

This is a remarkable book which will surely become the standard bearer for Amillennialism for years to come. Storms is particularly adept (and gracious) at critiquing premillennial positions, especially dispensationalism. His interaction with postmillennialism and preterism is equally intelligent and insightful. This is a book I will return to many times in my personal study and in pastoral ministry. Storms has given us a model for accessible, relevant, warm-hearted scholarship in service of the church.

KEVIN DEYOUNG,

Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan

If Christians in the past were guilty of obsessing too much over the end times, evangelicals today may face the opposite problem of caring too little. The writings of Sam Storms are exactly what we need: faithful theology and careful exegesis served with a pastoral spirit and reverent worship. In these pages you will find Dr. Storms' mature reflections on the end times, honed over decades in the classroom and in the church. There is something in here to challenge and to encourage all of us, no matter our persuasion. I pray this book will help others in the same way it has helped me.

JUSTIN TAYLOR,

author and blogger, "Between Two Worlds"

Evangelicals continue to be divided over eschatology, and such divisions will likely continue until the eschaton. For some, premillennialism is virtually equivalent to orthodoxy. Sam Storms challenges such a premise with a vigorous defense of amillennialism. Storms marshals exegetical and theological arguments in defense of his view in this wide-ranging work. Even those who remain unconvinced will need to reckon with the powerful case made for an amillennial reading. The author calls us afresh to be Bereans who are summoned to search the scriptures to see if these things are so.

THOMAS R. SCHREINER,

James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

Sam Storms' book, *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative*, is a substantial work on the viability of the Amillennial perspective on eschatology, including that of the Book of Revelation. While one may not agree with all that he says on this subject, the upshot of the book as a whole is a solid argument in favor of Amillennialism. His dialogue partners are Premillennial interpreters, whom he finds fall short in presenting a persuasive case for their view. Storms presents, in my own view, a very attractive way of understanding the millennial passage of Revelation 20:1-10, but his discussion of many other passages throughout the Bible also are adduced in an insightful way to support his view. He posits the surely correct hermeneutical approach that the rest of the Bible (e.g., Paul's epistles) should be understood as the main interpretative lens for eschatology and

not any particular interpretation of Revelation 20, which too many have let control their understanding of eschatology elsewhere throughout the Bible. Among the discussions that I found particularly helpful was his study of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. Even those who may disagree with Storms' Amillennial approach will definitely benefit from his book.

G. K. BEALE,

Professor of New Testament and Biblical Theology,
Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sam Storms' *Kingdom Come* is a remarkably comprehensive and informative study of eschatology from a Reformed perspective. Not only does he persuasively argue the amillennial position but he provides a clear and charitable understanding of the alternatives. On topic after topic, I marveled at Storms' sound handling and lucid teaching of difficult material. *Kingdom Come* is extraordinarily helpful to the student of eschatology and no Reformed library will be complete without this book.

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS,

Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina

Sam Storms' *Kingdom Come: The Amillennial Alternative* is the most helpful book on the various millennial views I have seen since W. J. Grier's *The Momentous Event*. His work is marked by careful exegesis of pertinent texts, and ranges widely and deeply in all of the relevant Scriptural passages dealing with the end of the age. While no one book is universal in its range, this one comes close to it! Storms' work is lucid and fair; he certainly works with a point of view (amillennialism), but is scrupulous in not misrepresenting the views he critiques, and is charitable in spirit throughout his substantial volume. While he surveys in detail the three major views of the millennium (in a balanced way, in my opinion), probably the majority of his attention is directed to premillennial dispensationalism (so dominant in American Evangelicalism). He marshals many a passage to show why it is really not possible to hold this view, if one takes seriously the majority of the Scriptural texts involved (as for instance, the belief in the premillennial rapture). I do think he is humble before the teaching of the Scriptures, and wishes for the clear teaching written Word to be taken as it stands. His interpretation of the seventy weeks of Daniel chapter 9 is a model of clear, exegetical theology, as is his understanding of what is now called 'replacement theology'. His discussion of the modern state of Israel is, I think, judicious and helpful. One does not have to agree with everything he says on the end of time to be able heartily to recommend this excellent book. I plan to use it in my teaching, and will be glad to have it available for the next time I teach Eschatology.

DOUGLAS F. KELLY,

Richard Jordan Professor of Systematic Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina



Kingdom Come



The Amillennial Alternative

Sam Storms

MENTOR



Sam is the Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision at Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the President of Enjoying God Ministries (www.samstorms.com). He has authored or edited 22 books and has published numerous journal articles and book reviews. He is a graduate of The University of Oklahoma (B.A.), Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M.), and The University of Texas at Dallas (Ph.D.). He and his wife Ann have been married for 41 years and are the parents of two grown daughters and have four grandchildren.

Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2007.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation Used by Permission. (www.lockman.org)

hardback ISBN 978-1-78191-132-7
epub ISBN 978-1-78191-195-2
mobi ISBN 978-1-78191-196-9

Copyright © Sam Storms 2012

First published in 2013
in the
Mentor Imprint
of
Christian Focus Publications Ltd.,
Geanies House, Fearn,
Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK
www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Jesse Owens
Printed by ???????

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or a license permitting restricted copying. In the U.K. such licenses are issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1 8TS www.cla.co.uk.



Contents

Introduction

~ 9 ~

CHAPTER ONE

The Hermeneutics of Eschatology: Five Foundational Principles for the Interpretation of Prophecy

~ 15 ~



CHAPTER TWO

Defining Dispensationalism

~ 43 ~

CHAPTER THREE

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9 and the Old Testament Roots of Dispensationalism

~ 71 ~

CHAPTER FOUR

Daniel's Contribution to Biblical Eschatology

~ 93 ~

CHAPTER FIVE

Problems with Premillennialism

~ 135 ~



Contents cont.

CHAPTER SIX

**Who are the People of God? Israel, the Church,
and “Replacement” Theology**

~ 177 ~

CHAPTER SEVEN

**The Eschatology of Jesus: Matthew 24 and
The Olivet Discourse (1)**

~ 229 ~

CHAPTER EIGHT

**The Eschatology of Jesus: Matthew 24 and
The Olivet Discourse (2)**

~ 259 ~

CHAPTER NINE

The Book of Acts and the Promise of Israel’s Restoration

~ 283 ~

CHAPTER TEN

Romans 11 and The “Future” of Israel

~ 303 ~

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Kingdom of God: Now and Not Yet

~ 335 ~

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Postmillennial View of the Kingdom of God

~ 361 ~



Contents cont.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**The Book of Revelation and Biblical Eschatology:
The Chronology of the Seal, Trumpet,
and Bowl Judgments**

~ 387 ~

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**Amillennialism, Revelation 20, and
The Binding of Satan**

~ 423 ~

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

**Amillennialism, Revelation 20, and
The First Resurrection**

~ 451 ~

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

**The Antichrist in Biblical Eschatology:
A Study of Revelation 13 and 17**

~ 475 ~

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

**The Antichrist in Biblical Eschatology:
A Study of 2 Thessalonians 2**

~ 521 ~

CONCLUSION

**A Cumulative Case Argument for
Amillennialism**

~ 549 ~



Introduction



I honestly can't remember giving a second thought to the second coming of Christ until my senior year in high school. My church believed in it, of course. I was raised Southern Baptist and undoubtedly must have heard a sermon here and there or sat through a Sunday school class when it was addressed. But I don't recall thinking deeply about the issue until First Baptist Church of Duncan, Oklahoma, held revival services either in late 1968 or early 1969. The only reason I know it was during that time span is that I was sitting with a particular young lady when the message was delivered and I most certainly do recall the time frame when we dated! Oh, the things we remember and forget!

