

ISRAEL'S KINGDOM IN THE APOCALYPSE

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I have been assigned to defend Dispensationalism for the upcoming B&H *Perspectives on Israel and the Church*. My approach is a strictly grammatical-historical reminder of the centrality of Israel in God's program for the world. I have traced the continuity of this focus through the OT and the NT to show the prominence of Israel in various biblical writers. The climax of this history of Israel will come in the future and is recorded in the last book of the Bible. This paper has room for a few reminders of how the kingdom of Israel stands out as the climax of what God intends for the nation in the future.

I will add to this paper some aspects of my interaction with other contributors in the 384-page *Perspective* book scheduled for release in March of 2015. I call these additions "sneak previews." The other contributors to the *Perspective* book include Robert Saucy (Progressive Dispensationalism), Robert Reymond (Traditional Covenant Theology), and Chad Brand with Tom Pratt (Progressive Covenantalism). Professor Brand is also the editor of the book for B&H.

The present study will examine the Book of Revelation for the fulfillments of Israel's covenants recorded there. It will also note how differing hermeneutical approaches affect an understanding of the Apocalypse. The major already published treatments selected for comparison are three recent evangelical commentaries on Revelation by Greg Beale, David Aune, and Grant Osborne.

Promises to Israel in the Apocalypse

Bruce Waltke is on record as finding no textual linkage to OT promises for Israel in Revelation 20 regarding a kingdom. He writes,

In the former essay I argued among other things that if there is any tension in one's interpretation between the Old Testament and the New, priority must be given to the New; that Revelation 20:1-10 cannot be linked textually with Israel's covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets the imagery of the Old Testament with reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne.¹

In supporting this claim, Waltke professes allegiance to grammatico-historical hermeneutics, but adds certain rules of interpretation that “go beyond” that approach, rules such as the “priority of the Bible over other data,” “the priority of New Testament interpretation over the interpretation of theologians,” “the priority of clear texts over obscure ones,” and “the priority of spiritual illumination over scientific exegesis.”² He fails to notice, however, that in applying his rules beyond the grammatical-historical method, he violates time-honored principles of that method, principles such as interpreting a passage in its historical context³ and the principle of single

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, “A Response,” *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 353. Waltke is referring to his earlier works “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 263–88; and “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 59–88.

² Waltke, “Kingdom Promises as Spiritual,” 263–65.

³ M. S. Terry writes, “The interpreter should, therefore, endeavour to take himself from the present and to transport himself into the historical position of an author, look through his eyes, note his surroundings, feel with his heart, and catch his emotion. Herein we note the import of the term *grammatico-historical* interpretation,” and “Subject and predicate and subordinate clauses must be closely analyzed, and the whole document, book, or epistle, should be viewed, as far as possible from the *author's historical* standpoint.” *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (1885; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947), 231 (emphasis in the original), 205 (emphasis added). B. Ramm adds, “Some interaction with the culture and history of a book of Holy Scripture is mandatory” and “The interpreter must know Biblical history. . . . Every event has its historical referent in that all Biblical events occur in a stream of history.” B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: Textbook of*

meaning.⁴ Like other covenant theologians, he interprets OT passages without adequate attention to their historical context, and in so doing, assigns them an additional meaning, one meaning being what the original author intended and the other being a meaning assigned by a NT writer.⁵ He fails to grant NT writers the prerogative of assigning additional meanings through use of their revelatory gifts of apostleship and prophecy.⁶

[**Sneak preview #1**] Saucy: “The difference in our understanding of the relation of Israel and the church thus rests not primarily on hermeneutical procedure, but rests on our interpretation of the New Testament explanation of the meaning of the earlier Old Testament revelation.” This statement comes just after he has criticized the systems that read the NT back into the Old. He acknowledges that traditional historical-grammatical hermeneutics does not allow that, but he tries to eliminate hermeneutical principles by distinguishing between meanings that God intended and those that humans understand. In the same general context, he criticizes a system that finds OT meanings in the NT. Yet in practice that is exactly what PD does.

Hermeneutics, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 150, 154, emphasis in original.

⁴ “A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncehaventy and conjecture” (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 205); “But here we must remember the old adage: ‘Interpretation is one; application is many.’ This means that there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study” (Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 113). Summit II of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy concurred with this principle: “We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed. We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application” (Article VII, “Articles of Affirmation and Denial,” adopted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 10–13 November, 1982). For further discussion of the principle of single meaning, see chapter 6 in my *Evangelical Hermeneutics*.

⁵ For an explanation of the NT use of the OT that does not violate either of these principles, see my discussion in chapter 9 of *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, 241–69.

⁶ *Ibid.*

By allowing NT passages to provide meaning for the OT, one is doing the same as other non-dispensational systems. Hermeneutics is a human discipline and should not allow a combining of separate passages to determine any meaning. Each passage should stand on its own grammatical-historical phenomena. By reading the NT meaning into the Abrahamic covenant, if it differs from the historical-grammatical OT meaning, one has breached another hermeneutical principle: the principle of single meaning. It amounts to finding a literal and a spiritual meaning in Gen 12:1–3, 7, the same error committed by systems that disdain any dispensational implications. **[End of sneak preview #1.]**

Waltke's view deserves a response in light of his inability to find any reference to Israel's covenants and promises in Rev 20:1–10 in particular. Since Rev 20:1–10 cannot be divorced from the remainder of the Apocalypse, that passage should be viewed through the eyes of the whole book.

The OT presents four covenants that are most relevant to “perspectives on Israel and the church”: the Abrahamic, the Palestinian or Land, the Davidic, and the New Covenants. Some consider the Land covenant to be a part of the Abrahamic, so that covenant will be considered as part of the Abrahamic. The three major covenants of God with Israel are the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants.

