interprets the whole passage as about the second coming and points out that verse 14 and more significantly verse 30 were hardly fulfilled in AD 70. But verse 14 may be said to have been fulfilled in Paul’s mission and by others. Similarly, verse 30 is not an obstacle to applying this to the destruction of Jerusalem unless one interprets it literally rather than through the lens of apocalyptic and of the OT scriptures it echoes. The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, apocalyptically, could be seen as the dramatic intervention of the Son of Man. Those opting for the traditional view, can point to the close parallel between the verses pre and post verse 36 and argue, therefore, that their interpretation is more coherent.

Whichever interpretation is adopted, all point to the fact that the story of God’s coming kingdom has not yet reached its final chapter. We may differ on what the chapters prior to this final one contains, and even, indeed, how many chapters there will be. But we know the story is not over yet.

(b) *The coming kingdom in Paul’s writings*

Paul only refers to the kingdom of God ten times, outside of Acts¹⁹ – mainly to talk of it as a present realm we can enter or a future inheritance we will receive. Yet the whole thrust of his ministry was oriented towards the future (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Thess. 2:19), as

¹⁹ Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:24; 50; Gal 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col 4:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5.

was the whole of the Christian life (e.g., Rom. 12:19; 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph 5:25-27; Phil. 3:17-20; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 1:3-12).

For our purposes the statement about the kingdom of God in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 is the most significant reference.

²⁴ Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

His vision is of a world put to rights because all God’s enemies have been vanquished, all God’s people have been vindicated and transformed, and God himself assumes his rightful place in the creation, reigning supreme, ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28). The same vision is expressed in different language in Ephesians 1:10 when what God has purposed in Christ will ‘be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ’. Similar thought forms are found in Colossians 1:20, where Paul looks forward to ‘all things’ (which, since the context is that of creation, does not mean a few individuals) will be reconciled to God because of the peace Christ has made on the cross.

His kingdom is categorically closely related to his cross, not something different from it, as Colossians 1:20, and other texts, show. As Jeremy Treat has recently written, ‘One need not choose between the kingdom and the cross, for the cross is royal and the kingdom is cruciform’.²⁰ Briefly, the problem for humanity is a rejection of God’s rule which results in a subjection to Satan’s control. Consequently if people are to be rescued Satan must be defeated, which is what Christ accomplished on the cross (that is *Christus Victor*). But he did not do this superficially. He did it by pulling the rug from under Satan’s feet and removing the ground by which he could keep people enslaved, which is that they are sinners. Christ dealt with humanity’s problem both by defeating humanity’s enemy, Satan, and by paying the penalty of our sin which Satan exploited (that is penal

²⁰ Jeremy R. Treat: *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014, p. 141.

substitution). So Satan, like the serpent in Eden, no longer has a leg to stand on, and his rule is unmasks for the deception it is.²¹

(c) *The coming kingdom in NT Apocalyptic*

Another major and different perspective on the coming kingdom is found in the apocalyptic writings of the NT. We have already noted Matthew 24 and parallels but here I’m thinking of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation. They need to be understood and interpreted through the lens of apocalyptic rather than being taken to be in a literal, superficial way. Apocalyptic operated according to a set of conventions through visions of momentous cosmic disturbances that lay beyond normal human or creational experience, and made use of numerical and other codes.

Peter’s apocalyptic uses traditional terminology about ‘the last days’ and ‘the day of the Lord’ which will come unexpectedly, ‘like a thief’. His vision of that day is of the cataclysmic recreation of the present cosmos and the coming of ‘a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells’. Although he does not explicitly relate this to God’s reign, the cumulative effect of his language leads us to conclude that this is God’s righteous rule taking its unchallenged place. As Dale Patrick has said, ‘The kingdom of God comes at the end of time as the culmination of everything that has happened from creation until now’.²²

Revelation, more obviously, is about the triumph of God’s rule in the face of unspeakable evil. Behind the experience of setback and persecution, all of which were foretold in Jesus’ teaching, believers need to understand that God remains on his throne and remains worthy to receive ‘glory honour and power’ (Rev. 4:11). At the centre of the throne stands the lion who, in reality, turns out to be a slain lamb. He has ‘triumphed’ over all

21 *Ibid.*, p. 204.

22 Dale Patrick, ‘The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament’ in *The Kingdom of God in the 20th Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendall Willis, Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987, cited by Waltke, ‘The Kingdom of God: Definition and Story’ p. 55.

evil through the shedding of his blood (Rev 5:4-6). His victory may not yet be universally evident, but they are secure nonetheless. The conflict may be fierce, and there will be many casualties en route, but the day will come when the battle reaches its dénouement and the heavenly warrior will defeat the beast and all who have joined with him in rebellion against God. Then the devil will be ‘thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown’ (20:10). Creation will then celebrate the one who is ‘King of Kings and Lord of Lords’ (19:16) and God will resume his place at the heart of the new creation and in the midst of redeemed humanity (21:1-22:5).

The promise of his coming to bring God’s kingdom to fulfilment remains a promise to this day. He says he is coming ‘soon’, imminently, at any time. Until he does we continue to pray, in Jesus’ own words, ‘Your kingdom come’ or in the closing words of Scripture, ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus’.

To pray that is to express the longing for the day when the world will be free from all that troubles it now, because it has sought to dislodge God from his throne. To pray that is to express the hope that what we saw as glimpses of God’s kingdom in the life of Jesus may become our all-consuming reality. To pray that is to express faith in God that however fierce the battle, however great the disappointments, however delayed the coming, he will one day reign unchallenged in his creation. To pray that is to place ourselves under his reign now and to live before our time, as it were, as obedient subjects of the great King. For to pray ‘Your kingdom come’ is also to pray, ‘Your will be done on earth,’ not simply sometime in the future by all but now in the present by me.

Theologians have swung between seeing the kingdom as purely future (Weiss and Schweitzer) to seeing it as wholly realized in the present (Dodd). Others have focused not on the grand picture but the detailed sequence that will lead to his coming, and especially to the continuing place of Israel in that story. But Jesus has brought the future into the present; the kingdom is already here, even if it has not yet reached its

fulfilment. Our task is not to speculate on God’s timetable, which is unknown, or even his steps towards that unknown day, but to live now, under the sovereignty of God, in anticipation of the way we will live then. To appropriate what Tom Wright wrote about 1 Corinthians 13 and apply it to the coming kingdom of God, “It is the music God has written for all his creatures to sing, and we are called to learn it and practise it now so as to be ready when the conductor brings down his baton.”²³

23 Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, p. 301.



The Coming Kingdom and the Hope of Israel

Calvin L. Smith

KEYWORDS:

| The Kingdom of God | Israel | Romans | Hope |
| Eschatology | Biblical Theology | Day of the Lord | Zion |

ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this paper is to set out a case for the hope of Israel in the eschatological future. The primary focus in this paper is Romans, the climax of the Apostle Paul's discussion and argument concerning ethnic Israel in Romans 9-11, in addition this is framed by drawing on other biblical texts. The aim is to set the scene — and provide a summary in terms of biblical theology — for the case for God's calling and purpose for the Jewish people, with a special focus on the eschatological place of Israel as set out in Romans 11. In so doing we will establish precise contextual definitions for key terms: Israel, Supersessionism/Non-supersessionism, Christian Zionism, and Restorationism, and how this relates to the resolution the Apostle Paul sets-out in Romans 11: Israel is inextricably intertwined in God's eschatological scheme. The conclusions of this paper will serve as a basis for more detailed hermeneutical and theological treatments of this and related topics in later papers presented at this conference.

AIMS AND PURPOSE¹

The purpose of this paper is to set out a case for Israel’s hope in the eschatological future. Although drawing on other biblical texts, my primary focus in this paper is Romans 11, which is the climax of the Apostle Paul’s discussion and argument concerning ethnic Israel in Romans 9–11. My aims here are modest, namely, to set the scene and provide a summary biblical theology case² for God’s calling and purpose for the Jewish people, with a special focus on the eschatological place of Israel as set out in Romans 11. This will serve as a basis for more detailed hermeneutical and theological treatments of this and related topics in later papers presented at this conference.

DISCLOSURE

I approach this issue from a premillennial but also a non-dispensational perspective (I lean towards post-tribulationalism). My position, then, is hardly one typically associated with the main pro-Israel stereotypes sometimes bandied about in much of today’s debate. Arguably much of that debate has become over-simplified whereby nonsupersessionism, Christian Zionism and pro-Israel camps are all bunched together (often pejoratively) under a dispensationalist banner. Yet the reality is far more complex than such parodies suggest, so now seems an appropriate time to set out some terminology before proceeding.

TERMINOLOGY

1 This paper is presented in a conference talk format and as such references are minimal. A list of further reading is included at the end of the paper.

2 Biblical theology is defined here as tracing biblical themes across the unfolding revelation of Scripture, with a focus on canonical, or diachronic (over synchronic) interpretation.

i. Israel

The term can be used in various ways, none of them mutually exclusive and which sometimes overlap considerably (whether “the Jewish people”, “ethnic Israel”, or sometimes in the field of theology “national Israel”). In short, in this paper I will use the term “Israel” to define those who identify themselves culturally, historically, religiously and ethnically as Jews.³ So in a biblical theology discussion of Israel we do not use the term to refer to the modern State of Israel, but rather the Jewish people as a whole. That said, with perhaps around fifty per cent of the world’s Jewry living in what today constitutes the State of Israel, neither can that political entity be cavalierly dismissed in this discussion. In any discussion of God’s calling and purpose of the Jewish people, the Middle East state—where half of the world’s people who identify themselves as Jews live in their ancestral homeland—remains absolutely relevant to this discussion.

I recognise that the question “who is a Jew?” is a perennial one which has been discussed at length by the Jewish people, where definitions and disagreements revolve around Jewishness as an ethnic, religious, cultural, political and/or geographical characteristic(s). My own view is that it combines elements of all these. However, time and other constraints do not allow us to delve into this issue now, so for the purposes of this paper we will simply define “Israel” as the Jewish people.

ii. Supersessionism

This is the view that God no longer retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people (national Israel). It comes from the Latin for sitting over or upon, the idea being it means to replace or supersede another—in this case the theological view that the Church replaces Israel as the people of

³ Craig Blaising offers a similar definition of “Israel” in “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question”, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44.3 (Sept 2001), 435.

God. Supersessionism is sometimes referred to as replacement theology.⁴

In his useful *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, the scholar R. Kendall Soulen moves beyond supersessionism as an over-arching term to identify three variations.⁵ The first is *punitive supersessionism*, the view that the replacement of the Jews with the Church was a punishment for the former’s rejection of God (e.g., through idolatry) in the Old Testament and/or Jesus as Messiah in the New Testament. Previously the harsh position and language of this punitive supersessionist view, which was dominant in the medieval Christian era, might have been referred to as “hard supersessionism”. Conversely, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust, some Protestants have moved away from the language of hard or punitive supersessionism to speak instead of Israel’s role in God’s economy of salvation as having been completed or fulfilled. Soulen refers to this as *economic supersessionism*, while its softer tone (albeit still triumphalist in that it still maintains God’s wholesale replacement of the Jewish people) previously earned the title “soft supersessionism”. Soulen’s third definition is *structural supersessionism*, based on a hermeneutical reading of the canonical narrative whereby some aspects of Scripture are placed in the foreground and others are relegated to the background. In this classic canonical reading of Scripture dominant throughout much of Church history, then, covenant, eschatology and the Old Testament tend to be downplayed, and with them (given how it features so strongly in these topics) the role of Israel in the Bible.

I would suggest punitive supersessionism is making somewhat of a comeback, with “hard” supersessionist language perhaps more widely used than ever since the end of the Holocaust. One is also struck by how many Palestinian and pro-Palestinian Christians (including some Evangelicals) often draw on the language of punitive supersessionism

4 For an important examination and critique of the history and theology of replacement theology see Michael Vlach, *Has The Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010).

5 R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

in their demonisation of the modern Jewish state. Meanwhile the BDS (Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions) efforts, which anti-Zionists are so involved in, is in some ways reminiscent of the boycotts of Jewish businesses in 1930s Europe.⁶ A key difference is how the word “Jew” has been replaced by “Israel”; but listening to how the words such as “Zionist” or “Israel” are used, it is clear that in some cases they are replacements for “Jew”, thus reflecting how elements of anti-Semitism remain among segments of Christendom.

iii. Christian Zionism

This is the theological view that God has brought (or will bring) the Jewish people back to their ancestral homeland in the Middle East. It is based on biblical and theological arguments and therefore is the religious counterpart of political Zionism, which seeks a Jewish homeland on political grounds. It is vital to recognise that Christian Zionism comes in many shapes and sizes and cannot be presented as a simplistic, homogenous expression as many have sought to parody it in the current battle of ideas and simplified political narratives.

iv. Restorationism and Nonsupersessionism

Restorationism is the view that God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people, that He will somehow restore His people in his eternal plan. However, restorationism can take several forms. Some, on the basis of Acts 1:6, believe God will physically restore the Kingdom of Israel in a geographical sense—a view which falls within parts of the Christian Zionist camp. Other restorationists, however, focus on the people rather than the land, which they maintain can be regarded as incidental. Others may argue God *will* restore the Jewish people to the land, where they

⁶ For a helpful (but disturbing) treatment of the re-emergence of waves of punitive supersessionism in Europe see Colin Barnes, *They Conspire Against Your People: The European Churches and the Holocaust* (Broadstairs, Kent: King’s Divinity Press, 2014).

will be in the eschatological future. However, they state that we cannot be certain the modern State of Israel is such a restoration, or indeed if we are actually in the end times. A further complication is that elsewhere in theology, in the subdiscipline of Pentecostal Studies, restorationism is the view that God is restoring to the Church all of the apostolic gifts and callings.

Therefore, given these complications I prefer the word “nonsupersessionism” as an umbrella term to identify those who believe God retains a plan and purpose for the Jewish people, whether Christian Zionist or not. It is not particularly ideal to identify oneself by what you are not, but in this case seems the best way forward to avoid confusion.

ROMANS 11

Having established this important background we can now move on to Romans 11. But before we do so, we need to consider briefly what Jesus said shortly before the ascension, in Acts 1:6-8:

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

It is important to note that Jesus is speaking here to the disciples (now the apostles), who had lived and fellowshipped with and been taught by their Master for three years. The ascension represents the culmination of their period of discipleship under Jesus and marks the beginning of the new task of apostleship as leaders of a new Church. This is a significant moment as Jesus shares His last thoughts with them immediately before He is taken up to heaven.

So when they asked Jesus if now is the time the kingdom was to be restored to Israel, either they got it spectacularly wrong (in which case

one would naturally expect these newly-qualified apostles would have been corrected by Jesus as was so often the case in the Gospels), or else they were not wrong at all, that indeed their expectations (if not timing) were correct. After their three-year discipleship period in preparation for this moment, one struggles to see how—if they were so woefully wrong in their understanding—the matter would be left as it is in Acts 1, with Jesus immediately leaving to their own devices (and to run His new Church) a group of disciples who had just proved they had failed their apprenticeship.

Instead, the passage naturally suggests that the disciples' expectation of a hope for Israel was not erroneous at all, rather simply the timing. The passage indicates they were thinking “Israel’s hope here and now”, whereas Jesus’ words indicate a future hope for Israel, a hope that is projected into the eschatological future. Note, for example, Jesus’ reference to the “times and seasons” fixed by the Father, echoing similar phrases in Matthew 24:36 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1, significantly both eschatological in context. Likewise, Paul suggests a future hope for Israel in Romans 11 when he states: “A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved” (11:25b-26a). It is to this future, eschatological hope in Romans 11 we now turn. We begin with some background to this important chapter.

BACKGROUND TO ROMANS 11

Romans 11 is the culmination of an argument set out by Paul over three chapters (9–11). Arguably, the general consensus today is that the entire focus of this section of Romans is upon ethnic, or national, Israel (note Paul’s several references to his kinsmen according to the flesh in 9:1–5). One important exception is the scholar N. T. Wright who ascribes Israel with different meanings even within the space of a few words in the latter part of Romans 11. There is insufficient space to become distracted on

this issue here, and it seems best to leave the matter to another well-known scholar and friend of Wright’s (Larry Hurtado) who makes the following observation:

I find this friend for whom I have great admiration unpersuasive in his handling of this material. It is remarkable that, per his view, in Romans 11:25a the “Israel” upon whom a “hardening” (against the Gospel) has come = the Jewish people, but (within only a few words) the “all Israel” who shall be saved in 11:25b = the church (composed, to be sure, as Wright emphasizes, of gentiles and those Jews who, like Paul, accept the Gospel). Shifting the meaning of “Israel” within one verse, that’s going some!⁷

Hurtado also makes the point that however one views—or disagrees with—Paul’s views on this issue, it is important to let Paul speak for himself rather than seek to change the meaning of Paul’s intent to make his views more palatable. It is indeed an important point for biblical scholars to bear in mind. Another point I would make is that this demonstrates the dangers of synchronic over diachronic interpretation, focusing upon and basing a doctrine on a short passage or meaning of a single word, rather than building a more robust doctrinal case upon a canonical/biblical theology theme. A final (and somewhat unrelated point) here is how Paul devotes around a fifth of his seminal epistle to the Romans on this issue, which directly challenges those who maintain the New Testament has little to say about national Israel.

ROMANS 11 AND ESCHATOLOGY

So what has Romans 11 to do with the future, or eschatological, hope of Israel? On the surface this chapter does not immediately appear to focus on eschatological matters; and, arguably, we could instead explore

⁷ Larry Hurtado, “Paul and Israel’s Salvation: In Dialogue With Tom Wright”, Larry Hurtado’s blog (18 April 2012). Available at <https://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/paul-and-israels-salvation-in-dialogue-with-tom-wright/> (last accessed 13 June 2015).

Israel’s future hope in, say, several lengthy Old Testament apocalyptic passages or perhaps look at the theme of Israel in the New Testament book of Revelation. Yet upon closer examination Romans 11 is thoroughly eschatological in its dealings with the future hope of Israel. Consider the evidence:

First, Paul’s argument across Romans 9 to 11 seems clearly to divide across three stages of time (which the later inserters of chapters and verses seem to have recognised from the natural progression of Paul’s argument across this section of Scripture). Thus Romans 9 focuses on Israel’s past, Romans 10 on her present state, while Romans 11 shifts focus by and large to Israel’s future.

Next, in Romans 11 Paul juxtaposes a *remnant* of Israel in the *here and now* (11:5) with the *future* salvation of *all Israel* (11:25-27). We can go further. As the chapter progresses the apostle juxtaposes a *firstfruits* of Israel being saved (11:15-16) with the *whole lump* in the future (their full inclusion, 11:12). Here Paul is drawing on an Old Testament concept of the firstfruits of a sacrifice compared with the later and full, or complete, offering. Surely, too, it is not insignificant that “firstfruits” also has eschatological connotations elsewhere in Scripture, notably Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection when He was resurrected, which is compared with the resurrection of all humanity at the end of time (see 1 Cor 15). Likewise, a remnant of Israel is saved now (the firstfruits), with Paul proclaiming the fullness of Jews ushered into the kingdom in the future.

Another feature of Romans 11 indicating an eschatological theme in Paul’s mind is his partial quotation in 11:26-27 of Isaiah 59. Paul quotes Isaiah as a basis of Israel’s future salvation. Significantly, the very Isaiah passage he cites sets out the future judgment, coming of the Lord and the salvation of Israel (59:19).

Finally, Romans 11:25-26 refers to “time of the Gentiles”. This choice of words echoes very closely Luke’s choice of words in his eschatological treatment in 21:24. Note that Luke’s context here, which strongly echoes much of the material in Matthew’s great eschatological discourse (Matt

24–25), is clearly eschatological, pertaining to the eschaton (or end times). So in summary, in Romans 11 Paul affirms categorically that God has not rejected national Israel (11:1), going on to juxtapose her present condition with her future hope (see figure 1).

Thus, the apostle culminates with the climax of Romans 9–11 in 11:25–27:

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

But it is not just Romans 11 that discusses Israel’s future hope and salvation. This *Day of the Lord + national Israel + her salvation* formula appears in numerous biblical passages, notably Isaiah 59 (see above), Ezekiel 36:22–29 and arguably Jeremiah 31:31–34. These texts detail not only the cleansing of Israel, but also God putting upon them His Spirit. Thus we read in Zechariah 12:10, 13:1 (note again yet another eschatological passage relating to the future hope of Israel, in the context of her cleansing):

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn...

“On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.

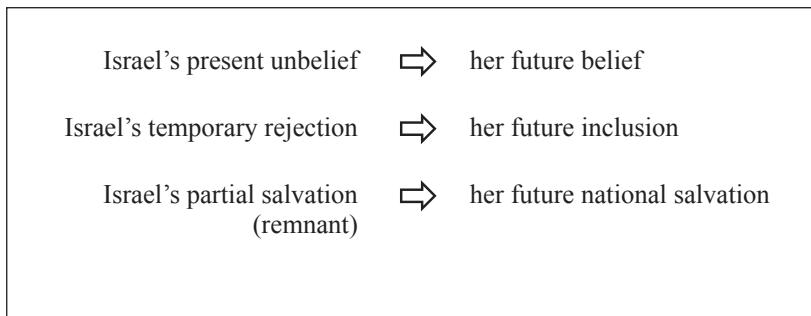


Figure 1

SUMMARY OF WHAT WE ARE SAYING

That Israel is inextricably intertwined in God’s eschatological scheme. This is a twin theme which runs through much of Old Testament, Acts 1:6, Romans 9–11, the book of Revelation and various other passages we have commented briefly upon (and many we have not). So not only is Israel a major biblical theme running across both Testaments, it is also projected into the eschatological future where her fortunes are inextricably intertwined with God’s eschatological dealings with the nations.

Given this link between Israel and eschatology, it is hardly surprising that traditions and churches that tend to downplay eschatology also relegate Israel to the sidelines. Indeed this is precisely the point Soulen makes, where a distorted canonical narrative that relegates Israel (and eschatology) to the background all but writes Israel out of God’s entire story, as expressed across the whole of the Bible’s unfolding revelation. I am sure many of us here can identify individual churches with a weak emphasis on eschatology. The chances are also that there will be a weak (or missing) treatment of the biblical theme of Israel.

To recap, then, Israel’s future hope is her national salvation (cf. Zech

12:10). Note how, through Israel, God demonstrates His salvific plan. Indeed it is through Israel that we receive salvation; as Jesus stated to the woman at the well, “Salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). God raised the Jewish nation, through who comes a Jewish Messiah, to bring salvation to the world. If God’s salvation of humanity, and all that represents, is everything that Satan despises, and Israel was instrumental in bringing that salvation to this world, who would Satan most likely make war upon? I find it striking how Revelation 7 speaks of the dragon attacking the woman (Israel) and then making war on her other offspring. In their excellent book, David Torrance and Howard Taylor identify how two of the most godless ideologies of the twentieth century—Stalinism and Nazism—likewise made war on the Jewish people. It is all the more concerning, then, when people, in the name of Christianity, seek to demonise Israel. It is not legitimate criticism of Israel that is the issue (which is wholly acceptable), or even that such people subscribe to supersessionism (a position I consider biblically unsustainable but which, in itself, does not, in my view, constitute heterodoxy or inclinations towards anti-Semitism). Rather, it is the singling out of the Jewish state as the cause of all ills, to the detriment of every other conflict, and how Israel is irrationally held to a different standard than any other nation.

This aside and moving on, if, as Jesus stated, “salvation is from the Jews” it seems only fair it comes back to the Jewish people one day, which is precisely the point Paul seems to make in Romans 11. Today, a remnant is saved; but, eschatologically, national Israel as a whole will be (or as Paul refers to them, the unbelieving branches, the “whole lump”), at which stage it is important here to emphasise the national, rather than universal, salvation of Israel. The former refers to the nation as a whole; the latter refers to every single Jewish person. Paul’s context is clearly corporate, not individualist, meaning the congregation or nation will one day be saved (my colleague Andy Cheung discusses grammatically the phrase “all Israel” in my edited volume on supersessionism⁸).

8 Andy Cheung, “Who is the ‘Israel’ of Romans 11:26” in Calvin L. Smith, ed. *The Jews*,

WHAT WE ARE NOT SAYING

That there are two ways of salvation: i.e., through both Moses and Christ, a doctrine known as dual covenantalism. Orthodox Christianity maintains that salvation comes only through Christ (John 14:6), which is why Paul always preached the gospel in the synagogues during his missionary journeys recorded in Acts.

Neither are we equating the modern, secular State of Israel wholly with biblical Israel. Clearly, as we have pointed out, “Israel” means more than those living in the Middle Eastern state, with as many Jewish people outside modern Israel as within it. Yet neither are we saying modern Israel has no bearing whatsoever on this discussion. As noted earlier, approximately half of all the Jewish people in the world live in that state in the Middle East.

Third, it is not suggested or argued that modern Israel is sinless, or demanded that Christians take an “Israel right or wrong” position. If even biblical Israel sinned, it is folly to suggest today’s Jewish state is perfect. It is not. No state is, indeed no human institution is.

Finally, I am not suggesting the issue of Israel is or should be a test of orthodoxy (as a minority on the Christian Zionist fringes seem to make it). That said, the more I see the world demonise Israel and excuse far worse things going on in the world—while many of those who demonise Israel also tend to oppose Christian values—the more I am convinced this is becoming a seminal issue for believers today.

In conclusion, Romans 11, I believe, sets out the future hope of Israel. Note too, towards the end of his three-chapter argument, how Paul wraps up his argument by highlighting God’s covenant with the Jewish people (11:27), extended nationally on account of the Patriarchs (11:28). Having established this historical act of grace towards the Jewish people, Paul ends by stating that the callings and gifts of God (in this case His calling

of Israel) are irrevocable (11:29). In other words, he tells his audience, God has not finished with Israel.

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The Great Commission and the Coming Kingdom: Matthew 28:18-20

Mitch Glaser

KEYWORDS:

Jewish Evangelism	Missions	Gospel
Kingdom	The Great Commission	Matthew
Jewish Backgrounds	Eschatology	

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that God has a plan and purpose for the conclusion of our present age. This future will not be ethereal or nondescript as Scripture outlines coming prophetic events with great detail and specificity. Dr. Glaser, in a thorough exposition of Matthew 28:18-20, concludes that Jesus linked the proclamation of the Gospel with His second coming by commanding His disciples to make disciples throughout world “until the end of the age.”

Therefore, Jesus and the disciples were very concerned about the world to come and Dr. Glaser suggests that the future hope of a literal Messianic kingdom is woven into the very core of both Testaments but is presently minimized by a rising eschatological cynicism within today’s church.

Dr. Glaser develops the task given to the disciples known as the Great Commission through a careful exegesis of the text and discussion of the first century Jewish understanding of what it meant to “make disciples.” Further, Glaser demonstrates that the term *συντελείας* used in Matthew 28:20 and in 24:3 and translated as “end” would best be viewed as the consummation of a series of eschatological events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. Glaser dismisses the notion that the “end of the age,” as the phrase is so often translated, should be understood by today’s disciples as simple words of comfort or a conclusion to what has gone before, but rather to an unfolding of “end times” events inclusive

of the restoration of Israel, various eschatological judgments and the penultimate return of Christ.

Dr. Glaser argues that Jesus encouraged the disciples to look towards the events of the *συντελείας*, the consummation of the age, thereby creating a greater sense of urgency and providing the motivation for fulfilling the Commission. He further suggests that when the events of the future are de-literalized and downplayed that the burden for bringing the Gospel to those without Jesus is diminished

INTRODUCTION

It can be quite frightening to think about the future – especially if you read the Bible and take it literally! The more romanticized happy ending we all love in literature, theatre and the movies is simply not part of the divine script for human history. The future will be unyielding and selective as it holds good news for some and bad news for others. How harshly this falls on our 21st century ears. Yet, it is true!

Jesus calls us to be engaged, but not overly attached to our very temporary existence on earth. Believers, like everyone else, tend to embrace the world’s dream of a better life – to live longer, to enjoy a “no worries” mentality, to live for the moment, to change what we can on earth and to not become overly concerned with the future. We sometimes behave as if God has given the future to man to control and shape as we see fit.

We know that our Messiah wants us to join Him in being crucified daily, forsaking the things of this passing planet to follow Him in obedience to all He has taught. But, it is hard to let go of this world, as this existence is all we know! Admittedly, we have a difficult time trusting the Lord today, nevertheless tomorrow. Yet, the future God planned for us before the foundations of the earth is inevitable and coming soon.

Humanity is not meandering through the ages, as God has a plan and

purpose for the conclusion of our present age. This future will not be ethereal or nondescript and is outlined with great detail and specificity in Scripture. It will include a full itinerary of events that cannot be avoided. Rather than remaining passive participants in the future God has prepared for humanity, we should study the Scriptures and discover what He has planned so that we may take an active role in the plan.

As one of our best-known modern-day *Jewish prophets*, Bob Dylan wrote,

... Like a thief in the night, he'll replace
wrong with right

When He returns.

... Will I ever learn that there'll be no
peace that the war won't cease?

Until He returns.

... Of every earthly plan that be known to
man, He is unconcerned
He's got plans of His own to set up
His throne

When He returns.¹

The future God has planned for the world is unstoppable!

Today, many thoughtful Evangelicals gravitate towards a more undefined view of the future, spiritualizing the kingdom message of the Old Testament prophets. We tend to take the Bible's teaching about the future less literally than in previous years. We say, "Thy kingdom come," but have only a minimal understanding of the kingdom we expect.

In fact, eschatological or "end times" agnosticism is more common today than digging deeply into Scripture to find out what God has in store for those who love Him and His Word. Perhaps we have overemphasized the coming kingdom in the past? The current emphasis within the Church

¹ <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bobdylan/whenhereturns.html> from "Slow Train Coming," Lyrics and Music by Bob Dylan.

over the last few decades encouraging believers to do what is possible to alleviate present suffering and injustice is positive; however, this focus on the present tends to obfuscate the teaching of Scripture about our future hope. We behave as if nurturing a future hope is less godly and appositional to working towards a better present.

Unfortunately, the church has become imbalanced, not realizing that our sure hope for the future is what Scripture provides to strengthen our efforts to transform the ungodly structures of a fallen world and comfort those suffering in its wake. We often quote the Sermon on the Mount to undergird our concern for the present when Jesus says,

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself.
Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:34)

However, using this text to minimize or lessen the significance of God’s plan for the future in Scripture is a misunderstanding of the text. Jesus never avoided the future! In Matthew 6, the Lord is simply telling us to trust God with our tomorrows and to believe that He will provide for our needs as we “seek first His kingdom.” The Lord is not telling us to ignore the future. In fact, He says the opposite in Matthew 24:32-33,

Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door.

Knowing more about our biblical future and the coming kingdom is one of our duties as disciples of Jesus the Messiah. We are not only part of God’s today, but we also have starring roles in His forever story! We must discover what He has planned to the best of our ability and allow the future to inform the way we live and serve in the present.

This is precisely why He addressed the future as part of what we term the Great Commission. What we do today in obedience to Jesus only makes sense in light of the future that awaits us. The Savior calls His disciples to live today in light of tomorrow.

We recognize that our days are numbered and understand that life, as we know it, will soon end. We also believe that we have little time left to let the world know what Jesus has taught us about salvation, the abundant life and His plan for the future.

Jesus teaches His disciples that the “end of the age” is as certain as His death and resurrection. Should we then concern ourselves with the details? Of course! As His disciples we should not trivialize what mattered so profoundly to our Savior. If so, we demonstrate that we have not learned, followed and observed what He taught, thereby denying the very *teaching* He called us to pass along.

If we are not telling people about the end of the age then we are not doing what Jesus instructed us to do. Perhaps we do not want to embarrass God or be viewed as fanatics on a soapbox in Hyde Park or as Americans would imagine, standing in the middle of a busy urban center with a sandwich board sign hanging on our bodies announcing that the end is near. Yet, it is this recognition of our temporal nature and of our few remaining days on earth that compels us to reflect upon the *Great Commission in Light of the Coming Kingdom*. I have come to believe that it is impossible to fulfill the Savior’s directions to “Go” in Matthew 28:19-20 without powerful motivation. It is this hope of His coming and His reminder of what He has planned for us that will motivate His disciples to carry out this holy Commission. The day is coming when we will run out of time to fulfill the *Commission* He has given us and it is for this reason that Jesus links the Great Commission to the future He planned before the foundations of the earth.

I hope to explore this link between the Great Commission and the coming Kingdom. In doing so, I have chosen to quote liberally from a series of messages given by the great expositor and Christian leader, John Stott, who thought deeply about the Great Commission. He is considered the father of the Lausanne Consultation on World Evangelism and as a local pastor had a great heart for world missions. This series of messages were given at the Berlin Consultation on World Evangelism in 1966.

However, his words are as gripping today as they were nearly half-century ago.

I had the joy of spending time with John Stott at the Lausanne Younger Leaders Conference, held in Singapore in 1987, and was impressed by his humility, grasp of the word and his evident love for the Lord and for the Jewish people. It is with deep appreciation for his teaching and ministry that I refer to his comments in Berlin.

COMMON UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

The text in its purest form is found in Matthew 28:18-20, where the Savior issues His last set of standing orders to His disciples prior to the ascension,

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Speaking to the Berlin Congress on World Evangelism in 1966, John Stott wrote,

The so-called “Great Commission” or “Universal Commission” occurs five times in our Bibles, at the end of each of the four Gospels and once at the beginning of the Acts. There is no need to suppose that these are five versions of a single occasion. It is much more probable that, during the forty days which elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension, the risen Lord repeated the same commission many times, although in different words and with different emphases.²

The Commission is found in various texts in the New Testament³, but we

2 John Stott, Address to World Conference on Evangelism, Berlin 1966, Part 1 <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott1.htm>. Accessed August 2014.

3 Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:44-49, John 20:19-23, and Acts 1:6-8.

will focus on the statement found in Matthew 28:18-20. Stott affirms,

For, in the last resort, we engage in evangelism today, not because we want to or because we choose to or because we like to, but because we have been told to. The Church is under orders. The risen Lord has commanded us to “go,” to “preach,” “to make disciples,” and that is enough for us. *Evangelistic inactivity is disobedience.* It is, therefore, right for us to go back to the very beginning and re-examine our marching orders.⁴

Allow me then to summarize the various views Christians hold regarding what we usually entitle the *Great Commission* – our marching orders!

Marv Newell, Senior Vice President with *Missio Nexus*, a fellowship of Mission agencies, reduces the various statements of the Great Commission into four helpful points in his book, *Commissioned*:

In the Great Commission Jesus calls for: a worthy messenger, a certain message, a clear strategy, an ultimate goal – world evangelization.⁵

John Stott views the Great Commission as the carrying out of Jesus' command to go and do three things: make disciples, baptize and teach.

Christ used three verbs: “make disciples,” “baptize,” and “teach.” Some scholars interpret this as a single command to “go and make disciples”; “baptizing them” and “teaching them” [when] they consider the explanation of how disciples are made. I prefer to take the three verbs separately as descriptions of three distinct parts or stages of the one Great Commission of Christ to “go.”⁶

One can already see from a cursory reading of these comments that there is considerable agreement on what the Great Commission is all about. The instructions are fairly clear. Jesus, after His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, calls upon the eleven to “go” out from their usual

4 Stott, Berlin Conference.

5 Marvin J. Newell, *Commissioned: What Jesus Wants You to Know as You Go*, ChurchSmart Resources, 2010, 182 pp. in the book review by David Mays, <http://www.davidmays.org/BN/NewComm.html>, accessed August 2014.

6 Stott, Berlin Conference.

surroundings reaching the world with the message of the Gospel. The strategy and call to action is to carry out three or four tasks, depending on how you divide them: *to make disciples, to baptize these disciples and then to teach them everything the Savior taught us and to help the new disciples to be obedient to what they have learned.*

Chris Wright, British missiologist, Old Testament theologian and International Ministries Director of the Langham Partnership, comments extensively on the nature of the Great Commission in his excellent article, *Integral Mission and the Great Commission “The Five Marks of Mission”*.

Wright both simplifies and yet expands the scope of the Commission. He takes the *Five Marks of Mission*, adopted by the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in 1988⁷, and reduces them to three. The five marks are:

1. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom; 2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers; 3. To respond to human need by loving service; 4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society; 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth.⁸

Wright comments,

However, I prefer to keep things simpler and we can do that by grouping four of the five into two pairs, putting evangelism and teaching together, and putting compassion and justice together. That then creates three major missional tasks, or three focal points for our missional engagement: church, society and creation. Our mission, then, includes:

1. Building the church (through evangelism and teaching), bringing people to repentance, faith and obedience as disciples of Jesus Christ.
2. Serving society (through compassion and justice), in response to Jesus sending us ‘into the world’, to love and serve, to be salt and light, to do good, and to ‘seek the welfare’ of the people around us (as Jeremiah told the Israelites in Babylon, Jer. 29:7).

⁷ <http://www.loimission.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Chris-Wright-IntegralMissionandtheGreatCommission.pdf>, p.3

⁸ Wright, pp. 3-4.

3. Caring for creation (through godly use of the resources of creation along with ecological concern and action), fulfilling the very first ‘great commission’ given to humanity in Genesis 1 and 2.⁹

Wright argues that the basis for his inclusion of serving society and caring for creation in the mission of the church is based upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:20 where He states, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you* and therefore his points 2 and 3 flow from the expanse of Jesus’ teaching in the Scripture and are not explicitly stated in our text.

I believe adding these more expansive elements as summarized by Wright¹⁰ or any attempt to merge the various emphases of our Messiah’s teaching into the Great Commission is unnecessary as the *commission* focuses on what the disciples are to do and not on the specifics of the curriculum which are expansive, *πάντα ὅσα ἐντειλάμην ὑμῖν*.

I am concerned about delineating priorities from Jesus’ teaching and including these as part of the Great Commission. This effort moves us beyond the text and may be viewed as imposing the *mood of our day* upon the words of the Savior, though the priorities Wright chooses are certainly important. I prefer a broader interpretation of the Great Commission in defining the mission of the church. In the text, Jesus did not summarize or prioritize what the disciples were to know and obey; and so Wright’s selections appear to be arbitrary and reveal his priorities more than those of the Savior – as critical as Wright’s priorities are for the church today.

I believe this is why Jesus kept the commission broad. He may have been concerned that we would promote some of His commands and minimize others.

9 Wright, p. 5.

10 Wright’s influence has profoundly influenced the global church through his role as the Chairman of the Theological Commission of the Lausanne movement.

THE CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

It is important to remember that the Great Commission was given on the mountain (Matthew 28:16) after the resurrection, perhaps immediately preceding the ascension as was the case with Luke 24:45-49 and Acts 1:6-11. Additionally, we note that the commission was given to the “11” and not, at least in this case, to the broader group of disciples.

As was the case in Acts 1:8, the commission to go out was linked to Jesus’ death, resurrection and to His second coming. Clearly, the commission was the job description given to the disciples to pursue until Jesus returned. The commission revealed the work of the disciples in the interim period between His first and second comings.

This promise to return was clearly viewed as being more immediate by the 11 than by today’s disciples who have been waiting for two thousand years! Therefore, the words of Jesus fell upon eager ears tagged with an urgency we have lost today. The disciples were given a task needing to be completed in what was probably understood as a very short amount of time. Weeks, months, and years – we cannot be certain, but evidently the disciples believed they would see Jesus again very soon.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

We notice that the Savior’s authority and the command to go, make disciples, baptize, teach, etc., are linked together by literary style and grammar.¹¹ I would agree with Stott and other commentators that Jesus joined these critical elements into a cohesive strategy formulated in the Great Commission. We will therefore briefly examine each aspect of the commission.

¹¹ Matthew may intend Jesus’ words to be understood as arranged in a chiasm around the baptism statement in v. 19b. Balanced around this will be the discipling (v. 19a) and teaching statements (v. 20a), and around these in turn the statements about authority (v. 18b) and presence (v. 20b). Nolland, J. (2005). *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press. p.1264.

Once again, it is helpful to read the passage as we begin now to explore the details of the commission.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.¹²

HIS MESSIANIC AUTHORITY

Jesus proclaims,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς)

The Great Commission flows from the divine authority granted to Jesus, expressed in this prolegomena to the Commission. What then is the link between the authority of Jesus held prior to this moment and this new moment that causes Jesus to begin the statement of the Commission by mentioning that “all authority” is being given to Him? Was there a change that should be noted and one that impacts His commissioning of the disciples?

I believe that there was a profound change and that new and greater authority was given to Jesus and thereby passed along to the disciples! First of all, the work of redemption is now complete as He died as a ransom for sin. Secondly, He resurrected from the grave, conquering sin and death showing that even though the Jewish people rejected him as the promised Messianic King, He did fulfill an additional array of prophecies, specifically Isaiah 53.