The guest evangelist spoke forcefully on the events that had transpired in Israel which he believed were a harbinger of the return of Christ. I recall being quite frightened by stories of the Antichrist and false prophet and the impending forceful imposition of 666 on the foreheads of his followers.

In the summer of 1970, following my freshman year at the University of Oklahoma (OU), I lived in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, working on an evangelistic project with Campus Crusade for Christ. Aside from this being the season of violent anti-Vietnam War protests on many college campuses, as well as the time when the Jesus movement first emerged, it was the summer when Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was released. All of us on the project quickly ingested every word and prayed that we would be ready should the rapture occur at any moment, which, of course, all of us believed it would (or at least could).

Upon returning to college in the fall I purchased a Scofield Reference Bible and began to devour its notes more passionately than I did the biblical text on which they commented. No one, as I recall, ever suggested there was another view, much less a wide range of options, when it came to the end times or to biblical prophecy. We cut our theological teeth on the dispensational, pretribulational, premillennialism of the Scofield Bible. Anyone who dared call it into question was suspected of not believing in biblical inerrancy.

While in school at OU I attended Metropolitan Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, then pastored by three graduates of Dallas Theological Seminary. Wednesday evenings at the church were often devoted to lectures by prominent theologians from around the country. I became quite accustomed to hearing a Dallas Seminary professor speak on the subject of eschatology. I was becoming ever more deeply ingrained in the dispensational school of thought and, again, never considered the possibility that other views might fall within the boundaries of orthodoxy. Anyone who dared question the pre-trib. rapture or the accuracy of Scofield was automatically viewed as either liberal or fast sliding down the slope thereto.

Upon graduating from OU in 1973, I began my studies at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) in pursuit of the Th.M., or Master of Theology, degree. My professors were a Who's Who of dispensational premillennialism: John Walvoord (then President of DTS), Charles Ryrie (author of *Dispensationalism Today* and *The Ryrie Study Bible*), and J. Dwight Pentecost (author of perhaps the most influential text on the subject at that time, *Things to Come*), just to mention the more well-known. Anything other than the dispensational premillennial perspective as found in Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology* and taught in the many DTS classrooms was considered less than evangelical. The only thing I recall hearing about amillennialism, for example, was how dangerous it was given the fact that it was popular among theological liberals who didn't take the Bible very seriously.

One incident in class is illustrative of the atmosphere in the 1970s at Dallas. We had just been exhorted by one of the profes-

sors (who will remain anonymous) to dig deeply into Scripture and particularly the eschatological passages and to read widely in the literature. The student sitting next to me (who likewise will remain anonymous) raised his hand and asked: "If we do what you say and end up embracing something other than dispensational, pretribulational premillennialism, can you promise us that we will still graduate on time?" The professor paused for a moment and then said, "No, I can't make that promise." Sure enough, during my senior year a classmate of mine expressed his belief in covenant theology and was told that his diploma would be withheld until such time as the faculty was confident that he properly understood the doctrine of eschatology. As I recall, he dropped out of Dallas and eventually obtained his degree at Reformed Theological Seminary.

Robert Gundry's book, *The Church and the Tribulation*, was released in 1973, the same year I began my studies at Dallas, and fell like a theological atom bomb on the campus. Everyone was reading it, and more than a few were being drawn to its post-tribulational perspective on the timing of the Rapture. Debates in the classroom, cafeteria, and elsewhere were many and quite heated. Someone obtained a copy of Daniel Fuller's Ph.D. dissertation in which he critiqued the hermeneutics of dispensationalism and more gasoline was thrown on the fire.

Upon my graduation from Dallas Seminary in 1977 I immediately immersed myself in a study of all aspects and schools of eschatological thought. However, without question the most influential and persuasive volume I read was *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* by George Eldon Ladd, then Professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. I'll have considerably more to say later about Ladd's writings and the influence he exerted on my thinking, but it is worth noting here that the distinction between Israel and the Church, on which dispensationalism is largely based, could not withstand Ladd's relentless assault.

It wasn't long before Ladd (and Gundry, together with a few others) had persuaded me that there was no basis in Scripture for

a pretribulation rapture of the Church.¹ That was, in the eyes of many, bad enough. Indeed, I distinctly recall the horror (trust me, “horror” is by no means an exaggerated term to describe the reaction I received) in my church when I made it known that I could no longer embrace a pretribulation rapture. More than a few were convinced that I was well on my way into theological liberalism! But when in the early 1980s I abandoned premillennialism in all its forms, public reaction was such that you would have sworn I had committed the unpardonable sin. I’m not suggesting that all or even the majority of dispensational premillennialists feel this way today (I hope and pray that few do), but the atmosphere in the 1970s and 1980s was something less than amicable for those who departed from the accepted eschatological faith.

Over the next few years I continued my study of the subject and eventually, sometime in 1985, wrote the first draft of what is now the book you have in your hands. It was largely restricted to a critique of premillennialism and was graced by a Foreword from Anthony Hoekema whose book, *The Bible and the Future* (Eerdmans, 1979), had greatly shaped my thinking on the subject. I can only attribute it to the providential mercy of God that I never submitted the manuscript for publication, but waited until now when a more comprehensive work could be made available. As you might expect, the last quarter of a century has been one in which my understanding of this issue has, I hope, grown and improved, and I pray that the final product will be one that proves beneficial and edifying to the body of Christ. You, the reader, will alone be the judge on that point.

This book is not an exhaustive treatment of every issue or biblical text relating to end-time prophecy. No such book has ever been written and I doubt if it will. Therefore, I am quite prepared to be criticized for not addressing a number of passages and topics that

1. Another influential work that contributed to my doubts about pretribulationism was the Ph.D. dissertation of a DTS graduate, William E. Bell, Jr. The title of his work, written in 1967 and submitted to the School of Education of New York University, was: “A Critical Evaluation of the Pretribulation Rapture Doctrine in Christian Eschatology.” As far as I know it was never formally published.



INTRODUCTION

I suspect many of my readers were hoping I might explain. My primary aim will be to provide a biblical rationale for what is commonly known as amillennialism. In doing so I will of necessity be forced to account for what I also believe are the shortcomings of all varieties of premillennialism, and in particular the dispensational, pretribulational eschatology of the quite famous *Left Behind* series of books authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Along the way we will closely examine what Scripture says concerning the kingdom of God, the relationship between Israel and the Church and whether or not there is a distinct future for national Israel in God's redemptive purposes. I will also examine the third among the millennial options known as postmillennialism, as well as the biblical perspective on the beast of Revelation. As will become evident, the book is built around an in-depth analysis of the major biblical texts that inform our understanding of eschatology. In the final analysis, as I hope all of us will agree, the only thing that matters isn't the theology of a TV personality, the op-ed page of the *New York Times*, or the denominational tradition in which any of us were raised, but the word of God and only the word of God.

