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THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A FRAMEWORK FOR
EVANGELICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A FRAMEWORK FOR EVANGELICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Daniel Lane Patterson

Read and Approved by:

Russell D. Moore (Chair)

Michael A. G. Haykin

David E. Prince

Date _____

To Molly,
My love,
this study, and my life,
I lovingly dedicate to you with joy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| PREFACE | vi |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Thesis | 5 |
| Background to the Study | 11 |
| Methodology | 19 |
| Outline..... | 21 |
| 2. THE KINGDOM AND THE WORD OF GOD: THE FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS..... | 23 |
| The Word and the Progression of the Kingdom | 26 |
| The Kingdom through the Progression of the Word..... | 51 |
| The Kingdom, the Word, and the Doctrine of Scripture..... | 88 |
| Conclusion | 102 |
| 3. THE KINGDOM AND THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETER: THE POSSIBILITY OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS | 105 |
| The Interpreter and the Fall of Biblical Hermeneutics | 108 |
| The Interpreter and the Redemption of Biblical Hermeneutics | 114 |
| Conclusion | 147 |

| Chapter | Page |
|--|------|
| 4. THE KINGDOM AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS | 149 |
| The Neglect of the Kingdom in Biblical Hermeneutics..... | 151 |
| The Promise of the Kingdom for Biblical Hermeneutics | 164 |
| Conclusion | 187 |
| 5. CONCLUSION | 190 |
| Summary of Arguments | 191 |
| Areas for Further Research | 195 |
| The Possibility of Kingdom-Focused Biblical Hermeneutics | 200 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 204 |

PREFACE

For some, the idea for a dissertation topic finds its genesis in the course of a seminary classroom lecture, or in a moment of late night reflection over a thought-provoking passage in a book, or in the context of friendly conversation or even contentious debate. For me, it all started twenty years ago—at Vacation Bible School.

At the time, I was ten years old, and I could not have spelled, let alone defined inaugurated eschatology. But sitting in that rickety pew as a young boy, I heard a gospel message—one that I had heard countless times before, but this time, one that struck me differently. It was there by faith I received my sight, soteriologically. But more than that, in ways I didn’t even realize at the time, it was there too that the trajectory of my entire life was reset. This because, when I heard this message, I was gripped not only by the weight of my sin, but also by the gravity of this faithful pastor I had just recently met, a man who had so clearly given himself over to the proclamation of unassailable truth, truth that changed lives, truth found in this one particular book.

From that moment on, I was fascinated with Christian theology—with understanding the Bible, with defending its truth, with knowing how to appropriate its message to my own life. I even thought this fascination was a calling to ministry of sorts, albeit a very particular kind: this fascination with the Bible, I just knew, was because the Lord had saved me to be the next great Christian catcher—leading the National League to Christ and the Chicago Cubs to their first World Series championship in a century. I was

right about the ministry part, wrong about the baseball part. Though my ability to hit a curveball was weighed in the balance and found wanting, what remained was a sense of calling, a desire to know the Bible and make it known to others. What could possibly be more important, more ultimate, more meaningful than that?

It was this drive that led me over the years to a surrender to a call to ministry, to enroll in seminary, and then in the fullness of time to undertake this dissertation topic. Hardly a thing can be more foundational to the Christian life than the Bible itself, and it has been a joy to devote these years and these pages to this study of how we may best understand the Bible and its interpretation in light of its central eschatological storyline.

I never could have imagined the direction of my life when I felt the first hint of a call to ministry as a ten-year-old boy, or even when I surrendered to that call years after that in college. But I am continually amazed by and grateful for God's grace and mercy and kind providence. In the midst of this study, there are so very many people to thank. I am grateful for my wonderful family, who have been a source of encouragement and love to me not only in this project but throughout my entire my life: my parents, Dave and Kathy Patterson, who taught me virtually everything I know about dedication and responsibility; my siblings, Scott and Kimberly, a consistent source of friendship; and my grandfather, Bill Maners, a man who embodies selflessness and humility.

I am deeply indebted to two churches, and two men in particular who pastored those churches. Roger Freeman, the pastor of my home church, First Baptist Church of Clarksville, Tennessee, was the man the Lord used at at that Vacation Bible School to call me to faith in Christ. He is a convictional and loving pastor, and I am proud to be a son of his faithful ministry and grateful for my mother congregation who taught me to

love the gospel of grace and licensed me to preach. Dean Sisk, pastor of Belle Aire Baptist Church in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, was the pastor of the church I served while attending college, and a model of faithfulness and master of exposition. Not only that, but it was at Belle Aire where I had the opportunity to serve on my first church staff, and it was this congregation that confirmed my calling, encouraged my pursuit of seminary studies, supported me throughout, and ordained me to gospel ministry.

I am grateful for the opportunities God has provided me during my seven years of study as a master's and doctoral student in Louisville, Kentucky. I am thankful to Bill Pearson, my boss for three years early on at Stock Yards Bank & Trust, Co., whose generosity in giving me the most flexible hours imaginable allowed me to pursue my studies in ways otherwise impossible. I am grateful too for those with whom I had the opportunity to serve for several years on the staff of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, including Michael Haykin and David Prince, who kindly served as members of my committee of instruction; David Puckett and Jonathan Pennington, both of whom I had the opportunity to work closely with in the Research Doctoral Studies office; Stephen Wellum and Brian Vickers, with whom I had the privilege to join at *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*; and Randy Stinson and Greg Wills, both of whom have shown me great kindness and whose leadership and godliness I so greatly admire.

The writing of this dissertation has been inspired by and forged under the instruction and theological vision of Russell Moore. Not only that, but so much of my life has similarly been shaped by his leadership and friendship. When I first met Russell Moore nearly a decade ago, I never could have imagined the countless opportunities with which he would go on to entrust me: asking me to serve for years as his intern, his editor,

his Garrett Fellow, and later as his assistant. I was honored more than I could express to serve in each of those roles, as I am now serving on his cabinet at the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission. When most people think of Russell Moore, they think of him as a visionary leader in the evangelical world, or as a prophetic voice in the public square, or as a gifted theologian and ethicist. He is all those—and more even still. That said, while all those same gifts come to my mind, added to them are those moments outside the public eye that few others ever see—those moments in which it becomes clear that the only thing that surpasses the breadth of Russell Moore’s gifts is the depth of his integrity. “Thank you,” or anything else I can say here, is hardly sufficient for the debt of gratitude I will forever owe him. Even still, thank you.

Our precious daughter, Emma, has been a joy beyond description. When deadlines were looming and stress was mounting, her occasional “interruptions,” bounding into my office laughing and smiling were a refuge and delight. When days were long and my work could begin to feel abstract, I would often be reminded of this sweet girl and my longing for her to know and inherit the kingdom of God. Our youngest daughter Claire was born to us just weeks ago, appropriately enough in that already—not yet period at the end of doctoral programs, when the dissertation is already completed but the degree itself not yet conferred. She has brought enormous joy to our lives already, and I’m grateful to God for this newness of life in our family.

And then there is Molly. I met my beautiful Molly right at the outset of my doctoral studies, and she has never known a time in which there was not some seminar paper or some deadline looming. And yet despite so many hours holed up in my study, so many Saturdays I spent sequestered off poring over chapters, through it all she has been

grace and blessing personified. I have learned much of the kingdom of God just by virtue of seeing her love, her servant-hearted commitment to our family, her godliness and gentleness. Additionally, the completion of this degree is a special moment for me in part because so much of my life together with Molly is bound up with this school—we met, became engaged, and were married on the campus of Southern Seminary. Not only that, but as it stands I will graduate with this degree exactly five years to the day we were wed, and in the very same chapel. That this degree is conferred on the same day as the commemoration of our wedding seems only fitting, as this dissertation would not have been possible apart from the constant devotion and love I have known in marriage to Molly. So Molly, this graduation day is as much yours as it is mine. You are God's most precious gift in this life to me, and I love you more than I can ever say.

Daniel L. Patterson

Nashville, Tennessee

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“There does not seem to be much apostolic apprehension over kingdom preaching,” notes evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry. So much so, “the apostolic view of the kingdom should likewise be definitive for contemporary evangelicalism,” Henry insists.¹ And so it has been in many areas. Indeed, many have identified the kingdom of God as a central theme in Scripture,² while others have pointed to kingdom theology to show its potential for driving theological consensus.³ At the same time, evangelical hermeneutical theory has seen considerable development in recent years—enriched by a wide array of differing approaches ranging from those that focus on the narrative storyline of Scripture seen in biblical theology, to others that analyze inner-canonical connections, to some that explore how a passage has been interpreted in the history of the church, or others still that propose theological approaches to interpretation.⁴

¹Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 51. See also, *idem*, *The God Who Shows Himself* (Waco, TX: Word, 1966).

²For foundational works on the kingdom of God in the context of inaugurated eschatology, the work of New Testament theologian George Eldon Ladd have especially foundational. See especially his works, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

³For two recent works that engage in this, see Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

⁴I will analyze many of these developments over the course of the dissertation. For a number of helpful overviews of both the history of interpretation and recent hermeneutical developments, see David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); David Paul Parris, *Reading the Bible with Giants: How 2000 Years*

That said, despite all the attention paid to the kingdom, and all the development within biblical hermeneutics, evangelicals have largely neglected to incorporate the theological significance of the kingdom of God and eschatological consummation in Christ within their interpretive approaches.⁵ The question, then, must be asked—if the kingdom of God plays so central a role in the storyline of Scripture and the purposes of God in redemption, might an evangelical approach to biblical hermeneutics stand to benefit from a thoroughgoing interaction with the concept of the kingdom of God as developed in recent years?

Not only that, but to speak of biblical hermeneutics is necessarily to speak about more than just the interpretive process. Evangelical theology has consistently maintained that the interpretive task is bound up with what one believes about both the Bible and the interpreter.⁶ This is precisely the reason why biblical hermeneutics exists distinct from a general hermeneutic—one approaches the text of Holy Scripture differently than any other kind of text because the Bible itself is a different kind of book, demanding a special approach.⁷ In saying, then, that biblical hermeneutics stands to gain

of Biblical Interpretation Can Shed Light on Old Texts (London: Paternoster, 2006); Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010).

⁵David E. Prince argues similarly in a recent dissertation on expository preaching: “One of the most underemphasized aspects in the contemporary models of Christocentric expository preaching is the eschatological orientation of a Christocentric approach to interpretation and preaching.” David E. Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 11.

⁶For a useful treatment on the nature of the Bible and the interpreter, see Vern S. Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

⁷Even those within evangelicalism who call for a general hermeneutic to be applied to biblical hermeneutics—such as Old Testament theologian Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., who posits as a “first principle” that “the Bible is to be interpreted in the same manner and with the same principles as all other books”—often do so with a prior theological commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Thus, even those evangelicals who call for a general hermeneutic to be applied to the interpretation of Scripture would concede the inescapable relationship between interpretation and one’s doctrine of Scripture. Walter C. Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 119.

from a thorough interaction with the kingdom of God, it is not merely the rules and processes that govern interpretation that are in view but also the relationship between the kingdom of God and both the Bible and the interpreter.⁸ Thus the threefold locus of Bible, interpreter, and interpretation will form the backbone of this study.

If the most full-orbed treatment of biblical hermeneutics is one that has in view this threefold range, then it seems the most faithful treatment of biblical hermeneutics is one that understands these three in light of what is arguably Scripture's defining theme—the kingdom of God.⁹ This because the Word of God is everywhere associated with the kingdom of God. Indeed, throughout redemptive history God's kingdom has been advanced through a Word-mediated rule—in commands decreed in the Eden, through promises given to the patriarchs, on stone tablets delivered from Mount Sinai, by the inspired words of Scripture, from the mouth of a returning King out of which will “come a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations” (Rev 19:15).¹⁰ Accordingly, the kingdom cannot be understood apart from the Word of God, and that Word which readers have—the Bible—cannot be understood apart from God's purpose in building and advancing his kingdom.¹¹

⁸Happily, a number of recent works in the realm of biblical hermeneutics have approached the study more holistically, with each of these three—Bible, reader, and interpretation—in view. See, for example, Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁹It is outside the scope of this study to defend the centrality of the kingdom of God as a defining theme in biblical and systematic theology. For a number of works that argue for the centrality of the kingdom, see Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 107; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003); Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (InterVarsity, 2012); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom: A Christian Interpretation of the Old Testament* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981).

¹⁰Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

¹¹Phillip Ross Bethancourt makes a similar argument in a recent dissertation on biblical warfare, showing how “the kingdom cannot be understood apart from warfare, and warfare cannot be

The connection between the kingdom of God and the Word of God extends further, though, down to the level of the individual, because the kingdom of God advances as individual *persons* put themselves in submission to God's rule and live in obedience to it. This obedience, in turn, implies that those under God's rule are themselves reading, understanding, and appropriating this Word to their own lives—in short, engaging in biblical hermeneutics. Consequently, the kingdom of God touches on not only the Bible and the process of interpretation, but also the interpreter himself who stands in submission to God's Word—living, reading, and learning to appropriate God's Word to their lives as part of a kingdom community.¹²

Too often, though, evangelical theology has overlooked this connection between the kingdom of God and the Word of God. Strangely enough, this oversight exists in spite of the fact that the fields of biblical and systematic theology have been flooded with treatments that either uphold the prominence of the kingdom across canonical revelation or examine the nature of the eschatological kingdom.¹³ Too often, though, these same works tend to end at the level of identification—one recognizes in

understood apart from the kingdom.” Phillip Ross Bethancourt, “Christ the Warrior King: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Analysis of the Divine Warrior Theme in Christology” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 3.