12 καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρός καὶ τοῦ νιοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν · καὶ ἴδου ἐγώ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰώνος.

Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:26-27)

Therefore, His kingly authority is not based upon His accession to the Davidic throne or upon Israel’s acceptance of His right to rule. Jesus is Israel’s king and Savior of the world according to the will of His Father and obedience as the divine Son, vindicated by the resurrection of the dead, as Paul describes in Romans 1:2-6, as Jesus *was declared the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead.*

Finally, because the risen Messiah was given all authority, which now includes πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, *all nations*, as the intended audience for the message borne by the disciples now significantly changes. This good news would no longer be limited to Israel but proclaimed to the nations of the world. This is a change in instructions from the Gospels (Matthew 10:5) and affirms Jesus’ fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel chapter 7 of the divine Son of Man.

I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one, which will not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

John Nolland in his commentary on the Book of Matthew adds,

It seems, then, that Mt. 28:18 is most likely to represent a reaffirmation of authority after the rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem authorities which led to his death. Through resurrection God has vindicated Jesus, who is now able to freshly affirm his authority.¹³

Therefore, in light of His rejection, death, resurrection and ascension,

13 Nolland John. (2005). Preface. *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press), 1265.

Daniel 7 can now be better understood as falling into the “body of prophecies” speaking of His second coming, the establishment of the kingdom on earth and fulfillment of the many other *second coming* prophecies, especially Isaiah 9:7 where the prophet writes,

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

Jesus was raised from rejection as the Messianic and Davidic King and granted authority over Israel and the nations, alluding to His fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant. However, this does not diminish the hope of a literal Davidic kingdom, it only postpones it as even in this final reminder to His disciples of His Messianic authority, the imminence of His return to reign as King is implicitly stated. He would still establish the literal throne of David on earth upon His return, with all of the concomitant blessings for the nations (Genesis 12:3).

He did not lose authority because of Israel’s rejection, rather His authority was expanded on the basis of His “finished work” on the cross and resurrection from the dead. His authority extends beyond Israel to the nations as He came as the King of Israel, but died, rose and ascended as Lord of all nations. In effect, His passion rather than His conquests in the traditional sense led to His receiving “all authority” and the passing along of this authority over both Israel and the Gentiles to His disciples. His death did not make Him less of a king as, in fact, it made Him a greater King with a broader empire.

The authority the disciples now receive is linked to the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish the task (Luke 24: 48-49, Acts 1:8) and to His present and future rule as the Messianic Davidic King over Israel and the nations.

As John Stott so eloquently concludes nearly half-century ago,

The fundamental basis of all Christian missionary enterprise is the universal authority of Jesus Christ, “in heaven and on earth.” If the

authority of Jesus were circumscribed on earth, if He were but one of many religious teachers, one of many Jewish prophets, one of many divine incarnations, we would have no mandate to present Him to the nations as the Lord and Saviour of the world. If the authority of Jesus were limited in heaven, if He had not decisively overthrown the principalities and powers, we might still proclaim Him to the nations, but we would never be able to “turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). Only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ are we go to all nations. And only because all authority in heaven as well is His have we any hope of success. It must have seemed ridiculous to send that tiny nucleus of Palestinian peasants to win the world for Christ. For Christ’s Church today, so hopelessly outnumbered by hundreds of millions who neither know nor acknowledge Him, the task is equally gigantic. It is the unique, the universal authority of Jesus Christ which gives us both the right and the confidence to seek to make disciples of all the nations. Before His authority on earth the nations must bow; before His authority in heaven no demon can stop them.¹⁴

THE COMMAND TO GO

The first part of the Commission is an appeal to the disciples by Jesus “to go”!

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. (**πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.**)

There have been endless discussions as to whether or not the “Go” should be translated as an imperative. Most English translations simply use the word “go” and do not try to “squeeze” more from the Greek.¹⁵ Though

14 John Stott, Berlin Conference, Part 2, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott2.htm>, Accessed August 2014.

15 If the correct sense of the aorist participle in Matthew 28:19 is “as you go,” one wonders why no translation brings this out? Every translation consulted translates the participle as a definite command “go.” These translations include KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, TNIV, ESV, TEV, CEV, JB Phillips, The Living Bible, Amplified New Testament, The Jerusalem Bible, NAB (i.e., The Catholic Bible). It is possible that some of these translations translated the participle as a command by accident, or ignorance. However, it is unlikely that the major translations listed above were ignorant of the Greek

the participle is not an imperative, it can take on the quality of command as the following verb, μαθητεύσατε, which is dominant in the sentence, is an imperative.¹⁶ It is understandable why so many think the “go” is a command, but this is only true by way of implication and attachment to the participle to make disciples.

The verb, πορευθέντες “to go” is an aorist passive participle plural and this form of the verb has caused many debates and impacted the mission strategy of many. The participle could have the sense of “after having gone,” “once you have left,” or “even while you are on the way,” etc. There is a presumption that the disciples would be on their way to bring the message of Jesus to the world.

Therefore the call to action would emphasize what the disciples should do as they go and not emphasize the call to “go” as if it is a decision to be made. This is also not completely clear from the text, but seems to be a strong possibility and, at the least, the translation “having gone” would certainly be acceptable to most scholars¹⁷.

So, there is an assumption on Jesus’ part that the disciples would be on their way, and the commission defines what they should do as they go. In other words, they would be leaving their homes in pursuit of the mission of “making disciples of all the nations.” This makes sense as one could hardly disciple the nations by staying in one geographic area!

Craig Blomberg brings a healthy balance to these discussions regarding πορευθέντες as he suggests caution in using Jesus’ call to the disciples to “go” as somehow elevating foreign missions over serving the Lord wherever the Lord has placed you. He writes,

Too much is made of it when the disciples’ “going” is overly subordinated, so that Jesus’ charge is to proselytize merely where one is. Matthew frequently uses “go” as an introductory circumstantial participle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb—

grammar when translating into the English. (<http://www.faithandreasonforum.com/index.asp?PageID=16&ArticleID=536>, accessed August 20,2014)

16 <https://www.teknia.com/greek-dictionary/matheteuo>.

17 <http://www.teknia.com/greekexercise/12-8-t>.

here “Go and make” (cf. 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7). Too little is made of it when all attention is centered on the command to “go,” as in countless appeals for missionary candidates, so that foreign missions are elevated to a higher status of Christian service than other forms of spiritual activity. To “make disciples of all nations” does require many people to leave their homelands, but Jesus’ main focus remains on the task of all believers to duplicate themselves wherever they may be.¹⁸

I agree that these two potential avenues for fulfilling the Great Commission should be kept in balance: moving cross culturally – which can also mean “staying where you are,” especially today where we have the opportunity to serve so many different people groups in major urban areas; or, on the other hand, *going* in the traditional foreign missions sense – a ministry that is still needed, especially for those who are humble and able to serve nationals leading movements within their own culture, country and language groups.

Either way, Jesus is explicitly clear in commanding His disciples to disciple others whether they go to a new place, invest their lives in a local foreign culture or remain where they are. Disciples are responsible to disciple others without restriction of culture, ethnicity, geography or language.

THE INCLUSION OF THE GENTILES

It is worth further exploring the expansion of the commission to non-Jews in some greater depth. As mentioned, Jesus calls the disciples to go beyond the physical seed of Abraham and to make disciples among the Gentiles. As Yeshua said, make disciples of all the nations ($\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha \tau\alpha \xi\theta\nu\eta$).¹⁹

18 Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 431

19 Though it often emphasized the judgment that would fall on the Gentile oppressors of God’s people, OT eschatology also had a very positive place for Gentiles in God’s ultimate purposes. See e.g., Ps. 87; 96; Is. 2:2–4; 42:1, 6; 49:6; 66:19–20; Mic. 4:2–3; Zc. 8:20–23. Nolland, p.1266 footnote.

Prior to this post-resurrection command to include the nations, the disciples were told to limit their ministries to the Jewish people. Matthew writes,

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (Matthew 10:5-7)

Later on Matthew records the healing of a Gentile girl by Jesus (Matthew 15:24-26), but describes this miracle as an exception to His mission among the Jewish people.

But He answered and said, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and began to bow down before Him, saying, “Lord, help me!” And He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.

Julius Scott, former New Testament professor at Wheaton College, suggests that the restriction to the Jewish people was not because of any first century ethnocentrism but rather because Jesus respected the plan of God outlined in the Old Testament that described different stages in the unfolding of God’s plan for the world and varying roles for both Jews and Gentiles. He indicates that the inclusion of the Gentiles in Matthew is part of the more general eschatological emphasis of Matthew. This redirection to preach to the Gentiles in Matthew 28:19-20 is another additional signal of the importance of the *age to come* with the preaching of the Gospel in our present age. It is impossible to separate what we have been called to do with what God has planned for the future.

Scott writes,

The answer to the question is to be found in a proper understanding of the way God works at various stages of salvation history. God’s offer of salvation to accept the unworthy, His promise that “I will be your God and you shall be my people,” is to all, but it is to be mediated through his chosen people. Jesus words and deeds in Matthew 10 and Matthew 15 show His awareness of the need to make the offer of

salvation first to Israel to call it into being the renewed people of God who will then communicate that message to others. It was a procedure that had been firmly fixed in the Old Testament and understood by at least some of Jesus' contemporaries. These words and deeds demonstrate a keen sense of Jesus part of what was appropriate in this stage of salvation history in which He lived. His healing and ministry to the Gentile demoniacs, the Centurion's servant, a Samaritan woman and leper, and other non-Jews is the first fruits of a larger ingathering that shows His compassion for individuals was not restricted.²⁰

We should read the Gospel of Matthew and the life of Jesus as a story, with an introduction, beginning and end along with plot twists throughout the narrative. The shift, which took place in Matthew chapter 12 at His rejection by Israel's leaders, initiates His minimizing further discussion of establishing a physical kingdom. The evident agenda for His first coming now focuses on rejection, death, resurrection; and the literal kingdom He came to establish in Israel is moved to the future, subsequent to this predicted passion

Note the change in chapter 16:20-21 where Matthew records,

Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

Jesus presented the Good News to His own people but was rejected by the leadership. Within the context and story line of the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus respond and by setting His mind on the cross (Isaiah 53 etc.) leaving the fulfillment of the many remaining kingdom promises pertaining to Israel for His return. These kingdom promises were given to the Jewish people and the Gentiles as the prophets wrote extensively about the role of the nations in the eschatological Kingdom of God (Amos 9:15).

20 J. Julius Scott Jr., “Gentiles and the Ministry of Jesus: Further Observations on Matthew 10:5–6, 15:21–28” in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33/2 (June 1990), 161–169.

However, there is an implied delay in the fulfillment of these promises made explicit by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, Luke 21). It was not as if Jesus would die and rise and the earthly Kingdom would immediately appear. There are many hints, warning His disciples of a delay, though again, the length of the delay would certainly have been deemed shorter in the minds of the disciples than we understand 2,000 years later.

There are two statements Jesus made during the Olivet discourse, one recorded in Luke 21 and the other in Matthew 24 that are critical to our understanding of a shift marking the inclusion the Gentiles as part of the Commission and the future, literal kingdom. In Luke 21:24, Jesus says,

and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Jesus informs His disciples of a change of seasons coming whereby the Gentiles will be included in God's present focus and for a time will be dominant in the same way Israel was dominant in the previous age. Yet, this time would be temporary, as the promises God made to the Jewish people that they will again become a nation, with their own land ruled by an enthroned Savior, would still come to pass.

Further in Matthew 24:14, Jesus says,

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.²¹

The shift is obvious. Israel's rejection of Jesus as King and Messiah caused a "predicted" change in His ministry that led to an intensified focus on His death for sin, the description of the expected literal kingdom as future and the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's greater plan.

However, *Gentile inclusion would not precipitate Israel's exclusion*²²

21 In this instance Jesus describes the end by using the term καὶ τότε ἥξει τὸ τέλος.

22 I am grateful to my often co-editor, Dr. Darrell Bock, for this wonderful turn of phrase.

or “replace” the Jewish people with the Gentiles since, in his earliest promises to Abram, both Jews and Gentiles were included in His redemptive purposes. His death, resurrection and ascension to His Father’s right hand would continue until a sovereignly selected moment when He returns to establish His literal Davidic kingdom and throne amidst a repentant Israel and obedient community of Gentiles.

Peter describes this phasing in of the Kingdom in this way,

Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21)

If this promise of Peter is taken literally, there is no question that His return to establish this kingdom is viewed by the earliest Apostles as a certain hope and would be precipitated by the turning of the Jewish people to Jesus. We do not know when He is coming but we do understand from Peter’s appeal the basis upon which He would return. This turning of the Jewish people to Jesus would precipitate the return of Christ.

We should not be surprised that Jesus calls upon His disciples, a remnant representing a renewed Israel (Romans 11:5) and precursor to the faithful Israel of the future (Romans 11:11-15), to do what God had called the Jewish people to do in the past – to bring His blessings to the nations. The inclusion of Gentiles into the Kingdom would therefore not start when Jesus returns but would begin immediately and lead to the day when both Jews and Gentiles become joyful citizens of the Kingdom of God. This is foreshadowed in today’s Church and expanded at the return of the Lord.

The presence of the Church made up of redeemed Jews and Gentiles should not detract from the eschatological establishment of a literal kingdom, as God’s plan for the planet would be fulfilled incrementally. The *eleven* are called to disciple the nations, initiating, in part, the

culmination of His promises to both Jews and Gentiles, built upon the bedrock of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3), with Jesus as the chief cornerstone! The disciples are called to preach to all in light of His soon coming and the Great Commission is simply one additional step towards the future God has planned for mankind.

Finally, we must understand that the shift within the Gospel of Matthew from a focus on Jewish people to non-Jews, does not imply that the Jewish people are excluded from the *panta ta ethnē*.

Blomberg concludes,

"All nations" translates *panta ta ethnē*. The two main options for interpreting *ethnē* are Gentiles (non-Jews) and peoples (somewhat equivalent to ethnic groups). The former translation is popular among those who see either Jesus or Matthew as believing that God once-for-all rejected the Jews. We have repeatedly seen evidence that calls this perspective into serious question (see under 10:23; 23:39; 24:30; 27:25). Matthew's most recent uses of *ethnē* (24:9, 14; 25:32) seem to include Jews and Gentiles alike as the recipients of evangelism and judgment.

God is not turning his back on Jewish people here. What has changed is that they can no longer be saved simply by trusting in God under the Mosaic covenant. All who wish to be in fellowship with God must now come to him through Jesus.²³

Blomberg interprets the words of Jesus accurately as the Messiah had come and fulfilled the promises of the prophets for both Jews and Gentiles. There would be no other name by which men could be saved (Acts 4:12) and no other way to the Father but through the Jewish Messiah. (John 14:6). It is His death and resurrection that provides salvation today and provides the basis for His second coming and right to rule as the once-and-forever Son of David (Isaiah 9:6-7). Yet, the inclusion of all nations in His plan of redemption does not negate the literal nature of the promises related to the establishment of a literal kingdom in Jerusalem that provides even greater peace and blessing for both Jewish and Gentiles²⁴.

23 Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 431-432.

24 Romans 11:11-15.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

In many ways the Great Commission may be viewed as, in part, fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant. In this foundational passage God outlined His plan for His chosen people and marked four major legs upon which the promise stands. By calling Abram to be His “Semite” (see Genesis 9:26, 11:10-32, 12:1-3) and vehicle of promise for a fallen world, God promised the Patriarch that he would be given a people, a land, a relationship with the Creator and a mission – to bless the world. There would be consequences for those nations that did not bless the descendants of Abraham, as God would not bless them (Genesis 12:3)²⁵

God chose the Abrahamic family to be His conduit of blessings to a broken world. The Lord always had the nations in mind even when He selected Abram and narrowed His choice. This role for Israel among the nations was reiterated through the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 41:8-9, 43:10, 44:8). Israel was chosen was to show the nations the glory of the one true God and to capture His inerrant words through Moses, the Psalmists, prophets and ultimately the writers of the New Testament (who were primarily Jewish). Israel failed in her efforts to bring the light to the nations so God the Father, through His Son, fulfilled the task and now disciples of the Son from among the remnant of Israel and the Gentiles are charged with completing this task by the time Jesus returns and again as Luke writes,

and they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until *the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.* (Luke 21:24)

In light of the Abrahamic Covenant, it is easy to view the Great Commission as an eschatological commission, a mission with the future in mind, and a

²⁵ Moses uses two Hebrew words for curse. The first, from **לִלְלָה**, referring to making light of the role the Jewish people would play in God’s plan and the second, from **גַּזֵּף**, used throughout Dt. 28 and Lev. 26, refers to the temporal curses that would be meted out upon Israel for disobedience. Therefore, if a nation made light of the Jewish people they would receive the curses for disobedience that were promised to fall upon Israel as well.

sign of the soon-coming consummation of the ages. The inclusion of the Gentiles was part of God's plan for all eternity and begins incrementally with the birth of the Church, continuing towards full fruition when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

These new disciples from among the "other sheep" (John 10:16) would not replace the Jewish people but rather support the Jewish disciples in their global evangelistic mission. Is it any wonder the Lord called a learned Jewish disciple Paul (Saul of Tarsus) to be the father of the Gentile mission. And when the task is completed, the Lord will return to reign as the Prince of Peace and eternal Davidic King (Isaiah 9:6-7, Romans 11:11-29), bringing blessing to all.

The Gentiles would have a major role in the events of the consummation of history as God's vehicle in turning the Jewish people back to Himself through His Son. As Paul writes,

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!
But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. (Romans 11:11)

And this future conversion of the Jewish people would serve as the lynch pin for the second coming and the events of the consummation. The Gentiles therefore have a key role in bringing about the consummation when the Abrahamic blessings will be fully enjoyed. These expected eschatological blessings were not viewed as ethereal and should not be allegorized as this hope for the nations included physical promises of restoration and blessing to Israel and the Gentile nations as well.

THE WORK OF THOSE WHO GO

Jesus gives His disciples three main tasks to accomplish as they go. These cannot be fully understood without knowing more about the first-century Jewish history and culture. Matthew had no model for the relationship between a disciple and the Messiah other than that of a Rabbi to his

disciples. Knowing more about this relationship helps unlock the meaning of the text by providing us with the historical context to understand Jesus' and Matthew's emphasis on reproducing disciples, baptism and teaching for the purpose of obedience. The focus of the Commission is to make disciples and therefore, it is critical to try and understand what the Savior meant in using the term “disciple,” μαθητής.

Make Disciples

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη)

There has been quite a bit of scholarly and even popular discussion these days about the Jewish roots of the faith. Understanding first century Jewish life is today understood as providing a valuable key to the interpretation of the New Testament. The role of the first century Jewish Rabbi and his relationship to his disciples provides the context for understanding the “goal” of the Great Commission: disciples reproducing disciples.

It was not unusual for a Rabbi, like Jesus, to have disciples. The word “disciples” (*talmidim*) is from a Hebrew word which means *to learn*. The disciples were learners. The way a disciple learned from their Rabbi has been described in Jewish literature, though most of what we have written is from the Mishnaic period²⁶ and beyond, but still reflects an earlier understanding of the Rabbi/Disciple relationship. In effect, the disciples of a first century Rabbi were apprentices who lived, ate, travelled, worked and “sat at the feet” of their Rabbi.

In her popular volume, *Sitting at the Feet of Jesus*, Ann Spangler describes the Rabbi/Disciple relationship for today’s Christians.²⁷

26 200-500 AD.

27 Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg, *Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2009).

Members of the Jerusalem School of Synoptic Studies, including Brad Young who teaches at Oral Roberts University, have helped us grapple with these Jewish backgrounds as reflected in the early Jesus movement. Additional Jewish background materials can be found in Alfred Edersheim's volumes²⁸ and many additional efforts.

Samuel Byrskog, in his excellent study, *Jesus the Only Teacher*, takes an in-depth look at the Jewish backgrounds of what is meant by being a disciple.²⁹ The fact that Jesus, the teacher/Rabbi, calls together a group of followers that become His disciples is similar to what other Rabbis and itinerant Jewish teachers did at the time. Byrskog writes,

Jesus is primarily the teacher of his own chosen disciples. To be sure, the didactic storyline (In the Gospel of Matthew) depicts him also as a teacher handing over teaching to other persons: he teaches openly; he enters into discussions and conflicts. But he addresses his teaching mainly to his own disciples. They are his pupils, expected in a special way to carry –first by receiving and understanding – his teaching.³⁰

There are three aspects of the Rabbi/Disciple relationship that are critical to our understanding of the Great Commission. The first involves the duty of the disciple to speak on behalf of their Rabbi, under his authority. The second is to make other disciples. The Rabbi, at a certain stage in the disciple's growth, goes beyond sending the junior disciple to deliver messages on behalf of the Rabbi and calls upon the junior to gather their own group of younger disciples and to pass along the teachings of their Rabbi.

Finally, the disciple was not only taught to understand what their Rabbis said, but to also obey his teachings based upon the Scriptures. The disciples were to go beyond a mere cognitive understanding of the

28 Alfred Edersheim. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Vol. all. (McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1886 and 1983).

29 Samuel Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher: Didactic Authority & Transmission in Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism & the Matthean Community* (Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series) Paperback – August 1, 1994.

30 Ibid., p.234.

Rabbi's teachings and to observe and obey what they were taught. It is important to understand that in Jewish thinking, belief and understanding are subordinate to obedience. The moral imperative of Jewish life – behavior over belief – was as common in the first century as it is today. Judaism is a religion of obedience to the Law and not the gathering of religious knowledge.

Byrskog confirms the above by stating,

Most significant was the duty (of the disciple) to minister to the teacher... It was accordingly of vital importance for a student to attend to the needs of the Rabbi. Certain texts even claim that the rabbis considered those who did not fulfill this duty—no matter what knowledge had been acquired—like uneducated people; they had no part in the world to come; they were liable to death. The pupil was to do for the Rabbi the same services as an ordinary slave, though in order not to be mistaken for a non-Jewish slave he might at certain places be released from some menial tasks such as untying the sandals of the Rabbi.

The duty to minister was not external to the actual studies. On the contrary it was an integral part of learning Torah. The action of the master, though occasionally idiosyncratic and exceptional, was normative teaching. The pupil did not learn only by listening to the words. He was also to observe and be a witness to his teacher's actions... According to Mishna Abot 6:6, the pupils learn the Torah through 48 qualifications, including the ministry to sages.

The integration of these acts into the Torah study itself suggests that the basis of validation residing outside of the life and status of the teacher. Torah, in its various forms, not the Rabbi himself was the focus of attention. The teacher was of interest primarily as the embodiment of Torah in words and deeds... the implicit validation expressed in the active ministry to the teacher was essentially not an acknowledgment of the life and the status of the teacher, but of the teacher's ability to transmit Torah.³¹

This system, so prevalent in the first century where a Rabbi/Teacher gathers a community of disciples who both serve the Rabbi and learn from the

31 Samuel Byrskog, p.89-92. See his use of extensive quotes from rabbinic sources on these matters.

Rabbi is at the very heart of understanding the Great Commission. Jesus called His disciples to create new communities of like-minded disciples who would adhere to the interpretations of the Torah they learned from their Rabbi/Teacher – Jesus. The making of disciples was the way in which Jesus would disseminate His teachings to the Jewish people and then, in a most stunning expansion of the model, to spread His teachings among the Gentiles as well.

However, it must be remembered that devotion to the Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and, more importantly, Jesus' interpretation of the entirety of the Old Testament Scriptures was to be the focus of the disciples' task. A disciple's loyalty to their Rabbi was to be subordinated to their love for the Torah and in particular their Rabbi's interpretation of Torah. Jesus' authority rested on His person in a unique manner, as He was the fulfillment of the Torah. This elevated the disciple/Rabbi relationship to a new level. Yet, at heart, Jesus still taught His disciples to follow His interpretations of the Torah, wherein lies His true divine authority (Matthew 5:17-19).

The commission therefore, was a call to create a new community of disciples, from every nation, who would serve the risen Rabbi and have their lives shaped by His teachings.

John Stott adds,

For in preaching the Gospel we preach Christ so that men are converted to Him and become His disciples. We can never get away from, or grow out of, this elementary truth that evangelism is preaching Jesus Christ and making disciples of Jesus Christ. The central objective of all Christian evangelism is to secure the allegiance of men and women neither to a church nor to a system of thought or behavior, but to the person of Jesus Christ. Discipleship of Jesus Christ comes first; the church membership, the theology, the ethical conduct follow.³²

One could debate whether or not a disciple of Jesus should be more loyal to the person of Jesus or to His teachings. However, this is a false

32 Stott, Berlin Conference, Part 2, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/Berlin66/stott2.htm>

dichotomy in this instance, as we are not simply following any human Rabbi, but rather God incarnate and therefore His interpretations of the Word are congruent with His person as would never have been the case with any other Rabbi (John 1:1-3). The first century Jewish Rabbi claimed authority from the Torah, or from another venerated teacher, but Jesus is the living Torah and needed to make no additional claim of additional authority (Hebrews 1:1-3). In His case, both the teachings and person are united as we follow the Person and His teachings, for they are one and the same.

Jesus’ disciples – the ones we are to go out and make disciples – must be taught loyalty and devotion to both the written and living Word.

Baptize

Whereas, making disciples is primary, the baptizing of these new disciples is also of critical importance to Jesus. The commission continues by calling upon His disciples to baptize, as Matthew writes,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ νιοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀγίου πνεύματος,

The Greek word used by Matthew, *βαπτίζοντες*, is a participle governed by the verb *μαθητεύσατε*, “to make disciples” and therefore is a key aspect to the commission given by Jesus to His Jewish disciples. The disciples would have understood the importance of baptism as it was an every-day part of the religious life of first century Jewish life and observed in a variety of contexts for both men and women.

Understanding the importance of baptism within first-century Jewish life is also critical in understanding why Jesus emphasized the ritual. One only needs to visit the Southern steps in Jerusalem to see the multitude of baptismal pools to understand how important Jewish ritual immersion was to the first century Jewish community. Baptism was an inauguration ritual and an external indicator of an internal change demonstrating, in

this instance, a cleansing of one's heart and life. Much has been written this about the first century Jewish understanding of baptism³³ and there is no need to add to the already excellent and available studies on the topic.

The church has also interpreted baptism in many ways: sprinkling, immersion, for babies, adults who profess faith in Jesus the Messiah, etc.³⁴ One of the most important elements of baptism is that it was a community event and, therefore, the internal change was given expression by both outward observance and public witness.

In his address to the Berlin conference, Stott reminds us that baptism is both personal and corporate, as the disciples are to win and disciple yet also incorporate new believers into the new *Jesus communities* planted.

Further, whatever the precise significance of baptism may be (and doubtless our particular convictions on this matter are to some extent divergent), we would all agree that baptism is essentially a public act. People may become disciples of Jesus secretly, but they must be baptized publicly. At the very least, baptism is the public confession and public acknowledgment of those who claim to be Christ's disciples, and thus admits them into the visible church. So in advancing from discipleship to baptism, Jesus moves from the private to the public, from the personal to the corporate, from conversion to church membership.³⁵

33 See:

- 1) Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary* (2 Vols.), (Baker Academic, 2010), 440-448
- 2) R. Alastair Campbell, "Jesus and His Baptism" in *Tyndale Bulletin* 47.2 (Nov. 1996) 191-214, http://98.131.162.170/tynbul/library/TynBull_1996_47_2_01_Campbell_JesusBaptism.pdf

34 See the following:

- 1) G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973)
- 2) *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Dr. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, Series: New American Commentary Studies in Bible & Theology (Book 2) (B&H Academic; annotated edition, January 2007).
- 3) John Stott and Alec Motyer, *The Anglican Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, Latimer Trust.
- 4) John Stott, "The Evangelical Doctrine of Baptism," *Churchman* 112/1, 1998 http://archive.churchsociety.org/churchman/documents/Cman_112_1_Stott.pdf
- 5) John Stott, *Baptism And Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, Michael S. Horton (Foreword), (IVP Classics Paperback November 2006).

35 Stott, Berlin Conference, Part 2, <http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/docs/>

Teach

Jesus adds an additional task to the commission by calling upon His disciples to teach the members of these new spiritual communities, as Matthew writes, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you* (*διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν*). Stott comments on this third aspect of the disciples’ mission – to teach the newly baptized disciples, *διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς*, all He taught them with the goal to bring about a transformation of their character and behavior.

The purpose of Christ in the Great Commission is not fully met, however, when people are discipled and baptized; they must also be taught. A lifetime of learning and obeying follows conversion, until disciples are conformed to the image of their Lord. Moreover, the substance of the teachings to be given them is all the teaching of Jesus Christ, “all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Notice carefully what we are to teach converts. It is neither what they may want to hear, nor what we may want to say, but what Christ Himself has taught. This is what they are to “keep,” that is, to believe and to obey.³⁶

Stott points out where we can find the “curriculum” we are to use in discipling and teaching these new believers.

Where, then, is all the teaching of Jesus Christ to be found? The correct answer is not in His discourses in the Gospels, but “in the whole Bible.” Properly understood, the teaching of Jesus Christ includes the Old Testament (for He set His seal upon its truth and its authority), the Gospels (in which His own words are recorded), and the rest of the New Testament (which contains the teaching of the Apostles through whom, we believe, He continued to speak, in order to complete His self-revelation).³⁷

I concur with Stott’s conclusion to this discussion of the three major tasks of the Great Commission; to make disciples, baptize and to teach – for the

Berlin66/stott2.htm.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

sake of observance and obedience. He writes,

Such is the risen Lord's concept of evangelism--a conception considerably more balanced and comprehensive than much of our modern practice of evangelism. Jesus sent forth His followers not merely to make disciples--discipling was only the first stage of the Great Commission. Two further stages were to follow, namely, baptizing and teaching. The evangelist who would be loyal to his commission, therefore, must have three major concerns: first, conversions to Christ; second, the church membership of converts; and third, their instructions in all the teaching of Christ. While it is legitimate no doubt for sporadic evangelistic missions and crusades to concentrate on their first concern, it would be irresponsible to do so unless adequate provision is made also for admitting converts to church membership and for instructing them.³⁸

Blomberg also agrees with Stott,

The verb “make disciples” also commands a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith. The truly subordinate participles in v. 19 explain what making disciples involve: “baptizing” them and “teaching” them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task.³⁹

This is a more holistic approach to the Great Commission. Clearly our job begins with the preaching of the Gospel. I would view preaching for conversion or proclamation as implied by the Great Commission though not explicitly stated. There is no reason why Jesus could not have said, “*Go therefore, proclaim the Gospel and convert sinners, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you*”, if that was His intention.

Yet, the Savior chose to state the task in a different way that includes proclamation implicitly. The task of evangelism, however, would remain

38 Ibid.

39 Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, p 431.

a part of the Commission and not the whole commission. To equate the Great Commission with what we usually understand as evangelism leading to personal conversion is to misunderstand the Commission. So those who equate the Great Commission as synonymous with proclamation fall short of the Savior’s instructions. The casting of the Great Commission by Jesus in Acts 1:8 calls upon the disciples to be His witnesses. Jesus says,

...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Again, this term would include proclamation and more – even as the term *mártυς* would later become synonymous with self-sacrifice and death.

This does not minimize the good and godly efforts at evangelism⁴⁰ of those who have this vision, calling and giftedness. Nor does it lessen the value of those who view their ministry as focused upon helping believers grow in their faith. And those called to planting and nurturing churches – the more corporate aspects of what Stott describes – are not doing less for the Savior if they are not quite as active in engaging nonbelievers in their community because of their responsibilities to the saints.

The Great Commission demands each of the aforementioned ministries, yet believers vary in giftedness and ability. It is the responsibility of disciples to be engaged in the overall Commission though they might focus on a part to which they feel specialty called.

We must follow our calling by better understanding how God has designed and gifted us. Through prayer, Bible study and seeking wise counsel we must discover where we best fit in with this Great Commission. If we tend to focus on one area of the Commission we should not see ourselves as in any way deficient. What we do personally in fulfilling the

⁴⁰ The following is a good definition of evangelism in the traditional sense: “Evangelism is the announcement, proclamation, and/or preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), the good news of and about Jesus Christ. Therefore, the gospel is a communicated message--communicated in verbal (Luke 7:22; Romans 10:14-17) and/or written (Luke 1:1-4) form.” <http://carm.org/what-is-evangelism>.

Great Commission does not change the evident truth of the text – that Jesus has called His early and modern disciples to win the lost to Jesus, to baptize them and help them find their place in the Body of Christ and then to nurture those who come to faith through teaching them the Word of God, so they become obedient disciples.

Chris Wright adds to our understanding by reminding us that the Great Commission is not the work of the clergy or mission professionals but the responsibility of all of Jesus' disciples,

So the discipleship and mission that Jesus calls us into is for the whole of life. If Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth then there is no place, no job, no vocation, no day or night, no part of life at all, that is exempt from the rest of what he says in the Great Commission and all that it refers back to in the rest of the Gospel. Mission is not an agenda, to be tackled by people assigned to 'do it for the rest of us'. Mission is the mode of existence for the whole life of every member of the whole church.⁴¹

Finally, the best way to accomplish these Great Commission tasks is by modeling. We cannot help people become what we are not and therefore our own growth as disciples, and thereby disciple-makers, is never over!

THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE TO THOSE WHO GO

Jesus concludes His commission to the eleven with a promise to be with them until what is often translated as "the end of the age." It is this promise that we want to focus upon as it directly pertains to our topic: The Coming Kingdom and the Great Commission.

Jesus says,

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (καὶ ἴδον ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἔως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰώνος.)

41 <http://www.loimission.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Chris-Wright-IntegralMissionandtheGreatCommission.pdf>, p. 20, Accessed August 2014.

Stott concludes his comments on the text as well by warmly focusing on this promise of the Lord’s presence in fulfilling the Great Commission,

“I am with you all the days”—in days of safety and of peril, days of failure and of success, days of freedom to preach and days of restriction and persecution, days of peace and of conflict and war—“I am with you all the days unto the end of the world.” The promise of Christ spans the whole Gospel age. While the Christ who is speaking has only just died and been raised from death, He even now looks ahead to His return in glory. He who has just inaugurated the new age promises to be with His people from its beginning to its end, from its inauguration to its consummation, “even to the close of the age”.⁴²

As a pastor’s pastor, Stott and others who preach and teach on these few words at the conclusion of the Commission, emphasize the comfort the saints will enjoy through the presence of Jesus’ indwelling Spirit in their hearts as they go about fulfilling this *Great Commission*. As His disciples we are grateful that the Spirit of the Lord is with us: giving us power (John 20:21-23, Acts 1:8 etc.), boldness (Acts 4:31) and the confidence of knowing that though invisible, He is our ever-present partner in the work of turning the hearts of men and women to Jesus (John 16:5-11).

Charles Simeon, also a *pastor’s pastor*, emphasizes the enjoyment and comfort God brings through His Spirit to those in the process of fulfilling the Great Commission. Simeon writes,

The Lord Jesus Christ will be with his Church and people “even to the end of the world,” and every faithful minister may expect from him all needful direction and support. He will “give testimony to the word of his grace,” and will clothe it with power divine, that it may effect that for which he has sent it. However weak in itself, it shall in his hands “be quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword.” It shall be as “a hammer or a fire that breaketh the rock in pieces.” In dependence on him therefore we go forth, expecting assuredly, that, notwithstanding the weakness of those who deliver it, “it shall be the power of God to the salvation of those who hear it. “Were it not for this encouragement, no man, possessed of reason, would presume to

42 Stott, Berlin Conference, Part 2.

undertake the office of a minister: but depending on Christ's promised aid, we do hope that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.⁴³

This is certainly a comfort for all who are serious about fulfilling the Great Commission. Leon Morris, as true of most modern commentators reflecting on this passage, does not further explore the eschatological details implied in the phrase, "end of the age." He writes what may be understood as a fairly typical view of this promise,

This Gospel opened with the assurance that in the coming of Jesus God was with his people (1:23), and it closes with the promise that the very presence of Jesus Christ will never be lacking to his faithful follower. This does not, of course, mean that Jesus has not been with his people hitherto; he has made it clear that where two or three are met in his name he is there, right in the middle of them (18:20). But when Matthew draws his Gospel to its close, he has nothing in the way of an ascension account. He emphasizes the importance of his continuing presence and concludes his Gospel with the magnificent assurance to the followers of Jesus that that presence will never be withdrawn; he will be with them always, to the end of the world and to the end of time.⁴⁴.

However, there is more to tease from this conclusion to the Commission in Matthew 28:20.

THE CONSUMMATION OF THE AGE

Jesus concludes His instructions to the earliest disciples by assuring them of His faithful presence throughout their lives and for the disciples they make as well. In fact He promises that He would *be with* His followers, by His spirit, until the consummation of the ages.

Matthew writes,

43 Charles Simeon (1832–1863). *Horae Homileticae: Matthew*, Vol. 11, London: Holdsworth and Ball, 619-620.

44 Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 749-750.

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.(καὶ ἴδου ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰώνος.)

Jesus outlines His plans for the *συντελείας* earlier when asked by His disciples, “*Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?*” (Matthew 24:3). The term used for the “end” (even to the end of the age) as it is often translated in English⁴⁵, is the Greek word *συντελείας*. This word could be translated simply as “the end” meaning: conclusion, fulfillment, the goal achieved, etc., emphasizing the Greek term *τέλος*, which is part of the compound term *συντελείας*.

However, *συντελείας* has a different nuance as it adds the prefix *συν*, meaning *together with*, which encourages us to translate *συντελείας* (or *συντελεία*, the nominative form) to mean “consummation.” This understanding of the term would place a greater emphasis on the series of events included as part of the culmination of the age.⁴⁶ The term refers to a series of events and not simply a conclusion to what has gone before.

Matthew used the term in Matthew 24:3 in reference the series of events linked to the second coming of Jesus outlined in the Olivet discourse.

45 ESV, NASB, NIV, “end of the age,” KJV, “end of the world”

46 In response to the question, is there a difference between Greek words *τέλος* (*tel’-os*) and *συντελείας* (*soon-tel’-i-ah*) used at Matthew 24:14 and 28:20 respectively? Can they refer to the same thing? Do they have the same derivation?

If you are asking whether *τὸ τέλος* and *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος* in Matthew 24:14 and 28:20 respectively refer to the same point of time prophetically, the simple answer is yes. *τὸ τέλος* and *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος* are used interchangeably in vv. 3, 6 and 14 in Matthew 24. Since *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος* has a uniform meaning throughout the New Testament, we have the equation *τὸ τέλος* in Matthew 24:14 = *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος* in Matthew 28:20. However, *τέλος* in the NT is not always identical with *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος*, even in a prophetic context. Matthew 24:13-14 reads 13ο δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος οὐτος σωθήσεται. 14καὶ κηρυχθήσεται τοῦτο τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ εἰς μαρτύριον πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καὶ τότε ἥξει τὸ τέλος. The second *τέλος* is the equivalent of *ἡ συντελεία τοῦ αἰώνος* but the first *τέλος* is not. It rather refers to the end of the earthly life of each believer (cf. John 13:1: Πρὸ δὲ τῆς ἑορτῆς τοῦ πάσχα εἰδὼς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἥλθεν αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα ἵνα μεταβῇ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, ἀγαπήσας τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εἰς τέλος ἥγαπτσεν αὐτοὺς, where *τέλος* refers to the end of Jesus’ earthly life) (<http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=2635> Re: Greek words rendered at Matthew 24:14; 28:20 as “end” at Matthew 24:14; 28:20 by Leonard Jayawardena » July 7, 2014, 12:48 am.)

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your **coming**, and of **the end** of the age?”(τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰώνος).

Again, the meaning of συντελείας, especially in this passage⁴⁷, is best translated by the English phrase, “the consummation of the age.”⁴⁸ In other words, Jesus will be with us (by His Spirit) unto the consummation of the ages... when He returns. This is especially true when used with the word παρουσίας (parousia), translated, “your coming” in Matthew 24:3.⁴⁹ This slightly different English translation portrays the συντελείας as an event in itself and not simply as the conclusion of what was previous. The disciples understood this and it is why they ask, “*Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end (consummation) of the age?*”

In response to their question, Jesus details the various signs attached to *consummation of the age*. This is critical as the command to “Go” now takes on a greater urgency emphasizing the *soon-coming* events of the end rather than His daily presence with us – as wonderful as this is for the disciples. The comforting presence of the Lord in carrying out of the Commission tends to turn our eyes inwards rather than to what is coming: the συντελείας, the consummation of the ages which is at the heart of our motivation for carrying out the commission. It is recognizing what is

47 καὶ ιδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰώνος.