 

Chapter One

The Hermeneutics of Eschatology

Five Foundational Principles for the Interpretation of Prophecy¹



Many who study biblical prophecy often fall into one of two camps, reflecting one of two perspectives. On the one hand, there are those who see prophetic texts as providing us with something of a crystal ball through which we can ascertain specific details about what the future holds. The biblical text, on this view, functions much like the blueprints for a new home, providing “specs” and dimensions concerning the future down to the smallest of details. On the other hand, there are those who read prophecy as if it were a stained-glass window, designed to paint in broad brush strokes the general principles that will govern how God brings this world to its consummation in Christ. Although there is a measure of legitimacy in both approaches, neither perspective is entirely adequate. Whereas one tends to demand an almost objective photographic precision from passages that are largely symbolic, the other can easily drift into a slippery subjectivism that treats the Bible like an impressionist work of art.

I certainly don’t intend to provide a comprehensive remedy, as if in one short chapter I could even begin to articulate all the

1. For those unfamiliar with the term, *hermeneutics* simply refers to the science or study of interpretation. That is to say, it is concerned with the principles and patterns of analysis that enable us to make sense of the biblical text.

principles that help us interpret God's Word. What I would like to do, however, is set forth five basic hermeneutical assumptions that undergird and largely account for what you will encounter in the subsequent chapters. I make little effort to defend these principles (that in itself would require an entire book), but rather strive simply to explain them in a way that is intelligible (even if not persuasive!) to all my readers. So let me begin.



1. The central and controlling thesis that I believe is warranted by the biblical text is that the fulfillment of Israel's prophetic hope as portrayed in the Old Testament documents is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the believing remnant, the Church, which he established at his first coming. The point is that Jesus Christ and his Church are the focal and terminating point of all prophecy.

This may sound somewhat trite at first hearing. After all, most Christians are quick to agree that Jesus is the center or focal point of all biblical revelation, that the Old Testament was a foreshadowing of his person and work, and that it is the Father's purpose to "unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10b). But I have in mind something far more specific, something far more comprehensive in terms of how the Old Testament finds its consummate fulfillment in the person of Christ and his body, the Church.

Jesus is the Temple

For example (from among several that I might cite), many affirm that Jesus was the true temple of God, the one in whom the Old Testament physical structure finds its perfect expression. But these same people also insist that God will approve and oversee the construction of yet another (third) physical temple in conjunction with events at the end of the age. Let's take a moment, therefore, and tease out this theme to see how it illustrates the hermeneutical principle in view.²

2. Much of the following discussion is adapted from my book, *A Sincere and Pure Devotion to Christ: 100 Daily Meditations on 2 Corinthians* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

The starting point for understanding this crucial concept is the Old Testament narrative in which we find the visible manifestation of the splendor of God among his people, the *shekinah* of God, his majestic and radiant glory without which the Israelites would have been left in the darkness that characterized the Gentile world. Before Solomon's temple was built, God revealed his glory in the tent or tabernacle which Moses constructed. It was there that God would come, dwell, and meet with his people. "Let them make me a sanctuary," the Lord spoke to Moses, "that I may dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:8). It was there that "the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and [there that] the LORD would speak with Moses" (Exod. 33:9). It was there that "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Exod. 40:34). The tabernacle was where the people of Israel would draw near to hear from God, to worship him, and to stand in his presence (cf. Lev. 9:23; Num. 14:10).

What was true of the tabernacle during the days of Israel's sojourn was even more the case in the temple of Solomon. When the Ark of the Covenant was brought "to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim" (2 Chron. 5:7), "the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:14).

It is against this preparatory backdrop that we read the stunning declaration of the Apostle John that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). The word translated "dwelt" (*skenoo*) literally means "to pitch a tent" or "to live in a tabernacle" and unmistakably points back to the Old Testament when God's glory took up residence in the tent of Moses, the portable tabernacle, and eventually in Solomon's temple.

John's point is that God has now chosen to dwell with his people in a yet more personal way, in the Word who became flesh: in Jesus! The Word, Jesus of Nazareth, is the true and ultimate *shekinah* glory of God, the complete and perfect manifestation of the presence of God among his people. The place of God's glorious

dwelling is the flesh of his Son! The glory which once shined in the tent/tabernacle/temple of old, veiled in the mysterious cloud, was simply *a fore-glow, a mere anticipatory flicker*, if you will, of that exceedingly excelling glory now embodied in the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 1:19).

God no longer lives in a tent or tabernacle built by human hands, *nor will he ever*. God's glorious manifest presence is not to be found in an ornate temple of marble, gold, and precious stones, but rather in Jesus. Jesus is the glory of God in human flesh, the one in whom God has finally and fully pitched his tent.

The point is that the temple of the Old Covenant was a type or foreshadowing of the glory of Christ (more on Typology below). It was the place where the Law of Moses was preserved, of which Jesus is now the fulfillment. It was the place of revelation and relationship, where God met with and spoke to his people. Now we hear God and see God and meet God in Jesus. It was the place of sacrifice, where forgiveness of sins was obtained. For that, we now go to Jesus (see Mark 2:1-12). Israel worshiped and celebrated in the temple in Jerusalem. We now worship in spirit and truth, regardless of geographical locale (cf. John 4:20-26).

In order to meet with God, to talk with him, and to worship him, we no longer come to a building or a tent or a structure made with human hands. We come to Jesus! Jesus is the Temple of God! Gary Burge is right: "Divine space is now no longer located in a place but in a person."³

But the story doesn't end there. *We, the Church, are the body of Christ* and therefore constitute the *temple* in which God is pleased to dwell. The *shekinah* of Yahweh now abides permanently and powerfully in us through the Holy Spirit. When Paul describes this in his letter to the Ephesians, he refers to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21-22).

3. Gary M. Burge, *Jesus and the Land: The New Testament Challenge to "Holy Land" Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 52 (emphasis his).

Simply put, God's residence is "neither a literal temple in Jerusalem nor simply heaven, but the Church, of which the Gentile Christian readers in Asia Minor were a part."⁴

This formation of the temple is an on-going divine project, a continuous process (see also Ephesians 4:15-16). Although it may seem strange to speak of a "building" experiencing continuous "growth", Paul surely wants us to conceive of the Church as an *organic* entity. Recall that Peter also refers to believers somewhat paradoxically as "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5)!

Again, Paul grounds his appeal to the Corinthians in this truth: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor. 3:16-17). In his plea for sexual purity, Paul again asks: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19-20; see also the graphic portrayal of this truth in 1 Pet. 2:4-10).

All this brings us to Paul's consummate declaration in 2 Corinthians 6:16b: "For we are the temple of the living God"! To reinforce this point he conflates several Old Testament texts (Lev. 26:11-12; Isa. 52:11; Ezek. 11:17; 20:34, 41; 2 Sam. 7:14) which prophesied of a coming temple, one of which is Ezekiel 37:26-27 where God declares: "I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will set them in their land and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Let me come straight to the point. Beginning with the incarnation and consummating in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with the progressive building of his spiritual body, the Church, God is fulfilling his promise of an eschatological temple in which he will forever dwell.

4. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 158.

But what about the literal, physical temple in Jerusalem? Has it lost its spiritual significance in God's redemptive purposes? To answer this we must look to Jesus' words in Matthew 23–24 (about which I'll have much to say in two subsequent chapters).

In his judgment against the Jewish people, the temple complex was abandoned by our Lord, both physically and spiritually, as he departed and made his way to the Mount of Olives. "Your house," said Jesus, "is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). It has thus ceased to be "God's" house. When Jesus died and "the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:51), God forever ceased to bless it with his presence or to acknowledge it as anything other than *ichabod* (the glory has departed).

