

# The Future of an Allusion –

## G.K. Beale's New Testament Biblical Theology

By Paul Martin Henebury

**A Review of G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011, xiv + 1047 pages, hdbk, \$54.99.**

G. K. Beale is among the most prominent evangelical scholars. He is acknowledged in the evangelical world as being something of an expert on the relationship of the OT to the New. Together with D.A. Carson he is the general editor of the *Commentary of the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, and the subtitle of the present book is “The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New.” Among other notable publications he has authored the Commentary on the Greek text of Revelation in the NIGNTC series, and *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. Beale is a covenant theologian who teaches at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia. His eschatology is amillennial and supercessionist.

The book under review has been called magisterial. It is certainly big. It is without doubt as impressive as it is imposing. It is possibly the most thorough apology for amillennialism ever put into print.

### Brief Overview of the Book

*A New Testament Biblical Theology* is divided into ten parts with an introduction. In the introduction Beale explains how the NT authors were employed in “creatively developing the original sense beyond what may appear to be the ‘surface meaning’ of the OT text.” (4). In this he is following the line of Richard B. Hays and others who have scrutinized the OT allusions they find in the NT. This produces a reading of the Bible wherein the NT transforms the OT storyline (6, 9, 15, 16). This means that the OT storyline has to be understood, in the final analysis, through the lens of the NT; even though Beale does claim that either Testament “deserves to have its own witness heard on its own terms.” (10). I shall have cause to return to this claim in my critique.

In the opening chapters of Part One (chs. 2-3) the storyline of the OT is mapped out with special emphasis on Genesis 1-3. The next chapter reviews Jewish eschatological opinions of the day, then come two chapters on NT eschatology, particularly in terms of the Latter Days. By “eschatology” the author means an “already-not yet new-creational reign in Christ” (177), a definition loaded with theological baggage which must be inspected. This leads in to Part Two (ch.7), which argues for the time between the advents as being the “inaugurated end-time tribulation,” and Part Three (chs.8-11), which set out a framework for NT biblical theology centered in the resurrection, understood as both physical and spiritual (viz. regeneration). Parts Four through Six, consisting of chapters 13 to 19, deal with the restoration of the Divine image in man in salvation, and his settlement in the already-not yet eschatological temple, which is the Church.

Parts Seven and Eight (chs.20-24) will set premillennialists fidgeting as Beale's replacement theology shifts into top gear. Chapters 25 and 26 comprise Part Nine where the Christian life is viewed as a participation in the new creation now. Then comes the Conclusion in Part Ten (chs. 27 and 28). A Bibliography and good indices complete the volume.

### **Description of the Argument of the Book**

This is a very long and detailed work filled with impressive scholarship and a love of Scripture. The author wants to present the inner cohesiveness of Scripture by showing how the NT authors, Paul in particular, develop the OT storyline in new and sometimes surprising ways by their use of an "already/not yet" theological hermeneutics. This hermeneutics draws added strength from carefully uncovering the allusions of the NT writers to their Hebrew (well, mostly LXX Greek) Bibles. In many cases, these allusions reshape the apparent surface meaning of the text, broadening the picture in no small part through the realization that what might at first be thought of as referring to an End Times denouement, has, in fact, been inaugurated at the Resurrection of Christ, although the fuller realization and completion of this work lies ahead. Another way to put this is by Beale's oft-repeated refrain of "Inaugurated End Time New Creation."

The long chapters 2 and 3 begin with a focus on the opening chapters of Genesis as the basis for much of what is unfolded in the rest of the OT. Beale tries to develop several somewhat speculative notions regarding God's overcoming of "chaos" (39), the symbolism of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (he thinks this was a "judgment tree" where Adam should have judged the serpent and then ruled over it. 35, 45), the clothing of the fallen ones, etc. Throughout the chapter, though not limited to it, words like "possible," "seems," "if," "perhaps," reoccur. Beale also manages to slip in a plea for a covenant [of Works] between God and Adam in Eden (42-43). Ezekiel 28 is utilized to tell us that Eden was apparently situated on a mountain (105); whatismore, the one who is in Eden in Ezekiel 28:13-14 is identified as Adam (cf. 74, 360 n.7, etc.). Adam was given a commission which he was unable to fulfill; a commission which was reiterated throughout OT history, but which only the second Adam could carry out. (45ff., 61). Beale even has some of the tribes of Israel attempting to fulfill it (98), though whether they were aware of this is not stated. Israel is "apparently... a corporate Adam" in this typological scenario (56, 85, 90, 95 n.22), which sees "cyclic patterns" (60) of,

progressive reestablishment of [God's] "new-creational kingdom out of chaos over a sinful people by his word by his 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." (62, etc.)

This is not a "center" but rather the main strand of the OT storyline. A better perspective from which to view this is to look at it through the lens of the beginning and the end of the Bible; the "bookends" of Genesis 1-3 and Revelation 21.

