

The Kingdom Will Come As the Prophets Predicted

A Critique of Waltke’s Case for Amillennialism

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OT means Old Testament. NT means New Testament. Except as noted, Bible quotations are from the New International Version 1984. Sometimes I change the royal title Christ to its equivalent Messiah (John 1:41). Page numbers in notes are from Waltke’s OT Theology. Kingdom does not refer to God’s universal and unchanging rule but the promised one that came near.

Introduction

The coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus is a treasure worth infinitely more than all we have. An unbelievably perfect pearl that we can nevertheless own (Matt. 13:44-45). God’s Word gives glimpses of it as the goal to which He is moving His people and all creation. Its coming to earth is the Bible’s main theme. In his *OT Theology* Bruce K. Waltke rightly calls this “irruption of the holy God’s merciful kingship” “a universal that embraces all the biblical text....”² Later he acclaims some of its attributes:

The whole creation waits in eager expectation for the true nature of the people of God to be revealed in their resurrection, which is the redemption *of* their bodies—not redemption *from* their bodies. Saints will enjoy their freedom from sin and its effects in this regenerated earth that is liberated from its present state of imperfection and decay (Matt. 19:28; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:22-25; Rev. 21:1), not in a spiritual, disembodied heaven “up there.”

The creation’s present condition is akin to a woman’s labor pains in childbirth in order that it might bring forth its eschatological destiny (Rom. 8:18-25). At that time the meek (i.e., the people of glory) will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). This is the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, whom Paul in Romans 4:13 calls “heir of the world” (cf. Heb. 11:16).³

¹ Among my other writings on these issues are “[Will God Eternally Bless Ethnic Israel? A Critique of Replacement Theology](#)” and studies of [Thessalonians](#), [Romans](#), and [Revelation](#). For defenses of every aspect of premillennialism, consult the reprint in three volumes of George N.H. Peters’ masterful *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, As Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1957). Peters often italicizes for emphasis, which I copy when quoting him.

² Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 147. This quotation is from Chapter 6: “The Bible’s Center: An Overview of an Old Testament Theology” (pp. 143-169). The whole book has 1040 pages.

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A delightful trove of OT exegesis and bibliography, the book just quoted is only one of Waltke's many helpful writings. Another is a solid source for Hebrew word studies, the *Theological Wordbook*, for which he was an Associate Editor.⁴ He has been a personal blessing, both as my classmate at Dallas Theological Seminary and later as a teacher there.⁵ That school is a bastion of the dispensational version of premillennialism.

- Premillennialism insists that biblical prophecies, such as, those of Messiah's kingdom, will be fulfilled according to normal ("literal") criteria. For example, "the Holy Land" is and will remain a material territory; "Israel" is and will remain the nation descended from Abraham.
- Dispensationalism maintains that the church was unforeseen in the OT and will always be separate from Israel. Most dispensationalists (not all) have always assumed that Jesus started a spiritual kingdom at His first coming—but not the one predicted by earlier prophets.

Waltke and I have both changed the ways we understand the church. But he has also forsaken premillennialism and adopted amillennialism, which asserts (a) that the church has replaced ethnic Israel⁶ and (b) that Messiah's predicted kingdom has begun. If Jesus already rules from the throne of David, many prophecies must be spiritualized, which Waltke does. I agree there is "realized eschatology": some eternal things have begun. Not, however, the kingdom itself.⁷

I will address Waltke's case for amillennialism, *as I see it* in his *OT Theology*. I sent him an early draft of this study, and he graciously commented on several details. However, I may still misunderstand his case or be unfair. Part A will propose his main points, his general rationale. I will introduce each point with my own summary but document with selected statements from his book. Part B will critique in more detail three of his main reasons for reinterpreting prophecies. Part C will respond to his crucial argument from Acts 2 that the Messiah has begun to rule. My most important goal is to help redirect our attention to Jesus as "coming soon" (Rev. 22:12, 20)—just as Paul did in his last chapter (2 Tim. 4:1):

**In the presence of God and of Messiah Jesus,
who will judge the living and the dead,
and in view of his appearing and his kingdom...**

⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).

⁵ I still remember some of his encouraging but suggestive comments after my "senior sermon." And his classes I audited there, boosting my Hebrew, after my years in Mexico.

⁶ God "forsakes them [Israel] as a nation," says Waltke, "and chooses instead to form a new Israel" (329). We premillennialists usually call that view "Replacement Theology." See my section "The Elect Nation Israel."

⁷ "Realized eschatology" usually means the initial fulfillment of final things including the kingdom itself. "In this system the kingdom promised to Israel is realized in the church and the consummation of the kingdom is still future..." (Waltke, 322). I agree that some eternal things have begun to be fulfilled, such as, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant, but not the kingdom itself, for which essential elements are missing.

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A. Waltke's Main Points Leading Him to Amillennialism

"Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you...so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem.... And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him"
(Zech. 8:14, 15, 20, 22).

1. OT Consensus. OT prophets predicted a perfected kingdom of God over all the earth, including a repentant and glorified nation of Israel. (I agree.)⁸
(Look up the context of each of the Scriptures referred to here. Like many others, they all *contrast* Israel's continual failure to its final glory.)

- "Moses anticipated Israel's failure under the conditional Sinaitic covenant (Deut. 31:14—32:43)...But beyond Israel's cataclysmic failure, Moses prophesied that God would give Israel a new covenant and an ideal king guaranteeing Israel *I AM's* blessings, not curses (Deut. 30:1-10)."⁹
- "[B]ecause of the merciful God's unconditional covenant to bless Abraham...the prophets prophesy Israel's golden age under the Messiah that outlasts God's judgments. Micah 7:18-20 illustrates a typical salvation oracle." (Waltke then quotes those three verses. They praise God who "will not stay angry forever...will again have compassion on [Israel]...will tread our sins underfoot and...will be true to Jacob, and show mercy to Abraham as you pledged on oath to our fathers.")¹⁰
- Next in chapter 6 Waltke also quotes from another passage that "clearly illustrates the thesis of this chapter": Isaiah 2:2-4.¹¹ (God considered this prophecy so important that He also gave it in Micah 4:1-4.) The passage describes a worldwide kingdom in which "all nations" will live in peace and justice. They will learn God's "ways" and His "law" that will emanate from "the LORD's temple" on His "mountain" of "Zion." (Like most kingdom prophecies in the OT, this one promises ultimate blessing to ethnic Israel. Isaiah 2:1 introduces it as "concerning Judah and Jerusalem.")

Waltke concludes that in the OT prophets' "timeline of salvation history there are two stages in the breaking in of the kingdom of God: a failed form in the present [that is, the prophets'] age

⁸ Let me again recommend most of Waltke's analyses of OT Scriptures. Regardless of what he later decides about supposed NT reinterpretations, his explanations of original OT meanings in their contexts are usually solid.

⁹ Ch. 6, II. The Primary History, D. The Pentateuch, 153. "I AM" is Waltke's translation of God's name often written as *Yahweh* (represented by "LORD" in many versions).

¹⁰ Ch. 6, IV. Prophetic Literature, 157-158

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and a triumphant form in the age to come.” In that coming age “His mediatorial kingdom will become a universal kingdom involving all nations.”¹² Waltke’s observation is correct; I will reiterate it: OT prophets gave witness that God’s kingdom centered on Israel would not continue as it was but would be perfect and universal in the age to come. Won’t that be delightful!

“I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them” (Amos 9:15).

2. Early NT Consensus. Until Pentecost godly Jews believed that in the ultimate kingdom ethnic Israel will inherit the Promised (Holy) Land forever. (I agree.)

The literature of the Second Temple era shares in common the belief that *I AM*’s promise to give the descendants of the patriarchs the Land gives Israel an eternal right to the Land; it assumes an indissoluble connection between Israel and the Land. Moreover, the literature shares the common vision of Israel’s restoration to a renewed Holy Land.¹³

Notice that by *Israel* Waltke usually means the nation composed of “descendants of the patriarchs.” This is the term’s normal (or universal) meaning in the Bible, which I will discuss under Part B. Waltke closes chapter 19 referring once more to that nation in the words of Leslie Hoppe:

Jewish hopes for the future centered around something concrete and tangible: the constitution of Israel in its land, the return of the exiles, the reestablishment of the Jewish ruler over the land, and peace and prosperity in that land. Of course, Jerusalem as the site of the Temple and the capital of the former Judahite kingdom was an essential component of Jewish hopes for the future.¹⁴

To sum up, in Points 1 and 2 Waltke has admitted that the early church understood the kingdom according to the OT prophecies. I agree—and praise God that we non-Jews can take part with Israel in that glorious future.¹⁵ In Point 3, however, Waltke will claim that starting at Pentecost, God showed that the church was mistaken and God corrected it. I disagree. Part B will discuss the supposed biblical revelations that would require his different (revised) view.¹⁶

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¹³ 556. This and the next quotations are from Waltke’s Chapter 19: “The Gift of Land, Part 2: The Old Testament” (pp. 534-557). In that chapter this is Part XII. “Land in Second Temple Sources, Conclusion.”

¹⁴ 557, quoting from Leslie Hoppe, *The Holy City*, 9.

¹⁵ It is truly refreshing to find an amillennialist who is expert and orthodox in OT studies, yet willing to acknowledge facts that undermine his own conclusions. He admits to what the OT prophets originally meant and how the “early church” understood them, even though he then feels obligated to change their meaning.

¹⁶ From here on, most quotations are selected from Waltke’s Chapter 20: “The Gift of Land, Part 3: The New Testament” (pp. 558-587). Those under Point 3 are from Section III of that chapter: “Land as Geopolitical Territory, B. In Luke-Acts” (570-572).

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“The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:10).

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory” (Matt. 25:31).

3. Pentecostal Changes. The Holy Spirit imparted at Pentecost showed that previous prophecies about the kingdom give the wrong impression and must be reinterpreted spiritually. (I disagree.)

Waltke on the basis of his interpretation of Christ and His apostles does not hesitate to correct the early church’s “Jewish expectations” about the kingdom. That includes the “common vision of Israel’s restoration to a renewed Holy Land.” He lists some other “Jewish Misunderstandings of the Primitive Church,” starting in Luke 1.¹⁷ In those chapters, he says, “the pious characters of Luke’s infancy narratives—Zechariah and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary and Simeon” were wrong (he would prefer “unenlightened”). He gives examples:

Not yet having heard the teachings of Jesus and not yet having experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit, they express their praise in terms they inherited from the Jewish context. Mary probably understood Gabriel’s announcement that Jesus would reign over the House of Jacob from David’s throne in an everlasting kingdom as referring to David’s throne in Jerusalem (vv. 32-33). The priest Zechariah, on the birth of his son, John the Baptist, praises God that he “raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” to save Israel from her enemies (v. 69), probably meaning that Messiah would deliver Jerusalem from Rome’s yoke.¹⁸

I appreciate Waltke’s honest acknowledgment of what the “primitive church” (as he calls it) understood—and that its knowledge came from God’s revelation up to that date. He could have added that John the Baptist later had the same understanding. For example, John expected Jesus to quickly “clear his threshing floor” and “burn up the chaff” (Luke 3:17).

¹⁷ To Waltke the “primitive church” means the believers from Luke 1 through Acts 1. That is misleading because Jesus spoke of the church as still future in Matthew 16:18 (“I will build my church”). It began at Pentecost when He began baptizing in the Holy Spirit. That distinction hardly affects our arguments on this point, since we agree that the Gospels were written years after the church began. It seems unreasonable, however, that the Gospel writers would offer wrong kingdom theology from some of God’s prophets. Yet, amillennialists think they can improve on it. Similarly, some of my dispensational friends try to improve on the Gospel of Matthew. They think it is too “Jewish” and lacking in “grace teaching.”

¹⁸ 570. Waltke supposes that by Israel’s “enemies” Zechariah probably referred to the Romans. No doubt he did. But, as a friend says, Zechariah “probably had a fuller view of history than that.”

Why did they persist in beliefs “inherited from the Jewish context”? Because of two limitations, alleges Waltke: (1) “Not yet having heard the teachings of Jesus” and (2) “not yet having experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit,” they were uninformed. Neither of those reasons seems valid.

“Not yet having experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit.” On the contrary, the first chapters of Luke are dominated by God’s Spirit. For example, “Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied” (Luke 1:67). And his son John was “filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth” (1:15). See also 1:35, 41; 2:25, 26, 27. This was the same Holy Spirit whose permanent coming was foreseen by John the Baptist (e.g., John 1:33). Jesus later added that “when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13). We will consider Waltke’s allegation that the Spirit later taught things that in effect canceled His earlier teaching.

“Not yet having heard the teachings of Jesus.” On the contrary, even after years of hearing those teachings, Jesus’ apostles *still had their “Jewish” views*. Waltke acknowledges as much when he comments on their final question before Jesus ascended to the Father’s throne (Acts 1:6). Like all amillennialists, he considers them misguided, and says,

the disciples still think like the primitive church: “Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” they ask....¹⁹

Really? Did they “still think” wrongly about the kingdom after being the Lord’s disciples (= learners) for years? And after the risen Lord had trained them? He “appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). During that training “He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). Not just a few passages. Instead, “beginning with *Moses and all the Prophets*, he explained to them what was said *in all the Scriptures* concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). So they had indeed heard Jesus’ teachings, during their years of following Him and after His resurrection. During His last forty days on earth, He had taught specifically about “the kingdom” and enlightened them about “all the Scriptures.” Yet, Acts 1:6 shows that in regard to the kingdom “the disciples still think like the primitive church.” Amillennialists allege that Acts 2 and following will change that thinking. In Waltke’s words: “But as Luke continues his two-part drama, the primitive church’s Jewish expectations for the kingdom are reshaped.” He elaborates:

In [Acts] we can trace by this extension of church history Luke’s redefinition of the kingdom of God from a reference to life in territorial space to a reference to life in Christ. The primitive church expected Jesus Messiah to rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem and reestablish Israel’s glory and in that way to be a light to the nations. However, the Spirit-enlightened and Spirit-empowered church came to understand that Messiah Jesus rules the

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world from David's throne in heaven in a universal kingdom without national boundaries.²⁰

Don't miss this point. Amillennialists admit they believe and teach differently from what the prophets and Jesus taught before Pentecost—at least, what they managed to communicate. That means the Spirit-filled prophets of the OT and Luke 1-3. It also means the Lord Himself, both before and after His death and resurrection. Amillennialists do not blame Him, of course. Here are two arguments to justify His seeming failures: (a) When He told His disciples something, they were often slow to learn or they misunderstood. (b) Some things were only revealed progressively, when the time became ripe for each. For example, God waited for centuries before He revealed that Messiah would come twice instead of once (Matt. 13). And He waited well past Pentecost to reveal that uncircumcised Gentiles can be fully acceptable in the church (Acts 10-11; Eph. 2-3).

In regard to argument (a), we must not exaggerate the apparent “failures.” On nearly every occasion of confusion, Jesus proceeded to clarify to believers what was unclear.²¹ Furthermore, there is no record of His trying (much less, failing) to correct their definition of the expected kingdom. Instead, His succeeding prophecies confirmed it (e.g., Matt. 13:36-43; 19:28-29). In regard to (b), progressive revelation modifies or adds but does not basically change what God solemnly promised. Amillennialism would have us think that post-Pentecost revelations changed the kingdom in ways no one could have guessed.

So starting at Pentecost, says amillennialism, there is a “redefinition of the kingdom of God.” No longer is the kingdom what the church “expected” but what it “came to understand.” A huge change for them—and us—regarding basics! We should expect strong evidence for such a change, and Waltke proposes it. He proposes that the meanings of the Promised Land, the elect nation Israel, and Messiah's covenanted kingdom all changed. In Part B we will consider those three elements.