Just as dramatically as Jesus had entered Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1-17, the so-called "Triumphal Entry") and its temple, he now departs. This once grand and glorious house of God is now consigned exclusively to them ("See, *your* house is left to *you* desolate," Matt. 23:38; emphasis mine). The echoes of God's withdrawal from the temple in Ezekiel's vision reverberate in the words of our Lord (see Ezek. 10:18-19; 11:22-23). The ultimate physical destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 is but the outward consummation of God's spiritual repudiation of it. Jesus has now left, never to return. Indeed, the action of Jesus in departing the temple and taking his seat on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:3) recalls Ezekiel 11:23 where we read that "the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city."

This applies equally to any supposed future temple that many believe will be built in Jerusalem in the general vicinity where the Dome of the Rock now stands. It's entirely possible, of course, that people in Israel may one day build a temple structure and resume their religious activities within it. The political and military implications of such, not to mention the religious furor it would provoke, are obvious. Whether or not this will ever occur is hard to say, but if it does *it will have no eschatological or theological significance whatsoever*, other than to rise up as a stench in the nostrils of God. The only temple in which God is now and forever will be pleased to dwell is Jesus Christ and the Church, his spiritual body.

It would be an egregious expression of the worst imaginable *redemptive regression* to suggest that God would ever sanction the rebuilding of the temple. It would be tantamount to a denial that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. It would constitute a repudiation of the Church as the temple of God and thus an affront to the explicit affirmation of Paul here in 2 Corinthians 6 and elsewhere.⁵

Finally, let's not lose sight of the practical point Paul is making in this passage in 2 Corinthians 6. It is because we as the Church are the place of God's presence in the world today that we must guard ourselves against any and every expression of idolatry. We are not simply another cultural institution or "social service meeting the felt needs" of our neighbors. "Instead, as the new covenant people of God, the church is the 'family of God' united by a common identity in Christ and gathered around her common worship and fear of 'the Lord Almighty.'"⁶ May our lives always reflect that glorious and gracious identity.

Jesus fulfills the Feasts

Yet another example of this hermeneutical principle at work is seen in the way Jesus fulfills in his person and work all the feasts of Israel. One particular instance of this is made explicitly clear in John 7:37-44. The feast of Tabernacles was, if not the most popular celebration in Israel during the time of the old covenant, certainly the most joyful. It was celebrated in early fall, following harvest, after the crop was in the barn. Unlike the somber and serious mood of Passover, Tabernacles was a time of great festivity and rejoicing. For seven days in Jerusalem the people lived in booths or tabernacles made of leaves and branches. It was truly a time of joy, dancing, singing, and shouting (see Lev. 23:40).

On the seventh and final day of the feast, a typical celebrant would carry in his right hand a *lulabha*, the branch of a myrtle tree, one from

-
5. For an excellent explanation of how Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 40-48) of a restored temple fits in with the perspective developed here, see G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 335-64.
 6. Scott Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 292.

a willow, and another from a palm tree, all tied together. In the left hand one carried an *ethrog*, or citrus branches bound as one. One of the priests would take in hand a golden pitcher and lead the crowd in festive procession, to the accompaniment of flutes and trumpets, to the pool of Siloam. He would fill the pitcher with water from the pool and then lead the worshiping parade back to the temple. He immediately proceeded to the altar where the sacrifice had been offered and there poured the water into a funnel which led to the base of the altar. Then, to the accompaniment of the flute, shaking the lulabha in the right hand and the ethrog in the left, all the people would chant, antiphonally, Psalms 113–118, climaxed by the public recitation of Psalm 118:24-29. The symbolic purpose of the water ritual, considered the high point of the festival, was to remind the people of the provision of water from God during the time of wilderness wandering (see Num. 20:7-11; Neh. 9:15, 19-20) as well as his showering the earth to make possible the growth of their crops.

It was then, with the ritual of water still fresh in the minds of the people, that a man from Nazareth stood up from a visible and prominent place and cried aloud: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37-38). Simply, yet profoundly, put, Jesus was saying: “This feast is all about **me!** The water that flowed from the rock in the wilderness symbolized **me!** The sacrifice on the altar is about **me!** The water in the golden pitcher points to **me!** The promise of refreshing waters of salvation refers to **me!** The water that I offer is better than that which flowed from the rock, better than that which falls from heaven to nourish your crops, better than that just taken from the pool of Siloam. I am the water that gives eternal life, eternal refreshment, and eternal joy! No longer do you need to go to the temple. No longer do you need to celebrate the feast. Celebrate **me!** Come and drink of **me!**”

Jesus is our Sabbath Rest

We also see this principle expressed in how Jesus responded to the accusation of the Pharisees that he and his disciples had profaned the Sabbath when they plucked heads of grain to satisfy their

hunger (Mark 2:23-28). Matthew's version of the story includes this remarkable declaration by our Lord: "Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:5-6). Jesus is saying in response to their accusations: "I am greater than David! I am greater than the temple!" But he doesn't stop there: "And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man [i.e., for his benefit and spiritual and physical welfare] not man for the Sabbath [the Sabbath has no needs that a human can fulfill]. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27-28).

Do you see what Jesus is saying? This isn't primarily a story about finding a loophole in the Sabbath regulations. This isn't primarily about finding precedent in the Old Testament for reaping and eating on the Sabbath. It isn't even primarily about whether or not you can do good by healing a man on the Sabbath. *This is a story about who Jesus is!* It is all about Jesus saying to them and to us: *I am greater than David. I am the fulfillment of all that David typified. I am greater than the temple. I am the fulfillment of all that the temple typified and symbolized. I am greater than the Sabbath. I bring to you a rest and satisfaction that not even the Old Testament Sabbath could provide.* In the words of N.T. Wright, "If Jesus is a walking, living, breathing Temple, he is also the walking, celebrating, victorious sabbath."⁷

Remember that the Sabbath was instituted by God as a sign of the old covenant with Israel (see Exod. 31:12-13, 16-17). However, as Paul makes clear in Colossians 2:16-17, Jesus is the fulfillment of all that the Old Testament prophesied, prefigured, and foreshadowed: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

The immediate purpose of the Sabbath in the Old Testament was to provide men and women with physical rest from their physical

7. N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 138.

labors. When Paul says that this Sabbath was a shadow, of which Christ is the substance, he means that the physical rest provided by the Old Testament Sabbath finds its fulfillment in the spiritual rest provided by Jesus. We cease from our labors, not by resting physically one day in seven, but by resting spiritually every day and forever in Christ by faith alone. We experience God's true Sabbath rest, not by taking off from work one day in seven, but by placing our faith in the saving work of Jesus. To experience God's Sabbath rest, therefore, is to cease from those works of righteousness by which we were seeking to be justified. The New Testament fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath is not one day in seven of physical rest, but an eternity of spiritual rest through faith in the work of Christ.

Physical rest, of course, is still essential. God does not intend for us to work seven days a week. Our body and spirit need to experience renewal and refreshment by resting. But resting on Sunday is not the same thing as the OT observance of the Sabbath day. Some Christians have chosen to treat Sunday as if it were a Sabbath, as if it were special, and that's entirely permissible. Don't let anyone tell you it is wrong. But neither should you tell anyone that it is wrong if they treat Sunday like every other day of the week. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). If you want to observe Sunday as a day of rest to the exclusion of all other worldly pursuits or activities, that's fine. But you have no biblical right to expect others to do the same and therefore no biblical right to pass judgment on them if they don't.