On page 115 Beale lists ten ideas which represent the OT notion of "the latter days." Interestingly, Dispensationalists would have no trouble agreeing with this list, even if they would maybe add more details. This is *not* to say that they come out at the same place as Beale. It is the same when he lists four conceptions involved in Jewish interpretations of "the latter days" in

extra-biblical sources (128). Again, Dispensationalists would basically agree with the picture Beale gives while wishing to provide further corroboration. Focusing only on Jewish expectations produces just such a picture of covenant understanding as Dispensationalists like to stress (esp. 111-128). Of course, Beale has already gone to some trouble to set the stage for NT transformations of these expectations, and in chapter 5 and following he will turn to the New Testament.

As chapter 5 begins, the reader is reminded that,

The phrase “latter days”...occurs numerous times in the NT and often does not refer exclusively to the very end of history, as we typically think of it. (130)

Few people would disagree. He then enters into a survey of NT eschatology which he says, “changed my entire perspective on the NT.” Soon he is referring us to John 5:24-29, a text that will play a crucial role in his outlook. He correctly notices that “verses 28-29 quote Daniel 12:2” (131). However, he also believes Daniel 12 is in view in John 5:24-25. The comparisons he adduces (in Table 5.1) look strained. Of course, his mission here is to come away with two sorts of “resurrections”; a physical one and a spiritual one. The “spiritual resurrection” is absolutely essential to Beale’s “already/not yet new-creational” model and he will spend several chapters trying to prove his thesis (the whole of Part Three).

I have no room to set out Beale’s arguments, but he relies heavily on OT allusions and his interpretations of them. Adopting this method presupposes that a). a deliberate allusion is being made, and b). the right understanding of its use is held by the interpreter.

Beale believes Adam’s disobedience involved a worship of self and a loss (or near loss) of the functional image of God. He even asserts,

Adam’s shift from trusting God to trusting the serpent meant that he no longer reflected God’s image but rather the serpent’s image. (359)

One might counter with Paul’s assertion in 1 Timothy 2:14 that Adam was not deceived by Satan, and the reason for his fall lie elsewhere than in his trusting the serpent. In the next chapter (ch. 13) Beale tries to establish the “Son of Man” figure in Daniel 7 as corporate saved Israel (394f. cf. 191f.), seemingly not wanting to see that the four beasts represent four individual kings as well as their kingdoms (Dan. 7:17). The One who comes on the clouds of heaven (7:13, cf. Matt. 24:30, 26:64) and receives “dominion, glory, and a kingdom” is surely an individual (Messiah)? But Beale is wishing to prove that Jesus is Israel (a la R.T. France & G. Goldsworthy), paving the way for his more strident supercessionism of later chapters. On pages 412-437 he goes to great lengths to demonstrate this identification. Jesus is Israel and corporate Adam who brings the kingdom, though in an unexpected way. Beale admits that “Jesus’s kingdom...appears not to be the kind of kingdom prophesied in the OT and expected by Judaism.” (431). Quite an alarming thing to say, but in-line with the demands of his covenant theology.

The section is rounded off with this short statement:

Christ has come as the end time Adam to do what the first Adam should have done and to reflect his Father's image perfectly and to enable his people to have that image restored to them. In doing so, Christ is restarting history, which is a new-creational age to be successfully consummated at his final coming. (465)

There is certainly a lot of Scripture cited and many scholars are referenced, but, as everywhere in the book, there is little balance offered. The author's interpretations are not brought up against contrary views.

I am going to pass over Part Five (chs. 15-16), not because they do not deserve treatment. Indeed, I think they are the best chapters in the book, being much more firmly grounded in the texts being used, with less use of the imagination or dependence upon interpretations of types and allusions (esp. ch.15). One might wish to raise an objection here and there (e.g. Christ's "active obedience", and future justification!), but if read charitably few will come away from these chapters with big disagreements.

This brings us on to Part Six, which stresses the roles of the Spirit in transforming the old order into the new. As this section manifests the beginning of a more insistent application of supercessionist eschatology I shall refrain from reviewing it until next time. My objective is to first try to present the teaching of the book, continued in Part Two, before providing a critique, which will have to be in Part Four.

### **The Argument of the Book (continued)**

I said in the first part of this review that Beale is a supercessionist (he believes the Church is the "true Israel"), and the second half of the book makes this crystal clear (although it is not absent from the first half). Although building on things said in the first half, I found the allusions and Beale's interpretations of them (especially in light of what was overlooked in the contexts), to be more strained and partisan than the previous sixteen chapters.

Part Six investigates the role of the Holy Spirit in the "already/not yet eschatological" paradigm which Beale has set up. He cites Ezekiel 36:26-27 and 37:1-14 (560-561) as examples of OT Spirit-texts. Although he has commented on these passages before he does not read them in light of their clear covenantal context (e.g. 34:11-15, 23-27, 36:22-28; 37:22-26), nor does he notice the constant refrain "O mountains of Israel" tying these chapters together. One should beware of coming to these chapters only to plunder one or two proof texts before departing. Beale ties these passages to Isaiah 32:15 (but notice v.1) and 44:3-5 ("Jacob" is referred to 3 times in the context, and also in vv.21-22). Taken as read they relate to a time when "Jacob" (Israel) will be redeemed and blessed in their land and shepherded over by the promised Davidic king; a covenant promise which Beale has already shown was expected to be fulfilled literally. But it quickly becomes apparent that for Beale "Jacob" is not national Israel, and the fulfillment is upon the "true Israel" and the national promises have dissipated. Beale associates, rightly, Ezekiel 36 with John 3, and draws the common though questionable conclusion that,

Jesus himself” interprets the new birth as “the inbreaking new age as [being] the beginning fulfillment of the Ezek. 36-37 prophecy that the Spirit would create God’s new people by resurrecting them. (570).