This study will examine the Book of Revelation to see fulfillments of these covenants that it records. Results yielded by differing hermeneutical approaches to the book will also come under scrutiny.

The Abrahamic Covenant

God promised Abraham a people, the land, and becoming a source of blessing to all families of the earth.

A People. Revelation depicts a number of times and a number of ways that God will fulfill His promises to Abraham. Abraham's descendants are in view several times in Revelation. Perhaps the most conspicuous instances are 7:1–8 and 14:1–5, in which 144,000 descended from the twelve sons of Abram's grandson Jacob are mentioned. These are not the total of Abraham's descendants, but are a select group from among that number who will in future times fulfill a special mission.⁷

Of course, covenantalists do not accept the clear meaning of the 144,000. Beale, in line with his eclectic hermeneutics, concludes that “the group of 7:4–8 represents a remnant from the visible church, which professes to be true Israel”⁸ or “the totality of God's people throughout the ages, viewed as true Israelites.”⁹ He describes his eclectic hermeneutics as a combination of idealist and futurist approaches to the book.¹⁰ Eclectic hermeneutics allow a person to switch from literal to allegorical and vice versa in any passage to confirm a preferred theological persuasion. In Revelation, this most often happens by assuming that the book's apocalyptic genre allows for such vacillation. Eclecticism allows Beale to interpret idealistically in some places, as

⁷ Others who interpret the book literally may see a different role for the 144,000 (e.g., John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody, 1966], 140), but they all agree that the 144,000 are descendants of Abraham.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 423.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 733.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48–49. After being criticized for his eclecticism, to me privately Beale's approach “realistic” hermeneutics, but realism for some can be just as subjective as eclecticism.

in chapters 7 and 14, and futuristically in others, as in chapter 19.

In contrast with Beale, Aune sees the 144,000 as future Christians, not believers of all ages.¹¹ He also differs from Beale when he differentiates the 144,000 from the innumerable multitude of 7:9–17.¹² A comparison of these two allegorists in their comments on this passage illustrates how varying interpretations of Revelation are uncontrolled when exegetes forsake grammatical-historical principles. Aune reaches his conclusions after laboring hard to find a consensus definition of apocalyptic genre.¹³ He eventually has to set down his own definitions of “genre” and “apocalypse,”¹⁴ while admitting that some authorities disagree with his definitions.¹⁵

Hermeneutically, Osborne falls into the eclectic camp with Beale, but instead of combining just idealist and futurist approaches, he combines futurist with preterist and idealist.¹⁶ He, too, can vacillate to suit his own theological leanings. Yet, he hesitantly advocates “hermeneutical humility” and caution, whatever principles of interpretation one adopts.¹⁷

He understands the 144,000 to be the church because of emphasis on the church throughout Revelation,¹⁸ finding “no mention of Jewish believers apart from the Gentile church

¹¹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B, (Dallas: Word, 1998), 443–44.

¹² *Ibid.*, 440.

¹³ *Ibid.*, lxxi–xc.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, lxxxix–lxxxviii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, lxxxviii–lxxxix.

¹⁶ Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 21–22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

elsewhere in Revelation,”¹⁹ a statement that will be shown to be fallacious below. Osborne’s other supports for his conclusion draw upon other NT passages such as Gal 6:16, in which he wrongly claims that the church is called Israel.²⁰

[Sneak preview #2] Prof. Reymond at times avers that the Genesis promises to Abraham are for Abraham and his physical **and spiritual** descendants. With this approach he uses only NT Scripture as justification for distinguishing between physical and spiritual. That step violates grammatical-historical principles in at least two ways: (1) When Reymond writes about the “spiritual promises of the Abrahamic covenant,” he derives his support from NT passages rather than the historical context of the Genesis statements about the covenant. Surely, one cannot learn Abraham’s understanding of the covenant and God’s intention in Genesis by resorting to Paul’s words in Eph 2:11–13. Paul’s ethnic and theological circumstances were entirely different. The words of Genesis 12 must be understood as dictated by their historical context in the OT. Paul’s historical and theological circumstances came much later and were different. The words of Genesis 12 must be understood as dictated by their place in the historical context of the OT.

Terry and Ramm caution against the danger of trying to make passages parallel that are not parallel and the pitfall of mistaking likeness of sentiment for real parallelism.²¹

Terry also warns that general analogy of faith cannot govern in places that have no real

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 311-12.

²¹ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 222–23; Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 115-16.

parallel and that stand unopposed by other parts.²² Single revelations of divine truth without elaborations must be allowed. General analogy is of little help in such cases. One's goal in biblical interpretation is to let each passage speak for itself, i.e. have its own objective meaning.

(2) At one point Prof. Reymond acknowledges that Abraham understood the Genesis-12 covenant as referring to his **physical** descendants, acknowledging that temporal earthly promises of a land to Abraham and his *physical* seed were among the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8). In assigning two meanings (physical and spiritual) in the same OT passage, he violates the traditional principle of single meaning.²³

Summit II of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy agreed with this principle: "We affirm that the meaning expressed in each biblical text is single, definite and fixed. We deny that the recognition of this single meaning eliminates the variety of its application."²⁴

So the promise is for Abraham and his descendants, not just his "**spiritual** descendants" as Prof. Reymond predominantly calls them. In his approach he uses only NT Scripture as justification for a distinction between physical and spiritual. That step violates grammatical-historical principles. When he writes about the "spiritual promises of the Abrahamic covenant," he derives his support from NT passages rather than the context of the Genesis statements, and he assigns the same passage two different meanings. He allows his "analogy of faith" to overpower principles of grammatical-historical hermeneutics by assigning two different meanings to the same statement of the Abrahamic covenant.**[End of sneak preview #2]**

²² Terry, 581.

²³ Ramm, 113.

²⁴ Article VII, "Articles of Affirmation and Denial," adopted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, November 10–13, 1982.