My point is simply that for the Christian, for the person who is trusting in the work of Jesus Christ rather than in his own efforts, for those resting by faith in Jesus, *every day is the Sabbath!* Every day is a celebration of the fact that we don't have to do any spiritual or physical works to gain acceptance with God. We are accepted by him through faith in the works of Jesus Christ. If you are a child of God, born again, trusting and believing in Jesus for your acceptance with God rather than in your own works and efforts, you are experiencing the true meaning of Sabbath twenty-four hours a day,

seven days a week. I observe the Sabbath every moment of every day to the degree that I rest in the work of Christ for me. Thus, for the Christian, Jesus is our Sabbath rest!⁸

The same scenario, the identical claim on the part of Jesus, can also be made with regard to every Old Testament feast, holiday, type, celebration, or institution. Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath (Col. 2:16-17) but also of the Old Testament Passover (1 Cor. 5:7-8), the Old Testament temple (Matt. 12:6), as well as the entire Old Testament sacrificial system (Heb. 10:1-18). Everything and all that these events and institutions were designed to be and do, Jesus was and did. To suggest that any such Old Testament shadow might yet re-emerge in God's divine economy is worse than redemptive retrograde. It is tantamount to a denial of the coming of Christ Jesus and the sufficiency of all that he accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection. Thus any attempt to interpret Old Testament prophetic texts that, as it were, leapfrogs the incarnate Christ will ultimately mislead us into expecting at some future time what God never intended and never will bring to pass.

Jesus is the True Vine

One more example of this principle in operation is found in our Lord's claim to be "the true vine" in John 15:1-5. One of the primary metaphors in the Old Testament of Israel's rootedness in the land is that of the vineyard. We see this in numerous texts, such as Hosea 10:1 ("Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit"); as well as Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 12:11f.; Ezekiel 15:1-8; 17:1-10; 19:10-14; and Isaiah 5:7 ("For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel"); 27:2-6. The most explicit statement is found in Psalm 80:7-11,

⁷Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

⁸You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and

8. For more on this subject, see *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, Charles P. Arand, Craig L. Blomberg, Skip MacCarty, Joseph A. Pipa, edited by Christopher John Donato (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011). I especially recommend the chapter by Blomberg, 305-58.

planted it. ⁹You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. ¹⁰The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. ¹¹It set out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the River.

But as Burge points out, “the crux for John 15 is that Jesus is changing the place of rootedness for Israel. The commonplace prophetic metaphor (the land as vineyard, the people of Israel as vines) now undergoes a dramatic shift. God’s vineyard, the land of Israel, now has only one vine: Jesus. The people of Israel cannot claim to be planted as vines in the land; they cannot be *rooted* in the vineyard unless first they are *grafted* into Jesus.”⁹ God the vinedresser “now has one vine growing in his vineyard. And the only means of attachment to the land is through this one vine, Jesus Christ.”¹⁰

Thus, just as we saw with the temple, here in the fourth gospel John “is transferring spatial, earthbound gifts from God and connecting them to a living person, Jesus Christ.”¹¹ Whatever sense of identity or spiritual benefits and blessings God’s people derived from the land in the Old Testament, they now can find only through a relationship of faith in Jesus. Burge here anticipates what we’ll look at later with regard to the role of the “land” in God’s prophetic purpose when he says that “those who pursue territory, religious turf, motivated by the expectation that it is theirs by privilege hoping that God will bless their endeavor, are sorely mistaken.... ‘The way’ [to God] is not territorial. It is spiritual.”¹² In sum, here in John 15 “Jesus exploits the vineyard metaphor in order to take from it what Judaism had sought from the land. Now Jesus is the sole source of life and hope and future. The land as holy territory therefore should now recede from the concern of God’s people. The vineyard is no longer an object of religious desire as it once had been.”¹³ Only Jesus is!

9. Gary Burge, *Jesus and the Land*, 54-55.

10. *Ibid.*, 55.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, 56.

The Meaning of "Forever"

What, then, should we do with those texts where specific Old Testament institutions or practices are said to have been established by God "forever" or are declared to be "everlasting" (one example being the Sabbath; see again Exodus 31:12-13, 16-17). Whereas the immediate response of many is to assume that "When the Bible says 'forever' it means 'forever,'" a closer look reveals this to be a facile and erroneous conclusion. In fact, the Hebrew word for "forever" or "everlasting" is not nearly as chronologically or temporally "infinite" as it may sound in English. The Aaronic Levites as priests (1 Chron. 23:13) and the descendants of David as kings (2 Sam. 7:12-16) are said to have been instituted "forever", yet both have come to their end and are unmistakably seen as fulfilled in Christ in the new covenant. Thus, as Christopher Wright has noted, "when the land, the kings and the priests were declared to be 'forever', it meant that these dimensions were permanent and guaranteed while Israel as a nation was the limit of God's redemptive work and covenant relationship. Once this national and territorial basis was transcended through the coming of the Messiah and the extension of the gospel of redemption to Gentiles and Jews through him, then the 'forever-ness' of these things resides in Christ himself, the embodiment of Israel."¹⁴ Thus these features do, in a sense, exist forever, but not simply in the concrete terms in which they were first expressed but in their consummate and transcendent expression when fulfilled and perpetuated eternally in Christ.

Thus, on occasion, "forever" can "designate something that is true presently and lasts indefinitely into the future, without interruption and without end"¹⁵ (as, for example, when the psalmist declares: "Your testimonies are righteous forever," Ps. 119:144). But in countless other texts, notes Brent Sandy, "forever" "may or

-
14. Christopher Wright, "A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy Concerning Israel," in *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, edited by P.W.L. Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.
 15. D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 98.

may not begin immediately, may be interrupted for long periods of time, and may achieve its perpetuity only in the distant future, when time essentially will no longer matter anyway.”¹⁶ In other places “forever” may “designate perpetuity in the present world, with no notion of its being without end. It is simply the notion of continuing.”¹⁷ “Forever” may also be used in hyperbole, especially in Old Testament poetic literature (see Isa. 34:10; Jer. 15:14; 17:27; 18:16; Jonah 2:6). In a number of texts “forever” is used “to add a sense of pregnancy to language, or a sense of power and emotion and mystery,” rather than to indicate simply perpetuity.¹⁸



2. The previous principle should not lead us to neglect the equally legitimate truth that whereas the Old Testament saw the consummation of God’s redemptive purposes in one act, the New Testament authors portray it as coming in two phases. This is often seen in the New Testament in terms of the “overlapping” of the ages. The consummation of God’s redemptive purpose has begun in Christ but we still abide in the present evil age. Some refer to this as the “inauguration of the end”. God has acted in Christ to “fulfill” his prophetic promise but the “consummation” will come only when Christ does for a second time.

Thus the unfolding fulfillment of God’s promises may be seen in terms of what Geerhardus Vos called a “binary configuration.”¹⁹ That is to say, human history reflects a tension between what was accomplished at the first advent of Christ and what awaits consummation at the second. Thus we live in “this present evil age” but partake, in part, of the glories of “the age to come.” Hence there is a tension between what has “Already” been fulfilled (or at least

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 99. See 1 Kings 1:31; Neh. 2:3; Dan. 2:4; 3:9; 6:21; Josh. 4:7.

18. Ibid., 100. On p. 222 of his book, Sandy lists more than thirty texts in which “forever” does not mean literally “in perpetuity”.