But there is a good deal in Ezekiel 36 and 37 (not to mention chs.34, 40ff.) which is being filtered into this opinion; especially when it is realized that Beale’s now-but-not-yet “resurrection” is in view, along with the belief that “God’s new people” means different people than the nation addressed by the prophet (see 572, 592). A couple of pages later is a chart (Table 17.2) where comparisons between several Isaianic passages are supposedly being alluded to in Acts 1:8, but I’m afraid all I see are coincidences in wording, which can scarcely be avoided.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 is then appealed to to prove that we are participating in resurrection life now (579), and then I Cor. 15:20, 23 and Rom. 8:23 are brought together to teach “the believer’s new resurrected spiritual being” (582) shall in future be united to the resurrected body. The thinking is that we are already resurrected in Christ’s resurrection, even though that resurrection was physical. There follows a section connecting the fruit of the Spirit with Isaiah, although again, some scholars see things others do not. Next the “two witnesses” of Revelation 11:11-12, whom Beale believes represent the church, are connected with the symbolic resurrection depicted in Ezekiel 47:5, 10, thus closing the circle.

The next chapter (ch.18) develops the author’s previous work on the church in Jesus as the “End-Time Already-Not Yet Eschatological Temple.” Jesus proclaimed Himself as the the end-time temple in John 2:19-22 (593), and “the underlying narrative” of Acts 2 is interpreted as Christ’s ongoing construction of the spiritual temple by His Spirit. He cites Isa. 4:2-6, 30:27-30; Jer. 3:16-17, and Zech. 1:16-2:13 to show that the OT itself conceives of “a nonarchitectural temple” (594. cf. 643 n.55) – these prophecies finding initial fulfillment at Pentecost. Some Bible students may fail to make the same connections Beale does.

The author also believes that through allusions to Jewish interpretations of Exodus 20:18a,

Luke was intending to some degree that his readers have in mind God’s revelation to Moses at Sinai as a backdrop for understanding the events leading up to and climaxing at Pentecost. (596).

If this is so then Acts (and so also Luke) was clearly written for a Jewish audience (which seems problematic). This would simplify the problem of interpretive expectation, but would intensify other matters (e.g. Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; 26:7). Also, did the people prophesy in Acts 2:16-17? Beale thinks so (602). What about Acts 2:19-20? Even non-premillennial interpreters are cautious with their interpretations of Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2.

There follows an enlightening excursus about Sinai being a kind of temple, although it is surely possible to see a temple as a physical representation of the true tabernacle (Heb. 8:2-5)?

Chapter 19 is where he really gets going with the temple motif, where he summarizes the argument of *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*. Rev. 21:1-22:5 is called an “apocalyptic vision” (615), raising questions about what New Jerusalem really is. Then there is some interesting information about the parallels between Eden and Solomon’s Temple along with the

reassertion of Adam being the one referred to in Ezekiel. 28:13 (618), his fall being depicted in 28:16 (621). While this speculation has more going for it than most, it could be argued that the temple was more a remembrance picture of Eden (e.g., A. P. Ross), than Eden itself being a temple. Still, it is worth pondering.

Not as convincing is the next section where the author attempts to show that Adam's commission to rule the earth as priest-king is passed on to Abraham and his descendents (623-626). Despite the scriptures adduced by the writer, nowhere do we read of a commission being given to Abraham. He was given an unconditional covenant which only God obligated Himself to fulfill (Gen. 15). Moreover, Abraham did not fail in those temporary conditions which he was given later (Gen. 17, 22). In fact, one of the reoccurring issues in the book is that similarities are very often pushed to the exclusion of important dissimilarities.

Israel's temple is viewed as a model of the future cosmic glory (631); something which New Jerusalem also appears to picture (639). In fact, Israel was to expand the limits of the temple and of its own land to the ends of the earth in the way that Adam should have done. (631). Beale has some proof texts, but this reviewer will let the reader of Beale's book to decide if they are up to the task he assigns them.

He then moves into the New Testament, where his aim is to show that Christ and His church make up the eschatological end-time temple. Along the way he mentions Heb. 9:11 and comments,

Israel's temple was a symbolic shadow pointing to the eschatological "greater and more perfect tabernacle"...in which Christ and the church would dwell and would form a part. (634).

A few lines previously Christ is called "the true temple." This raises two questions: first, if Christ (and the church) form only "a part" of the future tabernacle, how can Christ *be* that tabernacle? Second, Hebrews 9:11, is referring to the true tabernacle in heaven after which the earthly one was patterned (Heb. 8:2-5). This is not a future tabernacle, but one which must have existed prior to Moses' tabernacle. Beale, along with many expositors, seems not to believe this heavenly tabernacle exists (see 634 n.42), although nothing in Hebrews suggests it does not. If that is so, Christ cannot be in the process of building it, as Beale suggests, because it is already built.