48 *syntéleia*. Outside the Bible this word means ‘common accomplishment’ (also ‘taxes’), ‘cooperation,’ ‘execution,’ ‘completion,’ ‘conclusion.’ In the LXX it has such varied senses as ‘execution,’ ‘totality,’ ‘satiety,’ ‘fulfillment,’ ‘conclusion,’ ‘cessation,’ and ‘destruction.’ In Daniel LXX it is a technical term for the eschatological ‘end’ (cf. 11:35; 12:4), though it may also mean ‘end’ in a more general sense (9:26). It is a technical apocalyptic term in the Testaments of the Twelve, sometimes with the thought of completion. The NT uses the term only in eschatological sayings. In Hebrews 9:27 Christ’s saving work is the event of the end time. The juxtaposition stresses its definitiveness and perfection. In Matthew the phrase ‘end of the age’ (13:39; 24:3; 28:20) refers to eschatological events that have yet to take place, including the judgment (13:39- 40, 49). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume* (Olive Tree software version), ed. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Abridged edition, 1985).

49 And “tou ainios” in 28:20.

ahead that compels us to Go!

By using the word consummation, we give greater shape to the expectation of His literal and physical return. This is why Jesus spends two chapters describing the details of the συντελείας, Matthew 24-25. The συντελείας should be viewed as an event in itself and not simply a conclusion to what has gone before. It is in knowing what is ahead, in specific detail, that we find the urgency of heart that drives us to fulfill the Great Commission. I am concerned that a neglect of the specifics of God’s future plan, especially regarding the return of Jesus, will lull the church to sleep and cause us to believe we have “all the time in the world” to accomplish our task.

These plans for the consummation weighed heavily on the minds of the disciples as well as the Messiah and we must ask ourselves, “why are today’s disciples so disinterested in the great prophecies of scripture describing the events of the very last days?

After all, Jesus and the disciples were very concerned about the coming of the future kingdom. The future Messianic kingdom was woven into the very core of first century Judaism, influenced by the Old Testament itself as well as first century Jewish Messianic expectation; inter-testament literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Rabbinic literature. These expectations surfaced at an almost feverish pitch at the time of Jesus’ first coming and yet today, concern for the future has been generally minimized by a rising cynicism within the church that disparages preaching about the second coming and the core themes related to the συντελείας.

When our expectation of the συντελείας is shaped and informed by Scripture we will be motivated to go out and make disciples. This was the intention of the Savior, which is why He linked the commission to our future hope. As Evangelicals we need to embrace the future God planned for us. Jesus mentions this future many times in the Gospels.

In an article in Jesus.org, popular American preacher and pastor, Chuck Swindoll writes,

These facts from biblical prophecy about Christ’s return may surprise you:

- One out of every 30 verses in the Bible mentions the subject of Christ’s return or the end of time.
- Of the 216 chapters in the New Testament, there are well over 300 references to the return of Christ.
- 23 of the 27 New Testament books mention Christ’s return.
- Christ often spoke specifically about His own return to earth.
- Throughout the centuries, Christ’s disciples and followers have adamantly believed, written, and taught that Christ would someday return to earth.
- The Bible teaches it. The Lord Jesus stood upon its truths. The apostles declared it and wrote about it. The creeds include it and affirm it.⁵⁰

Swindoll is correct in his assessment. The future is a major concern among the authors of Scripture. Therefore, what should we expect? What is coming? What are the events attached to or part of this coming consummation of human history?

The following is a representative summary of the events, divided between those events that are commonly agreed upon by Christians and others which are debated.

I. Matters Commonly Agreed Upon

- A. Growing tribulation and hardship on earth
(1 Thessalonians 5:2-9; Revelation 3:10; 11:18)
- B. The Anti-Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:8ff; Revelation 13:11-15)
- C. The physical return of Jesus (Matthew 19:28; 24:30-31; Luke 12:40)

⁵⁰ <http://www.jesus.org/early-church-history/promise-of-the-second-coming/does-the-bible-teach-that-jesus-will-return.html>.

- D. The lifting of the curse upon earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 21)
- E. The establishment of the Kingdom (Daniel 2:34-35, 44; Isaiah 9:6-7)
- F. The resurrection of the dead (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:52)
- G. The national repentance of the remnant of Israel (Romans 11:26; Zechariah 12:10 -13:1)
- H. The Great White Throne Judgment (John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15)
- I. The Binding of Satan (Revelation 19:20; 20:1-3)
- J. The arrival of the Saints from Heaven with Jesus (Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:14)

II. Debated Matters

- A. The Rapture of the Church (John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)
- B. The Rebuilding of the Temple (evidence for Temple: Matthew 24:15; Revelation 11:1-12)
- C. The *Millennial* Temple (Zechariah 6:12-13; Isaiah 6:1-5; Ezekiel 43:1-5)
- D. The attack by the nations against Israel (Zechariah 12:1-9; 14:3; Ezekiel 38 – 39)
- E. The return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel (Ezekiel 34:11-13; 37:1-14; Isaiah 11:11-12)
- F. The re-establishment of the literal Davidic throne in Jerusalem (Jeremiah 23:4-6; Isaiah 11:1-5)
- G. The Gentiles coming to Jerusalem to worship the Messiah and participate in the events of the Jewish calendar (Zechariah 14:12-20; Micah 4:1-4)

Again, one could include additional events or leave out others and even switch the above categories, but the list give us an idea of the critical events usually associated with the second coming or period immediately afterwards. In some Christian circles the above events have been minimized or viewed as having already been fulfilled either literally or in some spiritual sense⁵¹ and are therefore viewed as speculative.

These events are also deemed less important than how we live our lives and whom we help each day. This has led to a dearth of serious study on the future and diminished preaching on the subject from our pulpits, giving rise to a generation of believers that know very little about the coming consummation and therefore do not think about the second coming and events surrounding the consummation of the ages. This has diminished our sense of urgency in the preaching of the Gospel and turned our ministries towards good activities but reduced our attention to more direct Gospel proclamation. This is not as true among those groups that continue to emphasize the soon return of the Lord.

Yet, the future is important to God and it should be important to us as well. The future must shape our present! When we lose a future-oriented perspective and neglect to study eschatology with an eye for the details of Jesus' second coming, we lose the urgency attached by Jesus to the Great Commission.

JEWISH EVANGELISM, THE FUTURE AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

One of the most critical areas of study must be the role Israel and the Jewish people play in the events and details attached to the consummation. Ignoring the future Jesus envisions for Israel and the nations, which includes the literal establishment of the Davidic Kingdom, promised in

⁵¹ Those, like American theologian RC Sproul, who take a Preterist view of the Book of Revelation and Olivet Discourse would view many of these events as taking place before 70 AD.

2 Samuel 7:14ff and 1 Chronicles 17:10-15, Psalm 89, etc., and further developed in the writings of the prophets (Isaiah 42, 44, 49, 60-65; Jeremiah 31-35; Ezekiel 36-39, etc.), short circuits our understanding of what we teach new disciples until He comes about what will happen when He comes. If we minimize the teaching of the Old Testament in our disciple making by spiritualizing the coming kingdom, de-literalizing the Abrahamic and Davidic promises of God to Israel, then the events of the συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος will be non-specific and unclear.

By minimizing or spiritualizing the details of the consummation, we excise the literal role of the Jewish people from God’s plans for the future. Therefore we need to seriously consider the role Jewish people will play in God’s plans for the planet.

Has God abandoned His covenant people because of unbelief and disobedience? Or, is there still a particular purpose God has for Jewish people today? Are the Jewish people one ἔθνη among many in the fulfillment of the great Commission, or do the Jewish people still have a biblically defined role in the συντελείας.

Paul, a Messianic Jew himself, responds to his own questions in Romans 11:1 by describing the future salvation of the Jewish people and the impact this will have on the rest of the world and argues in Romans chapter 11 more particularly that the salvation of the Jewish people will be the precursor to the second coming of Christ and therefore have a critical role in the fulfillment of God’s ultimate purposes for the world.

¹² Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ¹⁵ For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

I can only imagine that this is the event Paul had in mind when he penned Romans 1:16. Knowing the future plan of God, the Church should somehow prioritize Jewish evangelism, especially as we see the day of His second coming drawing near.

Bringing the Gospel to the Jewish people *first* should not be viewed as

a *priority of privilege*, but as a *priority founded on the Lord's strategy to heal a world broken by sin*. God chose the Jewish people for a special role and one day this will become evident as the end-time remnant of Jewish people repent and the Lord returns (Zechariah 12:10, Isaiah 9:6-7, Acts 3:19 ff.).

This gives us insight into Paul's statement earlier in Romans 11:11.

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.

As mentioned earlier, according to Paul's statement in Romans 11:11, the Gentiles are called to make the Jewish people jealous of Jesus living within them. The Lord chose the Jewish people to reach the Gentiles, but the Jewish people failed, so He sent His Son, the greatest Jewish person who ever lived, to complete the task. And now He calls upon Gentiles who believed the Gospel through a remnant of Jewish people to bring the message back to the original messengers!

How will the church fulfill this mandate to prioritize Jewish evangelism and make Jewish people jealous? What practical steps can be taken to give the church around the world a passion for reaching Jewish people with the message of the Jewish Messiah? The turning of the Jewish people to Jesus is one of the great and final events included as part of the συντελείας.

CONCLUSION: OUR FUTURE HOPE AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

We have less time left to fulfill the Lord's command to make disciples among the nations than we think. And it is this very sense of urgency that will motivate us to complete the task. Yet, we are in great danger of losing this urgency if we continue to minimize or spiritualize God's future plan. In essence, this future hope is as much a part of the great Commission as the command to make disciples and is mentioned by Jesus to provide both

comfort and motivation. The Lord is encouraging His disciples to fulfill the Commission with dispatch and urgency as the planned events for the συντελείας are unyielding, inevitable and unstoppable and will soon be upon us.

If we do not have the end in mind then we will not do the work He has called us to do with dispatch or urgent enthusiasm. Human need can only motivate global evangelism to a certain extent as there are billions needing Jesus who will never hear because their materials needs are not apparent. We have become more concerned with the present than the future. We feed the body and attempt to free captives from various forms of social slavery, but these expressions of love and grace alone will not save a person. It is the burning hope of heaven and fear of hell rooted in the soul of the disciple and part of Jesus' teaching about the “consummation” and the end of the age that will move the Church to complete her task.

To balance the above, we also understand that our ministry to those suffering in this present world, motivated by the love and compassion of the Messiah resident in our hearts, is also of great importance. Historically Christians have had great difficulties combining our love for people and belief in the “harder truths” of eternal judgment in determining our strategies to fulfill the Great Commission. We need to take both sides of this eternal equation into heartfelt consideration.

Clearly, the mood in the church has shifted over the last 50 years. Today’s disciples are generally uncomfortable discussing biblical prophecy, heaven and hell, and trend towards accepting some type of *eschatological agnosticism*. If asked, most believers will tell you they do believe in the physical return of the Lord and the establishment of the kingdom, but if you ask anything further you might be told that it is enough to know the future is coming and we should not debate the specifics. It seems that any discussion about the literal second coming of Jesus that goes beyond acknowledging that the event will take place is viewed with skepticism and those interested in the topic are viewed as having an obsession to discover unknowable future events.

A concern for studying, preaching or discussing the details of events surrounding the second coming of Jesus is often deemed inappropriate and unhealthy as it takes the eyes of Evangelicals off of a suffering humanity and the problems of today. There is an underlying attitude that suggests we should be more concerned about today rather than tomorrow – which is *unknowable*. Because of this perspective many Bible teachers write and speak about the end times in the murkiest of terms, as end-times events are considered difficult to interpret, divisive and at times, fanciful.

Admittedly, the Church might be over-compensating for what has been an overzealousness and imbalance in 20th-century prophetic Bible teaching and more specifically, during the last half of the 20th century, with the formation of the modern state of Israel. *Yet, we should not throw out the baby with the over sensationalized prophetic bath water!* It is time to recalibrate our reading of Scripture and return to a deep concern and even a longing for the συντελείας mentioned in our text and the events surrounding the second coming of Christ. We cannot dismiss gaining a biblical understanding of the future because of the errors of the past. We must be concerned about the συντελείας as the future is part of what Jesus told His disciples to teach to their new disciples. The πάντα ὄσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν includes His teachings about His coming and the need to prepare for this eventuality.

By studying the details of the consummation we will help our disciples develop a greater sense of urgency for the Gospel. They will be less cynical and understand that though the *signs of the times* at times may have been misread by overly zealous believers, they are still a critical part of the full counsel of God for which we will be held accountable to teach our disciples.

We should be motivated in our proclamation by love for both God and man, yet we should also have a rightful fear on behalf of those who do not believe as the συντελείας brings with it both great blessings to those who believe and judgment to those who do not. It is this imminence of the future that drives us to preach the Gospel with greater urgency.

What are we to do with our time until this συντελείας arrives? Jesus has called us to persuade a sinful and broken world that they not only need to believe, but to learn, follow and observe (obey) what He said. May the Lord help us fulfill the task!



The Coming Kingdom in Jesus' Words

Darrell Bock

KEYWORDS

| Kingdom of God | Eschatology |
| Israel | Jesus | Acts |

ABSTRACT

Noting that the kingdom is already, not yet and that Jesus' outline of what is to come only starts the biblical discussion of the end, this study traces six themes from Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom to come. It also considers some "until" texts in Luke-Acts that show hope for Israel's restoration. Finally there is a look at Acts 1:6-8 showing Jesus taught the hope for Israel's restoration. The hope of the end is the hope of shalom, justice, and the vindication of the saints.

INTRODUCTION

To discuss the coming Kingdom in Jesus' words in a short lecture is a little like saying, "Cover the reality of the universe in fifteen pages." Here is what Jesus scholars recognize as the major theme of Jesus' teaching. As we heard from Derek Kinder, what Jesus has to say about the kingdom is that it is now and not yet, as it was arriving with his ministry but would be consummated in the future. One of the innovations of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom is that what the OT tended to present as one package and

side by side, Jesus split up into a process that involved his two comings. Understanding that the coming and saving work of the Messiah, the eschatological figure of promise, would not take place all at once, but in two comings, is one of the things that Jewish people struggle to understand about Jesus. When they question Jesus being the Messiah because *shalom* and deliverance have not come in full, they are struggling with seeing that the kingdom comes in two steps: arrival and consummation. So getting what Jesus says about the kingdom is important, not just for eschatology, but for understanding the program of God in terms of salvation.

I will briefly mention antecedents to the kingdom hope in Judaism and the already arrival of the kingdom with Jesus before turning our attention to themes tied to the consummation. I will then close with a very important discussion on Acts 1:6-8. I begin with a caveat. The epistles fill in detail on the end that Jesus does not cover. We know this because Paul in 1 Thess 4 refers to revealing a word of the Lord when he discusses the taking up of the saints in that text. This means that what he reveals is fresh prophetic revelation. The Word of the Lord is a technical expression in the OT in many contexts for a prophetic declaration (Gen 15:1; Isa 1:10; Jonah 1:10). In addition, the book of Revelation goes into a great deal of detail about the end that Jesus does not address. So not everything we know about the end comes from Jesus. This observation is important because those who argue to build an eschatology starting and ending with Jesus in a Christocentric focus risk missing what gets added to the eschatological calendar by later revelation. The very fact we have the book of Revelation as the last part of the NT canon should alert us to the fact that what Jesus says about the end is important, but what is said about the end does not end with Jesus. What we do know is that for Jesus, the end is ultimately about the completion of God’s faithfulness in redemption and the vindication of the righteous.

JEWISH ANTECEDENTS TO THE TERM KINGDOM OF GOD

Interestingly, the term “kingdom of God” is not that prevalent in the Hebrew Scriptures. In fact it does not appear once! References to your kingdom (Ps 45:6), His kingdom (Dan 6:26), or to an everlasting kingdom (Dan 2:44) do exist. What is emphasized is God’s rule and the hope of *shalom* in a dynasty out of the house of David to come (2 Sam 7:7-17; Ps 2 and 100; Dan 2 and 7). What Second Temple Judaism said primarily of the kingdom is that it would be a time of judgment for the nations and of vindication of the saints (*I Enoch* 9:4-5; 12:3; chap 25; 27:3 81:3, tied to a Son of Man figure in chaps. 39-71; *Pss Sol* 17-18; *2 Baruch* 36-40; *4 Ezra* 7:28-29; 12:32-34; 13:26). Satan will be defeated in that time (*Assumption of Moses* 7-10). As we shall see, Jesus will reinforce these themes and work with many of them. To invoke the kingdom is to look to the deliverance of the saints from her enemies, something Luke 1:68-75 also affirms in the words of that hopeful saint Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, when he looked for the deliverance out of the house of David from all our enemies so we could serve God “without fear in holiness and righteousness all the day of our lives” (vv. 74-75).

ARRIVAL: THE ALREADY KINGDOM

The already arrival of the kingdom is tied to Jesus’ presence and activity. So in Luke 11:20, he says that if he casts out demons by the power of Beelzebul, then the kingdom of God has come upon (*ephthasen*) them. The key verb here *phthanō* means to arrive or reach a goal (Rom 9:31; 2 Cor 10:14; 1 Thess 2:16). In Luke 17:20-21, he makes the point that people do not need to hunt to find the kingdom of God for it is in their midst. In his parables of the leaven and mustard seed, the kingdom starts out small, like a small mustard seed or a pinch of leaven, and grows into

a place where one can find shelter or that permeates the whole loaf. These teachings picture the in-breaking of the kingdom with the coming of Jesus. John the Baptist is the last of the old era as the law and prophets were until John, but now the kingdom is preached (Matt 11:12; Luke 16:16). At the Last Supper, Jesus says the new covenant is poured out in his blood, clearing the way for the forgiveness and promise of God to give the enabling power of the Spirit to those who are now cleansed by his work (Luke 3:16; 22:19-20; 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; 2:30-39; 11:15-18). Luke 14:15-24 shows that Israel’s rejection does not postpone the kingdom; the invitation to sit at the banquet and celebrate blessing takes place now with others now invited, even as those seemingly first in line have missed the blessing in the current time because they did not come when invited.

In sum, God’s active rule begins with Jesus’ work, involves the coming of the Spirit, and points to the defeat of Satan. It functions on the earth today in a limited way among those in whom the Spirit of God is active. The active realm of the kingdom is in the believing community, but there is a claim Jesus has on all people because he is God’s chosen one in the way of salvation (Matt 7:13-14, 21-27). For evidence of the claim on all people, Jesus says the seed of the kingdom is sown in all the world, which is the field for the sowing of kingdom presence (Matthew 13:38). To fail to enter into that realm now means exclusion from blessing later, when the consummation comes.

CONSUMMATION: THE NOT YET KINGDOM TO COME

In thinking about the consummation and Jesus’ teaching, I’d like to survey six points that emerge from what the gospels record.

First, when we think of the consummation of the kingdom program, the words of Jesus introduce a tension between its being imminent, capable of coming at any time, even soon, and the idea that it will be long enough that some will lose faith. Numerous parables portray the

coming as something for which one must stay alert because the exact time is unknown and its coming is unexpected and sudden. So images are used like a thief coming in the night (Luke 12:39; Matthew 24:43). It will be visible and sudden like lightening (Luke 17:24; Matthew 24:27). It will be unexpected (Luke 12:40; Matthew 24:44) It will be like the days of Noah and Lot, when judgment comes suddenly in the midst of life (Luke 17:26-30; Matthew 24:44). The vindication is soon and yet long enough that when the return takes place, Jesus asks if the Son of Man will find faith when he comes (Luke 18:8). The suggestion is that some will not persevere by the time the return happens. Part of the point about the immediacy of the return appears to be that it is the next thing on the eschatological calendar. Yet the gospel must makes it way into all the world (Mark 13:10; Matthew 24:14). This is not something that can be figured out, despite the many efforts of people trying to do so. Jesus said even the Son does not know the time along with the angels (Mark 13:32). If Jesus does not know, we cannot figure it out. So the call is to stay alert since you do not know when it will take place (Mark 13:33).

Second, the consummation is a time of judgment and redemption by the Son of Man. Much of the end of the Olivet Discourse makes this point, as the elect are gathered from all the corners of the earth (Matthew 24:29-31; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-28), as do parables about the separation that comes to humanity at the end. So wheat is separated from chaff and good fish from bad fish (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50). What is redemption for the elect means judgment for those who have not embraced the hope of God. The saints are gathered as people are separated into sheep and goats in a parable that expresses the separation in terms of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46).

Third, associated with the events of the end is the desecration of the temple by the antichrist, a person standing where he ought not be (Matthew 24:15; Mark 13:14). The event is described in a pattern prophecy where Rome’s destruction of the temple in AD 70 is seen as a parallel to what the desecration of the end will look like (Luke 21:20). The language of

the abomination of desolation in Matthew comes from Daniel 9:27 and points to the antichrist figure. The model for this eschatological picture was Antiochus Epiphanes, whose march into the Holy of Holies at the start of the Maccabean War in 167 BC was seen as desecration of the highest order. In the end, there will be chaos around Israel as there was then. The text also assumes a temple rebuilt by the time of the end.

Fourth, the apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the consummation (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). The apostles may be facing persecution now but vindication will come when they exercise authority over the nation. Jesus’ coming and their association with him gives them this coming prerogative.

Fifth, Israel is judged until she says “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:34-35). This is a vitally important text. It presents Israel’s rejection as temporary and assumes that one day she will turn back to God. The picture is of an exilic-like judgment as the desolate house is language from Jeremiah 12:7 and 22:5-6. The picture is of Jerusalem under judgment and overrun. It is the realization of the threat made in Luke 13:6-9, that if the nation did not bear fruit she would be cut out of the garden. In context, she is unprotected as she failed to allow God to gather her under his protective wings. Exposed, because of unbelief, she is under and succumbs to pressure from the nations. This is not just the temple that is in view. Acts 2:36 shows how house can refer to people. The context here, throughout Luke 13, is of the nation’s lack of response.

There is more to that judgment than a building; a nation is at risk until she returns to embrace the sent Messiah as the one to come sent by God. However, the very fact that an “until” is uttered shows Jesus anticipates a turning back one day. In Acts 3:18-22, Peter issues a call for such a turn to Israelites living in the time of Jesus. Nothing about what is said here allows for any form of a dual covenant that says Jews are blessed as a people simply because they are Jewish. To share in redemption, they must respond to the redeemer and Savior-Messiah God has sent. A second Lucan “until” text adds to this picture. In Luke 21:20-24, Jesus declares

that Jerusalem will be trampled down until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, a remark that suggests that there will be a future time when Israel will again be front and center in God’s program. There is no other way to explain these “until’s” that can explain their presence, especially when placed alongside Romans 9–11 as that has to be about ethnic Israel for Paul is discussing those he weeps over and longs to see saved. That cannot be a redefined Israel in any sense.

Finally, this is the time of salvation for the saints; the vindication Jewish texts always longed for at the end with its hope of *shalom*. Luke 21:28 says when the Son of Man returns, they can lift up their heads for redemption is near. Matthew 24:31 says this will be the time when the Son of Man gathers his elect from the four corners of the earth.

There is precious little detail here other than the result. Judgment comes. The righteous are affirmed and delivered. All is made right in the world. A separation takes place among people.

This is how Jesus portrays the end. It is God being faithful in vindicating those who have embraced the one he has sent to deliver them.

ACTS 1:6-8: KINGDOM, ISRAEL AND MISSION

A crucial text in thinking about the restoration of the kingdom is part of the last topic Jesus addressed before his ascension. In Acts 1:6-8, the apostles ask Jesus if this is the time he will restore the kingdom to Israel. The very fact this question is asked reveals what Jesus has taught the apostles, for they ask it having spent 40 days with Jesus and with him having expounded the hope of the Hebrew Scripture about the Christ to them (Luke 24:44-49). There is a strand of interpretation that argues that this question expressed the wrong hope. The idea that the kingdom and Israel had a future missed the boat on where Jesus was taking the kingdom program. The question, however, is a natural one given what the Hebrew Scripture taught about the consummation and Israel (Isaiah

42:1; 44:3; 59:21; Ezekiel 36:24-28; 37: 14; the dry bones of chapter 39; Joel 2:28-3:1). Craig Kenner gets this right in his commentary when he says, “Some view this question as shortsighted, but the context specifies the problem is with timing (Acts 1:7), not with content.” He goes on to note a series of texts in Luke-Acts that affirm hope of Israel’s restoration (Luke 1:32-33; 54-55, 68-74; 2:32, 38; 22:15-16, 30; 24:21) and to argue Luke’s view of eschatology is shared with Paul (Rom 11:15-26).¹ Luke sees a restoration for Israel.² There is no indication in Luke that this was a wrong question or inference about the kingdom program. In fact, Peter’s Spirit-inspired speech in Acts 3 reinforces this view as he preaches a hope for Israel. In 3:18-22 he calls Israel to repent so that the time of refreshing can come to the nation in alignment with what the prophets of the Hebrew Scripture teach. Nothing about what Peter says suggests this reading of hope for Israel needs reframing and applies rather to others.

What is at stake here is the promise, word and faithfulness of God. God made covenant commitments to Israel. Even though it is clear that the gospel, kingdom, and salvation benefits extend to the nations, and fulfillment comes through Christ alone, nothing in making that affirmation means Israel has lost her place and the potential for hope in that program that God initially committed himself to for them in the covenants. Gentile inclusion does not mean Israelite exclusion. One can have both. Scripture affirms both. So does the Christ who stands at the center of all fulfillment.

As we already have suggested, Jesus does not put into question the apostles’ question. He does not challenge its premise. Jesus merely replies that the issue of timing is the Father’s business. He will not tell them when the kingdom will be restored to Israel. God will do it in his time. The disciples are not on a need to know basis for this question. The eschatological clock is completely in God’s hands.

1 Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Grand Rapids; Baker, 2012), 683. So also Eckhard Schnabel, *Acts*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 76, esp. n. 37. He also lists a series of Hebrew Scripture texts (Isaiah 2:2-4; 49:6; Jeremiah 16:15; 23:8; 24:6; 31:27-34; Ezekiel 34-37; Hosea 2:3; 11:11; Amos 9:11-15; Ps 14:7; 85:2

2 Ibid, 687, “Jesus does not deny that Israel’s restoration will come.”

In the meantime, the disciples have a priority assignment. It is the mission of believers—their calling. It is to receive the enablement, the power which the Spirit of God will give to them and engage in the mission of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. They are to start in Jerusalem and go to the ends of the earth. The phrase “ends of the earth” has Hebrew Scripture roots from Isaiah 48:20, 49:6—a Servant song, and Jeremiah 10:13. A priority for the disciples over figuring out the timing of the end is mission, taking the gospel into the world, all of it for both Jew and Gentile. Mission and ministry have a priority over eschatological star-gazing. When it comes to eschatology, one is to stay alert because the end could come at any time. The task is not to seek escape from this world but to engage it with the hope of the gospel. Interestingly, this is Jesus’ last word about the kingdom program during his ministry on earth. Making sure eschatology is properly prioritized in relationship to mission was a final concern Jesus left for his disciples.

CONCLUSION

In sum, Jesus actually says very little about what the kingdom will be at the end. There will be victory, peace, justice, shalom, and vindication for the righteous. There is no discussion of how the kingdom is structured or what it will be like. The apostolic teaching in Acts and Paul suggests that the OT tells us much of that story. The emphasis is on the accountability and blessing that comes with the consummation of the kingdom. The point is that all will be held accountable for how they have associated themselves with the kingdom and its hope. That situation and that need is the same for Jew and Gentile.

Still there are a few key points Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom to comes makes.

First, Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom tells us it comes in stages, not all at once. Things the Hebrew Scripture said Messiah would do that Jesus has not yet done will be accomplished in the consummation phase of the

kingdom program that is already and not yet. People cannot charge Jesus with not being the Messiah because things were not done that Scripture said the Messiah would do, because Jesus' kingdom program is not yet complete.

Second, the end will be a time tied to judgment and world conflict swirling around Jerusalem, but also means of vindication for the saints.

Third, the timing of the coming of the consummation of the kingdom is unknown, so those who believe should stay alert to its coming.

Fourth, with the return will come a restoration for Israel in the kingdom program of God. She will turn and embrace her Messiah Jesus. Much of that story is already told and detailed in the Hebrew Scripture. When promise and restoration are raised, that hope and its story are already well known.

Finally, in the meantime, saints are to be hard at work drawing on the enabling power of God's Spirit to preach and represent the gospel to a needy world. For what both the nations and Israel need is to respond to the hope, life, and forgiveness that God so graciously offers through Jesus, Messiah of Israel and Lord of all. So we pray may his kingdom come, may his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. The proper response to eschatological hope is to be engaged in the mission that draws people into that kingdom to come.



The Coming Kingdom and the Day of the Lord in Joel 2

Daniel Nessim

KEYWORDS

| Day of the Lord | Joel | Repentance | Locusts |
| Eschatology | Rebellion–Judgement |

ABSTRACT

The concept of the ‘Day of the Lord’ requires definition in regard to other ‘Days’ in the Hebrew Bible and has proven difficult for scholars to find an agreed approach to, let alone come to a consensus definition. The prophet Joel and its locust imagery provide a matrix for interpreting the term. The militarisation of the locust horde in Joel 2 compared to that of Joel 1 clarifies the author’s metaphorical intent. It also signals the actual, literal Day of the Lord that Joel wishes to signify. While eschatological in nature, this Day of the Lord can be averted by repentance. Thus Peter’s call for repentance in Acts 2, based on the text of Joel 2, can be seen to avert the Day of the Lord and its horrific judgment. In contrast the lack of repentance by the rebellious subjects of Revelation 9 leads to their judgement and the execution of the Day of the Lord upon them.

The death of the reformist Yorkshire MP William Wilberforce in 1833 along with a number of other ‘old leaders’ in Evangelicalism was a factor in a new, assertive tone for British Evangelicalism.¹ One facet of that new

1 David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989), 75ff.

assertiveness was an increasing emphasis upon the literal and historical meaning of the Scriptures. This had significant implications as the ‘new’ method of interpretation linked the return of Christ to the salvation of the Jewish people and his subsequent millennial rule.² The new hermeneutic also required a reassessment of the ‘נִמְיוֹ’,³ or the Day of the Lord (=DL). The DL, in Ladislav Černý’s view ‘the basic notion of eschatology’,⁴ and as Yair Hoffmann puts it ‘inseparable from the overall problem of Biblical Eschatology’⁵ is thus the subject of this paper. Joel 2 makes a particularly interesting study on account of the prophet Joel’s placement within the ‘Book of Twelve’ Minor Prophets; the general focus of Joel on the Day of the Lord; and the crucial role played by Joel 2 in describing that day. It is the purpose of this article, then, to evaluate Joel 2 from a historical and literary perspective to ascertain the author’s eschatological expectations.

THE ORIGIN OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

The origin of the phrase DL within the Hebrew Bible is a matter of ongoing interest. One viewpoint is that it originates in the concept of God’s holy war. Another is that it is related to the occurrence of theophany. The two are in fact related. In 1958, while proposing that the DL was primarily related to God’s ‘final uprising against his foes’⁶, Gerhard von Rad began by noting that there ‘is in fact something peculiar about the expectation of the Day of J’, for wherever it occurs in prophecy, the statements culminate in an allusion to J’s coming in person.⁷ This

2 Ibid., 88.

3 This paper represents the Tetragrammaton with ’נִמְיוֹ’ in Hebrew and Y’ or J’ in English.

4 Ladislav Černý, *The Day of Y’ and Some Relevant Problems*, PráCe Z VědeckýCh ÚStavů (V Praze: University Karlovy, 1948), vii.

5 Yair Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” *ZAW* 93, no. 1 (1981): 37; See also Gerhard von Rad, *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, trans. David Muir Gibson Stalker, 2 vols., vol. 2, Old Testament Theology (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 119.

6 *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, 2, 124.

7 Ibid., 119.

observation would also be echoed by Weiss who rejected von Rad's basic idea of 'an ancient "HW [Holy War] tradition"' and concluded from a survey of the relevant passages that the 'DL motif-complex...has its roots in the ancient motif-complex of the theophany-descriptions.'⁸ Based on his interpretation of the use of the term in texts that he takes to interpret past events, Joseph Everson concludes that the term 'Day of the Lord' 'is a concept that is used to interpret momentous events of war' and suggests that the prophets speak 'of the succession of momentous events as Days of Y'.⁹ The question thus arises as to whether the DL refers to a singular event, a series of events or a constellation of events.

A key criterion for this discussion is the determination of which passages in particular should be considered part of the data by which to define the DL. While the precise term DL occurs 16 time in the prophets, related terms abound such as the Day of the Lord's sacrifice (*יום זבח ה'*), the Day of the Lord's vengeance (*יום נקם ה'*), the Lord has a Day (*יום ל'*), the Day of the Lord's wrath (*יום עבירה ה'*), the Day of the Lord's anger (*יום עז ה'*) and so forth.¹⁰

Daniella Ishai-Rosenboim questions the idea that study of the DL must begin with the 16 instances of the exact term, and takes the position that the above listed terms should be included. In her very title she asks 'Is *הַיּוֹם ה'* (the Day of the Lord) a Term in Biblical Language?'¹¹ and

8 Meir Weiss, "The Origin of the "Day of the Lord" — Reconsidered," *HUCA* 37(1966): 60. Hoffmann betrays a reluctance to accept the possibility that DOL requires an actual appearance of God. He writes that 'It is hard to believe that during the period of the classical prophets there still existed among the masses expectations of a real, concrete appearance of God, such as the one depicted in Ex 14 17-18.Hence what we mean by theophany is a special and exceptional intervention in the current stream of events, which could be defined as a miracle.' Hoffmann, "The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature," 44.

9 A. Joseph Everson, "The Days of Y'," *JBL* 93, no. 3 (1974): 336-37.

10 Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament Using the Hebrew and Aramaic Text*, 2 ed. (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1989), 455. Isa 13:6, 9; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:4; 4:14; Amos 5:18 (twice), 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14 (twice), and Mal 3:23; Ishai-Rosenboim counts 16 occurrences, including Ezek 13:5: Daniella Ishai-Rosenboim, "Is *הַיּוֹם ה'* (the Day of the Lord) a Term in Biblical Language?," *Biblica* 87, no. 3 (2006): 398.

11 "Is *הַיּוֹם ה'* (the Day of the Lord) a Term in Biblical Language?."

continues to argue that a ‘term is one, specific and unchanged expression referring to one, specific and unchanged concept.’¹² On the basis of a grammatical analysis she concludes that the ‘collocation’ of the terms Day and Lord ‘is not the key to the study of the concept called today ‘The Day of the Lord’’¹³ In fact, Ishai-Rosenboim views the DL as ‘so amorphous, that it is unreasonable that it should become a term.’¹⁴ Thus a speaker’s audience would only know what was meant by the DL by other clues in the speaker’s address.

Ishai-Rosenboim’s thesis is in response to Yair Hoffman who argued twenty five years previous that one must begin study of the concept of the DL with a study of the usage of the specific phrase. Therefore, ‘only after a careful philological examination of the proper phrase can one proceed to evaluate the significance of the related phrases.’¹⁵ Hoffman pointed out the contrast in methodology between those who examine the term and its usage in Scripture and those who do not, saying ‘Before we investigate the relationship between the phrase []’הַיּוֹם and the other phrases, it is necessary to make primary definition of DOL [=Day of the Lord] on the basis of those passages that specifically use this phrase. Some studies have not been conducted according to this method, and a recent one by A. J. Everson [1974] is a prime example of the opposite.’¹⁶

His approach was an attempt to provide a reasonable starting point for the study that would provide reliable results since previous studies had demonstrated to him the folly of casting one’s net so wide that the concept eludes definition.¹⁷ Both approaches show the difficulty in determining what the DL is and point towards the value of a closer look at the extended description of the DL in the key texts such as Joel 2.

12 Ibid., 395.

13 Ibid., 401.

14 Ibid., 400.

15 Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” 38.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid. Hoffman particularly singles the following article out as an example; Everson, “The Days of Y.”

The complexity of the discussion is reduced somewhat by the fact that, as Meir Weiss assures, ‘the DL does not figure in any form whatsoever, in extra-prophetic literature.’¹⁸ The closest to be found is a reference to a festival as ‘the day of god’ in an Assyrian text.¹⁹ In other words, the DL is a purely biblical term and the context in which it is used is limited to the prophetic corpus.

Within the prophets the earliest occurrence of the exact phrase DL is generally taken to be in Amos. Hoffmann himself began his study of the term with Amos 5:18-20.²⁰ Yet even with this starting point there is a lack of consensus. Hans Walter Wolff in his commentary weighed in to judge that ‘vRad is, however, right in claiming “that Amos 5:18 is not sufficiently unequivocal to be used as a suitable starting-point for an examination; it is advisable to begin with texts which convey a more unequivocal, and at the same time a broader conception of the Day of Y”’²¹ His point is well taken for Amos 5 raises the prospect of a DL that establishes justice, and far from being a war is in 5:18-20 a dark day to be apprehensive about. Amos does not describe the DL in detail other than to state the outcome that it will inaugurate. As Hoffman himself notes, ‘one may say as opposed to the *uncrystallized popular concept* regarding the appearance of God in an act of salvation ... Amos represents *another uncrystallized approach*: the appearance of God would be »darkness and not light«.²²

In all probability the DL will continue to present dilemmas and controversy for the foreseeable future. Further study of the key texts in which the phrase appears has much to commend it and it is on the strength of that that Joel becomes a prophet of interest.

18 Weiss, “The Origin of the “Day of the Lord” — Reconsidered,” 41.

19 Černý, *The Day of Y' and Some Relevant Problems*, 15.

20 Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” 39.

21 Weiss, “The Origin of the “Day of the Lord” — Reconsidered,” 39.

22 Hoffmann, “The Day of the Lord as a Concept and a Term in the Prophetic Literature,” 42.

THE PROPHET JOEL

Reading Joel involves numerous uncertainties. Among these, there is little certainty as to Joel’s identity. He is described as the son of Pethuel (1:1) which gives rise to various theories as to his identity, none of which are secure.²³ Nevertheless these uncertainties are not decisive or essential in terms of interpreting the prophet’s message. So it is that O. Palmer Robertson points out the silver lining of this cloudy picture, and suggests that the ‘effect of this anonymity is to keep the reader’s concentration focused on the message, not on the man.’²⁴

A related and further ambiguity is expressed in the wide range of opinion as to the book’s date. Elie Assis has recently made a persuasive argument for its composition during the exile between 587 and 538.²⁵ The most obvious question regarding this dating is that there is limited evidence for a significant Jewish population in Israel during this time. While it is possible that ‘the land of Judah continued to be populated after the exile’ Assis has to acknowledge that it was ‘very small and in a depressed state’.²⁶ Nevertheless, an exilic dating does seem possible, even likely, and so Assis’ dating provides a good starting point.

In Hebrew counting, there are twelve Minor Prophets, and the second of these is Joel. The placement directly after Hosea is not accidental. Deist has identified significant affinities between Hosea 2 and Joel 2 in which similar imagery of agricultural devastation and subsequent blessing and

23 In his midrash on Joel, Rashi identified him in the earliest era, as the prophet Samuel’s son ‘בֶן שְׁמוֹאֵל הנָבִיא שְׁפִירָה לְחַל בְּפִיְתָה’. Matis Roberts and Yitzchok Stavsky, *The Later Prophets: The Twelve Prophets* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 2014).

24 O. Palmer Robertson, *Prophet of the Coming Day of the Lord: The Message of Joel* (Durham: Evangelical Press, 1995), 22.

25 Elie Assis, “The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel,” VT 61, no. 2 (2011). The promise that God will ‘restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem’ (3:1) as well as the reference to his people ‘scattered among the nations’ (3:2) argue against a pre-exilic date. The observation that there is no reference to idolatry suggests an exilic or post-exilic date. Yet if Joel was written during the exile, a consequent question to be answered is how this prophecy could have been located in the Land and refer to the Temple cult.

26 Ibid., 180-81.

restoration by the Lord are present.²⁷ Similarly Joel 2:1, 15 clearly echo Hosea 5:8, which reads: ‘Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!’ As Richard Coggins argues, ‘It is surely right here to see a deliberate literary link’.²⁸ When Joel writes he is not confronting the idolatry that faced Hosea, neither are Gibeah and Ramah any more part of the Northern Kingdom fearing invasion from the south. Now Zion is the focus and Joel applies the imagery of a previous generation to his current situation.

