

Book Reflection: *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*

Karen Liang

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## Content Purpose

*From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, by T. Desmond Alexander, gives a thorough overview of an introduction to biblical theology. Using key themes of the biblical meta-story, Alexander attempts to explore Scriptures as an ongoing story of redemption, hope, and restoration. The study develops in a reverse order, beginning with the last book of the Bible, specifically Revelation 20-22. Linking this passage with Genesis 1-3, the author suggests that they form the entire biblical meta-story. From the onset of the creation account, God is filling the earth with his dominion. His sovereignty and power are displayed as he establishes his kingdom and reign on earth. However, as a result of the fall, God's people wait for the promised future glory of a New Jerusalem when He shall reign forever.

God's creation blueprint, as Alexander described, was for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and extend his temple throughout the earth. Created in the image of God, the man and woman carry a royal, divine kingship as priest-kings.<sup>1</sup> But in disobeying their Creator, Adam and Eve lose their priestly status and authority to rule the earth. Still, from the seed of the woman comes the promised hope. Divine kingship is contrasted with human kingship. Under the line of Adam, the Bible witnesses the first murder account: Cain kills his brother Abel. Corrupt humanity is now marked by sin and disobedience. From here, a succession of human kingship follows throughout the OT. Nevertheless, God has orchestrated a unique line of descendants, from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to David's royal line, ultimately leading to King Jesus. A divine kingship, then, is being established amid chaos and confusion.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Desmond. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 69.

## Content Analysis

Alexander draws theological implications from his careful study of the biblical text. Despite Adam and Eve's disobedience, God, in his sovereignty and infinite wisdom, offers a remedy. As observed from the first chapters of Genesis, Eden was created as a temple-garden, a divine sanctuary where God's presence dwells. By rejecting God, Adam and Eve are removed from the temple-garden, no longer having immediate access to God. The very ones called to fill the earth and extend God's dwelling place are excluded.<sup>2</sup> However, as the author notes, God reestablishes his presence on the earth through a lengthy, redemptive process. Leaving Eden, the tabernacle becomes the new dwelling place of God on earth. As Numbers chapter 9 describes: "At the Lord's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord's order and did not set out."<sup>3</sup> Here, God's presence is tangible and close. The author is careful to note that God's presence is not limited to a certain location, rather like the temple-garden, the tabernacle serves as a divine sanctuary to experience God.

To continue the meta-story, God's dwelling place transfers to a physical temple in Jerusalem. Although David desires to build a temple for the Lord, it is Solomon his son that eventually builds God's house. As the new sanctuary, God's presence is expanded and "the whole city has become his dwelling place."<sup>4</sup> Despite its magnificence and grandeur, the Jerusalem temple is only a glimpse of God's intention for the whole earth. From the royal line of David, God's church is established in the NT, replacing the OT temple. Now, through the

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2      Ibid., 19.

3      Num. 9:18-19 (NIV).

4      Alexander, *From Eden*, 30.

incarnation of Jesus, the church of God serves as the physical witness of God's embodiment and divine dwelling. Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT allows for an immediate "access to the Father by one Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

The dividing wall of hostility has been broken; Jews and Gentiles alike can participate in the true temple of Jesus. As Alexander notes, "Whereas in the Old Testament God was perceived in dwelling *among* his people, in the New Testament he is viewed as dwelling *within* his people... In the new covenant the people of God *are* the temple, and God dwells *in* them."<sup>6</sup> Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the believers, the presence of God moves from a fixed location to an outward movement where God's glory will fill the earth. The Church, however, is not God's ultimate dwelling place. A New Jerusalem awaits the Church as Revelation 21 describes: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."<sup>7</sup>

### **Content Integration**

From class discussions thus far, a similar biblical narrative structure exists in the motif of divine presence on earth. The biblical plot, divided into five main episodes, mirrors that of the five significant developments of God's dwelling place. Defiled by sin, God's presence and holiness can no longer dwell in the temple-garden. It is only through the work of Jesus on the cross that redemption springs forth. Alexander delves into forms of typology and foreshadowing within the OT. For instance, the motif of redemption is significant throughout Scriptures,

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5 Eph. 2:18.