¹²Daniel Treier notes that evangelical theology has given “increased attention” to the communal aspects of biblical hermeneutics, as they have grown to “[recognize] the inescapable and important role of interpretive communities.” Daniel J. Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42. Leading in this area has been Stanley Grenz, who has argued, “Community is integral to epistemology Central to the knowing process is a cognitive framework mediated to the individual by the community in which one participates.” Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 23; see also Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

¹³For a number of representative examples, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

Scripture that the kingdom of God is a central theme, or one learns about the eschatological kingdom based on the unified teaching of Scripture.¹⁴ Such treatments are helpful and necessary as far as they go, but more still can be said.

The possibility for advancing the discussion from here may best be asked in the form of a question: if Scripture identifies the kingdom as the unifying center of canonical revelation and the *telos* of redemptive history, if the Word of God is itself the means through which the kingdom is advanced, do not these theological conclusions themselves compel evangelical theology to ask how the kingdom of God should inform the way readers think of Scripture and its interpretation? Could it be that both the Bible and the interpretation of the Bible not only reveal God's revelation *about* the kingdom but also have themselves a distinct role to play *in* the eschatological triumph of the kingdom of God? Could a kingdom-focused approach to the Bible and its interpretation represent the next point at which there is potential for advancing the evangelical consensus on the kingdom of God? This dissertation will seek to answer these questions and others.

Thesis

This dissertation will explore the theological relationship between the Word of God and the kingdom of God as it relates to biblical hermeneutics, arguing that the kingdom of God should function as a central organizing principle in the area of

¹⁴David Prince makes this indictment himself of some prominent kingdom-focused treatments of biblical theology: "The approaches of Goldsworthy and VanGemeren are correct as far as they go. The theme of the kingdom of God is a good starting point for thinking about the center of Scripture. Nevertheless, it is inadequate, not because of what it says but because of what it does not say. The phrase itself lacks eschatological orientation grounded in the concept of the kingdom of Christ. What unifies the entire biblical canon is not a static notion of the kingdom as such but an eschatological realization that the kingdom of God was inaugurated in Christ and will be consummated in him." Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 48.

evangelical biblical hermeneutics—as it offers a unified theological vision of the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and biblical interpretation and has the explanatory power to inform and enrich evangelical theology at several key points.¹⁵ Stated slightly differently, this study will seek to advance the argument that one understands the Bible, the biblical interpreter, and the process of biblical interpretation most faithfully when one understands all three in light of the kingdom of God.¹⁶

A kingdom-focused biblical hermeneutic arises from the substantial evangelical consensus on the nature and centrality of the kingdom of God. This study, therefore, focuses on the theological foundations to biblical hermeneutics.¹⁷ Though perhaps not often thought of as a theological discipline, biblical hermeneutics is inescapably theological as it consists of deeply theological elements—an inspired Bible, a redeemed human interpreter, and a Spirit-aided process of interpretation.¹⁸ To further

¹⁵The language of “central organizing principle” comes from evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz, who establishes the concept of an integrative motif in systematic theology. Describing this concept, Grenz explains, “This concept serves as systematic theology’s central organizational feature, the theme around which it is structured. Such a motif is ‘integrative’ in that it focuses the issues discussed and illuminates the formulations of the responses to these issues. In short, the integrative motif is the central idea that provides the thematic perspective in light of which all other theological concepts are understood and given their relative meaning or value.” Though Grenz himself affirms the (eschatological) community of God as an integrative motif, his definition is nonetheless useful for explaining how this dissertation affirms the function of the kingdom in relation to biblical hermeneutics. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 20–21.

¹⁶Scott Swain prosecutes a similar argument, but with a different focus. He argues that “One may best appreciate the theological significance of the Bible and biblical interpretation if we understand these two themes in a trinitarian, covenantal context.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 7. Utilizing a similar methodology, I am deeply indebted to Swain in terms of the structure of his argument and agree with him at a great many points; at the same time, I propose a different theological theme as the center of my own proposal, as I will discuss throughout this study.

¹⁷To be clear, then, this study does not seek to supplant more descriptive works detailing interpretive methods and schools of interpretive thought but rather seeks to complement them, showing how this overlooked theological relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God can inform and enrich an evangelical approach to biblical hermeneutics.

¹⁸At the same time, this study does not locate itself necessarily within the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement, although it is indebted to much of the work that has come from this field in recent years. For an introduction to this movement, see Gregg R. Allison, “Theological

demonstrate the need for this study, I will elaborate on each of these three elements below to highlight the distinctively theological nature of biblical hermeneutics.

First, the theological nature of the Bible is seen most clearly in evangelical theology's insistence that the Bible is not simply a book like any other but is itself the Word of God (2 Pet 1:21), the result of a concursive relationship between God and man—one in which “God in his sovereignty so superintended the freely composed human writings we call Scripture that the result was nothing less than God’s words.”¹⁹ The nature of the Bible being “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16) means that Scripture has a divine origin and theological significance.²⁰ As Scott Swain has rightly argued, when it comes to interpreting the Bible, “what it [the Bible] *is* must determine how we *approach it* and how we *use it*.²¹ The Bible, then, is deeply theological in nature, and in its drive toward redemption through and fulfillment in Christ is thoroughly eschatological in its aim. If so, then a study of relationship between the Word of God and the kingdom of God has the potential to inform the way one understands the role of the Bible in the life of the interpreter and the nature of the Bible in the formulation of a doctrine of Scripture with greater clarity. This will be the focus of chapter 2.

Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 2 (2010): 28–36. For an analysis of the movement itself, see D. A. Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . . ,” in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 187–207.

¹⁹D. A. Carson, “Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 45.

²⁰For a seminal treatment on the inspiration of Scripture, see Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948). See also, Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 4:129–61. For an important recent contribution on an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, see Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin, eds., *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013).

²¹Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 4. Additionally, unless otherwise indicated, all italics in quotes are found in the original citation.

Second, the theological nature of the interpreter is bound up with the creatureliness and fallenness of the interpreter himself. Understanding the interpreter in light of the kingdom of God most thoroughly reveals the way in which the interpreter of Scripture is himself marred by sin and caught up in the conquest of the kingdom in redemption and renewal.²² For, apart from the grace of God, every human being exists in a state of hermeneutic blindness and rebellion.²³ Paul reveals that even though God's nature and his existence are "clearly perceived" (Rom 1:20), apart from redemption in Christ mankind works to "suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18). Not only that, but the interpreter of Scripture does not act autonomously in interpretation, as if the Bible were merely a static object to be examined. Instead, Scripture is dynamic through the power of the Holy Spirit, "living and active" as the writer of Hebrews states (Heb 4:12). The interpreter in Scripture is everywhere tied to the ministry of the Spirit, who is sent so "we may understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). Thus, the kingdom of God affords a valuable lens through which one may construct a theology of the interpreter, caught up as he is in the need of redemption and renewal, and empowered by the ministry of the Spirit in the context of the local church. This will be the focus of chapter 3.

Third, the act of interpretation is inherently theological as it is tied to the eschatological drive towards consummation in Christ. In other words, if the unified

²²For a number of helpful works how Jesus redeems the interpretation of Scripture, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 305–21; idem, "God's Lordship in Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 27–64.

²³In a similar vein, Vern Poythress argues, "Because of human sin, we are separated from God and would die if we stood in his presence (remember Exod 33:20). But receiving the word of God involves receiving his presence. We would die reading Scripture except for the mediation of the Son. Through the Son we receive knowledge of God without dying." Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Why Must Our Hermeneutics Be Trinitarian?," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 96.

witness of Scripture reveals that a central goal in God’s redemptive plan is the establishment of an eternal kingdom in a renewed creation with Christ as Lord over all, then the kingdom establishes biblically-grounded parameters that guide the interpretation of Scripture and has the potential to sharpen the focus of a number of hermeneutical evangelical approaches. Because the progress of the kingdom was revealed over time, the kingdom compels interpreters to a careful, thorough analysis of Scripture in interpretation.²⁴ Because the locus of the kingdom is the local church—where Christ rules as head (Col 1:18)—the interpretation of Scripture is informed by the proclamation of the church.²⁵ Because the kingdom of God has been inaugurated, the position of the interpreter in the “already” of the kingdom means that every act of interpretation is itself an eschatological act, and this reality informs the way one understands the promise of Scripture and joy in the Christian life.²⁶ This will be the focus of chapter 4.

This study, therefore, is an exercise in theology seeking to show how theological conclusions about the nature and centrality of the kingdom of God come alongside and complement the careful work done in biblical theology and interpretive theory, informing biblical hermeneutics from Scripture’s revealed whole, in light of

²⁴Hence, this study affirms the insistence—widespread throughout evangelicalism—on the necessity of expository preaching. For a number of seminal works in this field in recent years, see Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

²⁵For a constructive proposal on the relationship between the kingdom of God and an the doctrine of the church, see Russell D. Moore and Robert E. Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 68–86.

²⁶For a helpful treatment of how the believer stands with Paul redemptive-historically and its implication for hermeneutics, see Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul’s Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 17–31.

which each of its separate parts must be read.²⁷ This study affirms the distinctiveness of biblical hermeneutics,²⁸ but does so without denying legitimate points of continuity with general hermeneutics, including the insistence that close attention must be paid to the context, genre, and the expressed intent of the human author.²⁹

Finally, foundational to this study are a number of key terms, for which definitions will be useful. By “kingdom of God” I mean “the reign of God through his human mediator-king over a world in submission to his righteous rule.”³⁰ The kingdom of God is not merely an abstract realm or theological concept but a concrete reality, as the kingdom of God has been inaugurated in Christ in the present order and is seen now in the life of the local church—the location where Christ rules now in the same manner that

²⁷Others have argued that overarching themes in Scripture influence the way one interprets Scripture. By way of example, two recent treatments do this with different themes. Stephen Wellum and Peter Gentry trace the centrality of the theme of covenant across Scripture, while Vern Poythress works from the idea of the centrality of the glory of God in Scripture and theology. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation*.

²⁸There is within evangelical theology a minority who dissent on this point, calling for an approach to the interpretation of Scripture that interprets it in the same manner as any other book. The aforementioned Walter Kaiser, for example, has maintained that a “first rule” in biblical interpretation is “that the Bible is to be interpreted in the same manner and with the same principles as all other books.” Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” 119. David Dockery identifies the works of Friederich Schleiermacher as the alpha point of this phenomenon in the domain of hermeneutics: “Prior to Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was understood as special hermeneutics (*hermeneutica sacra*) and general hermeneutics (*hermeneutica profana*). Special hermeneutics was concerned with how the Bible ought to be interpreted and general hermeneutics was used to interpret other kinds of literature. Schleiermacher, however, insisted that the understanding of linguistic symbols, whether biblical, legal, or literary texts, should be derived from a consideration of how understanding in general takes place, thus a shift from special hermeneutics to general hermeneutics.” Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 162–63.

²⁹Indeed, most evangelical treatments of biblical hermeneutics devote a great deal of attention to these principles, and rightly so. For a number of important works in this vein, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Andreas J Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011).

³⁰Russell D. Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 862. Definitions of the kingdom of God abound in scholarly literature, though many posit three central elements: (1) rule; (2) people; and (3) place. For example, Graeme Goldsworthy defines the kingdom of God, “simply as God’s people in God’s place under

he will ultimately rule over the entire created order at the consummation of the eschatological kingdom. By “kingdom theology” I refer broadly to a theological approach that identifies the eschatological kingdom as an integrative motif or central theme within biblical theology. By the “evangelical consensus” on the kingdom of God I refer broadly to the agreed upon framework of the kingdom as organized around inaugurated eschatology being both “already” and “not yet.”³¹

Background to the Study

The significance of this dissertation will best be measured in light of other treatments of kingdom, Scripture, and biblical hermeneutics in contemporary theology. Since the significance of the kingdom and development within biblical hermeneutics have developed along different disciplinary tracks, it will be useful to see the broader context of each. With these in place, it will be clearer how this study makes a significant contribution to the discussion.

First, the kingdom of God was identified as a unifying theme increasingly throughout the twentieth century,³² especially within Protestant Liberalism.³³ Within this

God’s rule.” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 75.

³¹More detail on this history of kingdom theology will be detailed below, but for a number of key works, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*; Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

³²Of course, to make this claim is not to say that the kingdom of God as a theological category did not exist until the twentieth century. To the contrary, there exist important works on the eschatological kingdom from Papias, Irenaeus, and Tertullian in the early church era, on through important figures in the medieval and Reformation eras of the church as well. Instead, the intent of this section is to trace the immediate degrees of influence that lead to the modern era’s coalescence around an already—not yet theology of the kingdom of God. For an important work tracing millennial and eschatological thought in the early church, see Charles E. Hill, *Regnum Caelorum: Patterns of Millennial Thought in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). For a helpful overview tracing perspectives on the kingdom of God through the history of the church, see Stephen J. Nichols, “The Kingdoms of God: The Kingdom in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 25–48.

camp there existed two competing visions: first, there was a vision of the kingdom as present reality.³⁴ Adolf von Harnack, for example, defined the kingdom of God as God's rule in the hearts of men and women³⁵—thus he internalized the kingdom entirely within the life of the individual.³⁶ Similarly, C. H. Dodd's “realized eschatology” located the kingdom in the present on the grounds of Jesus' teaching—Jesus says the kingdom *has* come but nowhere explicitly says the kingdom *will* come, Dodd argued.³⁷ Some, however, argued for an entirely future kingdom.³⁸ Albert Schweitzer's “thoroughgoing eschatology”³⁹ argued that apocalyptic themes of a future kingdom were central to Jesus'

³³For a useful survey of twentieth-century theology, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992). For an analysis of Protestant Liberalism as a movement, see Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 3 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

³⁴Many locate the origins of realized eschatologies as flowing from a prior commitment to a Hegelian system that grounds religion in history and upholds the resurrection as the ultimate synthesis—illustrating the union of God and Spirit and bringing about the advent of the age of the Absolute Spirit. Indeed, the work of Hegel has been called “the work of a radical immanentist.” This phrase comes from the introduction by George Lichtheim in G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), xxiii. For a useful treatment of Hegel’s influence, and the way his dialectic proved influential across twentieth-century theology, see Grenz and Olson, *20th Century Theology*, 31–39.