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²¹ Here at random are two examples of the disciples' slowness to learn: Matthew 15:16 (“Are you still so dull?”) and 16:9 (“Do you still not understand?”). In both cases the Lord proceeded to clarify, and “then they understood” (16:12). In the case of newly revealed “secrets of the kingdom,” “Jesus spoke the word to them [using parables], *as much as they could understand*. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he *explained everything*” (Mark 4:33-34). Did not Mark mean that at least in general the disciples understood? Should I instead accept the amillennial lament that the disciples were still wrong to hold their “Jewish expectations” about the kingdom?

I am not denying that Jesus as a master teacher gave his pupils some hard things to think about. For example, He repeatedly predicted His passion and resurrection, knowing they could not understand that yet. *But in this case the Scripture informs us*: “Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about” (Luke 18:31-34).

B. Waltke's Evidence that Key Definitions Must Be Changed

"In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness" (Isa. 16:5).

Remember that "the primitive church expected Jesus Messiah to rule from David's throne in Jerusalem and reestablish Israel's glory and in that way to be a light to the nations." From OT prophecies such as Isaiah 2:2-4, they expected worldwide peace and justice, with Israel restored and dominant.²²

We looked at two of the Spirit-filled prophets in the Gospels: Zechariah and his son, John the Baptist. Each of them *announced as "near" exactly what many prophets had seen at a distance*. "Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied" that Jerusalem was about to triumph (Luke 1:67-75). Later John, "filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth" (1:15), proclaimed that the kingdom had drawn near and judgment was imminent (Matt. 3:10, 12; 11:2-3). For those who know the OT, there was nothing obscure about their messages. God had often revealed the kingdom's character. So we know how Zechariah and John and their hearers understood their own prophecies.

Kingdom prophecies not fulfilled. They did not get fulfilled as they were understood. There was no liberation for Jerusalem, no converted nation, none of the glories as predicted, no severe judgment. So those who are convinced that the kingdom came must *reinterpret* much that the OT and NT prophets said. Waltke assures us, however, that we should not reinterpret all of them. There are two kinds, he says. The "prophecies regarding Christ's earthly passion find an earthly fulfillment." Those we can leave as they are. But the "prophecies that pertain to his glory (i.e., his spiritual reign from heaven) will find a spiritual fulfillment."²³ Those we must reinterpret. Waltke's argument here is based on two assumptions that he will try to prove: (1) that Messiah's kingdom has begun as an alleged "spiritual reign," and (2) that the alleged "spiritual reign" is Messiah's glory. If He indeed began His prophesied glorious reign, then the prophecies did not mean what they said. But the NT does not support those assumptions. Consider, first, what it says about His glory.

²² It is difficult to determine what amillennialists really think about Isaiah 2:2-4. Waltke mostly refers to it as a sample OT prophecy that the Holy Spirit later corrected (158). But he also opens the possibility that it may be fulfilled literally (with amillennial changes): "This prophecy should be redefined within its canonical context as a reference to the heavenly Jerusalem and/or to its being lowered to the new earth in the eschaton [final state]. Let the church rejoice that myriads of Christians from all over the world make their pilgrimage to heavenly Mount Zion to feed upon the hidden manna of Jesus Christ." (587)

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Messiah's glory. We will look at what is revealed in regard to three epochs: (a) His life on earth until His death, (b) His resurrection and ascension, (c) His Second Coming.

- First, in His life on earth, most references to Jesus' glory looked forward to His Second Coming to rule. For example, Matthew 16:27 and parallel passages promised that He "is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels" to judge (which usually means to rule). Days later, some disciples saw Him transformed "in glorious splendor" on a mountain (Luke 9:32 and parallels). Peter explained that event as a preview of the coming

eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father... on the sacred mountain. (2 Peter 1:11-18)

About a dozen passages in the Synoptics refer to Jesus' glory in that coming kingdom. Another example: "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30 and parallel passages).

In this matter the Gospel of John, as usual, is supplementary. It emphasizes a revelation seen only by those who believed, a revelation of the eternal God in Jesus: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father... No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only... has made him known" (John 1:14, 18; cf. 11:4, 40). But even in John "he revealed his glory" in "signs" that pointed to His future kingdom (2:11). Hebrews 6:5, using a Greek word often translated "miracles," calls them "*powers* of the coming age." If the "coming age" had arrived, the miracles would have continued until everything would have been restored (Acts 3:21).

- Second, Jesus was glorified in and after His resurrection. "God... glorified his servant Jesus [when He] raised him from the dead" (Acts 3:13-15). Jesus' prayer was answered: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5). He "was taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Acts 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:21), "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9)—with glory the world still cannot see. The glory restored to Him is what He had before, but He is now a *man* (Heb. 2:9). As man He has received "the glory of becoming a high priest" and ministers as such (Heb. 5:5; 9:15). As man He will also rule, though now He must *wait* "for his enemies to be made his footstool" (Heb. 10:13).
- Third, He will rule when He "comes in his glory" and sits "on his throne in heavenly glory" (Matt. 25:31).²⁴ That is every Christian's "blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Furthermore, "When Christ... appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4; cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Thess. 2:14; Heb. 2:10; 1 John 3:2, 3). The apostle Peter emphasized the same thing: "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Messiah, so that you may be overjoyed *when his glory is revealed*" (1 Peter

²⁴ Matthew 19:28a says the same as 25:31 about the Son of Man returning to rule. It translates the same four Greek words more literally: "on his glorious throne."

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4:13). Peter himself was a “witness of Messiah’s sufferings...who also will share in *the glory to be revealed*” (5:1; cf. 5:10). He said it another way earlier: We “through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of *the salvation that is ready to be revealed* at the last time” (1:3-5). Nowhere in his sermons or writings does Peter (or any other NT writer) reflect Waltke’s view that Jesus’ glory is a “spiritual reign” now.

So, instead of referring to Jesus now reigning in glory, the NT overwhelmingly looks for His glory when He returns. Every believer should keep alive that same hope, at least by memorizing some of the promises. Meanwhile, we will proceed to consider Waltke’s reinterpretations of the Land and of Israel.

“I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah those who will possess my mountains; my chosen people will inherit them, and there will my servants live.” (Isa. 65:9).
“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5 and Ps. 37:11).

1. The Promised Land

As noted previously, the OT very often refers to the Promised Land by name—over a period of hundreds of years.²⁵ There can hardly be any doubt about where it was located—or to whom God promised it (to Abraham and the nation descended from him through Isaac and Jacob). Here are a few samples:

“All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.” (Gen. 13:15; the LORD to Abraham)

“I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it...To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates...” (Gen. 15:7, 18; the LORD to Abraham)²⁶

²⁵ “Land...is the fourth most frequently used word in the Old Testament” (p. 585)! A great number of those times it refers to the Promised Land.

²⁶ Waltke considers Genesis 15:1 to 16:16 the climax of Act 1 in the “Abraham Cycle.” In this passage God makes an irrevocable, unconditional covenant to give Abraham the land of Canaan with the clearly marked boundaries of the ten nations currently dwelling in it...[It] is also a janus passage...for it reintroduces the theme of seed—in this case, the physical seed of Abraham, an inseparable component of God’s covenant to give the land as a permanent possession to Abraham and his descendants. (312)

“May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham.” (Gen. 28:4, Isaac to Jacob)

“I will gather you...and bring you back into your own land...the land I gave your forefathers....I will bring you back to the land of Israel...settle you in your own land....I will gather them and bring them back into their own land...make them one nation in the land. ...They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.” (Ezek. 36:24, 28; 37:12, 14, 21, 22, 25; the LORD to Ezekiel for the “house of Israel”)

Waltke rightly considers the meaning of the Land a key to correct kingdom theology. Of three chapters he dedicates to that subject (chs. 18-20, pp. 512-587), one of them (ch. 19) analyzes it in the OT. At the end of that chapter he includes this summary, which I quoted more fully earlier: “Jewish hopes for the future centered around something concrete and tangible: the constitution of Israel in its land, the return of the exiles, the reestablishment of the Jewish ruler over the land, and peace and prosperity in that land.”²⁷

So Waltke recognizes that OT prophets spoke with one voice about the Promised Land. Yet, he assures us that it must be redefined. Not an easy task! “The trajectory of the Land motif into the New Testament,” he admits,

is the most difficult biblical motif to track....Since the New Testament does not use the term “Land,” we have to work with equivalent terms that imply Land, such as “Jerusalem,” “throne of David,” “temple,” and “Zion.”²⁸

It seems more than strange that “the New Testament *does not use the term*” and yet changes its meaning! Pause to consider why Waltke feels justified in trying to prove this.

Relative apostolic silence. There are many OT prophecies about the Land and Israel (and related matters) which NT Epistles do not clearly repeat or reflect. When that happens, Waltke proposes what I will here call an “assumption from silence,” namely, that their silence on some aspect negated it. To him that shows that the Holy Spirit was teaching *a different kind of kingdom* than the one pictured earlier. Notice how he applies that supposed rule:

If the Spirit will guide the apostles into all truth about Christ’s kingdom, and if the inspired apostles *do not teach a future Jewish kingdom that is centered in Jerusalem*, then

²⁷ 557, quoting from Leslie Hoppe, *The Holy City*, 9.

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the popular, evangelical eschatology that the Land will play a role in an intermediate Jewish kingdom between two comings of Christ is not true.²⁹

Here Waltke uses his “assumption from silence” to deny “*a future Jewish kingdom that is centered in Jerusalem.*” Thus, he also denies that “the Land will play a role” as it constantly did in OT promises. By supposedly finding better meanings, this “assumption from silence” in effect cancels earlier promises, making them seem inferior and misleading. If the assumption is right, only NT prophecies can be trusted implicitly. Premillennialists object, finding substantial harmony between NT revelations/allusions and the super-abundant OT evidence. They mesh so well that further repetition might be redundant. Furthermore, the extent of “silence” is exaggerated, as you will see when I discuss Jerusalem. And there were good reasons not to repeat some of the prophecies, such as, to avoid misunderstanding by the Roman Empire.³⁰

We do not see in NT writings this amillennial distrust of OT prophecies. On the contrary, they are recommended *without warnings!* In “the Law or the Prophets,” our Lord said, “not the smallest letter...will by any means disappear...until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17-19). In his last epistle Peter exalted “the word of the prophets...you will do well to pay attention to it, as to *a light shining in a dark place*” (2 Pet. 1:19). Until the end Paul still exhorted Timothy to “continue in what you have learned...from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are *able to make you wise for salvation....All Scripture...is useful for teaching...*” (2 Tim. 3:14-17).³¹ How could these apostles recommend the OT as a light that makes one wise if much of it does not mean what it says?

²⁹ 574. I’m not sure what Waltke means about “an intermediate Jewish kingdom between two comings of Christ.” But my concern here is about apostolic silence and the Land.

³⁰ The “assumption from silence” supposes that apostles limited their descriptions of the future to show what was really valid. George Peters suggests better reasons for their procedure. For example, the

Kingdom being thus postponed, and the process of the gathering out of the elect now going on, is sufficient reason why *no additional Revelation* is necessary. The Apocalypse of John, to encourage our faith and hope, includes all that is additionally required to be known, appropriately closing the direct Divine communications, and confirming the voices of the prophets. Jesus Himself refrained from penning down anything, contenting Himself with the testimony of chosen witnesses, because He foresaw that such writing, if given, would have been perverted by His enemies and employed against Himself in accusation to the Roman power (as was even done through His reported words)...[A] more extended and detailed notice would *unnecessarily* (owing to this postponement) have excited the jealousy, hostility, and persecution of the Roman Empire. (*Theocratic Kingdom*, I:626-627, emphasis his)

³¹ Jesus showed full confidence in the understandability of OT prophecies. He preached (and had His disciples preach) that the kingdom was near but did not define it. This implied that *Israel knew from the Scriptures* what it will be. When He later presented new kingdom revelations for His disciples, He built on that solid foundation. He did not supersede older revelations but supplemented them. “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom has been given to you but not to them” (Matt. 13:11), He promised. And indeed, they gained that knowledge because He explained the secrets to them, explanations built directly on their previous beliefs from the Scriptures. Finally,

“Have you understood all these things,” Jesus asked. “Yes,” they replied. He said to them, “Therefore [meaning, since you understand] every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom...is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures *as well as old.*” (Matt. 13:51-52)

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Furthermore, the NT implies its agreement with much more of the OT than it quotes. As Waltke acknowledges, a few words often code for a much longer prophecy (or several).³² Consider, for example, “the times of the restoration of all things, of which [times] God spoke long ago through the mouth of the holy ones” (Acts 3:21, literal). This refers to *many prophecies* of the new world God will create, labeled “new heavens and a new earth” in Isaiah 65:17 and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, we will continue to look at Waltke’s evidence. He thinks that the changes he supposes for “equivalent terms” certainly change “Land” also. As he says later,

The contrast between the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament teachings of the apostles regarding the Land is so striking that it becomes a *tour de force* [an amazing performance] that the New Testament redefines the concept. “Land” no longer refers to territorial space but to spiritual space that encompasses both universal space...and universal time (i.e., “forever more”).³³

“No longer...territorial...but...spiritual....” Sometimes he is even more specific, as in the Conclusion to Chapter 20:

The Old Testament promises regarding the Land must be interpreted in the light of the canon’s own redefinition of the correlative terms pertaining to the Land.... Accordingly, the promise that Israel will inherit a land flowing with milk and honey becomes a metaphor for the milk and honey of life in Christ, a participation in heaven itself....³⁴

Is the Land a type of “Life in Christ”? This is Waltke’s favorite revised meaning for the Land as promised.³⁵ How does he try to validate it? Partly, it seems, from the constant use in the Epistles of the expression “in Christ.” Since that concept has some similarities to inheriting the

The “new treasures” about the kingdom did/do not take the place of the old ones but supplement them. There was no need of rehashing the old.

³² Waltke agrees with C. H. Dodd, who “argues convincingly that the apostolic community selected certain large sections of the Old Testament and understood them as testimonies to Jesus Christ. He further argued that, although the early Christian scholars quoted only particular verses or sentences, these citations were understood as pointers to the whole context....” (136)

³³ 573

³⁴ 586

³⁵ Waltke strongly advocates this redefinition of “Land” as “Life in Christ” (586-587). However, he sometimes changes to yet other definitions, arguing

that the New Testament redefines Land in three ways: first, *spiritually*, as a reference to Christ’s person; second, *transcendentally*, as a reference to heavenly Jerusalem; and third, *eschatologically*, as a reference to the New Jerusalem after Christ’s second coming. By “redefine” we mean that whereas “Land” in the Old Testament refers to Israel’s life in Canaan, in the New Testament “Land” [which term the NT “does not use”] is transmuted to refer to life in Christ. (560)

Land, he calls the Land a “type” and life in Christ its “antitype.”³⁶ I assume Waltke refers primarily to the *future Land* (see his word “promise”), not the *historical Land*, which they never inherited. God indeed promised Abraham “that he and his descendants after him would possess the land” but “gave him no inheritance...not even a foot of ground” (Acts 7:5-6). Not to Abraham nor to his “descendants as numerous as the stars.” “All these people...died [and] did not receive the things promised” (Heb. 11:13, 39). So there was *no historical inheritance* to serve as a type! There was only God’s promise, which Waltke thinks got replaced by an antitype! That seems a strange extension of typology, in which types are normally real things, not unfulfilled promises. Nevertheless, it is an argument often used by amillennialists.