The placement just before Amos is likewise appropriate. The two prophets also have substantial affinities. In both, Tyre, Philistia and Edom are singled out (Joel 3:4, 19; Amos 1:8-9), and in both, the ‘Lord roars from Zion’ (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). Both warn of devouring locusts (Joel 1:24; 2:25 and Amos 4:9; 7:1-3) and both issue a call for repentance (Joel 1:13, 2:12 and Amos 5:4-6, 14-15). For both the DL is darkness (Joel 2:2, Amos 5:18). Wolff suggests that, ‘in all likelihood those who arranged the collection of the Twelve wished us to read Amos and the following prophets in the light of Joel’s proclamation.’²⁹ If this is true, it momentously signifies that Joel is the lens through which the other descriptions of the DL were intended to be read.

THE LOCUSTS OF JOEL

The book of Joel progresses in phases from its opening words ‘Hear this, you elders!’ The first chapter portrays four waves of locusts devastating the Land, and subsequently calls the priests and elders to call the people to repentance in the face of this DL. Without identifying the locusts by

27 Ferdinand E. Deist, “Parallels and Reinterpretation in the Book of Joel: A Theology of the Yom Y?”, in *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F.C. Fensham*, ed. W. Claassen, Jsotsup (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 70-71.

28 Richard James Coggins, *Joel and Amos*, ed. Ronald E. Clements, New Century Bible Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 38. See also Jer 6:1.

29 Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, trans. Hans Walter Wolff, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 3.

name the second chapter repeats the picture of invasion and devastation in militaristic terms. This chapter also calls the people to repentance in the face of the DL (2:12-17) but progresses a step further. In 2:1827 Joel promises the Lord’s pity on the repentant inhabitants, once again mentioning the locusts by name. The third chapter (in English Bibles 2:28-32) does not mention the DL by name but introduces an apocalyptic depiction which persists to the end of the book and concludes ‘The Lord dwells in Zion’ (4:21). It is no surprise that with the careful arrangement of the book, its inter-textual references and parallels, that Ferdinand Deist concluded that Joel includes various ‘theologies’ of the DL which are ‘arranged in such a manner that they may be read as reinterpretations of each other.’³⁰

In reading Joel, the reader is immediately faced with the need to identify the locust army being described. Pablo Andiñach goes as far as to argue that, whenever the book of Joel was penned, its interpretation is ‘dependent upon a decision about the identity of the locusts’.³¹ Are the locusts literal or figurative? Are the armies literal or eschatological? And what is the relationship between these different possibilities?

Various arguments have been marshalled against the idea that Joel writes of a literal plague of locusts. On the basis that Exodus 10:14 promised that there would never be a plague of locusts like that which was inflicted upon the Egyptians some ancient rabbis argued that they are not literal.³² Thus Cecil Roth has argued that the ancient view was that the locusts represented far more than a literal plague, although unfortunately he does not provide his sources.³³ On the other hand, Joel’s

30 Deist, “Parallels and Reinterpretation in the Book of Joel: A Theology of the Yom Y?” 75.

31 Pablo R. Andiñach, “The Locusts in the Message of Joel,” VT 42, no. 4 (1992): 433. John A. Thompson, “Joel’s Locusts in the Light of Near Eastern Parallels,” JNES 14, no. 1 (1955).

32 Roberts and Stavsky, *The Later Prophets: The Twelve Prophets*, 117.

33 ‘In the view of the covenanters of Qumran (and the same was to be the case with other pious interpreters later on), it was obviously inconceivable that the store of inspiration conveyed by the Prophet should be devoted to something so transitory and so trivial as a plague of locusts.’ Cecil Roth, “The Teacher of Righteousness and the

description of a locust army in chapter 1 is so graphic and detailed that it leaves little room for an alternative.³⁴ The description of four waves, or possibly types of locusts in 1:4, 2:25 draw upon what seems to be common knowledge between the author and his readers. This is not unlikely. Israeli entomologist F.S. Bodenheimer wrote in 1950 that ‘At intervals of 11 to 13 years, huge swarms have invaded the country, in the late winter or early spring, for from one to four consecutive years.’³⁵ Specific consequences such as the physical damage to vines and fig trees (1:7) and the cancellation of grain and drink offerings ‘from the house of the Lord’ due to lack of produce (1:9) are indicative of an historical event. Joel consistently speaks of the locusts as a past event the effects of which were presently being experienced. There is no hint of military forces or destruction in the description of Joel 1.

The army of Joel 2 has various features in common with the locust horde of chapter 1, but also some unique characteristics. It seems that on the basis of the literal locust invasion in Joel 1, the prophet expanded his message to forewarn of a yet coming invasion. The problem facing interpreters is that Joel 2:2-11 describes an army so closely after the pattern of the locust army in Joel 1 that it is common for commentators to take them as being the same army. On the other hand, as Feinberg has put it, there does indeed appear to be a ‘sinister reality behind the locust plague’.³⁶

Prophecy of Joel,” VT 13, no. 1 (1963): 93.

34 Commentators who take the locusts as literal include such as Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 74; Elie Assis, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, vol. 581, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 34-35; Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, ed. R.K. Harrison, Nicot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 49-51.

35 F. S. (Shimon Fritz) Bodenheimer, “Note on Invasions of Palestine by Rare Locusts,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 1, no. 3 (1950): 146. Bodenheimer identifies three different species of locusts known to invade Palestine.

36 Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 75; Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, thus writes ‘...the plague in its literal sense does not exhaust the intent of the Lord.’ 74.

THE LOCUST PLAGUE

In Joel 1:6 the locust army is described as a mighty (מַזְעֵן) nation. In Joel 2 the same term (מַזְעֵן) is used of the invaders no less than three times: in 2:2, 5 as a mighty people and in 2:11 as a mighty army. In the face of the invasion Joel 1:1 asks ‘has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers?’ whereas Joel 2:2 states ‘their like has never been before.’ In what forms the first part of an inclusio, Joel 1:4 describes the locusts with four of the ten different terms that are used of locusts in the Hebrew Bible.³⁷ In Joel 2:25 the inclusion is completed as the same four terms are repeated in the context of a reprise of Joel one’s agricultural imagery in the previous chapter.

Nevertheless, Joel also distinguishes the two armies. In chapter one the direction from which the locusts come is not mentioned, but his readers would have known that locusts typically invade from the south. In chapter two the army is described as coming from the north (2:20). This was the traditional direction from which foreign enemies were expected to invade the land (e.g. Jer 4:6, 6:1; Ezek 39:2).³⁸ While in chapter 1 the picture is that of four kinds of locusts, chapter 2:2 portrays a single army. Whereas chapter 1 compares the locusts to lions or lionesses which were native threats to the inhabitants of the land,³⁹ in military terminology chapter 2 compares the locusts to horses, cavalry, warriors and soldiers (2:5,7). In this he draws upon the literal visual comparison that can be made between the appearance of locusts and horses (apart from scale!). The comparison has been made in more cultures than just that of the prophet Joel. Feinberg makes the observation that just as the locusts are described like ‘horses’ in 2:4 so even in Italian (*cavalletta*) and German (*Haupferde*) there are terms for locusts derived from words for horses.⁴⁰

37 Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, 64.

38 Brevard S. Childs, “The Enemy from the North and the Chaos Tradition,” *JBL* 78, no. 3 (1959).

39 Judges 14:5; 1 Sam 17:34-37.

40 Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 76. See also C.J. (ed.) Ellicott, *A New Testament*

Thus the primarily *agricultural* image of Joel 1 gives way to a military one in Joel 2. In terms of what these armies do, no longer is the issue one of agricultural destruction with new wine being snatched from the lips (1:5), vines laid waste and fig trees debarked (1:7), or crop destruction and drought (1:10,12). Rather now in Joel 2 the portrayal is that of walls being scaled (2:7), the breaching of defenses (2:8), the scaling of city walls and infiltration of homes (2:9). Perhaps most frighteningly, whereas the first invasion is described as a *mighty* army Joel makes it clear that the army of Joel 2 is the *Lord's* army that obeys his command (2:11). There is an intensification as well as a reidentification of the army's significance.

Various features of Joel 2 therefore suggest that the prophet is warning of more than an approaching second invasion of locusts. In fact, Barton is so uncomfortable with the idea that Joel 2 might simply be referring to a further locust invasion that he wonders if 2:25, the latter part of our inclusio, 'might be a later insertion.⁴¹ This is unsubstantiated, but serves to illustrate the tension and connection between the armies of Joel 1 and 2.

Such a comparison of locusts and armies is one found both within and without the Scriptures, suggesting the possibility that the simile was well known. Thus the invading Midianite hordes are described as 'like locusts' in Judges 6:5 and 7:12 as they and their camels devour everything the Israelites have. Also in the Ugaritic texts of *Keret* and *Anat* there is also an invading army, compared to a swarm of locusts. This army, 'troops without number, soldiers uncountable' is like locusts for 'they occupy the field, like grasshoppers the corners of the desert.'⁴²

This is of interest, because in all such examples like in Judges and *Keret* and *Anat* the armies are said to be like locusts, but in Joel, the locusts are said to be an army. The effect is thus to draw the reader's

Commentary for English Readers, by Various Writers, 3 vols., vol. 3 (London: Cassell, Petter, Galpin and Co., 1884), 576.

⁴¹ John Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 90.

⁴² Deist, "Parallels and Reinterpretation in the Book of Joel: A Theology of the Yom Y?," 66, citing Krt 88-91, 103-05.

attention from the known to the fearsome unknown. In view of these similarities and differences I take the view that Joel’s readers would have understood that in the second chapter he was describing a coming military invasion in terms of the locust invasion they had just experienced. Is this then what the DL is all about?

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN JOEL 2

The term DL (**יום רוחם**) occurs three times in Joel, each time in the context of a coming event. In Joel 1:15 the people have been enjoined to mourn in response to the agricultural disaster they are facing. It is a disaster that can only but remind them of the destructive DL which ‘is near’ (**קרוב**) and ‘will come’ (**יבוא**). In Joel 2:1 the DL is once again ‘coming’ (**בא**) and ‘near’ (**קרוב**). It is thus that Joel, with his call to ‘blow the trumpet (**שופר**) in Zion’ introduces two important pieces of information in his description of the DL.

The first is that of location: Zion, which is to be identified with the eastern ridge upon which Jerusalem was built and where the Temple stood.⁴³ There is a direct connection in Joel 2:1 between Zion and ‘my holy mountain’. This is the place where in the prophet’s day God was worshipped, even though it is highly likely that the Temple had not yet been rebuilt when Joel prophesied. The alarm being called for was on account of danger not just to the city of Jerusalem, but specifically this mountain where God was worshipped. The priesthood, who were as it was stakeholders in the events surrounding the DL, and are mentioned in 1:9, are thus put in context. It is clear (as might have been assumed) that their functions were performed on the Temple mount, still called the ‘house of the Lord’ despite their lack of the Solomonic structure. From this point on, in the words of James Crenshaw the ‘identity of the endangered city

43 Lewis Bayles Paton, “Jerusalem in Bible Times: V. Zion, Ophel, and Moriah,” *The Biblical World* 29, no. 5 (1907).

is made known'.⁴⁴ This locus is reaffirmed in 2:23; 3:5; 4:16, 17 and 21.

The second piece of information that Joel introduces in his description of the DL is regarding its nature. In 1:13 the prophet had not described the DL other than to say that it was ‘near’ and coming ‘as destruction from the Almighty’, the same two points that are made in Joel 2:1. From there he returned to a description of the devastation his readers had seen. Whereas the locust invasion of Joel 1 is a past event, the DL as described following Joel 2:1 is an ominously imminent and unremittingly dark prospect. It is something to tremble at. Here the wording is identical to that of Zeph 1:14-16: ‘a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness’. Not only is it terrifying in this respect, but it is also reminiscent of his predecessor Isaiah’s description of the DL as ‘destruction from the Almighty’ (Isaiah 13:6) and ‘cruel, with wrath and fierce anger’ (13:9). It is this darkness Amos describes, disaster upon disaster as when a man flees from a lion only to meet a bear (5:18-20).

Joel continues in graphic terms, and his message is further clarified by what at first might seem to be mere poetry, but is revealed to be far more. As seen above, the prophet is now at pains to describe the DL in terms of the locusts that have so recently traumatised his readers. Again and again in 2:2-9 Joel describes the locusts as ‘like’ warriors, armies, or thieves and the effects of their activity as ‘like’ blackness, and ‘like’ fire. These locusts evidently must be distinguished from those in Joel 1. They have features that are neither merely agricultural nor military. Before them the ‘earth quakes’ and the ‘heavens tremble’ (2:10). As with the theme of darkness, Wolff associates this terminology with the theophany accounts of the ‘Sinai tradition’.⁴⁵ On Sinai the Lord’s presence was accompanied by smoke ‘and the whole mountain trembled greatly’. (Ex 19:18). It is a sign of the presence of the Lord, and in keeping with that, just as at Sinai (Ex 19:19), the voice of the Lord is heard in the subsequent verse. It is a sign that the Lord is present in the midst of the army being described.

44 James L. Crenshaw, *Joel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24c, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 117.

45 Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, 47.

It is the presence of the Lord in the midst of all of this that lifts the events being portrayed out of the ordinary world of agricultural and military disasters. Thus von Rad was right to point out that Joel 2:2-11 describes the locust army in dramatic terms and ‘equates the locusts with the armies of the Day of J’ marching into battle,’ enabling Joel ‘to draw on the whole range of war concepts connected with the Day of J’.⁴⁶ This is what leads Barton to also argue that ‘the problem envisaged in chapter 2 is not a locust plague but an enemy army, and not just any army but an “apocalyptic army”’⁴⁷ In the face of this army, Joel emphasises that the DL is ‘great’ and ‘very awesome’; so much so that the question has to be asked in advance: ‘who can endure it?’ (2:11).

JOEL’S APPEAL TO RETURN (שׁוֹב)

In the first chapter Joel had called upon the priests and ministers to put on sackcloth and mourn before God (1:13) on the basis of the locust invasion.⁴⁸ The priests were to declare a fast and sacred assembly (*עַזָּרָה*); summon the elders and the people to the House of the Lord; and cry out to the Lord (1:14). In some ways then the priests had a liturgical as well as a leadership function, leading the people of Israel in approaching God. This is a thread running through both chapter 1 and 2 as in both priests and sacrifice are mentioned (1:9,13; 2:17). Yet as James Linville points out, it is not the priests who are the centre of attention. In fact ‘Joel employs a strategy which allows for the priests to be all but taken for granted.’⁴⁹ The focus is on an appeal to God by all sectors of society – the religious

46 Rad, *The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions*, 2, 121.

47 Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, 69; See also Marvin A. Sweeney, *The Twelve Prophets*, ed. David W. Cotter, Berit Olam: *Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 162.

48 Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, takes the ‘ministers’ to be the priests, its use in opposition to ‘priests’ being ‘characteristic of postexilic writings’, 53n.

49 James R. Linville, “The Day of Y and the Mourning of the Priests in Joel,” in *The Priests in the Prophets: The Portrayal of Priests, Prophets and Other Religious Specialists in the Latter Prophets*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Alice Ogden Bellis, Jsotsup (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 99.

leadership, civil leadership (elders), and the people.⁵⁰ All are enjoined to turn to God in the midst of their distress.

Unlike the pre-exilic prophets, Joel's focus is not on the sins of the people. The locust horde of chapter 1 is not used as proof of divine judgment (although this could be considered to be implicit, with a possible hint of this to be found in 1:13 where the prophet writes of 'my God' versus 'your God').⁵¹ The tone is not one of denunciation. Rather, the focus of Joel's appeal is the DL. In Joel 1, after calling for all the deeds of lamentation, he clarifies that rather than the current or past locust plague, the reason to lament is that 'the day of the Lord is near' (1:15). In the face of all the current devastation, it is to the Lord that the prophet calls (1:19). As fits Assis' dating of Joel during the exile, it seems that the prophet is addressing an already chastised and humbled people and does not need to catalogue the sins for which they are already suffering.

Thus it is that when the reader of Joel 2:13 is faced with the imperative 'return (**בָּשׁוּ**) to me with all your heart' that the verb '**בָּשׁוּ**' should be taken as a call to 'a renewed and heightened devotion to the deity'. As Linville saliently points out 'Joel's silence on the people's sins must not be drowned out by importing into its word-world the emphasis on guilt found in other literature and having this dominate our thinking about the book.'⁵² Here is an opportunity for the people to avert the decree (2:14). The hearkening back to the theophany on Mount Sinai is continued with a description of God's character in accord with the 'thirteen attributes of mercy' revealed to Moses in Ex 34:6-7, the memorable phrase 'merciful and gracious' (**רַחֲמֵנוּ וְנִזְכְּרָנוּ**) reversed in order and rendered by Joel as 'gracious and merciful' (**נִזְכְּרָנוּ וַיַּחֲנֹן**).

Demonstrating a common human motivation to pray for relief in the face of locust plagues, Victor Hurowitz has observed that the language of Joel regarding locusts is strikingly similar to a 'text from Nineveh

⁵⁰ The lack of nobles and a monarchy in Joel is another sign of its composition during the exilic period.

⁵¹ Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets*, 74.

⁵² Linville, "The Day of Y" and the Mourning of the Priests in Joel," 101.

(K 3600 + DT 75) containing a partially preserved hymn to the goddess Nanaya concluding with a prayer on behalf of Sargon II, king of Assyria (721-705 BCE).⁵³ There one reads ‘The evil locust which destroys the crop/grain.... may by your command it be turned to nothing.’⁵⁴ Hurowitz continues to observe that the literary similarities between Joel 1:4-20 and the hymn point to either a dependency of one upon the other or a reliance upon ‘common traditional language’.⁵⁵

Joel, however, has taken the metaphor of a locust plague out of the ordinary and into the numinous. He is not just concerned about locusts. The picture of repentance and God’s ensuing mercy is appropriate enough to a locust army, but elements of it point to a future reality beyond any imminent invasion. Thus in contrast to some more contemporary translations, when Joel describes the Lord’s response to his people’s prayer in 2:18 the word ‘jealous’ or ‘zealous’ (**קָנֵז**) should be translated as a future tense just as it is conjugated in the Hebrew, looking forward to a future time in accordance with the whole passage it introduces.⁵⁶ Present and future are conflated in his prophecy, and rather than that being a confusing matter, it is a tool of the prophet to bring the immanency of a future event to light for his readers.

THE COMING DAY

Is the DL an eschatological event? Marco Treves found ‘nothing eschatological in the book of Joel’.⁵⁷ Relegating it to the fourth century BCE via eighteen dubious arguments he dated it to the days of the Ptolemy

53 Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, “Joel’s Locust Plague in Light of Sargon II’s Hymn to Nanaya,” *JBL* 112, no. 4 (1993): 598.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 603.

56 Some render the mood as jussive: ‘May the Lord be jealous...’ Assis suggests Joel is portraying the Lord’s response to the people’s prayer. *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*, 581, 164.

57 Marco Treves, “The Date of Joel,” *VT* 7, no. 2 (1957): 150.

Soter and thus merely useful as a historical document.⁵⁸ This minimalist approach has little to commend it in reality, and jars with the book's intertextual relationship to the other prophets and the general assessment of not only Christian but Jewish scholarship.⁵⁹ Elie Assis has carefully and effectively countered most of Treves' eighteen arguments.⁶⁰

It may well be that Joel 2:10 (also 4:14 / 3:15) does not refer to the ultimate end of the universe as both Wolff and Weiss have estimated.⁶¹ Eschatology must be distinguished from Apocalyptic.

If that were so, why the call for repentance in order to avert the decree, and why the promise to restore the years that the 'locust has eaten' (2:25)? The context of Joel 2, the entire book and the DL in the Book of the Twelve Prophets would not suggest that. Joel uses poetic language, but this does not allow one to avoid the eschatological force of his arguments.

In Joel 2:10 the prophet declares 'The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.' His language clearly hearkens back to that of Amos 5:18 with its description of the DL as 'darkness, and not light.' Regardless of how literally these phenomena are to be taken, the point is that the DL is coming, and it is a Day when he 'executes his word' (2:11). Joel is portraying a literal, future event.

Joel expects that Judah will experience the DL in some way. The good news for Joel's readers is that, as Barton puts it, 'The "day of Y" "predicted in chapter 2, just like that in chapter 1, is an occasion when Y" judges the people decisively; but beyond it lies the possibility of a restoration of the normal conditions of life, with sacrifices restored to the Temple (2:14), the locust plague removed (2:20), and the effects of the

58 Ibid., 156.

59 In rabbinic literature, Joel is dated between Ahab, king of Israel and Manasseh king of Judah (i.e. c. 870-640 BCE). Roberts and Stavsky, *The Later Prophets: The Twelve Prophets*, 116.

60 Assis, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel."

61 Weiss, "The Origin of the "Day of the Lord" — Reconsidered," 59; Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*.

devastation made good in the future.⁶² Thus the Lord promises that he will ‘restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten’ (2:25). Joel 2, which began with the call of the trumpet thus ends with a promise (2:26), ‘And my people shall never again be put to shame.’ It is yet an unfulfilled promise to the inhabitants of the land. It is also an important promise, for just as Joel has repeated the call to ‘blow the trumpet in Zion’ (2:1, 15), and repeated his warning about the DL (2:1,11), so he now repeats the phrase verbatim in 2:27: ‘And my people shall never again be put to shame.’⁶³ The trumpet has been blown in Zion, and the children of Zion can rejoice (2:23).

THE DAY OF THE LORD IN ACTS AND REVELATION

As we have seen, Joel spoke of both a future eschatological DL and made a call for repentance. Almost 600 years after the prophet Joel, Peter proclaimed that Joel’s DL had arrived (Acts 2:17-21). Taking his cue from the fact that his companions were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other languages (Acts 2:4), Peter associated that with Joel 3:1-2, which twice states ‘I will pour out my Spirit’. The connection led Peter to conclude that this was a sign of the DL. He was assisted in making the connection by his understanding of the significance of his location in Jerusalem. Thus he addressed the ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem’ (Acts 2:14). This echoed Joel’s location – ‘Blow the trumpet in Zion’ (Joel 2:1,15) and ‘in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape’ (Joel 3:5). Presumably understanding the figurative nature of Joel’s reference to the DL as ‘darkness and not light’

62 Barton, *Joel and Obadiah: A Commentary*, 70.

63 John Strazicich, *Joel’s Use of Scripture and the Scripture’s Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. R. Alan Culpepper and Ellen van Wolde, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 200. Strazicich notes that ‘Both Dahmen and Crenshaw suggest that Joel’s allusion to the Scham statement stems from Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 45:17b:....’

Peter was able to confirm that the day had come when the Lord would ‘show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below’ (Acts 2:19 = Joel 2:4).

Peter’s audience was not going to see military deliverance, though that may be what they hoped for. After all, his sermon was delivered to devout Jewish audience,⁶⁴ who were acutely aware of Israel’s indignities under an oppressive Roman regime. It is doubtful that they failed to infer what could not be explicitly preached – that the Roman legions were to be likened to the locust armies of Joel. They, as the locusts, were exemplars of the judgment of God. When Peter reminded them that ‘everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Acts 2:21 = Joel 3:5) it is reasonable to say that the salvation envisaged by his audience was tinged by expectations of deliverance from a military foe.⁶⁵ In other words, they were hoping for the DL to arrive in its fullness in the imminent future.

The thrust of Joel’s message, that the DL calls for שׁוֹבֵת, repentance, came through clearly. Just as Joel used the DL as a pretext to call for repentance, so Peter called for repentance on the same basis (Acts 2:21 = Joel 3:5) and appealed for them to do the same (Acts 2:38). Peter interpreted Joel’s message for them, related it to what they were observing in the hearing of various languages, and connected that to the recent events of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is this context which helps to explain his hearer’s reaction to his message and the outcome that they were ‘cut to the heart’ (Acts 2:37). Military deliverance would remain to be fulfilled, as would the fulfilment of the prophet’s twice repeated words ‘And my people shall never again be put to shame’ (2:26-27), but for the present, repentance was the appropriate response.

64 These are represented in Acts as residents of Jerusalem and Judea but their geographical origins suggests that their number also includes pilgrims on account of the festival, one of the three annual festivals when Jews congregated in Jerusalem.

65 Gary Gilbert, “The List of Nations in Acts 2: Roman Propaganda and the Lukan Response,” *JBL* 121, no. 3 (2002), has shown that ‘Acts has adapted the well-known form of Roman propaganda in order to create a map of contested terrain and reinforce the claim that all the nations of the earth now rest under the dominion not of Caesar but of God and his son, Jesus.’ p. 529.

One cannot conclude without taking into account the locust army described in Rev 9:7-11. The portrayal there is even more alarming than that of Joel. In John’s account the locusts are:

In appearance... like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, their hair like women’s hair, and their teeth like lions’ teeth; they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. (ESV)

Significant similarities can be seen between these locusts and those of the book of Joel, but also key differences.⁶⁶ Firstly as has been seen, Joel’s military image of locusts is far from unique either in the Scripture or in contemporary literature. This is the imagery that John uses in Revelation, but as Joseph Mangina puts it ‘In John’s vision this image is taken up and transformed into something even more awful’.⁶⁷ Secondly, unlike Joel’s locusts who are the Lord’s army, these locusts have a king who comes from the bottomless pit. In Revelation the Lamb does precipitate the advent of the locust army as he opens the seals (Rev 8:1), but this does not correlate clearly enough with Joel’s forthright identification of the locusts as specifically the Lord’s army. Thus the case for a direct identification of the locusts in Joel and Revelation is not entirely clear-cut.

A key similarity cannot be passed by however. Just as Joel did, John informs us that the appropriate response to this locust army should be repentance. Despite the fact that Rev 9 depicts a day of the judgement, a DL, Rev 9:20 notes that in this instance such repentance does not come. Thus judgement proceeds unrelentingly. Revelation backs up the message

⁶⁶ Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), identifies the locusts with demons and draws strong parallels to the locusts of Joel, pp. 2014-26.

⁶⁷ Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation* (London: SCM, 2010), 122.

of Acts 2 and that of Joel. Future judgement can be averted by a repentant response. In this respect the DL is both coming and yet demanding immediate repentance in each of these three cases. Repentance can ‘avert the decree’ in the words of the Jewish Day of Atonement liturgy. It can bring restoration of the ‘years that the locust has eaten’ in the words of Joel. But for those who do not repent the DL remains a future gloomy and dark prospect. Thus there is still a future aspect to the DL and prophetic aspects of the DL and the locust army in Joel 2 remain to be fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

Joel is very much a tapestry, and in Craig Blaising’s words presents an ‘aggregate’ view of the DL.⁶⁸ This survey of Joel and in particular Joel 2 shows the need for a literal, historical and grammatical foundation in the interpretation of his prophecy. It is this ‘literal’ approach that inexorably draws us to an understanding of what will be ‘literal’ eschatological events, rooted in the past and coming to fruit in the future.

Joel issued a message to repent for the DL was near. Both John the Baptist and Jesus called for repentance for the Kingdom of Heaven is near (Matt 3:2, 4:17). In this respect Joel’s message has a timeless quality and may be considered to speak even today in the face of environmental, geopolitical and military disasters.

68 Craig A. Blaising, “The Day of the Lord,” Dallas Theological Seminary, [http://www.dts.edu/media/play/the-day-of-the-lord-blasing-craig-a/?adsource=TUBE_chapel](http://www.dts.edu/media/play/the-day-of-the-lord-blaising-craig-a/?adsource=TUBE_chapel).



Thy Kingdom Come

Do we have to be Premillennial?

Mike Moore

KEYWORDS:

| Kingdom of God | Prophecy | Biblical interpretation |
| Words of Jesus | Israel | Christian Mission |

ABSTRACT:

Many Premillennialists believe that Premillennialism alone establishes a proper biblical foundation for establishing a future hope for the Jewish people. Historically, however, some Amillennialists and Postmillennialists have also believed in a bright future for the nation of Israel. Furthermore, though Premillennialism insists on a literalistic hermeneutic, Premillennialists tend to be selectively literalistic in their interpretation of the words of Scripture in general and the words of Jesus in particular. While Premillennialists are, in the main, committed to obeying the Great Commission, there is a tendency to be pessimistic about the future.

This paper addresses the following questions of Premillennialism: Does one have to be Premillennial to hold a future hope for Israel? Does one have to be Premillennial to rightly understand the Bible? Does one have to be Premillennial to rightly understand words of Jesus? Does one have to be Premillennial to rightly understand the Great Commission with a view to encouraging an optimistic, as opposed to a pessimistic, view of the future?

INTRODUCTION

I became a Christian in a denomination that preached Jesus as ‘Saviour, Healer, Baptiser in the Holy Spirit and Coming King.’ The Second Advent was part of the gospel we preached and until I went to study at the denomination’s Bible College in 1971 I’m not sure I was aware of any other way of thinking about the Second Advent other than as a Premillennial event. At college I learned that Amillennialism was pretty much Liberalism, that Postmillennialism was the domain of a tiny group of cranks and that Preterism was so ridiculous that only hard-core theological Liberals subscribed to it.

In my early years as a believer, two subjects dominated my thinking: creation and the future, and I devoured books on prophecy, including the classic *Things to Come* by J Dwight Pentecost and, of course, Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* and I was able to critique with little difficulty the few A-mill works that came into my hands. In fact, forty years ago I knew everything there was to know about biblical prophecy. All I know for sure about the End Times now is how *little* I know.

The Basis of Faith of Christian Witness to Israel, the mission with which I work, is the consensus of the Protestant Reformed Confessions. There being no consensus on eschatology, CWI allows its workers to embrace whatever position they believe is taught in Scripture. Premillennialists, Postmillennialists and Amillennialists work with CWI but I can’t recall a single argument ever taking place between any members of staff over anything relating to the End Times. Our primary focus as a mission is the proclamation of the gospel to Jewish people.

In 1983, when I was invited to work with CWI, the classic Premillennialist position I held was not seen as an issue. However, although I identified as a Premillennialist, for some time I had been privately questioning the position. Although I no longer describe myself as a Premillennialist, I continue to respect those who do and it is not my purpose in this paper to attack my more learned brethren who have

presented far more erudite papers than this one. Nor is it my intention to state my own position, which I'm not sure fits comfortably into any of the standard frameworks. I simply wish to put forward a question: Do we have to be Premillennial in order to understand the Kingdom of God?

For most people at this conference, the question is a no-brainer. Some months ago, a pastor who was interested in having me speak at his church called to ask me some questions. Actually, he had only one question: 'Are you Premillennial?' When I asked if it would matter if I wasn't, the reply was, 'Yes.' For the pastor, it didn't matter how faithfully I evangelised the Jewish people; if I was not a Premillennialist I was suspect. In fairness to him when we met face-to-face he bought me a very nice lunch and opened his pulpit to me!

THE STRENGTH OF PREMILLENNIALISM

The great strength of Premillennialism is that it seeks to take the Bible literally. I seriously doubt that a liberal theologian could be Premillennial. Nevertheless, just because someone is not Premillennial – be they Amillennial, Postmillennial or even Preterist – does not, by default, make them liberal.

Throughout history, great men of God have held to the three main schools of prophetic understanding and there needs to be an attitude of mutual respect for those with whom we differ. That is not to say there cannot be disputes – indeed there should be disputes – but in my arguments with a well-known evangelical anti-Christian Zionist author, I have reminded him that he has more in common with the Dispensationalists and extreme Christian Zionists he opposes than he does with the liberal theologians, radical Muslims, anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers, and anti-Christians with whom he frequently shares platforms in order to denounce Israel and Christian Zionists.

My brief in this paper is to present an alternative understanding of the Kingdom of God to the Dispensational/Premillennial positions held by the other speakers. I wish, therefore to apply the question ‘Do we have to be Premillennial?’ to the themes of four of the other papers. Do we have to be Premillennial to believe Israel has a future hope? Do we have to be Premillennial to interpret the Bible properly? Do we have to be Premillennial to understand the words of Jesus properly? Do we have to be Premillennial to be serious about the Great Commission?

THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

Before Premillennialism became as popular as it is today and before Dispensationalism existed as the complex system it now is, there existed (and still does exist) a hope for the national and spiritual restoration of the Jewish nation among Christians. For example, Question 191 of *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, compiled in 1648, asks what is meant by the second petition of the Lord’s Prayer: ‘Thy kingdom come.’ The answer given is: ‘In the second petition . . . acknowledging ourselves and all mankind to be by nature under the dominion of sin and Satan, we pray, that the kingdom of sin and Satan may be destroyed, the gospel propagated throughout the world, *the Jews called*, the fullness of the Gentiles brought in . . .’

In his massive seven-volume commentary on Hebrews, the Postmillennial English Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) wrote: ‘There are many promises on record in the Scripture concerning their [the Jews] gathering together, their return to God by the Messiah, with the great peace and glory that shall ensue thereupon... *Return they shall to their own land, to enjoy it for a quiet and everlasting possession*, their adversaries being destroyed; filled they shall be also with the light and knowledge of the will and worship of God, so as to be a guide and blessing to the

residue of the Gentiles who shall seek after the Lord; and, it may be, be entrusted with great empire and rule in the world.' (*Hebrews*, Vol. 1, p. 445. Emphasis added.)

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) the Postmillennial New England Puritan, wrote: '*The Jews shall return to their own land . . . [they] shall . . . flow together to the blessed Jesus, penitently, humbly, and joyfully owning him as their glorious king and only saviour*, and shall with all their hearts as with one heart and voice declare his praises unto other nations...' ('A History of the Work of Redemption' in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1, p. 607. Emphasis added.).

In the preface to his 1968 book *The Restoration of Israel*, Postmillennialist Erroll Hulse wrote: 'The territorial restoration of the ancient land of Israel to the Jewish people . . . has involved a series of events which even non-religious people describe as miraculous . . . The conviction that these events form the prelude to a much greater miracle – the conversion of the Jewish people to New Testament Christianity – has resulted in this book.' (Erroll Hulse, *The Restoration of Israel*, p.5.)

Amillennialist D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones told *Christianity Today* in 1980: 'Luke 21:43 is one of the most significant prophetic verses: "Jerusalem," it reads, "shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled." It seems to me that that took place in 1967 — something crucially important that had not occurred in 2,000 years . . .'

In his sermons on Romans 11, Lloyd-Jones stated that at some future point, 'the bulk of the nation of Israel shall be converted to Christ.' (*Romans: An Exposition of Chapter II*, p. 91.)

Vern Poythress, another Amillennialist, believes 'Jesus will return bodily to the world, that all people will be judged, and that the earth itself will be renewed, Jesus will reign over the nations and usher in an era of great peace and prosperity. Faithful Jews will possess the land of Palestine [sic!], as well as the entirety of the renewed earth.'

Though not all Amillennialists and Postmillennialists hold such positive future hopes for Israel – geographical and/or spiritual – these

quotations demonstrate that a non-millennarian theology does not necessarily exclude the Jewish nation from future blessing. Iain Murray’s *The Puritan Hope* presents abundant evidence that among the seventeenth century postmillennial Puritans there was a widespread belief in the return of the Jewish people to their ancient homeland, after which they would turn to their Messiah.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Premillennialism claims to be founded on a strictly literalistic hermeneutic. In other words, Premillennialism claims that the right way to understand the Bible is to read it ‘literally’ unless the context dictates otherwise. But is it possible to apply a consistent strict literalism to our interpretation of the Bible? For example, does any Premillennialist believe that *literal* stars will one day *literally* fall from a *literal* heaven? Or that the *literal* moon will turn to *literal* blood? Or that the *literal* sun will turn black? Or that the *literal* heavens be *literally* be rolled up like a scroll?

In his commentary *The Revelation Record*, Henry Morris attempts a consistently literal approach to the interpretation of the book of Revelation: ‘I have tried to follow a strictly literal and sequential approach to the events narrated, on the assumption that the *best* interpretation of a historical record is *no* interpretation . . . Although many other writers have also tried to follow such an approach, the student may well find this to be the most literal approach he has encountered . . . ’ (Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, pp. 13,14.). But when Morris reaches verse 4 of the book, he has to explain that the ‘seven spirits’ are really the one Holy Spirit.

Premillennialism tends to be selectively ‘literal’ in its interpretation of the Bible. For example, after 2,000 years, how much longer can we continue to say that we are *literally* in ‘the last days’ or that we are the ‘final generation’? If words mean anything, the term ‘last days’ must

signify a relatively short space of time; at the very least considerably less than two millennia.

In 1970, Hal Lindsey cautiously suggested that the Lord might return around the year 1988. Commenting on Matthew 24: 34 – ‘This generation will not pass away until all these things take place’ – Lindsey wrote: ‘ . . . in context, [‘this generation’ is] the generation that would see the signs — chief among them being the rebirth of Israel. A generation in the Bible is something like forty years. If this is a correct deduction, then within forty years or so of 1948, all these things could take place.’ (Hal Lindsey with C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p.54.)

By 1980, Lindsey was far less cautious: ‘But what generation was Jesus talking about? ...He could only have meant the generation that would see the prophetic predictions come together... WE ARE THE GENERATION HE WAS TALKING ABOUT!’ (Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, p.162. Capitalisation in the original.)

The term ‘This generation’ occurs six times in Matthew’s Gospel (11:16; 12:41, 42, 45; 23:36 and 24:34) and I know of no reputable scholar who disputes that the first five of those references are to the ‘generation’ alive at the time Jesus was speaking. Why then does the final ‘this generation’ in Matthew’s Gospel suddenly become ‘this people’ or ‘this race’?

The disciples had asked the Lord for the signs of ‘the end of the age’ and his Parousia. ‘Imagine,’ says J. Stuart Russell in his virtually forgotten classic *The Parousia*, ‘a prophet in our own times predicting a great catastrophe in which London would be destroyed, St. Paul’s and the Houses of Parliament levelled with the ground, and a fearful slaughter of the inhabitants be perpetrated; and that when asked, “When shall these things come to pass?” he should reply, “The Anglo-Saxon race shall not become extinct till all these things be fulfilled”!’ (J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia*, p. 87.)

Though he died in 1992, Barry Smith continues to be revered in certain circles as a no-nonsense, tell-it-like-it-is Bible teacher and his

books, CDs and DVDs on prophecy still sell. But in 1984, at a series of meetings at Papatoetoe Baptist Church in Auckland, New Zealand, Smith stated categorically that Henry Kissinger was the Antichrist and that the world was about to go ‘cashless,’ thus inaugurating the Mark of the Beast. Moreover, Smith stated, without presenting any evidence, that a biblical generation is 50 years and declared that ‘the rabbis in Jerusalem’ had just announced that their Messiah was going to ‘return in 1998’!

What happens when the predictions (albeit based on biblical texts) of prophecy experts such as Lindsey and Smith fail to come to pass? In the 1990s, the editor of an American Messianic magazine justified making predictions that failed to materialise on the basis that people needed to be ‘kept on their toes.’

If Hal Lindsey was correct and a biblical generation is forty years, Israel came into being as a sovereign state more than a generation-and-a-half ago. Even if Barry Smith’s claim that a generation in the Bible is fifty years, the Lord’s coming is overdue by almost half a generation. How much longer, then, can we continue to say we are ‘literally’ in ‘the last days’ or that we are literally ‘the final generation’? According to Peter in Acts 2:17, he and his hearers were even at that time in ‘the last days.’ Hebrews 1:2 says God had ‘spoken to us by his Son’ in ‘these last days,’ while James 5:3 warns the unrighteous rich of his day that they had ‘laid up treasure in the last days.’

Some thirty years after Peter stated that the tongues of the Day of Pentecost were a sign of the last days, John (the author of The Revelation) wrote in his first letter: ‘Little children, it is *the last hour*, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore *we know it is the last hour*’ (1 Jn 2:18). How is it that the world can move within the space of less than forty years from ‘the last days’ to ‘the last hour’ and then, 1,900 years later, be back in the last days?

The Revelation opens with the warning that the things revealed in the book must ‘shortly come to pass . . .’ The Greek word *tachos* signifies ‘speed’; it is the word from which we get our English words ‘tachometer’

and ‘tachograph.’ In the New Testament, especially in Revelation, *tachos* indicates something that is to happen soon or to be done soon (see: Luke 18:8; Acts 2:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:6,7,12,20). That is why the ESV translates Rev 1:1: ‘ . . . things that *must soon take place*.’ Why then do literalist commentatorss not take *tachos* literally?

Revelation 1:1 actually indicates that the book is not to be understood literally. Jesus ‘sent and signified [*eeseimenen*] it by his angel . . .’ The Greek word *seemeio* is a ‘sign’. To coin a phrase, Jesus ‘*sign*-ified’ his revelation to John. The visions John saw were symbols of a greater reality just as each of the miracles recorded in John’s Gospel was a ‘sign’ (*seemeio*) of a higher reality.

Why do literalist commentators on The Revelation not interpret the very first verse literally? Why do they not recognise that the book consists of a series of ‘signs’ of things that were soon to affect the seven churches to whom John was instructed to write? Thus, by insisting on a literalist hermeneutic it can’t apply consistently, Premillennialism’s greatest strength ironically becomes its greatest weakness.