³⁵Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 52–57.

³⁶For Harnack and much of the liberal tradition, then, the kingdom is divorced from any eschatological realities and essentially equated with ethics. For a work from a contemporary of Harnack’s that traces how the Liberal tradition ignored apocalyptic realities of the kingdom, see Johannes Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*, ed. Leander E. Keck, trans. Richard Hyde Hiers and David Larrimore Holland (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

³⁷C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 3rd rev. ed. (London: Nisbet, 1936).

³⁸For two articles that provide useful surveys on the debate among German scholars on the kingdom, see (1) Wendell Willis, “The Discovery of the Eschatological Kingdom: Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer” in *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth-Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell Willis (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 1–14 and (2) Richard Hiers, Jr., “Pivotal Reactions to the Eschatological Interpretations: Rudolf Bultmann and C. H. Dodd,” in *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth-Century Interpretation*, ed. Wendell Wills (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 15–33.

³⁹Schweitzer, it should be noted, is building upon the earlier work of Johannes Weiss. For the most significant work in which Weiss lays out his eschatological work, see Weiss, *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*.

message—that Jesus died believing the kingdom was imminent,⁴⁰ that his death would bring it about, but also that he was tragically wrong.⁴¹ Jesus died, and the kingdom never came, Schweitzer argues.⁴² As a result, the church had to make sense of Jesus's death in some other way, and did so by locating the kingdom of God as future.⁴³ In both of these competing visions of the kingdom, though, there is no synthesis of present and future aspects of the kingdom, and both streams operate with anti-supernaturalist approaches to Scripture; as a result there is, understandably, no discussion of how the kingdom of God is related to the Word of God.

Second, the kingdom of God drew focused attention in evangelical circles largely through the work of New Testament theologian George Eldon Ladd, who worked to show the kingdom has an already—not yet tension.⁴⁴ The kingdom of God that is to

⁴⁰ Of the future-oriented nature of the kingdom Schweitzer argued, in the mind of Jesus, “It is present only as a cloud may be said to be present which which throws its shadow upon the earth.” Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Motgomery and F. C. Burkitt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 238.

⁴¹ Schweitzer says famously of Jesus that he “lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution. . . . It refuses to turn, and he throws himself on it. Then it does turn; and it crushes him.” Ibid., 370–71. Graeme Goldsworthy usefully summarizes Schweitzer’s view, arguing that Schweitzer “stressed the influence of apocalyptic on the futurist eschatological views of Jesus. Jesus’ ethical teachings constitute an interim ethic until the imminent kingdom arrives. He dies a disappointed man because the expected kingdom does not come.” Graeme Goldsworthy, “Kingdom of God,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 618.

⁴² Evangelical New Testament theologian Thomas R. Schreiner notes the catastrophic effect on Christian theology, were Schweitzer’s reading of the Gospels to be accurate: “If Schweitzer was correct, it is difficult to know how Jesus’ message of the kingdom relates to us today. It would seem that Jesus’ view stands as a monument to the delusion that God was about to bring in his kingdom and fulfill his promises. Since it did not happen, should we venerate Jesus for his aspirations while realizing that he was profoundly mistaken?” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 69.

⁴³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1985), 51. For his analysis of the kingdom in the early Christian church, see Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery, new ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Ladd was not the first to identify this tension, but is the one who is identified most with developing it. Cullman’s *Christ and Time* represents an earlier work that also proposes an inaugurated eschatology.

come in fullness in the age to come has broken into this present age, giving an actual foretaste of the eschatological salvation to come.⁴⁵ This tension between inauguration and consummation is what the previous generation of German scholars neglected,⁴⁶ and this taxonomy has proved crucial within the life of evangelical theology—and is central to the argument made in this dissertation.⁴⁷

Third, the most significant development in kingdom theology has been the emergence of an evangelical consensus on the nature of the kingdom. One study tracing this development has come from Baptist theologian and ethicist Russell Moore, who highlights the consensus that was achieved on “an understanding of the Kingdom as an inaugurated reality, salvation as holistic and Christological, and the church as an initial manifestation of Kingdom righteousness.”⁴⁸ Moore upholds the kingdom as a central theme across canonical revelation and shows how it provides a framework for a renewed approach to sociopolitical engagement.⁴⁹ The evangelical consensus on the nature of the kingdom of God—as Moore and others have shown—has the potential to inform other

⁴⁵Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 216. See also, George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956).

⁴⁶Ladd continues, “Before the eschatological appearance of God’s Kingdom at the end of the age, God’s Kingdom has become dynamically active among men in Jesus’ person and mission.” Ladd, *The Blessed Hope*, 139.

⁴⁷Stephen Nichols observes, “These developments were not, however, merely owing to Ladd and the Germans. For as Ladd mediated German positions on the kingdom, so too Richard Gaffin mediated Dutch positions for Americans. The collective work of Geerhardus Vos (a Dutch theologian who taught biblical theology in the Princeton) and Herman Ridderbos (a Dutch theologian who taught biblical theology in the Netherlands) stresses redemptive history, all from the center point of Christ’s proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom understood as inaugurated eschatology.” Nichols, “The Kingdoms of God,” 43.

⁴⁸Russell Dwayne Moore, “Kingdom Theology and the American Evangelical Consensus: Emerging Implications for Sociopolitical Engagement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 2.

⁴⁹Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*.

areas of systematic theology.⁵⁰ This dissertation, then, is an intentional development of the kingdom framework Moore posits, examining how the kingdom of God provides a framework that informs biblical hermeneutics and stands as an organizing principle offering a holistic theological vision of the interpretive task.

Fourth, in terms of developments within biblical hermeneutics, the kingdom of God has been central especially within the discipline of biblical theology.⁵¹ An important figure among evangelicals in this area has been Graeme Goldsworthy, who upholds the kingdom “as a hermeneutical grid for the whole of Scripture.” The kingdom must function this way, argues Goldsworthy, “since it is the hermeneutical reference point for the universe and its destiny as Scripture portrays it.”⁵² Goldsworthy has interacted more thoroughly with the kingdom than have others in this field; even still, at the methodological level the primary role the kingdom plays is as the central theme of biblical theology rather than an animating force within hermeneutics. This dissertation therefore seeks to explore precisely how the kingdom functions as a lens through which

⁵⁰In a later work, Moore shows how the kingdom of God can inform ecclesiology at the level of polity, arguing that “Understanding the church as a colony of the Kingdom in the already/not yet framework makes most sense within a Baptist ecclesial framework.” Moore and Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church,” 68. Additionally, an aforementioned dissertation positions itself as an extension of Moore’s work, examining kingdom warfare imagery in biblical theology and systematic theology, showing it to be a central feature in Christology, and having the explanatory power to inform a number of contemporary issues in systematic theology. Bethancourt, “Christ the Warrior King.”

⁵¹Brian Rosner offers a useful definition of biblical theology: “ Biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse [sic] and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.” Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian S. Rosner et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 10.

⁵²Graeme Goldsworthy, “The Kingdom of God as a Hermeneutical Grid,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 14. Interestingly, in the same article, Goldsworthy posits Jesus as a hermeneutical grid: “We break the real nexus between Jesus and the Bible either by concluding that the Scriptures are not about Christ, or by maintaining that the perspectives on the Christ in bold Old and New Testaments are so diverse as to lack any real unity. But, if we conclude that it is true to say that the Scriptures are all about the Christ, then he provides the hermeneutical grid for all of Scripture.” Ibid., 6.

one may best understand both Scripture and its interpretation.⁵³

Fifth, in terms of treatments on hermeneutics close to the one I am proposing, in a recent dissertation David Prince argued for the necessity of Christocentric, kingdom-focused model of expository preaching. In this dissertation, Prince maintains “the unifying theological center of both interpretation and homiletics is the glory of God in Jesus Christ and his kingdom,”⁵⁴ and argues that “any move away from expository preaching or any approach to expository preaching that does not seek to preach Christ from all of the Scripture to be unfaithful to the preaching task and unhealthy for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵⁵ This study stands in agreement with Prince on both the centrality of the kingdom and the necessity of a Christocentric, kingdom-focused model. What makes this dissertation distinct is that whereas Prince’s study seeks to explain *why* one cannot faithfully expose the meaning of a text in sermonic proclamation without understanding it in light of the kingdom, this study seeks to show *what* the kingdom does in transforming one’s understanding of the Bible, the interpreter, and the interpretation of Scripture.

Sixth, and finally, a recent monograph on theological interpretation posited a methodology that is similar to the one used in this dissertation. Scott Swain, in his book *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its*

⁵³Matthew Levering has argued that modern biblical hermeneutics is plagued with a privileging of “historical” approaches but one in which “‘history’ signifies a realm of human autonomy to which theological realities are extrinsic. Instead, Levering argues, “Christian biblical exegesis, in accord with the Christian and biblical understanding of reality, should envision history not only as a linear unfolding of individual moments, but also as an ongoing participation in God’s active providence, both metaphysically and Christologically-pneumatically.” Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 14, 1.

⁵⁴Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 9.

⁵⁵Ibid., 8.

Interpretation, examines the same basic topic I do in this dissertation—namely, “the theological significance of the Bible and biblical interpretation.”⁵⁶ In examining these themes, however, Swain argues that it is a “trinitarian, covenantal context” that serves as the best lens through which one may most rightly view the Bible and its interpretation.⁵⁷ I agree with a great deal of what Swain proposes, but in this study, I have intentionally adopted a similar methodology to show by way of comparison why I believe the kingdom of God to be the most useful grid through which one may understand these themes.

With this context in view, the need for this study exploring the theological relationship between the kingdom of God and biblical hermeneutics can more be seen more readily. To be even more specific, I will explain below the precise ways in which this dissertation will seek to make a number of distinct contributions to the field of biblical hermeneutics.

First, this dissertation has the potential to contribute to the ever-present debate on the doctrine of Scripture. A high view of Scripture has long been one of the “fundamentals” around which evangelical theology unites.⁵⁸ And this study maintains that the kingdom of God is the lens through which one may best appreciate the theological character of the Bible in the context of biblical interpretation. Understanding the role of the Bible in the context of the kingdom and in light of biblical interpretation provides a biblically-grounded framework within which one may incorporate the best of

⁵⁶Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 7.

⁵⁷For another significant volume that posits a Trinitarian basis for biblical hermeneutics—although arguing along slightly different lines—see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*.

⁵⁸For a helpful work on the significance of the doctrine of inerrancy in the context of evangelical theology, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

recent developments in linguistic theory, such as speech-act theory,⁵⁹ while at the same time affirming evangelical theology's high view of Scripture.⁶⁰

Second, this dissertation has the potential to contribute to the discussion on Christian spirituality and the role of Scripture and its interpretation in the life of the Christian. The inauguration of the kingdom in the present age, it will be argued, functions at least in part to cultivate joy and hope in the interpreter and the interpretive process. Additionally, the connection between interpretation and obedience—present everywhere throughout Scripture—has implications for the way in which the interpreter understands the role of virtue in interpretation, and the context of posture and humility in biblical interpretation.⁶¹ Finally, the kingdom of God provides a unique perspective within which the interpreter understands the way in which God communes with the interpreter through the Spirit and in the proclamation of the church in the process of interpretation.

Third, this dissertation has the potential to help shape debates within evangelical biblical hermeneutics. If the kingdom of God is a central organizing feature for biblical hermeneutics—as this dissertation will argue—then it is natural to expect that it will have implications for approaches to biblical hermeneutics that overlook this center. This dissertation will interact with a number of different approaches, showing how a

⁵⁹For a number of seminal works in speech-act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); idem, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For evangelical appropriations, see Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Semantics of Biblical Literature,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 49–104; idem, “God’s Mighty Speech Acts,” in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143–81; Gregg R. Allison, “Speech Act Theory and its Implications for the Doctrine of Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture,” *Philosophia Christi* 18 (1995): 1–23.

⁶⁰For a recent work detailing the contemporary debate on the nature of Scripture, see J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds., *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

⁶¹On the role of humility in biblical interpretation, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 136–39.

kingdom-focused approach often has the potential to affirm the best of much that is already present in these approaches, all the while sharpening its focus and calling it towards Scripture's self-identified central theme.

Methodology

This dissertation argues that biblical hermeneutics has much to gain by viewing the full range of the interpretive task through the lens of the kingdom of God. In analysis of this range, chapters will be devoted to each main aspect of biblical hermeneutics—Scripture, the interpreter of Scripture, and the interpretation of Scripture. Being a theological study, the argument will operate largely by tracing the influence of the kingdom in relation to the traditional loci of systematic theology relevant to each chapter's respective focus. To be more specific, in the chapter on Scripture, this study will examine how the role of Scripture in the context of the kingdom informs the interpretive task and how the kingdom of God informs the doctrine of Scripture in many of its standard categories—namely, the sufficiency, authority, and trustworthiness of Scripture. In the chapter on the biblical interpreter, this study will work through various aspects of soteriology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology to show how the kingdom informs the interpreter in his need of redemption and renewal. In the chapter on the process of biblical interpretation, this study will work through several standard categories within the discipline of biblical hermeneutics to show how the kingdom of God transforms one's understanding of the enterprise of biblical interpretation.