19. Geerhardus Vos, “The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, edited by Richard B Gaffin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 93-94.

partially inaugurated) and what has “Not Yet” been consummated. Examples of this abound, but here are only a few:

- Salvation is now, but also future (Eph. 2:8 / Rom. 5:10)
- Justification is now, but also future (Rom. 5:1 / Rom. 2:13)
- We have been adopted into God’s family as his children, but our adoption is also yet to come (1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:23)
- We have been raised with Christ, but the resurrection is also yet future (Eph. 2; Rom. 6 / Phil. 3; 1 Cor. 15)
- We have been glorified, but will be glorified (Rom. 8:30 / Phil. 3; 1 John 3)
- We have been redeemed, but redemption is yet future (Eph. 1:4ff. / Rom. 8:23; 13:11).
- Regenerate believers are a “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), while we yet await the new heavens and new earth at the return of Jesus.

Thus, when reading the Old Testament one must reckon with the placement of events in close proximity, as if they happen simultaneously or in quick succession. The fact is, as both the New Testament and history have proven, events are often separated by significant intervals of time. This has often been called *prophetic foreshortening*. Donald Garlington provides this example:

The classic illustration is that of the advent of Messiah. The Prophets saw only one coming, with no distinction made between two phases of that coming. Thus, what is represented by the Prophets as transpiring once-for-all in “the latter days” is realized over an expanse of time which is already virtually two millennia in length. Therefore, it is in light of the New Testament we discern that Messiah’s coming is in *two* stages, corresponding to the *inauguration and consummation* of God’s eschatological purposes.²⁰

20. Donald Garlington, “Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 and the Question of the Millennium,” in *Reformation and Revival Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1997, 60-61.



3. Essential to this interpretive perspective is that “the New Testament serves, as it were, as the ‘lexicon’ of the Old Testament’s eschatological expectation. In a nutshell, the Old Testament anticipates realities which are unpacked and explicated by the apostolic writings from the vantage point of salvation-historical realization in Christ.”²¹ In sum, Jesus is himself the inspired interpreter of the Old Testament. His identity, life, and mission provide the framework within which we are to read and approach the Old Testament (see especially Luke 24:25-27 and 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Let’s look at this more closely with help from G.K. Beale. Certain Old Testament texts, he tells us, have “thick” content, the full meaning of which may have been unknown to its original author and is discernible only in the aftermath of Christ’s coming and our access to the Scriptures in their final canonical form. In other words, biblical texts can “grow in meaning.”²² This can happen when an original author either consciously or, more likely, unconsciously writes in such a way that his text is “open-ended or indeterminate.”²³ In other words, “authors may wish to include a potential in what they say to extend meaning into the indefinite future by espousing principles intended for an indefinite number of applications. Or, alternatively, authors may be aware that their original meaning has the potential to be recontextualized by subsequent interpreters who ascertain creative applications of the meaning to new contexts. In such cases a provision is made for subsequent readers to interpret in a way that ‘extends meaning.’ Thus an original meaning is so designed to tolerate some revision in cognitive content and yet not be essentially altered.”²⁴

Beale argues that this may be what is happening when New Testament authors cite or allude to Old Testament prophetic passages. The

21. Ibid., 56.

22. G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 377.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

original intent of a particular Old Testament author may not be “as comprehensive as the simultaneous divine intentions, which become progressively unpacked as the history of revelation progresses until they reach climax in Christ.”²⁵ Old Testament authors thus prophesied of events that would occur in a distant time and in a new world inaugurated by Jesus. From their original context they might not fully grasp how their words would find fulfillment in a history radically transformed by the coming of Christ. Thus “the literal picture of Old Testament prophecy is magnified by the lens of New Testament progressive revelation, which enlarges the details of fulfillment in the beginning new world that will be completed at Christ’s last advent.”²⁶

In sum, “the progress of revelation reveals enlarged meanings of earlier biblical texts, and later biblical writers further interpret prior canonical writings in ways that amplify earlier texts. These later interpretations may formulate meanings of which earlier authors may not have been conscious, but which do not contravene their original organic intention but may ‘supervene’ on it. This is to say that original meanings have ‘thick’ content and that original authors likely were not exhaustively aware (in the way God was) of the full extent of that content. In this regard, fulfillment often ‘fleshes out’ prophecy with details of which even the prophet may not have been fully cognizant.”²⁷



4. We now come to a principle of interpretation apart from which the proper reading of prophetic texts may prove impossible. Brent Sandy points out, rightly so, in my opinion, that “our ideas about things we have never experienced are largely controlled by things we have experienced.”²⁸ In other words, whenever the biblical authors sought to describe the future, which they had not experienced, they often employed language and imagery from the present, which they

25. Ibid., 379.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 381.

28. Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 25.

had experienced. Or, as Richard Bauckham put it, “Prophecy can only depict the future in terms which make sense to its present. It clothes the purpose of God in the hopes and fears of its contemporaries.”²⁹ It’s the age-old problem of how to describe eschatological and heavenly concepts in human language. Sandy’s argument is that “under divine empowerment, the prophets created metaphors and similes from their world to let us experience what the world of God and heaven is like – as best they could.”³⁰

This principle is especially helpful in enabling us to grasp the distinction often drawn between what is *literal* and what is *figurative*. Take, for example, the passage from which the title of Sandy’s book was derived: “and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4; Micah 4:3; cf. Joel 3:10). How *literal* is this prophetic utterance? Do the prophets mean to suggest that people in the end times will literally or physically reshape an actual sword into an actual plow or pruning hook? Or do they mean that those who have any instruments of warfare will transform them, by whatever means possible, into instruments of agriculture? Or it may be that the point of the imagery is simply that God will restore order to the earth in the sense that political peace among all nations and the complete absence of military conflict will come to pass. I’m inclined to think the last is true. As Sandy points out, “only when we reach the point of denying that anything will happen as a result of these words have we moved completely away from literal meaning. At that point to be nonliteral would mean to be nonhistorical (nonactual).”³¹ His point, and this is critically important, is that one can interpret the prophets as speaking “literally” if, by that, we mean that what they *intended* to communicate will actually and historically come to pass. Whether or not there is a one-to-one “physical” equivalence between the words of predic-

29. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 450.

30. Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*, 28.

31. *Ibid.*, 39.

tion and the event of fulfillment is of secondary importance. The key then becomes ascertaining authorial intent.

The point is that “if we fail to hear the communication as the authors intended and the hearers understood, it is because we are outside in the dark. When God chose to use the forms of communication and culture available in the biblical world, he simply left us with the challenge to enter into that world to understand his revelation.”³² In other words, it is a fatal mistake to think we can interpret the prophetic word apart from an understanding of the social, linguistic, historical, economic, cultural, theological and aesthetic conventions of the author, as well as the range of what the original audience could reasonably be expected to grasp from his words.