Let us consider why Waltke thinks the promise of the future Land is a “type” of something better. He discusses “Typology” on pages 136-142 (also 455-456). We agree there are types wherever “God intended earlier persons, acts, and institutions to present a type or shadow or pattern of future greater fulfillment.” But Waltke greatly enlarges that scope, implying that similarities between events indicate a divinely planned evolution of meaning. Notice the five stages (see my added numbers) he includes in the “Exodus” series: “[1] Abraham’s exodus from Egypt foreshadowed [2] Israel’s exodus from Egypt four centuries later.” Then,

the exodus of Moses and of the first generation [from Egypt] became a type of [3] Joshua’s and the second generation’s conquest of the land...It also became a type of [4] Israel’s deliverance from Israel’s exile from Assyria and especially from Babylon...Four centuries later, [the Gospel of Mark] sees [5] our salvation through Jesus as a spiritual exodus and a conquest of the Sworn Land.

Notice that by this means Waltke arrives at a redefinition of “the Sworn Land.” Apparently he thinks that repeating patterns are sufficient proof that God intended to change meanings. He agrees with Leonhard Goppelt that “typology is the dominant and characteristic method of interpretation for the New Testament use of the Old Testament.” Accordingly, he claims that

the New Testament redefines most Old Testament motifs or themes. In the new dispensation the covenant people of God are not marked by circumcision as in the old, but by their doing God’s will...Jesus does away with Sabbath-keeping as a religious obligation and “redefines” it according to its true intent: a time to heal, to do good, and to enjoy spiritual rest.³⁷

Indeed, there are OT types that get transformed in fulfillment. But in each such case Scriptures clearly say so. Take the two just mentioned.

³⁶ Waltke lists seven similarities he sees “between Israel’s Land on the one hand and the church and its life in Christ on the other” (p. 584). Both, for example, (1) “are a divine gift,” (2) “are entered by faith alone,” (3) “are an inheritance,” and (4) “uniquely offer blessed rest and security.”

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- Physical circumcision. This had always had a metaphorical meaning (Deut. 10:16; 30:6)—but now “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything” (Gal. 6:15).
- The Sabbath. Believers should no longer be judged “with regard to...a Sabbath day...a shadow of the things that were to come” (Col. 2:16-17).³⁸

There is also strong Scriptural support for

- The “change of the priesthood” (Heb. 7:12; see vv. 11-28). “For the law appoints as high priest men who are weak; but the oath...appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever” (Heb. 7:28).
- The discontinuance of animal sacrifices. “And where [sins] have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin” (Heb. 10:18).³⁹

But it is arbitrary to claim that just any NT illustration may cancel the original it is like. For example, Jesus’ body is called a temple (John 2:19-22). So is the church (Eph. 2:21). So are individual believers (1 Cor. 6:19). But none of these cancels OT predictions about the *temple* (to be discussed). Much less does the promise of the Land change meaning. Yet, Waltke thinks it does change (even though the NT “does not use the term”) because of what he calls typology.

George Peters strongly disagrees—and argues that calling promises types is an amillennial ploy in order to redefine those promises. Here is a small sample of his discussion (emphasis his).

The promises in the covenants are not typical, as many argue (impelled to it by not seeing a present fulfillment, and by a disbelief in a future fulfillment), for a typical character is opposed to the very nature of a covenant. It would in a great measure make the real truth unrecognizable until the appearance of the anti-type, and the result would be to enshroud the covenants themselves in conjecture and mystery, which is opposed to the simple fact

³⁸ Many OT events and prophecies had spiritual aspects that Israel overlooked. For example, they should have learned that manna from heaven pictured more than physical food (Deut. 8:3; John 6:31-32). Yet, it did not cancel eating “with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom” (Matt. 8:11). Nicodemus should have understood that “a new heart and a new spirit” for “the house of Israel” implied their new birth (Ezek. 36:22-27; John 3:3-10). That did not negate the promise “You will live in the land I gave your forefathers” (Ezek. 36:28). And probably all godly Israelites understood that the tree of life and the water of life will not only be real but also sacraments that impart what they picture. When Jesus pointed out such spiritual meanings, He was not canceling promises of material blessings.

³⁹ Ezekiel chapters 40-48 describe what is often called a millennial temple and worship. The description includes many OT types that have been superseded. The interpreter must decide, for example, if the coming kingdom will still have a Levitical priesthood offering Old Covenant sacrifices and an unglorified “prince” (46:16) who requires such ministry on his behalf. George Peters in *Theocratic Kingdom* denies that Ezekiel 40-48 was a prediction, since it was offered to Ezekiel’s generation (Ezek. 43:10-11). See my discussion of that passage in Appendix B of my Ezekiel Study Guide. Though the most extensive, it is only one of the passages that picture a continuance of the Levitical priesthood (e.g., Jer. 33:18), which is now canceled (Heb. 7:12; 10:18).

that God appeals to the covenants as to promises well comprehended. The partial fulfillment of them clearly shows that they are not to be regarded as typical.

...Many excellent writers...make e.g. the inheritance promised to the Patriarchs a typical one, and the proof texts assigned for this are the passages which speak of the saints inheriting the earth, of Abraham being “heir of the world,” etc. But this is a begging of the question, for these passages in no shape or form intimate a typical nature of the inheritance but, on the contrary, the reality of the promise....[The] Theocratic King inherits not only David’s throne and kingdom, but also the territory....His dominion...is to extend over the whole earth....Here comes in the fatal mistake that [Fairbairn] and others make in supposing that covenant promises are typical, impelling them, as an illustration of the same, to infer *the typical nature of “the seed.”* We may well ask, in reply, Was not Christ Abraham’s *natural* seed, and if so, did “seed” stand for a type? Certainly not, for there is *a literal fulfillment of promise. Precisely so*, with the inheritance; it is better to wait and see what God yet intends to do, before we explain away His own words by a typical process. For if we adopt this modernized principle, so prevailing, where is then a promise in the covenants to which can be ascribed *certainty* of meaning? Rejecting the plain one that the letter contains, or more conveniently converting it into a type, the promise may then represent what the ingenuity of man ascribes to it, and conjectures follow.⁴⁰

Can anyone blame us for calling the “type/antitype” argument subjective and doubtful? But that would be a moot question if Waltke could prove that the NT clearly changes the literal land promises to spiritual. So let us consider his other proofs for changing “Land.” They are based on the supposed change of meaning for “equivalent terms,” such as, *Jerusalem*.

NT prophecies about Jerusalem? Here are two claims by which Waltke thinks earthly Jerusalem is canceled:

- The “destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 terminates its role in salvation history.”⁴¹ Waltke opines that in His prophetic discourse (Matt. 24-25) Jesus predicted “that Jerusalem [would] be annihilated without any prospect of its being rebuilt.” This annihilation and no rebuilding, Waltke continues, “would make a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies regarding Messiah’s glory impossible.”⁴²
- In succeeding prophecies there was no promise of its reinstatement. If there will be a future “kingdom...centered in Jerusalem,” Waltke says, the Spirit-guided apostles would have to

⁴⁰ George N.H. Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (I:290-292). Peters acknowledges that some aspects of the OT kingdom were typical—but not the kingdom itself (I:218). He gives eleven “marks by which we may distinguish predictions that will finally be fulfilled from those that are merely conditional” (I:177).

⁴¹ 571

⁴² 585

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say so.⁴³ In other words, if the apostles did not repeat former predictions about Jerusalem, they will not come true.

Not rebuilt? Since Waltke knows it was rebuilt (and exists today), he must refer to its function. No reinstatement? Remember that Waltke is basing his argument on “apostolic teachings.” He considers them silent about significant roles for Jerusalem and the Promised Land in the future kingdom. See my earlier comments on “Relative apostolic silence.” We will look at further evidence under “Last-times Jerusalem/temple in Epistles.” But he should not so lightly dismiss the many OT prophecies about *restored* Jerusalem. Isaiah 40-66, for example, repeatedly promises sinful and punished “Zion” a glorious future. One example, with the LORD speaking to Zion:

“Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people....Kings...and their queens...will bow down before you with their faces to the ground....” (Isa. 49:19, 23)

Waltke admits that OT prophecies about Messiah’s first advent, suffering, and death were fulfilled literally. But it is impossible, he asserts, that prophecies of His ruling can also be fulfilled literally.⁴⁴ So impossible that for us to believe such prophecies, the apostles would have to reiterate them. Read again Waltke’s claim discussed near the beginning of this Part B: Those “prophecies regarding Christ’s earthly passion find an earthly fulfillment,” but “those prophecies that pertain to his glory (i.e., his spiritual reign from heaven) will find a spiritual fulfillment.”⁴⁵ We saw that key passages about Messiah’s glory do not support Waltke’s language but point forward to His coming in splendor to rule.

“Renewed earth.” Remember that Waltke is arguing that his alleged redefinition of Jerusalem requires redefinition of the Promised Land. But he is far from consistent in his own conclusion. He foresees, after all, a “renewed earth” to inherit,⁴⁶ and “earth” in NT Greek (*gen*) is the same

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⁴⁴ In order to simplify this discussion, I will go along with calling these separate prophecies. But nearly every mention of the suffering has it side by side with the glory *in the same prophecy*. For example, in Zechariah 9:9 the “king comes to [Jerusalem] gentle and riding on a donkey.” In verse 10, with no break, “He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea.” The NT reveals that these verses refer to two comings, not two kinds of prophecy (material and spiritual).

⁴⁵ 564

⁴⁶ Waltke is right that we will inherit (rule) as renewed (resurrected) people in the “renewed earth.” Glorified men and liberated creation—all still material but made immortal. That was always God’s plan. When will the “new heavens and new earth” come? I believe it will begin with the millennium (Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 20) but be consummated at its end (Rev. 21). Accordingly, the Lord called it “the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne” (Matt. 19:28; cf. Acts 3:21). Many dispensationalists do not agree, however. Based on their understanding of 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 20-21, they think the renewal will begin a thousand years later. See [“The Coming of Jesus’ Eternal Kingdom According to the Book of Revelation,”](#) especially “General Considerations in Revelation 21:1 to 22:5.”

word as “land.” Keep that in mind and reread his comments I quoted at the beginning of the Introduction. Here are two additional examples:

- Commenting on Matthew 5:5, he admits that “*ten gen* [the earth] has an obstinately territorial connotation and the beatitudes have an unmistakable eschatological dimension....[T]hose who humbly acknowledge their dependence on God’s power and justice...will inherit the earth.”⁴⁷ I heartily agree.
- Concluding his chapter on “The Bible’s Center: An Overview...,” he proposes both spiritual and literal fulfillments.

There has always been an already-and-not-yet aspect of the kingdom....The prophets and the psalm writers proclaim the hope of this new kingdom.... Waiting in the wings [i.e., not fully accomplished in the OT] is a greater *seed*—not the physical people of Abraham, but a spiritual people, true inheritors of his faith. There is a greater *law*, a new covenant....There is a greater *land*, which is both present and not-yet. On the one hand, the land is presently “Christified,” for in Jesus Christ his people find the place of life and rest that is not bounded by geography. On the other hand, the land promises will be consummated in the future new heaven and new earth.⁴⁸

So in spite of claiming that the Land has been redefined, Waltke acknowledges that *it will still mean Land at the end*. “The land promises will be consummated.” “The meek” really “will inherit the earth.”⁴⁹ That is precisely what the Bible’s final prophecies describe: “the future new heaven and new earth.” And those chapters repeatedly mention “the nations” (Rev. 21:24, 26; 22:2). What would prevent the Ruler from assigning each nation (even Israel) its particular share?

“Converted Jerusalem.” The same ambivalence Waltke shows about the land, he shows about Jerusalem. Remember, for example, his claim “that Jerusalem [would] be annihilated without any prospect of its being rebuilt”?⁵⁰ That is what he thinks Jesus taught in His prophetic discourse in Matthew 24-25. Yet, he acknowledges a far different outcome in Jesus’ last words just before that discourse (Matt. 23:37-39). In them Jesus lamented for “Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets...,” and He did predict its destruction. But at the end of its darkness He foresaw light: “you will not see me again *until you say*, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (23:39). Waltke correctly notices that light from Matthew 23, and comments, “At his second

⁴⁷ 582. On the same page he calls it “the renewed earth”; on page 562, “the world” (from Rom. 4:13).

⁴⁸ 168. The idea of *greater* in these three cases is misleading. Even if an addition is proved, it does not necessarily mean the replacement of the original promise. For example, additional seed for Abraham does not cancel promises for his physical seed.

⁴⁹ So was the “primitive church” wrong about this—or was it right after all? Waltke tries to have it both ways. But I believe it was *only right*.

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coming, however, a converted Jerusalem will greet him appropriately.”⁵¹ So Jerusalem will not only exist at His coming but will be redeemed. That contradicts Waltke’s conclusion in Matthew 24-25. And since King Jesus will come to that redeemed city, He will doubtless rule from there. Many prophecies picture it as the capital (e.g., Isa. 2:2-4; Zech. 14:8-9, 16-17).⁵²

Even within His prophetic discourse, Jesus anticipated a better day for the city. “Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles *until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24). This implied its subsequent restoration, as many former prophecies had predicted. Jesus had agreed with those prophecies, calling “Jerusalem...the city of the Great King” (Matt. 5:35). Even rejecting the Messiah (as predicted) would not make it lose that status.

Several OT prophecies about future Jerusalem/Zion also refer to a glorified temple there. Here are some examples:

- “Then suddenly the LORD...will come to his temple....He will sit as a refiner and purifier...” (Mal. 3:1-3).
- “I will shake all nations...and I will fill this house with glory...greater than the glory of the former house” (Hag. 2:7-9).
- “In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains” (Isa. 2:2; Micah 4:1).⁵³

Last-times Jerusalem/temple in Epistles. In spite of Waltke’s denials, the Epistles do refer to eschatological Jerusalem and a temple there. Waltke discusses three passages. Decide for yourself.⁵⁴

- **2 Thessalonians 2:4.** The Man of Lawlessness “takes his seat in the temple...of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” Waltke admits, “I am not saying that a third temple will not be built in Jerusalem, but...Old Testament prophecy does not require such a temple” (on the contrary, see above). He concedes that Paul does not suggest a spiritual meaning in this passage; that is, the temple does not mean the church here.⁵⁵ So he prefers the interpretation that “the reference is to God’s heavenly abode....so this lawless ruler will boast that he has dis-

⁵¹ 564

⁵² See my comments about Matthew 23:39 under “Kingdom elements redefined?”

⁵³ It is much less certain that Ezekiel 40-48 was a prediction, since it was offered to Ezekiel’s generation (Ezek. 43:10-11).

⁵⁴ 574-576

⁵⁵ 574. In the same note Waltke continues discussing the meaning of God’s “temple.” It is because of OT prophecies that traditional Judaism and premillennialists say “a third temple *must* be erected on the site of the previous temples.” In his “objections [to] this Jewish expectation,” Waltke offers two new NT meanings for temple. One is that “the Lord Jesus replaces the Jewish temple with his body (John 2:19-22).” The other is that “Paul consistently uses the term *naos theou* [temple of God] for the church in Christ.” For obvious reasons he does not suggest either of these meanings in 2 Thessalonians 2 or Revelation 11.

possessed God...” In other words, the ruler cannot really “take his seat in the temple” because it will not be on earth; the words do not represent an action but merely a claim.