As important as it is to lay out what this study intends to address in depth and detail, it is equally important to highlight a few qualifications about this study in terms of what this dissertation is not seeking to address. First, though this study proceeds from the

idea that the kingdom of God should function as a central organizing principle in biblical hermeneutics, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to defend the centrality of the kingdom as an integrative motif. Second, while dealing with the discipline of biblical hermeneutics, it is not the intention of this dissertation to develop a specific hermeneutical model. Third, as useful as have been many insights from secular interpretive theory on general hermeneutics as well as non-evangelical treatments of biblical hermeneutics, this dissertation is focused on the evangelical biblical hermeneutics and will keep its focus within these parameters. Fourth, though this study will interact with a number of theological disciplines and loci, the intention of this study is not to offer a full-orbed proposal of each or any of these areas. Admittedly, a robust theological analysis of even the theological nature of Scripture, for instance, would itself require a monograph-length study. Instead, the scope of this work is more narrow, seeking to show how the kingdom of God is organically connected to the way one conceives of the Bible, the interpreter, and the process of interpretation in the context of biblical hermeneutics.

At its core, this dissertation is a constructive proposal, examining the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God in the context of biblical interpretation. An exercise in theology, the goal of this dissertation is to highlight these connection points and show where they enrich and inform evangelical theology and biblical hermeneutics. This dissertation will examine opposing arguments, but only as secondary to its primary purpose of establishing the benefits of a kingdom-focused approach. The following proposed outline will sketch the specific way in which I propose to prosecute this argument throughout the study.

Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of kingdom-focused biblical hermeneutics in the context of its emergence from the evangelical consensus on the kingdom of God. It offers the thesis of this study, namely, the argument that the kingdom of God should function as a central organizing principle in the area of biblical hermeneutics as it offers a unified theological vision of the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and interpretation and has the explanatory power to inform and enrich evangelical theology at several key points. Following this, this chapter highlights the uniqueness of the study—showing how, though much work has been done on the nature of the kingdom, the doctrine of Scripture, and the discipline of biblical hermeneutics, this study joins all three so as to show how each are interrelated and enriched by a thoroughgoing interaction with the kingdom of God. Finally this chapter offers a summary of the arguments of each chapter.

Chapter 2 examines the nature of the kingdom in the doctrine of Scripture. It advances an argument along two lines. First, as the Bible is both theological and eschatological, one best understands the Bible’s theological significance in the context of Scripture’s central theme: the kingdom of God. Second, this chapter will trace the ways in which understanding the Word of God in light of the kingdom of God both reinforces and enriches traditional evangelical understandings of the doctrine of Scripture especially with respect to its authority, sufficiency, and trustworthiness of Scripture.

Chapter 3 considers the impact of the kingdom of God on the interpreter of Scripture, standing in need as he is of redemption and renewal. Because both the discipline of hermeneutics and the interpreter of Scripture are marred by sin, the redemption wrought through the victory of the kingdom has distinct implications for how

one approaches the Bible in interpretation. This chapter contends that a proper understanding of the kingdom shapes one's understanding of the impact of sin on the hermeneutic process, the nature of obedience in the interpretation of Scripture, the renewal of the interpreter, and the ecclesial context of interpretation.

Chapter 4 discusses the relationship between the kingdom and the act of interpretation itself. It shows how the centrality of the kingdom reveals the shape and frames our understanding of interpretation, informing and transforming a number of hermeneutical approaches, and providing the lens through which one may best appreciate the gift of God's self-disclosure. The focus on the kingdom has the potential to sharpen the best aspects of a number of evangelical approaches to interpretation. And the promise of the coming kingdom fosters hope in interpretation and cultivates a theologically grounded sensibility within interpretation.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing the arguments of the dissertation and offering possibilities for future study. It summarizes the importance of understanding the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God in the context of biblical interpretation and the ways in which understanding this theological connection enables one to see with greater clarity the roles which the Bible, the interpreter, and the interpretation of Scripture play in the eschatological conquest and triumph of Christ's kingdom.

CHAPTER 2

THE KINGDOM AND THE WORD OF GOD: THE FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

“It is clear that no view of Christ’s person and work which is separated from the context of the Kingdom can claim to reflect a biblical mode of thought,” evangelical theologian David Wells rightly argues.¹ Wells writes in the context of Christology, but a major contention of this study is that the same argument holds true of one’s view of the Bible and its interpretation.² At its foundation, this study seeks to explore the theological relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God as it relates to biblical hermeneutics. It does so in part because the kingdom of God, it will be argued, provides a unique framework within which one may best appreciate the unique interplay between Bible, interpreter, and interpretation.

Such an argument naturally raises a whole host of additional questions, here especially with respect to this chapter’s focus—the Bible as the Word of God. What, for example, does the Bible reveal about a relationship between the kingdom of God and the

¹David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ: A Biblical and Historical Analysis of the Incarnation*, Foundations for Faith (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984), 23. Similarly, Thomas Schreiner adds, “When we speak of the kingdom, inevitably we are introduced to Christology, for Jesus does not speak abstractly about the coming kingdom. He invariably considered his own role as paramount in the eschatological kingdom.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 51.

²On the topic of Christology, though, one recent book on the Bible and its message and interpretation argues that understanding the Bible in light of its whole Bible message will lead one naturally to Christological convictions: “The more deeply we probe the Jewish and OT roots of the Gospel narratives, the more clearly we see that each of the four Evangelists, in their diverse portrayals, identifies Jesus as the embodiment of the God of Israel.” Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 107.

Word of God? What role does the Word of God play in the conquest of the kingdom of God? How is understanding the Bible in light of the kingdom of God useful in terms of understanding the Bible itself? Does not the claim that the Bible should be understood in light of the kingdom of God force a synthetic theological category over the Bible,³ thus robbing Scripture of its ability to be understood intertextually and on its own terms?⁴ An analysis of the relationship of the kingdom of God to the Word of God will help answer these questions and others, as well as establish a foundation from which one may better understand the organic theological relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and the interpretation of Scripture.

This chapter will argue that there exists a close theological relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God, which carries with it significant implications for how one understands the role of Scripture in the divine economy and constructs a doctrine of Scripture. To do so, this chapter will advance along three basic steps. First, it will briefly trace the story of the kingdom across Scripture so as to establish the overarching framework from which this study will proceed and highlight the way in which the concept of the kingdom of God permeates Scripture's storyline. Second, it will explore the relationship between God's words and his saving activity, so as to highlight the function of the Word of God within the ever-unfolding expansion of the kingdom of God. Third, it will show how understanding the Word of God in light of

³For an analysis of the differences between intertextual and extratextual approaches to Scripture, see Stephen J. Wellum, "Postconservatism, Biblical Authority, and Recent Proposals for Re-Doing Evangelical Theology: A Critical Analysis," in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 184–85.

⁴For a survey of how "intertextuality" has developed along theoretical lines in literary theory and biblical studies, see Timothy Ward, "The Diversity and Sufficiency of Scripture," in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 197–202.

the kingdom of God provides a valuable lens through which one may develop and reinforce various aspects of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.⁵

At the outset of this chapter, the reader should keep in mind a few qualifications. First, this chapter does not provide a comprehensive treatment of the kingdom theme in Scripture.⁶ Instead, it surveys relevant biblical material in order to provide an appropriate context and backdrop for its central argument. Second, this chapter does not formulate a full-orbed doctrine of Scripture.⁷ Instead, it shows how an evangelical doctrine of Scripture stands to gain by viewing traditional aspects and attributes of Scripture through a kingdom lens.⁸ Third, and flowing from the previous point, this study presupposes that systematic theology may serve as a tool with which one may read Scripture more faithfully.⁹ After all, if systematic theology is “the application

⁵This study proceeds with the same basic conviction expressed by New Testament theologian G. K. Beale, who argues, “Our understanding of most of the traditional doctrines is not so much changed as radically enriched by seeing them through end-times lenses.” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 18.

⁶For such, a useful starting point is Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981). For a more recent and more thorough analysis, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*. Beale’s overriding goal is to show how “the major theological ideas in the NT gain their fullest meaning within the framework of this overriding plotline thrust of the new creation and kingdom and are but facets of it.” Ibid., 23.

⁷For a number of recent works formulating a doctrine of Scripture, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010); Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

⁸More will be said along these lines later in the chapter, but the move toward understanding Scripture in light of other doctrinal loci or in light of other doctrinal themes is a move made by several recent works, including John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, Current Issues in Theology 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Ward, *Words of Life*. I point these works out not to endorse the conclusions of these moves, but simply to show that the exercise itself is not without precedent.

⁹Defining systematic theology, John Murray adds, “The task of systematic theology is to set forth in orderly and coherent manner the truth respecting God and his relations to men and the world. This truth is derived from the data of revelation, and revelation comprises all those media by which God makes Himself and His will known to us men.” John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray: Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 4:1.

of God’s Word by persons to all areas of life,”¹⁰ then this includes our approach to the Bible and its interpretation.¹¹

The Word and the Progression of the Kingdom

In a recent work on the authority of Scripture, New Testament scholar N. T. Wright lamented the fact that “few if any of the systematic or philosophical theologians of the last couple of generations have written serious works on scripture itself; that is, on what the text actually says.”¹² In reference to one recent work in particular, Wright pointed out how “one would never have known, from reading this book, anything at all about what the Bible contains,” and suggests that since the particular author in reference was advancing a thesis “that scripture is the central source for all Christian thinking, it might have been appropriate . . . to base this contention, too, on scripture itself.”¹³ Certainly, few books can be exhaustive on every theme they address, but the point is well taken nonetheless.¹⁴

¹⁰John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 75. For a current discussion of the nature of systematic theology, see John Webster, “Principles of Systematic Theology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 1 (2009): 56–71. For a useful summary of the interrelationship between biblical and systematic theology, see D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. Brian Rosner et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 89–104.

¹¹Along similar lines, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum argue that systematic theology includes “unpacking the biblical story line and letting the Bible, on its own terms, describe for us how God’s plan unfolds, centered in Christ.” This framework, in turn, becomes the “interpretive matrix” by which we interpret the world. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 35.

¹²N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 12.

¹³Ibid., 12–13.

¹⁴Ironically, in a review of Wright’s own book from which the above quote is drawn, D. A. Carson critiques Wright along somewhat similar lines. Wright, Carson charges, “pays a lot of attention to a handful of biblical expressions, and entirely ignores others, thus giving the impression that he has summarized biblical teaching on how the Bible or ‘the word of the Lord’ or related expressions are to be viewed, when in reality the evidence is so selective it is mildly distorting.” D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, ed. Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 296.

Even beyond avoiding the trap of speaking of much theology and little Bible, there is good reason for tracing the contours of the kingdom of God as revealed across Scripture for the purposes of this study. First, as others have pointed out from the perspective of evangelical theology, the Bible itself is a unified story¹⁵—one that coheres around God’s purpose of redemption and renewal¹⁶ in the context of the kingdom of God.¹⁷ This being the case, examining the architectonic kingdom structure of biblical revelation will help cast the backdrop against which this study’s argument will be seen.¹⁸ Second, the kingdom of God itself—as the reign of God through his human mediator-king—is a reign that is established and extended across time in human history, and one sees the record of this conquest in Scripture itself.¹⁹ “The kingdom, in other words, has a

¹⁵Wright argues that “story” is indeed the primary way one ought to think of Scripture. “Most of its constituent parts, and all of it when part together . . . can best be described as *story*.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 24. In evaluation, Carson sees this argument as both a “great strength” of Wright’s work, but also argues, “The exclusiveness of this category to explain how the Bible hangs together rings gentle warning bells.” Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 296.

¹⁶To speak of Scripture not only as story but as a *unified* story is to speak in terms of metanarratives, which have been roundly criticized as oppressive and illegitimate by postmodern theorists. Indeed, one scholar has defined postmodernity as “incredulity toward metanarratives.” Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv. A number of recent works have defended an understanding of Scripture as unified story (or metanarrative), particularly on the grounds that the Bible is unique and not subject to the same criticisms levied against other metanarratives. For a number of these works, see Richard Bauckham, “Reading Scripture as Coherent Story,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 38–53; James K. A. Smith, “Little Story about Metanarratives: Lyotard, Religion, and Postmodernism Revisited,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 353–68; idem, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 62–66.

¹⁷Russell Moore makes this point in an explication of a doctrine of eschatology: “Perhaps clearer than other set of doctrines, eschatology reminds us that the Bible is one coherent story, with one Author and one theme. The storyline begins in an innocent garden and ends in a glorious garden city, with a bloody and violent war in between. All along the way the Scripture speaks of God’s purpose to build a Kingdom for his anointed incarnate Son as the firstborn among many brothers.” Russell D. Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 858.

¹⁸The language of architectonic structure is drawn from David C. Steinmetz, “Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 55.