As I have discussed more fully elsewhere,²⁵ valid exegetical arguments for taking designations in Rev 7:4–8 in other than their literal meaning are nonexistent. The only arguments for understanding them otherwise are theologically, not hermeneutically, motivated. Suffice it to say, no clear-cut example of the church being called “Israel” exists in the NT or in ancient church writings until A.D. 160.²⁶ John Walvoord’s point about the 144,000 is also strong: “It would be rather ridiculous to carry the typology of Israel representing the church to the extent of dividing them up into twelve tribes as was done here, if it was the intent of the writer to describe the church.”²⁷ Add to these distinctions the difference in number and nationality between the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude of Rev 7:9–17, and identification of the 144,000 as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becomes quite evident.

Another reference to the descendants of Abraham comes in Revelation 12, when the text tells of a great sign in heaven about a woman with child. The term *semeion* is the contextual signal to understanding a figurative interpretation of the woman. The connection of the woman’s description with Gen 37:9 identifies her as national Israel. God will in the future provide a place of refuge for the nation from the animosity of the dragon.

As part of a lengthy acknowledgment that the woman represents of Israel, Beale makes the following exegetically unsubstantiated statements: “This then is another example of the church being equated with the twelve tribes of Israel (see on 7:4–8). Chapter 12 presents the

²⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 473-78.

²⁶ Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 74–84, 206.

²⁷ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 143.

woman as incorporating the people of God living both before and after Christ's coming."²⁸ He does see references to the OT community of faith that brought forth the Messiah.²⁹ Yet, he notes, "It is too limiting to view the woman as representing only a remnant of Israelites living in trial at the last stage of history," and adds the conclusion that "the woman in 12:1–2 represents the community of faith in both the Old and New Testament ages."³⁰ Through some unexplained interpretive transition, he moves from a recognition that the woman is a symbol for Israel to making her a symbol for both believing Israel and the believing church.

Aune analyzes the words about the woman as probably derived from the Greek Leto-Apollo-Python myth. With only one passing mention of Gen 37:9–11,³¹ he allows that the myth about the woman can be read as a reference to Mary and her child from a Christian perspective, or as a reference to Israel, the persecuted people of God, from a Jewish perspective.³² Aune seems to pursue a reader-response type of hermeneutic in this instance.

Osborne correctly identifies the woman as Israel by referring to Gen 37:1–9, with the sun and the moon referring to Joseph's parents and the stars his brothers, but, inexplicably, he says that she represents the church in Rev 12:17.³³ He fails to explain how Jacob and Leah³⁴ are parents of the church as they are of Joseph. In Rev 12:6, he opts for a futurist explanation,

²⁸ Beale, *Revelation*, 627.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 629.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 680.

³² *Ibid.*, 712.

³³ Osborne, *Revelation*, 456.

³⁴ Osborne seemingly identifies Joseph's mother as Leah, but actually Joseph's mother was Rachel (Gen 30:22–24).

identifying those persecuted during the “final terrible persecution” as the church.³⁵ How Israel, the people of God, suddenly becomes the church, the people of God, he does not explain. The transition appears to be quite arbitrary. Again, the radical disagreement of allegorists in their handling of Revelation 12 illustrates the subjective nature of interpretation once the interpreter has forsaken grammatical-historical principles.

[Sneak preview #3] Under a later discussion of the “body-of-Christ” part of their framework, Brand and Pratt deny a “spiritualization of the promises” as they discuss isolated texts in Revelation. Though they deny it, that is exactly what they do in viewing the text through “the lens of new creation and a new eschatological age.” For example, in discussing John’s two visions in Revelation 7, they equate the 144,000 in the earlier part of the chapter with the innumerable multitude in the last part. They thereby equate their questionable identification of 144,000 Israelites in the earlier part with the church composed of people from every lineage. They unquestionably handle this chapter in a non-literal fashion. Principles of grammar and facts of history mandate that the innumerable multitude of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds demand that they be distinct from the earlier vision in the chapter’s first part. Those in the earlier vision are distinctly of Israelite lineage and differ from those in the latter vision. The Greek expression behind “after these things” in Rev 7:9 at the beginning of the second vision always indicates a new vision in John’s Apocalypse. Exegetical issues surrounding 7:9 and the second vision are very complex.³⁶ The best explanation is to see the two visions as distinct from each

³⁵ Osborne, *Revelation*, 464.

³⁶ Cf. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 483–87.

other and to locate the timing of the innumerable-crowd vision during the seventieth-week period of the future, not during the present “age of the Spirit” as Brand-Pratt call it.

What is also disappointing about the Brand-Pratt theory is their switch from non-literal interpretation in some parts of Revelation to some principles that are quite literal when writing about the future millennium. They concur with premillennialists in interpreting parts of Revelation 20 in accord with g.-h. principles. They should have followed those principles in interpreting the whole book consistently, but instead they chose to follow eclectic hermeneutics similar G. K. Beale. That kind of hermeneutics permits them to interpret literally when it fits their system and allegorically in other places when it does not.

An authority on traditional g.-h. principles has written, “Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text.”³⁷

The Brand-Pratt literal rendering of Revelation 20 presents their perspective with another inconsistency, their treatment of Christ’s kingdom reign. At some points they see a present “heavenly kingdom” with Christ currently reigning, but at others they have Him reigning in the future during the millennium. They are not completely clear about when the present kingdom began (at the preaching of John the Baptist or at Pentecost), but they are clear that the future millennial kingdom will begin in conjunction with Christ’s *parousia* (i.e., second coming) at the millennium’s beginning. Their explanation of how the two kingdoms differ from each other (one with Christ not personally present and the other with Him personally present) is missing. The

³⁷ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970) 115–16.

present era of Christian struggles with an adverse world system and the future era of millennial bliss must be different. Does Christ have two kinds of kingdoms? **[End of sneak preview #3]**

Cogent reasons exist for identifying the woman in Revelation 12 as the faithful remnant of Israel of the future and the dragon as the devil who will attempt to destroy her.³⁸ Clearly, the sun and the moon in Gen 37:9-10 refer to Jacob and Rachel, the parents of Joseph. National Israel is the mother who begat the Messiah, a feat that cannot with any valid justification be attributed to the church. To claim that Revelation makes no distinction between the people of God in the OT and another redeemed people is without merit. Such a distinction has already been noted in comparing 7:1–8 with 7:9–17. Whatever the composition of the innumerable multitude in 7:9–17, they are explicitly distinct from the 144,000 in 7:1–8. This account in Revelation 12 furnishes another instance of God’s faithfulness in fulfilling his promise to Abraham by raising up from him and preserving a people that has become a nation.