In response, it makes much better sense to interpret 2 Thessalonians 2:4 as an actual deed in an actual temple on earth. That corresponds to other passages regarding the same time and circumstances. Revelation 11:7-13, for example, shows how the final lawless ruler will be active in the future temple and Jerusalem on earth. In Revelation 13:7-8 he is pictured as a “beast” who is worshiped by all the unconverted people of the world. He embodies the power and character of the “fourth beast” on earth in Daniel 7:7-8, 19-26. There Daniel saw him begin as a “little horn” who soon “spoke boastfully....He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints...for a time, times, and half a time.” But even as Daniel heard “the boastful words the horn was speaking,” a court in heaven awarded “everlasting dominion” on earth to the “son of man” (Dan. 7:9-14). “The beast [including that horn] was slain and its body destroyed...” (Dan. 7:11). That is exactly what 2 Thessalonians 2:8 describes: “the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will...destroy by the splendor of his coming.”⁵⁶ The same penalty for the same beast at Jesus’ same coming in glory is pictured in Revelation 19:11-20. This all implies a literal temple of God in literal Jerusalem at that time. Thus, “taking his seat in the temple” in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 describes a visible action (not just words) *on earth* that will dramatize the lawless ruler’s boast.⁵⁷

- **Romans 11:26.** “The deliverer will come *from Zion*; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob....” Waltke agrees that this looks forward to “Israel’s spiritual salvation.” He also agrees that it refers to an “earthly Jerusalem” as source. Not a future redeemed Jerusalem, however. Instead, the city where the Redeemer died and rose but which became “the place of annihilation.”⁵⁸ In other words, future Israel will be saved because of the Gospel that started at Jerusalem *before it was destroyed*. Waltke believes that the apostle favors his view by changing Isaiah 59:20a (“The Redeemer will come *to Zion*”) to read “*from Zion*.”⁵⁹ Isaiah’s “to” had indicated God’s blessing on the future city, but Paul’s “from” could simply indicate source.

⁵⁶ Daniel 11:36-45 seems to describe the same lawless one: “The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god....”

⁵⁷ For more discussion of this aspect in 2 Thessalonians, see my writings about (a) [the church and the tribulation](#) and/or (b) [Thessalonians](#).

⁵⁸ 575. Waltke offers two choices for the meaning of Zion in Romans 11:26: (a) “heavenly Jerusalem,” from which “the ascended Lord rules on earth from heaven” or (b) “earthly Jerusalem, from which the gospel has gone out to the entire world.” He decides that the latter view “best matches salvation history,” which for him does not include a significant role for a final Jerusalem. He argues at length to prove “the characterization of Galilee as the place of proclaiming the new age and of Jerusalem as the place of annihilation...” (p. 567). Indeed, the Lord gave the Great Commission in Galilee. But making Galilee the new “center of God’s kingdom” misunderstands the meaning of the kingdom and contradicts Luke’s record.

⁵⁹ Some think that Paul changed to “from” to be more like the Septuagint reading “*heneken* [because of] Zion.” But he could have easily used *heneken* if that is what he wanted.

In response, Waltke is right to recognize (a) that ethnic Israel will finally have salvation (b) that will come from an “earthly Jerusalem.” But only his theology forces him to deny the original meaning of Zion in Isaiah 59:20 and Romans 11:26. Godly Israelites had often prayed for God’s blessing “from/out of Zion” (Pss. 14:7; 20:2) or “from/out of His holy hill” (Ps. 3:4). God’s earthly throne had been established over Israel during the Exodus (Exod. 25:22; 40:34-35) and had moved to Zion during David’s reign (cf. Amos 1:2). Isaiah 59 simply looks to the day when it will return there. The Redeemer coming “to Zion” will again make it possible for Him to come “from Zion.”⁶⁰

- **Revelation 11:1-13.** Revelation chapters 6-18 describe “the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world” (Rev. 3:10).⁶¹ During those visions John continues to see a “temple” of God in heaven (e.g., Rev. 7:15; 11:19). In 11:1-2 he also sees a “temple of God” in “the holy city” on which the Gentiles “trample...for 42 months.” After God’s “two witnesses...prophesy” there (11:3), “the beast...will...kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (11:7-8). So the passage has a tribulation temple in “the holy/great city” identified as Jerusalem. The “two witnesses” minister and die there.

Waltke holds puzzling if not contradictory interpretations of features in this passage. The first interpretation seems to acknowledge that this refers to a last-days Jerusalem: “It is possible that in 11:8 he *may* have libeled [*sic*, for *labeled*?] Jerusalem as the ‘great’—not ‘holy’—city, ‘where also their...Lord was crucified...’”⁶² Later Waltke gives a different interpretation more in accord with amillennialism: “The temple of God in Revelation 11:1 is a symbol of the true church, which is protected and kept secure from attacks in and by God’s very presence in it...”⁶³

In response, see again 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and my arguments about it. That passage and its parallels in Daniel all join Revelation 11 and 13 in picturing an eschatological temple and/or

⁶⁰ See further discussion of Romans 11 under “2. The Nation Israel.” Also, for this and other references to Romans, see my writing “[A Survey of Romans](#),” especially Appendix I.

⁶¹ Starting at Revelation 4:1, John is being shown “what must take place after this,” during “the great day of [divine] wrath” (6:17) coming to earth. Its effects on earth begin in chapter 6. See my [Survey of Revelation](#).

⁶² 576. It is not clear what Waltke is questioning by using the word *may* (his emphasis). Does he question whether the city Jerusalem will exist or how John used the word “great”? I assume the latter, that he thinks John is “correcting” the traditional title of Jerusalem (“the holy city”), found in verse 2.

⁶³ 580. Making the temple of Revelation 11 “the true church” seems to disregard several factors in the context. For example, during the period in question, the temple continues in “the great city...where also their Lord was crucified” (11:8). What else could that be but earthly Jerusalem? It is true that the church is at times compared to a temple; so are individual believers. But that does not justify nullifying prophecies of other temples. See the discussion of Matthew 19:27-29 near the end.

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Jerusalem. It is true that sometimes the church is obviously compared to a temple, but not in Revelation 11. That temple will be in “the city where their Lord was crucified.”⁶⁴

In short, these three passages all see a significant Jerusalem in the last days. Two (2 Thess. 2:4 and Rev. 11:1-13) refer to a tribulation temple there. The other (Rom. 11:26) pictures the Redeemer coming from there to save Israel at the beginning of the millennium. These harmonize with OT predictions of a temple at least to begin the kingdom (e.g., Isa. 2:1, 3). The Book of Revelation also has sufficient evidence of Jerusalem in the kingdom. In the millennium it is called “the city he loves” (Rev. 20:9). In the perfected state it is “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven” (21:2). And “the names of the twelve tribes of Israel” are written “on the gates” (21:12-13).⁶⁵

Not the present Jerusalem. We should recognize, however, that the ultimate future does not lie with “the present city of Jerusalem...in slavery with her children” (Gal. 4:25). Not as she is. Instead, “the Jerusalem that is above” (Gal. 4:26) must descend and replace/transform what is merely earthly. But the final city will nonetheless be literal, material, and territorial, as well as spiritual. This hope did not begin in the NT; the “father of all who believe” clearly showed it. Notice what I emphasize in the following passage from Hebrews 11. Abraham together with his heirs will inherit the “promised land” but only when “the city with foundations” is there.

By faith Abraham, when called to go to *a place he would later receive as his inheritance*, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home *in the promised land* like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For *he was looking forward to the city with foundations*, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb. 11:8-10; cf. 13:14)

Can you see any point in the passage at which to spiritualize this hope? The eternal city Abraham and his heirs looked for will have to be in the “promised land.” God is truthful and faithful and will give Abraham just what He promised. Here it is unmistakably defined as the “place he would later receive” and to which he “went.” It was “the promised land” where “like a stranger ...he lived in tents,” as did Isaac his son and Jacob his grandson. Obviously “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance” (11:13). In order to give them what He promised, God will raise them from the dead. That is the point of Jesus’ argument for resurrection in Luke 20:37-38. For the same reason He will raise every believer. As Waltke acknowledges, our inheritance will not be merely spiritual but material, “in the regeneration of all things,” in “the

⁶⁴ Waltke denies that “territorial Jerusalem by that name” is mentioned in Revelation. By that he does not mean to deny that “the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven” (2:12; 21:2, 10) is material. He believes it will come to the “regenerated earth” (where we will inherit) and will occupy territory there.

⁶⁵ John “did not see a temple in the city” (Rev. 21:22). Apparently, the millennial temple will be unneeded after the renewal of all things is complete.

heavenly Jerusalem” that will come to earth at “Christ’s second...appearing.”⁶⁶ Why not admit that we will receive our inheritance at the same time that the Promised Land gets glorified?

Church fathers expected to inherit the Promised Land. Many historians agree that for the first three centuries the only opponents to premillennial doctrine were the Gnostics. George Peters in *Theocratic Kingdom* quotes “Bh. Russell (*Discourse on the Mill.*, p. 236)...: ‘down to the beginning of the fourth century the belief (in Christ’s return and personal reign on earth) *was universal and undisputed*’” (I:450). Later he quotes Dr. Daniel Whitby, founder of post-millennialism, strongly opposed to premillennialism, in his *Treatise on Tradition*:

“The doctrine of the Millennium, or the reign of saints on earth for a thousand years, is now rejected by all Roman Catholics, and by the greatest part of Protestants; and yet it passed among *the best Christians, for two hundred and fifty years, for a tradition apostolical*; and, as such, is delivered by *many* Fathers of the second and third century, who speak of it as the tradition *of our Lord and His apostles*, and of *all the ancients* who lived before them.” (I:482)

Here are two of many samples quoted by George Peters from the church fathers (*Theocratic Kingdom*, I:304):

[A]long with Abraham we shall inherit the holy land, when we shall receive the inheritance for an endless eternity, being the children of Abraham through the like faith. (Justin Martyr, *Dial. Trypho.*, ch. 19)

It is fitting that the just, rising at the appearing of God, should in the renewed state receive the promise of inheritance which God covenanted to the Fathers, and should reign in it.... Thus, therefore, as God promised to [Abraham] the inheritance of the earth, and he received it not during the whole time he lived in it, it is necessary that he should receive it, together with his seed, that is, with such of them as fear God and believe in Him—in the resurrection of the just. (Irenaeus, *Ag. Her.*, ch. 32)

In summary, we have just looked at Waltke’s evidence that the NT redefines “Land” by redefining eschatological Jerusalem and its temple. Here are his three main arguments and my responses:

- He alleges that the NT treats such OT promises as types and gives them “spiritual” meanings. On the contrary, it shows spiritual aspects of the *same* promises.
- He alleges that Jesus predicted the annihilation of Jerusalem with no prospect of its being restored to importance. On the contrary, in verses like Matthew 23:39 and Luke 21:24 Jesus implied its final restoration.

⁶⁶ 580-581

- He alleges that the apostles never clearly described a “restored Jewish kingdom” including Jerusalem or the temple. Granted in part, but relevant passages (such as, 2 Thess. 2:4; Rom. 11:26; Rev. 11:1-13) perfectly harmonize with OT prophecies as given.

“I have great sorrow...for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons... the covenants...and the promises...” (Rom. 9:2-4).
“Did God reject his people? By no means. ...God did not reject his peop[e, whom he foreknew” (11:1-2).

2. The Elect Nation Israel

Amillennialists take on another monumental task trying to change the meaning of the term *Israel* in the Bible. For centuries it referred to the nation descended physically from Abraham, sometimes to ten of its tribes as a political unit. Amillennialists try to prove (a) that God has disowned historic Israel but (b) has created a new Israel. Thus, ethnic Israel will never receive the many solemn promises God made to it as a nation. We premillennialists usually call that view “Replacement Theology.” Some amillennialists complain that our term is inaccurate or unjust (because it can imply that God changed His mind) but do not provide a better one.⁶⁷

Israel disowned? God has had abundant reasons to “reject” that nation (Rom. 11:2). But the same verse reminds us that He never abandons those He elects: “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.”⁶⁸ Accordingly, the many OT Scriptures that documented or foresaw Israel’s rebellions and divine disciplines also promised its final restoration. “They will pay for their sins,” God would say, but “in spite of this...I will not reject them or...destroy them completely...” (Lev. 26:43-44; see also Deut. 30:1-10 and Jer. 31:28). In fact, He often promised to finally and forever “fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah [under the] righteous Branch...from David’s line,” the Messiah (Jer. 33:14-16).

Amillennialists would have us believe that Israel forfeited God’s “gracious promise” when they rejected King Jesus. The key parable from which they draw this conclusion is found in Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; and Luke 20:9-19. According to this parable, Waltke says, “national Israel beats and kills God’s prophets,” then crucifies God’s Son. “With that rejection,” Waltke continues, “there is no one else to send. In other words, the end has come for national Israel....I

⁶⁷ More and more amillennialists now allow that the promise “all Israel will be saved” (see on Rom. 11:25) means that nation. That future saved Israel, they say, will inherit as part of the church (I agree) but has lost its distinctive promises (I disagree).

⁶⁸ I could not find Waltke’s interpretation of Romans 11:2.

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AM forsakes them as a nation and chooses instead to form a new Israel.”⁶⁹ Matthew records Jesus’ own interpretation as “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matt. 21:43).

Indeed, Israel’s wickedness was great. Acts does not gloss it over. At Pentecost Peter spoke to that very nation about

“Jesus...a man accredited by God to you by miracles....This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death....[But] God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” (Acts 2:22-23, 36)

The apostles kept reminding Israel, “You killed the author of life” (Acts 3:15; cf. 13:27). In fact, Israel’s hatred of Jesus made it the chief persecutor of the church, as the Book of Acts chronicles (see 1 Thess. 2:14-16).⁷⁰ *But even the murder of God’s Son—and the murderers’ subsequent repentance (which is still future)—had been foreseen by the prophets!* For example, Isaiah 53:

- Who else but future redeemed Israel will look back and speak of “our message” that was not believed (Isa. 53:1)?
- Of God’s “tender shoot, and...root out of dry ground” with “no beauty or majesty to attract us” (v. 2)?
- Who else will be able to confess, “we esteemed him not” (v. 3)?
- But will realize that it was the king Himself who was “crushed for our iniquities” (v. 5)?
- Who else but Israel, not disowned but finally restored?!

In other words, this marvelous prophecy about Messiah’s suffering is spoken by the same nation that caused His suffering. Spoken after that nation has repented and been reinstated.

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⁷⁰ The church kept accusing Israel and Israel kept opposing the church. Nevertheless, many Jews still got converted as long as the church defined the kingdom the same way Israel (and the prophets) did. When the church finally changed that definition in the fourth century, Jewish conversions ceased and the church turned to “Replacement Theology.” Now they concluded that the promises to Israel had been transformed and passed to the church.

George Peters in *Theocratic Kingdom* documents this process especially on pages I:499-512 under his “Proposition 76. The doctrine of the Kingdom was changed under the Gnostic and Alexandrian influence.” He quotes from the *Cyclopedia* that the “ancient belief” looking for Christ’s kingdom “on earth, after the resurrection, was held for near three centuries *before it was charged as erroneous.*” Its decline “was brought about *‘principally through the influence and authority of Origen, who opposed it with the greatest warmth, because it was incompatible with some of his favorite sentiments’*” (508). Finally, “the conversion of Constantine, the deliverance and exaltation of the church, and finally the union of State and church under Imperial supervision and protection, *served to make Millenarianism unpalatable*” (505).

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So how should we understand “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you”? Well, “the chief priests and the Pharisees...knew he was talking about them” (Matt. 21:45). God’s kingdom program had been in the hands of those leaders of Israel.⁷¹ But now it would be “taken away from [them] and given to a people who will produce its fruit.” That “people” is either (a) a future generation of Israel that will be converted or (b) the largely non-Jewish church.⁷² Either way, the disciples correctly understood that some day He will “restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6).⁷³

Israel replaced? Amillennialists want to “believe the prophets” (Acts 26:27). Therefore, when they have made Israel vanish from the promises, they must fill the void. Often they start by showing some flexibility in that and related terms: “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (Rom. 9:6). And “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly” (Rom. 2:28). Such verses show that not all Israel deserved their honorable title. But does denying it to some of them imply that outsiders qualify? The amillennial hypothesis assumes that it does: “True Christians, be they Jews or Gentiles,” says Waltke, “are designated by the New Testament authors as...the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16).”⁷⁴ Probably all amillennialists cite Galatians 6:16 as using *Israel* in that supposedly new sense. The NIV compliantly translates, “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.” I will deal with that verse soon. But first

⁷¹ Notice that I said “kingdom *program*,” meaning the agenda leading to it. For centuries the kingdom, called “the former dominion” in Micah 4:8, had actually existed in Israel. But it had been discontinued at the fall of Jerusalem, when the throne was removed and God’s glory departed. Only during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus had it “drawn near” but been postponed. Being “given to a [different] people” did not mean that it was operating yet.

