

Book Review

God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth

by Beale and Kim

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Beale, G. K., and Mitchell Kim. *God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014.

Introduction

The stated purpose of *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* by G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim is “to fuel the church to fulfill its mission in the world.”¹ The authors wrote the book to condense and simplify an earlier work by Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, born from Beale’s study in the book of Revelation.² *God Dwells Among Us* (GDAU) begins in Genesis and ends in Revelation as Beale and Kim attempt to show that one unifying theme of the Bible is God’s desire for His image bearers to experience His presence and obediently “fill the earth” with more “image bearers” (Gen 1:28).³ I cannot agree with everything in GDAU concerning the temple and its literal fulfillment; however, there is much to be learned from the authors’ theological methods and practical lessons.

Summary

Biblical Theology Defined

Biblical theology (BT) should begin within the context of a particular book and then progressively work through the rest of Scripture as it was “given by inspiration of God” and written by “holy men of God” (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).⁴ In other words, BT “should be, and

¹ G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 7.

² G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 17 of *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; England: InterVarsity Press; Apollos, 2004), 11.

³ Beale and Kim, *God Dwells among*, 155.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are from *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

is, simply *what the Bible teaches in the order in which the Bible teaches it* (emphasis in original).⁵ This “progressive revelation” is reflected in how Beale and Kim developed the “biblical theology of the temple” contained in GDAU.⁶

Biblical Theology of the Temple in GDAU

In GDAU, the authors begin in the garden of Eden, which they describe “as a sanctuary and place where God dwells.”⁷ The first chapter not only argues that God dwelt with Adam and Eve but that “Eden itself was the temple and dwelling place of God.”⁸ Adam was to serve in a priestly role “to work and keep” the garden of Eden, which the authors argue “[p]arallels” the “tabernacle/temple.”⁹

Adam and Eve, who were themselves image bearers, were to both “resemble and represent the triune God” even as they were to “fill the earth” by “multiplying” more “image bearers” throughout the earth.¹⁰ However, “Adam failed” due to his inability to “subdue the serpent.”¹¹ As a result, sin entered the world; nonetheless, Adam’s commission was passed on to the patriarchs (Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Israel) and eventually to the church (Rom 5:12; Matt 28:19-20).

The authors argue that the tabernacle of Israel was “Eden remixed,” meaning that it was “familiar” but “refashioned in surprising ways.”¹² The tabernacle was a remix of “the dwelling

⁵ Melvin Grove Kyle, “Biblical Theology in the Light of Archaeological Research.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 86, no. 341 (1929): 31.

⁶ Beale and Kim, *God Dwells among*, 155.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

place of God in Eden.”¹³ Israel was to carry the tabernacle from place to place, expanding and filling the earth with more image bearers that “worship the glory of God.”¹⁴

GDAU continues to trace God’s dwelling place through the OT. They present scriptural references for the similarities between God's dwelling with His people in Eden, then the tabernacle, and eventually in God's temple.¹⁵ Additionally, they show that the temple's dedication included a commission for Israel to witness to the nations so “that all people of the earth may know” the Lord (2 Chr 6:33).¹⁶ However, the promise of God’s presence in the temple was “contingent upon Israel’s faithfulness (see Lev 26:14-39).”¹⁷ Sadly, like Adam, Israel “failed to be a beacon.”¹⁸

Nonetheless, the prophets “reiterate God’s purpose to establish and expand [H]is presence in a new Edenic temple.”¹⁹ Despite the failure of Adam and Israel, God promised through the prophets that He “would establish [H]is dwelling in their midst” (Dan 2:35; Jer 3:16-17; Zech 2:6-11; Isa 64:1-2).²⁰ There was coming One who would not fail;²¹ He would become flesh and tabernacle among His creation as they “beheld his glory” (John 1:1,14).²² Jesus would subdue the serpent, and as the chief cornerstone, He would begin to build a temple out of “living stones” (Ps 118:22; Isa 28:16; Matt 3:9; 21:42; Luke 3:8; Acts 4:11; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 2:5-7).²³

¹³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 65.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 73.

¹⁸ Ibid., 65, 77.

¹⁹ Ibid., 66.

²⁰ Ibid., 75.

²¹ Ibid., 93.

²² Ibid., 82.

²³ Ibid., 135.