THE WORDS OF JESUS

Inconsistency of interpretation is not only a weakness of Premillennialists; Amillennialists and Postmillennialists also fail to take some of the sayings of Jesus relating to the Kingdom in a straightforward manner. We will take note of just four statements.

First, does any literalist take Matthew 10:23 at face value: ‘You will not have gone through all the towns of Israel *before the Son of man comes*?’ Jesus makes the remarkable statement to his apostles that they will not have completed their evangelistic mission in Israel before ‘the coming of the Son of man,’ a phrase that has only one meaning in the New Testament; it is the standard formula for the Parousia, the second coming of Christ.

Secondly, consider Matthew 16:27-28: ‘For the Son of Man is going

to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, *there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.*’ The Greek text places the words *mellei gar* at the beginning of verse 27 for emphasis, so that a literal translation of the verse reads: ‘For the Son of Man *is about to come* with His angels in the glory of His Father . . . ’ The coming of the Son of Man is impending but is not so close as to be confused with the resurrection of Christ, still less his transfiguration as some scholars suggest.

Thirdly, what about Matthew 24:34: ‘Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place’? The Olivet discourse – as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 – is clearly addressed to the disciples in answer to their question regarding the time of the end of the age and, with it, the return of the Lord. Jesus speaks of what *the disciples* will see, what *they* will do and how *they* will suffer. The Lord’s words are not addressed to an invisible audience in what was at that time a far distant future; the events he foretells will fall within the parameters of the apostles’ own observation and experience.

But what is a ‘generation’? Unlike a year, a decade or a century, a biblical ‘generation’ is not an exact measure of time. There is a certain indefiniteness or elasticity about the term but there are, nevertheless, certain limits to a generation. In the book of Numbers, for example, the ‘generation’ that provoked God to exclude them from the Promised Land, was to perish in the wilderness within the space of forty years. In biblical terms it would seem, therefore, that, a generation is about forty years, a conclusion supported by Psalm 95:10: ‘For forty years I loathed that generation . . . ’

The messianic genealogy in Matthew 1 also confirms that a generation is about 40 years. Verse 17 states, ‘So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.’ The generally held date for the deportation

to Babylon that took place in the reign of Zedekiah is 586BC. By dividing 586 by 14, we find that the average length of the fourteen generations was just over 41 years. Thus, according to Jesus, all the events – not some or even most of the events of which he warned the disciples on the Mount of Olives – would take place within the space of about four decades.

Finally, at his trial, in Matthew 26:63-64, after Jesus was put on oath by the high priest to declare to the court if he was ‘the Messiah, the Son of God,’ he replied, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on *you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*’

The language implies that the persons Jesus addressed, or some of them at least, would witness the event he predicted. Taken at face value, would the expression ‘You will see’ not be improper if it referred to an event none of Jesus’ hearers would live to witness and which would not take place for thousands of years in the future? If we read Matthew 26:63-64 literally, it is virtually impossible to imagine that Jesus was stating anything other than that that his judges would live to see him coming to judge them.

Space forbids a detailed exegesis of these verses, Suffice it to say that they were among a number of other verses that caused me to re-examine my own presuppositions about the return of Christ and the establishment of his Kingdom.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Some years ago, after I concluded a presentation about the gospel ministry of Christian Witness to Israel, a troubled-looking lady approached me. ‘I think you’re working against the purposes of God,’ she announced. If the mission for which I worked succeeded in ‘getting all the Jews saved,’ she said, they wouldn’t go through the Great Tribulation. I could live with that, I told her. Probably thinking I was a little dense, she quoted a number of Bible verses relating to the unprecedented horrors she said the

Jewish people were destined to endure at some future time. She remained perturbed when I repeated that I had no problem with the Jewish nation escaping the worst tribulation event in history. In the end, I had to point out that an interpretation of prophecy that excludes any ethnic group from the commission to proclaim the gospel to every creature has to be wrong.

Thankfully, most adherents of the three major schools of eschatology tend to be committed to evangelism. Keith Mathison, for example, states. ‘Contemporary evangelical Christians tend to equate eschatology with particular millennial views, but to do so means that we miss the bigger picture . . . Biblical Eschatology is good news. It is “gospel”’ (Keith A. Mathison, *From Age to Age: the Unfolding of Biblical Eschatology*, p.699.)

However, how many Premillennialists, Postmillennialists or Amillennialists take the order of the Great Commission literally and place the Jewish people at the forefront of mission? There is undoubtedly a land promise for the Jewish people but what will it profit the Jews if they gain the whole land but lose their souls?

The order of the Great Commission at the end of the third Gospel is that ‘repentance and remission of sins should be preached . . . *beginning at Jerusalem . . .*’ (Lk 24:47) and the last words of Jesus before his ascension, as recorded by Luke, were, ‘You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth . . .’ (Acts 1:8).

As ‘the apostle to the Gentiles,’ Paul had a unique calling (Rom 11:13 c.f. Acts 9:15 c.f. 26:17-18). He alone of all the apostles was called to evangelise the Gentiles (Gal 2:9). Nevertheless, wherever ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’ went on his Gentile missions, he always preached the gospel ‘to the Jew first’ (Acts 13:2, 44-47; 14:1; 17:1-2, 10, 16-17; 18:4, 19; 19:8) out of a conviction that the gospel was for the Jews first: ‘I am not ashamed of the Good news of Messiah, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; to the Jew first and also to the Greek’ (Rom 1:16).

In his systematic theology, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, Amillennialist Michael Horton draws a connection between prophecy and Jewish mission. ‘In my view,’ says Horton, ‘amillennialism provides the most satisfying account of the passages adduced by pre-and postmillennialists . . . I do not believe that the New Testament teaches that the church is a replacement for Israel but rather that Gentiles have been grafted onto the vine of the true Israel, from which the original nucleus of new covenant disciples emerged. Salvation has come to the world through the Jews; Jesus was sent to the Jews; the gospel was first brought to the Jews, and the kingdom grew from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. In the end, it will be brought full circle, from the ends of the earth back to Jerusalem again.’ (Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*.)

Premillennialism, while seeing a great future for Israel and the nations in the Millennium, tends to be pessimistic about the future prior to the Millennium. According to David Pawson, ‘apocalyptic’ writings (of which Daniel and Revelation are the best known examples) are about the world getting worse and worse then suddenly getting better, by which Pawson means we can expect the world to get worse and worse until Jesus changes everything for the better by returning to inaugurate the Millennial Kingdom. But if, as Mathison argues, eschatology and the gospel can’t be separated, should we not hold to an eschatology of victory rather than one in which the church has to circle the wagons and hold off the forces of darkness until the heavenly cavalry arrives?

‘Postmillennialism,’ says missiologist Thomas Schirrmacher, ‘was the mother of Anglo-Saxon missions . . . As Jesus was not expected to return immediately, missions made considerable long-term investments in health, education systems, including Christian universities, and political involvement: the campaign against slavery, William Carey’s fight against the caste system, missionary opposition to the burning of widows, and protection of indigenous people’ (Thomas A. Schirrmacher. ‘Eschatology’ in *Dictionary of Mission Theology*, Ed: John Corrie, p.108).

Returning to the lady I referred to at the start of this sub-heading, how does our understanding of the Last Things influence our mission agenda? Does our understanding of the Kingdom motivate us not only to evangelism but also *confident* evangelism and mission? Does our understanding of Israel’s future motivate us to reach Jewish people with the message of Messiah or to support missions that are telling Jewish people the Good News of their Messiah? Are we gripped by the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:25: ‘*He must reign* until he has put all his enemies under his feet’?

Can those of us in Christian ministry say, as did William Carey (1761-1834) the founder of the Baptist Missionary Society: ‘We are neither working at uncertainty nor afraid for the result . . . *He must reign, till Satan has not an inch of territory*’?

Does our view of the Kingdom help us to believe that Jesus will ‘see of the travail of his soul *and be satisfied*’ (Is 53:11)?

Is our view of the future pessimistic or do we, as William Carey, see a future ‘as bright as the promises of God?’

May it be so.

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The Keys of The Kingdom: Christian *Halakhah* for the Realised Eschaton

Anthony Royle

KEYWORDS:

| Kingdom of Heaven | Eschatology | Ethics | Law |
| *Halakhah* | Jewish Hermeneutics |

ABSTRACT:

This paper seeks to look at how eschatology impacts Christian moral behaviour. Previously, scholars have noted how eschatology has been used as a motivating force in provoking moral behaviour. I propose that a realised eschatology, the inaugurated Kingdom of God, impacts Christian ethics in a more theologically informed and practically equipped way. The Kingdom that Jesus established, based on the Kingdom given to the Son of Man in Daniel 7, provides numerous theological points that form a hermeneutic for the interpretation of Biblical Law (*Halakhah*). This becomes apparent when surveying the many case studies in the NT that help us understand how the Kingdom impacted the approach to the application of the Jewish Scriptures by Jesus and His apostles.

INTRODUCTION

Eschatology has often been described as a motivating force used by Christians to provoke moral living. Scott Hafemann writes, “for Paul, the ultimate foundation for ethics is eschatology”.¹ The same could be

¹ Hafemann, Scott. ‘Eschatology and Ethics: The Future of Israel and the Nations in Romans 15:1-13’ in *Tyndale Bulletin* 51:2 (2000) p. 163

said of Jesus as His declaration of the coming Kingdom was followed with a call to repentance. The coming judgement of God and redemption of His people are usually concepts that are associated with motivating moral behaviour. One is based out of fear of standing before a just and holy God, the other is based on the “hope for the consummation of redemptive history”, which “is the engine that drives obedience of faith in the present”.²

So we may ask, can eschatology impact Christian ethical living beyond acting out of fear and hope?

When we consider the ethics of Jesus and His followers we must take into account their *Sitz im Leben*. Jesus was a Jew living in Israel during the first century. He held the Holy Scriptures as divine authority. He would have been Torah observant. We read that Jesus was obedient to the law and that He upheld the law. So any discussion concerning the moral teaching of Jesus and His followers cannot be done apart from the Jewish Scriptures as the source and authority of moral conduct. We must also take into account that Jesus was a teacher during the first century in Israel, therefore His teachings of Scripture must be placed within the setting of the diverse sects of Judaism of this period. Markus Bockmuehl highlights that the ethics of Jesus and His followers “are deeply conversant with Jewish moral presuppositions”.³

In the gospels, we read about Jesus discussing Scripture with the Scribes and Pharisees (amongst others) and scholars have noted that Jesus engages with Jewish Halakhah.

Halakhah comes from the Hebrew verb meaning “to walk”, and is a term generally referring to the interpretation of Biblical Law.⁴ Halakhah in the technical sense, is a term that was not used until a much later period and is usually restricted to the corpus of Rabbinic legal teachings that

2 Ibid p. 192

3 Bockmuehl, Markus. 2000. *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh p. 3.

4 Harrington, Hannah K. ‘The Halakhah and Religion of Qumran’ in *Religion in Dead Sea Scrolls*, Collins, John J. and Robert A. Kugler, eds. 2000. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, Michigan p. 74.

have developed over two millennia,⁵ however, scholars have noted the general halakhic treatments in the teachings of Jesus and others during the first century.⁶ Various groups within Second Temple Judaism used the same Jewish Scriptures but developed distinct and sometimes opposing rules. Therefore, Rabbinic Halakhah is distinct from Pharisee Halakhah, Qumran Halakhah and the Halakhah of Jesus. The term Christian Halakhah has been used to describe the continuation of the apostolic interpretation of Biblical law.⁷ There is evidence that a set of halakhic teachings were passed down from Jesus to the apostles and that these apostles also made halakhic instruction.

So what impact does eschatology have on the halakhic teachings of Jesus and His followers? Some have suggested that eschatology brings a form of antinomianism.⁸ They presuppose the coming of Christ and His Kingdom means a complete cessation of the Law.⁹ Some have suggested a division of moral and ceremonial law and that only the ceremonial law has ceased.¹⁰

5 Rayner, John D. and Edward Kessler. ‘Halakhah’ in *The Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Kessler, Edward and Neil Wenborn, eds. 2005. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge p. 175.

6 John Meier investigates whether the term Halakhah was used as a noun pre-70 AD. Meier argues against the popular view that the term *ḥālāqōt* found in 1QH 2 was a term that was only associated with the Pharisees and was viewed negatively by the Qumran Community. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls did indicate the use of Halakhah as a noun twice in the Rule of the Community (1QS 1:25, 3:9). On both occasions the use of the term Halakhah appears to be in a positive sense concerning the of the community’s own members. However, Halakhah is used generally in matters of conduct rather than the later rabbinic technical sense. (Meier, John P. ‘Is there Halaka (The Noun) at Qumran?’ in *Journal of Biblical Literature*. Vol. 122, No. 1 (Spring 2003) pp. 150-155).

7 Rayner, John D. and Edward Kessler. ‘Halakhah’ in *The Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, Kessler, Edward and Neil Wenborn, eds. 2005. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge p. 175

8 See Bockmuehl, Markus. 2000. *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh p. 12

9 Christopher Wright notes that dispensationalists argue that we are now under the age of grace and that the Law has no continuing authority. (Wright, Christopher J.H. ‘The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: Survey of Approaches. Part II’ in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (1992) p. 210).

10 Wright looks at both Walter Kaiser and John Goldingay’s similar approaches to the division of moral, civil and ceremonial laws that have their roots in the writings of Origen. (Wright, Christopher J.H. ‘The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament: Survey of

I propose that the inaugurated Kingdom of God¹¹ provides the theological framework in which a realised eschatology is the basis for interpreting the Jewish Scriptures to receive instruction for righteous living. The now/not yet aspect of The Kingdom highlights that we are living in the eschatological age but also in anticipation of its consummation. Therefore, the realisation of The Kingdom and the many aspects that make up The Kingdom, impact interpretation of Scripture for instruction in righteousness.

In his paper *The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian*, Jacob Neusner notes that The Kingdom of Heaven is not a system that has its own category-formation in Halakhah; however, it does form the background to halakhic category-formation.¹² Neusner’s Kingdom of Heaven in principle has similarities and differences to The Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus inaugurated but the influence of each defined Kingdom on halakhic rulings are just the same.

In the case of The Kingdom preached by Jesus, this Kingdom is centred on Jesus’ claim as the Danielic Son of Man. The many aspects of The Kingdom of Heaven in the teachings of Jesus are rooted in Daniel 7 and these aspects form the background to the halakhic rulings made by Jesus.

MATTHEW 16:13-28 AND DANIEL 7

Matthew 16:13-28 provides an interesting pericope that highlights the authority of Jesus as claimed in Scripture. The pericope begins with Jesus

Approaches. Part II’ in *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.2 (1992) pp. 205-209).

11 In this paper I use the phrases Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven interchangeably. They are one and the same. This is based on the use of both terms in parallel synoptic gospel passages (compare Mat 19:23 with Lk 18:24). Jacob Neusner also shows there is no distinction between the two in Rabbinic literature (See Neusner, Jacob. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian’ in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.2 (2005) pp. 284-286).

12 Neusner, Jacob. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian’ in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.2 (2005) p. 292.

asking His disciples, “who do you say the Son of Man is?” Daniel Boyarin¹³ notes that Jesus’ claim to authority is based on His self-identification as the Son of Man in Daniel 7.¹⁴ In Daniel’s vision, the Ancient of Days presents The Kingdom to the Son of Man with sovereignty and dominion so that all may serve and obey Him. Jesus claimed to have this sovereignty in order to judge, forgive sins and rule over matters of the law.

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus promises the Keys (a symbol of sovereignty) to The Kingdom of Heaven upon the confession of Peter that Jesus was the Messiah.¹⁵ These keys would give the disciple authority to bind and loose on earth what was bound and loosed in heaven. Donald Hagner notes that ‘*binding*’ and ‘*loosing*’ are terms associated with Halakhah.¹⁶ To ‘*bind*’ and ‘*loose*’ is to ‘*permit*’ or ‘*forbid*’ a person from one action or another through interpretation of Scripture. Daniel’s vision of the Son of Man receiving The Kingdom expresses the authority of God given to the Son of Man. We also read in Daniel 7:27 that The Kingdom is also given to the saints. This perhaps formed the background to Jesus giving the keys to the apostles.¹⁷

Whatever was then bound on earth was bound in heaven and whatever was loosed on earth was loosed in heaven. This is not to say that the

13 It is interesting to note that Boyarin is not a Christian. He is a Jewish Talmudic Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. In his book *The Jewish Gospels* Boyarin argues that Jesus’ claims to divinity as Son of Man as co-equal with God are thoroughly Jewish in thought and was similar to other views held during the Second Temple Period. The issue for Boyarin is not Jesus’ theological claims but whether Jesus was who he claimed to be.

14 Boyarin, Daniel. 2012. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. The New York Press: New York p. 38.

15 In Is 22:22 the prophet declares the Word of the Lord that God would bestow upon an individual the keys of the house of David (The Kingdom) and whatever he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open. If this verse in being alluded to by Jesus then it confirms a Christological reading of Daniel 7 because of the association Jesus is making.

16 Hagner, Donald A. 1995. *Matthew 14-28: Word Biblical Commentary*. Word Books: Dallas, Texas p. 473.

17 Jesus warned the Pharisees that *He* would take The Kingdom from them and give it to a people who bore the fruits of The Kingdom (Mat 21:43). Jesus accused the Pharisees of binding heavy burdens to shut out people from The Kingdom of Heaven (Mat 23:13). Jesus said that his yoke was easy and burden was light (Mat 11:30).

apostles were now dictating heaven but that the apostles were merely ruling on whatever had been decreed in heaven. The relationship between heaven and earth in Matthew 16 is an important point. There is a similar process in Rabbinic Judaism as Neusner explains that the “sages govern concrete cases on earth, but only within the larger system in which the Heavenly court exercises jurisdiction over cases of another order.”¹⁸ Neusner notes that in the case of the Judaic system, Israel forms the “*this-worldly* extension of God’s heavenly Kingdom”. In the case of Matthew 16 it would appear that the church forms the “*this-worldly*” extension of The Kingdom of Heaven.¹⁹

Ultimately, it is Jesus as the Son of Man who has authority and His incarnation inaugurated a new phase in the programme for The Kingdom. This made eschatology a present reality and Jesus made this known in His preaching, through His miracles and through His authority over the law.

On a number of occasions, Jesus claimed to have the authority of the Son of Man in making halakhic arguments. Boyarin uses the example of the words of Jesus in Mark 2:28 that “the Son of Man is Lord over the Sabbath.”²⁰ Jesus’ disciples had been walking through a field and gathered some of the corn on the Sabbath. The Pharisees asked why they picked the corn on the Sabbath and Jesus tells the story of David eating the showbread that was only reserved for the Priests (1 Sam 21:1-6).²¹ It is interesting to note that latter Rabbinic tradition uses the same story; however, the Rabbinic interpretation argues that sabbatical laws can only

18 Neusner, Jacob. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian’ in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.2 (2005) p. 291.

19 This is not to say that the church replaced Israel. I am merely pointing out the differences between the similar system that Neusner articulates and the authority that was given to the apostles in Matthew 16.

20 Neusner, Jacob. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian’ in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.2 (2005) p. 59.

21 The use of David as an example by Jesus could have been for Christological reasons. David as anointed King typified the Davidic Messiah and the authority He would have over the Law. (See Boyarin, Daniel. 2012. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. The New York Press: New York p67) This may indicate that Jesus provided an interpretation of the Son of Man as being the Messiah, which Peter later confessed (Mat 16:16).

be broken in matters of life and death (*Palestinian Talmud Yoma* 8:6, 45:b). There is nothing in Mark 2 that indicates that the disciples were starving to death; Jesus' reason was based on authority over the Sabbath. The rhetorical question, “was Sabbath made for man or man made for Sabbath?” provided the justification for the disciples' actions. Although this halakhic argument is less urgent than the Rabbinic one, Jesus' words have the theological weight of the presence of The Kingdom of God because of His own authority as Son of Man. Boyarin points out that Jesus' words did not abrogate the Sabbath but rather fulfilled it and even expanded the law as He uses the inclusive term ‘man’ thus expanding the law to the gentiles.²² Jesus was not “attacking the law or an alleged Pharisaic legalism”, as Boyarin points out, but rather Jesus is making “an apocalyptic declaration of a new moment in history in which a new Lord, the Son of Man, has been appointed over the Law”.²³

Because Jesus is the Son of Man, eschatology is ‘here and now’ and this new phase of the presence of The Kingdom has produced principles to guide a way of reading Biblical Law for application. I propose four aspects of the realised Kingdom that have influenced the Halakhah of Jesus and His followers.²⁴

22 Boyarin ‘gingerly’ proposes that the rule of the Son of Man over the nations in Daniel 7 is background to the extension of the Law. (Boyarin, Daniel. 2012. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. The New York Press: New York p. 65)

23 Jesus' claim to such authority provoked an accusation of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin. In his book *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism*, Darrell Bock notes that Jesus claim to be the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven placed Jesus on par with God and that His authority would be over the Sanhedrin. The irony being that the roles would be reversed and that Jesus would judge the Sanhedrin on judgement day. It was not because that such a claim was foreign to them as there are many exalted figures within early Jewish writings. The issue isn't theological as the Sanhedrin tries to make out, but rather about power and position. (Boyarin, Daniel. 2012. *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ*. The New York Press: New York p. 67.)

24 Markus Bockmuehl proposes four halakhic principles that arise from prominent cases in the ‘Palestinian Jewish Christian circles’- 1. The Precedence of Written Torah 2. The weightier things of Torah 3. Active and Motive 4. Purity and Integrity (Bockmuehl, Markus. 2000. *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. T&T Clark: Edinburgh p3-16). My approach is different as I wish to look at how the various aspects Kingdom of Heaven impact Halakhah as a background to category-formation.

RESTORATION OF CREATION ETHICS

The first aspect of The Kingdom is that it brings a restoration of Creation ethics. I. Howard Marshall argues that biblical teaching rests upon the natural order imposed by God as part of creation and the ethics of The Kingdom of Heaven.²⁵ There are a few examples in which Jesus had referred to the creation account in ruling over Mosaic Law. Firstly, the example of Jesus’ words in Mark 2, “was the Sabbath made for man, or man made for Sabbath?” provides an argument from the creation account in Genesis 1-2 for Sabbatical laws.

Jesus also appealed to creation in a discussion concerning divorce. When asked about the commandment of giving a certificate of divorce in the Law of Moses, Jesus responds that Moses permitted divorce because of the hardening of men’s hearts. Jesus’ position on divorce is that, “from the beginning it was not so.” (Mat 19:3-9, Mar 10:2-9) Jesus does not completely disregard divorce as divorce is permissible in cases where one party has committed adultery; however, when one provides a certificate of divorce in order to marry someone else then their act is considered as adulterous as they have strayed from the created order.

Lutz Doering proposes that Jesus’ answer concerning marriage and the resurrection that, “we will be as the angels” (Mat 22:30, Mar 12:25) indicates that the eternal order becomes the plumb line for the Halakhah of Jesus.²⁶ Doering compares Jesus’ answer with the Dead Sea Scrolls and that “being as the angels” would lead one to celibacy; however, the concession to be married within the confounds of the created order is part of the now/not yet eschatology.²⁷

Creation also plays an important part in Paul’s arguments for sexual

25 Marshall, I. Howard. ‘Eschatology and Ethics’ in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, eds. Atkinson, David J and David H. Field. 1995. IVP: Leicester p. 355.

26 Doering, Lutz. ‘Marriage and Creation in Mark 10 and CD 4-5’ in *Echoes From the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament*, ed. Martinez, Florentino Garcia. 2009. BRILL: Leiden p. 163.

27 Ibid p. 163.

ethics. Paul writes that homosexual behaviour has gone against the created order (Rom 1:27) and that homosexuals will not enter The Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9). The created order of male and female from the Genesis narrative also provided Paul with instruction for gender roles within the family and church (1 Cor 11:1-15, 1 Ti 2:9-15).

NO MORE JEW AND GENTILE DIVIDE

The second aspect of The Kingdom that I can see is the eradication of the Jew-Gentile divide. The Kingdom of Heaven is now extended to the gentiles. As Paul writes that the middle wall of partition has been separated (Eph 2:14), Jew and Gentile have been reconciled into one new man (Eph 2:15).

The inclusion of gentiles into The Kingdom provided a basis for ‘*loosing*’ dietary laws. In Peter’s vision in Acts 10 the Lord showed Peter four footed beasts, every creeping thing and every fowl of the air and told him to kill and eat. Peter objects and replies, “No Lord, I have never eaten anything common or unclean”. So the Lord responds by saying, “What God has cleansed, you call common?” Now, one may argue that Peter’s vision had nothing to do with eating Kosher but rather the vision was regarding Peter meeting a gentile named Cornelius²⁸; however the vision could be argued to be dealing with the larger issue of fellowship with gentiles - which evidently eating and drinking are part of.

Table fellowship was an important part of the early Christian church. The inclusion of gentiles became problematic concerning food that was consumed. At the Council of Jerusalem, gentiles were loosed from circumcision and obeying the Law of Moses but were bound abstaining

²⁸ Chris Miller argues that Peter’s vision had nothing to do with the abrogation of ‘*kosher laws*’ but rather fellowship with gentiles. Miller disagrees that Peter eating with the uncircumcised meant that Peter ‘ate pork’. I believe Miller makes too much of a distinction between the two issues that can hardly be separated. (Miller, Chris A. ‘Did Peter’s Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or the Menu?’ in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159:635 (July 2002).

from the consummation of blood and food sacrificed to idols. Scholars have noted that these restrictions on gentiles reflect commandments that were given as part of the Noahide covenant and Peter’s vision in Acts 10 also fits this category.

Paul appears to present another clause into the Halakhic discussion. In discussing whether eating meat sacrificed to idols is permissible, Paul writes that for the sake of conscience, if we bless the food and do not ask where the meat came from in the marketplace, then eating meat sacrificed to idols is permissible (1 Cor 10:27). This indicates that eating meat sacrifice is permissible according to one’s conscience (1 Cor 8:7-8). However, if a person present has a problem with eating meat sacrificed to idols because of their conscience then one should forgo their liberty (1 Cor 8:12, 10:29). Paul highlights the need not to offend a brother however reclining at the tables of idols in pagan temples is strictly forbidden (1 Cor 10:21).

Scott Hafemann notes the tension between the strong and the weak conscience in Paul’s epistle to the Romans and that a Roman principle of obligation is at hand.²⁹ This is within the context of dietary laws and the divide of Jew and Gentile. One must be willing to lay down his liberty and at the same time another must not bind upon his brother that which is impossible to keep. Hafemann writes that eschatology of a now/not yet Kingdom enable the strong in faith to bear the proclivities of the weak and vice versa (Rom 15:1-2, 14:4, 10 and 12).³⁰ Paul writes that the Kingdom of God is more than food or drink (Romans 14:17). Ultimately, The Kingdom is about righteousness and the glory of God. This is reflected in relationships between Jew and Gentile, preferring one another, serving one another.

29 Hafemann, Scott. ‘Eschatology and Ethics: The Future of Israel and the Nations in Romans 15:1-13’ in *Tyndale Bulletin* 51:2 (2000) p. 163.

30 Ibid p. 192.

LOVE GOD AND LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR

This leads to my third observation concerning The Kingdom of God influencing halakhic interpretation: loving God and loving your neighbour. Jesus taught that the greatest commandment was the Shema; to love God with all your heart, soul and strength (Mat 22:37, Mar 12:29, Deut 6:5). He also taught that the second greatest command was like the first; to love your neighbour (Mat 22:38, Mar 12:30, Lev 19:18). In the first epistle of John the apostle explains that the two commandments work hand in hand. “If you say you love God but hate your brother then you are a liar.”(1 John 4:20). Therefore, your love for your neighbour says a lot about how you love God and Jesus said in these two commandments that the whole law is fulfilled. (Mat 22:40) This claim is not far from the words of Rabbi Hillel who also saw Lev 19:18 commandments as fulfilling Torah (Shab 31a).

Jacob Neusner writes that when one recites the Shema, one accepts the yoke of The Kingdom of Heaven.³¹ To confess allegiance to God as King and to love Him is acceptance of His rule, which is His Kingdom. However, Neusner continues by arguing that accepting The Kingdom is not just reciting the Shema but a variety of actions and rites.³² Accepting the yoke expresses one’s attitude as God’s servant and acting in His service. The Kingdom of Heaven is not just creedal but is manifested in actions.

Similarly in the epistle of James, the apostle writes of the relationship between faith and works in relation to the Shema saying, “Even the demons believe God is One.” (James 2:19). James uses the example of father Abraham in the narrative of the *Aqedah* (Binding of Issac) that faith manifests itself in action.

Philip Sigal notes the supremacy of love in the actions and teachings of Jesus. He proposes that Jesus set love as the criterion by which to

31 Neusner, Jacob. ‘The Kingdom of Heaven in Kindred Systems, Judaic and Christian’ in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 15.2 (2005) p. 286.

32 Ibid p. 287.

make a choice when options were available.³³ This provides Jesus with a principle in which He can make a *Qal Vahomer*³⁴ argument (*Qal Vahomer* is an argument that presupposes that what applies in a less important case will certainly apply in a more important case). Jesus uses this principle in Matthew 12 in response to the people in the synagogue who asked whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Jesus answers by using the illustration of saving one’s sheep from a ditch on the Sabbath. Rescuing an animal from a ditch was compulsory by law (Ex 23:4-5, Deu 22:4)³⁵ So Jesus asks, using a typical *Qal Vahomer* term, how much more is man better than a sheep?

Loving your neighbour also transcends the issue of ceremonial uncleanness. In Luke 10 Jesus is put to the test by a Scribe who asks, “what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers, “what does it say in Moses?” The man replies, “Love God and your neighbour.” Jesus concurs the man was right. “This do and you shall live.” Luke writes that the man was seeking to justify himself by asking, “who is my neighbour?” which would suggest that ‘neighbour’ was a restrictive clause. Therefore, one may not act in love when dealing with gentiles. Jesus answers the question by telling a *mashal* (parable) of a man who was robbed on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Supposing the man was dead, a Priest and a Levite pass the man by because of fear that they would be ceremonially unclean as they were to enter the Holy city of Jerusalem. It was a Samaritan (who were considered unclean) who saved the man’s life and it was the Samaritan who proved himself to be a neighbour.

This is not saying to only love those who love you, but rather, upon

33 Sigal, Philip. 2007. *The Halakhah of Jesus of Nazareth According to the Gospel of Matthew*. Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, GA p. 22.

34 Qal Vahomer is one of seven Jewish exegetical *middoth* (rules) that are attributed to Rabbi Hillel. These rules are analogical in reasoning and therefore help the interpreter to exegete the scripture intertextually. There are many examples of Jesus and the apostles using these methods in interpreting the Jewish Scriptures. (See Longenecker, Richard N. 1995. Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period. Paternoster Press: Carlisle.)

35 Neither Ex 23:4-5 or Deu 22:4 take into account the Sabbath. However, later Rabbinic writings (Shab 117b) and the argument of Jesus suggest that there was an oral Law amongst the Scribes and Pharisees that such an action was permissible.

the command of Jesus to go and do likewise, love everyone and be a neighbour to everyone regardless of race and social status.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

My fourth observation of The Kingdom of Heaven’s influence of Christian Halakhah is the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Thomas Schreiner writes that, “where the Spirit is working in transforming people, there The Kingdom of God is.”³⁶ Saucy also writes that, “in the tension between the now and not yet aspects of eschatology, it is biblical pneumatology that will hold us from the poles of an over-realised and under-realised eschatology.”³⁷ In other words, Saucy writes that the Spirit’s presence is the presence of The Kingdom.

Paul often contrasts the spirit with the letter of the law. This is not a hermeneutic that spiritualises legal passages, but rather is an expression of covenants based on Jeremiah 31:31-33 that God would make a new covenant written on the hearts of men rather than tablets of stone.³⁸ This analogy is similar to the circumcision of hearts in Deuteronomy 30:6. Outward circumcision was a way of showing outward allegiance to the Lord, yet many of the circumcised failed to be fully aligned to God. The promise of the circumcised heart through the Spirit of God would cause men to love God, thus keeping the Shema rather than just reciting it.

The apostles make use of both imageries in reference to the pre-eminence of the Spirit (Rom 2:29, 2 Cor 3:3, Col 2:11-12 Heb 8:10, 10:16). The arrival of the Holy Spirit impacted their approach to the law. A major conflict within the early church was the need for gentiles to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. It is not until Acts 15, the Council

36 Schreiner, Thomas R. 2013. *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI p. 560.

37 Saucy, Mark R. ‘*Regnum Spiriti*: The Role of the Spirit in the Social Ethics of The Kingdom’ in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54:1 (March 2011) p. 91

38 See Jackson, Bernard S. 2008. Essays on Halakhah in the New Testament. BRILL: Leiden p. 8.

of Jerusalem that there was an official decision on the matter. Peter stood up before the brethren and declared that God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile, no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised in saving them. Both had received the Holy Spirit therefore it appears there is no need for gentiles who were already saved to be circumcised in order to become Christian. Secondly, Peter notes that they should not put a yoke on the gentiles that the patriarchs and the Jews of the day were able to bear.³⁹ Instead the circumcision of the heart by receiving the Holy Spirit, is what is necessary for salvation. The Holy Spirit transforms lives in order to make a person righteous.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing these four aspects of the realised Kingdom of Heaven we can see that Eschatology impacts ethical living that transcends being motivated by fear or hope. The nearness of The Kingdom means that we are not just obscurely motivated because of future events but theologically informed and practically equipped because we live in an eschatological age. The inauguration of The Kingdom of God under a now/not yet paradigm provides a theological framework in which Christians can approach the legal verses of the Jewish Scriptures for instruction in righteousness which continue to be authoritative today.

The apostles were able to bind and loose using the Jewish Scriptures as guidance, providing a Christian Halakhah for the realised eschaton. Now we have received their instruction in the book of the New Covenant we must not view the teachings of Jesus or the apostles as abrogating the law. Rather, they are upholding the law in championing the weightier matters of The Kingdom such as love, peace and mercy, expanding and loosening

³⁹ This does not mean that circumcision is forbidden, especially in the case of cultural identity. Paul wrote there were benefits of being a circumcised Jew (Rom 3:1-2). Paul circumcised Timothy on one of his missionary journeys (Acts 16:3) because of a particular group of Jews in a quarter of the Derbe and Lystra area. Yet circumcision is not the means of salvation or inheriting the promises of God.

commandments for the inclusion of gentiles and making concessions for the weak. The apostolic instruction in the Christian Scriptures should lead us to one of the fundamental aspects of The Kingdom i.e. righteousness - and then we will see The Kingdom of Heaven realised in our midst.



Creation Care in Eschatological Context

Daniel Button

KEYWORDS:

| Creation Care | *missio Dei* | Environmental Mission | Eschatology |
| Apocalypse | New Creation |

ABSTRACT:

The concept of *missio Dei* has recently been subjected to scrutiny and theological re-interpretation – notably in response to the advent of ‘Creation Care’ as a key component in the changing landscape of mission praxis. The ‘stewardship model’ of Christian environmentalism no longer seems robust enough to withstand the expanding crisis of climate change (for those who accept the scientific data). Yet is ‘saving the planet’ a valid theological agenda? When creation care is framed in an eschatological context, immediate questions arise regarding apocalyptic expectations, and the expected ‘end’ of this world. Is environmental mission a fruitless endeavour, or does it rather demand a grander objective on par with ‘reaching the world with the gospel’? The nature of the transition from creation to New Creation becomes the crucial theological underpinning for discerning our missional responsibility toward the environment. If Christ’s return signals not an end but a transition, then perhaps it is possible that ‘our labour is not in vain’. This paper seeks to develop a rational, purposeful, biblical justification for creation care in light of apocalyptic expectations and the concept of a new creation.

INTRODUCTION

No one involved in missional thinking today can fail to be aware of the tremendous impact that environmental concerns and climate change are having on Christian theology and ethics, and likewise on mission theory and praxis. However, many fundamental questions remain unresolved. What are we to do about it? What is our missional responsibility in relation to weather phenomena and global climate events happening on a massive scale, or the idea that biological diversity is in critical endangerment, or that climate stability has reached a tipping point? Much of what we hear is highly controversial and still being vigorously debated at the highest levels of scientific and political authority – let alone within the Church. Is it simply beyond our scope, theologically? Is it okay just to ‘do our bit for the environment’ and hope for the best, or ought we to have a grander objective in mind for the earth, something missionally equivalent to ‘reaching the world with the gospel’? Do we need an overarching operational strategy, or should we simply proceed as individuals, tracking our carbon footprint like our calorie intake, perhaps in response to a niggling sense of consumerist guilt, or a communal participation in the prevailing social angst, or just because it innately seems the right thing to do?

This paper is predicated on the assumption that it is incumbent upon us, as missional-theologians, to seek a rational, purposeful, biblical justification for our action in the world – even if we suspect before we begin that ultimately the task may be impossible. Thus far the Christian response to the secular/scientific outcry regarding the critical state of our planet has been tepid at best. We seem at a loss. Is ‘saving the planet’ really a valid theological agenda? Even if we reply affirmatively, is environmental mission to be considered as a goal on a par with saving souls? Or is it rather a matter of maintenance and good stewardship until Christ returns? Questions of priorities, resourcing mission, urgency of

action, Christian unity, and the nature of theological training, are all contingent upon our response to this dilemma; yet we might take comfort in knowing that generations past have faced equally daunting challenges and emerged with deeper and richer theological insights because of them. Perhaps the most prescient question of all: how are we to think of our environmental mission to the earth in light of an expectation of an apocalyptic end to this world?

THE ADVENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MISSION

There is mounting evidence that a new phenomenon is emerging in mission, its terminology vacillating between 'creation care' and 'environmental mission'. In 2012 the Lausanne Commission appointed its first ever Senior Associate in Creation Care. The mission agency OMF appointed a 'Creation Care Advocate' based at their international offices in Singapore. The Evangelical Theological Society's annual meeting was held under the theme of 'Caring for Creation', and the Micah Network issued a creation care 'Call to Action'. In November 2012 the Lausanne Commission convened a Global Consultation on 'Creation Care and the Gospel' in Jamaica, resulting in a widely translated Call to Action;¹ and in a later newsletter, Senior Associate Ed Brown referred to Environmental Missions as the new 'hot topic' for organisations traditionally involved in church planting and evangelism, announcing plans for an Environmental Missions Consortium in the USA in 2013.² Such developments have continued to escalate over the past 18 months.

Interestingly, while all this would seem to indicate a remarkable momentum, there are other signs that this has been a long and arduous journey, and that the larger Church is only finally beginning to stir from

1 See <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/all/2012-creation-care/1881-call-to-action.html>

2 See <http://conversation.lausanne.org/en/home/creation-care>

its lethargy. In 1984 an Anglican Consultative Council meeting set out four ‘marks of mission’, and in 1990, most significantly, a fifth was added. It is worthwhile listing them here in full:³

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation
and sustain and renew the life of the earth

I find this list fascinating for two reasons: first because it precisely mirrors my own journey of mission awareness and enthusiasm; and second because the fifth one is unique. It is unique because it is the only one not specifically anthropocentric, and not (on the surface at least) exclusively tied to human salvation; it came last, like an afterthought, but its implications are vast. In fact the surprise is not that it came last, but that it came at all. Considering that this meeting took place over 20 years ago, one could argue that the fifth mark lurched dramatically toward the idealistic and prophetic, unlike the others which are historically descriptive of the changing paradigm of the *missio Dei*. On the other hand, perhaps it was merely a recognition of the ever-present undercurrent of our creation mandate – to rule over the earth and subdue it.

The question I wish to pose regarding this fifth mark of mission is ‘why’? Why is it a missional imperative to ‘safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth’? In the book *Life Widening Mission*, arising from the 2010 Edinburgh Conference, John Kafwanka undertakes an explanation which on the surface, seems perfectly valid:

It is very important to emphasise here that all the Five Marks of Mission are biblical and reflect the ministry and work of Jesus Christ, in whom God’s mission has complete manifestation in the

³ Cathy Ross, ed., *Life Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives*. Oxford: Regnum Books, 2012, p147.

world. The life and ministry of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, was to bring about healing, wholeness and reconciliation of God's creation, and the Five Marks of Mission express both the reconciling and the holistic nature of God's mission.⁴

My intention here is not to dispute this statement theologically, although the shift from a reconciliation of God and man to a reconciliation of God's creation is striking, as is the claim that the nature of God's mission is holistic rather than salvific. And the reference to the ministry and work of Jesus Christ is puzzling, since perhaps the most tangible expression of Christ's environmental concern is the withering of the fig tree. As it happens, I essentially agree with Kafwanka's statement, but I believe the fifth mark requires a far more complex theological construction and justification than the other four, and simply stating that the fifth is likewise biblical and reflects the work of Jesus Christ may actually undermine that task. The view that this fifth mark was part of the 'reconciling work of Christ' is not readily apparent, or it would have been recognised for the past 2000 years rather than the past 20. I believe the disparity lies in a fundamental difference in the way we now regard the concept of the *missio Dei*. And that begs the deeper question: What is the so-called 'holistic nature' of God's mission?