Beale, Aune, and Osborne concur that Rev 2:9 and 3:9 are references to national Israel, but reject any teaching of future national repentance, saying that the verses simply refer to vindication of the Philadelphian believers.³⁹ Yet submission and homage by Jews in 3:9 can hardly be rendered by anyone who does not repent and become Christ’s follower.⁴⁰

³⁸ See Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 117–21, for a more extensive discussion.

³⁹ Beale, *Revelation*, 240–41, 286–88; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 162–65, 237–38; Osborne, *Revelation*, 190–91.

⁴⁰ See Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 282, for further discussion.

The Land. God also promised Abraham possession of the land to which He was to lead him, the land that came to be known as Israel, “the Promised Land.” Revelation 11:1–13 tells of measuring of the temple and two witnesses active in Jerusalem, a city in the heart of that Promised Land.

[Sneak preview #4] The following chart highlights differences between hermeneutical approaches to Rev 11:1–13. It reflects the results of the eclecticism of Beale and Osborne as compared with a literal or grammatical-historical approach to the book:

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
[1] “measure” (11:1)	“the infallible promise of God’s future presence”; “the protection of God’s eschatological community” (559) “until the parousia” (566)	“preservation of the saints spiritually in the coming great persecution” (410; cf. 411); “a ‘prophetic anticipation’ of the final victory of the church” (412)	“a mark of God’s favor” (80-81)
[2] “the temple (<i>naon</i>)” (11:1)	“the temple of the church” (561); “Christians” (562); “the whole covenant community” (562); “the community of believers undergoing persecution yet protected by God” (566)	heavenly temple depicting “the church, primarily the saints of this final period but secondarily the church of all ages” (410)	“a future temple in Jerusalem during the period just before Christ returns” (81-82)
[3] “the altar” (11:1)	“the suffering covenant community” (563)	“the [heavenly] altar of incense” (410)	“the brazen altar of sacrifice in the court outside the sanctuary” (82)

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
[4] “the worshipers” (11:1)	“believers wor- shiping together in the temple com- munity” (564)	“individual believers” (411)	“a future godly remnant in Israel” (82)
[5] “in it” (11:1)	“it” referring to the temple or the altar (571)	“in the church” (411)	“in the rebuilt temple” (82)
[6] “the court that is outside the temple (<i>naou</i>)” (11:2)	“God’s true people,” including Gentiles (560)	“the saints who are persecuted” (412)	“the wicked without God” (83)
[7] “cast outside” (11:2)	“not protected from various forms of earthly harm (physical, economic, social, etc.)” (569)	not protected from the Gentiles/nations (412); God delivers his followers into the hands of sinners (413)	“exclusion from God’s favor” (83)
[8] “the Gentiles” (11:2)	“unbelieving Gentiles and Jews” (569)	“the church handed over to the Gentiles/nations for a time” (412)	“a group [of non- Jews] in rebellion against God who will oppress the Jewish remnant” (83-84)
[9] “the holy city” (11:2)	“the initial form of the heavenly city, part of which is identified with believers living on earth” (568)	“the people of God” (413)	“the literal city of Jerusalem on earth” (84)
[10] “forty-two months” (11:2)	“figurative for the eschatological period of tribulation” (565); “attack on the community of faith throughout the church age” (566)	“a limited period that is strictly under God’s control”; “a time of martyrdom but also a time of preservation and witness” (415)	“the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week” (85)

<i>Term or Expression</i>	<i>Beale</i>	<i>Osborne</i>	<i>Thomas</i>
[11] “they will trample on” (11:2)	persecution of the church from Christ’s resurrection until His final coming (567)	“the saints will suffer incredibly” in a physical sense (413)	“future defilement and domination of Jerusalem” (86)
[12] “the two witnesses” (11:3)	the church; “the whole community of faith” (573)	“two major eschatological figures . . . [and a symbol for] the witnessing church” (418)	two future prophets, probably Moses and Elijah (87-89)
[13] “the great city . . . where their Lord was crucified” (11:8)	“Babylon” = “Rome” = “the ungodly world” (591-92)	Jerusalem and Rome; secondarily, all cities that oppose God (426-27)	Jerusalem (93-94)
[14] the resurrection and ascension of the two witnesses (11:11-12)	“divine legitimation of a prophetic call” (599)	“A proleptic anticipation of the ‘rapture’ of the church” (432)	the resurrection of the two witnesses (97)

(Note: page numbers in parentheses refer to Beale’s commentary, Osborne’s commentary, and Thomas’ commentary.⁴¹ On the chart, the shaded blocks show Beale and Osborne partially agree with each other, but Osborne places the saints in the end times and Beale sees reference to the church of all time. Besides these six partial agreements, they substantially disagree with each other elsewhere. They disagree with a literal understanding in all fourteen areas.)

Of special interest for this study are rows 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 11, and 13. In a literal understanding of the passage, all pertain to a geographical location within the land that God promised to Abraham. Following a futurist, literal approach to the book, one learns that these are part of the future fulfillment of His promise to Abraham.