There are some comments about Ezekiel's temple (not the real one in the first part of the book, but the "symbolic" one in the second half). He believes the New Jerusalem picture draws on those chapters. There are some words about what "literal" means in terms of a promise made to someone who could not understand future realities (643). Then we enter chapters 20 and 21 where the author depicts "The Church as the Transformed and Restored Eschatological Israel." He begins by discussing his presuppositions, the second of which is that Christ is the true Israel and the church in Him is "the continuation of true Israel from the OT." (652) This move of equating Christ with Israel and the church as "true Israel" in Christ is a popular one made by contemporary covenant theologians. While being clearly supercessionist it does not have a marked anti-Israel look to it.

How does Beale argue his case? After saying that Jesus is the “true Israel” he deals with the meaning of “mystery” in Eph. 3 (654-655 although he does not mention Col. 1 or indeed his interpretation of the term in his Commentary on Rev. 1:20 where it refers to “fulfillment of prophecy in an unexpected manner.” – which, if amillennialism is followed, would make virtually all prophecy a “mystery”). As a covenant theologian Beale does not see the church as a “new man” starting at Pentecost. Then come brief expositions of portions of Isa. 49; Psa. 87; Isa. 19, 56, 66; Zechariah, and Ezek. 47. The purpose of looking at these passages is to show how Gentiles in the *eschaton* are referred to as Israelites, and even priests!

The next section runs through names and images of OT Israel which are given to the church in the NT. Beale acknowledges Charles Provan’s book, *The Church is Israel Now: The Transfer of Conditional Privilege* (669 n.50). Provan is a self-confessed replacement theologian. Beale doesn’t assume the title, but he argues for it all the same. For example, on page 670f. he argues for “Christians as Sons of God [ok], Abraham’s Seed [fine], Israel [?], Jerusalem [!], Circumcised Jews [?].” Nowhere does the NT ever explicitly say the church is any of these last three things (Beale’s book has many admissions about the lack of explicit references to his teaching), so inferences come to the fore. For example, using Paul’s allegory in Gal. 4 he writes,

Consequently, new-covenant believers are children of “Jerusalem above,” who is their “mother,” so that they are considered to have been born in the true Jerusalem (Gal. 4:26, 31) and thus to be true Jerusalemites. In saying this, Paul may have been influenced by Ps. 87, which, as we saw earlier, prophesied that gentiles were to be born in end-time Jerusalem... (671-672)

Jerusalem which is above, is, of course, not in Israel. Jerusalem in Psa. 87 is on earth (his presuppositions show in that he thinks this is an either/or state of affairs – 766). The author puts a lot of weight on the Gentiles in Psa. 87 being born in Jerusalem and infers that they are viewed as Israelites, but it is at least as likely that Psa. 87:4-6 should be interpreted as designating national boundaries for those born in those places as that all are to be seen as being born in Zion. In his interpretation of Matt. 21:43 he shows his colors when he declares “Jesus then interprets this to mean that ‘the kingdom of God will be taken away from you [*Israel*] and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.’” (673 my emphasis). On page 680 he writes of “rejecting ethnic national Israel as God’s true people” (cf. also 681), and interprets the stone cut out without hands which smashes the image in Dan. 2 as smashing “the ungodly nations, which also includes Israel.” (682).

Beale sees James’s use of Amos 9:12 in Acts 15:14 as an indication that Gentiles will become the eschatological Israel (i.e. the Church) along with the small remnant of Jews. He quotes replacement advocate Provan approvingly: “If [it]...looks, quacks, waddles, and feels like a duck and in the NT is called a duck – then [it]...is, indeed, a duck.” (686). Some may not be convinced he has made a good case, and instead feel justified in heeding Jer. 33:23-26. One thing ought to be clear: “if it looks, talks, acts, and writes like a replacement theologian – and appeals to the same arguments as replacement theologians – then, it is indeed, a replacement theologian.”

As we continue to the end of this impressive book we come to the second part of Beale’s two chapter treatment of supercessionism (although the doctrine permeates the whole work).

The author is among those who believe all the phenomena in Joel's prophecy recited by Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:16-21 came to pass, even though it didn't really. But that is ancillary to his argument, which is that the prophecy was aimed at Israel (689), and in Christ gentiles become tagged as Israel (690). This is helped by another allusion, this time to Isaiah 2:2-4; the first part of which "implies that gentiles become identified with Israel." (691). Once more, some will miss the subtlety of the connection Beale makes, more particularly because of the physical phenomena described in Isaiah 2 and its seemingly obvious connection to places like Isaiah 11:1-10; Zechariah 14 and Romans 8:18f., which appear to place this transformation after the Second Advent.

The same passing over descriptions of physical transformation occurs in the writer's comparison of Isaiah 32:13 with Acts 1:8 (693). Chapter 20 closes with a look at the work of Rikki Watts and David Pao and their extension of "the view of such scholars as C. H. Dodd and Francis Foulkes that the citation of or allusion to OT passages in the NT are indicators of broader hermeneutic frameworks, storylines,..." and such like (699). Beale lists five points from Pao which he thinks show that hearers of these OT allusions in the early church would have been able to make the same connections a few twentieth and twenty-first century scholars have made (700). How many readers and hearers since that time have been able to do likewise is an open question.