The authors present the church as “the beginning of the fulfillment of the eschatological temple.”²⁴ Like Adam, and like the priesthood of Israel, the church is a “holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5).²⁵ They also are to “fill the earth” through the preaching of the Word.²⁶

According to the authors, Revelation 21-22 is a picture of the church’s “mission accomplished.”²⁷ In the end, the church succeeds where Israel and Adam failed. Being a “faithful witness,” the church eventually expands and fills “the entire earth.”²⁸ Consequently, Revelation pictures “the dwelling place of God expanded to fill the entire cosmos.”²⁹

This progressive view of the temple that began in the garden of Eden, then became the tabernacle, then the temple of Israel, and eventually reached its fulfillment in the church through Christ has been missed by others because of “blindness.”³⁰ These blinders include a misunderstanding of “cosmology, biblical unity, history/typology, and understanding ‘literal’ fulfillment.”³¹ Furthermore, the authors argue that they are not “spiritualizing” the text but are presenting “a literal understanding of the texts” in question.³²

Beale and Kim conclude with practical reflections on missions, sacrifices, faithfulness, obedience, expository preaching, and praying.³³ The church will expand to fulfill the great

²⁴ Ibid., 104.

²⁵ Ibid., 106.

²⁶ Ibid., 104, 112.

²⁷ Ibid., 135

²⁸ Ibid., 136

²⁹ Ibid., 145.

³⁰ Ibid., 147-148.

³¹ Ibid., 148.

³² Ibid., 156.

³³ Ibid., 157-166

commission, but it must remain faithful and obedient.³⁴ Furthermore, the church “must return to the solid foundations of the Word of God.”³⁵

Critique

Hermeneutical Approach Defined

The English word hermeneutic comes from the Greek word *hermēneuō*. It is translated as “expounded” in Luke (Luke 24:27). In Corinthians, it is translated as “interpret,” where it refers to the necessity of having someone available to “interpret” unknown tongues (1 Cor. 14:5,13,27). Consequently, hermeneutics is the interpretation and explanation of Scripture.³⁶

Hermeneutical Approach of Beale and Kim

Beale and Kim skillfully and artfully present an excellent hermeneutical approach for a biblical theology of the temple from Genesis to Revelation. They offer multiple arguments based on parallel accounts of the Eden narrative, the tabernacle, the temple, and the church being God's dwelling place. Furthermore, they develop the importance of dwelling in God's presence throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.³⁷ They argue that “the themes of Eden, the temple, God's glorious presence, new creation, and the [church's] mission” are all “facets of the same reality.”³⁸

One more crucial hermeneutical principle should be pointed out before mentioning areas of disagreement. The authors are to be commended for desiring to present a “literal

³⁴ Ibid., 159.

³⁵ Ibid., 160.

³⁶ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 20.

³⁷ Beale and Kim, *God Dwells among*, 149.

³⁸ Ibid., 7.

understanding of the texts” relating to the temple.³⁹ They recognized that Revelation “seems to refer to an earthly temple structure;” however, the authors argue that they are not spiritualizing the text when they say that “it refers to the people of God.”⁴⁰

Hermeneutical Disagreement with Beale and Kim

Nonetheless, I believe that the authors *are* guilty of spiritualizing texts that should be taken literally. Beale and Kim spiritualize the temple's prophetic fulfillment because they have also spiritualized prophecies related to the *nation* of Israel. For example, Ezekiel prophesied that the regathering of the *nation* of Israel after seventy years of captivity would be as miraculous as the resurrection of a great army of dead bones (Ezek 37:1-14). If Israel's *national* return after seventy years was proof that the God of Israel was the Lord, then how much more does the literal return of Israel in 1948 after nearly two thousand years prove that He is the Sovereign One?⁴¹ Furthermore, Ezekiel tells the *nation* that the covenant with Israel is “an everlasting covenant” and that He will set His “sanctuary in the midst of them” (Ezek 37:26-28). Jeremiah also echoes the eternal nature of God's covenant with *national* Israel when God says that Israel will not “cease from being a *nation*” unless “day and night” should also cease (*emphasis added*, Jer 31:35-36; 33:20).

Daniel knew that Israel's seventy years of captivity were about up, and he prayed for God to keep His covenant promise with His people (Jer 25:11; Dan 9:1-4). Daniel makes it very clear that he is talking about national Israel and not the church by tripling down on exactly who he is referring to:

³⁹ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁴¹ Thomas McCall, “Dallas Seminary Says: Don't Take A Stand for Israel,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 07, no. 22 (Dec. 2003), WORDsearch CROSS e-book: 312-313.

- “the men of Judah,”
- “the inhabitants of Jerusalem,” and
- “all Israel” (Dan 9:7).