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE *MISSIO DEI*

To ascertain just how radical I believe the extent of this difference is, we need only turn to David Bosch's seminal 1991 publication of *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission*. In over 500 pages, there is not a whisper of an expanded or holistic *missio Dei* encompassing the concept of creation. At times 'the whole world' is included, but this is clearly the whole human world, not the whole of

⁴ John Kafwanka, "The Five Marks of Mission and the Anglican Communion", In *Life-Widening Mission, op. cit.* pp146-7.

creation. Bosch describes the paradigm shift from a *missio ecclesia* to a *missio Dei* in the mid-20th century, tracing the roots of this transition to Karl Barth’s monumental influence at the 1952 Willingen Conference.⁵ Here the classical Trinitarian ‘sending’ model expands to include the church: ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God.’⁶ This gradually developed into the commonly heard adage, ‘It’s not the Church that has a mission, but God’s mission that has a church’. Thus the church came to be seen as the instrument, rather than the source, of mission. Yet the nature of that mission had not conceptually changed. It was, and remained, essentially salvific, as Moltmann’s original statement clearly expresses: ‘It is not the church that has a mission of *salvation* to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church’⁷ (my italics). As Bosch adds, ‘To participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God’s love toward people’⁸ (my italics). Bosch goes on to elucidate thirteen different models of mission in what he calls the ‘emerging ecumenical paradigm’, all of which are salvation based and anthropocentric, none of which mention creation as a part of the new paradigm. Even the final eschatological section centres on a ‘salvation-historical’ model, and Bosch’s deferral to Hoekendijk is telling: ‘Where liberation to true humanity has taken place, we may conclude that the *missio Dei* has reached its goal’.⁹

If Bosch’s acclaimed work in 1991 contains no mention of a creation-centred missional paradigm, then clearly such a proposal is both recent and radical. But it is perhaps less surprising when one considers that the very concept of the *missio-Dei* has always been ascertained as God’s response to the fall. In other words, God’s mission has been seen as a

5 David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York: Orbis, 1991, p390.

6 Ibid.

7 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. London: SCM, 1977, p64.

8 Bosch: p390.

9 J.C. Hoekendijk in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, op. cit. p 507.

rescue mission, a restorative, reconciliatory, redemptive mission to save mankind from the effects of sin and the fall. But what if the mission of God were seen as stemming not *from* the fall, but *prior* to the fall, from the creation mandate? Missiologically we trace our need for redemption to Adam's sin, but theologically, God's purposes for humankind precede the fall. The creation mandate of Ge 1:28 is not merely a command for humankind, but a teleological statement of God's mission for the whole of creation.

This idea is perhaps expressed most clearly in the recent emergence of 'temple theology' (e.g. such as by that Greg Beale¹⁰ and John Walton¹¹), viewing the central concept of the temple through the lens of the Ancient Near Eastern cosmological worldview, and building a strong case that the Garden of Eden is in fact the first temple; the temple represents the point of connection between God and man, the nexus of heaven and earth, the place from which God's rule is asserted and where his presence is located. While in other Ancient Near Eastern cults, the god's image was situated in the temple and ministered to by the priests, in the Old Testament narrative, God's image is found in the man and woman themselves, and they were to act as priests to creation, mediating God's presence and rule outward toward the rest of creation – beyond the Garden, the holy place of his temple on earth. In temple theology, we begin to glimpse the relationship between creation and new creation, not just as old and new, but as purpose and fulfilment. And most importantly, we see in this the crucial role of human beings, as the image bearers of God, to be the intended instruments of bringing about this transformation. We see the eschatological trajectory of creation to new creation as a *process*, not an *event*. And the free agency of human beings as a creative projection of God's own purposes, rather than the tragic channel through which sin and death enter the picture and change forever the means to that end.

10 Greg Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology. Leicester: Apollos, 2004.

11 John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*. Nottingham: Apollos, 2007.

THE FIFTH MARK OF MISSION

And so – back to the fifth mark of mission. Reporting on the 2010 World Mission Conference in Edinburgh, at which one track was dedicated to developing the corresponding theological themes of each mark of mission, Kanya John Kaoma expressed deep disappointment that ‘the integrity of creation was not addressed as an independent missiological issue...[but] ecological issues were only integrated in major themes.’¹² Positively he notes that the context of the current ecological crisis conveyed serious eco-social and theological overtones amongst the conference participants,¹³ yet there was little evidence that this resulted in deeper theological deliberations. Kaoma himself admirably attempts to implant this new mark of mission within the *missio Dei*, yet his emphasis focuses on discovering the sacramental nature of Creation, developing a ‘creation-centred consciousness’, and protecting the dignity of the earth as belonging to the Lord.

Tragically, all of this seems to miss the mark. Along with the deep environmental concern for the sinful damage humanity has inflicted on the earth, Kaoma’s insights seem grounded in the here-and-now, in the present creation, the damage we have done to it, and our Christian imperative to take care of the earth because it is the Lord’s. I detected nothing of a future-looking purpose for the earth beyond the obvious recognition that the earth is our home and therefore a necessary context for mission. One phrase stood out in particular: ‘Christians ought to remember that the death of Earth, is the death of Christian Mission!’¹⁴ Well, perhaps true – but is this necessarily a bad thing? If one steps back from the *missio Dei* and into the broader eschatological view of God’s purposes – the fulfilment of mission, the destruction of the earth, and the end of this present age, all have a distinctly biblical ring! The phrase ‘death of the

12 Kanya John Kaoma, *Life Widening Mission*, op. cit. p83.

13 Ibid. p75.

14 Ibid. p80.

earth' perhaps overstates the case, but certainly bible-believing Christians expect an apocalyptic 'ending' of some sort.

Subtle hints of a broader view can be found in Kaoma's attempt to revisit the concept of the *missio Dei*. 'In short', he writes, 'mission is an invitation to participate in God's purposes for the entire created order.'¹⁵ This certainly reflects a departure from prior concepts of the *missio Dei*, which centred exclusively on the particularity of God's love and salvific desire for humanity; but the eschatological implications have not yet been fully grasped, and thus it lacks the theological conviction of a truly re-interpreted *missio Dei*. 'Safeguarding the integrity of creation' somehow intimates the preserving of what is, rather than the transforming into what it will become. Yet why do we assume God's purposes for creation are static, while his purposes for his people are dynamic and future oriented? Should we see *creatio continua* or should we look for an end to this present creation? If the fifth mark of mission is limited to the here and now, it will inevitably be interpreted in parallel with its secular counterpart, as a desperate bid to 'save the planet'. Once again, we return to the question of what is the wider purpose of God, or the nature of a holistic *missio Dei*?

MISSION IN ESCHATOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Perhaps the answer to this question lies buried in the fertile fields of eschatology. As Martin Luther famously remarked, 'Even if I knew that the world would end tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree today.' Rather than sheer stubbornness or bravado, what if Luther actually had a theological basis for his assertion? Is it possible that what we do now in this present creation has implications for the advent of the New Creation? Paul's concluding statement in 1Co 15:58 implies exactly that: 'Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.' If our 'work' still involves, as part of

15 Ibid. p79.

God's own mission, the creation mandate, then our care of creation now is not in vain, even in light of the New Creation to come. We might equate this with our own temporal human existence. Although our Christian hope lies in receiving resurrected bodies of sinless perfection, we consider our present sanctification as critical and profoundly meaningful. We may not grasp how, but based on Christ's resurrection, we know that our own identities in this life will carry forward, at least in part, to our resurrected identities in a New Heaven and New Earth. How we live now matters.

Christians throughout the centuries have lived in tension between the promises of this life, and the future hope of the life to come, the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’. The final step, to leave behind this body of sin in the sure and certain hope that it will be replaced with a resurrected body (1Co 15:42-44) is utterly foundational to our faith, and unique to Christianity. Should that likewise be our expectation for the earth? Carrying this analogy to an extreme, we might conclude that this present creation must therefore die, and be resurrected as a new creation at the *parousia*. But is it theologically justifiable to consider the earth in such tight parallel with humanity? The natural world is subject to the laws of entropy, and according to Ro 8:20 subject to ‘frustration’. But death and resurrection? It seems not. As Paul clarifies, ‘creation waits in eager expectation...in hope that it will be liberated from its bondage to decay, and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We are subject to death, and await a resurrection; creation is subject to decay and awaits its liberation.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

But this is where we run into an eschatological gridlock, and finally we are forced to confront the elephant in the room: the elephant of the apocalypse. When looking toward ultimate purposes – the true ‘holistic mission of God’ – the eschatological New Creation forces itself into the picture like a bull in a china shop. It presents an inescapable reality

which, without careful consideration, diminishes the goal of preserving this earth, and demolishes the idea that saving this earth should be a key aspect of the *missio Dei*. Quite the opposite it seems to imply, this present earth is destined for destruction – not by human recklessness, but by God's own command (Mt 24:35, 2Pe 3:7). And yet, a careful exegesis is needed here. The language of 'destruction' leads too easily to an overly simplistic interpretational scheme where discontinuity becomes absolute. Yet throughout all the periods of salvation history, we see continuity inter-mixed with discontinuity. Even the 2Peter 3 passage compares the coming 'destruction' with the destruction of Noah's day, a destruction which both author and recipients knew full well did not 'destroy' the earth itself, but destroyed the 'world' of that day, a world rife with sin and wickedness. After 150 days of waiting (Ge 8:3), the waters receded from the earth, and Noah and his family eventually stepped out into very same creation they had left behind.

Whatever this coming destruction may entail, it is set in the context of the coming of Christ, and his *parousia* remains one of the great unifying beliefs of the Christian faith in all its diversity. As the Nicene creed states, 'He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.' And when he returns, the present age will come to an end (Mt 24:30). Christians uniformly believe that this world, rife with sickness, poverty, suffering and wickedness is destined to end. Sin and evil will be destroyed. Death will be no more. And the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord (Rev 11:15). The *parousia* likewise signals our entrance into a glorious age of a New Creation: a New Heaven and a New Earth. But here we find it is all too easy to focus purely on the before and after, leaving aside any thought of transition or continuity. Our theology describes our resurrection as a miraculous 'event', and we freely ascribe this 'event' motif to the advent of the whole of the New Creation. Unless our theological thinking undergoes a drastic revision, it seems both the resurrection – and the New Creation as its context – will take place in a miraculous divine 'moment'. And an apocalyptic ending, judgement,

and total destruction, seem to be a straightforward and even necessary precursor to such an event.

Our challenge is to consider an alternative, and by doing so, perhaps to demand a hearing for a substantial revision in our theology. If our aim in creation care is to join the secular bandwagon in a desperate bid to ‘save the planet’ we Christians face a tragic dilemma. Biblically, the apocalypse will come, and then the new creation. If that apocalypse represents a complete destruction – a radical discontinuity with the present creation – we have no more chance of succeeding than we have in avoiding death. Medicine may preserve life for a time, but death will triumph in the end. On the other hand, if our aim in creation care is merely to ‘safeguard the integrity of creation’ or to ‘sustain the life of the earth’ as the fifth mark of mission espouses, then we face an opposite dilemma. By aiming to preserve creation ‘as it is’ (even including a positive impetus toward reversing the effects of pollution, exploitation and environmental degradation) we may ultimately find ourselves working *against* God’s missiological and eschatological plan to *transform* creation into New Creation. Saving the planet is not equivalent to transforming it. And if that transformation is a miraculous work of God at the time of the *parousia*, then our meagre attempts at creation care now have no future relevance or eschatological purpose. We need a third alternative, and one small clue can be even be found in the fifth mark – the word ‘renew’. To ‘sustain and renew the life of the earth’, yet these two words – sustain and renew – seem to imply quite different ideas.

A THIRD ALTERNATIVE: THE END AS TRANSITION

The third alternative sees the concept of ‘the end’ not as final but as transitional. Eschatology is often misrepresented as a study of the end, yet theologically in both individual and corporate terms, *the end* is never absolute, but is rather a process or an event which serves as a transitional

phase from one state to another. In fact 'end' is an unfortunate choice of words, because it signifies a terminal point. In terms of our apocalyptic expectations for the earth, 'cataclysmic upheaval' may be a better phrase, and indeed is not without precedent. From a scientific perspective, the earth has undergone several such transitional upheavals in its history, as has life on earth in general, and even human existence.¹⁶ Some of these transitions – collisions with comets and asteroids, mass extinctions, or dramatic climate shifts – have been incredibly destructive, even catastrophic, yet none has represented a complete or absolute end; life on earth recovered, and continuity has remained within the discontinuity.

Until recently, it was possible to hold both an apocalyptic expectation and an environmental responsibility in creative tension, albeit without a great deal of theological rationale. 'After all', we reason, 'this world may end, but we don't know when, so until it does, we ought to look after it' – as long as it doesn't require too much effort or sacrifice. But in the context of the current ecological and climate change crisis – this casual attitude no longer has any currency; in fact such lazy reasoning is regarded with disdain by many creation care advocates (not to mention secular environmentalists) who see a drastic and immediate need for radical changes in lifestyle to forestall the tipping point of an irreversible doomsday scenario for the earth. We cannot escape the possibility that the current ecological crisis may well be a harbinger of the end, and we need a more robust response.

The only interpretative position that gives credence to both an apocalyptic expectation and a New Creation, and at the same time makes sense of our missiological responsibility to the earth, is one in which our involvement in Creation Care *now* will be genuinely worthwhile and eschatologically meaningful, and will somehow *carry over* into the New Creation. Is such a view possible? It needs to be. Only when we can theologically articulate why our labour is not in vain, will the Church

16 William R. Stoeger "Scientific Accounts of Ultimate Catastrophes in Our Life-Bearing Universe." In *The End of the World and the Ends of God*, edited by John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker. Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000.

be able to find a platform to fully engage in environmental mission, strategically, unreservedly, and with all the resources at its disposal. The key consideration in this theological dilemma is a proper assessment of the level of continuity and discontinuity between this present earth/creation and the new creation to come.

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY

I have thus far suggested that human death and resurrection are not in direct parallel with the end of this age and the advent of a New Creation. But they do share something in common – a strong veneer of radical discontinuity. The theological challenge is to determine whether there is continuity within the apparent discontinuity. There are three theological positions which need to be considered. The first is the still prevalent misconception that we go to heaven when we die, and there we shall encounter the paradise of the New Creation, already in existence beyond this physical space-time universe. The second is the previously mentioned view that the resurrection of humanity is a model paralleling the resurrection of the earth. The third position posits two different means of transition: while humanity’s resurrection involves a divine act, the transformation of the earth will be a process, guided by God, but involving his people as mediators of that transformation. This becomes a purposeful post-resurrection activity, with God’s people given authority over creation as human beings were intended to have from the beginning.

In assessing these three positions, it is helpful to clarify the use of the term ‘heaven’. N.T. Wright’s examination of the biblical concept of ‘heaven’ reveals that our future hope is not a hope of heaven, but a hope of resurrection.¹⁷ Likewise he points to a proper understanding of eternal

¹⁷ See e.g. *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of Christian Hope*. Vol. B11, Grove Biblical Series. Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999; “New Heavens, New Earth.” In *Called to One Hope*, ed. John Colwell. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000; *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. New York: Harper One, 2008.

life as 'the life of the age to come'. For Christianity, the terminus of human destiny is not heaven, but resurrected life in the new creation. As Wright says, we might *call* this heaven, but the Bible never does. In the OT Jewish understanding, the 'age to come' was always a new age on the earth – with nationalistic fulfilment of promises, in continuity with the present age. And on a more universal scale, inherent in our creation mandate is the understanding that we are creatures *of* the earth, we were created *for* this earth, and resurrected life is accordingly earth-centric – even accepting that a new and open relationship with heaven may well be accessible to us.

Likewise, resurrection means, (despite some modern scholarship's re-interpretation), a 're-embodiment to new life'. It refers to a physically embodied state, not a spiritual experience; therefore *where* this resurrection occurs becomes a vital consideration. It must take place in an environment conducive to physical embodiment – and thus the connection between humanity and the new creation becomes a dominant eschatological theme. Moltmann writes, 'We cannot talk about the new creation of human beings without talking about the new creation of the earth. There is no eternal life without "the life of the world to come"'.¹⁸ 'Only the new earth offers possibilities for the new embodiment of human beings'.¹⁹

Philosopher Nancey Murphy clears elucidates the case for the second position:

Our essential physicality emphasizes our unity with the rest of nature, and suggests that we are not saved *out of* this cosmos, but as part of it. That is, it leads us to expect that the entire cosmos will be transformed or re-recreated in the same way as we humans are.²⁰

¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – the Beginning: The Life of Hope*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, p151.

¹⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, p104.

²⁰ Nancey Murphy, "Resurrection Body and Personal Identity: Possibilities and Limits of Eschatological Knowledge." In *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, edited by Ted Peters, Robert J. Russell and Michael Welker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, pp203-4.

Our consideration here is on the earth being transformed *in the same way* as we humans are. In a similar vein, physicist-theologian John Polkinghorne sees little sense in talking about human resurrection apart from its material relationship to new creation as a whole:

“The scope of this new creation is cosmic and it is not limited to human destiny alone.²¹ The fact that the Lord’s risen body is the glorified form of his dead body testifies to the fact that in Christ there is a destiny not only for humankind but also for matter.²²

Both Polkinghorne and Murphy see the scope of new creation as encompassing the entire cosmos – all of matter – thus the resurrection is a profound indication that God himself has chosen to become ontologically joined to this material universe.

A positive assessment of this position suggests that resurrected eternal life for humanity – with no more death or suffering or pain – requires a similarly transformed earth. New Creation in this view is clearly earth (not heaven), but an earth utterly transformed and renewed, perhaps in a way ‘resurrected’. There is a well-known controversy here between advocates of a ‘destruction-recreation’ model, and advocates of a ‘renewal-transformation’ model. But for our purposes it makes no difference; in both cases, the transformation is a divine act, an event rather than a process. And herein lies the first element of a negative assessment – this view poses a disturbingly radical discontinuity. It fails to recognise any transitional phase. A second criticism centres on the idea that a transformation of all matter under a new regime of laws would require a divine act of universal and cosmic magnitude (i.e. changing the laws of nature). The need for such a cosmic-scale transformation of matter is not clearly demonstrated, but is problematic in that it removes *a priori* any possibility of humanity playing a role in the transformation.

21 John Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*. London: SPCK, 2002, p84.

22 John Polkinghorne, *Science and the Trinity*. London: SPCK, 2004, p168.

NEW CREATION AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

In the third position, God's teleological purposes likewise refer to this earth, but the transformation to new creation need only take place within an earthly framework rather than the universe as whole. Accordingly, the transformation need not involve such a dramatic overturning of physical laws and transience as Polkinghorne proposes, but might rather involve the *removal* of the obstacles to creation's fulfilment: sin and evil, corruption, environmental degradation, pollution, exploitation of the earth's beauty and resources, etc. Despite the conjecture that a resurrected humanity requires an utterly transformed creation, we must consider that Christ, in his resurrected body, breathed the air, walked the ground, and ate the food of this present creation!

There is a strong case both biblically and theologically (not to mention scientifically) for *continuity* in creation. If the new creation does not require a Divine overturning of the current laws of nature, then we ought to consider the possibility that the advent of a new creation need not be a miraculous, divine act of God, but may instead be a long and gradual process involving God's people as the agents of transformation, mediating the presence of God to all creation. Such a goal can only be fully realised *after the parousia*, and after the destruction of sin and evil in the world. But the process can begin even now in the present creation. Biblically, the redeemed in Christ are 'new creations' already, even if not yet in their final resurrected bodies. In this proposal, the creation mandate applies to us now, as it did to Adam and Eve, and as it will continue to apply *after* resurrection. That mandate involves the transition from creation to new creation, and in this view, it will be the work of God's post-resurrection people just as it our responsibility to care for the earth now.

CREATION CARE IN ESCHATOLOGICAL CONTEXT

We now return to a theology of creation care. If the New Creation comes all at once as a divine work of God’s power, superseding the present creation, then missiologically speaking, there is no demonstrable continuity between the work of stewardship in the present creation (i.e. our role in the *missio Dei*) and the final form of the future creation; there may be a material continuity, but we have no role in that, and there is no eschatological *purpose* for Christian environmentalism. Stewardship for the present, yes; but in the context of ecological crisis, we can justifiably abandon ship and await our rescue. In the process view, a strong theological *and* missiological basis is maintained; theologically, humans were designated as rulers and co-creators, given authority over creation and a mandate to fulfill, in the guise of Adam’s role as priest-mediator to the rest of creation.²³ The intended purpose for Adam and Eve was not to transform the universe and overcome its transience, but to order creation properly toward God. Thus human beings will continue to act in that role, designated as God’s mediators of transformation, through Christ, to all creation. This further implies that human resurrection will take place not in the context of a consummated new creation, but (just like Christ’s resurrection) in the context of the present creation, as the *means of bringing about the new creation*. The redemption of creation (Romans 8) can be more accurately understood not as redemption from transience and death, but as the redemption of God’s original purpose.²⁴ As with the other four marks of mission, this reflects the tension of the already and the not yet.

The idea that we might actually be responsible for fashioning and constructing the New Heaven and New Earth is not a widely-held view in Christian theology, but this I believe is because the focus has always been

23 Greg Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, *op. cit.*

24 The idea of restoration to original intent as opposed to restoration of the original form is taken up by Moltmann in *The Coming of God*, *op. cit.* pp 264-6.

on the end result, not the process of getting there. In John's vision, the new Jerusalem is the holy of holies of the temple, expanded in dimensions but with the same purpose – to radiate God's presence outward into all creation. That work has always been the priestly role of God's people, and we might now assert that that priestly role will at last be expressed in its fullness after Christ's coming – when redeemed humanity can guide creation toward its teleological goal of new creation, no longer contending with the obstacles of sin and wickedness. Furthermore, the missiological significance of this view is clear – it means that the work we do now is not in vain (1Co 15:58). The good works of creation care in the present climate, regardless of ecological crisis or apocalyptic upheaval, will nevertheless form the basis for a gradual transformation into new creation in the future.

What we do on this earth and with this earth will have a significant bearing on the New Heaven and New Earth, just as our present sanctification has a bearing on our resurrected identity. Luther's determination to plant the apple tree was, I believe, based on a positive view that what we do now really does matter, even in the face of the end. It doesn't really matter if the world will end tomorrow, or in a thousand years. We still have a rational theological justification to forge ahead and plant our apple trees today. The present creation is valuable and important to God not only because it belongs to Him, but because it will form the basis of the New Creation yet to come. Creation care advocates and Christian environmentalists can claim purpose and meaning to their work which transcends the present crisis, even if that crisis leads to cataclysmic upheaval. The elephant in the room is no longer a concern; for it turns out the room is sufficiently expansive to accommodate it.



“The Israel of God” in its own Context and in Light of Comparative Jewish Texts*

Stefan Bosman

KEYWORDS:

| Israel of God | Galatians 6:16 | Supersessionism |
| Replacement Theology | Traditionsgeschichte | Peace and Mercy |

ABSTRACT:

This study seeks to establish the identity of “the Israel of God” in Paul’s enigmatic statement in Galatians 6:16b, “peace [be] upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.” (ειρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ.) Comparing this Pauline text with contemporary Jewish texts uncovers a possible trajectory of Jewish traditions that suggests that the Israel of God points to nothing else, but (eschatological) ethnic Israel. While this is not a new position, the argument informed by *Traditionsgeschichte* does contain a new proposal, not hitherto considered. Furthermore, the result of this tradition-historical investigation affirms the findings of grammatical, lexical, and contextual investigations. As a result, the conclusions of this study challenge the still widely held supersessionist reading of Galatians 6:16, which poses that “the Israel of God” points to the Church.

* : Suggestions of Carl Martin and Trond Skinstad improved this article’s English and clarity. Errors are the author’s.

In Matthew 16:3 Jesus chastises the Sadducees and Pharisees, because they recognize meteorological signs, but not the “signs of the times.” In this day and age biblical interpretative approaches and theological positions undoubtedly influence whether today’s news is understood as old things happening to new people, or whether they can also be identified as “the signs of the times.” This study does not aim to directly address world events, but rather only an aspect of theology that influences how such events are interpreted, viz. supersessionism.

Supersessionism is also known by a different name, namely replacement theology, or in German *Ersatztheology*. The latter expression requires no explanation. The former essentially expresses the same idea. “Supersessionism, from the Latin, *supersedere* (to sit upon, to preside over)”¹ expresses the same sentiment as replacement theology in that “the Church is the new Israel that supersedes national Israel as the people of God.”² One should bear in mind that supersessionism is not just a matter of ticking a theological box, but rather can have consequences on many levels. For example, it impacts Christology in that Christ is not only a man-God, but also one who takes on Old Testament roles, such as being the ruler on David’s throne. It impacts ecclesiology, since either all covenants are fulfilled in the Church, or some are still awaiting fulfilment in Israel. It impacts eschatological-ecclesiology by asking whether the Church is one homogenous whole or will there, for example, be a distinct role for Israel in the last days? And finally, it impacts missiology in that there should or should not be a distinct mission to the Jews. Thus much more is at stake than subscribing to an intellectual position, because it impacts many areas of our theological understanding and even practical life.

The examination at hand does not tackle the whole problem of replacement theology, but it does address the most important passage used as a prooftext, which is Galatians 6:16. A rather literal translation directly

1 Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 10-11.

2 Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2010), 79.

¹⁵ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

¹⁵ οὐτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἔστιν οὐτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις.

¹⁶ And those who will walk by this rule, peace [be] upon them and mercy and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁶ καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τὸν θεοῦ.¹

ⁱ : Text critical issues, while important, do not significantly support alternative readings. Hence, such readings are not discussed here. For more information see Constantin von Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Vol. 2 (Lipsiae: J.C. Hinrichs, 1872), 661.; Stephen C. Carlson, “The Text of Galatians and its History” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2012), 271-73.

Table 1

reveals its awkward turns of phrase. Verses 15-16 follow. (See Table 1.)

The peculiar grammar of verse 16, as well as the hitherto unique expression, “the Israel of God,” has baffled many a scholar. According to the consensus view, this text clearly indicates that the Church is now the Israel of God.³ Should this view be accepted without challenge? Our discussion at hand has two goals, namely: first, to determine whether a replacement theological reading is possible, and second, to search for the tradition that underlies the writing of Galatians 6:16, which subsequently will be called the Galatian Benediction.

3 Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel?: A Theological Evaluation*, 125n8 The list is not exhaustive, but would it be, it would be too overwhelming. Among those mentioned are: James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 100.; Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1953), 227.; N. A. Dahl, “Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung Von Gal 6, 16,” *Judaica* 6 (1950), 168.; G. K. Beale, “Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6, 16b,” *Biblica* 80 (1999), 205. Also, the two key figures of the Reformation should be mentioned in this regard: John Calvin and Martin Luther. Another list of those supporting the supersessionist view is found in S. L. Johnson Jr., “Paul and “The Israel of God”: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” *TMS* 20, no. 1 (2009), 43-44.

IS A REPLACEMENT THEOLOGICAL READING POSSIBLE?

Three Readings

There exist typically three possible readings of Galatians 6:16. In the first reading, the Israel of God is the same group as those walking according to this rule. Here the last καὶ⁴ is understood as an apposition, which in English translates as “that is.” (Cf. NIV, NLT, RSV) A second scenario creates two bestowals on two groups. (Cf. ESV, NASB, NET) A third scenario speaks of one bestowal on one group and another bestowal on another group. (Cf. Holman, ISV, and possibly the KJV.) (See Table 2 overleaf.) Of these three readings, only the first reading is supersessionist, i.e. the Church assumes the title, “the Israel of God.” In effect the Christian Church thus supersedes or replaces the old Israel, as the (new or true) Israel of God.

Grammatical Considerations

To determine whether a supersessionist reading is valid, depends on whether or not the two addressees in Galatians 6:16 are identical. While not being conclusive, a linguistic inquiry favors a non-supersessionist reading. This can be seen in three areas: (1) the usage of καὶ, (2) the bestowal-order, peace followed by mercy, and (3) the double ἐπί⁵ followed by an accusative.

First, for a supersessionist reading, where the addressees are identical, the last καὶ needs to function as an apposition. However, an appositional καὶ is rare in the New Testament and possibly even absent from the Pauline corpus.⁶

4 The word καὶ is the most common Greek word and typically means “and,” although it can also mean numerous other things, such as: or, and then, and so, and yet, and in spite of that, nevertheless, and even. William Arndt and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), 494-96.

5 The word ἐπί is a preposition typically meaning “upon” when followed by an accusative. C.f. Ibid., 363-67

6 Johnson, *Paul and “The Israel of God”*: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study, 48; Michael Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a*

<i>1 group, 2 bestowals</i>	<i>2 groups, 2 bestowals</i>	<i>2 groups, each 1 bestowal</i>
peace be upon them, (καὶ) and mercy, (καὶ) that is upon the Israel of God.	peace be upon them, (καὶ) and also mercy, (καὶ) and also upon the Israel of God.	peace be upon them, (καὶ) and mercy (καὶ) even upon the Israel of God.

Table 2

Galatians 1 ³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins in order to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of God and our Father; ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.ⁱ

1QHodayot 5 ³³ ...Only by your goodness ³⁴ will a man be made righteous and by {your} plentiful compa{ssion(s)} --} in the way you cause him to be in splendour, and you will cause him to reign with many delights with peace ³⁵ [for]ever and [in] length of days...

³ χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρός καὶ κυρίου ὑμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ⁴ τοῦ δόντος ἐαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν ὅπως ἔξεληται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰώνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρός ὑμῶν, ⁵ φῶν δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν.

רַק בְּטוֹבֵךְ יִצְדָּק אִישׁ וּבָרְבָּן ...³³
מִיךְ -- [בְּהֶדְרֵךְ תִּפְאַרְנוּ וְתִשְׂלִיכְנָהוּ]
בְּרַב עֲדָנִים עַם שָׁלוֹם עֲולָם וְאוֹרֵךְ³⁵ ...
ימִסְ ...ⁱⁱ

ⁱ The Revised Standard Version

ⁱⁱ Martin G. Abegg, Jr., *Qumran Sectarian Manuscripts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003)

Table 3

Second, the peculiar order of peace and mercy is unique in the New Testament. The reverse order of mercy and peace is the common order, which suggests an idea of cause and effect, i.e. mercy causes peace. Two examples that illustrate causation follow. (See Table 3.) In Galatians 1:3-5, Christ’s atonement, allowed for the bestowal of grace upon the Galatian believers, resulting in peace with God. Further, in 1 QHodayyot 5:33-35, God’s compassions are clearly explicated as the cause of everlasting peace. A causal connection between grace and peace thus seems reasonable. By implication, the reversal of this order suggests that each benediction refers to a different group. Why otherwise would those already having received peace need mercy?

Third, New Testament statistics of the double ἐπὶ with a direct object refer nine out of ten times to non-identical addressees.⁷ An example in Acts 5:11 follows: “And great fear came *upon* the whole Church” (ἐφ’ ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν) “and *upon* all who heard of these things” (καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς ἀκούοντας ταῦτα). The Church and those hearing these things may be overlapping groups, but they are certainly not identical. Thus also in regard of the double occurrence of ἐπὶ followed by a direct object, it is unlikely that a supersessionist reading exists in Galatians 6:16. Hence, in retrospect, the previous grammatical considerations of the order of peace then mercy, the rare appositional meaning of καὶ, as well as the rare chance (10%) that a double ἐπὶ with direct object refers to multiple addressees, make a supersessionist reading that equates “the Israel of God” with “those walking according to this rule,” from a grammatical perspective, an improbable possibility.

Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology (Cambridge, U.K.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 199 n49.; C. J. Ellicott, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Longmans, Green, 1867), 154.

7 A comparison of the double ἐπὶ in the accusative case within the NT yields ten relevant occurrences. Only one of these ten occurrences points to an identical object in terms of meaning. (Different: Matt 21:5, Matt 27:25, Acts 2:18, Acts 5:11, Acts 7:10 (only in a variant reading), Acts 11:15, Heb 8:8, Rev 8:10, Rev 19:16, Rev 20:4; identical: Rev 14:6)

The Term Israel

It appears that the term Israel always points to ethnic Israel in Second Temple Jewish literature.⁸ Only Philo uses the term ambiguously.⁹ In other words, Philo neither affirms nor denies that Israel could point to those outside the boundaries of ethnic “Israel.” In the *Community Rule* and *Warscroll*, which are eschatological documents from Qumran, the community is depicted as a sort of a true Israel within the larger ethnic Israel.¹⁰ Hence, also there the term Israel still only points to ethnic Jews. A similar case can be made for Romans 9:6b, which literally translates as, “for not all, who [are] from Israel, these ones [are] Israel.” (*οὐ γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἐξ Ἰσραὴλ, οὐδὲ τοι Ισραὴλ*). While a significant number of commentators maintain that here the subset of Israel points to the Church¹¹, this is hardly likely in light of the context. The preceding context speaks of the Israelite Jesus-believing remnant (Rom 9:1-5). The succeeding context speaks of the genealogical line of the patriarchs (Rom 9:7-13). While the ideas, “election” and “promise,” feature prominently in verses 7-13, commentators as Dunn, neglect to point out that each descendent there refers to a physical descendant.¹² In this regard Romans 9:6-13 is unlike Romans 4:16, where Abraham’s descendants are numbered by

8 Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), 359-360, 372.; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (London: Cambridge U.P., 1969), 218-20.

9 Sigurd Grindheim, *The Crux of Election: Paul’s Critique of the Jewish Confidence in the Election of Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 69-73. For a list of various opinions on whether Philo’s Israel included Gentiles, see *Ibid.*, 71n138

10 Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, “Israel and the Community in Paul (Rom 9-11) and the Rule Texts from Qumran,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Pauline Literature*, ed. Jean-Sébastien Rey (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014), 286-87.; David Flusser, *Judaism of the Second Temple Period* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge; Jerusalem: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2007), 16.

11 E.g. John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 65.; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 239.; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans, Vol. 2* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 539.

12 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 509-10.

those believing like him.¹³ Thus, Romans 4:16 speaks about the ethnic-universalism of the Body of Christ. Romans 9:6, however, speaks just like Qumran about a faithful ethnic remnant, i.e. Israel within Israel. Finally, while much more could be said about the term Israel, we will limit ourselves to only one more observation, namely its reception-history. The term Israel as applied to the Church, only emerges in 160 CE, in Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue with Trypho*.¹⁴ Thus for more than a century, patristic writers refrained from using (the) Israel (of God) in a supersessionist fashion, evidently because Israel was not understood to be superseded by the Church. It follows from this survey that there exists much reason to consider the term Israel in Paul to refer only to ethnic Israel.

Context

From the perspective of the broader context, some scholars have suggested that Paul’s attitude towards Jews in Galatians exhibits a so-called disinheritance theory, where Jewish ethnic titles are now applied to Christians.¹⁵ Others classify Galatians as a letter that is primarily concerned with eradicating the dividing distinctions.¹⁶ “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus There is neither Jew nor Greek ...” (πάντες γὰρ νιοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὐκ ἔνι Ιουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἐλλην ...) (Gal 3:26, 28). While it is true that there is a transposition of Israelite or Jewish ethnic terms to Christians, this does not carry through to the term “Israel” or have supersessionist consequences.¹⁷ Further, while there certainly is unity and equality before

13 “It depends on faith ...” (Διὰ τοῦτο ἐκ πίστεως ...)

14 Trypho asks “are you Israel?” (Ὑμεῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἐστε), to which Justin Martyr eventually responds “we, who have been hewn out from the belly of Christ, are the true Israelite race.” (ἡμεῖς ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ λατομηθέντες Ἰσραηλιτικὸν τὸ ἀληθινόν ἔσμεν γένος) (Just., D. 123:7, 135:3).

15 Jürgen Roloff, *Die Kirche Im Neuen Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 126.

16 E.g. Aaron Sherwood, *Paul and the Restoration of Humanity in Light of Ancient Jewish Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 227-29.; Christopher Cowan, “Context is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16,” *SBJT* 14, no. 3 (2010), 78-85.

17 For New Testament and other texts, where ethnic Israelite terms became redefined,

God in Christ Jesus, closer scrutiny shows also another reality in which ethnic distinction is still important in past and present. For example, it is clear that for Paul it is still relevant whether someone was male, female, slave or free, because he gave specific instructions to such groups. The same would then also count for Jew and Gentile. The latter can, for example, be seen in Romans 11, where there exists a clear distinction between Jews and Gentiles.¹⁸ Another example is the collection that is mentioned in Galatians and Romans (Gal 2:10, Rom 15:26-27). Especially in Romans, the rationale for giving “material blessings” by Gentile believers to Jewish believers is clearly an ethnic-laden statement. Even within Galatians there are numerous ways in which Paul differentiates between Jews and Gentiles.¹⁹ Consider for example Paul’s esteem for the Jerusalem pillars, the support for the poor (Jewish believers) in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9-10), or the Jewishness of God’s Son “born under the law” ($\gamma\epsilon\nu\mu\epsilon\nu\sigma\upsilon\pi\circ\upsilon\mu\sigma\sigma\circ\upsilon$). Thus, while the context of the Pauline corpus, in general, and of Galatians, in particular, speaks of soteriological unity and equality in Christ, these very contexts also continue to uphold a diversity of Jew and Gentile within this unity. These contextual observations will need to be taken into consideration when evaluating Galatians 6:16. The claim that only ideas of unity exist in Galatians and that hence Galatians 6:16 only points to one group of people, cannot be maintained.²⁰ Thus, the Galatian context cannot rule either for or against a supersessionist reading.

Eschatology

Another concern is the future. While, the Galatian Epistle may not strike the reader as eschatological, closer scrutiny shows that this is exactly

sometimes even referring to Gentiles, see Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church*, 31-32. However, the special title “Israel” was not applied to the Church until Justin Martyr’s dialogue with Trypho. See n14.

18 C.f. Romans 11:5, 13-14, 24-25, 29, 31-32

19 Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology*, 105; Donald W. B. Robinson, “The Distinction between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians,” *ABR* 13 (1965), 41-45.

20 Cowan, *Context is Everything: ‘The Israel of God’ in Galatians 6:16*, 78-85

what Galatians 6:16 seems to express. The future tense, “will walk” (*στοιχήσουσιν*), in Galatians 6:16, is directed towards the Galatian audience. These Galatians who are in Christ (Gal 3:26-29) and already part of the new creation (Gal 6:15, 2:20, c.f. Rom 6:5-11, 2 Cor 5:17), are urged, or even threatened²¹, to walk according to the rule of this new creation (Gal 6:16a). Having met this condition (“those who will walk according to this rule”), they will in the future receive peace (“peace be upon them”). Paul’s intent here is that the Galatians participate in this new creation. Considering the conditional nature of Galatians 6:16 and its future tense, it follows that this peace has not yet been realized in the Galatians’ lives, but points to a future expectation. A further consideration is the significant Isaianic backdrop to Galatians. The Isaianic peace refers to eschatological peace that comes as a result of the LORD’s salvation.²² Thus, the significant Isaianic backdrop in Galatians as well as the use of the future tense, suggest that the Galatian Benediction discusses final eschatology.

Conclusion

The previous discussions focused on linguistic considerations, the use of the term Israel in Second Temple Jewish literature and Paul, the context of Galatians 6:16, and the question of eschatology. First, linguistic considerations rendered the equation of the Church with the Israel of God unlikely. Second, the term Israel appeared nowhere in Second Temple Judaism to refer to anything but Israel. Only Philo’s use of the term is dubious and can therefore not be determined either way. Similarly, in the New Testament, including the Pauline corpus, the term Israel only refers to ethnic Israel. It is likely that this also counts for the passage in question. Further, in patristic texts, the Israel of God does not refer to the Church,

21 Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 321.

22 Matthew S. Harmon, *She must and Shall Go Free Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians* (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 55.

Isaiah 54 ¹⁰ [Nor] will the mountains be removed and neither will your hills be shifted, so neither, from me to you, will mercy fail, nor will the covenant of your peace be removed, but my steadfast love shall certainly not depart from you, for the Lord, who is merciful, has spoken to you.