Chapter 21 examines several NT passages pertinent to the discussion: Rom. 9:24-26 and 27-29; 10:11-13, 25-26; 2 Cor. 6; Gal. 4:22-27 and 6:16; Eph. 2:13-18; and sundry passages in Hebrews, 1 Peter and Revelation. It would take extended comments to analyze Beale's treatments of these texts, but the upshot is that few naysayers would be won over to his views, whereas those already in agreement would feel more secure in their position (the exception would be Romans 9:24-29 where even many "Dutch school" covenant theologians would argue against Beale).

The author's decided replacementism surfaces again in his closing comment on Gal. 6:16:

Here [Gal. 6:16], as in 2 Cor. 5:14-7:1, it needs to be emphasized that the church in fulfilling Israel's end-time restoration prophecies [n.b. Israel didn't fulfill them!] is also fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies of new creation. (724).

On page 728 Beale provides five ways in which the new covenant has been understood. However, he misses a sixth way: that the same new covenant, who is Jesus Christ, is made with both the church (at the first coming), and with national Israel (at His second coming). As all God's covenant obligations depend for their consummation on righteousness obtained through Christ, once that righteousness is given, nothing stands in the way of literal fulfillment of the original covenanted promises.

In the next chapter (22) Israel's land promises are dealt with. The now common route of expansion of "the land" is the tack taken. As per writers like O. Palmer Robertson, the promise is thought to begin in Eden (751) of which the land covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a recapitulation. This is called an "expansive temple-land theology" (753) wherein the "temple/land" is to extend throughout the new earth of Rev. 21. As usual, none of the texts used

to prove the contention actually say that this is the case. Neither is the simple fact that Israel is never equated with its temple dealt with. What needs to be in place to make it all work is the joint assumption that the NT reinterprets the OT, and the deductive skills of the interpreter play a magisterial role. For an instance of the latter, the author cites Heb. 11:13 as teaching that Christians have reached New Jerusalem even while living on earth (766), whereas the writer of Hebrews appears to say nothing of the kind.

Part Eight enlarges upon the Reformed understanding of the “Christian Sabbath” (Ch. 23), and “Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the Church Office, and New Testament Canon” (Ch.24). This is where some who have ridden this train to this point may want to disembark, and we are glad to have them on our side even if for a short stay. Briefly, although the Bible records no keeping of the seventh-day prior to the Book of Exodus, it is viewed as *in situ* as a “creation ordinance” since creation week (e.g. 781, 789). The connection between Eden and Israel depends heavily upon Beale’s assertion that Israel is a “corporate Adam.” Beale then turns to the NT evidence. There follows a rather convoluted argument from Hebrews followed by three inferences based thereon (788-789). Then there are several proposals about the sabbath as a creation mandate linked in with the author’s view that Adam was to spread out the “Eden temple” while ruling over opposition from the serpent (798). To some of us, such teachings seem so foreign to what the Scriptures actually say that it is difficult to keep ones concentration, and even Beale is forced to admit that there,

is no exegetical evidence supporting such a change, just as there is no explicit evidence supporting the notion that Christ’s resurrection has consummated rest for him and inaugurated it for believers. (799).

Indeed, the lack of explicit evidence for so many of the book’s major assertions is almost habitual. In the next chapter (24), in the midst of a treatment of Col. 2:9-13, we read that in view of the “overtones of idolatry” connected to “handmade” circumcision in the LXX and the NT,

the implied reference to “circumcision made with hands” in Col. 2 further enforces the notion that it is idolatrous to continue to trust in the OT “shadows” once their fulfillment has come. (804)

While not agreeing with the author one does not wish to be an unsympathetic reader, but such a statement raises the eyebrows. For surely the pious believer who fails to acknowledge what covenant theologians call “shadows” and “types,” but who instead wants to take God’s words at face value, is not to be considered guilty of idolatry for so doing? After all, if God had meant what we are told He meant, couldn’t He have said it without employing so much equivocal language, making “literalists” guilty for believing He meant what He said? I am not going to say much more here but I feel I must include this quote from the end of chapter 24:

Just as Israel had its book from God, so does the new Israel, the church, have its book, which is an already-not yet eschatological unpacking of the meaning of Israel’s book. (830).

Now Beale goes on say to that the Bible “is ultimately one book” revealed progressively. But one does not have to read through to this part of the book to twig that the NT is being exalted

above the OT and the church is being exalted above Israel. Too, for covenant theologians, progressive revelation is not very progressive (as in one idea augmented by another), but is rather supercessive revelation (as in one idea being displaced by another).

Two short chapters comprise Part Nine. The only thing I wish to say is that Beale's chapter including "Marriage as a Transformed New-Creational Institution in Ephesians 5" forces this question: if, as Beale agrees, marriage is a covenant, can it be transformed to include others not mentioned in the original covenant oath? Can a man "transform" his "wife" so that she is not the same one to whom he actually made his vows?

The Conclusion, which consists of two chapters (Ch. 27 being long; ch, 28 short), making up Part Ten, compares OT lives with NT lives, provides an apology for a form of *sensus plenior* (954-956), and reiterates, in more doxological fashion, the thesis of the book.

In this piece I shall enter into criticism more plainly. I had envisaged a detailed critique and had lined up several pages of references to problems I see in the book, but that would be impracticable. There are literally dozens of issues where I believe Beale is seeing things that just aren't there while missing things that plainly are there. But I will have to be satisfied with more selective comments.