The Meaning of “Metaphor”

All this demands that we engage in a brief analysis of the nature of metaphor. Metaphors, Sandy notes, “begin with something non-figurative and make it figurative by using it to describe something beyond the scope of its normal meaning.”³³ It’s important to remember, then, that “metaphors speak truths, but the surface meaning of the words in metaphors speak untruths.”³⁴ The surface meaning of, “We locked horns on that topic,” is meaningless. Neither of the disputants had horns! But the statement communicates a real, actual, historical truth, namely, that I and another person disagreed and argued about a particular issue. Thus, figurative language, such as metaphor, hyperbole, simile, etc. may actually enhance the truth and power and force of utterances in a way that surface, flat-footed literalism never could. Or to illustrate yet again, “when people are nearly blind, we increase the font size. When people are nearly deaf, we turn up the volume. When people are mentally handicapped, we use visuals. The audience of prophetic language was sometimes blind, sometimes deaf and often mentally handicapped.”³⁵ There-

32. Ibid., 57.

33. Ibid., 62.

34. Ibid., 63-64.

35. Ibid., 73.

fore, figurative language was employed to communicate more effectively the truth about God's eschatological purposes.

We simply cannot escape the fact that metaphor is dominant in Scripture, especially in prophetic texts. This recognition does not undermine the authority or infallibility of the word. Evangelicals must stop their knee-jerk reaction to the word as if it is nothing more than the liberal scholar's way of dismissing the historicity of the Bible. The concepts and principles communicated via figurative language are as true and real as those communicated via more "literal" language. To say that a text or phrase is metaphorical does not mean it isn't true or that it is emptied of concrete reality. It simply means that ordinary, flat-footed literalism would fail to fully and properly communicate what God intended.

The New Heavens and New Earth

This foundational principle in the interpretation of prophetic literature comes to light in the way one handles the Old Testament portrayal of the new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65:17-25 (see also 66:22). The problem this text poses for all Christians, regardless of their millennial beliefs, is found in verses 20 and 23. There we read that in the new heavens and new earth there shall not be "an infant who lives but a few days or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed" (v. 20). And in verse 23 it appears to suggest that women during that time will bear children.

The principle we have been discussing is clearly articulated by Garlington:

Prophecy is characteristically cast in terms of the limited understanding of the person to whom it was given. That is to say, the language of prophecy is conditioned by the historical and cultural setting in which the prophet and the people found themselves.... [Thus] the future kingdom is beheld as an extension and glorification of the theocracy, the most common representation of which is its condition in the reigns of David and Solomon. The prospect for the future, accord-

ingly, is portrayed in terms of *the ideal past*, in terms both familiar and pleasing to the contemporaries of the prophet. This phenomenon has been termed “recapitulation eschatology,” i.e., the future is depicted as a recapitulation or repetition of the past glory of the kingdom.³⁶

As noted earlier, the point is that the Old Testament author frequently spoke of the future in terms, images, and concepts borrowed from the social and cultural world with which he and his contemporaries were familiar. Since he likely could not fully grasp how his words would find fulfillment in a distant time and altogether new world transformed by the coming of Christ, he clothed the eschatological purposes of God, including the glory of the new heaven and new earth, in the beliefs, fears, and hopes of those to whom they were originally delivered. Thus, when prophets spoke about the future, says Christopher Wright, “they could only do so meaningfully by using terms and realities that existed in their past or present experience.”³⁷ These realities included such things as the land, the law, the city of Jerusalem, the temple, the sacrificial system, and the priesthood. Therefore, “to speak of restoration without recourse to such concrete features of being Israel would have been meaningless, even if it had been possible.”³⁸

It should also be noted that the fulfillment of such prophecies, cast in terms of those contemporary realities with which the original audience was conversant, would often go beyond and transcend them. There is almost always an element of *escalation* or *intensification* in the fulfillment of any particular promise. The best and most intelligible way that the original author of this prophecy could communicate the *realistic future* glory of the new heaven and new earth, to people who were necessarily limited by the progress of revelation to that point in time, was to portray it in the hyperbolic or exaggerated terms of an *ideal present*. What greater glory was imaginable to

36. Donald Garlington, “Reigning with Christ,” 61.

37. Christopher Wright, “A Christian Approach to Old Testament Prophecy Concerning Israel,” 3.

38. *Ibid.* This principle may well provide us with the best possible explanation of the enigmatic prophecy of Zechariah 14:1-21.

the original audience to whom Isaiah wrote than to speak of an age in which a person dying at 100 would be thought of as an infant, an age in which the all too familiar anguish of childbirth was a thing of the past? His point isn't to assert that people will actually die or that women will continue to give birth. Rather, he has taken two very concrete and painful experiences from the common life of people in his own day to illustrate what to them, then, was an almost unimaginable and inexpressible glory yet to come. The explanation of this principle by Alec Motyer should suffice:

Things we have no real capacity to understand can be expressed only through things we know and experience. So it is that in this present order of things death cuts life off before it has well begun or before it has fully matured. But it will not be so then. No infant will fail to enjoy life nor an elderly person come short of total fulfilment. Indeed, one would be but a youth were one to die aged a hundred! This does not imply that death will still be present (contradicting 25:7-8) but rather affirms that over the whole of life, as we should now say from infancy to old age, the power of death will be destroyed.³⁹



5. Our final principle concerns what is known as typology. In typology the student of Scripture finds a divinely orchestrated correspondence or parallel in one or more respects between a person, event, series of circumstances, or institution in the Old Testament (called the *type*) and a person, event, or thing in the New Testament (called the *antitype*). In most cases the Old Testament type finds a deeper realization or expression in some aspect of the life of Jesus, his redemptive work, his judgments, or in his future return and reign. The correspondence is based on the premise that God controls history. There is, therefore, a *providential pattern* in the type that is repeated in the antitype. The characteristic features of an earlier (Old Testament) individual, experience, or relationship

39. J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 530.

between God and humanity reappear later (New Testament) with a finality and sense of fulfillment not initially apparent. God is the one who molds and shapes the specific details of history so that they occur originally as types and are later recognized by New Testament authors as such. Typology clearly assumes the organic unity of the two testaments in the sense that the Old is a preparatory foreshadowing of which the New is its continuation and consummation.

Most scholars recognize several important features in typology. For example, the Old Testament person, event, or institution which serves as the type must be historical and not something read back into the Old Testament text. R.T. France also points out that there is always some notable point of resemblance or analogy or correspondence between the “type” (Old Testament) and its “antitype” (New Testament):

This correspondence must be both historical (i.e., a correspondence of situation and event) and theological (i.e., an embodiment of the same principle of God’s working). The lack of a real historical correspondence reduces typology to allegory, as when the scarlet thread hung in the window by Rahab is taken as a prefiguration of the blood of Christ; both may be concerned with deliverance, but the situations and events are utterly dissimilar. On the other hand, the lack of a real theological correspondence destroys what we have seen as the very basis of typology, the perception of a constant principle in the working of God. This is not, of course, to demand a correspondence in every detail of the two persons or events, but simply that the same theological principle should be seen operating in two persons or events which present a recognizable analogy to each other in terms of the actual historical situation. Only where there is both a historical and theological correspondence is a typological use of the Old Testament justified.⁴⁰

Of great significance is the fact that there is in the “antitype” an *intensification* or *escalation* of the “type.” The relation between the

40. R.T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1971), 41.

two is not simply one of mere repetition, nor even of comparative increase. Rather, in the “antitype” there is *eschatological completion and consummation*. The nature of this intensification or escalation or consummation which we see in the “antitype” is often such that involves a movement from the external and earthly to the internal and spiritual. For example, France points to John 3:14-15 and the incident of the brazen serpent. The points of correspondence are “lifting up” and “life”. Both the serpent and Christ were “lifted up,” but the latter in a way far more significant and spiritual than the former. Similarly, those who “looked” at the serpent received “life” in the physical sense, i.e., they did not die of the snake bite; on the other hand, those who “look” to Christ (i.e., believe in him) receive “life” in the spiritual sense, eternal life.