Turning attention to Aune, one sees that he agrees with Osborne that the temple refers to the heavenly temple, not the earthly one, but he does so under the assumption that the earthly

⁴¹ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*.

temple will not be rebuilt.⁴² Yet, he later acknowledges that the temple described in 11:1–2 is most definitely the earthly temple in Jerusalem.⁴³ He also believes that “the holy city” is a clear reference to the earthly city Jerusalem that is referred to again in 11:8.⁴⁴ Yet, he agrees with Osborne that the worshipers are a divinely protected remnant of Christians who will survive until the arrival of the eschaton.⁴⁵ **[End of sneak preview #4]**

For those whose hermeneutical principles accord with literal interpretation, the land promises to Abraham are resounding throughout the Apocalypse. Other references to the land promised to Abraham include Rev 16:16 and 20:9. The former refers to a place called Harmagedon or Armageddon, where a future battle will be fought. The “*Har-*” prefix probably refers to the hill country around a town called Megiddo. Megiddo was a city on the Great Road linking Gaza and Damascus, connecting the coastal plain and the Plain of Esdraelon or Megiddo. That the kings from the east must cross the Euphrates River to get to the land of Israel and Megiddo is another indication of the geographical connotation of Armageddon and of the fulfillment of the land promise to Abraham (Rev 16:12).⁴⁶ The reference in 20:9 speaks of “the camp of the saints and the beloved city,” most clearly a reference to the city of Jerusalem.

⁴² Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 596–97.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 605.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 608–9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 630.

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 261–62.

In Beale's system, "Armageddon" is a figurative reference to the place where the final battle against the saints and Christ will be fought. He sees that as a name for the whole world.⁴⁷ Similarly, he opts for another allegorical interpretation when he sees "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" as the church.⁴⁸

Aune calls Armageddon "the mythical apocalyptic-world mountain where the forces hostile to God, assembled by demonic spirits, will gather for a final battle against God and his people."⁴⁹ Regarding "the beloved city," he comments, "Since the heavenly Jerusalem does not make its appearance until 21:10 (aside from 3:12), 'the beloved city' cannot be the New Jerusalem but must be the earthly Jerusalem."⁵⁰ Yet, one should not conclude that Aune handles Revelation's prophecies as a futurist. Because of his source and redaction critical assumptions, he simply assumes that the final editor of the Apocalypse incorporated earlier traditions and/or myths into the passage.

After briefly examining eight possible meanings, Osborne understands "Armageddon" to be a broadening of apostate Israel to depict all nations in their final war against God.⁵¹ This too is allegorical. After acknowledging the term's geographical connotation,⁵² he opts for a symbolic meaning. From OT times, the plain and the hill country around Megiddo were a well-known battleground, and are a suitable location for Christ's final victory over his enemies. The plain of

⁴⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 838–39.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1027.

⁴⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 898.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52C, (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1098–99.

⁵¹ Osborne, *Revelation*, 596.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 594.

Megiddo is not large enough to contain armies from all over the world, but furnishes an assembly area for a larger deployment that covers two hundred miles from north to south and the width of Palestine from east to west (see Rev 14:20).⁵³

In agreement with literal interpretation, Osborne reverts to his literal-futurist mode in identifying “the beloved city” of Rev 20:9 with Jerusalem, which will have been reinstated as the capital of Christ’s kingdom during the millennium.⁵⁴ That refreshing conclusion supports the land promise to Abraham by locating activities of the millennium geographically within the boundaries of territory promised to Abraham. This will be the location of Israel’s Messiah in ruling His world kingdom on earth.⁵⁵

Among Abraham’s descendants will be the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19:16), whose conquest will free the righteous of the earth from the deceptions, tyranny, and injustice of the beast and the false prophet (19:20). This great battle will eventuate in the imprisonment of deceiver of the nations (20:3), a great blessing to all the families of the earth.

The Davidic Covenant

God’s promises to David included the following: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish His kingdom. . . . *I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever . . .*

⁵³ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 270–71.

⁵⁴ Osborne, *Revelation*, 714.

⁵⁵ See Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 425.

and your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (1 Sam 7:12, 13, 16; emphasis added).

Davidic Covenant Explicit

Fulfillment of the Davidic covenant is a major theme of Revelation, from beginning to end. In Rev 1:5, the titles chosen for Christ come from Psalm 89, an inspired commentary on the Davidic covenant (“I have sworn to David My servant” [89:7b]). Those titles are “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” “The firstborn of the dead” comes from “My firstborn” in Ps 89:27, “the ruler of the kings of the earth” from “the highest of the kings of the earth” in Ps 89:27, and “the faithful witness” from “the witness in the sky is faithful” in Ps 89:37. All these portions are part of God’s covenant-promises to Israel.

David is prominent at the book’s end, too. Revelation 22:16 reads, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.” Jesus is both the ancestor (the root) and the descendant (the offspring) of David. He is the beginning and end of the economy associated with David’s family. In the words of 2 Sam 7:12, He is the descendant whom God promised to raise up after David. He will inaugurate the kingdom promised to David. Paul refers to Jesus similarly in Rom 15:12, calling Him “the root of Jesse.”

In Rev 5:5, one of the twenty-four elders assures John that “the lion who is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David” has conquered and will open the seven-sealed book. “Root” has the sense of “offspring” here and points to Christ’s headship in the final Davidic kingdom. The title alludes to the Messianic prophecy of Isa 11:1, 10.

Beale agrees in connecting these titles of Rev 1:5 with Psalm 89, but concludes that John views David as “the ideal Davidic king on an escalated eschatological level.”⁵⁶ In other words, he sees an allegorical fulfillment of the promise to David, not a literal understanding, as the promise would have been understood by David. He says that Christ assumed his sovereign position over the cosmos and is fulfilling his reign during the present, not in the future.