The book has received more than its share of adulation since its release, and, from the perspective of supercessionist theologies, it is easy to see why. The book represents a very impressive presentation of the amillennialist thesis, mixed, as contemporary presentations of that approach are, with G.E. Ladd's "already/not yet" hermeneutic. It employs fully up-to-date arguments and extensive "exegetical" reasoning. It seeks to persuade readers that this is how the Bible itself presents its interpretation. Moreover, despite its considerable size (circa, 1,000 closely printed pages), it makes appeal to other significant studies by the same author in support of its teachings. I want to say that the author is both brilliant and reflective. In pushing his theology into farther reaches he has done precisely what I believe a generation or more of recumbent dispensationalists have not done (I do not include progressive dispensationalists in this number, since, although one can learn from it, I believe PD is a different animal than the dispensationalism of Scofield, Chafer, Walvoord, Ryrie, or even Erich Sauer or Michael Vlach).

The following critique is from a certain point of view. Notwithstanding, I stand behind it as a solid basis for not recommending Beale's work as an accurate account of biblical theology.

### **Some Quick Miscellaneous Criticisms:**

1. The prolixity of the author's style. Beale takes a long time to say what he means. Granted, one must argue a point, but Beale still needs more words than necessary to say it. Just a look at his headings and subheadings proves my point. One example from among many will do the job: chapter 19 is entitled "The Story of the Eden Sanctuary, Israel's Temple, and Christ and the Church as the Ongoing Eschatological Temple of the Spirit in the New-Creational Kingdom." Nuff said.

2. This problem leads to another one, which is the dearth of references to or critical interaction with opposing views (a rare example includes a note on page 350 n.94). As with some other of this author's work (e.g. *The Temple and the Church's Mission*), one gets the feeling that Beale thinks he's just right and doesn't need to defend his views. Hence, someone wishing to find involved discussion with other viewpoints will not find it here. This is acutely the case with dispensational writers (hardly even mentioned). This is a covenant theologian writing for covenant theologians.

3. The author's thesis, drawn as it is from his interpretation of allusions and types, is, I firmly believe, quite beyond the ken of the vast majority of Bible students past or present. This is *esoteric theology funded by esoteric reading of the Bible*. Scripture's constant "transformations" of seemingly clear teachings via the sorts of subtleties Beale appeals to make it the preserve of scholars. The Bible is *not* for Everyman, since the key to its interpretation is an enigma to most of us (saved or lost). Instead of just using language to tell us straight, it seems, if Beale is to be followed, that God hides the reality within the symbolically concealed. A man who can write, "Perhaps one of the most striking features of Jesus' kingdom is that it appears not to be the kind of kingdom prophesied in the OT and expected by Judaism" (431 my emphasis), without contemplating the gravity, philosophically speaking, of what he is saying, is not, in our estimation, a safe guide. What use then are the tests of a prophet (Deut. 18:22) if fulfillments can be transformed into something the original hearers wouldn't have understood? Those who take their queue from Paul, who told others, "**Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told**" (Acts 27:25), have, it would seem, gotten hold of the wrong end of the interpretative stick.

### **What is Missing:**

1. The most glaring absentees from Beale's book are the biblical covenants. Although one might argue that this is explained by this being a New Testament theology, the author's subtitle, "The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New" fairly screams for attention to the covenants. He does briefly refer to covenants (e.g. 42-43, 166), and he uses Hugenberger's definition, which, as already pointed out, presupposes covenants cannot undergo transformation and must mean exactly what they say. The "problem" of the covenants, as I see it, is that they are useless unless their words are stuck to (see Gal. 3:15). And God Himself appears to be of the same opinion (see Jer. 34:18-20). Indeed, the live illustration of the Rechabites in Jer. 35 would lose all its poignancy if the meaning of God's words could undergo the sorts of "transformation" which Beale and others envisage. To my way of thinking at least, any biblical theology which ignores the biblical covenants needs to go back to the drawing board. The biblical covenants act as sentinels against wayward theological constructions – if they are heeded! But who heeds them?

2. Ignoring dissimilarities. A real danger for Bible interpreters is to fasten on to similarities which appear to support their position while disregarding important dissimilarities. Proponents of the mythical Jesus, for instance, like to compare the resurrection stories to ancient myths of Osiris and Tammuz while neglecting major differences between them. Evolutionists commonly do this in their superficial discussions of homology; choosing not to notice crucial discrepancies in their comparisons. The dissimilarities tend to show themselves in the details (i.e. in the context). His remarks about God overcoming chaos and establishing "creational order" (39) find

no foothold in Genesis. On page 40 he avers, “Just as God had achieved heavenly rest after overcoming the creational chaos...” Where does he get this? Assuredly from connecting Genesis 1 with ANE creation accounts (cf. 247 n.44; 630 n.36).

