

From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology,

T. Desmond Alexander

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reviewed by Richard C. Barcellos

T. Desmond Alexander's *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* provides the reader with what its title indicates and more – it is both an introduction to biblical theology and an excellent example of inner-biblical/inner-textual/canonical/typological interpretation, a crucial (and too often neglected!) element in the hermeneutical process. It also whets the appetite for more to come, something which Alexander promises (see below).

The book's chapters are as follows: 1. Introduction, 2. From sacred garden to holy city: experiencing the presence of God, 3. Thrown from the throne: re-establishing the sovereignty of God, 4. Dealing with the devil: destroying the source of evil, 5. The slaughter of the Lamb: accomplishing the redemption of creation, 6. Feasting from the tree of life: reinvigorating the lives of people from every nation, 7. Strong foundations and solid walls: living securely among the people of God, and 8. Conclusion.

The book's origin comes from Alexander's study of Revelation 20-22. He says:

This study began life as a short course exploring what Revelation 20-22 reveals about life after death. In unpacking this, two things became evident: (1) the biblical description of our future existence has more in common with our present life than most people assume; (2) the concluding chapters of Revelation offer a window through which the main themes of the biblical meta-narrative may be studied. (7)

Alexander's words reminded me of a book I read several years ago – *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21-22 and the Old Testament* by William J. Dumbrell (a book I highly recommend).

Alexander identifies his approach. "The approach adopted here is to begin at the end. As is often the case, a story's conclusion provides a good guide to the themes and ideas dominant throughout" (10). He sees Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22 as framing the entire Bible. "The very strong links between Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 20-22 suggest that these passages frame the entire biblical meta-story" (10). This approach allows us to see the big picture and not lose the forest for the trees (11). The basic structure of each of the main chapters (2-7) is to state the theme of the chapter (from Rev. 20-22), find the theme in the Old Testament, while tracing its unfolding to the New Testament.

Chapter 2 deals with the garden (Gen. 1-3) and its relation to the holy city (Rev. 21). As the Bible ends with a holy city inhabited by both God and man, so it began in similar fashion – the garden was a dwelling place shared by God and man. Alexander traces the biblical teaching of the presence of God with man on the earth. He argues that the garden was the first temple – the temple-garden of Eden. His discussion is dependent upon studies by Wenham, Walton, and Beale, among many others. The striking parallels between the garden and later Israelite sanctuaries are presented as proof that the garden ought to be viewed as the first holy place/temple/sanctuary on the earth, prototypical of all subsequent holy places/temples/sanctuaries in the Bible (including the church), and finding its eschatological and escalated antitype in the New Heavens and the New Earth (20-73). He closes this chapter with these words:

We began this chapter by noting that Revelation 21 – 22 anticipates a new earth dominated by a golden city of immense proportions in which God resides. Observing that the origins of this temple-city may be traced back to the opening chapters of Genesis, our survey of the theme of divine presence reveals a fascinating and coherent progression from Eden to tabernacle to Jerusalem temple to church to New Jerusalem. This distinctive framework is not only important for understanding the biblical meta-story, but it enables us, as we shall see in our remaining chapters, to understand better complementary themes that run in parallel from the initial chapters of Genesis to the final chapters of Revelation. (73)

Instead of tracing the argument of each chapter, I will close this review with some high-level observations, encouraging readers to take up and read this book and others. My concluding observations will come under three headings: the hermeneutical approach of the book, recommended reading of books

that utilize a similar approach, and identifying one theme that Alexander promises to explore in a subsequent work.

As mentioned above, Alexander's method is comprised of inner-biblical/inner-textual/canonical/typological interpretation. This method of interpretation is gaining ground in academic halls (and, I think, rightly so). Slowly but surely, conservative scholars are recognizing that some pre-critical exegetical/hermeneutical methodology worth retaining was abandoned due to Enlightenment influences that slowly crept into conservative scholarship. The grammatical-historical approach to interpreting texts became a control mechanism to keep interpreters from fanciful, allegorical interpretations. So far so good. However, some forms of grammatical-historical exegesis/hermeneutics over-emphasize human authorial intent and end up not allowing the Bible to interpret itself and do not allow the hermeneutical principles utilized by the biblical authors to become our principles. I found Alexander's method refreshing and a good example of allowing the whole Bible its place in the interpretation of any given text or textual theme. Bravo, T. D.!

Here are some books and articles that will give the reader a flavor for Alexander's approach in terms of both the establishment of principles, historical analysis of various methods, and actual application of the principles: 1) Books – *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, David S. Dockery; *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, G. K. Beale ; *Last Things First*, J. V. Fesko; *Him We Proclaim*, Dennis E. Johnson; 2) Articles – G. K. Beale, "Did Jesus and his Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?"; Vern S. Poythress, "The Presence of God Qualifying Our Notions of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation: Genesis 3:15 as a Test Case"; Scott A. Swanson, "Can We Reproduce The Exegesis Of The New Testament? Why Are We Still Asking?"; and the following articles by James Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," "The Typology of David's Rise to Power: Messianic Patterns in the Book of Samuel," and "Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus." All of the articles are available on the internet.

On page 188, Alexander acknowledges the fact that other themes are worthy of consideration. He mentions two: "the related concepts of rest and peace are closely coupled with temple building" and "the intimate link that exists within the biblical meta-story between the Davidic dynasty and the divine temple." He then says, "This is a subject I hope to explore in a subsequent volume" (188, n. 1.). This reviewer of *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* eagerly awaits this subsequent volume!