As for Rev 22:16, Beale does the same. Here he sees David’s kingdom as both already inaugurated and future.⁵⁷ A literal understanding of the Davidic covenant, however, limits that kingdom to the future only. Note that Beale’s combination of idealist and futurist hermeneutics in this instance, allegorical in seeing a present fulfillment and literal in seeing a future fulfillment, is another violation of the principle of single meaning. At Rev 5:5, Beale has little to say about Jesus’ connection to David. Concerning the two titles, he notes that “both concern the prophecy of a messianic figure who will overcome his enemy through judgment.”⁵⁸ Those words fall into an idealist mold, which allegedly could be fulfilled at any time.

Aune notes the connection of Rev 1:5 with Ps 89:27, 37,⁵⁹ but fails to connect the psalm with the Davidic covenant on which the psalm furnishes a commentary. In Rev 22:16, he notes the Messianic connotation of the title, but again does not mention the Davidic covenant and its fulfillment in Revelation. He correctly ties the titles of Rev 5:5 with OT prophecies of the Messiah who was coming to reign, but does not take the next step and tie them to fulfillment of

⁵⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 190–91.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1146–47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵⁹ David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 37–40.

the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7. He does refer to the reign of David's house in the 2 Samuel passage in connection with Rev 11:15, "He shall reign forever and ever," but that is the only place in his three volumes that he does so.

Osborne prefers not to connect "the faithful witness" of Rev 1:5 with Ps 89:27, but he does connect the other two titles of 1:5 with Psalm 89.⁶⁰ Yet, he makes no direct connection with the fulfillment of Israel's Davidic covenant.⁶¹ Concerning Rev 22:16, he relates "the Root and Offspring of David" to "the fulfillment of the Davidic messianic hope," and calls Jesus "the Davidic Messiah."⁶² Still, he refrains from noting how such a fulfillment contributes to the hope of national Israel. Regarding 5:5, Osborne notes the connection of "the root of David" with Isaiah 11:1, a military passage, and admits that the military side of the Davidic imagery predominates in Revelation.⁶³ Yet, he fails to see Him as the Christ returning to accomplish His victory. Rather, he identifies Jesus' cross as the major weapon in warfare with God's enemies.⁶⁴ That hardly does justice to a literal interpretation of Revelation and to fulfillment of Israel's Davidic covenant in the future.

In Rev 3:7, addressing the church at Philadelphia, Jesus refers to himself as the one who holds "the key of David." Possession of that key means that he has the right to admit to or exclude from the city of David, Jerusalem both old and new. That key pertains to the prerogative of determining who will have a part in the kingdom of David, over which He as the Messiah will

⁶⁰ Osborne, *Revelation*, 62–63.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 792–93.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

rule. Again, this remark would be impossible without His fulfillment of the promise made to David.

Regarding “the key of David” (Rev 3:7), Aune concludes, “The phrase refers to the key to the Davidic or messianic kingdom, i.e., to the true Israel,” but Aune erroneously equates “the true Israel with the church,” not with a future kingdom promised to David and Israel in 2 Samuel 7.⁶⁵

For Beale, “the key of David” is an amplification of a similar phrase in Rev 1:18 and equates to Jesus’ power over salvation and judgment.⁶⁶ He correctly notes the stress of the Lord’s sovereignty over those entering the kingdom, but he defines the kingdom as the church in the present era, and consistently spiritualizes references to Israel in the OT. He does the same in Revelation, a book that so clearly points to a kingdom in the future, not a present one.⁶⁷

Osborne equates “the key of David” in Rev 3:7 with “the keys of the kingdom” in Matt 16:18–19, keys which Christ holds and passes on to his followers.⁶⁸ In the Revelation context, he sees a reference to Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, “who controls entrance to God’s kingdom, the ‘New Jerusalem’ (3:12).”⁶⁹ Why Osborne speaks of access to the eternal kingdom rather than the millennial kingdom remains a mystery. The millennial kingdom pertains most specifically to the present earth, where Israel’s hopes will be fulfilled. The “key” promise to the Philadelphian

⁶⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 235.

⁶⁶ Beale, *Revelation*, 284.

⁶⁷ See Robert L. Thomas, “The Kingdom of Christ in the Apocalypse,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 3.2 (Fall 1992): 117–40.

⁶⁸ Osborne, *Revelation*, 187.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

church shows that the resurrected church will share in the blessings of that future kingdom in which mortal Israelites will be most prominent.

Davidic Covenant Implicit

In addition to explicit references to David in the Apocalypse are a number of references to David's kingdom. In fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, Revelation speaks often of a future kingdom on the present earth, prophecies that correspond to OT prophecies about that kingdom. Revelation 11:15 records, "And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become [the kingdom] of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.'" What other kingdom could that be than the Messiah's future kingdom? The language of this proleptic song by heavenly voices echoes Ps 2:2, a psalm that speaks of the transference of power from heathen nations to God and His Messiah.

Elsewhere, I have pointed out in numerous instances the dominant focus of Revelation on the futurity of the kingdom.⁷⁰ Discussion about the kingdom should not be limited to Rev 19:11–20:10. The teaching of the book as a whole needs to be taken into consideration. Anticipation of the future kingdom is an integral part of motivation for present Christian experience.⁷¹ Whatever meaning "kingdom" may have for the corporate Christian church of today, that meaning does not eradicate the fact that a future kingdom on earth is still ahead, and

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 546–50.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 546.

Revelation connects that future kingdom with God's covenants with David and Abraham.⁷²

Proleptic songs about the initiation of the kingdom also occur in Rev 12:10 and 19:6.