⁷² George Peters in *Theocratic Kingdom* reminds us that the kingdom had been promised by covenant to the Jewish nation. God honors this in preparing the new people. “[T]o preserve *the solemnly pledged faithfulness of God*, this people, to whom the Kingdom is to be given, must, in the very nature of the case, stand *closely related to the Jewish race*” (I:387). “God must now—to carry out His purpose—raise up a nation *unto* Abraham, i.e., a nation in some way *still related to him*” (I:392). “God raises up a seed unto Abraham *out of* the Gentiles by engrafting them through faith in the Christ, and *accounting them* as the children of Abraham by virtue of their Abrahamic justifying faith” (I:396).

⁷³ The disciples’ question in Acts 1:6 concerned the *time* of the kingdom Jesus had been teaching them about. If they had misunderstood the kingdom itself, Jesus would have made that clear. Instead, He admitted that “the times or dates” they were concerned about, “the Father has set by his own authority.”

⁷⁴ P. 18. Here are some of my comments on Romans 2:28-29 and 9:6 in my [Survey of Romans](#), Appendix I: But these verses say nothing about Gentiles! They simply affirm that unregenerate Jews do not deserve their noble name....Nevertheless, Paul calls them by that name. In the very next verses (3:1-3) he speaks of “Jews” who “did not have faith.” Using a similar pattern in chapter 9, he warns that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (9:6). Yet, later in the chapter “Israel” still includes the whole nation, of which “only the remnant will be saved” (9:27-28). Excluding some from the true Israel does not add Gentiles to Israel. Neither does the fact that God called Gentiles. He (a) “called [them], not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles,” and (b) labeled Gentiles as “my people” and “sons of the living God” (vv. 24-26). Paul later illustrates this new arrangement as Gentiles now participating in the “olive tree” of Israel’s blessings (11:17-21; see Eph. 2:12-22). But participating there does not make them Israel nor change God’s promises to that nation.

consider some other NT Scriptures that seem to merge Gentiles with Israel or give them the same inheritance.

- **Ephesians 2:12-13** says that Gentiles who were once “foreigners to [Israel’s] covenants of the promise...have been brought near through the blood of Messiah.” The church enjoys the same “covenants of the promise” as Israel. But will every share be identical?
- **Galatians 3:28-29** was written to Gentiles in the church, which has “neither Jew nor Greek.” “If you belong to Messiah,” it says, “then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” The ultimate heir of what God promised to Abraham is Messiah. Even Gentiles who are incorporated into Messiah will inherit with Him. But will every group or individual get the same portions?

Waltke gives Ephesians 2:11-22 and Galatians 3:29 as evidence that Israel is replaced. He is showing “continuities between the old and new covenants....Both are given to the ‘house of Israel’ and the ‘house of Judah’ (Exod. 19:3...Jer. 31:31).” So far so good, but then look at Waltke’s amillennial twist: “While the prophet had in mind Abraham’s ethnic descendants, the apostles reinterpreted Israel as the church, which includes Jews and Gentiles, by their baptism into Christ, the true seed of Abraham (Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:29...).”⁷⁵ But when Gentiles are included, must they quite displace the original heirs?

- **Romans 4:9-17** says that Abraham is “father” to all who believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised. As “Abraham’s offspring,” it continues, we participate in “the promise that he would be heir of the world.” Since the church inherits the world, then, does it do so *along with* Israel or *in place of* Israel?
- **Romans 11:13-24** says that we Gentiles, “a wild olive shoot, have been...grafted into [Israel’s] cultivated olive tree.” So we “now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root.” It seems obvious that this tree of blessing began with Abraham (the main root). Through him God promised eternal blessings to “all peoples on earth” (Gen. 12:3). From that root grew a tree, receiving Abraham’s blessings and passing them on. At first the tree consisted of ethnic Israelites (of the nation God promised to make of Abraham). Later, some branches were broken out and believing Gentiles were grafted in. So the tree is no longer just ethnic Israel. Does this mean Israel has lost its identity and been forever replaced by the church? The amillennial hypothesis says yes, that “True Christians...are designated by the New Testament authors as...the ‘Israel of God.’”⁷⁶ But you will see that the amillennial conclusion is wrong. “Israel” still means ethnic Israel, and ethnic Israel is still God’s elected nation.

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“For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15).

“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob’” (Rom. 11:26).

“Israel” still means ethnic Israel. If the term had really changed its meaning, apostolic writings would use it in the new sense and rarely if ever in the old ethnic sense (at least without explaining it). *That is not the case!* The NT has the term *Israel* sixty-seven times. Nearly every passage *has to* refer to that nation; all of them most likely do refer to it.⁷⁷ Amillennial students must realize that any other meaning is exceptional. In a moment we will consider the verse they cite the most as exceptional, Galatians 6:16. First we will look at three other passages some of them use to prove that “Israel” includes or is replaced by Gentiles.

- **Romans 11:26:** “so all Israel will be saved.” But, as Waltke and other amillennialists now show (and I will discuss shortly), the replacement interpretation misses the point of Romans 11.
- **Romans 2:28-29:** “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly.... a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly.” But denying that all Jews are real Jews does not suggest that believing Gentiles are now Jews. Moreover, this passage does not use the term *Israel*.
- **Hebrews 8:8-12:** “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” Thus begins God’s promise to Israel in Jeremiah 31, to make a better covenant with them than He made at Sinai. It is quoted in Hebrews to show that our high priest mediates a “better covenant” than “the old one” (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). But why should extending His covenant to us make us take their place or prevent His giving them what He promised?
- **Galatians 6:16.** This is the only verse some cite to prove that “Israel” supposedly means the church. In the NIV it says, “Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, *even* [Greek *kai*] *to the Israel of God.*” By translating *kai* as “even” (appositional), it equates “the Israel of God” with “all who follow this rule,” seeing them as one group. But that translation is doubtful. The apostle Paul always uses *kai* as a connective (“and”), not in apposition. Here he shows he is talking about distinct groups by using “upon” (*epi*) with each one. The NASB has it right: “And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be *upon* them, *and upon* the Israel of God.” Who are these two groups? The first (“those who will walk by this rule”) is or includes believing Gentiles. The second (“the Israel of God”) is the converted Jewish remnant, including Paul. (The first group may refer to all believers and the second group be a subset of the first.) This meaning meshes with the preceding verse (15), which also men-

⁷⁷ The NT also uses the word for *Israelite* nine times. Not one clearly includes Gentiles.

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tions two groups: the “circumcision” and the “uncircumcision,” both now in the “new creation.”⁷⁸

Other NT passages even more clearly distinguish Israel from Gentiles.

- **Revelation 7:4-8 and 9-17.** Consider the two groups of believers side by side in these verses.⁷⁹ The first group is “144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.” It seems unreasonable to deny that they are representatives of ethnic Israel: (a) Each tribe is listed individually and (b) the whole group is distinguished from the second group, composed of Gentiles. The latter are “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” (7:9), “coming out of the great tribulation” (7:14, Greek).
- **Matthew 19:28.** “[A]t the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you...will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” This clearly points to the Lord’s kingdom after His Second Coming. Why would anyone assume that “Israel” here included Gentiles or that the apostles might have understood it that way?
- **Revelation 21:12.** “On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.” Obviously, this indicates that Israel will have access to the New Jerusalem. Also obvious is their distinction from “the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” on the foundations of the walls (21:14).

Ethnic Israel is still God’s elected nation. As already noted, the apostles showed by their question in Acts 1:6 that Jesus had not taught them that Israel was rejected. God would “restore the kingdom to Israel.” But let us consider what the apostle Paul taught about this same matter in Romans 9-11. There, as Waltke recognizes, “Paul reflects theologically on the role of ethnic Israel in salvation history.”⁸⁰ Those chapters are probably the best place to study the apostolic use of the term *Israel*. They are the only chapters in Romans where Paul uses it (eleven times). Every time (as elsewhere) it refers to the nation.⁸¹ Waltke knows better than to claim his amillennial meaning for *Israel* anywhere in those chapters.⁸² On the contrary, he carefully shows

⁷⁸ Every translator has theological biases. NIV 1984 often promotes an amillennial agenda. It does so in Galatians 6:16 by choosing an unusual meaning for the common Greek word *kai*. Instead of translating it as “and” (connective), it uses “even” (appositional), as Paul never does. Thus, it favors reinterpreting the word *Israel*. For other examples, see Matthew 21:31 and Luke 16:16 in my “[The Four Gospels: the Kingdom Offered & Postponed](#).”

⁷⁹ The main subject in the Book of Revelation is what will happen when Messiah asks the Father to give Him His inheritance, the kingdom. See my [Survey of Revelation](#).

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⁸¹ Romans has *Israel* the most of any epistle—eleven times. All eleven are in the three chapters dedicated to explaining how the gospel is related to that nation. Acts has it twenty-one times.

⁸² Waltke very often uses his amillennial redefinition of *Israel*, appealing only to Galatians 6:16. It seems that he gives his arguments for this change only in his discussion of Romans 9-11. However, he cannot find it used in the new way in those chapters—nor does he use it when commenting on their text. For example, Paul says that “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel” (9:6). But denying that all physical Israelites deserve the name does not imply that non-Israelites are now included in it.

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that Paul's main point in Romans 11 is the *reinstatement of that nation!*⁸³ He analyzes a "symmetrical pattern" in 11:11-32 (study Chart D on p. 52), which

strongly argues that... "until the fullness of the Gentiles" refers to the end point of God's program for Gentile salvation, after which he will again return to his program for Israel.... "All Israel" refers to ethnic Israel at their future time of acceptance....⁸⁴

In other words, Waltke understands there will be a converted *nation* of Israel in the coming kingdom.⁸⁵ He rightly sees the same thing implied in Acts 3:19-21: "As in Romans 11, the final end occurs in connection with Israel as a nation repenting, turning to God and having their sins wiped away."⁸⁶

In summary, Waltke's evidence that God has disowned historic Israel and created a new Israel is unconvincing. Instead, God had predicted Israel's worst sins but promised ultimate restoration, as reaffirmed in Romans 11. The nation is presently under judgment, and Gentiles being grafted into her tree of blessings. But the nation as a whole will be grafted back in and reinstated. Accordingly, the term "Israel" in the NT, even in Galatians 6:16, always refers to ethnic Israel.

⁸³ 325 to 332. Paul had just concluded that Israel was "disobedient and obstinate" (10:21). But he began to discuss their restoration by reminding that they were God's "people, whom he foreknew" and that Paul was one of the present remnant.

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⁸⁵ Not all amillennialists understand that climax in Romans 11, but Waltke does. In fact, he admits that since the State of Israel was established in 1947, "many Christian theologians have supported the notion that ethnic Israel still has a role to play in salvation history. Exegesis confirms what Blaising calls 'the new consensus'" (331-332). Waltke is clearly part of that consensus: "At the end of church history the people of God will include the bulk of ethnic Israel" (323; see pp. 326, 330).

⁸⁶ 581. Waltke would probably agree with some of my following thoughts expressed elsewhere:

Since Israel is still elected by God, how is it related to the church? The church (*ekklesia*) was foreseen in the OT as Messiah's future kingdom assembly (Ps. 22:22; quoted in Heb. 2:12). Messiah began to build His *ekklesia* when He began baptizing in the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (1 Cor. 12:12-13). When Israel gets converted, He will baptize them the same way, joining them to the same body. They will inherit their share as part of that body.

He “went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once” (Luke 19:11).

Believers “will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).

3. Messiah’s Covenanted Kingdom

Remember that we are not talking about God’s universal kingdom, in which He has always ruled over everything (Ps. 103:19; Dan. 4:25-26). Nor God’s control over the hearts of people who love Him, which has always been valid. Instead, it is a kingdom that *had been distant but came near* in the Gospels. God’s covenant with David had defined it. He promised David, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever...your throne will be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). David’s kingdom was suspended at the fall of Jerusalem. But the same prophets that foretold its suspension also predicted its restoration.⁸⁷ That is the kingdom that *came near*. Did it begin?

In answering, I will recall various relevant facts already discussed. Start with Waltke’s yes answer. He alleges

Luke’s redefinition of the kingdom of God from a reference to life in territorial space to a reference to life in Christ...However, the Spirit-enlightened and Spirit-empowered church came to understand that Messiah Jesus rules the world from David’s throne in heaven in a universal kingdom without national boundaries.⁸⁸

In short, Waltke thinks Messiah’s kingdom has begun as spiritual, not material or political. It lacks the characteristics “the primitive church expected.” Where did it get its supposedly faulty understanding? Waltke admits that it was from the OT and NT prophets up to Jesus’ ministry. Early NT prophets echoed the OT. But they were mistaken, alleges Waltke, (1) “not yet having heard the teachings of Jesus” and (2) “not yet having experienced the gift of the Holy Spirit.” I have argued that neither of those reasons is valid. (1) The apostles were taught and enlightened by Jesus for years, yet held to those same views, as seen in Acts 1:6. And (2) “the Spirit of Christ was in” all true OT and NT prophets (1 Peter 1:11; Luke 1-2), not just after Pentecost as Waltke intimates.

⁸⁷ It is wearisome to read definitions of the kingdom that grow out of personal theology rather than clear Scriptures. Micah 4:1-8 is one such Scripture. After describing the future kingdom just as Isaiah 2:2-4 does, it gives it a label: “the *former dominion* will be restored.” No one needs to guess what that means. It was established in the Exodus. “When Israel came out of Egypt...Judah became God’s sanctuary, Israel his *dominion*” (Ps. 114:2; cf. Exod. 19:5-6; 25:22).

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Kingdom elements redefined? As proof that the kingdom has begun in a spiritual form, he tries to show that its elements have been redefined spiritually. Let us quickly review some of his contentions along with his concessions that contradict them.

- Prophets spoke many times of **the Land promised to Israel**. Waltke claims that without using the term *land*, the NT changes it. “The promise that Israel will inherit a land flowing with milk and honey becomes a metaphor for the milk and honey of life in Christ.”

Yet, he admits that “the land promises will be consummated in the future new heaven and new earth.” If so, why not conclude that the kingdom will begin then?⁸⁹

- Prophets exalted **Zion/Jerusalem as the final world capital**. Waltke denies any future spiritual importance for Jerusalem. “The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 terminates its role in salvation history.”⁹⁰

Yet, he concedes from Matthew 23:39, “At his second coming, however, a converted Jerusalem will greet him appropriately.”⁹¹ If so, why should it not resume its promised role?

- Prophets constantly pictured **the wicked nation Israel as finally redeemed** and liberated. Waltke argues that *Israel* no longer means *Israel*: “True Christians, be they Jews or Gentiles, are designated by the New Testament authors as...the ‘Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16).”⁹²

Yet, he does not justify this interpretation of Galatians 6:16 and does not (cannot) point to any other possible usage of *Israel* in that alleged sense. On the contrary, he recognizes, especially from Romans 11, that God “will again return to his program for Israel.”⁹³ And commenting on Acts 3:19-21, he adds, “As in Romans 11, the final end occurs in connection with Israel as a nation repenting, turning to God and having their sins wiped away.”⁹⁴ If so, will He not then “restore the kingdom to Israel”?