The praying prophet is answered by the angel Gabriel who informs Daniel about another future prophecy consisting of not seventy years but seventy times seven years. Just as Daniel’s prayer was about literal Israel, so is the angel’s answer. Gabriel was talking about “thy people,” that is, Daniel’s people (Dan 9:24). He was referring to “thy holy city,” that is Daniel’s holy city” (Dan 9:24). The angelic messenger was discussing the literal city of “Jerusalem,” a crucial city in Daniel’s literal Israel (Dan 9:25). The prophecy is about Israel, the same Israel that David prayed would be delivered (Dan 9:7,11,20). This same Israel would see the coming of the “Messiah,” who would be “cut off” (Dan 9:26). However, this prophecy about national Israel extends past the crucifixion of Christ. It goes on to describe what would happen to Israel, “Jerusalem,” and the temple “sacrifice” (Dan 9:25-27). Paul describes this same future event when the antichrist will dishonor the holy temple when he sets “in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess 2:4).

Like the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel, Paul believed in a literal future for national Israel. He argued that “blindness in part has happened to *Israel* until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (*emphasis added*; Rom 11:26). Paul cannot be using *Israel* in this passage as a synonym for the *church* because believing Jews (*aka* Christian Jews or Messianic Jews) are not blind. Furthermore, believing Jews are already a part of the church (see Rom 11:1,5); therefore, Paul

must be referring to the “elect Jewish people alive at the end of the tribulation.”⁴² Israel is distinct from the church, and future prophecies about a “literal Israel” include “a literal temple.”⁴³

The authors of GDAU never mention Romans 11, Daniel 9, or 2 Thessalonians. However, Beale does discuss those passages in *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. Nonetheless, in that longer book, Beale makes a circular argument when he reads the Church “back into” OT texts, which are then viewed as “parallel passages” to strengthen his interpretation of the NT texts that he read back into those OT texts.⁴⁴

Finally, dispensationalists recognize that “temple” is *sometimes* “used to describe the Church.”⁴⁵ Likewise, the body of Christ is also *occasionally* used to refer to the church (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18, 24). Nonetheless, that does not mean that Christ’s resurrected body should *always* be spiritualized to refer to the church. “Jesus had a physical body that could eat” and was “proof of His literal resurrection body.”⁴⁶ Just as every reference to the body of Christ is not synonymous with the church, likewise, every prophetic reference to the temple of God is not synonymous with the church.⁴⁷

Consistent Biblical Theology (BT)

Nonetheless, Beale and Kim present a consistent BT that establishes a clear storyline from Genesis to Revelation. They also show a clear relationship between the OT and the NT.

⁴² John MacArthur, ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible: Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*, New American Standard Bible, Signature Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 1683.

⁴³ Michael Stallard, “The Temple in the Olivet Discourse and Other New Testament Texts,” *Conservative Theological Journal* Volume 9 9, no. 28 (2005): 386.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁴⁶ Norman L Geisler, “The Significance of Christ’s Physical Resurrection,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 (1989): 163.

⁴⁷ Stallard, “The Temple,” 386.

However, Beale argues elsewhere that it is “*possible* to agree” with his “overall approach” while still maintaining a belief in a future literal physical temple, but “it would seem to be *inconsistent* with it” (*emphasis added*).⁴⁸

Nonetheless, I agree with Beale and Kim’s overall approach to the central theme of GDAU. I agree that people were created to enjoy God’s presence. I can agree with that premise and still believe in a literal physical temple in Revelation without being inconsistent. Beale and Kim present multiple proofs that “God’s presence gives life and purpose” to His image bearers.⁴⁹ The view that the Bible is united by God’s desire to make His presence known throughout the pages of Scripture does not require dispensationalists to abandon a literal plan for the nation of Israel and a literal future temple.

Practical Implications and Ministry Relevance

GDAU is an excellent book for all, including covenant theologians and dispensationalists. Not only should all Christians agree with the importance of a longing for and a need for God’s people to dwell with their Creator, but the practical lessons from the book are incredibly relevant to ministry and missions. The authors stress the everyday importance of preaching the Word, evangelism, and holy living.⁵⁰ Those directives are practical, relevant, and very much needed as they are seldom even mentioned by social justice advocates of the social gospel.

⁴⁸ Beale, Gregory K. “Eden, the Temple, and the Church’s Mission in the New Creation.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 1 (2005): 21.

⁴⁹ Beale and Kim, *God Dwells among*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54, 106, 160.

Conclusion

In conclusion, dispensationalists and covenant theologians should read each other's works and talk to one another and not past each other. Thanks to Beale and Kim, I have a better understanding of why covenant theologians think the way they do about Israel and the temple. Furthermore, GDAU is an excellent example of how the Bible is united from Genesis to Revelation by God's desire for Christians to dwell with Him forever and multiply other image bearers that will also enjoy God's presence for eternity. Consequently, GDAU is not just for covenant theologians but also dispensationalists. Regardless of whether or not we believe Israel and the church are synonymous, we can agree that God desires to dwell among us.⁵¹

⁵¹ Ibid., 85, 100.

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