Beale, in commenting on Rev 11:15 says, "God now takes to himself the rule that formerly he permitted Satan to have over the world."⁷³ Yet, two paragraphs later he comments,

Vv. 16–17 show that it is the Lord whose eternal reign is focused on here. . . . The consummated fulfillment of the long-awaited messianic kingdom prophesied in the OT finally has come to pass. . . . It is difficult to say how Christ's delivering up the kingdom to the Father and subjecting himself to the Father at the consummation in 1 Cor. 15:24–28 relates to the present text. Perhaps Christ gives up the redemptive historical phase of his rule and then assumes an eternal rule alongside but in subjection to his Father.⁷⁴

Beale has at least two difficulties with Rev 11:15. (1) At one point he says the verse looks forward to a change of rulership over *the world*, but in the next two verses he contradicts himself by changing the kingdom's domain from *this world* to the new heavens and the new earth in the eternal state. (2) His second difficulty, which he admits, is in understanding how Christ could at the time of the consummation deliver up the kingdom to the Father as 1 Corinthians 15 requires, since Christ will only be starting his rule over the kingdoms of this world at that time.

The response to both of Beale's dilemmas is an acknowledgment that the future kingdom will have a temporal phase relating to the present earth, followed by an eternal kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. From its own statement, Rev 11:15 speaks of a future temporal kingdom on this earth, a transference of power from heathen nations to God and His Messiah. At

⁷² Ibid., 550–58.

⁷³ Beale, *Revelation*, 611.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the end of that future temporal kingdom the Messiah will deliver up that kingdom to the Father as 1 Corinthians 15 describes.

Aune creates for himself the same dilemma as Beale in first defining “the kingdom of the world” of Rev 11:15b as either the totality of creation or the human world in opposition to God and in conflict with His purposes, and then identifying the eternal reign of 11:15c as the eternal reign of God.⁷⁵ In so doing, he anticipates a future kingdom *on this earth* that will be eternal in duration, leaving no room for a new heaven and a new earth that he allows for elsewhere.

Osborne locates the replacement of the kingdom of the world with the kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah at the second coming of Christ, and sees it as the fulfillment of Jewish and NT expectations.⁷⁶ He has the same dilemma as Beale and Aune, however, because he sees this as the beginning of Christ’s eternal kingdom,⁷⁷ even though Rev 11:15 specifically locates this kingdom in *this world*, not in the new creation. He makes no allowance for the millennial kingdom whose location will be the present earth.⁷⁸

Of course, at this point neither Beale, Aune, nor Osborne says anything about a fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. That is because Rev 11:15 creates an impossible situation for those who interpret the book non-literally, but for those who interpret it literally, it marks the fulfillment by God of the promises He made to David, and ultimately to Abraham, too.

⁷⁵ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 638–39.

⁷⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 440–41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁷⁸ For further verification on the location of the millennial kingdom, see Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 550–52.

[Sneak preview #5] Professor Reymond says, “The future messianic kingdom will embrace the whole of the newly recreated cosmos and will not experience a special manifestation that could be regarded *in any sense* as “Jewish” in the region of the so-called holy land area or anywhere else.

Peter, the apostle to the circumcision (who surely would have had his ear tuned to any and every future privilege Jews might enjoy), when he wrote of future things in 2 Peter 3, said nothing about a *Jewish* millennium or about a restoration of a *Jewish* kingdom in the land of Israel, but rather divided the whole of earth history into three periods: the *first* period—“the world of that time”—extending from the beginning of creation to the Genesis flood (2 Pet 3:5–6), that was destroyed by the flood; the *second* period—“the heavens and earth that now exist” (2 Pet 3:7)—extending from the flood to the final Day of the Lord, at which time the earth will be destroyed by fire (2 Pet 3:7) and the present heavens “will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved” (2 Pet 3:10); and the *third* period—“new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13)—extending throughout eternity future. If he had believed in a Jewish millennium following this present age, it is legitimate to assert that 2 Peter 3 would have been the appropriate place to mention it, but he makes no mention of a millennium, much less a *Jewish* millennium; rather, he places the entirety of earth history within the three time frames that I just mentioned.” **[End of sneak preview #5]**

The New Covenant

Jeremiah 31:31–34 records God’s New Covenant with Israel. Among its other provisions are two that are relevant to the present discussion. When God said, “I will forgive their iniquity,

and their sin I will remember no more,” that was partly how Abraham would be a source of blessing to all people, and when He said, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people,” He provided for Israel and all other peoples a new relationship with Himself, another source of universal blessing.

Forgiveness of sins. Much in Revelation deals with the forgiveness of sins. In Rev 12:11, a heavenly voice sings about the blood of the Lamb: “They [referring to the martyrs among the Israelites] overcame him [referring to the devil] through the blood of the Lamb.” Anywhere the book refers to the blood of the Lamb, or simply to the Lamb, it alludes to His death at Calvary to provide forgiveness of sins (see 5:6; 7:14; 13:8). Revelation refers to the Lamb twenty-five times. The Lamb did not die sacrificially for Israel alone, of course—redemption is among the benefits extended to the body of Christ⁷⁹—but His death happened for Israel’s sins especially, as the Servant Song of Isa 52:13–53:12 emphasizes. The 144,000 special servants from among the Israelites were “redeemed from the earth” according to Rev 14:3. They are seen on Mount Zion standing with the Lamb in 14:1. Their redemption must be provided by the suffering Messiah. According to 5:9, the redemption came through the blood of the Lamb. Since Beale, Aune, and Osborne do not connect the woman of chapter 12 with Israel specifically, the fact that they do not connect the blood of the Lamb in 12:11 with God’s New Covenant promise to Israel is no surprise. Beale identifies the woman as “all believers, past, present and future.”⁸⁰ Aune says,

⁷⁹ Because of Israel’s rejection of her Messiah at his first advent, Jesus extended the benefit of forgiveness of sins beyond the boundaries of Israel (Matt 26:28; see Mark 14:24). This is why Revelation also speaks of forgiveness when the objects are not limited to Israel (see Rev 1:5; 7:9, 14, 17).