So we see the same pattern regarding each of these essential elements (and others) of the predicted kingdom. In each case (a) Waltke asserts that the element has been spiritually redefined *and spiritually fulfilled*. But (b) he also acknowledges a final literal meaning *which has not been*

⁸⁹ 168 In a note under “Renewed earth” I said, “The ‘new heavens and new earth’ *begin with the millennium* (Isa. 65:17-25) but are consummated at its end.” This means that they begin when the Lord begins to rule in Revelation 20. However, being incomplete and undescribed at that stage, they are not mentioned until chapter 21.

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⁹¹ 564 When Waltke admits a restored Jerusalem in Matthew 23:39, he implies much, much more. The OT quotation in that verse (Ps. 118:26) is like a code affirming many prophecies. See “Relative apostolic silence.”

⁹² 18, cf. 438. See my previous discussion of Galatians 6:16 under “‘Israel’ still means ethnic Israel.”

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*fulfilled but will be.*⁹⁵ As Waltke acknowledges, the prophets intended those literal meanings. When those elements take place as intended, the kingdom will be constituted as they predicted it. But amillennialists insist that the alleged spiritual elements, which many of us do not see in Scripture, already constitute the kingdom. Why do they insist on this unforeseen (and to some, unconvincing) form of the kingdom? I suppose that their main reason is to honor the Lord. Having tasted His goodness, they consider it greater honor if He is actually ruling rather than waiting to rule.

“You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8).

Alleged evidence that the kingdom began. I will now list, in his own words, some of Waltke’s supposed positive evidence. In his quotations I will add emphasis. After each item I will comment after the word *BUT*.

- a. **“The kingdom...has drawn near.”** Waltke claims that “God’s kingdom of eternal life and salvation... broke into the world in such a radical away [*sic*] in the coming of Jesus Christ that it could be said with his appearing that ‘the Kingdom of God *has come*.’”⁹⁶

BUT it is wrong to translate Greek *engiken* as “has come”; it always means “has drawn near” (as in James 5:8 and 1 Peter 4:7).⁹⁷ Throughout most of Jesus’ ministry the kingdom was near. But it was no longer near when He “went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return” (Luke 19:11-12). We are still waiting for His return to rule.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Since he calls the present condition the “fulfillment,” Waltke calls the future condition the “consummation.”

⁹⁶ 145. He is referring to the constant kingdom-near message by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2), Jesus (4:17), and the disciples at Jesus’ orders (10:7; Luke 10:9, 11).

⁹⁷ In James 5:8 James said that “the Lord’s coming is near (*engiken*).” In 1 Peter 4:7 Peter said that “the end of all things is near (*engiken*).” Certainly we are still waiting for both, which are both related to the coming kingdom.

⁹⁸ Occasionally a Scripture refers to the future kingdom as present. For example, two of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3 and 10) both say, “Theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” Some take that as proof positive that the kingdom had begun. But they neglect the context. (a) Matthew 4:17 had just said that the constant message was the kingdom’s nearness, not its presence (see also Matt. 10:7). (b) All the other Beatitudes also refer to the kingdom but are in the future tense. Here from my writing on [Romans 14:17](#) is an extract discussing this:

Many interpreters argue from occasional use of the present tense that the kingdom is present. Speaking of that kingdom in the present tense, however, (“the kingdom **is**”) does not prove that it has begun. It is not unusual and not confusing to speak in the present tense of something important yet future. For example, in Luke 20:35–36 the future resurrection is described with six present-tense verbs: “**marry...are given** in marriage...**can** no longer **die...are...are...**” The verbs are all present in Greek but refer to the future. Likewise, Romans 2:2 speaks of the future judgment in the present tense: “God’s judgment...**is** based on truth.”

- b. **Messiah's signs.** Waltke says, "Christ breaks into [Satan's] world/kingdom...to...establish his universal rule *by doing signs and wonders* and by his disciples bearing witness to him...."⁹⁹

BUT Jesus' signs and wonders were not intended to "establish his universal rule." Instead, they showed His credentials, assuring Israel that He had the power and wisdom to bring the kind of kingdom as predicted. Take examples from Isaiah 35:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. (35:5-6).

As God's Anointed One, Jesus showed that He could make those changes. Israel had to repent and accept Him. On the contrary, if His works had established the kingdom, they would have continued until now.

- c. **"The age to come."** Waltke says,

Jesus Christ's appearing brought "this age" to its close, and his resurrection from the dead inaugurated "*the age to come*." Jesus Christ embodies the kingdom of God, which is also called in Matthew "the kingdom of heaven"...his presence is the kingdom of God... (Luke 17:21 TNIV).¹⁰⁰

BUT it is a mistake to think that the "age to come" has come. Ephesians 1:20-21, long after the church began, says that Messiah is "seated...far above all rule and authority...not only in the present age but also in the one to come." It is still "to come." Hebrews 2:5-10 looks forward to man's rule in "the world to come" and says that he does not rule yet, though one Man has been "crowned with glory and honor" (Heb. 2:9).¹⁰¹ Indeed, Messiah embodied that kingdom when He was here; in Him it had "come upon them" (Matt. 12:28). But it is not here while He has gone "to a distant country to have himself appointed king" (Luke 19:12).

- d. **"Secrets of the kingdom" parables.** This one has many considerations. Waltke (quoting George Ladd) says, "*The mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom* into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation."¹⁰² "In other words," comments Waltke, "through parables Jesus taught his disciples about a realized kingdom and an

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¹⁰¹ Amillennialists like Waltke assume that Jesus' crown in Hebrews 2:9 implies that He already rules (p. 222). But Hebrews chapters 1-2 look to "the world to come, about which we are speaking" (2:5). In that world everything will be subject to "man/the son of man," as per Psalm 8, though "at present we *do not see everything subject to him*." That world is future even for Jesus, who is crowned, ready, and "bringing [or taking, *agagonta*] many sons to [that] glory" (2:10).

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eschatological kingdom.”¹⁰³ Most (but not all) dispensationalists have also agreed that these parables depict a present kingdom, though they deny that it is the promised one.

BUT we must be careful not to read modern theology into these parables.

- They did not reveal a “secret” (KJV “mystery”) kingdom but “secrets” *about* the same kingdom that was being announced as near. Those to whom Jesus explained the parables would all interpret “kingdom” from that framework.
- They did not teach that the kingdom had started or was about to start but that it would be postponed.

They revealed *a previously unforeseen extension of the present age leading to the glorious kingdom as predicted*. Let us test that in the Lord’s sample interpretation of the Parable of the Weeds/Tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). He introduced this parable saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field” (13:24).¹⁰⁴ “His enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat” (13:25). In order not to root up wheat along with weeds, the man let “both grow together until the harvest.” At the harvest the weeds were gathered to be burned and the wheat was put in his barn (13:30). Jesus explained in detail:

The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one.... The harvest is the end of the age.... his angels... will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin.... Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father. (13:38-43)

So the kingdom will begin at the harvest. Nothing earlier in the parable represents the kingdom. Not the field in which wheat and weeds grow together—“the field is the world,” not the kingdom. Not the wheat either, who are “the sons of the kingdom.”

Waltke, in contrast, sees both weeds and wheat as two kingdoms already. “In this age,” he asserts, “the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God grow together as tares and wheat....”¹⁰⁵ But here are reasons that interpretation is unlikely:

- “Sons of the kingdom” did not imply a present kingdom in its other use (Matt. 8:12, using the same Greek words). There it referred to Jews who thought they would have sure tickets to the kingdom when it came.

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¹⁰⁴ “*The kingdom of heaven is like a man...*” (Matt. 13:24). This kind of introduction was often used by Jewish rabbis. It *did not mean* that the subject (here “the kingdom”) was the first thing mentioned (here “a man”). Instead, the story had an important teaching about the subject, which subject might be represented or not. Disciples already knew enough to find the subject, which in Jesus’ kingdom parables was the grand climax (called “the kingdom” in 13:43).

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- The weeds were not pictured as an independent group but as an addition to the wheat. They cannot be safely separated before the harvest.
- The kingdom as a reality (not just a goal) was not mentioned until “the harvest (which) is the end of the age” (13:39).
- In His Parable of the Net the Lord again pictured the angels separating men in judgment when setting up the kingdom at the same “end of the age” (13:47-50).

So to reiterate, the kingdom will begin at “the harvest,” which is “the end of the age.” At that time “the Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom ...all who do evil” (Matt. 13:39-43). The context justifies this understanding: “out of His kingdom then being established.”¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, *after the harvest* “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom” (13:43). Jesus thus explained the secrets to His disciples who had spiritual ears to hear Him. The kingdom would still be the grand consummation they expected, but only after a *relatively unimpressive* seed-sowing and a period of waiting. This interpretation fits all of Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom in succeeding chapters.¹⁰⁷

This all meant, of course, that from their point of view the kingdom would be postponed. It also meant that the Messiah would come *twice*, not just once. There were excellent reasons for God’s not revealing these things earlier, then revealing them only to believers.¹⁰⁸

And now Waltke’s fifth supposed evidence that the kingdom began:

- e. Indications in the Book of Hebrews that OT shadows have been replaced.** Waltke draws attention to

the earthly tabernacle, its Aaronic priests and animal sacrifices and the heavenly reality to which Christ entered as king-priest after the order of Melchizedek after he offered himself as the real sacrifice for sin (Heb. 8-10).

Without discussing these marvelous contrasts, I must simply emphasize that Hebrews *does not picture a present kingdom or present salvation*. Instead, just like the Gospels, it constantly points us to the future. Here are some sample indications: “will inherit salva-

¹⁰⁶ Out of context the words “weed *out of* his kingdom” could imply that the kingdom already exists. But given the disciples’ presuppositions and the Lord’s other predictions, they refer to the process of *setting up* His kingdom with judgment. Compare, for example, to His prediction in Matthew 25. When He comes in glory and sits on His throne, He will separate people as a shepherd separates sheep and goats (25:31-33). He will invite the “sheep” to inherit the kingdom (25:34-40) but send the “goats” out of His kingdom into “eternal fire” (25:41-45).

¹⁰⁷ There are many factors to consider when interpreting these “secrets.” We should understand them as the disciples could, not as our own theology dictates. See my comments on Matthew 13 and related passages in my writing “[The Four Gospels](#).”

¹⁰⁸ For further discussion of the Lord’s procedure and meanings in these kingdom parables, see also George Peters, *Theocratic Kingdom*, I:232, 242.

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tion” (1:14); “the world to come, about which we are speaking” (2:5); “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens...so that what cannot be shaken may remain...we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (12:26-28); “Here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (13:14).¹⁰⁹

In summary, we have considered five of Waltke’s arguments that the kingdom began. Instead, they all point forward to the Second Coming.

- a. The constant message up to the last Passover, “The kingdom...has drawn near,” guarantees it did not actually begin.
- b. “Messiah’s signs” did not establish His rule but showed He could fulfill kingdom prophecies.
- c. “The age to come” was not inaugurated but is still to come.
- d. “‘Secrets of the kingdom’ parables” did not reveal a present form of the kingdom but an unexpected lengthening of preparation for it, including an additional coming for Messiah.
- e. Indications in Hebrews that the shadows have been replaced do not point to a present kingdom. The book constantly sees the kingdom and salvation in it as future.

Next we will consider Acts 2, where amillennialists deduce their most cogent argument. I will show that their assumptions are mistaken. Actually, Acts 2 requires us to look to the future more than the present.

¹⁰⁹ Here are some more sample expressions that show the futurity of salvation and the kingdom in Hebrews: “hold firmly till the end the confidence” (3:14); “It still remains that some will enter that rest...There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest...make every effort to enter that rest” (4:6, 9, 11); “show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure” (6:11); “he is able to save completely...because he always lives” (7:25); “they will all know me” (8:11); “that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance” (9:15); “he will appear a second time...to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (9:28); “in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come’” (10:37); “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for” (11:1).

C. Did the Kingdom Begin in Acts 2?

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’” (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:34).

1. Amillennial view

Of all amillennial arguments, this one from Acts 2 seems the most crucial for them. I will quote one of Waltke’s *many* summaries of their view:

With Christ’s ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Luke explicitly redefines crucial terms regarding the kingdom of God. Spirit-enlightened Peter locates David’s throne in heaven. He explains the gift of the Spirit...as evidence that he now sits on David’s heavenly throne....¹¹⁰

2. Overview

Acts 2 records evidence that Jesus was acting from heaven as Master and Messiah. It narrates what happened when He poured out God’s Spirit as promised in Scripture and recent prophecies. In this way He began to build His kingdom assembly (the *ekklesia*), who will take part when He returns in glory. Therefore, let me sketch the context and contents of the apostle Peter’s sermon to the Jews on that occasion. For more detail, see the Appendix on page 53.

- Context. “Over a period of forty days” after His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples “about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). He also told them to wait in Jerusalem until He would baptize them in the Holy Spirit as promised (1:4-5). He ascended to heaven and from there poured out the gift of the Spirit (1:9—2:13), as evidenced by supernatural signs, including speaking in tongues.
- Contents. Peter explained that God was imparting His Holy Spirit, as Joel had predicted He would do in the last days (Acts 2:14-21). Second, it all had to do with Jesus, whom God had accredited by His miracles but they had put to death (2:22-23). Third, God had raised Him from the dead, as predicted by King David. David knew His Descendant would have to be physically alive to reign from David’s throne (2:24-32, quoting Ps. 16:10). Fourth, He had ascended to God’s right hand, also predicted by David (2:33-35, quoting Ps. 110:1). Fifth, on God’s throne He had received the Holy Spirit, whom He “poured out” on believers (2:33). Sixth, this meant that God had “made this Jesus, whom [they] crucified, both Lord and Messiah,” in whose name they should be baptized (2:36-40).

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From these facts amillennialists (and some premillennialists) conclude (a) that by imparting the Spirit Messiah had begun to rule, which (b) implies that His Davidic throne is now moved to heaven. These are unwarranted assumptions, which I will address in reverse order.

3. Has God moved David's throne to heaven?

First, we must ascertain what David's throne means. In His covenant with King David the LORD had promised him, "Your **house** and your **kingdom** will endure forever before me; your **throne** will be established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). Those three are inseparably linked: David's royal house, kingdom, and throne. When that kingdom was suspended and Jerusalem fell, Israel began centuries "without [a] king" (Hos. 3:4) or his throne. The royal house of David became "David's fallen tent." The LORD would have to "restore...repair...rebuild it as it used to be" (Amos 9:11). When restored "as it used to be," what would its Davidic throne be like? What defines it?

- **First, the throne of David is for an embodied human being.** It requires a descendant of David to reign from it *as God's agent*. A living human being, since the throne is neither divine nor angelic. Because David saw this, he predicted that his royal Descendant would have to be raised from the dead first.
- **Second, it is mediatorial and earthly.** Historically that throne was made of precious stones and/or metal. But God's promise to make it eternal did not refer *to its components but to the authority and activity it signified*. It represented authority over and exercise of God's mediatorial rule on earth. Accordingly, every unambiguous passage had the throne of David on earth. For example, its four occurrences in Psalm 89 (vv. 4, 14, 36, 44) are in contrast to God's throne in heaven in verse 29. Likewise, Jesus contrasted the same two thrones in Revelation 3:21. The overcomer will "sit with me on **my throne**, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on **his throne**."¹¹¹
- **Third, it is over Israel.** That was *always* true (e.g., 1 Kings 8:25; 10:9). The angel Gabriel announced its coming reinstatement: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign *over the house of Jacob forever*" (Luke 1:32-33). It seems obvious that the throne of David requires the restoration of Israel/Jacob.