Millennial references are routinely given new creational (as in New Heavens and Earth) fulfillments (56, 71, 101, 109, 121, etc.). In chapter 19 Ezekiel’s Temple is equated with the New Jerusalem (615), which in turn is the entire new cosmos (616). As an aside, thanks to the pliability of “apocalyptic genre” Stephen Smalley, in his commentary, can make New Jerusalem the new covenant! Unperturbed that the New Jerusalem is distinguished from “the new heaven” (Re. 21:1-2), and “the new earth” (Rev. 21:24), and “no temple [is] in it” (21:22), or that the temple in Ezek. 40ff. has specific detailed measurements differing markedly from those in Rev.21:16-17, which God commands it to be built to (Ezek. 43:10-12); that Zadokite priests minister in it (43:19; 44:15), including offering sacrifices for sin (43:21), whereas other Levites serve within it in a lesser capacity (44:10-14), and that it is distinguished from the land around it (47:12-23), the similarities trump all this and the dissimilarities are assimilated.

Are Abraham and Israel truly given Adam’s commission (47-53)? Does the fact that the Church shares the same general descriptions as Israel mean the many discontinuities between the two vanish in the typological ether? Do all the patent repetitions of covenant oaths to Israel run out of gas when Jesus comes? Just what is God saying in Jer. 33:14-24?

### **Esoterism and Speculation**

This problem is only exacerbated by Beale’s confusing appeals to “literal” interpretation. In some notable cases this means nothing but “I literally mean what I am now asserting having changed the surface meaning of the passages.” (see e.g. 151, 641).

The most obvious thing is Beale’s position on the NT reinterpreting (my word) or transforming (his word) the natural meanings in the OT. How often throughout the book is one informed about the “transformation” of meaning from what was expected before the cross! Here are a few more examples:

Mark 10:45 depicts Jesus as beginning to fulfill the Daniel prophecy [7:13] in an apparently different way than prophesied...in a hitherto unexpected manner (195)

The word [*mysterion*] elsewhere, when so linked with OT allusions, is used to indicate that prophecy is beginning fulfillment but in an unexpected manner in comparison to the way OT readers might have expected...(202)

Then what was the use of the prophecy? And what becomes of the perspicuity of revelation? Doesn’t this mean that for all intents and purposes the OT really wasn’t for the original recipients, but for us? But it is far from clear to many of us! There is a fine line between this sort of interpretation and casuistry. The subtitle of the book is “The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New.” A more accurate subtitle would be “The Transforming of the OT in the New.”

One example, Beale says that “readers need to be aware that they are living in the midst of the “great tribulation”...so that they will not get caught off guard and be deceived.” (153 my emphasis). If that is so, couldn’t one Apostolic writer have just come right out and said it like Beale did? (apparently we are also reigning now too – 208 n.35, 678).

The book is filled with esoteric interpretations. Among many we find:

The centrality of the covenant community’s mission...is to be understood primarily through the lens of the extension of the temple of God’s presence over the earth. (175)

Luke is indicating that Jesus is a new Moses and is inaugurating a new exodus in order to restore eschatological Israel [who is the church] (573)

the implied reference to “circumcision made without hands” in Col. 2 further enforces the notion that it is idolatrous to continue to trust in the OT “shadows” once their fulfillment has come (804)

Adam is “the anointed cherub” of Ezek. 28:13 (74, 360 n.7). It was he who allowed the serpent into the Garden (359). Adam should have judged the serpent at “the judgment tree” (35), and ruled over him (34). Evidently the tree of the knowledge of good and evil really was “desirable to make one wise” (67). Moreover,

Adam’s shift from trusting God to trusting the serpent meant that he no longer reflected God’s image but rather the serpent’s image. (359).

Another thing is his fixation on allusions. As I have already said, establishing the presence of an allusion does not tell you what it is being used for. Since the Hebrew (or Old Greek) Bible was the only Scripture these men had, it should surprise no one that their writings are saturated with references and allusions to it. But one must be careful not to allow such allusions to drive the argument of the author, especially when doing so would divert attention away from the surface meaning of the passage in question.

Beale sees allusions everywhere (see esp. 195, 309. we even get “analogical allusions” – 806), and none is without significance to him. He would have benefited from a more careful definition of allusion (as is done in G. Klein’s recent NAC Commentary on *Zechariah*, 50f., where Klein distinguishes between quotation, intentional indirect allusion, and unintentional coincidental echo). By permitting this littering of allusion broadcast through the NT one gives tacit approval to a submerged analogy of faith principle by which only the specialists understand what’s going on, and God is portrayed as the God of the nod and the wink. This is more and more the trend in evangelical circles and it is very disturbing. The clarity of Scripture cannot stand up under this ulterior method of interpretation. And when that goes, the sufficiency of Scripture goes too. To someone like me, this represents the Author of the Bible as playing cosmic scrabble.

Was Luke – Acts written to those “in-the-know”? Are we really to believe that Luke wrote his Gospel and the Acts with a mainly Jewish audience in mind? Beale’s thesis requires it since non-proselyte Gentiles could never have cottoned on to the underlying motifs and allusions

which he thinks shed true light on what Luke is doing (e.g. 595-596). This goes against the grain of most NT Introductions' view of his intended audience, but Beale needs it to be that way.

