

G.K. Beale

*A New Testament Biblical Theology:
The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the
New*

TH7176: God and Israel in Biblical Theology

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Beale, G.K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New*. Ada: Baker Publishing Group, 2011.

Incorporating the influences of Peter Stuhlmacher¹ and C.H. Dodd,² Beale's impressive 1000-page volume builds upon the foundation of Geerhardus Vos to explore the major theological ideas that makeup and flow through the storyline of the Bible.³ To Beale, the new creation kingdom, and the expansion of that kingdom resulting in the glory of God is central to that narrative (p.23). He does this by attempting to determine the roles of the 'kingdom of new creation' through a consistent exegetical and theological framework.

Beale believes that theology is best understood through an interpretive lens of the eschatological "already-not-yet" paradigm (p.19). The Inaugurated eschatology end-times view sees the first coming of Christ as the start of the kingdom (our present time), however he acknowledges that the complete fulfilment of that kingdom has not yet come (but will come in the future).

Beale endeavours to trace the interwoven story of both testaments, understanding how the New Testament (NT) enhances the Old (OT). Beale's starting point comes from an understanding of God's purpose through creation, fall, redemption and consummation (p.5-6). Instead of elaborating on significant categories within the NT plotlines, Beale chooses to conduct a detailed exegetical examination of key passages and themes within the NT taking support from OT quotations and themes.

He opens his biblical theology with a focus on the OT through the first five chapters; grounding the reader in his understanding of the development of the OT storyline. This then flows into chapters 6-28 covering the NT storyline, and his development of the inaugurated end-times lens which he interprets through. His emphasis on the OT, although limited, results in a level of depth not usually found in most biblical theologies.

His study of the major themes within the volume is highly exegetical, which does limit the number of subtopics that can be explored (compared to other works). Each theme explored within the NT, starts from the perspective of its development within OT Judaism, and the background to the passage, before proceeding with the analysis of relevant NT material.

¹ P. Stuhlmacher and D.P. Bailey, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

² C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures, the Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1953).

³ Beale presents the below summaries of the storylines running through the OT and NT (p.16):

"The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively re-establishes his eschatological new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word and Spirit through promise, covenant, and redemption, resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this kingdom and judgment (defeat or exile) for the unfaithful, unto his glory."

The New Testament storyline: "Jesus's life, trials, death for sinners, and especially resurrection by the Spirit have launched the fulfilment of the eschatological already-not yet new-creational reign, bestowed by grace through faith and resulting in worldwide commission to the faithful to advance this new-creational reign and resulting in judgment for the unbelieving, unto the triune God's glory."

Within chapter 20, Beale is unpacking the relationship between the church and Israel. In the beginning, he outlines two presuppositions that open his argument. (1) “Corporate solidarity or identification”, where the actions of one (e.g. a King or prophet) represent another (Israel). As sin entered the world through Adam or as God, through Christ, bestows righteousness on all who believe. This “corporate” hermeneutic is used when examining passages to argue his second proposition, (2) that Christ is the true Israel, and the church, through Christ, represents true Israel (p.652).

In the OT he spends time surveying Isaiah 19, 49, 56, 66, Psalm 87, Zechariah, Ezekiel 47; ultimately concluding that “when gentiles [were] converted in the latter days, they would come to Israel and become Israelites” (p.656-665). The interpretation of Isaiah 66:21 is reviewed within broader literature where Beale concludes the clear majority (~70% of commentators surveyed) agreed with the interpretation of ‘*mêhem*’ (Isaiah 66:21) as *Gentiles, not Jews*. Firmly making his case that it was always God’s intention to save the Gentiles.

He then examines the NT to argue that the mystery Paul talks about in Ephesians 3 is this revelation of Jesus as the true Israel. Where Jews and Gentiles alike are equal because of their standing through Christ. He examines Paul synergies relating unbelieving gentiles as: “separate from Christ”; “alien from Israel”; “strangers to the covenant of promise”. By implication, if unbelieving gentiles are not those things, believing Gentiles must be those things. He argues the context to the mystery in Ephesians 3:5, “as it has been revealed” takes the more common Greek meaning of being “comparative, indicating partial but not full revelation of the mystery in the OT”. Arguing against Charles C. Ryrie who advocated for a “rare meaning” of the word (p.655). Which aligns with the meaning Beale has identified in his previous work.⁴

More broadly within the NT, he looks at: (1) how the NT authors identify the church with Israel by name, or through common OT imagery (p.669); (2) the transference of stewardship from Israel to the church (p.680); and (3) how Israel’s restoration prophecies begin fulfilment in Jesus’ followers and the church through Mark, Luke and Acts (p.683).⁵ He justifies this final point through extensive discussion with Rikki Watts⁶ and David Pao,⁷ concluding that the evidence outlined by both authors demonstrates “how saturated these NT books are with the notion that the end-time second exodus prophesied in Isaiah 40-66 was already being fulfilled” (p.703). Beale concludes by identifying how this understanding is embodied within the NT storyline he proposes.

With an emphasis on unity, rather than diversity, Beale misses the opportunity to detail the diversity and historical particularity that many other Biblical Theologies handle. He also doesn’t cover in significant detail: postmodern Hermeneutics; the NT canon; issues of

⁴ G.K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, The Library of New Testament Studies (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), 215–272.

⁵ Matthew wasn’t considered for space reasons, although Beale argues the same witness can be identified (p.694).

⁶ R.E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament (Bristol: Isd, 1997).

⁷ D.W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016).

prolegomena; or the varying definitions of intertextuality (p.1-2). To his defence, he does not set out with that purpose in mind, instead choosing to direct readers to other works addressing those issues.

Beale sets out to focus not just on the descriptive element of theology, but also on the prescriptive – the practical need for people to follow and obey what scripture is saying. I would argue he falls slightly short of this aim with his central focus of interpretation and theology, rather than including a significant element of practical application. Although he does touch upon practicalities within his final chapters (e.g. 28).

Conclusion

Lacking in some areas a typical NT biblical theology would address, Beale sets out a clear and convincing argument to prove his intended thesis. Beale demonstrates how the lens of the inaugurated end-times helps us understand better the whole narrative of scripture. Although complex initially for lay readers, Beale's contribution towards the broader area of biblical theology will assist lay and academic readers alike with the ultimate redemptive-historical goal, of glorifying God (p.962).

Bibliography

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