¹⁹Again, I allude to the definition of the kingdom of God offered by Russell Moore, which serves as the operating definition for this study, positing the kingdom of God as “the reign of God through

history,” notes Scott Swain, and “in order to grasp the role of the Word of God within the kingdom of God . . . it is necessary to trace the progressive communication of God’s word in history.”²⁰ As it pertains to this study, then, examining the way the kingdom of God is presented across canonical revelation—even if only in sketch form—will allow one to see more clearly how Scripture functions in the economy of God’s kingdom conquest, which in turn has implications for how one formulates a doctrine of Scripture and approach the Bible in interpretation.

The Old Testament

Though the term “kingdom of God” is nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament, its presence permeates the pages of Israel’s story. Indeed, one sees the animating drive that unites the Old Testament is hope for the coming of a messianic, eschatological kingdom and its blessings.²¹ This kingdom hope is established first in creation, and continues through the patriarchs and prophets, pervasive throughout such that one Old Testament scholar—analyzing the theological message behind the shape and structure of the Old Testament—concluded, “The messianic thrust of the OT was the whole reason the books of the Hebrew Bible were written.”²² How, though, is this kingdom theme revealed across time throughout the pages of Scripture?

his human mediator-king over a world in submission to his righteous rule.” Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 862.

²⁰Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 18.

²¹Indeed, Jim Hamilton argues that “from start to finish, the OT is a messianic document, written from a messianic perspective in order to provoke and sustain messianic hope.” James Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30.

²²John Sailhamer, “The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2003): 23.

Kingdom in creation. The opening chapters of Scripture themselves reveal aspects of the nature of the kingdom of God. The first of these is the sheer kingly sovereignty of God in the act of creation. One finds the sovereignty and kingship of God as the One who calls the universe into existence and takes delight in his creation (Gen 1:3). The authority of God as king in creation is undisputed; he is the one who regulates the rise and fall of the sun and changing of the seasons (Gen 1:14-19), the one with the authority to name (Gen 1:3), to dispense blessing (Gen 1:22), and even to declare the inherit goodness of his creation (Gen 1:31).

This kingly rule, Scripture reveals, leads to another aspect of the kingdom seen in creation—the establishing of humanity as God’s earthly viceregent.²³ God grants authority to man to rule “over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen 1:26). This authority is grounded in the fact that God created man “in the image of God” (Gen 1:27).²⁴ Hence, Old Testament theologian Peter Gentry rightly notes, “As servant-king and son of God humanity will mediate God’s rule to the creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and the earth on the

²³For a thorough treatment on the issue viceregency and the establishment of the kingdom, see Dan G. McCartney, “*Ecce Homo*: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 1–21. Jeremy Treat offers a useful summary of the significance of human viceregency: “Human viceregency entails three significant points. First, God the creator-king reigns *over* all his creatures, but he also reigns *through* his image-bearing servant-kings. . . . Second, the relationship between the divine king and the human servant-kings is a *covenant*. The covenantal relational aspect of the kingdom provides the proper context for understanding God’s kingship. Third, the scope of God’s eschatological kingdom is as wide as creation, but the focus is on his people. In other words, while the kingdom of God captures the comprehensive nature of God’s work, it still maintains the special place of humanity.” Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 42.

²⁴For a classic evangelical treatment on the *imago Dei*, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

other. Hence the concept of the kingdom of God is found on the first page of Scripture.”²⁵

The mediated rule of God in humanity itself presupposes an additional aspect of the kingdom seen in creation—relationship with God. One sees God in the creation account establishing a relationship with humanity: blessing man (Gen 1:28), preparing for him a land and a suitable helper (Gen 2:15-16), and communicating with him through verbal instruction and commands designed to instruct, warn, and mediate blessing (2:16-17).²⁶ As Swain notes, “The Sovereign Creator does not merely reveal himself to Adam indirectly through his work in creation (cf. Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:20). He also condescends to communicate with him verbally, in a direct and interpersonal manner.”²⁷ Goldsworthy similarly highlights the relational aspect of the kingdom seen in the opening chapters of Genesis: “The focus on the kingdom of God is on the relationships between God and his people. Man is subject to God, while the rest of creation is subject to man and exists for his benefit. . . . This basic understanding of the kingdom is never changed in Scripture.”²⁸

In all these ways, on display in Eden is what Graeme Goldsworthy calls “the pattern of the kingdom,”²⁹ defined simply as “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.”³⁰ Adam, living in relational fellowship with God and wielding God-mediated

²⁵Peter J. Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 32.

²⁶Timothy Ward notes, “God has established a relationship between himself and Adam and Eve in part by means of command (‘you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil’) and a threatened consequence if the command is disobeyed (‘for when you eat of it you will certainly die,’ Gen 2:17). These words also imply a positive promise: the blessings of life in the garden will continue to flow to humanity if they obey God’s command.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 26.

²⁷Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 19.

²⁸Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 95.

²⁹Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 99.

³⁰Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 60. Elsewhere, Goldsworthy elaborates more fully on this pattern: “The pattern of the kingdom of God is this: God establishes a perfect creation that he loves and over which he rules. The highest honor is given to mankind as the only part of creation made in God’s

authority as he exercises dominion over the land and extends God's glory to the ends of the earth, is reflecting God's own purpose for creation.³¹ Thus, in the opening salvo of Scripture the primeval couple show in miniature and in part a basic template for what the kingdom of God will look like consummated in Christ.³²

The vision of the kingdom derived from creation, though, is incomplete apart from its spoiling seen in the fall. Succumbing to the temptation of the serpent in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-6), Adam and Eve commit treason against God's authority and set themselves against the rule of their King.³³ In doing so, they violate the terms of their relationship with God, blight their viceregency,³⁴ alienate themselves from God,³⁵ and introduce conflict between God and man.³⁶ God curses the

image. The kingdom means that everything in creation relates perfectly, that is, as God intends it should, to everything else and to God himself." Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 99.

³¹For a helpful treatment of the dominion mandate in light of human viceregency, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003).

³²Beale notes how even prior to the fall the primal couple exist in "a condition that is to be brought to eschatological completion by God escalating the conditions and blessings of the prefill state into a permanent, indestructible creation . . . the image of God in which Adam and Eve were created contained an eschatological latency that was to be actualized." Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 89.

³³Russell Moore elaborates on the treachery of the fall's treason: "When Eve, and then Adam, turned from the word of God to believing the word of Satan, they acted as though Satan could be the guarantor of their exaltation. They worshiped him. The nihilism of the fall wasn't simply that the primeval couple ate from the wrong tree. They worshiped the wrong God and thus attacked the entire structure of the divine economy." Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 140.

³⁴McCartney summarizes, "God's rule on earth was, in the original order of creation, accomplished through the agency of man's viceregency. When man fell, he spoiled his viceregency; man was cast out of the garden, and the earth was no longer compliant in subjection to him." McCartney, "Ecce Homo," 3.

³⁵Donald Bloesch is right to point out that "sin, in the biblical perspective, is both an act and a state. It entails separation from God as well as deliberate violation of his will." Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 1:93.

³⁶For a treatment of the conflict theme of Scripture in line with this study's affirmation of the centrality of the kingdom of God, see Phillip Ross Bethancourt, "Christ the Warrior King: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Analysis of the Divine Warrior Theme in Christology" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 55–200.

primal couple (Gen 3:16-10)³⁷ and expels them from Eden, God's kingdom throne room (Gen 3:23-24).³⁸ Beyond the personal implications for Adam and Eve flowing from this revolt and judgment, the Adamic fall “is cosmic in its extent,” notes Russell Moore, “resulting in a disruption of the natural order, a degradation of the animal creation, a frustration of human labor, spiritual alienation from God, a conflict between the human and demonic realms, disharmony between the sexes, and a bloody reign of death extending eastward from Eden (Gen 3:14-23).”³⁹

Against the bleakness of this judgment, though, there is seen in creation a future hope—the kingdom promise of the *protoevangelium*, that another seed of woman would come and crush the head of the wicked serpent (Gen 3:15). Hence, in creation one sees the introduction of kingdom hope,⁴⁰ a hint of a restored viceregency, and the imagery of a warrior king who would trample the Satanic powers underfoot.⁴¹

³⁷The effects of Adam’s sin extend to all his progeny, though the exact relationship of Adam’s sin and those of his descendants is a debated point. The NT draws a connection between Adam and his progeny explicitly (Rom 5:12). In Adam, possessing all of humanity “in his loins” at the moment of the fall, in some sense all human being sins in Adam—in the same way the NT says Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while “still in the loins of his ancestor [Abraham]” (Heb 7:10). Not only that, but Paul also speaks of Adam as man’s representative (1 Cor 15:22). For representative works stressing the natural headship of Adam, see W. G. T Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 255–68; Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium and Commonplace-Book Designed for the Use of Theological Students* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland, 1907), 619–29; Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 651–56. For representative works stressing the federal headship of Adam, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 242–43; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 2:51–64; John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 93. Murray, though, does allow for aspects of natural headship as well. For a useful sketch on the differing emphases in each camp, see Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 194–201.

³⁸On Eden as kingdom throne room, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 62.

³⁹Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 859.

⁴⁰Beale notes, “Death comes in an inaugurated manner: first the couple are separated from God, suggesting the beginning of spiritual death, which would be followed at a later point by physical death. The promise in Gen 3:15 of the seed of the woman who would decisively defeat the serpent likely entails also an implicit reversal of his work that introduced death.” Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 228.

⁴¹Hence, Gregory Boyd adds, “It is clear that in the understanding of the New Testament, Christ came to earth primarily to accomplish what this interpretation of Genesis 3:15 proclaims: ‘to destroy

Accordingly, James Hamilton is right to locate a messianic kingdom hope in the promise of judgment against the serpent: “from the moment God uttered his judgment against the serpent, the seed of the woman (the collective of those who trust in God) were hoping for *the seed of the woman* (the man who would achieve the ultimate victory over the serpent).”⁴²

Kingdom in Israel’s history. In the lives and records of the patriarchs,⁴³ these same themes are picked up throughout, while others grow organically from them.⁴⁴ The sovereignty of God, for example, and his rule over the created order is everywhere assumed and often asserted, particularly by David (cf. Pss 22:28; 33:6-9). But these themes are often particularized through the lens of *covenant*. So foundational to Israel’s story are God’s covenant promises, Gentry and Wellum argue that the themes of kingdom and covenant are conjoined, and that “it is primarily through the biblical covenants viewed diachronically that we learn how the saving reign of God comes to the world.”⁴⁵

Viewing these covenants—and with them Israel’s history—across the canon in such a manner one sees that God often funnels his personal and cosmic kingdom

the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:18). . . . On the cross the serpent struck the “heel of Christ . . . but it was Christ who ultimately crushed the head of the serpent.” Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 242.

⁴²Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman,” 43.

⁴³This phrase “kingdom in Israel’s history” is adopted from Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 67.

⁴⁴OT scholar Tremper Longman III points out how “the account of the Fall demonstrates a pattern that will be repeated in the four stories that follow in Genesis 4-11 (Cain and Abel, the sons of God and the daughters of men, the flood, the tower of Babel). The pattern narrates (1) a sin, followed by (2) a judgment speech of God. However, before (4) God executes the judgment, he (3) gives them a token of his grace.” Tremper Longman, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 114. Additionally, Beale argues that each of the covenants are themselves amplifications of God’s mandate to Adam in Gen 1:28, see Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 57.

⁴⁵Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 602.

purposes through these covenantal promises and relationships.⁴⁶ Against the backdrop of the *Noahic* covenant is the wreckage left in Adam's wake—East of Eden mankind sprints headlong into degradation, seen in murder and violence (Gen 4:8, 24; 6:11), sexual depravity (Gen 6:2), and unrepentant wickedness (Gen 6:5). In the Noahic narrative, God judges this corruption by wiping out every living creature in a cataclysmic flood—all except for one, Noah, with whom God sets himself in covenant relationship, sparing him and his progeny from watery judgment and through him refilling the earth (Gen 6:9, 18; 9:1-4, 8-17).⁴⁷ In so doing, God embeds a vision of the salvation of God's remnant in a new creation within the hope of the Old Testament kingdom promises.⁴⁸ And yet, while creation is reset, man is still haunted by Adam's lapsarian wreckage, and immediately following deliverance from the flood one finds still present the wickedness that gave rise to God's watery judgment (Gen 9:20-25; 11:1-9).⁴⁹

In the *Abrahamic* narrative, God reiterates his intentions to bring about a kingdom despite man's wickedness, and more than that reveals the line through which

⁴⁶Summarizing the cosmic significance of the Noahic covenant, Paul Williamson observes, “Given the Noahic covenant provides the biblical-theological framework within which all subsequent divine-human covenants operate, its universal scope is undoubtedly significant. As suggested by allusions to Genesis 1 noted above, the universal scope of this covenant implies that blessing for which humanity had been created and the creation had now been preserved will ultimately encompass not just one people or nation, but rather the whole earth.” Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 68.

⁴⁷Gentry and Wellum argue that in receiving the same mandate as did Adam (“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” [Gen 9:1; cf. 1:28]), Noah himself is functioning as a New Adam. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 163–65.

⁴⁸Bruce Waltke observes the organic link between the creation and flood narratives which reinforce the imagery of a new creation seen in the way the flood narrative is made up of seven phases which echo the creation account itself. Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 128–29.

