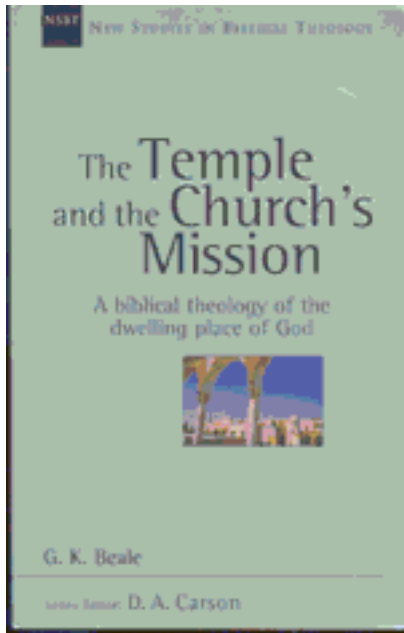


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Beale, G. K.

The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God

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Beale begins with the Old Testament and its background, moves into the pertinent New Testament texts, and ends with some reflections as to what this biblical theological theme means for the church today. One does not need to read much of Gregory K. Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* to recognize the amount of hard work and dedicated scholarship that went into this book. From the opening chapter until the conclusion, each portion is thoroughly researched and documented.

The Old Testament is the focus for a large portion of this book because, as Beale explains, the foundation for such a study must begin at the beginning. In the temple, he sees a three-part structure of the outer courts, the holy place, and the holy of holies, which refer cosmologically to the waters, the land, and the heavens. Thus, each temple structure has an implicit or explicit three-tiered nature. In addition, Beale detects a garden theme both in Israel's temple as well as in other temples. Thus, Eden as a first temple becomes a center point to the ideas in the book. The mission of Adam was to expand the garden to cover the earth. Beale sees a parallel with the temple in that God commanded Israel to expand the temple to cover all the earth. He argues for this by making linguistic connections between the charge given to Adam and Eve and the charges given to Noah,

Moses, and Israel. There is a direct link between Eden and the temple. Beale traces this theme through the Old Testament, especially highlighting Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Amos. At each step along the way, Beale cites other ancient Near Eastern sources that confirm this idea, noting that the temple-garden connection is not limited to Israel, nor is the concept of expanding the temple of the god(s) to cover the earth.

Beale discusses this same threefold temple structure in the New Testament. Instead of linking this idea with a physical temple, however, he looks for what he terms a literal nonphysical temple. By this he describes the new people of God as the true temple, the reality to which the Old Testament was pointing. The physical temple in Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden were both types, and the church is the antitype. He traces this theme through the Synoptic Gospels, using Matthew as a template. Next he notes the functions of the temple in John, recognizing that Jesus claims the role of the temple. Acts continues the idea of Christ as the new temple. Throughout the Gospels and Acts, Beale details an eschatological concept of the temple as the people of God, arguing for a tension between the temple as already being realized in the church and as not yet fulfilled until the last day. Beale finds the same basic concept running throughout the Pauline Corpus, taking special care to highlight how 2 Thess 2 refers to a nonphysical fulfillment of Daniel's temple prophecy. Hebrews records the presence of Christ in heaven as a spiritual temple and high priest, and Revelation describes the throne room of God in temple terms and ends with Jerusalem expanding to cover the entire earth and no temple structure present.

Beale concludes the book by covering three important issues. First, he spends a great deal of time showing the various connections between Ezek 40–48 and the New Testament. He describes in depth how Ezekiel itself is missing key components of Solomon's temple, listing specific items missing from each area of the temple. Therefore he concludes that Ezekiel did not mean to imply a new physical temple; rather, there is a spiritual reality signified. He connects this interpretation of the passage with various parallel passages throughout the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern literature. In turning to the New Testament, he covers the various mentions of water in John, since they relate to the water imagery of Ezekiel. He examines Revelation closely and finds direct correspondences with Ezekiel, because Revelation does not mention most of the temple accoutrements, and it brings together the entire world in one place to worship God. The next chapter, though titled theological conclusions, covers hermeneutical issues. Beale links the Old Testament texts more closely to the New Testament, noting how the authors of the New Testament understood and explicated various Old Testament texts. He finds that the New Testament writers smoothly and accurately relay the concept of the temple, collectively interpreting the unfolding revelation found in the Old Testament in the same manner. The final chapter covers the theological aspects of the

study. Beale concludes that the mission of the church, then, is to spread the gospel throughout the world in order to fulfill the creation mandate.

Throughout the book it is very clear that Beale has a few different aims in mind. First, he wants to make it quite clear that the Old Testament never called for a new temple to be built. In fact, he finds that the Old Testament calls for the temple to disappear in order for God truly to dwell with his people. The problem is that Beale rarely entertains that he could be wrong in a real sense. He admits that not everyone will agree with his conclusions on certain key passages, but he asserts his correctness and continues his argument. He does much the same thing when insinuating his amillennial view of the end times, especially when one notes how his arguments fit a postmillennial context more tightly. Another curious omission occurs when Beale makes a case for the expansion of the temple/garden being the ultimate expression of the message of the entire Bible, yet he never connects this theme with the teaching about the kingdom of God/heaven, which is so prevalent in the New Testament. For such an important, overarching concept, one wonders how Beale could overlook the possible connection or disjunction between these two key ideas. The biggest problem in this book, however, is the lack of nuance in handling the New Testament. For example, Beale lumps all the Synoptics together, asserting each point from Matthew without arguing for the correspondence of the other Gospels. Modern scholarship has demonstrated time and again that the authors of these Gospels wrote for different reasons, and therefore they often used the same occurrences to represent very different themes. Beale also talks about the Paul of Acts as a person instead of a character, missing the important line between narrative and an actual person.

Beale's book contains strengths as well. Acts 15 confounds most scholars, but the reasons that Beale gives for the connection between the letter from James and the laws in Leviticus make sense. He also deftly covers the difficult passage in Heb 9, noting the similarities with Ezekiel's description of the temple. The greatest value of this book, however, does not occur in the New Testament sections, as one would suspect; instead, it is Beale's coverage of the Old Testament and the ancient Near Eastern parallels that stand out. He is very lucid and convincing when he recounts how ancient civilizations understood their temples as the physical dwelling of various gods that needed to be expanded to cover the entire earth in order to validate those gods. Conquest was not about the growth of a country; it was a theological enterprise that proved which god was the greatest. In examining these parallels, Beale illuminates the Old Testament texts. While the book seems to have some methodological problems, it still stands as a strong study on the temple throughout the canon. Scholars working in biblical theology, the significance of the temple, or the mission of the church will need to read this work.