6 Ibid., 69.

7 Rev. 21: 2-3.

specifically during the first Passover account in Exodus. As the author points out, the Gospel writers understood that the death of Jesus had an “exodus” significance: a typological link exists between his death and the Passover sacrifice.<sup>8</sup> The Passover ritual performed by the Israelites transfers over to Jesus as the ultimate Passover sacrifice. Through his atonement (death) on the cross, God purifies and cleanses (blood) sinners and sanctifies them to share in his holy nature by partaking in the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus’ sacrifice as the Passover Lamb is the typological fulfillment of the exodus. This imagery of Christ as the Passover Lamb is prophesied by John the Baptist when he refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Also, in 1 Peter, Christ is “a lamb without blemish or defect.”<sup>9</sup> But no other book in Scriptures references the Lamb as noticeably as Revelation. Here, the term Jesus as “Lamb” is mentioned 28 times.<sup>10</sup> In John’s vision, he witnesses thousands upon thousands crying out “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”<sup>11</sup> And later a loud voice from heaven saying, “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.”<sup>12</sup> Because of the sacrificial Lamb, God’s people have victory over death and hope in anticipation for the New Jerusalem.

As told from the creation account and the fall, God is writing a story of redemption. As Reformed theologians say, “what is latent (concealed) in the Old Testament is patent (fully

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8 Ibid., 112.

9 1 Peter 1:19.

10 Ibid., 110.

11 Rev. 5:12.

12 Rev. 12:11a.

revealed) in the New.”<sup>13</sup> God is in the process of redeeming his children and creating a people for himself. Through the descendants of David, God creates a divine kingship: a new covenant that is brought about through the person of Jesus. As Williams explains, the new covenant is a continuity of the old, yet at the same time the new covenant provides for full forgiveness of sins and covenant intimacy and obedience that was impossible with the former.<sup>14</sup> With God’s establishment of divine kingship, Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promise as the true Israel and true Adam. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”<sup>15</sup> Christ incarnate has reversed the curse of sin and death. His glory has descended, and a greater glory is yet to come. As Paul the apostle writes to the Corinthians:

We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, God’s original blueprint is fulfilled in the new covenant that is Jesus and extends beyond the earth to a new heaven and a new earth.

### **Content Application**

Studying the biblical meta-story through the lens of biblical professors like T. Desmond Alexander and Michael D. Williams has resulted in a greater appreciation and understanding of

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13 Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2005), 11.

14 *Ibid.*, 214.

15 1 Cor. 15:21-22.

16 2 Cor. 3:13-18.

Scriptures as a continued story of God's purpose for his creation. His divine presence guided the Israelites through the wilderness, and his Holy Spirit continues to lead the Church today. Considering the biblical narrative in light of contemporary ministry, it can be easy for us to lose sight of the bigger picture. Perhaps like Adam and Eve, in our guilt and shame, we hide in confusion when God is begging us to turn to Him. I think of the Israelites and their sinful, rebellious patterns and how God patiently draws them back to his presence. As the perfect Creator, God longs for his creation to be restored and reconciled. I wonder how many people in the OT held on to the prophecies of a coming Messiah, a new offspring under the new covenant? Or how many worshippers of God left in fear and doubt that anything majestic could come out of the seed of David?

The Church lives in a challenging time where the kingdom of God is "already, but not yet" here. Jesus, the fulfillment of the old covenant, has entered the world and atoned for the sin of mankind for us to be made right with God. We have a relationship with the Father as a result of his bodily death and resurrection. But as the body of Christ, we wait for the return of his coming when He will come in glory and power. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, this earth serves only as a temporary home: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies."<sup>17</sup> As faithful followers of Christ, we know that heaven is our true home. Hence, we eagerly wait for our bodies to be made anew and to experience the New Jerusalem that God has prepared for those who love Him.

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17 Rom. 8:22-23.

### **Bibliography**

Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009.

Williams, Michael D. *Far as the Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story of Redemption*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2005.