⁴⁹Waltke comments along these same lines: “The sin of Noah sheds light on the human plight. O... ‘What if we started over? What if we expunged history and wiped the slate clean?’ The account of Noah puts the lie to that solution.” Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 298.

these blessings will come.⁵⁰ Scott Swain summarizes the contours of the Abrahamic covenant well:

In his sovereign initiative and undeserved kindness (cf. Josh 24:2), God promises to Abraham the fulfillment of his original kingdom purpose. God calls Abraham out of Ur to a land yet to be seen (place). He promises to make him a blessing to the nations and to grant him a multitude of offspring (people), from among whom kings also will arise (Gen 17:6; cf. 49:10). God solemnly commits himself by oath to Abraham (Gen 15:7-21) and his descendants and commands them to keep his ways (Gen 17:1).⁵¹

In the content of the covenant with Abraham, then, the material shape of the kingdom comes into sharper focus—involving ruling authority, covenant fellowship, and land inheritance.⁵² More than that, Abraham leads his kindred out from captivity (Gen 14:14-16) and receives blessing from the priest-king of Salem, Melchizedek (Gen 14:19-20). In doing so, he reinforces the dual imagery of the conquering priest-king who will reign over God’s kingdom. More still, the forward-looking nature of faith for those who will inherit the kingdom is seen as Abraham obeys God and lifts the knife to sacrifice his only son—believing that not even death could not terminate God’s promises, for the Sovereign King could raise the promised son from the dead (Gen 22:1-19; Heb 11:17-19).⁵³ In

⁵⁰N. T. Wright is insightful on the theological significance of the Abrahamic covenant: “Abraham emerges within the structure of Genesis as the answer to the plight of all humankind. The line of disaster and of the ‘curse,’ from Adam, through Cain, through the Flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says, ‘in you all the families of the Earth shall be blessed.’” N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 262.

⁵¹Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 27.

⁵²Wright astutely points out the role of Abraham as a new Adam, but traces lines of continuity and discontinuity between the creation and Abraham narratives: “At key moments—Abraham’s call, his circumcision, the offering of Isaac, the transition from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob, and in the sojourn to Egypt—the narrative quietly makes the point that Abraham and his family inherit, in a measure, the role of Adam and Eve. The differences are not, however, insignificant. . . . The command (‘be fruitful’) has tuned into a promise (‘I will make you fruitful’). . . . And most importantly, possession of the land of Canaan, and supremacy over enemies, has taken the place of the dominion over nature given in [Gen]1:28.” N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 22-23.

⁵³Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 861.

covenant with Abraham, God's kingdom purposes march on. In short, "Abraham's children are God's true humanity, and their homeland is the new Eden."⁵⁴

In the *Mosaic* narrative, God's kingdom purposes take shape in a more corporate form—in the life of the nation of Israel.⁵⁵ The covenant God establishes with Israel through Moses is set within the context of God's deliverance of his people from the land of Egypt (Exod 1-14), in line with the promise made to Abraham (Gen 15:13-14). God the conquering king delivers his people from the clutches of Pharaoh's tyranny—bringing judgment on the Egyptian nation that set themselves against God's chosen people, and brings Israel safely through the watery judgment like he did their father Noah. At Sinai, God builds on his covenant promises by disclosing himself and his purposes further in the giving of the law to Israel and the establishment of them as a kingdom of priests.⁵⁶ In so doing, God makes known the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience to this nation Israel—one declared to be God's son (Exod 4:22-23). Gentry and Wellum are helpful in summarizing the importance and purpose of the Mosaic covenant, noting that Israel is designed now to function as "to make the ways of God known to the nations and also to bring the nations into a right relationship to God. Israel will display to the rest of the world within its covenant community the kind of

⁵⁴Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 23.

⁵⁵Eugene Merrill notes the significance of the Mosaic covenant, in that through it, "the people became a nation founded on a covenant that both constituted them as such and provided the mechanism by which they could live out the privileges and responsibilities inherent in a new relationship with the Lord." Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 269.

⁵⁶Merrill notes the theological implications of the Mosaic covenant as related to Israel declared to be a kingdom of priests: "By this instrument [the covenant] Yahweh confirmed his word of redeeming his vassal people from the overlordship of Egypt by making them his own servants, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod 19:6). Their role henceforth would be to mediate or intercede as priests between the holy God and the wayward nations of the world, with the end in view not only of declaring his salvation, but providing the human channel in and through whom that salvation would be effected." Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 80.

relations first to God and then to one another and to the physical world that God intended originally for all of humanity.”⁵⁷ And yet even before Moses can descend the mountain, the people of Israel have already abandoned their God for a golden calf (Exod 32:1-6).

In the years preceding the *Davidic* narrative, Israel often finds itself languishing in cycles of rebellion and deliverance—which is in turn often cast within the context of kingship. As Moore observes, “The Old Testament demonstrates graphically the lack of restraint and moral chaos that comes with no kingship (the Book of Judges), with wicked or inept kings (Saul, the narratives of 1 and 2 Kings), and with tyrannical foreign dictatorship (the Assyrians and the Babylonians).”⁵⁸ From here, the focus on the corporate life of Israel is concentrated on the life of her king.⁵⁹ The warrior-shepherd David is anointed by God as king over Israel (2 Sam 5:3) and a covenant is made with him promising that God will establish an everlasting kingdom through David (2 Sam 7:13).⁶⁰ To this Davidic Son, God will be to him a father (2 Sam 7:14), and through his victorious and everlasting reign Israel will receive rest from its enemies (2 Sam 7:8-11).⁶¹ And yet, much of the remainder of the Old Testament chronicles the ultimate failure of Israel’s kings. David’s kingdom is desecrated by his own defiance—an adulterous

⁵⁷Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 303.

⁵⁸Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 863.

⁵⁹Gentry and Wellum summarize, “The covenant with David institutes a kingship where the rule of God is established among his people since the king is to function as covenant administrator. What God planned for the nation as a whole will now be implemented through the king and his leadership.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 433.

⁶⁰Some dispute the reality of a Davidic covenant *per se* in that the word for covenant itself is not used in 2 Sam 7. The characteristics of a covenant are present, however, and other texts explicitly refer to the promises to David as a covenant (2 Sam 23:5; Jer 33:21; Ps 89; and 2 Chr 13:5). Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 393.

⁶¹McCartney notes, “In the Davidic theocracy, a typological and imperfect human viceregency was reinstated as partial fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. The king of Israel was anointed on Zion as the son of God (Ps 2:7; 89:27f). In spite of the imperfection of Israel’s kingship, it reminded God’s people

relationship with Bathsheba, and the assassination of her husband (2 Sam 11:1-21). Solomon reigns victoriously “for one brief shining moment,”⁶² but he too falls prey to sexual sin and turns away from God (1 Kgs 11:1-8). Russell Moore correctly concludes, “The whole history of Israel then is one of failing kings, and a divided, then vanquished kingdom.”⁶³

Kingdom in the prophets. In the ministries of the *prophets*, Swain notes, “God’s prophets prosecute the terms of the Mosaic Covenant against Israel and her kings in poetic word and parabolic act.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, one sees throughout the prophetic writings a driving emphasis on the kingdom of God. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes, though prophets existed prior to the decline of the nation of Israel, “Once the decline of the nation begins, a new perspective emerges. In part, the prophets continue to point to Israel’s failure to keep the covenant and threaten the judgment of God upon their sin. But there is also the recognition that Israel is incapable of true repentance, and that God must do a new work of salvation.”⁶⁵

The framework of the kingdom, then, is the vehicle that carries along the prophetic message. The structure of the covenants as outlined in the section above are crucial for understanding the progression of God’s promises, but the covenants

of the proper eschatological state of affairs, and it pointed toward a future when David’s greater Son would rule a perfect kingdom as God’s viceregent.” McCartney, “*Ecce Homo*,” 3.

⁶²Moore sketches the victorious reign of Solomon, seen in his constructing a majestic temple (2 Chr 3), receiving rest over his enemies (1 Kgs 8:56), in the anointing of the Spirit (1 Chr 29:22-25), and seeing nations stream into the City of the Great King (1 Kgs 2-10). Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 863.

⁶³Ibid. On the failure of Israel and her kings, see also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 74–89.

⁶⁴Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 30.

⁶⁵Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 184.

themselves all look forward to the kingdom—which the prophets continue to trace throughout their messages of judgment and hope.⁶⁶ At the forefront of the prophetic message stands the severity of Israel’s transgressions—not simply moral failures but rebellion against the Sovereign King (Amos 9:7; Dan 4:17; Jer 46:18) who has placed himself in covenant with Israel, only to be met time and again with rebelliousness, idolatry, and stiff-necked defiance resulting in God’s judgment (Isa 1:1-31; Amos 4:6-13; Hos 9:1-17).⁶⁷ “The faithful city,” laments Isaiah, “has become a whore” (Isa 1:21; cf. Ezek 16:1-58).

Even still, the prophetic message looks forward—with hopefulness of the kingdom’s restoration and a conquering king.⁶⁸ Isaiah foretells of the day in which the stump of Jesse will be filled with the Spirit and vanquish the enemies of God (Isa 11:1-5; 42:1-2; 61:1). This Spirit-anointed one will come forward as a king, extending his rule to the ends of the earth as Adam was commanded to do in Eden (Mic 5:1-5; Zech 9:9-10). Not only that, but this same Spirit will be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:29-32).⁶⁹ As a result of this kingly dominion, Israel is called to rejoice—for God’s everlasting covenant of peace will not be forgotten (Ezek 16:60; Dan 7:14); God’s people will return from

⁶⁶On this point, see especially Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 81–84.

⁶⁷On the need for the new covenant, Bruce Waltke notes, “The Mosaic covenant was doomed to failure from the start, as foreseen by Moses (Deut 30:1-3) and Joshua (Josh 24:14-27).” Such is seen also by the fact, Waltke argues, that the covenant had to be ratified repeatedly flowing from Israel’s disobedience. Bruce Waltke, “The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament: The Covenants,” ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 90.

⁶⁸As J. Richard Middleton notes, “After Samson, the book of Judges portrays the nation devolving into bloody intertribal violence (chaps. 17-21), when everyone did what was right in their own eyes (17:6; 21:25). In sum, life has again regressed to the preflood situation, when violence filled the earth. The text, however, teases the reader with the repeated comment, ‘in those days there was no king in Israel’ (18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Does this mean that a king would solve their problems?” J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 65.

⁶⁹Moore notes that this text “hints at the head/body relationship between the Christ and his people.” Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 863.

exile (Isa 14:1-2), “posses the nations” (Isa 54:3), dwell in a new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:22; Isa 43:18-19), and rest in God’s covenant promise (Isa 55:1-5; 59:21).

Beyond the hope of the kingdom seen in the prophets, Moore shows also how the prophetic message emphasizes the way in which the covenants themselves coalesce around the restoration of God’s kingdom:

The covenants picture their fulfillment not just in terms of inheritance blessings, but also in terms of a restoration of Eden (Ezek 36:33-36, 37:22-23), the building of a glorious Temple (2 Sam 7:13; Ezek 40:1-47:12), the return of a remnant from exile (Isa 11:12-16), and the construction of a holy city of Zion in which Yahweh dwells with his people in splendor (Ps 48:1-14, 74:2; Isa 18:7; Lam 5:17-22; Ezek 48:30-35). The covenants will come to their goal when Israel is judged for sin, raised from the dead, and anointed with the Spirit of Yahweh—a public act in the face of the hostile nations (Ezek 20:21, 35-49, 37:11-27). These eschatological covenant promises are then inherently eschatological and messianic—a truth seen in the fact that the patriarchs themselves died and rotted away without seeing the realization of the promises (Heb 11:13-16).⁷⁰

More than anything, perhaps, the kingdom of God is seen in Jeremiah’s explicit promise of a “new covenant.” “The day is coming,” foretells the prophet Jeremiah, when “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:31, 33). In doing so, covenant fellowship will be restored by a new David, a “son of man” (Dan 7:14),⁷¹ resulting in a new people, in a new creation, in an everlasting kingdom.⁷²

⁷⁰Ibid., 861-62.

⁷¹McCartney traces the messianic overtones of the “son of man” language in Dan 7: “Why is this figure in Daniel 7 called ‘one like a son of man’? Because he stands in contrasts to the *beasts* mentioned earlier in the chapter. There is already a hint of deity, since he comes on the clouds, like YHWH in Ps 68:4, and the ‘like’ indicates that this figure has human attributes, just as ‘like a son of God’ in Dan 3:25 has divine attributes.” McCartney, “*Ecce Homo*,” 6.

⁷²Wellum and Gentry helpfully outline the role of the prophets in relation to the kingdom of God: “In the Old Testament, these promises, hopes, and expectations are picked up, proclaimed, and announced by the prophets. Through the prophets, God announces hope for the nation of Israel and for this poor, lost world. The prophets who proclaim an overall pattern of renewal do so by recapitulating the past history of redemption and projecting it into the future, when the Lord comes to save his people through a new exodus, a new Jerusalem, a new Davidic king to rule in a glorious and eternal kingdom.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 595.

The New Testament

Across the Old Testament, one sees the kingdom of God as the primary strand that weaves the biblical storyline together.⁷³ Indeed, G. K. Beale argues, “The Old Testament is the story of God, who progressively reestablishes his new-creational kingdom.”⁷⁴ That the kingdom God is central to the New Testament’s witness is evident simply from the pervasive use of the term itself—as “kingdom” or “kingdom of God”⁷⁵ is used explicitly 224 times across the New Testament.⁷⁶ Beyond usage of the term itself, foundational to this kingdom are themes running throughout the Old Testament—including kingship, dominion, rule mediated through a human viceregent, a return from exile into land, rest, and a restoration of Eden brought about in a new creation. Across the New Testament, these themes coalesce around Jesus—who brings both the inauguration and the consummation of the kingdom of God.