It’s also important that we differentiate typology from allegory, and in some sense also from prophecy. Bernard Ramm is helpful in the former case. Allegorical interpretation, he contends, “is the interpretation of a document whereby something *foreign, peculiar, or hidden* is introduced into the meaning of the text giving it a proposed deeper or real meaning.... *Typological interpretation* is specifically the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments whereby something in the Old shadows, prefigures, adumbrates something in the New. Hence, what is interpreted in the Old is not foreign or peculiar or hidden, but rises naturally out of the text due to the relationship of the two Testaments.”⁴¹ A good example of allegory is the way in which one of the church fathers interpreted the story of Herod’s slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem (Matthew 2). The fact that only the children of two years old and under were murdered while those of three presumably escaped is meant to teach us that those who hold the Trinitarian faith will be saved whereas Binitarians (those who recognize only two divine persons in the Godhead) and Unitarians (one divine person) will undoubtedly perish!

41. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 223.

France also seeks to differentiate between typology and prophecy, although this is admittedly more difficult. A type, says France, is not a prediction. "In itself it is simply a person, event, etc. recorded as historical fact, with no intrinsic reference to the future. Nor is an antitype the fulfillment of a prediction; it is rather the re-embodiment of a principle which has been previously exemplified in the type. A prediction looks forward to, and demands, an event which is to be its fulfillment; typology, however, consists essentially in looking back and discerning previous examples of a pattern now reaching its culmination."⁴²

There are number of different sorts of types in the Old Testament. One can find persons (Adam, Solomon, David, Jonah), events (the Passover, the experience of Israel in the wilderness), articles of religious life (the temple and its furnishings), institutions (the Levitical sacrificial system), offices (Aaron as priest and Moses as prophet), and certain actions (the lifting up of the brazen serpent, as noted earlier, is a case in point) that function in typological fashion.

One of the most common expressions of typology is in the way certain individuals in the Old Testament embody characteristics that later reappear in the life and ministry of Jesus. We see this with Jonah (Matt. 12:38-41; Luke 11:29-30,32), Solomon (Matt. 12:42; Luke 11:31), David (Mark 2:25-26; Matt. 12:3-4; Luke 6:3-4), Elijah and Elisha (Mark 6:35ff.; Matt. 14:15ff.; Luke 4:23-30; Luke 9:12ff.), and Isaiah (Mark 4:12; Matt. 13:13; Luke 8:10; see Isa. 6:9-10). A similar pattern exists between the temple and Jesus (Matt. 12:5-6), as well as Israel and Jesus (the temptation – Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; the Exodus and cross – Luke 9:31).

No one has proven more helpful than R.T. France in bringing to our awareness the implications of typology for eschatology, and in particular how typology accounts for how Jesus himself relates to the Old Testament.⁴³

First, says France, typology reveals that *Jesus is in line with the Old Testament*. In response to accusations of being a revolutionary

42. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 39-40.

43. I've summarized the argument as provided by France in *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 78-80.

and of setting himself against the Old Testament, Jesus claimed a continuity between God's working in the Old Testament and his own ministry. He was simply working out patterns already seen in the Old Testament. If in the Old Testament God worked through prophets, priests, and kings, then Jesus could point to all three as types of himself. If in the Old Testament God selected a people to whom he made promises of blessing, then Jesus could claim that in himself and his disciples that people was embodied, and those promises would find their fulfillment. Jesus understood the Old Testament Christologically: in its essential principles, and even in its details, it foreshadows the Messiah whom it promises. *The entire theological system of the Old Testament points forward to his work, and in his coming the whole Old Testament economy finds its perfection and fulfillment.*

Second, typology discloses how *Jesus is not only in line with the Old Testament but is superior to it.* God's working is not only repeated, but *repeated on a higher plane*, and with a greater glory and significance. Three times Jesus states this superiority of the antitype to the type in so many words: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6); "something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41); "something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). In Mark 2:25-26, a parallel argument to Matthew 12:6, although the superiority is not explicit, the argument depends on it. In Mark 6:35ff. Jesus repeats Elisha's miracle, but on a vastly greater scale. *Twice he succeeds where Old Testament Israel, the type, had failed (the temptation, and the resurrection, where Israel's vain hope comes to fruition in him).* And since Jesus is superior to the Old Testament types, the Jewish refusal to accept him as God's messenger must carry a greater condemnation. Their punishment, in the destruction of Jerusalem and the final rejection of the nation from their privileged status as the people of God, will be on a scale higher even than the most terrible disasters known to the Old Testament: "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be" (Mark 13:19). The rejection of the Old Testament prophets brought severe condemnation, but,

as the parable of the tenants shows, something greater than the prophets is here.

Finally, *Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament*. In Jesus the age of fulfillment has come. *The patterns discerned in the Old Testament are not only repeated on a higher plane, but they are now finding their final and perfect embodiment*. All God's working in the Old Testament is now reaching its culmination, and the Old Testament economy is at an end. The new, messianic age has dawned.

This is seen, paradoxically, in the fact that Jewish unbelief has now reached its highest point, so that its punishment must this time be final and complete. *The true Israel of this eschatological age is no longer the nation of the old covenant, but the Christian community, inaugurated by a new covenant through a mediator greater than the Israelite priesthood; for Jesus not only repeats the work of prophet, priest and king, but in him it is perfected. In this new community the hopes of the Old Testament Israel are fulfilled*. The glorious fulfillment to which the Old Testament looked forward has come; these are the "last days." The words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:11 sum up the conviction of Jesus: "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."

France's point is that Jesus saw his mission as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, not just of those which predicted a coming redeemer, but of the whole sweep of Old Testament ideas. The patterns of God's working which the discerning eye could trace in the history and institutions of Israel were all preparing for the great climax when all would be taken up into the final and perfect act of God which the prophets foretold. And in the coming of Jesus all this was fulfilled. That was why he could find "in *all* the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27b).

Conclusion

What these principles lead us to conclude, when applied to the many texts that we will shortly examine, is that Jesus Christ is not simply analogous to the Old Testament nation of Israel nor simply parallel to her in terms of his experience, and far less is he

merely one more Israelite in a long line of individual descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus is Israel in the sense that God's purposes, promises, and predictions for the nation are fulfilled in his life, death, resurrection, exaltation, session, and second coming. This principle of the consummate fulfillment of the nation's destiny in the person of Christ is necessarily extended to his spiritual body, the Church. Since the Church is the body of Christ, of which he himself is the Head, what God intended for him, God also intended for her. What is true of him is true of her. *Both Jesus and his body, the Church, constitute the true Israel in and for whom all the promises of the Old Testament find their fulfillment.* "The whole of the Old Testament is gathered up in him," notes France. "He himself embodies in his own person the status and destiny of Israel, and in the community of those who belong to him that status and destiny are to be fulfilled, no longer in the nation as such."⁴⁴

For some, I've probably raised more questions in this chapter than I've provided answers. Even should that be the case, I hope that the exegetical conclusions in subsequent chapters will confirm the validity of these principles.

44. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, 76. See also his discussion of this theme in "Matthew and Israel," in *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1989), 206-41. For those who wish to delve more deeply into this theme, I can do no better than to recommend the comprehensive, and I believe persuasive, treatment as found in G.K. Beale's *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).