¹⁰ τὰ ὅρη μεταστήσεσθαι οὐδὲ οἱ βουνοί σου μετακινηθήσονται, οὔτως οὐδὲ τὸ παρ̄ ἐμοῦ σοι ἔλεος ἐκλείψῃ οὐδὲ ἡ διαθήκη τῆς εἰρήνης σου οὐ μὴ μεταστῇ, εἴτεν γὰρ κύριος Ἰακώβος σοι.

Table 4

but until one century after the letter to the Galatians was written. Third, in terms of context, it appears that next to the theme of soteriological unity, there also exist texts that distinguish between Jews and Gentiles, even when both belong to the Jesus movement. Fourth, the usage of the term peace and the use of the future tense, mark the verse of Galatians 6:16 as a present condition with a future eschatological fulfilment. These observations show that a supersessionist reading of Galatians 6:16 should be abandoned. As a result, the last clause speaks about an eschatological mercy upon the Israel of God. While by now this is hopefully a fairly well established point, a more tentative enquiry about the sources underlying this passage may further illuminate Paul’s intent for his Galatian audience.

THE JEWISH EXEGETICAL TRAJECTORY OF GALATIANS 6:16

Comparative texts

The next section of this study focuses on the text or tradition that might have undergirded the Galatian Benediction, which is also known as tradition-history or *Traditionsgeschichte*. This type of inquiry runs the

risk of minimizing an author’s creativity, in this case Paul’s. On the other hand, uncovering anything of an author’s source, may help cast further light on this verse.

Limited space will not permit consideration of the full scale of sources that could have served as backdrop to the Galatian Benediction. At any rate, most seemingly comparable texts can be dismissed based on the fact that they do not share the peculiar feature of peace being followed by mercy. This leaves us with only three traditions that do share the peculiar order of peace followed by mercy in common with the Galatian Benediction, namely, LXX.Isaiah 54:10, 1 Enoch 1:8, and the last Benediction of the Babylonian Amidah. As backdrop to the Galatian Benediction, the Amidah has often been proposed, Isaiah has been proposed by Gregory Beale²³, and 1 Enoch by Michael Bachmann.²⁴

Isaiah

Gregory Beale suggested that LXX.Isaiah 54:10 undergirds the Galatian Benediction. (See Table 4.) It is the only passage in the Septuagint that contains the peculiar order of peace followed by mercy. Further, the precious stones in Isaiah 54:11-12 underlie Revelation 21:18-21, which describes the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 in turn discusses the new creation. Revelation’s employment of Isaiah 54 allows Beale to associate the new creation with Isaiah. This constitutes a further parallel with the Galatian Benediction, since the new creation is mentioned in Galatians 6:15. In addition, using Isaiah in the Galatian Benediction coincides with several studies that confirm the prominent background of Isaiah for Galatians.²⁵ Thus, because of the shared word-order, eschatological setting, possible association with the new creation, Isaiah 54:10 forms a good candidate as inspiration for Paul’s passage.

23 Beale, *Peace and Mercy upon the Israel of God: The Old Testament Background of Galatians 6*, 16b, 204-223

24 Bachmann, *Anti-Judaism in Galatians?: Exegetical Studies on a Polemical Letter and on Paul’s Theology*.

25 E.g. Harmon, *She must and Shall Go Free Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians*

1 Enoch

Another candidate as backdrop to Galatians 6:16 was proposed by Michael Bachmann, namely 1 Enoch 1:8. While, Bachmann’s discussion is worthy of consideration elsewhere, this study wishes to leave Bachmann’s discussion aside in order to focus on an alternative comparison between 1 Enoch 1:8 and the Galatian Benediction. Just as Isaiah, 1 Enoch 1:8, shares the order of “peace” followed by “mercy.” Its context also discusses an eschatological setting as well as the idea of new creation.

When comparing Galatians 6:16 with the first four clauses of 1 Enoch 1:8—after having taken some text critical observations into account—some remarkable parallels become visible. (See Table 5.) First, both the bestowal of peace and the bestowal of mercy occur with the preposition ἐπὶ, followed by a direct object. Observe 1 Enoch 1:8a and 8c: “(a) And upon (ἐπὶ) the righteous (accusative) He will make peace, (c) And upon (ἐπὶ) them (accusative) will be mercy.” Second, if the them of 8c is read as referring to the elect, then the bestowal of mercy is upon Israel, just as in Galatians. Last, if 8d is again understood as referring to the elect then we have a very close resemblance with the unique expression, the Israel of God, namely: “And the elect will all belong to God.” These striking parallels lead to the conclusion that 1 Enoch parallels the Galatian Benediction more closely than Isaiah 54—though it would be safer to speak of an Enoch-like tradition, rather than an explicit usage of 1 Enoch *per se*.

While it has now been determined that 1 Enoch 1:8a-d most closely resembles the Galatian Benediction, it would be difficult to suppose that the Galatians would have understood an Enochic reference. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that 1 Enoch 1:8 seems to be a reworking of Isaiah 54:10. The Enochic verse can in a sense be considered as a commentary on Isaiah. Hence, considering the three areas, namely: (1) the clear Isaianic backdrop to Galatians, (2) the much closer resemblance of 1 Enoch 1:8 to the Galatian Benediction, as well as (3) the clear reliance

of 1 Enoch 1:8 on Isaiah 54:10, this study proposes that underlying the Galatian Benediction lies a tradition like 1 Enoch 1:8. By utilizing this Enoch-like tradition, Paul’s audience would still have been able to suppose the Isaianic backdrop, while Paul, using the Enoch-like tradition was able to more clearly speak of two groups, namely: those who walk according to this rule, i.e. the Church, as well as the Israel of God, i.e. eschatological ethnic Israel.

Babylonian Amidah

One final tradition not yet considered is the last benediction of the Babylonian Amidah, i.e. Birkat-haShalom. (See Table 6.) This tradition probably did not exist in Paul’s time. An earlier version of this benediction can be found in the Palestinian Amidah, which is dissimilar enough to no longer be a serious candidate as backdrop to the Galatian Benediction. However, the later Babylonian Amidah, does show how a benediction that first mentions peace and then mercy, even on two groups, was still in use after the formulation of the Galatian Benediction. It thus supports a contemporary and wider Jewish usage of this formula.

Trajectory

These observations allow the postulation of the trajectory in a chronological perspective.²⁶ First, the text of Isaiah gave rise to a reworking in 1 Enoch 1:8. While it is hard to tell, which came first, the Septuagint or 1 Enoch, it is clear that the text in the Septuagint is much shorter. 1 Enoch could have elaborated this Septuagint text. A tradition like 1 Enoch 1 could certainly have been known by Paul, as is evident from Jude citing 1

26 This does not mean that all traditions are chronologically related to one another. The case made in this study was that Paul relies on an Enoch-like tradition. The Amidah, however, most likely did not rely on Galatians. Neither were the rabbis very fond of Enochic material. The Amidah at this stage of inquiry simply seems to point to a wider Jewish usage of the “peace followed by mercy” benediction.

1 Enoch 1:8

- | | |
|---|---|
| (a) And upon the righteous He will make peace, | (a) καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς δικαίους ⁱ τὴν εἰρήνην ποιήσει, |
| (b) And upon the elect there will be protection, | (b) καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς ἔσται συντήρησις [καὶ εἰρήνη], ⁱⁱ |
| (c) And upon them will be mercy | (c) καὶ ἐπ’ αὐτοὺς γενήσεται ἔλεος, |
| (d) And they will all belong to God, ⁱⁱⁱ | (d) καὶ ἔσσονται πάντες τοῦ θεοῦ, ^{iv} |

ⁱ The Ethiopic has either “and upon all the righteous” or “but to all the righteous” (*walā ’la šādeqān kwellomu/lašādeqān*). George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36, 81-108* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 143. In light of formulaic coherence with the following lines the former is preferred, *ወላል፡ ዳድ፡ ቅን፡ ከተማው*. Hence, the Greek μετὰ τῶν δικαίων can alternatively and preferentially be rendered ἐπὶ τοὺς δικαίους.

ⁱⁱ Both Black and Nickelsburg consider the καὶ εἰρήνη an addition, which according to Black made by the translator of the Greek. Matthew Black, James C. VanderKam, and O. Neugebauer, *The Book of Enoch: A New English Edition* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 108.; Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1-36, 81-108*, 143.

ⁱⁱⁱ This translation is based on the Greek reconstruction, which is the result of evaluating Ethiopic and Greek text-critical data. See n.i and n.ii, above.

^{iv} The Greek text, in as far as it has not been changed, comes from Black’s edition, which is mainly based on *Codex Panopolitanus, Gizeh Papyrus*, dating to the sixth century C.E. Matthew Black and Albert-Marie Denis, *Apocalypse Henochi Graece* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 7, 19.

Table 5

Grant peace, welfare, blessing, grace,
lovingkindness and mercy to us and to
all Israel your people

שים שלום טובה וברכה חן וחסד וرحמים
עלינו ועל כל ישראל עמך

Table 6

Enoch.²⁷ Further, even post-70 CE the formula of peace being followed by mercy reappears in the Amidah, thereby suggesting it could very well have been part of Paul’s milieu.

Isaiah

(before the second century BCE)

LXX, Isaiah and 1 Enoch

(approximately second century BCE)

Galatians

(approximately mid first century CE)

Babylonian Amidah

(after 70 CE)

Afterthought

Those who do not confirm to the consensus view that the Galatian Benediction refers only to one group of people that is the Galatian churches, or by implication the Christian Church, are sometimes accused of relying on Romans 9-11.²⁸ This accusation does not apply to this study.

In the Babylonian Amidah, “upon us and upon all Israel” discusses two groups, namely “us” and wider Israel. While some argue that the righteous and elect are the same in 1 Enoch, they could also be considered distinct, especially from Paul’s perspective, as recipient of this tradition (or the like). Further, the second benediction in 1 Enoch speaks (at least) about ethnic Israel. Similarly, in the Amidah this is explicitly stated in “upon all Israel.” Further, the text in Revelation 21, alongside a comparable text about the New Jerusalem in Tobit 13, discusses Gentiles visiting Jerusalem. These texts portray distinct identities of Gentiles and Jews in the New Jerusalem. Considering that these texts employed Isaiah

27 Jude 14-15 cites 1 Enoch 1:9.

28 Sherwood, *Paul and the Restoration of Humanity in Light of Ancient Jewish Traditions*, 229

54 for their statements, we can consider these texts in some sense to be instructive for the Galatian Benediction in terms of Jews and Gentiles.²⁹ The exegetical trajectory thus supports the idea that Jews and Gentiles have a distinct eschatological role, which reappears in the eschatologically oriented Galatian Benediction.

Thus the Galatian Benediction argues against supersessionism in its own right. It does not need to rely on Romans 9-11. However, this does not preclude appealing nevertheless to Romans 11:25-32 as an afterthought. This text in Romans could possibly represent a teaching that was in one way or the other already familiar in Galatia.³⁰ A justification for appealing to this text is found in that the idea of mercy plays an important role in the salvation of Israel at the end of times.³¹

25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, 26 and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; 27 “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” 28 As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. 30 Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.³²

29 Both Galatians and Revelation speak of the new creation (Gal 6:15-16, Rev 21). A distinction between Jew and Gentile in the new creation, thus also reflects back on the Galatian Benediction.

30 One may think of a teaching that was common knowledge, taught by Paul, or expounded by Paul’s letter carrier.

31 It should be noted that the argument here only speaks of Romans 11 as afterthought. Again the exegetical trajectory sufficiently indicates that the last recipient in the Galatian benediction refers to ethnic Israel. Thus Sherwood’s statement that “[v]irtually all those who resist this interpretation do so because they feel verse 16 must be interpreted in terms of Paul’s later depiction(s) of Israel in Romans 9-11”, does not apply here. Ibid., 228

32 The Revised Standard Version

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study consisted of two sections. The first section discussed the context of the Pauline corpus and in particular the Galatian epistle that an *a priori* dismissal of ethnic diversity in this letter cannot be sustained. Further, grammatical considerations and a lexical survey established that in terms of “the Israel of God” there is hardly, if at all, room for a supersessionist understanding. Contrary to the consensus view, “the Israel of God” should be understood as only referring to ethnic Israel.

The second part of this study was to postulate the most likely trajectory behind Paul’s statement. On the one hand, this was a heuristic exercise, whose results cannot be absolutely verified. Thus, one needs to be cautioned that these results are tentative. However, the results of this inquiry, in their own right, more or less reaffirmed the findings of the grammatical, lexical, and contextual inquiries.

The proposed exegetical trajectory suggests that some kind of a relationship exists between LXX.Isaiah 54, 1 Enoch 1, the Galatian Benediction, and possibly the Babylonian Amidah. The closest of these texts to the Galatian Benediction is 1 Enoch 1:8a-d, which reaffirms a reading of the righteous receiving peace and the elect receiving mercy. It even possibly offers a close parallel to the *hapax legomenon* “the Israel of God.” Close connections between Isaiah 54 and 1 Enoch 1 suggest that Paul could have used this tradition (or the like) as “commentary” to Isaiah. Further, the suggestion was offered that Romans 11:25-32, may after all be considered as an afterthought, resembling a teaching explaining Galatians 6:16.

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Assessing Socio-Political Arguments used to Support Theological Supersessionism

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KEYWORDS:

| Church | Israel | Palestinian | Supersessionism |
| Zionism | Anti-Semitism |

ABSTRACT:

The question of whether Israel has been replaced by the Church in the plan of God has long been debated by biblical scholars. The contemporary debate has focused largely on hermeneutical differences and has given little attention to the way contemporary socio-political situations are being utilised to foster support for a supersessionist theology. This paper will examine the influence of this growing phenomenon within evangelicalism. Specifically, this paper will look at the accusations levied against modern Israel such as racism and apartheid in order to show the way evangelical supersessionists are promoting these accusations in their publications. These claims will be assessed to ascertain their accuracy and relevancy to the issue of supersessionism. This paper concludes that supersessionists cannot resort to exploiting the contemporary political situation in order to make their theological position more plausible and deny Israel's role in the outworking of the Kingdom program.

INTRODUCTION

Questions surrounding the future of Israel and the relevance of the land existed long before the Modern State was formed in 1948. In fact, this theological debate has a history stretching back almost as far as the Church itself. Any Christian cognisant with the intricacies of eschatology will almost certainly be aware of the controversy. Although this debate is multifaceted, at the centre of the controversy lies one fundamental question: is there any future purpose for the nation of Israel, or has Israel been superseded in the plan of God by the Church? The traditional response of the Church to this question has been that of supersessionism. Simply put, this is the view that “the Church completely and permanently replaced ethnic Israel in the working out of God’s plan and as recipient of the OT promises to Israel” (Diprose 2000:2). This being the case, Jerusalem and the land of Israel itself are rendered virtually irrelevant. The status of Israel as an elect nation no longer serves any practical or theological purpose except to wander the earth as a visible sign of divine judgment. This viewpoint, given impetus by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Bar-Kochba rebellion, quickly became the dominant viewpoint in the Post-Apostolic Church. As the influence of supersessionism grew, it brought with it a shameful legacy of Christian anti-Semitism that persisted, or some would say culminated, in the terrible events of the twentieth century. It has been said that one can trace the abuses of anti-Semitism from Augustine to Auschwitz. Indeed, as Prager and Telushkin note, “Christianity did not create the Holocaust...but it made it possible. Without Christian anti-Semitism, the Holocaust would have been inconceivable” (2003:87). They continue that for, “nearly two thousand years...the Christian world dehumanized the Jew, ultimately helping lay the groundwork for the Holocaust” (2003:92). This in no way implies that all who hold to supersessionism are somehow anti-Semitic, far from it. Yet, at the same time, as Vlach concludes, “it is undeniable that anti-

Jewish bias has often gone hand in hand with the supersessionist view" (Vlach 2010:5).

Two twentieth century events have required the Church to confront this legacy of supersessionism and propelled the questions concerning Israel back onto centre stage. The tragic events of the Holocaust led to a period of soul searching for the Christian church. Post-Holocaust theology has led many theologians to "criticize the church's supersessionist ideology towards the Jews and Judaism" (Williamson 1993:7). The establishment of the modern state of Israel on May 14th 1948 quite literally forced the issue upon even those who were content to ignore it. Answers to the questions concerning Israel could no longer be merely theoretical, now they were political, practical and theological. These circumstances meant that the church had to "revisit the teaching of supersessionism after nearly two thousand years" (Soulé 1996:10). This led many segments of the church to reject the teaching of supersessionism and re-examine the fidelity of God's covenantal promises to the Jewish people. However, this kind of dramatic revision was not without its problems. The rejection of supersessionism sent reverberations throughout the entire spectrum of Christian theology. The post-establishment history of the state of Israel and the ensuing geo-political situation have exacerbated these efforts. The Arab-Israeli conflict is surely one of the most intractable disputes in recent history. No other conflict has stirred "the conscience of humanity" as the "problem of Israel in its land," observed former Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Yaakov Herzog (1975: 127). This attitude is also found within the Church: "as soon as the Land of Israel is mentioned an emotive force is released. There are few people, especially in the Christian church who hold a neutral view" (Wright 1994: 9). Terms such as "Zionism" and "Palestinian" "have become highly emotive epithets for fiercely opposing causes" (Horner 2007:2). The phenomenon of modern Israel has facilitated the presence of a robust and vigorous strand of Christian Zionism within evangelicalism. This in turn has elicited the birth of a reactionary counter movement which is decisively anti-Zionist. This movement holds to the

antithetical Palestinian narrative and fuses it together with traditional supersessionist doctrines synthesising a novel form of supersessionism.

This paper will assess some of the views being promoted by the new supersessionism that are overtly anti-Israel, and comment on the implications for the church. Due to the presence of a here-and-now political theology, conducive to an anti-Zionist, hard left ideology, the new supersessionism dismisses the eschatological content of the Bible, particularly how it relates to the future of Israel and the Jews as God's people.

SUPERSESSIONISM AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Before looking at the specific beliefs of this new strand of supersessionism we need a clear grasp of the implications as they relate to eschatology. Supersessionism in its broadest sense is the term given to the view that the Church has replaced Israel in the future plan of God. In this view the covenantal promises regarding Israel's future have now been transferred to the Church, which has become the new 'spiritual Israel'. This view, dominant for the majority of Church history, usually espouses an "Augustinian, homogenous eschatology that absorbs and supplants all former Jewish distinctions" (Horner 2007:2). Sometimes known as 'replacement theology' or, more recently, 'fulfilment theology', advocates of this view would all agree that the church has superseded Israel, however this does not mean they are monolithic in their understanding. R. Kendall Soulen has identified 3 types of supersessionism: Punitive supersessionism, which focuses on Israel's wickedness and disobedience as the primary cause for its rejection; Economic supersessionism, which is the view that "carnal Israel's history is providentially ordered from the outset to be taken up into the spiritual church" (Soulen 1996:181); and structural supersessionism. This third form is different in that it is not so much a doctrinal position like the first two, but it is a hermeneutical

position. This view concerns the deeply ingrained bias about how the Scriptures are understood. Soulen argues that the church's standard canonical narrative, bequeathed to us as early as Irenaeus, hinges on four key events; creation, fall, redemption and consummation. What this means is that we start in Genesis 1, go to Genesis 3, and then leap all the way over to the Gospels. The narrative of Israel, and God's revelation of himself to them, have been totally eliminated from the church's understanding of the Bible. The history of Israel has "become largely indecisive for the Christian conception of God" (Soulen 1996:32). A fourth variation has recently been proposed by Barry Horner; territorial supersessionism. This view focuses on the land of Israel and is summed up by proponent Gary Burge, who claims, "in a word, Jesus spiritualises the land" (Burge 2010:56). Burge argues for a landless and nationless theology, the nation of Israel is lost through spiritual absorption into the church, and the Old Testament Promised Land is lost by means of spiritual expansion that encompasses the world as God's superseding territory (Horner 2010:28).

Taking the conclusions of these various forms of supersessionism together, it is easy to understand why any "question of a future for Israel is traditionally met with automatic rejection if not incomprehension" (Blaising 2008:104). The implications of this for eschatology, particularly as it relates to the future of Israel, are huge. This is perhaps most easily illustrated by looking at the interpretation of a verse that has long been a stronghold for non-supersessionist belief in a future restoration of Israel. In Acts 1:6-8 we have the disciples' question to Jesus enquiring about the restoration of Kingdom to Israel. Clearly the disciples still held nationalistic hopes concerning the Kingdom, even after 40 days of specific instruction by the resurrected Jesus of the "things concerning the Kingdom of God"(Acts 1:3). Non-supersessionists have generally argued that although Jesus does refuse to address the timing of the Kingdom, he doesn't take issue with the underlying premise of their question. On the other hand, supersessionists see in this episode a demonstration of the disciples' blindness. Burge says that Jesus acknowledges their

incomprehension. Jesus, in effect says, “Yes I will restore Israel – but in a way you cannot imagine” (2010:61). At this point I would agree with Burge, I do not think the disciples would ever have been able to imagine the supersessionist teaching on Israel because it is not consistent with the clear intent of the promises they had received. In effect, Jesus would be saying, “I am the long awaited Jewish Messiah promised through the Jewish Scriptures. Now that I am here though, your purpose, election, nationhood, and covenantal promises are being rendered obsolete, or at least altered beyond recognition. In fact, the coming of the Jewish Messiah is the very event that spells the end for Israel!”

While many scholars have commented that supersessionism is no longer dominant (Vlach 2010:72) and “the legitimacy of a supersessionist reading of scripture grows ever more dim to the point of vanishing altogether” (Blaising 2008:108), many have noticed a resurgence of a particularly aggressive form of supersessionism in recent years. This new expression of supersessionism is overtly political, overtly pejorative, anti-Zionist, deeply critical of modern Israel, and often sails dangerously close to the line - if not past the line - between legitimate criticism and classical anti-Semitism. Unfortunately, when understood against the backdrop of the Church’s less than illustrious record of Jewish persecution, “this is, at best, unfortunate” (Smith 2013:5).

THE NEW SUPERSESSIONISM AND CHRISTIAN ANTI-ZIONISM.

While many of the foundational theological arguments for the new supersessionism remain the same, and have been addressed by others elsewhere, the novel elements we shall examine are the arguments that are based on quasi-political motifs and nationalistic aspirations. The roots of the new supersessionism come from a number of different sources. The ideological fountainhead of the new supersessionism is a movement that has become known as Christian Palestinianism. This movement

advocates aggressively for a pro-Palestinian narrative by using arguments derived from Palestinian political theory and liberation theology. Briefly, the Palestinian narrative focuses on the catastrophe of 1948, when Israeli troops, controlled by imperialist colonial powers, dispossessed indigenous Arabs from their ancient home land, called Palestine. This political narrative shapes the theology of Christian Palestinianism which sees Israel as a ‘racist state’ guilty of ‘apartheid’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, and ‘genocide’. As such, any Christian who broadly believes in any sort of future for Israel is uncritically lumped together under the umbrella of Christian Zionism, now guilty of holding to a “gun-slinging, Armageddon-fixated ideology” (Clark 2007:256), they are all complicit and charged with “justifying colonisation, apartheid and empire-building”¹. Generally, Christian Palestinianism targets high profile “celebrity” Zionists such as Jerry Falwell and John Hagee, and constructs a straw-man caricature of all pro-Israel evangelicals around their actions. This parody is highly inaccurate. The evangelical community today is a global amorphous body that cannot be constrained to one particular stereotype. The reasons many evangelicals support Israel are diverse and multifaceted. Admittedly, some do hold an apocalyptic eschatology that envisages Israel as a sign of the second coming. Others take a more nuanced approach, and their support comes from the belief in the fidelity of God’s covenantal promises to the nation of Israel. Still others support Israel simply because it is a fellow democracy in a region filled with autocrats who undermine freedom of religion. And many just support Israel out of compassion for the historical suffering the Jews have undergone throughout history.²

The fountain head of Christian Palestinianism is the Palestinian Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, popularly known as Sabeel. Founded by Naim Ateek in 1994, the work of Sabeel has been the major

1 Sabbah Michel, *Religious Leaders Statements on Christian Zionism*: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/religious-leaders-statement-on-christian-zionism>. Last accessed 7th October 2014.

2 Moon, Luke. *The Latest Threat to Evangelical support for Israel. The Tower Issue 16*: <http://www.thetower.org/article/the-latest-threat-to-evangelical-support-for-israel/>. Last accessed 7 October 2014.

driving force in defining and solidifying international support for Christian Palestinianism. The vision of this new movement was to set Palestinian liberation theology “in the context of other liberation theologies from around the world”³. Palestinian theology has been described as “supersessionism clothed in the robes of liberation theology” (Wilkinson 2007:61). Liberationists propose to free man from all that enslaves him socially, economically, and politically through peaceful protest or, if necessary, through revolutionary violence (Blue 1990:90). Liberation theology is “an ethical theology that grew out of a social awareness and the desire to act” (Sanders 1973:168). Finding its origins in the political ferment of Latin America, liberation theology is often referred to as “baptized Marxism”. Liberation theologians advocate a sort of revised humanism as the cure for the continued problems of injustice. An axiom of the liberation theology movement today is “Social Justice”, a practical way to right the wrongs of injustice, inequality and uphold human rights. In reality though, social justice is a politically charged term for those on the left side of the political spectrum. In Christian Palestinianism social justice becomes the hermeneutical grid through which the entire bible is read. God is seen as always taking the side of the oppressed. For progressive evangelicals in the western church, too often “social justice is the sheepskin socialism wears to make inroads into evangelicalism” (Vicari 2014:76). It is very easy to see how this pseudo-theology is being applied to the Israeli-Palestinian situation. In this situation, Israel is the oppressor, inflicting injustice and suffering upon others. Ateek gives us a clear example of this in his 2001 Easter message:

Jesus is the powerless Palestinian humiliated at the checkpoint...it seems that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. Palestinian men, women and children being crucified...The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily.⁴

3 Sabeel Newsletter Issue 1: Spring 1994.<http://www.sabeel.org/datadir/en-events/ev19/files/Issue%201.pdf> pg 5. Last accessed 6th October 2014.

4 Ateek, Naim, *Sabeel Easter Message* April 6 2001: <http://www.sabeel.org/>

There are really only two options in this reductionist narrative: One either supports the apartheid, wall-building murderous Israelis, or they support the downtrodden persecuted Palestinians. It is easy to see why Middle East historian Neil Lochery says that these recent attempts to portray Israel as the new apartheid state, "have lowered the intellectual bar even further" (2005:11).

This narrative has been gaining popularity in the evangelical church largely due to the efforts of a few high profile evangelical Anglican scholars and left-leaning progressive evangelicals. Through a co-ordinated campaign of conferences, publications, documentaries and social action, "more evidence is emerging that these anti-Israel Christians are succeeding in reaching beyond the evangelical left and influencing the mainstream, particularly the millennial generation" (Brog 2014). As David Brog warns, these young evangelicals are rebelling against the perceived political conservatism of their parents. As they seek to uphold and imitate Jesus' stand with the oppressed, they want to decide which party is being oppressed in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Brog concludes that "whoever first defines the conflict for these young evangelicals will win lifelong allies".

Anglican vicar Stephen Sizer is the most well known anti-Israel campaigner in the UK today, having published two books on the topic, many articles, as well as speaking at numerous conferences around the world. He is the former vice-chairman of Friends of Sabeel UK, and founder of the Institute for the study of Christian Zionism (ISCZ). His work is characteristic of western theologians who promote Christian Palestinianism. Unfortunately, we are exposed to the same invective anti-Israel sentiments found within the native strand. Israel is depicted as a "brutal, repressive and racist state", a "materialistic society, an apartheid state practicing repressive and dehumanising measures against the Palestinians"⁵. It is not uncommon to read accusations that

pdfs/2001%20Easter%20Message.htm. Last accessed 8th October 2014.

5 Cornell, N. and Sizer, S. *"Whose Promised Land: Israel and Biblical Prophecy Debate"*. March 1997 <http://www.sizers.org/articles/debate.html>. Last accessed 10th

Israel is engaged in “ethnic cleansing” of the Palestinians as well as comparisons of Israel to Nazi Germany, and comments that the Jews are to be “condemned for exploiting the Holocaust” (Sizer 2004:21). At a 2012 Christian conference that featured an array of speakers advocating the pro-Palestinian narrative, Israel was again lambasted for being “the only state in the world that can defy international law”⁶. Such a comment is disingenuous at best, and preposterous at worst, given the level of Christian persecution throughout the world today. The one-sided narrative continues targeting Israeli actions as the main reason there is no peace in the region. Another speaker at this conference, who is associated with Sabeel, indicated that “most Christian churches are intimidated by the Jewish Lobby”⁷. The power and controlling influence of the Jewish lobby, along with the Christian Zionist lobby, are portrayed in terms that are reminiscent of traditional anti-Semitic calumnies all too prevalent throughout the Middle East. One initiative that is bringing this narrative into the evangelical world is the Christ at the Checkpoint conferences (CATC), of which Stephen Sizer is on the organising committee. The conference, which is in its third year now, brings together a who’s who of scholars from around the globe who support the new anti-Israel narrative. The conference promotional materials feature images of the ominous Israeli Security Wall. The conference website explains that “the checkpoint and the wall became a focal point and symbol of the conflict”.⁸ This “apartheid” wall is now a worldwide symbol of Israeli oppression, calls for its removal feature heavily at these conferences, the spotlight is on the suffering caused by the existence of these checkpoints. A church in London recently erected a mock version of the wall on its premises to

October 2014.

6 MacEoin, Dennis. *The Christian Aid Conference on Peace and Justice in the Holy Land*. January 8th 2013. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3529/christian-aid-conference-holy-land>. Last accessed 1st October 2014.

7 MacEoin, Dennis. *The Christian Aid Conference on Peace and Justice in the Holy Land*. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3529/christian-aid-conference-holy-land>. Last accessed 1st October 2014.

8 <http://www.bethbc.org/get-involved/visit-us/christ-at-the-checkpoint-conference>. Last accessed 13th October 2014.

show solidarity with those suffering this injustice, while disregarding any attempt to present a counter-narrative that might provide a fuller picture of reality.

In what has been dubbed an “unprecedented advisory”, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a warning for Christians to steer clear of the CATC conference. The official announcement stated that; “the attempt to use religious motifs in order to mobilize political propaganda and agitate the feelings of the faithful through the manipulation of religion and politics is an unacceptable and shameful act”. Supporters of the conference have been quick to respond claiming “Israeli bureaucrats” simply want to silence the voice of these people and keep evangelicals from hearing things that would make them question the standard Israeli narrative.⁹ However, is there not at least partial justification for their concern, considering that the most recent conference opened by pledging allegiance to PA leader Mahmoud Abbas (whose doctoral dissertation was entitled “The Connection between the Nazis and the leaders of the Zionist Movement”¹⁰), coupled with the overwhelming anti-Israel narrative being presented, as well as the religiously fueled imagery depicting Christ suffering at the checkpoints under the heavy-handed, gun toting, colonizing Jews? Especially considering historian Paul Johnson’s remark that one of the principal lessons of Jewish history has been that repeated verbal slanders are sooner or later followed by violent physical deeds (Johnson 2001:579).

These three strands; supersessionism, liberation theology, and an aggressive anti-Israel narrative have blended together into what is being labelled the new supersessionism. With such an overbearing political narrative informing their theology, can we really expect the biblical

9 Morgan, Timothy C. *Evangelical's Defend Christ at the Checkpoint from Israeli Critics*. Christianity Today March 2014. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/march/israel-blasts-evangelical-bethlehem-christ-at-checkpoint.html>. Last accessed 13th October 2014.

10 Williams Christine. *New Anti-Semitism tailored to Evangelicals*. Jewish Press March 25th 2014. <http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/new-anti-semitism-tailored-for-evangelicals/2014/03/25/2/?print>. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

promises regarding the election of Israel and their national future to be taken at face value? With Israel being portrayed in such negative terms, the theological deck has already been stacked. Any Christian seeking to understand this issue already knows that, based on their Christian principles, they cannot support racism or injustice of any sort, and thus, any positive statements or future promises they discover in the biblical text cannot be speaking about the situation today and must be explained some other way. Then, in steps the solution – the hermeneutics of supersessionism.

RESPONDING TO THE NEW SUPERSESSIONISM

At this point we need to clarify what is not being suggested here. We are not denying, that as with all secular nations, Israel has many black spots in its history. As a nation, they deal with many of the same problems that other nations face around the world and sometimes they make mistakes in dealing with these situations. We are not suggesting that everyone should necessarily hold a Christian Zionist position, or side with the Religious Right over against the Religious Left. We are not denying that there are unbelievable pressures placed upon those in the Christian Palestinian community and they have many legitimate complaints that need to be heard. What is being suggested is that the narrative of the movement known as Christian Palestinianism is offering a skewed perspective that is not conducive to formulating a comprehensive biblical theology of Israel and the Jewish people. In the volatile and emotional atmosphere that surrounds these discussions, both in secular and religious settings, agreement is found with the statement of Dr. Glaser that, “the only place we will find answers to the profound questions that will ultimately shape how we view the Middle East – especially the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians – is in the Bible, the Word of God” (Glaser 2014:21).

In assessing some of the specific components of the new

supersessionism, it seems at the outset that the accusation against Christian Zionists that they portray an ‘Israel-is-always-right’ attitude is merely being countered with an anti-Zionist ‘Israel-is-always-wrong’ attitude. While this is not surprising, seeing that “Palestinian nationalism...arose as a response to emergent Zionism” (Wright 1994:221), does such a reactionary movement provide a good foundation for theology? Another factor concerning evangelical support is raised by Mark Tooley, president of the Institute for Religion and Democracy: “the new mythology that the evangelical left hopes to perpetuate about the Middle East is just as loaded as the politically charged theology that all pro-Israel evangelicals are alleged to have”.¹¹ In short, the claim from anti-Zionists that Christian Zionism is an exclusive theology driven by a political agenda also applies equally well to their own theology.

Another very troubling aspect of the new supersessionism is that most of these Christian supporters of the Palestinian cause do not seem to take into account that the overwhelming majority of Palestinians are Islamic. Islamic anti-Semitism is among the most egregious and prevalent in the world today. This Islamic influence is clearly visible in Christian Palestinianism. It seems, both have found comrades around common enemies: Zionism and Israel. Thus, “the replacement theology of Palestinian Christians, as it is spread in the Land, now finds a common language with a Muslim replacement theology (Nerel 2005:217). The verbal mantras of pro-Palestinian Christians such as ‘occupation’, Zionist entity’ and ‘Nazi’ are common place in the more radical lexis of vocabulary found in segments of the anti-Semitic Arab media (Lochery 2004:3). It is no surprise that Stephen Sizer’s articles attacking Israel and Zionism have been published in the Al-Aqsa Journal, and his campaign involvement includes such groups as the Islamic Human Rights Commission, Crescent International and the Muslim Association of Great Britain (Wilkinson 2007:49). Most recently, Sizer spoke at the New Horizon Conference

¹¹ Tooley Mark. *Evangelical Left Targets Israel*. The Institute on Religion & Democracy blog. April 5th 2010. <http://juicyecumenism.com/2010/04/05/evangelical-left-targets-israel/> Last accessed 13th October 2014

in Iran. He was to address the topic of “Christian Jihad vs Christian Zionism”, as well as speaking about the influence of the Zionist lobby in England. The conference was clearly an anti-Semitic conference which according to Iranian state-run Press TV intended “to unveil the secrets behind the dominance of the Zionist lobby on the West”.¹² The conference featured an array of holocaust deniers and conspiracy theorists. The presence of a leading evangelical scholar at this conference, who has claimed that anti-Semitism must be “repudiated unequivocally” (Sizer 2007:15) is illustrative of the blurred lines appearing within the Christian pro-Palestinian perspective. Even the avidly pro-Palestinian academic Edward Said has acknowledged that “the whole of Palestinian nationalism was based on driving all Israelis out”¹³. Such a statement should cause consternation for those supporting a theology that is infused with Palestinian nationalism.

This does raise another issue with advocates of the new supersessionism who would claim they are anti-Zionist but not anti-Semitic. Desmond Tutu, patron of Sabeel, comments; “The Israeli government is placed on a pedestal and to criticise it is to be immediately dubbed anti-Semitic.” (Tutu 2005:12) Now it is very important to realise that as a democracy, an imperfect democracy, criticism of Israel can be important for positive change. A valid, albeit negative criticism of Israeli policy should not be considered anti-Semitic. In a government consisting of both religious and secular groups, having those on the left and the right, you will not find fiercer debate about Israeli policies than within Israel itself. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* wrote the following; “criticising Israel is not anti-Semitic, and saying so is vile. But singling out Israel for opprobrium and international sanction – out of all proportion to any other party in the

12 Press release: *Iran Hosts 2nd International New Horizon conference*. September 20th 2014. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/09/30/380593/new-horizon-confab-2014-opens-in-iran/>. Last accessed 13th October 2014.

13 Blume, Harvey. *Setting the Record Straight*. Atlantic Online September 22nd 1999. <https://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/interviews/ba990922.htm>. Last accessed 13th October 2014.

Middle East – is anti-Semitic, and not saying so is dishonest.”¹⁴ In reality, I don’t think anyone is being labelled anti-Semitic for just criticising Israeli policy; however questions are being raised when condemnations of Israel cross the line from valid criticisms into denigration that could be classed as anti-Semitic. This is a very serious charge, and the line between the two can often be very difficult to judge “since this new anti-Semitism can hide behind the veneer of legitimate criticism of Israel”¹⁵. Former minister Nathan Sharansky, who as a dissident in the former Soviet Union monitored anti-Semitism, laid out the criteria for distinguishing these boundaries in his article “Anti-Semitism in 3D”¹⁶. The 3D’s test of the new anti-Semitism are: demonization, double standards and delegitimisation.

It is important to realise that anti-Zionism is a relatively new phenomenon and understanding its modern usage is informative. Although many new supersessionists would agree with Sizer that “anti-Zionism is not the same thing as anti-Semitism” (Sizer 2007:15), history proves that this distinction is not as clear as many would like. During the war “anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union was rampant to an extent that it is impossible for anyone never having lived in that country to imagine” (Johnson 2001:570). Importantly, in the post-war period, the Soviet campaign against the Jews was “conducted under the codename of anti-Zionism, which became a cover for every variety of anti-Semitism” (2001:572). From the early 1950s, the Soviet anti-Zionist propaganda stressed the links between Zionism, the Jews in general, and Judaism. (Johnson 2001:575). Johnson comments that the fact that “Zionism in practice stood for ‘the Jews’ became quickly apparent” (2001:575). Hundreds of publications, rivalling that of the Nazi output, emanated from

14 Friedman, Thomas. *Campus Hypocrisy*. New York Times, October 16th 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/16/opinion/campus-hypocrisy.html>. Last accessed 10th October 2014.

15 The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism. FAQ: *The Campaign to Defame Israel*. <http://antisemitism.org.il/eng/FAQ:%20The%20campaign%20to%20defame%20Israel>. Last accessed 10th October 2014.

16 Sharansky, Natan. *3D Test of Anti-Semitism*. CFCA 21st December 2009. <http://www.antisemitism.org.il/article/17763/3d-test-antisemitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization>. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

the Soviet Union portraying Zionists and Israeli leaders as being engaged in a world-wide conspiracy, along the lines of the *Protocols of Zion*. After the 1967 Six Day War, the Soviet propaganda machine became the main source for anti-Semitic material in the world. Johnson again notes that, “in doing so they assembled materials from virtually every archaeological layer of anti-Semitic history” (Johnson 2001:575).

Disturbingly this Soviet-inspired propaganda was closely replicated throughout the Arab world by Russia’s allies. The difference was more in form than substance, the Arabs were less thorough in their use of ideological jargon; they would use the word “Jews”, whereas the Russians would employ the codename “Zionists”. The Arabs openly published the *Protocols of Zion*, printed in innumerable editions, remade for TV, and even appearing in Arab school textbooks. All these editions, it should be added, were specially edited for Arab readers, and the Elders were presented in the context of the Palestine problem (Johnson 2001:577). Is it any wonder we still see events such as the New Horizon conference in Iran we mentioned earlier? What does it do to the testimony of the Church when we have Christian ministers speaking at these events?