The inauguration of the kingdom. At the dawn of the era recorded in the New Testament, readers of the Hebrew Scriptures found themselves in the midst of a “story in search of a conclusion.”⁷⁷ Few, though, would have anticipated this story’s grand conclusion to arise from a Middle Eastern backwater. And yet it is Jesus of Nazareth in whom the kingdom dawns, the New Testament reveals. Though his

⁷³Beale uses this same strand-thread language, “strand of the biblical storyline thread,” as opposed to “central” or “defining theme” in arguing for the primacy of the new-creational kingdom framework of canonical revelation. Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 87.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵For a useful study on kingdom language in the Gospel of Matthew, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

⁷⁶For a useful breakdown of where each of these terms is used across the NT books, see Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation,” in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 99–100.

⁷⁷Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 217.

conception was shrouded in whispers of scandal (Matt 1:18-19) and his birthplace lacking any discernable splendor (Luke 2:7), the one born to Joseph and Mary was proclaimed King: born in the city of David, he is declared to be the one who would inherit David's throne and reign as "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32-33). Thus, the kingly status of Jesus is thrust upon readers of the New Testament immediately and in no uncertain terms. Matthew and Luke take pains to establish his descent from Abraham and David (Matt 1:1ff.; Luke 3:23-28); Joseph is instructed to name the child Jesus, for he comes as king to "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:22) and to personify the meaning of his name—"God with us" (Matt 1:23); Zechariah prophesies of the coming king who would be "a horn of salvation for us" (Luke 1:69); Mary praises God for this birth which will bring down thrones (Luke 1:55); Herod is told of this one born in David's city—one who is "king of the Jews" (Matt 2:2)—and lashes out in fury;⁷⁸ and God himself anoints Jesus at his baptism with the Holy Spirit in a moment of kingly coronation⁷⁹ and declares him to be the royal Son of God (Mark 1:9-11).⁸⁰

The Gospel narratives move almost immediately from coronation to conflict, moving from birth narratives and baptism to wilderness temptations and public ministry

⁷⁸Moore adds, "Like Israel under pagan rule, he escapes from a baby-murdering tyrant, and is brought out of Egypt. 'Out of Egypt, I have called my son,' says Hosea, referencing the exodus of God's 'son' Israel from Egypt, and yet Matthew applies this prophetically to the young Jesus (Matt 2:15; Hosea 11:1)." Moore, "Personal and Cosmic Eschatology," 864.

⁷⁹Treat explores the linkage between Jesus' kingship and his baptism: "Jesus' baptism is his public anointing to the kingship. Jesus is declared to be God's beloved Son, the anointed one of Psalm 2. Although his rule will be misunderstood, rejected, and even hidden, from this point forward Jesus *is* king. Furthermore, as in the Old Testament, Jesus' anointing to kingship carries with it a commission. In the baptism, Jesus is not only declared the royal Son of God, he is also empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out his messianic mission of establishing God's kingdom (Mark 1:9-11; cf. 2 Sam 7:12-14; Psalm 2; Isa 42:1)." Treat, *The Crucified King*, 151.

⁸⁰Telford Work comments, "Whatever form it took, God's baptismal affirmation of Jesus is affirmed in every Gospel and in the apostolic preaching preserved in Acts (10:36-38). It is universally portrayed as the moment when Jesus' ministry is divinely authorized and empowered." Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 186.

where Jesus shows himself to be the one with whom the kingdom has come. In desert wanderings and temptation, Jesus shows himself to be the faithful king of Israel (Matt 4:1-11).⁸¹ Unlike the kings of Israel, from whom the Spirit departed, the Spirit rests on this faithful king who does battle with Satan in the wilderness.⁸² In so doing, he shows himself at the same time to be a warrior-king—victorious in battle over Satan—and simultaneously a new Adam, exerting his kingly dominion and conquering by a trust in God’s word rather than a capitulation to Satan’s schemes.⁸³

Not only a faithful king, Jesus recapitulates Israel’s story in his own life, but is obedient at every point where Israel fails. Along these lines Moore notes,

Advancing forward God’s kingdom, Jesus applies Temple language to himself—to his own body (Matt 12:6). Like Ezekiel’s eschatological Temple, the living water of the Spirit flows from Jesus bringing life as it streams toward the Tree of Life (John 7:37-39; Ezek 47:1-12). He applies the vine language of Israel to himself—and to his disciples as branches sharing the blessings with him. He speaks of himself as the Davidic shepherd-king who will fight the wolves and establish the flock of Israel under one head (Mark 14:27; John 10:1-21). Like the prophecy of Israel’s latter day glory, Jesus announces that he is the “light of the world” in whom the nations will see God (John 8:12-20).

Jesus applies Israel’s language of the coming restoration of the nation by the Spirit to personal regeneration and entrance into the kingdom itself. He confronts a teacher of Israel inquiring why he would not know that only the regenerate remnant of the nation can enter the promised kingdom (John 3:1-13). When Jesus is rejected

⁸¹Work, again, insightfully notes, “In this exchange, Deuteronomy 6:16-19 has undergone an extraordinary transformation. Jesus has not only applied the original story of Massah and Meribah (Exod 17:2-7) to his own exchange with the devil, but has recapitulated it. His own messianic obedience has reversed its tragic outcome and honored the commandment that followed it, gaining the blessings (Deut 6:18) that eluded Israel in the wilderness. Most strikingly, he has arguably referred its ‘the Lord your God’ to *himself*. The *coup de grâce* is delivered, the Scripture is fulfilled (Deut 6:19: ‘thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised’), and the devil flees. Ibid., 173-74.

⁸²For a more thorough treatment of Jesus’ wilderness temptations as related to the kingdom of God, see Moore, *Tempted and Tried*.

⁸³Beale notes that part of the dominion mandate of Gen 1:28 “likely was defeating and ruling over the evil serpent partly by remembering and trusting in God’s word of command. . . . Furthermore, Adam should have slain and thus judged the serpent in carrying out the mandate of Gen 1:28 to ‘rule and subdue.’” Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 34.

by Israel, he announces that the prophets of old foresaw this aspect of the kingdom as well (John 12:36-43).⁸⁴

Goldsworthy likewise notes⁸⁵ the ways in which Jesus is seen to be a new and faithful Adam (Luke 3:23-28; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 3:21-22; Rom 5:18-21; 1 Cor 15:20-22, 45-49), the seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), and as the faithful son of David, concluding rightly that the faithful king “embodies the whole people and is their representative.”⁸⁶

Beyond just his life, Jesus explicitly announces the arrival of the kingdom of God in his public ministry. Indeed, the announcement of the kingdom of God is the starting point for the preaching ministry of Jesus, whose central theme was made explicit from the outset: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15).⁸⁷ More mysteriously, the “secret of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11) was revealed in parabolic form⁸⁸ throughout Jesus’ teaching in the Gospels.⁸⁹ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes clear that the presence of the kingdom of God has dramatic implications for the way God’s people are to live (Matt 5-7).⁹⁰ More than that, in the

⁸⁴Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 865.

⁸⁵Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom*, 112.

⁸⁶Similar to Goldsworthy, Timothy Ward rightly notes how Jesus “is the new Moses proclaiming a new law, and the new David establishing God’s reign on earth. Yet he is also representative of the nation of Israel as a whole, tempted by Satan in the desert, just as they were. And he is representative of the whole of the new humanity to which God is giving spiritual birth, a point Paul expands in Romans 5 and 6.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 41.

⁸⁷Treat comments on the linkage between John and Jesus: “John ‘prepares the way’ for Jesus not only by proclaiming him but by foreshadowing his career. John preaches and is handed over to be killed; then Jesus preaches and is handed over to be killed.” Treat, *The Crucified King*, 90.

⁸⁸Indeed, Yarbrough argues that “Jesus’ preferred didactic method, at least in this phase of his ministry and on reported occasions, was to announce the kingdom by the oblique means of parable.” Robert W. Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God: Mark through the Epistles,” in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 127.

⁸⁹For a helpful treatment on the kingdom sayings in the Gospels, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

⁹⁰For a useful work on the Sermon, see D. A. Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5-10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004).

same discourse Jesus declares himself to be the gatekeeper of the kingdom of God—only those whom Jesus receives will enter the kingdom (Matt 7:21-23).⁹¹ As Moore notes, Jesus even applies Isaiah’s prophecy of the promised eschatological anointing of the Spirit to himself (Luke 4:16-21) and the promise of Israel’s inheritance to his followers (Matt 5:5; cf. Ps 37:11, 22).⁹²

Beyond the proclamation of the kingdom, Jesus also demonstrates the arrival of the kingdom of God. Jesus walks on water and calms storms (Matt 8:23-27), showing himself to be the human viceregent who possesses the dominion over God’s creation which Adam forfeited.⁹³ Empowered by the Spirit, Jesus casts out demons and declares this to be evidence that “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt 12:28)—and shows himself to be a warrior-king, triumphing over his demonic adversaries.⁹⁴ Jesus performs miracles⁹⁵—healing and even raising others from the dead—⁹⁶showing himself

⁹¹ Along the same lines, Yarbrough notes, “The kingdom emphasis throughout the Sermon on the Mount helps account for the astonishment the discourse created (Matt 7:28-29). Jesus projected ‘authority,’ the prerogative of a ruler. And he cast the entirety of human existence under the jurisdiction and eschatological verdict of himself as the gatekeeper of his domain.” Yarbrough, “The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Matthew and Revelation,” 115.

⁹² Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 865.

⁹³ Following McCartney, “Although the disciples can see very well that Jesus is a human being, it is also clear that Jesus is exercising divine authority over the elements, even as the Lord is said to do in several psalms (18:15; 65:7; 89:9; 107:29). Here is demonstrated that Jesus, a man, exercises viceregency over nature.” McCartney, “*Ecce Homo*,” 10.

⁹⁴ McCartney is also right to see the exorcisms also in light of Jesus’ functioning as a second Adam: “Jesus did what Adam should have done; he cast the serpent out of the garden.” Ibid.

⁹⁵ For a useful survey of Jesus’ miracles and exorcisms and how they function in the inauguration of the kingdom of God, see Clinton Arnold, “The Kingdom, Miracles, Satan, and Demons,” in *The Kingdom of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 153–78.

⁹⁶ John Frame points out the significance of the centurion’s request for Jesus to heal his daughter: “What is remarkable,” argues Frame, “[is] his request to ‘say the word’. . . In Greek, this phrase is redundant, ‘speak with a word’ (*eipe logo*). The unusual emphasis on the verbal nature of this healing indicates the centurion’s belief in the power of Jesus’ word to heal the servant.” John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 51.

to be the one who is restoring the created order and rolling back the curse.⁹⁷

The most vivid display of the kingdom seen in the Gospels is in the death and resurrection of Jesus. As Timothy Ward notes, the progression of the kingdom involves both expansion and narrowing—with the expansion of God’s people brought about through the narrowing of God’s redemptive purposes.⁹⁸ The place where these redemptive purposes concentrate most narrowly and ultimately is in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus himself. Entering into Jerusalem atop a donkey, Jesus fulfills the Scripture (Zech 9:9-10) and foreshadows the humble reign over the universe he will exert in his kingdom. But the joyful expectation following this kingly entry soon turns to crushing despair, for Jesus is killed in a manner that shows he has no claim on the promises made to Israel (Deut 22:21-23).⁹⁹ On the cross, though, Jesus receives the judgment due Israel, and takes on the full curses of the Law in his crucifixion.¹⁰⁰ The judgment that was to come on the last day breaks into history and descends on Christ

⁹⁷Similarly, John Gray argues, “Healing thus implied the victory of the Divine King in the cosmic conflict and Creation as an aspect of the imposition of His government.” John Gray, *The Biblical Doctrine of the Reign of God* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 1n1.

⁹⁸“As the southern kingdom of Judah stays center stage while the northern kingdom of Israel disappears; as the ‘faithful remnant’ emerges as more significant in God’s purposes for salvation than the nation as a whole; and as Israel’s hopes for the future become focused on the emergence of a single Messiah figure. The narrowing reaches a climax with the arrival of Christ.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 41.

⁹⁹Sinclair Ferguson adds, “Paul views the resurrection of Christ from the dead as his [Jesus’] ‘redemption.’ His death is everything that death truly is. In his capacity as the second man, the last Adam, he experienced death as the wages of sin, separation from life, judgment under the wrath of God and alienation from the face of the Father (Rom 6:10; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). He died to the sin under whose power he came (Rom 6:10: ‘the death he died, he died *to sin*’). But from death thus conceived Christ was raised, delivered, vindicated, or ‘saved’ through the resurrection (1 Tim 3:15). In his resurrection he was ‘redeemed’ and delivered from death by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 104.

¹⁰⁰For useful treatments of the propitiatory nature of Jesus’ atoning death, see Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 147–202; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 152–91; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

with God's full fury.¹⁰¹ And though the proclamation of God's judgment in the cross is clear (Gal 3:13), there comes in Jesus' resurrection a resounding counter-proclamation—God declares in miraculous act the same thing he previously declared in word at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17).¹⁰² God does not abandon Jesus to the grave but instead vindicates him¹⁰³ and shows him to be the faithful and obedient Messiah after all.¹⁰⁴ Beale rightly notes the kingdom implications of the resurrection: "The vindication of God's people against the unjust verdicts of their accusers was to happen at the eschaton, but this has been pushed back to Christ's resurrection and applied to him."¹⁰⁵ Jesus' resurrection leads, successively, to the sending of the Holy Spirit which further signals the presence of the kingdom¹⁰⁶—as the same Spirit which raised Jesus from the dead now indwells his brothers, uniting them to Jesus in faith and conforming them to his image and serving as the guarantor that all those in Christ will be raised from the dead and reign with Jesus in a renewed creation, sharing in the promised inheritance Jesus receives (Rom 8:11; Eph 1:13-14; Eph 4:30).