In sum, the throne of David is designed for a human being to rule over Israel and all of God's kingdom on earth. By definition, that throne is not yet available for Messiah to occupy. There is no converted Israel and no earthly capital as promised. But Waltke comes to a different conclusion. He assures us that in Acts 2 "Spirit-enlightened Peter locates David's throne in heaven." Well, Jesus is indeed on a throne, God's throne, and is ministering from there. But has David's throne changed its character and moved there? No Scripture says so. Is His ministry His promised kingdom? That is the final crucial question.

¹¹¹ God's throne in heaven was never called David's throne, although the reverse was true. David's throne really belonged to God because its occupant was ruling for God. The queen of Sheba recognized this about Solomon: "Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and *placed you on his throne* as king to rule for the LORD your God" (2 Chron. 9:8; see also 1 Chron. 29:23).

“He always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25). “We do have such a high priest, who sat down...in heaven, and who serves...” (8:1-2). “Messiah is the mediator of a new covenant...” (9:15).

4. Is Jesus’ present activity in heaven His promised rule?

He certainly is active. He builds His church by sending and baptizing in the Holy Spirit and enabling disciples to bear witness. He continually intercedes as their priest. Referring to Acts 2, Waltke repeatedly pronounces this activity “evidence that he now sits on David’s heavenly throne...”¹¹² “Seated now at God’s right hand, Christ rules from heaven [references listed] and believers participate with him in his heavenly reign [more references listed].”¹¹³ These Scripture references are just what I was looking for: evidence that convinces Waltke that Jesus rules. Though he does not quote from any of them here, I will quote what seems relevant and make brief comments. None of them teaches that the kingdom has begun.

Scriptures that allegedly teach a present kingdom

- **Matthew 28:18.** “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Don’t all believers acknowledge that Jesus has far more authority than He is using? When He does use it (in His kingdom), the whole world will know.
- **Ephesians 1:20-22.** He is “far above all rule and authority...not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” This is similar to Matthew 28:18. We Christians already acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. In “the age to come,” however, the age of the kingdom, His actions will prove it to all.
- **1 Corinthians 15:27.** “For he [God the Father] ‘has put everything under his [the Son’s] feet.’” Here the apostle quotes a prophecy from Psalm 8. Though written as though past, it was a prediction when first written, a prediction when quoted, and *is still unfulfilled!* How do we know? One simple way is to turn to Hebrews 2:8, which quotes the same words and says they *have not yet been fulfilled.*¹¹⁴ In fact, that is just why He is waiting in heaven: “Sit at my right hand,” says His Father, “*until* I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Acts 2:34-35, quoting Psalm 110:1). “Since that time he *waits* for his enemies to be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:13). He is still waiting for the Father to do that. At the right time He will ask for His royal inheritance, and the Father will give it (Ps. 2:8-9; Rev. 5:6-7). He will

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¹¹⁴ Hebrews 2:5-8 shows that God intends to subject “the world to come” not to angels but to man. First it cites God’s plan for man from Psalm 8:4-6, then comments, “Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.”

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then come and “rule them with an iron scepter,” which perfectly fits what He Himself promised to do (Matt. 16:27-28; 19:28; 25:31).

That introductory, iron-scepter, stage of His rule will only last a thousand years. In it He will rule as Mediator representing both mankind and the Father, and will complete the process of subduing enemies. “When he comes,” says 1 Corinthians 15:23-26, “he must reign until he has put all his *enemies under his feet*.” What the Father will begin (*subduing* enemies), the Son will conclude (finally *destroying* them). By the end of the millennium He can present the kingdom perfect to the Father.¹¹⁵ However we understand this, His enemies are certainly not subdued yet—nor is He reigning yet. Study the small Chart A (here) and the more detailed Chart B (p. 50).

CHART A COMING OF THE KINGDOM				
PRESENT AGE (extended) The Son waiting to rule		MILLENNIUM The Son ruling as mediator		PERFECTED KINGDOM The Father & the Son ruling
	At the end the Father <i>subdues</i> the Son’s enemies.		By the end the Son <i>destroys</i> all enemies.	ETERNAL LIFE

- **1 Peter 3:22.** ‘who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.’ This is the same picture as in Ephesians 1:20-22. He has all authority legally but is not yet exercising it in reality.

I will not comment separately on Scriptures that picture believers as “raised with Christ” and “seated with him” (e.g., Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1). These simply mean that our life is now joined to His and will appear when He does (1 John 3:2). But the apostle Paul expressly denies that we are ruling yet (1 Cor. 4:8)!

Here are additional references Waltke lists on page 823 (without comments) to prove that Christ’s kingdom has started.

¹¹⁵ The Father will make the Son’s enemies a footstool so He can rule, then the Son will finally dispose of them during and as a consequence of the millennium. These are the last of three steps in the defeat of death, as sketched in 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. See Chart B on p. 44. The deciding victory (step one) was the resurrection of Messiah as “firstfruits.” The second step will be the resurrection “when he comes, [of] those who belong to him.” The third step will be after He has reigned “until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” even death. “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father.”

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- **Matthew 19:16-30.** I am truly puzzled why Waltke thinks this passage shows “a present aspect” of the kingdom. In it to “enter the kingdom” (vv. 23, 24) has several equivalents, such as, “be saved” (v. 25), “enter life” (v. 17), “get eternal life” (v. 16), and “will inherit eternal life” (v. 29). As the last expression clearly shows, *this does not refer to the present!* It will happen “at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne [and apostles] will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (vv. 28-29). None of that has happened yet.¹¹⁶
- **Luke 17:20-21.** “The kingdom of God is within you [Greek, in your midst].” As explained before, the kingdom was constantly announced as near during this long journey to Jerusalem. Furthermore, in the person of Jesus it was even in their midst (but gone after He left).
- **John 3:3, 5.** “No one can see [or enter] the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” Jesus made no attempt to change Nicodemus’s understanding of the kingdom itself but of the requirement for seeing/entering it. He chided him as “Israel’s teacher” for not knowing these things from Scripture (3:9-10). Ezekiel 36:24-26, for example, had informed Israel about them. There is nothing in John 3 about being born “*into the kingdom*”—but being born again in order to enter *when it comes*.
- **Colossians 1:13.** God “*has brought* us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” Whereas most references in the Epistles are to the kingdom as clearly future, this one seems exceptional. However, the unusual verb for “has brought” and the previous verse (1:12) about our inheritance in the future kingdom of light favor a legal, not factual, meaning.¹¹⁷ It is not a question of the future already starting but of our *belonging to the future*. We are the embryonic—not yet born—kingdom.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See my discussion of Matthew 19:27-29 near the end.

¹¹⁷ To help understand Colossians 1:13, the following is copied from my [Survey of Romans](#), Appendix A: This is abundant evidence that the kingdom has not started yet but is still future. Nevertheless, nowadays some disagree. Some cite only Colossians 1:13, which says that God “**has brought** us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” But this does not necessarily refer to the kingdom as present. Start with the Greek for the verb I have bolded (*metestesen*). Here it probably means *has transferred* or *carried away*, as in Acts 13:22 (removed Saul) and 1 Corinthians 13:2 (remove mountains). If so, Colossians 1:13 means that God has carried us away to Christ’s future kingdom. That would perfectly fit the previous verse (Col. 1:12), that “the Father...has qualified you to share in the **inheritance** of the saints **in the kingdom** of light.” That kingdom and inheritance are future, as you can read in four different Epistles cited above (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; and James 2:5). Thus, the statement in Colossians 1:13 is not absolute; it is true legally but not factually. We live here but belong to the future. The perspective is the same as in Colossians 3:1-4: “**your life is now hidden** with Christ in God. When Christ...appears, **then you also will appear.**” So Colossians 1:13 does not contradict the abundant evidence.

¹¹⁸ Another figure to describe our relationship is that we are “espoused” to Messiah but will get “married” when He comes (Rev. 19:6-9). Revelation 1:6 calls us His “kingdom and priests.” That this is proleptic (what we *will be*) is evident from 5:9-10, which has the same title and adds, “they *will reign* on the earth.” The same thing is true about Jesus’ title in 1:5, “the ruler of the kings of the earth.” Since the entire book points to His coming to reign, the title is proleptic.

- **Matthew 12:32.** “will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.” See my earlier discussion of this expression under B.3. The kingdom belongs to the age to come, which has not come.
- **Hebrews 6:4-6.** Speaks of those “who have tasted...the powers of the coming age.” The word “powers” refers to Jesus’ miracles, which belong to that “coming age,” not this one.
- **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.** “The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one....The harvest is the end of the age.... his angels...will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin....Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father.” Waltke claims that the first part of this parable pictures “a present aspect” of the kingdom. But the wheat and the weeds are growing together in “the world,” not in the kingdom, which is first present at “the harvest.” These parables do not reveal a new version of the kingdom but an unexpected stage in preparing for it. See my discussion of “Secrets of the kingdom” parables under B.3.

On pages 892-893 Waltke again alleges that in His “realized eschatology” Jesus “fulfilled Israel’s expectations and exceeded them as much as the heavens are higher than the earth.” For a proof text he again refers to Matthew 28:18-20. He adds John 17:2, which likewise speaks of Jesus’ “authority over all people,” even to “give eternal life.” Well, Jesus has begun exercising that authority in part. He already gives believers His Spirit as the “firstfruits” of eternal life (Rom. 8:23a). But “firstfruits” always implies a much bigger harvest. For our salvation harvest we “wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (8:23b). That refers to the resurrection, in which He “will give eternal life” to us fully (Rom. 2:7). And that is only one aspect of salvation; there are many other promises yet to be fulfilled. The partial exercise of Jesus’ authority now guarantees the other promises at the right time. These partial fulfillments are not His kingdom, as He and the apostles clearly taught in the following passages.

Special problem passages for amillennialism

- **Luke 19:11-27.** He “went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said, ‘A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.’” Though the kingdom was near throughout most of Jesus’ ministry, it was no longer near when He went to the “distant country.” It had to wait until “he was made king...and returned home” (19:15).¹¹⁹ We are still awaiting His return.
- **Matthew 19:27-29.** “[A]t the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Waltke considers verses 27-28 “the most difficult” passage to fit into his amillen-

¹¹⁹ In Luke 19:15 “was made king” does not itself mean “began to rule.” As the parable clearly shows, the one appointed to be ruler began ruling after he returned. This reflected what had actually happened to Archelaus after his father Herod’s death. He went to Rome and got permission to rule Judea (Matt. 2:22).

nial hypothesis. He does not try to make it refer to the supposed present kingdom.¹²⁰ Instead, “In the *eschaton* [final condition] Jesus will be enthroned as king over all things.” The word translated “renewal of all things” is Greek *palingenesia* (literally “new birth”). This word, Waltke admits, “entails the final judgment and the renewal of individuals and of the earth in a definitive final end.”¹²¹ That is when the Lord will sit “on his glorious throne” and the apostles from their thrones will rule “the twelve tribes of Israel.”

So how does Waltke interpret this reference to the tribes at the end? As ambiguous symbolic speech such as he sees in Revelation. “The highly symbolic Apocalypse also represents nations [so not really?] as having distinct roles when God lowers the heavenly Jerusalem to the new earth....” Then he boldly reverses the meaning of Daniel 7, in which prophecy he admits that future “Israel rules the nations.” Matthew 19, he claims, teaches the opposite: “a remarkable transfer of imagery...[in which] the followers of Jesus...take the place of the unbelieving nation...”¹²² That kind of exegesis is so flexible as to be lawless.

- **Matthew 24:26-35.** In Matthew 24:3 one of the questions Jesus’ disciples asked Him was “what will be the sign of your coming [Gr. *parousia*] and of the end of the age?” Their meaning was “How will we know when You are coming back to rule?” This is the first NT use of the Greek term *parousia*, which often meant—as here—the public “coming” of a king or other high official. “Parousia connotes the arrival of someone after a period of absence and is used especially of royalty and officials,” says Waltke. Here it is Jesus’ “second and final coming” in glory.¹²³ The parallel verb *erchomai* (“come”) had been used in that same sense previously in Matthew and was so used throughout this discourse.¹²⁴ How did Jesus answer their question about His coming to rule? After describing a future “great distress” (the “great tribulation”) in verses 15-26, He finally got to the *parousia* they asked about.

27 “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming [Gr. *parousia*] of the Son of Man.... 29 Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened....’ 30 At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming (Gr. *erchomenon*) on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect...from one end of the heavens to the other.... 33 ...when you see all these things, you know that it [Luke, “the kingdom of God”] is near....” (24:27-33)

¹²⁰ For some reason he lists the passage that includes it, Matthew 19:16-30, among those that prove a “present aspect” of the kingdom. See my brief discussion near the beginning of Part 3.C.

¹²¹ 582

¹²² 582-583, partly quoting R.T. France.

¹²³ 568-569. *Parousia* is used three more times in this chapter (Matt. 24:27, 37, 44 but nowhere else in the Gospels) and sometimes in the Epistles.

¹²⁴ *Erchomai* (“come”) is parallel to *parousia* in this discourse, for example, at Matthew 24:30, 42, 44, 50; 25:10, 19, 31. Some other places it has that meaning are 10:23; 11:3; 16:27 (in glory); 16:28 (in His kingdom); 23:39; 26:64 (in clouds); 1 Corinthians 4:5; 11:26; and 2 Thessalonians 1:10 (to be glorified).

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So Jesus' answer gave no hint that the kingdom would begin only days later at Pentecost (as amillennialists imagine). Instead, it will come "*after the distress*" He had just described. He will bring the kingdom in a "coming" (*parousia*) as visible from east to west as lightning. His "sign" (Himself?) will appear in the sky; all the nations will see Him coming gloriously on clouds. And it would be strange if they were oblivious to the "loud trumpet call" and the worldwide mission of the angels.

Waltke's theology does not fit the Lord's answer. So he changes several obvious meanings in these verses, including the normal meaning of *parousia* only in verse 27.¹²⁵ He transfers this *coming* to the Lord's ascension, long *before* the predicted distress: "'The coming of the Son of Man on the clouds' refers to his ascending to God to receive vindication and universal authority over all the earth (Dan. 7:13-14), not of his coming to earth...." The reference to the angels in 24:31, Waltke continues, "is not...as in 13:41, to the final judgment, but to the worldwide growth of the church...."¹²⁶ So the Lord already came on clouds and sent angels to "gather his elect"! I wonder how Waltke interprets Revelation 1:7, which, years after Acts, keeps us looking for the very same events he interprets as past.

Although all Bible interpreters are sometimes inconsistent, we should welcome correction. In this case Waltke changes a clear and well-attested meaning in order to justify his theology.¹²⁷ Instead, Matthew 24, just like Luke 19 and Matthew 19, gives powerful evidence that the Lord's kingdom will begin when He returns in glory to earth. For several other important issues in interpreting Matthew 24-25, see my "[Keys to Our Lord's Prophetic Discourse, Matthew 24-25.](#)"

¹²⁵ See Waltke's "Excursus 1: the Disciples' Questions" (pp. 568-569). As noted, he correctly defines *parousia* as the Lord's "second and final coming." That was its meaning in the disciples' second question (Matt. 24:3b). But for theological reasons Waltke thinks the Lord did not answer that question until verses 36-41. Indeed, verses 36-41 do mention the *parousia*. But they *do not describe it because it was just described* in verses 30-31. That coming, "immediately after the distress [great tribulation]," was called the *parousia* in verse 27. But in this passage Waltke interprets it to mean the Lord's ascension.

¹²⁶ This and the following quotations are from pp. 568-569. Here, as elsewhere, Waltke quotes with favor the amillennial interpretations of R.T. France in *The Gospel of Mark*.