Satan is an extremely active character in this book. Supposedly Adam ought to have ruled over him but failed (34, 53, though I find nothing in the Bible which teaches such a thing), while also guarding the sanctuary from unclean creatures (45). Beale requires the serpent to have made several visits to Eden (32). He is an amillennialist who believes Satan is presently bound and (presumably) in the abyss (Rev. 20:1-3, though "apocalyptic" helps to liberate him). Bound or not, Satan is at large (149-150, 188-189, 223, etc.). As he puts it,

Since Christ's death and resurrection, a woe is directed to the sphere of earth because the evil "has been cast down" to it. The woe is announced because the devil will now concentrate his efforts on causing chaos among the inhabitants of earth...the devil's fury is expressed against Christians, as Rev. 12:11, 13-17 makes clear...believers are always undergoing deceptive influence. (217-218).

Beale thinks the woman with child of Rev. 12:1-2 is the church (223, thus the church gives birth to Christ), even though the clear allusion to Gen. 37:9 marks her as Israel. Satan uses "all manner of deception,...to tear us away from our faith in and loyalty to Christ" (223). If we then venture to ask just what the words "so that he would not deceive the nations any longer" (Rev. 20:3) mean, one thing we could not say is that this applies to the church, but must instead refer to the unsaved world (despite 2 Cor. 4:4). This runs contrary to standard amillennial apologies on this phrase. One thing is clear, the angel in charge of binding, imprisoning, and sealing up Satan ought to be placed on traffic duty somewhere where his bungling won't have such disastrous results!

Even though there is much more to say, I shall only mention two more issues. The first is the prevalence of replacement theology (e.g. 161, 173, 182 n.65, 215, 307, 574, 770, etc.). So on page 211 the redeemed nations are called "authentic Israel," and new covenant believers (the church) are "true Jerusalemites." (671). In his comments on the supercessionist test-text Matt. 21:41 he speaks of God "rejecting ethnic national Israel as God's true people" (680), and of Israel's stewardship being taken from them and given to the gentiles (681). He says, "Jesus identifies himself with Daniel's stone which smashes the ungodly nations, which also includes...Israel." (682). Christ, of course, is the "true Israel" (140-141, 151, 307). Personally, I find this kind of theologizing obnoxious and quite contrary to Scripture. The author's tailored definition of eschatology (23, 177) aids his approach.

Beale, along with all amillennial covenant theologians, believes in two kinds of resurrections; one physical ("actual"), and the other spiritual (i.e. the new birth, 237, 240, 250-252, 331, 333, 579, 590). He places a huge burden on John 5:24-29:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. 25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. 26 "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; 27 and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because

He is the Son of Man. 28 “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, 29 and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.

Verse 24 is well known and refers to the new birth as a passing from one realm (death) to another (life). The “dead” in the next verse correspond to the pre-regenerate in v.24. This happens now and in the future (“the hour is coming and now is”). In vv.28-29 Jesus speaks of “all who are in the tombs” (definitely *not* the pre-regenerate, but physically dead saved and lost), who “shall come forth” in the future; one to “the [physical] resurrection of life,” and the other to “the [physical] resurrection of judgment.” Anyone can see that v.29 probably alludes to Daniel 12:2, and physical resurrection. But Beale wants v.25 to refer to a resurrection too – only spiritual (238), and he thinks the key word that assures this is “hour” (131-132). He thinks that because this word is used in Jn. 5:25 it “clearly refers to the same Daniel prophecy.” What is more clear to me is that Dan. 12:1-2 is not cited in Jn. 5:25, where resurrection is not in view, but is cited in Jn. 5:28-29 where resurrection is plainly spoken of. But once Beale has got what he wants he sees spiritual resurrection everywhere, and often Jn. 5:25 is brought in to remind the reader of what has formally been proven (238 n.32, 261, 301, 333, etc.).

## Conclusion

Beale wants to demonstrate how the NT interprets the OT. Many will follow him enthusiastically. Perhaps they are right to do so, but I cannot be among them. I simply do not see how the NT can appeal for its authority to the OT and at the same time “transform” and gain interpretive authority over the OT. I cannot see how saints in the first century could comprehend the new interpretations behind OT “types and shadows” without having personal acquaintance with the NT. Nor can I approve the notion that a 20th century hermeneutical approach (already/not yet) was the one intended by God to unlock His meaning from the start. The tacit belief that the perspicacity of the allusions used by the NT’s authors, contingent as many of them would have to be on the general availability of the LXX and the ability to read septuagintal Greek between c.400-1500 is too hard for me to digest. Finally, the view which makes the Author of language so inconsistent and ambiguous in His use of language I cannot countenance. If God transforms His meanings so unexpectedly (Beale’s word) then He may do so again in the future. If, as Beale thinks, the NT indicates fulfillment of the OT in ways that render the OT language misleading (again try Jer. 31:31ff. & 33:15ff.), then the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture is risible. And if the Bible can’t be taken at face value (like Beale occasionally wants it to be – 83-85, 91, 96-97, 113, 150, 155, 178, 201 n.21, 233, 351), then it is insufficient as revelation to mankind.

Biblical theology can be done in many ways. A clever man can do all kinds of things with it. Those who seek to comprehend it through types, shadows and often obscure allusions, believing that the NT reinterprets the Old, may win the day. They are good men who love the Lord and will answer to Him. But their approach differs so substantially from that of those of us who believe that God does not transform His stated meanings that there can be no theological rapprochement.