⁸⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 663.

“The passage deals with the proleptic victory of Christian martyrs.”⁸¹ Osborne identifies the overcomers in 12:11 with overcomers in the seven churches in Revelation 2–3.⁸²

Part of God’s promise to Abraham was that he would be a source of worldwide blessing. Obviously, forgiveness of sins was part of a fulfillment of that promise, but the New Covenant spoke of more than that. Jeremiah 31:33b–34a promises, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.” Such a condition as this can exist only after the binding of Satan spoken of in Rev 20:1–3. Satan will no longer have freedom to deceive the nations (20:3). Until that time, he will continue his leadership as “the prince of the power of the air, or the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2b) and as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). He has been judged already in a potential sense through the crucifixion of Christ, but the implementation of that judgment awaits the future kingdom on earth and the complete fulfillment of the covenant that God made with Abraham.

Control of the world in that future day will be in the hands of the descendant of David—the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16)—and those who rule with Him (Rev 20:4). Immediately before the millennial kingdom, He will raise the dead, including those who have been martyred during Daniel’s seventieth week, and they will rule with Him. It will be a rule of righteousness and equity, and thus Abraham and his descendants will be a source of blessing to all people.

⁸¹ Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 702–3.

⁸² Osborne, *Revelation*, 475–76.

A New Relationship with God. Clearly, in the New Jerusalem phase of David's future kingdom, Israel and all others who have received the forgiveness benefit of the New Covenant will enjoy an unparalleled relationship with God. John writes in Rev 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them." This promise comes in conjunction with the descent of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, from heaven (21:2). It recalls God's New Covenant promise to Israel, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer 31:33d; see Jer 32:38; Ezek 37:27).

Aune recognizes the covenant formula, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jer 31:33[LXX 38:33])," in Rev 21:3c, but sees it here as referring to all people. He recognizes that it is limited to the righteous in Israel throughout the OT.⁸³ He, of course, would not recognize God's dealings with Israel in particular in Revelation 7, 12, and 14 in order to bring them to this point. Beale sees fulfillment of Jer 31:33 by all people who trust in Jesus, "the true seed of Abraham and the only authentic Israelite, who died and rose for both Jew and Gentile."⁸⁴ He writes, "Everyone represented by Jesus, the ideal king and Israelite, is considered part of true Israel and therefore shares in the blessings that he receives."⁸⁵ Thereby, he shuns the literal fulfillment of the New Covenant with national Israel in the future kingdom.

Osborne connects Rev 21:3 with the promise of Ezek 37:27 as well as Jer 31:33b, but interprets the verses not as pointing to a fulfillment spiritually by Christians today, but by all

⁸³ Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1123.

⁸⁴ Beale, *Revelation*, 1047. See also 1048, where Jer 31:33 appears.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

people in the new heaven and new earth.⁸⁶ He omits any reference to the original recipients of the promises in Ezekiel and Jeremiah and their unique role. Ethnic Israel is the reason for this previously non-existent, close relationship between God and not only Israel, but all peoples. All the families of the earth will be blessed through God's promise to Abraham.

The promise of Rev 21:3 does extend beyond the boundaries of Israel, but to deny its special relevance to Israel and her New Covenant is to ignore the clearly distinctive role of national Israel through earlier portions of Revelation and even in producing this new closeness to God. Revelation 21:12, 14 shows that Israel will have a role distinct from the church even in the new Jerusalem, the eternal state. As the special object of God's choice, she will ever be distinctive.

Summary of Israel in the Apocalypse.

The Book of Revelation is full of references to God's faithfulness in fulfilling His promises to national Israel, specifically the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the New Covenants. For Him to turn away from Israel to fulfill them with other peoples, as those who interpret the book in an eclectic, non-literal, or allegorical manner suggest, would violate His faithfulness to His promises.

The means used by Beale, Aune, and Osborne to avoid finding references to Israel in the Apocalypse vary. Beale and Osborne generally resort to an eclectic hermeneutic, choosing an idealist or allegorical meaning whenever the text refers to Israel. Any referenc to Israel for them becomes a reference to the church, which they call the "New Israel." Aune does not describe his

⁸⁶ Osborne, *Revelation*, 734–35.

hermeneutics as “eclectic,” but his method of interpreting the Apocalypse easily falls into that category. He labors to find definitions for “apocalyptic” and for “genre,” ending with his own definitions that he admits will not be acceptable to some others. He then uses apocalyptic genre as justification for combining a literal-futuristic-mystical method in some passages with an allegorical-idealist-historical method in others. He and Osborne nibble at literal fulfillment here and there, but explain it away by a species of genre principles used to override normal grammatical-historical principles, by reader-response hermeneutic, or historical criticism.

All three men take negative references to Jewish people literally in Rev 2:9 and 3:9, but revert to figurative meanings for Israel and the sons of Israel in chapters 7 and 14. The frequent disagreements among the three graphically portray how uncontrolled interpretation can be when one forsakes a literal method of understanding Revelation. With a literal approach to the book, references to Israel are plain and plentiful.

With this characteristic of the book as a whole in mind, for someone to say “that Rev 20:1–10 cannot be linked textually with Israel’s covenants and promises; that no New Testament passage clearly teaches a future Jewish millennium; and that the New Testament interprets the imagery of the Old Testament with reference to the present spiritual reign of Christ from his heavenly throne”⁸⁷ is a denial of what is obvious through adopting meanings other than what words have in their normal usage. It is to view those verses as completely divorced from their context, an exegetically unacceptable option. God will fulfill in a literal manner all the promises He has made to national Israel and will retain His eternal attribute of faithfulness. Along with the

⁸⁷ Waltke, “A Response,” 353.

rest of the Old and New Testaments, the Apocalypse interpreted literally verifies His compliance with His promises to the nation.