¹²⁷ I have asserted that Matthew 24 gives a solid meaning for the Lord's *parousia*: His coming in glory and power to rule after the distress (tribulation). In 24:27 Waltke changes that meaning for theological reasons. Dispensationalists sometimes change it, too. They think the term accrues yet another meaning, resulting in two future *parousias*. The one described in Matthew 24 they call the "Second Coming." But the one in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 they call the "Rapture." It will take place *before* the great distress, they say, and not result in the kingdom but in taking the saints away. Most passages about the Lord's future coming give no hint about time—and not even one refers to two comings. But dispensationalists assign each passage to the coming they think it fits. For example, since 2 Thessalonians 2:1 mentions His coming plus "our being gathered to him," they make that the Rapture. But at His coming in 2:8 He "will destroy the lawless one." So they make that the Second Coming. More likely, both refer to the same coming described as the saints' hope in 1:5-10. Messiah will be revealed in fire and with His angels to judge and be glorified (1:7b-10). "He will pay back trouble...everlasting destruction" to those who trouble believers. But to those who "are suffering for the kingdom of God" He will "give relief" (1:5-7a). (For more on this, see my [Thessalonians](#) study.)

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- **Several passages in Acts** are problematic for amillennialism because they contradict the present kingdom theory. Certainly Acts proclaims that Jesus is Messiah/King (e.g., 2:36; 5:42; 17:2-3, 7). But His title and current position do not imply that His kingdom began.¹²⁸ Acts constantly points to that as future. For example:

Acts 1:6—The Lord is “going to restore the kingdom to Israel.”

3:19-21—“The Messiah...must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

14:21-22—“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”

15:16—““After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent.””¹²⁹

26:7-8—“This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled...that God raises the dead.”

Unfulfilled promises. It should be abundantly evident by now that Jesus’ present activity in heaven is not His promised rule. Amillennial arguments for a present kingdom all fall flat. Review what had happened. The kingdom had drawn near. Messiah, the predicted Ruler, had shown up, whose person had embodied the kingdom. He had done the works of the kingdom.¹³⁰ The Father had raised Him from death and said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” He had granted Him “all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). From heaven the Son now forgives—and grants the Spirit to—all who turn to Him. But *He does not yet rule in the ways God promised through the prophets.* See some of them on page 51 in Chart C: “Often-Predicted Elements of the Kingdom.”

Jesus has not ascended David’s throne over the House of Jacob, as Gabriel promised Mary. Nor raised up salvation for Israel from her enemies, as the Spirit assured Zechariah. Nor used His winnowing fork to judge, as He thundered through John. He has not yet raised the dead, nor lifted the curse, nor restored all things, nor proclaimed peace and brought justice to the nations. Nor purified God’s elect people Israel, nor allotted their inheritance. Amillennialists disagree. Since the kingdom drew near, they think it surely had to begin. If it did, most of God’s promises meant something different from what everyone thought.

Contingency. A better explanation is that God meant what He said—and will surely fulfill it in totality. But the time of the kingdom’s coming is contingent (dependent on other events). When

¹²⁸ David did not begin to rule for years after his first anointing: 1 Samuel 16:6, 12-13.

¹²⁹ George Peters in *Theocratic Kingdom* argues that Jesus spoke of the same tent of David as Acts 15:16. Jesus told Jerusalem, “Look, your house is left to you desolate” (Matt. 23:38; Luke 13:35). Peters says that Jesus here used “house” as “in the covenant itself.” It meant “the fallen Davidic house or Kingdom, which was indeed ‘desolate’ for a long time, and, being *left* by Him in that state, *continues so* to the present day.” (I:628)

¹³⁰ Remember that Hebrews 6:5, using a Greek word often translated “miracles,” calls Jesus’ works “*powers* of the coming age.”

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it first drew near, “the wedding banquet [was] ready, but those [He] invited did not deserve to come” (Matt. 22:8). “Those invited” were not a band of tramps but the most blessed and prepared of all nations, God’s chosen people. On purpose the king waited until they saw His works but would “not repent” (11:20). Only then did He begin revealing some “secrets of the kingdom” to believers (13:11). Those secrets involved an ostensible “postponement” of the kingdom and a *second coming* for the King. By not being allowed to learn those secrets, Israel could respond to God’s offer without complications. In doing so, they fully showed their depravity as mankind’s best representatives—and unknowingly offered the one sufficient sacrifice for sins, Messiah Himself!¹³¹

Let me repeat. The apparent “failure” of kingdom prophecies should not prompt us to reinterpret them. God offered (through prophets such as Zechariah and John his son) to fulfill them—but chose not to do so yet! That is because the coming of the kingdom is contingent (depends) on other factors that He had determined. Above all, Messiah had to die for sins and Israel will have to repent. To secure such results, God kept some secrets even from Zechariah and John. Until Israel had rejected and determined to kill Him, He revealed to no one that Messiah would come twice. And then He revealed it only to believers.

“Certainty rules.” I do not presume to resolve all the questions that divide godly believers about Messiah’s kingdom. Premillennialists sometimes insist on literal interpretations that disregard figures of speech or discord with NT revelation. Some of them, overeager to keep Israel separate, distance the church from God’s covenants and from “earthly” promises. In contrast, amillennialists often cancel Israel’s future and spiritualize prophecies to the vanishing point. If only both sides would struggle to agree on criteria for literal fulfillment! Here I propose some and beg for help in improving them.

These are “certainty rules” to help determine which prophecies, in God’s good time, *must be fulfilled literally or not*. They assume that God’s unconditional covenants (a) give an essential framework for all other revelation, (b) mean what God said and was understood to mean, and (c) will be fulfilled in that sense, plus additions God makes.

- The following must be fulfilled literally: (a) Essential elements of such covenants (e.g., the physical descendants of Abraham and the Promised Land); (b) Other elements often predicted in either OT or NT (e.g., Messiah on the throne of David).
- The following will be fulfilled non-literally: (a) Elements stated only in figurative terms (e.g., the unquenchable fire for Edom); (b) Elements now irretrievably gone (e.g., the ancient

¹³¹ The kingdom’s contingency includes Israel’s spiritual restoration. That must happen. It is the reason “Elijah” must come (Matt. 17:10-12; Mark 9:11-13; Mal. 4:5-6). He did come, provisionally, in John the Baptist, but was rejected. Therefore, he will come yet again. Since Waltke thinks the kingdom began, he does not address this contingency.

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enemies of Israel); (c) Elements now clearly canceled, not just by inference (e.g., the Levitical priesthood, animal sacrifices).

The kingdom will finally come. Psalm 2:7-9 tells how it will happen. When the time is ripe, the “Son” will “ask” His “Father” for “the nations” as His “inheritance” and “the ends of the earth” as His “possession.” Then He will come back in glory to sit on His throne of David “on Zion” and “will rule [the nations] with an iron scepter.” Thus will begin Jesus’ kingdom in which He will fully exercise His authority. And every believer will share in His eternal glory and inheritance.

*Be sure you belong to that coming kingdom
by acknowledging His authority now!*

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CHART B Three Steps in the Defeat of God’s Enemies 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 John Hepp, Jr.					
“THE PRESENT AGE” (EXTENDED) “The present heavens & earth” (2 Peter 3:7)		“ T H E A G E T O C O M E ” (T H E K I N G D O M) “The new heavens & new earth” (2 Peter 3:11)			
Jesus Waiting to Rule		The Mediatorial Kingdom		The Perfected Kingdom	
“raised...seated...far above all rule and authority...in the present age...also in the one to come” (Eph. 1:20-22).		“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet ” (25*)+ “a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4)		“after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power” (24c*) “he will reign...forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33)	
Step 1 “Messiah, the first-fruits” (23a*)		Step 2 “those who belong to him” (23c*)		Step 3 “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (26*)	
“God has raised this Jesus to life” (Acts 2:32) “Sit at my right hand until...” (Acts 2:34c)		“then [epeita#], when he comes,” (23b*) “...I make your enemies a footstool for your feet ”+ (Acts 2:35)		“Then [eita#] the end will come,” (24a*) “when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father” (24b*)	

* Scripture references are to verses in 1 Corinthians 15 unless otherwise indicated.

Greek *epeita* (then) and *eita* (then) designate successive stages.

+ Making “enemies a footstool” applies to two occasions: (a) At Step 2 the Father will do this for the Son (Acts 2:35), who can then begin His kingdom. (b) During the first thousand years of the kingdom, the Son as mediator will destroy every enemy, even death (1 Cor. 15:25-26).

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CHART C Often-Predicted Elements of the Kingdom		
Predicted Element	Present Fulfillment	Progress
<i>Involving the whole world</i>		
Son of David ruling from David's throne		Son of David still waiting on the Father's throne
Jerusalem on earth the capital of God's worldwide kingdom		New Jerusalem being readied to replace old Jerusalem
The curse on nature lifted		Jesus showed power over nature
Sins forgiven	Sins being forgiven	
The Holy Spirit in each believer	The Holy Spirit is granted to each believer	
Men judged according to works		Martyrs still asking, "How long?" (Rev. 6:10)
Nations living in peace		Many nations at war
Nations learning God's ways		Nations rebellious & wicked
<i>Especially involving the nation of Israel</i>		
Israel cleansed from sin		Israel still transgressing
Israel living under a new covenant		New covenant ratified; church under it but not Israel
Israel inheriting the Promised Land		Israel back in the Promised Land but not safe or secure

CHART D “All Israel Will Be Saved”# Cycles in Romans 11:11-26 John Hepp, Jr.*				
Verses	Ethnic Israel Partly Rejected	Results for Gentiles	Ethnic Israel To Be Accepted	Results for World
11-12	Their transgression (and being hardened)	Salvation has come to Gentiles (riches)	Their fullness	Greater riches
13-16	Their rejection	Reconciliation of the world	Their acceptance	Life from the dead
17-24	Natural branches broken off	Wild shoots grafted in	Natural branches grafted back in	
25-26	A hardening in part	(moving to) the full number of the (saved?) Gentiles	All Israel will be saved, turned from godlessness.	
<p># Romans 9-11 is addressed to “brothers” (e.g, 10:1; 11:25), explaining to them the status of Israel in salvation history. <i>Israel</i> occurs eleven times in these chapters, always for ethnic Israel and contrasted to <i>Gentiles</i>. After the cycles in chapter 11 there is a conclusion (28-32): “they are enemies on your account...[but] will receive mercy....”</p> <p>* This chart reflects observations by Douglas Moo & Bruce Waltke, amillennialists who admit that the nation of Israel will be converted just before Christ returns. God “will again return to his program for Israel... ‘All Israel’ (i.e., the people seen as a corporate solidarity, not as each and every individual...) refers to ethnic Israel at their future time of acceptance...” (Waltke, <i>OT Theology</i>, 331).</p>				

Appendix: Peter's Sermon in Acts 2

The Beginning of the Church

The occasion for the sermon. Jesus had risen from the dead and given His disciples “many convincing proofs that he was alive” (Acts 1:3a). He had “appeared to them over a period of forty days,” instructing them “about the kingdom of God” (1:3b). He had told them to wait in Jerusalem until He would baptize them in the Holy Spirit (1:4-5). (Peter later equated that with “the Holy Spirit...had come on us” and “the gift [God] gave us” [11:15-17].) That promise, made through John the Baptist, was recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33). With the stage set, Jesus had ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He will stay there “until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago” (Acts 3:21).

So the apostles and other disciples were in Jerusalem on the morning of the feast of Pentecost. They were mostly Galileans. With the sound of a “violent wind” and the appearance of “tongues of fire,” the Spirit of God came on them from heaven (2:1-3). Then they began “declaring the wonders of God” in languages they had not learned (2:4-11), often called “speaking in tongues.” Jews from every nation gathered, wondering what “this” supernatural evidence, especially the tongues-speaking, all meant (2:5-13). Then the apostle Peter explained.

Peter's procedure. He first explained the meaning of “this” that they saw and heard. It was God's giving His Spirit, as promised in Joel 2 (Acts 2:14-21) and leading to the Day of the Lord. Then he gave witness that Jesus' works (2:22), His resurrection (2:23-32), and His ascension (2:33-35) all fulfilled divine prophecies. They are evidence that God has constituted Jesus as the promised Messiah (King) and Lord (Master) (2:36). Peter concluded with an invitation and warning, to which many responded (2:38-41).

Peter's use of Joel 2:28-32. Peter explained what was happening: “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). **It was the same gift though not the same occasion.** In Joel God promised to give His Spirit to His people Israel “afterward” (Joel 2:28). After what? After He sees them threatened with extinction and “will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people” (Joel 2:18). After He destroys “the northern army” that will have attacked them (2:26).¹³² After He thus marvelously rescues, restores, and exalts His people (2:28-32). All that in “the day of the Lord” (2:31). So He will fulfill Joel's prophecy as a whole—and grant His Spirit to converted Israel—when the time comes to inaugurate His kingdom. But that which He will later do for them, He has already begun for us. Pentecost gave an earlier fulfillment of which Joel was not informed. Like all OT prophets, he saw Messiah's two advents as one (1 Peter 1:10-12).

There are other reasons the Joel passage was appropriate. (1) It reminded Israel that the gift of the Spirit precedes the often-predicted Day of the Lord. During that period God will establish His kingdom but not before great darkness and distress (Amos 5:18-20; Zeph. 1:14-18). (2) It tells how to be saved from God's judgment, by calling on His name.

¹³² Some think that the invasion of Joel 2:15-17 happened in Joel's time. If so, it has a double reference. Its future occurrence will be immediately followed by Israel's final restoration and exaltation. Joel chapter 3 again returns to that final battle (“in those days and at that time”).

To repeat, Peter quoted Joel to explain that Jesus the Messiah has begun baptizing in the Spirit. What does Messiah achieve by that? He thus imparts God's life to each believer, making him a member of Messiah's "body." In this way He builds His kingdom community (the *ekklesia*), as He promised when His apostles confessed Him to be Messiah (Matt. 16:16-18).

The Sermon Itself

Peter explained how they were enabled to speak in tongues (2:14-21). This was not drunkenness, as some thought who didn't understand the disciples' words (2:15). Instead, it resulted from the gift of the Holy Spirit as predicted by the prophet Joel (2:16). In Acts 2:17-21 Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 (with one change) about what was happening.

“[I]n the last days” (Joel, “afterward”) God would

(a) pour out the Holy Spirit on all...

who would prophesy, see visions, dream dreams (2:17)

even on slaves (2:18)

(b) also give celestial wonders and signs (2:19-20a)

before the Day of the Lord (2:20b)¹³³

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (2:21).

Peter summarized Jesus' ministry (2:22) as God's accrediting Jesus to Israel by signs. (This was the same message the Gospels were written to convey.)

Peter showed from Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (2:23-36). As a prophet, King David predicted the death, resurrection, and ascension of his descendant the Messiah.

- Messiah's death and resurrection (2:23-32). It was God's purpose for Israel to put Jesus to death in shame (2:23). In Psalm 16 David foresaw that his descendant, the future ruler, would be resurrected before His body could be corrupted (2:24-31). Jesus' disciples are witnesses to His resurrection (2:32).
- Messiah's ascension and honor (2:33-35). David also predicted, in Psalm 110, his descendant's exaltation to God's throne until God subjects His enemies to Him. From there Messiah has poured out the Holy Spirit, as Israel has seen and heard.
- The conclusion (2:36): God has made Jesus Lord (master) and Messiah (anointed ruler).

Peter issued an invitation (2:38-40): Repent and be baptized in Jesus' name to be forgiven, receive the Holy Spirit, and be saved from coming judgment. About 3000 responded by being baptized (2:41).

¹³³ Whether they mean changes in nature or in politics, the heavenly signs of Acts 2:19-20 have not been fulfilled. They might include those predicted for Messiah's Second Coming: “the heavens will disappear...the elements will melt...” (2 Peter 3:10, 12). Revelation 6:12 predicts using the same terms as Joel.