Now, to be fair, this history still doesn’t prove that everyone who is anti-Zionist is automatically engaged in anti-Semitic activity, this definitely is not the case, but the danger is often there. This is where Sharansky’s 3D test comes in. Unfortunately, it is possible to find examples of all three D’s in the writings and actions of the new supersessionism. The accusations of racism and apartheid, along with Nazi comparisons serve to both demonise and delegitimise the state of Israel. It should be pointed out that the use of comparisons to apartheid and the Nazis is specific. They represent two of the greatest evils of the twentieth century, and they thus become legitimate targets for elimination!¹⁷ The logic follows that if Israel is engaged in both of them, then she becomes a legitimate target for elimination. As it happens, this claim is far from accurate

17 The Coordination Forum for Countering Anti-Semitism. FAQ: *The Campaign to Defame Israel*. <http://antisemitism.org.il/eng/FAQ:%20The%20campaign%20to%20defame%20Israel>. Last accessed 10th October 2014.

and displays the one-sided narrative explicit throughout the movement. Kenneth Meshoe, member of the South African Parliament, comments; “This ridiculous assertion trivialises the word apartheid, minimising and belittling the racism and suffering endured by South Africans of colour”.¹⁸ Like most Western democracies Israel still struggles with the discrimination its minorities face and actively seeks, by law, to eradicate these problems.¹⁹ This is the exact opposite of apartheid. Israel has a multi-ethnic, multi-racial society, a liberal democracy whose legal system upholds equal rights for all its citizens. Israel’s 25% non-Jewish minority have equal voting rights and can hold seats in parliament. Arab citizens have absolute freedom of movement in Israel, Palestinian patients can lie next to Jewish ones in Israeli hospitals, and both Jews and Arabs study at the top universities together. No legitimate comparison can be made and such comparisons are far more indicative of the approach towards Israel by those making the judgement.²⁰

The Nazi comparisons so prevalent in Arab-media, and sometimes sheepishly suggested by those supporting the new supersessionism are no less shocking. This is clearly what human rights scholar Irwin Cotler has called “Ideological anti-Semitism” (Dershowitz 2003:211), a component of the new anti-Semitism. Not only was the Jewish-Nazi conspiracy used as a background by the Soviet propaganda machine to support charges of Israeli atrocities (Johnson 2001:576), but militant leaders of Arab nationalism also utilised this terminology, as “both right and left, saw in Hitler’s Germany the model of successful nationalism...an inspiring guide in the struggle against their two great enemies, the West and the Jews.” (Lewis 1986:160) In effect, says Lewis, “the world was thus treated to the

18 Meshoe, Kenneth. *Pro-Palestinian ads misrepresent apartheid*. *The Examiner*, May 15th 2013. <http://www.sfexaminer.com/sanfrancisco/pro-palestinian-ads-misrepresent-apartheid/Content?oid=2339168>. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

19 Kerry, John F. *Secretary's Preface Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2013*. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

20 Sharansky, Natan. *3D Test of Anti-Semitism*. CFCA 21st December 2009. <http://www.antisemitism.org.il/article/17763/3d-test-antisemitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization>. Last accessed 11th October 2014.

strange spectacle of Hitler’s erstwhile allies attacking Hitler’s foremost victims by calling them Nazis and racists” (Lewis 1986:163). The fact that this rhetoric has once again found its way into Christian circles is frankly, unbelievable.

Perhaps the most obvious elements of the new supersessionism are the double standards and one-sided approach being used to criticise Israel. To speak of supposed Israeli “apartheid” whilst simultaneously ignoring the well documented gender, sexual, and religious apartheid existing throughout the Middle East is to apply a double standard. To condemn Israel as one of the chief human rights violators in the world without condemning the rampant human rights violations by surrounding nations is a double standard. To omit the fact that Israel has consistently been judged as one of the freest societies in the world with the highest standards of human rights, is to give a one-sided interpretation.²¹ To claim that it is due to Israeli actions that we have no peace, without highlighting the many rejected peace offers made by Israel, without discussing the Khartoum Summit’s infamous “three no’s”: No Peace with Israel, no negotiations, no recognition, and without addressing the Charters of both the PA and Hamas that call for Israel’s destruction, is a biased interpretation. To criticise the Security Wall and call for its removal, without addressing the ideology that makes it necessary, is a double standard. Such reductionist evaluation only serves to muddy the theological waters rather than bring clarity to the situation.

CONCLUSION

The new supersessionism is built upon a three legged foundation. Traditional replacement theology, liberation theology and Palestinian nationalism. This paper has charted the growth of this movement and examined some key components of its narrative. In short, we found

21 Freedom House, *Freedom in the World: Israel 2014*. <http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/israel-0#.VD0vwZV0zVI>. Accessed 11th October 2014.

that such a strong emphasis on a here-and-now political theology will not produce an environment conducive to a proper understanding of the biblical data concerning Israel. The focus upon contemporary political realities, viewed through a one-sided narrative, has produced a theology that ideologically and practically disinherits any future for national Israel in the plan of God. As such, these socio-political arguments have been challenged and found to be inadmissible for use in the construction of a correct biblical theology concerning Israel and the Jews.

At the same time we need to acknowledge that there is real pain in the Palestinian Christian community and injustices have occurred. Because of this Daniel Juster has noted, “Arab Christians have developed a theology out of their pain: They have interpreted the Scriptures through the lens of their own circumstances while at the same time disregarding the original context of the Scriptures. This is faulty exegesis.”²² We need to work together and reclaim a narrative that seeks to place the interpretation of the Scriptures back in their original context, unhindered by the ingrained supersessionism of the past, and free from newly imposed political narratives of the twenty first century. Then we can affirm the Pauline promise in all its fullness that God has not rejected His people whom he foreknew.

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²² Juster, Daniel. *Palestinian Freedom and Justice: A Messianic Perspective*. The Controversy of Zion May 4th 2012. <http://thecontroversyofzion.com/2012/05/daniel-juster-palestinian-freedom-and-justice-a-messianic-perspective/>. Accessed 11th October 2014.

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The Coming Kingdom and Biblical Interpretation

Craig A. Blaising

KEYWORDS:

Hermeneutics	Israel	Bible–Scripture	
Supersessionism	Speech-Act	Interpretation	
Evangelical	Language	Definition	Promise

ABSTRACT:

This paper, on the Coming Kingdom and Biblical Interpretation, describes the methods used to interpret the Bible. Initially this involves an analytical summary of the historical difference between literal and figurative approaches to Scripture and how an allegorical reading of the Bible was used to minimize the role played by the Jewish people in the plan of God. Typology is used today by a supersessionist approach to the Bible to reject the national and territorial promises of Israel and spiritualize them as being fulfilled in Jesus and thereby the Church. In conclusion we can demonstrate the weakness of this approach and argue for a holistic reading of the Bible in which all of God's promises, including those that speak of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, are truly fulfilled.

This paper was originally published as 'Israel and Hermeneutics' in Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel: Israel and the Jewish People in the Plan of God*; our thanks and acknowledgement are to the Kregel Publications for permission to include it here:
<http://store.kregel.com/productdetails.cfm?PC=3377>.

INTRODUCTION

Evangelical theologians basically divide into two camps on the question of the future of Israel: there are those who say that the Bible teaches a future for ethnic and national Israel and those who claim that it does not. Both sides appeal to the Bible in making their cases, which could be somewhat disconcerting. One might be tempted to dismiss the difference as “just a matter of interpretation,” which in modern parlance often means a subjective decision on the order of a preference. However, this would be a mistake for two reasons. First, the subject—national and ethnic Israel—is not merely theoretical but a reality that is vitally important in our world today. Secondly, the question is not peripheral but central to the story line of the Bible. How one answers this question affects how one understands the story of the Bible from its beginning to its end. So, it is “a matter of interpretation,” but one of such vital importance that we need to make sure we are interpreting correctly.

If this was a dispute on the football field or the basketball court, we would turn to the officials for a ruling. In the absence of officials, we would have to consult a rule book, which explains the game and how it is to be played. In our case, we are looking for “rules” of interpretation, and the place to find them is in the many books on hermeneutics, the disciplinary field that addresses the methods and practice of interpretation.¹ In this

1. For an introduction to biblical hermeneutics, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993); Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991); G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980). On aspects of literary hermeneutics, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981; rev. ed. 2011); idem, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985; rev. ed. 2011); Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); V. Phillips Long, *The Art of Biblical History*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). On the broader field of hermeneutics, including philosophical hermeneutics, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980); idem, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). For a recent symposium

chapter, we will look at some of the principles and guidelines for correct interpretation and see how they might resolve the dispute on how to correctly interpret what the Bible has to say about the future of Israel, its land and people.

TRADITIONAL CATEGORIES

Traditionally, the dispute has been characterized as a difference regarding the correct practice of *literal* and *spiritual* interpretation. Supersessionists, those who believe that the church has replaced ethnic and national Israel in the plan of God so that there is no future for the latter, argue that non-supersessionists, those who see a future for ethnic and national Israel in the divine plan, interpret parts of the Bible literally that are supposed to be understood spiritually. Non-supersessionists reply that supersessionists spiritualize parts of the Bible that should be interpreted literally.²

The problem is often compared to the difference between *literal* and *figurative* interpretation. Most people would know that Robert Burns' famous poem, “My Love is Like a Red Red Rose,” is a figurative description of the poet's sweetheart. It would be a mistake, a misinterpretation, to think he was speaking of a bush. On the other hand, if I receive a text from my wife asking me to pick up some potatoes at the grocery store on my way home, and I interpret it figuratively as a request that I stop by the bookstore and purchase a book on hermeneutics for my light reading, that would be a mistake. Knowing when to interpret literally and when

covering different aspects of the field, see Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell, *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012).

2. On Supersessionism, see Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville: B&H, 2010); Calvin L. Smith, ed. *The Jews, Modern Israel and the New Supersessionism* (Lampeter, UK: Kings Divinity Press, 2009); Barry Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must Be Challenged* (Nashville: B&H, 2008). As an example of the debate in terms of literal vs. spiritual hermeneutics, see the discussions of interpretation in John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959); J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958); and Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1945).

to interpret figuratively is somewhat intuitive, but mistakes can be made, and that's when one needs to clarify the “rules” of hermeneutics. This has led to an identification of various figures of speech and figurative genre (types of literature), their customary uses, and ways to recognize them.

The difference between *literal* and *spiritual* biblical hermeneutics has also been compared to the difference between *literal* and *allegorical* interpretation. Allegory is a particular kind of literary figure. It is a story in which the literal elements of the narrative are symbolic of philosophical, religious, or other ideas. John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* is a good example of allegory. Its real meaning, intended by the author, lies on the allegorical, the symbolic level. Consequently, to interpret it correctly, one must read it *allegorically*. One would misinterpret *Pilgrim’s Progress* if one thought that it was intended to be a literal narrative history of someone named Pilgrim.

Disputes arose in ancient times on the correct reading of the Greek epics of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These epics tell stories of the deeds of gods and men, and many of the ancients took them literally. However, some Greek philosophers, embarrassed by literal interpretations of Homer, suggested that the stories were to be read allegorically as teachings of philosophical ideas.

In the early centuries of the church, the question likewise arose as to whether the Bible should be read allegorically. On the one hand, Gnosticism taught that behind the façade of the literal narrative of Scripture lay a completely different symbolic world, construed according to the ideas of the particular Gnostic system. Gnosticism was clearly heretical on a number of points of Christian doctrine and Christian churches rejected the allegorical methods of various Gnostisms as falsely imposing alien ideas upon the text. On the other hand, the church did accept forms of allegorical interpretation within clear doctrinal boundaries. Early Christian supersessionism used allegorical methods to interpret Israel in biblical narrative and prophecy as symbolic of a spiritual people, the church revealed in the New Testament. This way of reading

the Bible became traditional in the church, but it came to be challenged in the last few centuries by non-supersessionists as a mistake. They argued that supersessionists *spiritualized* or *allegorized* what should be interpreted *literally*. The terms *spiritual* and *allegorical* were often used interchangeably in this critique.

CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

Today, there is general agreement among Evangelical theologians and biblical scholars that *spiritual interpretation* as traditionally practiced is not acceptable. Evangelicals today are particularly sensitive to the problem of reading ideas into Scripture rather than receiving ideas from Scripture. One should not come to the Scripture and simply read into it what one wants.

In modern times the art and science of interpretation has come to be studied and articulated more carefully with the result that even the categories of *literal* versus *spiritual* are not as useful as they once seemed to be. It's not so much that they are wrong as that they are not sufficiently precise. It's like attempting to do surgery with flint knives in an age of scalpels and lasers.

So, what are the categories, principles, and methods that characterize evangelical biblical interpretation today? Generally, interpretation is described as a three-way relationship between the author, the text, and the reader. The author has formed the text as a communication to the reader(s). The reader needs to come to the text with a desire to understand what the author has said. Scripture is unique in that it has a Divine author, who superintended its composition. So, we seek to interpret Scripture properly so as to understand what the Author through and together with authors has communicated in the form of its text.

In order to do that, the reader needs to read the text in a manner that accords with its reality. This is often described as a *historical*,

grammatical, literary interpretation of the Bible. However, there are a number of other terms that describe the approach. Each is important in explaining an aspect or focus which interpretation needs to take into account. These terms are listed below.

The *historical* nature of interpretation recognizes that language doesn't just come out of the blue; the historical setting of the text provides its linguistic context. An author, a human author, writes within a specific historical setting and makes reference to things of that day and uses language within the vernacular of that day; we need to be aware of the historical situation of the text as we attempt to interpret it.

Interpretation is *lexical*, that is, it considers the definitions of words. The interpreter needs to be aware of all possible definitions, but the precise definition will be clear only in context. Consideration of context takes us first to the *grammatical* level where words are nuanced by grammar to combine in larger syntactical structures. Interpretation is then *syntactical*, recognizing that sentences and paragraphs are the primary level of meaning.

Interpretation must also take into account the *literary/formal* level of word and sentence combinations. At the literary level, we see how language is structured not just into sentences but into literature. Here one finds various *conventions* of word usage, such as various kinds of metaphor. But also, one notes the larger structural conventions that mark out different literary *genre*—the larger literary forms of poetry and prose. Most people recognize that a poem is a different kind of literature than a report, a letter, a narrative, or a chronicle. Larger works of literature often combine not just multiple words and sentences but multiple genre and multiple conventions. Interpretation of a text requires an understanding of the kind of literature in which a passage is located and the literary relationship it has to its surrounding context.

Interpretation needs to recognize the *performative* function of literary units—words, sentences, and genre. This is an aspect of interpretation that has come under discussion only in the past few decades. Performative

studies reveal that words and sentences not only describe things, they also do things.

Thematic is an aspect of contextual interpretation that recognizes that themes weave their way through larger literary structures. Thematic connection in a larger literary work is a context just as important as, and maybe more than verbal proximity. In the Bible, this includes themes such as the “Kingdom of God” or the “Day of the Lord.” How a theme develops through the canon of Scripture will be important to interpreting its appearance at various places in the text.

That brings us to the *canonical* level of interpretation. The canonical level, the whole canon of Scripture is the ultimate context for anything within it. The canon is a collection of writings that demonstrate not only thematic but inter-textual literary connections. We see this when biblical authors reuse words and phrases from other biblical writings intending to evoke within the reader’s mind those earlier contexts and associated patterns of meaning. This is similar to what sometimes happens when someone today quotes popular phrases from a movie or song. More may be intended than the mere repetition of a phrase. The quote may be intended to evoke images, ideas, or emotions associated with the original context of the quotation. We have come to see that connections like this occur in Scripture at the canonical level.

Finally, as we speak of the canonical level of interpretation, we need to note that such interpretation must be canonically *narratological*. Narrative is a literary genre. But we need to note that at the canonical level—a level that contains multiple genres: legal literature, poetry, hymns, historical accounts, and several of other types of literature—the whole Scripture also presents a story. To interpret it correctly requires one to grasp the whole and discern the movement from beginning to end that connects and relates all the parts.

This list of categories, methods, and practices would generally be accepted by most evangelical biblical scholars, including supersessionists and non-supersessionists alike.

EVANGELICAL SUPERSESSIONIST HERMENEUTICS

The difference between evangelical supersessionists and nonsupersessionists is seen primarily at the canonical narratological level of interpretation. Supersessionists believe that a *reality shift* takes place in the overall story of the Bible when one moves from *promise* in the Old Testament to *fulfillment* in the New. In the Old Testament the story of the Bible unfolds with promises regarding Israel, the land, the people, and the nation. But as the story moves to the New Testament, fulfillment takes place in an alternate reality—a different kind of Israel, one that transcends the land, the people, and the nation. This reality shift is from the material, the earthly, the ethnic, to a heavenly, a spiritual, a non-ethnic reality. It moves from a political, national reality to a non-political, universal reality. It changes from a focus on the particular to a universal focus. When supersessionists say that the promises to Israel are fulfilled in Christ, the church, or the new creation, this kind of reality shift informs their view.

A clear example of this kind of interpretation can be found in W. D. Davies' book, *The Gospel and the Land*.³ Davies acknowledges that the Old Testament covenant promise of land to Israel is clear and explicit. However, he argues that the New Testament shifts the substance of the promise from land to Christ. The territorial promise to Israel becomes “Christified” in its fulfillment.⁴ More recent scholars such as N. T. Wright, Collin Chapman, Gary Burge, and Peter Walker have adopted Davies' view.⁵ The reality shift from a particular territory to a universal new

3. W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). See also his *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism: With a Symposium and Further Reflections* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

4. *Ibid.*, 368.

5. See for example, Gary M. Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel and the Palestinians* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003); *idem*, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to ‘Holy Land’ Theology*

creation, from a particular ethnic people to a new universal people, takes place in Christ in whose person the promises are singularly realized and fulfilled.

This kind of reality shift in canonical narrative is promoted in Reformed biblical theology, as seen, for example, in the works of Geerhardus Vos and Palmer Robertson.⁶ The influential writings of scholars mostly associated with Moore Theological College, such as those by Graeme Goldsworthy, William Dumbrell, and T. Desmond Alexander, feature this same supersessionism in their presentations of the story of the Bible.⁷

These evangelical supersessionists generally argue that their perception of a reality shift in the canonical narrative is not due to any allegorization they have performed on the text. They do not claim to have read into the text meaning that is alien to it. Rather, they argue that this reality shift in the nature and substance of Old Testament promise is explicitly taught by the New Testament. It is not a matter of the interpreter allegorizing the text, they say, but a matter of the interpreter recognizing a typology embedded in the text.⁸ This typology is a literary convention

(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, eds. *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); P. W. L. Walker, ed. *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); P. W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

6. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930); *idem*, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948); O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980).

7. William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991); *idem*, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); *idem*, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

8. See Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981). See also, Stephen J. Wellum, “Hermeneutical Issues in ‘Putting Together’ the Covenants,” in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 81–126.

by which symbolism is recast. The text of the New Testament clarifies the working of this typology by explicitly recasting the symbolism of the Old Testament. The duty of the interpreter is to recognize this typology and incorporate it in the interpretation of the overall canonical narrative.

Let's look more closely at typology and how supersessionists see it functioning in the Bible. Types are essentially patterns that are repeated in the canonical narrative. Noticing these patterns in the canonical narrative may create something like a *déjà vu* experience in the reader. For example, after crossing the Red Sea, Israel comes up out of the water onto dry land (Ex. 14). But this pattern can be seen in Genesis 1, where God causes the land itself to come up out of the water. It can be seen in the flood narrative, where once again God causes the land to emerge from the water and brings Noah and his family onto the dry land. It can be seen in the Gospels where Jesus comes up out of the water in his baptism. And the pattern is seen in various psalms. This is a repetitive pattern, a narrative type.

The New Testament occasionally uses the word “type” in referring to this kind of pattern. Israel was *baptized* in both the cloud and in the sea and these served as types and examples to us (1 Cor. 10:6). Adam is a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14). The flood is a type of baptism (1 Peter 3:21). But supersessionists see this typology as more than narrative patterns. They cite these passages to argue for a progression in the narrative away from earthly to heavenly realities.

Matthew's use of the word “fulfillment” is cited as evidence for this. For example in Hosea 11:1, the Lord says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Matthew applies the verse to the infant Jesus being taken to Egypt to escape Herod and then returning after Herod’s death. Matthew says, “Thus it was *fulfilled*, “Out of Egypt I called my Son” (Matt. 2:15). In supersessionist thought, “fulfillment” brings about a shift in the reality of the referent of Hosea’s language. It has shifted in a spiritual and Christological direction away from Israel to Christ.

The references to “shadows” in the book of Hebrews are thought to indicate this same typological progression. Hebrews says that the tabernacle was built according to a pattern, or type, from heaven (Heb. 8:5; cf 9:23–24). Moses was shown this pattern on the mountain, and he built the tabernacle according to that pattern. As a type, the tabernacle is also seen as a “shadow” because the heavenly is fixed, whereas the earthly, like a “shadow” passes away (Heb. 8:3–13; cf. 10:1). Hebrews is written in anticipation of the destruction of the Temple, and it speaks of the passing away of the things that were made. It is talking particularly about the things made with hands, as opposed to that which is heavenly (cf. Heb. 9:11). However, supersessionists often overlook the fact that Hebrews is not speaking simply of a vertical dualism between earthly and heavenly realities since the writer expects that those heavenly realities are coming here in the future (Heb. 2:5; 13:14). This future coming in Hebrews is consistent with eschatological expectation elsewhere in the New Testament of a future renewal of all things.

The fourth gospel is also cited as evidence of the typological progression. In John 4:21–24, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the time is coming “when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship” but “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Jesus also speaks of himself as the true bread come down from heaven in contrast to the manna that the fathers ate in the wilderness (John 6:31–58). This way of speaking and other imagery in John’s Gospel is thought to show a progression from earthly, particularly Israelitish realities to a heavenly, spiritual reality in Christ.

EVALUATING EVANGELICAL SUPERSESSIONIST HERMENEUTICS

How does one evaluate supersessionist interpretation? If it were a matter of an individual passage of Scripture, the task would be relatively straightforward. One would offer an alternative interpretation of that

passage taking into account the words, grammar, syntax, and conventions found there in conjunction with its larger literary context, giving attention to genre, thematic issues, and broader narratological concerns. However, supersessionism is primarily a conviction held at the canonical narratological level which then construes numerous passages of Scripture in light of its overall reading of the Scripture story. How does one evaluate a comprehensive system of interpretation like this?

In his book, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief*, David Wolf offers four criteria for evaluating broad interpretive systems. These criteria are that a system of belief (or interpretation) must be *comprehensive, congruent, consistent, and coherent*.⁹ An interpretive system is strong to the extent that it meets these criteria. It is weak to the extent that it fails to do so. *Comprehensive* means that the interpretive system must cover all the data to be interpreted. In this case, it must cover all Scripture. To the extent that it does not cover portions of Scripture, it is weak at best. *Congruent* means that it must also *fit* the text. If it does not actually fit, if it does not accord with, or is not correct with the text, then again it is weak at best. *Consistent* means that the interpretations produced by this overall reading are not in conflict with one another; they do not contradict one another. Finally, the system must be *coherent*, which is to say that it makes sense.

I believe that supersessionism, as a system of biblical interpretation, is not comprehensive, congruent, consistent, or coherent. The following will briefly illustrate why.

Not Comprehensive

This criterion may seem idealistic. Is it really possible to cover all the data? Can an interpretative system actually address every passage, every verse in Scripture? Well, no, we don't really expect that any published work offering an interpretation of the whole story of the Bible will actually cite

9. David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1982), 50–55.

every passage of Scripture. But that is not what this criterion is saying. Comprehensiveness means that the interpretation does not leave out crucial data in the formulation of its interpretative system. By covering all crucial, or all relevant data, the system may plausibly be said to cover all data, since there would be nothing *left out* that could actually change or alter the interpretative system. Sometimes, however, supersessionist publications omit key texts that arguably challenge their system.

Consider for example, G. K. Beale’s recently published *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*.¹⁰ The book attempts to explain the theological teaching of the New Testament as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Many passages of Scripture are addressed in his attempt to give an account of the overall biblical story line (the Scripture index alone is thirty-four pages with references in small font size). However, when he comes to Romans 11:25–26, he gives one paragraph complaining that “the passage is too problematic and controversial to receive adequate discussion within the limited space of this book.”¹¹ The book is 1,047 pages long, plus twenty-four pages of front matter! One would think that *this passage* especially would require treatment in an overall interpretation that sees no future for Israel nationally or politically.

Another example can be seen in Michael E. Fuller’s *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts*.¹² The book focuses especially on Luke’s narrative concerning the restoration of Israel in both the Gospel and in Acts, examining passage after passage. However, he completely ignores

10. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

11. *Ibid.*, 710

12. Michael E. Fuller, *The Restoration of Israel: Israel’s Re-gathering and the Fate of the Nations in Early Jewish Literature and Luke-Acts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006). A better book is edited by James Scott, *Restoration, Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Although necessarily limited in the texts that it examines, it does feature studies on Romans 11:26 and Acts 1–3. The articles by Richard Bauckham [“The Restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts,” 435–87] and James Scott [“And then all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26), 489–527] on these texts are excellent.

Acts 3:17–26, a passage in which the word *restoration* appears linked to prophecy and covenant promise!

These examples, of course, could be dismissed as the oversights (although major ones) of individual publications. But they illustrate the point that any attempt to offer an overall interpretation of the story of the Bible must take into account crucial texts that speak to the fulfillment of the promises of God to Israel. Failure to address these texts is itself indication that the interpretation may be weak. When it is shown that these very texts refute a central conviction of supersessionist interpretation, that interpretation is seen not only to be weak but wrong.

Not Congruent

The “fit” or lack thereof of an interpretative system to individual texts can only be shown text by text. Evaluating a large comprehensive system of interpretation will necessarily entail the hermeneutical examination of many passages. However, one needs to note that with respect to a system of interpretation, each text does not have equal force. The system may be compared to a spider web, where the cross points of the web represent the interpretations of individual texts.¹³ Showing that the system is not congruent to a particular text may be seen as cutting the web at that juncture. What will happen? It depends on where the web is cut. Some points can be cut with little damage to the web overall. Other points are crucial to the integrity of the web. They are deeply ingressed into the structure and if rendered unstable, the stability of the whole web is put in jeopardy. In the book you are reading, several chapters address passages of Scripture with respect to the theme of Israel, the land and the nation, and criticisms of supersessionist interpretation are offered therein. But here, I would like to note three problems that challenge the web of supersessionist interpretation at a deep structural level. The first

13. The use of the web metaphor for logical systems can be found in W. V. O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1961). See the discussion in Wolfe, Epistemology, 44–45.

two have to do with the *performative force* of key texts. The third has to do with a central assumption of the supersessionist notion of typological progression. Each problem entails multiple texts that the system must *fit* in order to be considered plausible.

Speech-Act Implications of Divine Promise

Performative language, or speech-act analysis is a relatively recent hermeneutical tool. The philosophers J. L. Austin and John Searle were the formative thinkers whose publications first appeared in the 1960s.¹⁴ Since then, many have utilized and developed the insights both for hermeneutics and for language theory.¹⁵ The key insight of speech-act analysis is that language has a performative force. By language, people not only refer to things, they also do things. And, the paradigmatic example of a speech-act, which Austin himself cited, is a promise.

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

In Scripture, we see that God has made key promises to Abraham and Abraham’s descendants. Not only have promises been made, but conventions are followed in order to reinforce the point. A speech-act occurs in God’s communication to Abraham in Genesis 12—a promise concerning a land, a people, a nation, and blessing to all nations. In Genesis 15, Abraham questions God about the fulfillment of this promise

14. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1962); John Searle, *Speech-Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1969).

15. See for example, Richard Briggs, *Words in Action* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*; Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

of a land to his descendants, asking, “How shall I know that I will inherit it?” (Gen. 15:8). So God enacts a covenant with a ceremony, a very ancient ceremony, where God alone passes through the covenant pieces of the sacrifice and takes an obligation on Himself alone. This was so that Abraham would know that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land.

Compare this, for example, to the performative language of a wedding ceremony. As Richard Briggs has noted, when one says in a wedding ceremony “I do,” there is no convention by which one can turn around an hour later and say “well, really, I didn’t.”¹⁶ To say “I do” in the wedding ceremony is to accept formally the marriage relationship. By those words one forms a relationship with another person which has expectations and obligations. Similarly, when God takes the covenant upon Himself in Genesis 15, a relationship of expectation is grounded in the integrity of God Himself. Divine intention and resolve could not be more clear. Later, God adds to the ceremonially established promissory word the further convention of a solemn oath (Gen. 22:15–18). God swears that He will accomplish that which he promised. The writer to Hebrews, whose language of “shadows” and “types” (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) supersessionists like to quote, also says that “when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath” (Heb. 6:17). The promise and the oath are referred to as “two unchangeable things” (Heb. 6:18). To the recipients, these speech acts function as “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19). God’s word is certain, which means His people can confidently rely on what He promises.

God’s promise, covenant, and oath to Abraham is not a peripheral element in the story of the Bible. It is a key structural component in the central plot line. It is repeated to the line of patriarchs and is the ground and basis for the covenant at Sinai and the promise and covenant made

16. Richard Briggs, “Speech-Act Theory,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 763.

to David and his house. To postulate a “fulfillment” of these covenant promises by means of a reality shift in the thing promised overlooks the performative nature of the word of promise, violates the legitimate expectations of the recipients, and brings the integrity of God into question. Such an interpretation is not congruent to the textual string of divine promises, covenants, and oaths—a string of texts that lie at the heart of the canonical narrative.

Performative Force of Prophetic Reaffirmation

The second problem for supersessionist interpretation also has reference to performative language, namely the performative force of prophetic reaffirmation of these covenanted promises to Israel. Not only are the promises made early in the canonical narrative, but in the later narrative they are reinforced by prophetic speech acts of swearing, reaffirming, and emphatically restating God’s resolve to fulfill them as promised. The resolve is further underscored in several texts by sweeping rhetorical features like posing impossible odds, unsurmountable obstacles only to dismiss them as trifles to the powerful Creator of all things, and by dramatic scenes, such as the anguish and sorrow of adultery or the pain of parental rejection which in spite of punishment, hurt, and suffering is nevertheless overcome by an unquenchable, triumphant love. The supersessionist reading of the canonical narrative in which Israel is replaced and God’s promises are “Christified,” spiritualized, or otherwise substantively changed is not congruent with this line of prophetic reaffirmation and restated divine resolve.

Particularism and Universalism in the Old Testament and New Testament

The third problem has to do with the way supersessionist interpretation typically construes the progression of the canonical narrative from particularism to universalism. In this view, the Old Testament tells a story

about God’s plan for and blessings to one particular people, whereas the New Testament expands the plan and blessing to include all peoples. There is a progression from the particular to the universal, from an ethnic political Israel among the nations to a multi-ethnic, universal Israel inclusive of all nations!

Certainly, much of the Old Testament is taken up with God’ promises to and dealings with the particular ethnic people and nation of Israel. And, certainly, we see in the New Testament a mission to the nations and the establishment of the church inclusive of peoples of all nations through faith in Christ. However, reading the canonical narrative as a progression from particularism to universalism is not congruent with either the Old or New Testaments. From the beginning of God’s promise to Abraham, both the particular and the universal are present: “I will bless you . . . I will bless all peoples through you” (Gen. 12:2–3). God’s promise to the David house was not just rulership over a particular nation. Rather, the Davidic king is invited in Psalm 2:8, “Ask of me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance.” Many Psalms speak of blessing coming upon the nations as do the prophets. The dominion of the coming kingdom of God was predicted to be worldwide (Dan. 2:35), with all nations in their places and in peace (2 Sam. 7:10–11; Ezek. 37:26–28; Isa. 2:1–4). Isaiah foresaw the extension of the favored term “my people” to Gentile nations *in addition to not in substitution of or through redefinition of* Israel (Isa. 19:24–25). This is certainly compatible with John’s vision in Revelation 21:3, where many manuscripts read, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be *his peoples*.” Similarly, John foresees “nations . . . and kings of the earth” in the new creation walking by the light of the Jerusalem come down from heaven (Rev. 21:24). God’s plan for Israel and the nations are not mutually exclusive or successive programs but complementary throughout the entire canonical narrative. It is not necessary to eliminate the particular in order to institute the universal nor is it necessary to expand the particular to become the universal, rather, the particular is both the means to the blessing of the universal as well as

a central constitutive part of it. How the overall canonical narrative is read needs to be congruent with these and many other texts.

Not Consistent or Coherent

For brevity sake, these two criteria will be treated together. Consistency means freedom from contradiction, and coherence means that the assertions of the system make sense. Many interpretative systems seem to make sense. Usually the problems have to do with how they relate to the data they are interpreting. However, even apart from an examination of the facts, a sign of weakness in an interpretative system is a lack of internal consistency or coherence. Supersessionism is often thought to be a tight consistent, coherent reading of Scripture. However, the four matters cited below are just some examples that reveal internal problems with this viewpoint.

New Creation Eschatology

In the past couple of decades, many theologians, including some prominent evangelical supersessionists, have come to embrace what I call *new creation eschatology*.¹⁷ New Creation Eschatology believes that the eternal state is not a heavenly, timeless, non-material reality but a new heavens and new earth. That’s what Scripture says in passages like Isaiah 65, 2 Peter 3:13, and Revelation 21 and 22. The dwelling place

17. For the terminology of new creation eschatology in relation to what I call spiritual vision eschatology, see Craig A. Blasing, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 160–81. Some who have affirmed this type of eschatology include N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); *idem*, *New Heavens, New Earth: The Biblical Picture of the Christian Hope*, Grove Biblical Series B11 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming); Donald Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Douglas Moo, “Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006): 449–88.

of the redeemed in that new creation is not in heaven but on the new earth. Again, that is consistent with prophecies in Isaiah and Revelation. This new earth, like the old earth, has geographical particularity, which also fits with prophecies in Isaiah and Revelation as well as a number of other texts in Scripture. In fact, the imagery of refinement extending from Isaiah to 2 Peter is a basis for believing that the new earth is not an utterly new creation from nothing but a refinement and renovation of the present earth.¹⁸ God’s plan for his creation is not to destroy it and start over from nothing but to redeem, cleanse, and renew it. In light of this, it is clear that new creation eschatology envisions not a non-material eternity, but a redeemed earth and redeemed heavens fit for an everlasting (durative rather than static) glorious manifestation of the presence of God.

Now, given that the new earth has geographical particularity and that it is essentially this earth redeemed for an everlasting glory, is it not important to ask about the territorial promises to Israel? The land and nation promises to Israel were repeatedly stated to be everlasting. In Isaiah, the promise of the new earth is linked to the promise of a restored Jerusalem (Isaiah 65:18–25), the chief part of the land of promise. The blessings of the new earth parallel the promised blessings of the land of Israel in many texts so that the land becomes an example of what is intended for the whole earth.

Many supersessionist theologians have embraced new creation eschatology. N. T. Wright has celebrated his personal discovery of it and the change that has brought to his thinking.¹⁹ The material particularity of new creationism is especially appealing in addressing environmental and creation-care concerns. However, Wright still finds no place in his eschatology for national and territorial Israel. For him, as for many others, the nation and the land become entirely “Christified.”²⁰ Are these views

18. Paul’s words on the future glory of the present creation in Romans 8 also point the a renovation of the present creation rather than an annihilation and re-creation *de novo*.

19. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*.

20. A redefinition of Israel lies at the heart of Wright’s literary project. See for example, N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 29, 61–62, 240, 250; *idem*, *The New Testament and the*

consistent or coherent? So, let’s just imagine traversing the new earth, crossing its various and particular geographical features, and coming to the Middle East. What do we find there? A void? A spatial anomaly? But then, where would the New Jerusalem be? Maintaining new creation eschatology while arguing that the territory of Israel has been spiritualized or “Christified” is not a consistent or coherent view.

Interconnection of Covenant Promises

Supersessionists typically affirm the progression argued in the book of Hebrews from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. But they read this progression as an abandonment of God’s particular national and territorial promises to Israel. However, Hebrews explicitly quotes the Jeremiah 31 prophecy of the new covenant as a covenant that the Lord “will establish . . . with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Heb. 8:8). The implication of the last declaration quoted in Hebrews 8:12: “I will forgive *their* [Israel and Judah in context] iniquity and remember *their* sin no more” is explained in Jeremiah 31:35–37: Israel will be a nation forever before the Lord! It is not consistent or coherent to affirm the fulfillment of new covenant promises while denying a national future for Israel. The national and territorial promise to Israel is a constituent feature of covenant promise from Abraham to the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. There is no reason to exclude it from “the world to come” expected by the writer of Hebrews (Heb. 2:5). To include it would be the most consistent and coherent reading of that book together with the rest of the canon of Scripture.

False Hermeneutical Dichotomy

As noted earlier, a key assumption of many supersessionist readings of

People of God, Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 457–58; *idem*, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 446, 471.

Scripture is a dichotomy between the particular and universal in the plan of God. The universal must replace the particular. Really? Is a whole a *replacement* of a part—such that the part disappears and its place is taken by a whole? Is that coherent? What is a whole if it is not the total collection of parts? The part *must* be present and remain for a whole to be complete. The universal does not replace the particular in the story of the Bible. Rather the story of the Bible encompasses an interaction among parts, individuals and nations, until a whole with all its constitutive parts is completed. This is why Romans 11 is so important for understanding the main story line of the canonical narrative.

Theological Consistency and Coherence

Briefly, let us return to an implication of the discussion of performative language above. By virtue of the performative nature of a promise (not to mention the additional conventions which underscore its resolve), to argue that the Lord “Christifies,” spiritualizes, or revises *so as to essentially discard* the national and territorial promises to Israel in the fulfillment of the plot line of Scripture is to call into question the integrity of God. It is particularly inconsistent for Evangelical theologians, who affirm the inerrancy of Scripture, to make such claims. Typically, the doctrine of inerrancy is rooted in the integrity of God which extends to the integrity of His Word. How can His word in general be considered trustworthy if in its most paradigmatic trust-engendering form it is found untrustworthy? But even more, failure here extends to the very being of God as revealed by His Name. Ezekiel 37:26–28 and 39:25–29 speak of the resolution of the theological problem of Israel’s exile from the land, a problem repeatedly voiced in Ezekiel. God’s Name, God’s very character as God, is tied to the fulfillment of His covenant promises to Israel. The constitution of Israel as a nation among the nations in the eschatological kingdom is coordinate with true theology (“*they will know that I Am the Lord,*” Ezek. 39:28). To factor national and territorial Israel out will not produce a coherent theology—certainly not the theology that was prophesied in Scripture.

HERMENEUTICAL IMPORTANCE OF A HOLISTIC ESCHATOLOGY

In conclusion, how one perceives the end of a story will affect one’s estimate of the story as a whole—the significance of its various parts and their relevance in the story line. Supersessionism, the belief that Israel has been replaced, or redefined, in the story line of the Bible, is first of all an eschatological view—one in which there is no place for *Israel* as it was created, defined, and made the object of everlasting promises in Scripture. This necessarily impacts how one estimates various elements of the biblical story line not just as narrative but in terms of their ultimate theological importance. I do not think that it is a coincidence that the excision (considered by some to be a *revision*) of Israel from eschatological fulfillment is often coordinate with a reduction of theological concern regarding earthly, material realities. But it also impacts many areas of theology, such as Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, even theology proper.²¹ In contrast to supersessionism, I would recommend a *holistic eschatology* in which “all the promises of God find their Yes in Christ” (2 Cor 1:20). This includes promises regarding Israel. And, it extends to promises regarding the nations. It includes God’s plans and purpose for the earth as well as the heavens. It envisions human beings not only as individuals but in their various corporate connections from their ethnic identities to their political and social organizations. In a holistic eschatology, the kingdom of God is a robust rather than thin concept. And, the person of Christ, rather than being a mystical reductive principle, as in notions of “Christification,” is seen instead in the full reality of his holistic kingdom, bringing to completion the rich fullness of an inheritance that has been planned, promised, and proclaimed throughout the amazing story of Scripture.

21. Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (2001): 435–50, republished in *To the Jew First: A Case for Jewish Evangelism in Scripture and History*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 102–21.

Study Questions

1. How can we know when to interpret a text literally or figuratively?
2. Give some examples of misinterpretation from everyday life. Can you identify the problem in each example?
3. When is allegory a legitimate—or an illegitimate—method of interpretation?
4. List the categories, principles, and methods that characterize evangelical biblical interpretation today. Can you detect a movement from individual words to larger levels of context in these methods?
5. How do supersessionists read the movement from promise to fulfillment in the biblical story?
6. Explain briefly the four criteria for evaluating broad interpretative systems.
7. What must an interpretative system do to claim to be comprehensive? What are some texts that should not be ignored in considering how God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled?
8. How does performative language, or speech-act analysis help to evaluate the congruence of supersessionist and non-supersessionist approaches to Scripture?
9. What is a common mistake in reading the relation between God’s purpose for Israel and God’s purpose for all people in the movement from Old Testament to New Testament? How should that mistake be corrected?
10. What are some problems of consistency and coherence with supersessionist readings of Scripture? How does a holistic reading of Scripture answer these problems?



The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

ISSN: 2053-6763

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Typesetting :: Ash Design (UK)

Minion Pro & Times New Roman 10.5pt on 14.5pt