¹⁰¹G. K. Beale, "The Role of Resurrection in the Already-and-Not-Yet Phases of Justification," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 191.

¹⁰²Similarly, Beale adds, "Jesus' own resurrection was an end-time event that 'vindicated' or 'justified' him from the wrong verdict pronounced by the world's courts." *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰³Telford Work points out how the resurrection was a vindication not only of Jesus but also Scripture itself: "Scripture is a co-conspirator as long as the sentence is allowed to stand. Neither God nor his words may be trusted. Indeed, they are more than defeated on the cross; their ruthlessness is unmasked. In their tyranny God and his Bible are really no different from the powers. But with Easter's vindication, it is the myth of the scapegoat that is unmasked, and God's righteousness is revealed." Work, *Living and Active*, 191.

¹⁰⁴For a thoroughly helpful and thorough analysis of the resurrection of Jesus, see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

¹⁰⁵Beale, "The Role of Resurrection," 193.

¹⁰⁶Ferguson rightly connects the sending of the Spirit with Jesus' kingship: "The coming of the Spirit is, therefore, the evidence of the enthronement of Christ, just as the resurrection is the evidence of the efficacy of the death of Christ as atonement." Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 87.

The inauguration of the kingdom, throughout the rest of the New Testament, is seen most vividly in the life of the church; indeed, the local church is the present realm over which Jesus exerts his kingdom reign,¹⁰⁷ severing as the undisputed head over the body of believers called together in this age (Eph 1:1-2).¹⁰⁸ Thus, the church exists as the initial manifestation of the eschatological kingdom of God.¹⁰⁹ Having received gifts from the Spirit as Jesus' spoils of war (Eph 4:8), the church carries forward the warfare of its king (Eph 6:10-17) against the Satanic rulers of this age whose time is short (Rev 12:12). In addition to this, Moore notes, “The kingdom of God is seen within the assembly, not through demonstrations of power or through rule over the nations but in ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17).”¹¹⁰

The consummation of the kingdom. With the life and ministry of Jesus, the kingdom of God is inaugurated and the understanding of the kingdom is radically transformed. As D. A. Carson notes,

“Kingdom” no longer primarily conjures up a theocratic state in which God rules by his human vassal in the Davidic dynasty. It conjures up the immediate transforming reign of God, dawning now in the ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and session of Jesus, the promised Messiah, and consummated at his return. Eschatology

¹⁰⁷Concurring, Michael Horton argues, “At present it is only in the church where Christ’s universal reign becomes partially visible.” Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 30.

¹⁰⁸For an analysis of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the church, see Russell D. Moore and Robert E. Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 68–86.

¹⁰⁹Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen liken the relationship between the church and the kingdom to that of a preview and a film: “As the church enjoys this foretaste of the banquet to come, it becomes the prime exhibit of what the future kingdom will look like. Think here of a film preview, a few minutes of actual footage from a film not yet released. This trailer is shown so that the potential audience can catch a glimpse of what the whole film will look like once it is ready to be shown in its entirety. One important function of the church is thus to be a picture, a brief presentation, a sample of what the future in God’s kingdom will be.” Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 200.

¹¹⁰Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 868.

is thereby transformed. The locus of the people of God is no longer national and tribal; it is international, transracial, transcultural. If the Old Testament prophets constantly look forward to the day when God will act decisively, the New Testament writers announce that God has acted decisively, and that this is “good news,” gospel, of universal, eternal significance and stellar importance. Thus kingdom, Christology, eschatology, church, gospel, become dominant terms or themes. Temple, priest, sacrifice, law, and much more are transposed; national and tribal outlooks gradually fade from view.¹¹¹

And yet, there remains tension throughout the New Testament, which the writer of Hebrews points out: though God has put everything in subjection to Jesus, and “left nothing outside his control,” “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb 2:8). A surprise of the kingdom of God, the New Testament reveals, is that “this age” and “the age to come” overlap—the kingdom is “already” and “not yet.”¹¹²

The consummation of the kingdom is promised, inaugurated, and guaranteed by the resurrection, but the tension between the already and not yet is the backdrop against which the entire Christian life is carried out from Pentecost to present. Such seems to be the point of Jesus’ seemingly frustrating vagueness in his description of the end of this age—even he does not know the exact timing of the kingdom’s consummation (Matt 24:36), but followers of Jesus are to live expectantly of his return. “You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Matt 24:22). Followers of Jesus live in this age as “elect exiles” (1 Pet 1:1), on mission in the world, but as those who are not to be overly attached to it, looking instead with hope to the coming consummation of the kingdom (1 Tim 4:10).

¹¹¹D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 254.

¹¹²So argues Schreiner, “His miracles and exorcisms indicate the dawning of a new creation, and yet Jesus also taught that there is an age to come when God will judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous (Matt 12:32; 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; 20:35). Jewish thought regularly distinguished between “this age” and “the coming age.” It seems that Jesus taught the overlap of

The coming of the “not yet” aspects of the kingdom will be marked by the irruptive, visible return of the Jesus (Matt 24:27). At his return, those in Christ will be raised (1 Thess 4:14-17) and the dead will be judged (Rom 14:10-12; Matt 25:31-46); those resurrected at Jesus’ return will rule with Jesus during a “thousand year” reign of Christ, (Rev 20:1-6)¹¹³ after which Satan will be eternally vanquished (Rev 20:7-10). After this comes a glorious, eternal kingdom complete with culture, feasting, and abundance of life with redeemed humanity living in a restored creation under the rule of a resurrected Christ—through whom all the promises of God are fulfilled (Rev 21-22).

Armed with this vision from Scripture, the church lives now in the midst of this eschatological tension. At the same time, she experiences now a foretaste of the consummated kingdom even beyond the ways enumerated in the section above. Take, for example, the ways in which the ordinances of the church anticipate the consummation of the kingdom. In baptism, the one going under the water pledges allegiance to Jesus as the rightful king of the universe in the baptismal confession—“Jesus is Lord”—and ritually depicts and anticipates his own resurrection as he is raised from the watery judgment. The same is true in the Lord’s Supper; the meal itself is grounded in the imagery of eschatological victory, a foretaste of God’s commitment to prepare “a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Ps 23:5).¹¹⁴ Paul himself suggests this proleptic quality of

the ages, for in his ministry the age to come penetrated this present evil age, and yet the coming age had not yet been consummated.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 26.

¹¹³The nature and timing of the millennial reign of Christ is, of course, a disputed point within evangelical theology. For a useful treatment of the differing views, particularly of historic premillennialism and amillennialism, see Robert G. Clouse, ed., *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1977).

¹¹⁴Gregg Allison highlights the centrality of the kingdom in the Lord’s Supper in insisting, “The Lord’s Supper is a proleptic celebration of victory because Jesus, through his sacrificial death that has defeated sin and death, will return to establish the kingdom of God in fullness.” Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 409.

the Lord's Supper too in instructing the church to observe the ordinance "until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).¹¹⁵

Embedded all throughout the creation and Christian life, then, are touchpoints that reveal this already—not yet tension. The inauguration and consummation of the kingdom of God, and the space between the two, comprise the eschatological ecosystem in which the church, armed with the gospel, exists in this age—as a signpost pointing to the kingdom that is to come, as an embassy of the kingdom showing the world what the kingdom of God looks like, as controlled territory where the conquest of Christ's kingdom has already laid claim, and as an eschatological military front from which the Spirit—through the Word—wages war in its role in marching the church onward towards the consummation of the kingdom of God. How, though, does this kingdom mission intersect with God's relation to Scripture and his activity in it?

The Kingdom through the Progression of the Word

Decades ago, evangelical theologian J. I. Packer argued that "it is much to be wished that we might restate our hermeneutics in explicit correlation to the concept of God communicating, God speaking in such a way that terminates on man [and that] the thought of God active in communication [is] the central, and organizing, hermeneutical concept to which the Bible itself would lead us."¹¹⁶ In so doing, Packer underscores the concept often left unaddressed in treatments of the kingdom of God—namely, that the Word of God itself has a role to play in the divine economy of salvation. Scripture is

¹¹⁵Similarly, Moore and Sagers note, "The Lord's Supper, then, is to look forward to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when all the redeemed of all the ages will eat with a slain and resurrected King Jesus of Nazareth seated at the head of the table (Rev 19:6-9). But until that day, the church eats together of the broken bread and the fruit of the vine in anticipation of the Kingdom to come and in celebration of the Kingdom at hand." Moore and Sagers, "The Kingdom of God and the Church," 80–81.

indeed “living and active,” as the writer of Hebrews contends (Heb 4:12), and it is part of God’s cosmic mission to bring about redemption and new creation.

Scott Swain has memorably summarized the end results of God’s communicative action in redemptive history as establishing the twin truths that in his Word, (1) God *himself* communicates, and (2) God communicates *himself*.¹¹⁷ The Word of God as a theological category is a rich and multilayered one, and Swain has elegantly packed many features into this summary statement. At its core is the idea that the Scripture is not merely a repository of information pertaining to life and godliness,¹¹⁸ but a means through God acts with a clear and definite purpose.¹¹⁹ Hence, it is necessary to examine here the relationship between God’s speech in Scripture and his saving activity so as to establish an understanding of Scripture and biblical hermeneutics on the most secure theological and exegetical footing.

The Word and the Revealing of God

If God’s overarching purpose in creation and redemption is the enthronement of his Son in an eternal kingdom comprised of a redeemed humanity in a renewed creation, then it stands to reason that all of God’s dealings within the created order would

¹¹⁶James Packer, “Hermeneutics and Biblical Authority,” *Themelios* 1 (1975): 11.

¹¹⁷Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 35–36.

¹¹⁸To make such an argument, though, is not to deny the autonomous quality and authority of Scripture in and of itself. D. A. Carson is right to point out that one must not conflate the function of Scripture with the nature of Scripture, for “whatever the written thing is, it remains that, even if people ignore it, even if people turn blind eyes to it and fail to see it for what it is, and receive none of God’s self-presencing by this means.” Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 247.

¹¹⁹Similarly, B. B. Warfield argues that Scripture is one of God’s “redemptive acts, having its own part to play in the great work of establishing and building up the kingdom of God.” Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 161.

serve this eschatological end.¹²⁰ To state things slightly differently, God does not deal with the world haphazardly; thus, even the history of God's revealing of himself to man is purposeful, consistent with who God is and what he is planning to bring about.¹²¹

To best appreciate the role of God's Word in the context of the kingdom, then, one must understand first the *revelatory* function of the Word. Saying that God's Word is revelatory is to affirm what evangelical theology has traditionally insisted when speaking of revelation: the Bible is the definitive, authoritative self-disclosure of God¹²²—Scripture is “God's own testimony and teaching in human form,” predicated on the truth that “nobody would know the truth about God, or be able to relate to him in a personal way, had not God first acted to make himself known.”¹²³ From the giving of commands in Eden, to the giving of the Law at Sinai, to the proclamations of the prophets, God establishes clearly and quickly that he reveals his commands, his intentions, and even

¹²⁰Erich Sauer adds, “The Bible, as the record of salvation, is one complete whole, an organism throbbing with life, and a system of prophecy wrought out in history according to plan. It is ‘a marvelous structure, of which the ground plan was prepared in advance,’ a harmonious graduated whole, with perfect proportion and accord in all its parts, and having Christ as its goal. And the theme of the kingdom of God, with the rhythm of its progressively developing epochs and periods, is the leading basic melody of this whole majestic divine symphony.” Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of the History of Salvation in the Old Testament*, trans. G. H. Lang (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 12.

¹²¹Though space does not permit a full-orbed discussion of such, this study presupposes a meticulous model of divine providence. Bruce Ware summarizes this model well in his own definition: “God continually oversees and directs all things pertaining to the created order in such a way that 1) he preserves in existence and provides for the creation he has brought into being, and 2) he governs and reigns supremely over the entirety of the created order in order to fulfill all of his intended purposes in and through it.” Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 17. For a recent work, evaluating four competing models of divine providence, see Bruce A. Ware, ed., *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

¹²²For a classic evangelical treatment on Scripture and revelation, see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 2, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999).

¹²³J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 3. Packer also summarizes the concept of revelation as “the record, interpretation, expression, and embodiment of his [God's] self-disclosure.” Ibid.

himself through words. Stated more simply, as Swain has put it—in Scripture, God *himself* communicates.¹²⁴ This idea is explored in greater detail in subsequent sections.

To this point, however, I have addressed only half of Swain’s useful summary. Conceptually, revelation is most often put to use in the narrow space between bibliology and soteriology, most often in answer to questions concerning either the nature of the Bible or how man comes to a saving knowledge of God. Yet, God’s self-disclosure to man is a rich category in its own right, speaking not only to these specific areas but broadly of the relationship between God and his Word—of the Bible’s ontology.¹²⁵ Thus, one is free to consider how God’s eschatological intentions are reflected in Scripture itself, and how these intentions, in turn, shape the way readers come to their doctrinal conclusions about Scripture and their hermeneutical conclusions within Scripture. To do so is to consider the flip side of Swain’s coin—in Scripture, God communicates *himself*.

The first lens through which one may appreciate the way God reveals and communicates himself is the *triune character* of Scripture.¹²⁶ Throughout the history of the church many have highlighted the tight theological similarities between the Incarnation and inscripturation, known as the analogy of the Word—as the Word became flesh in the Incarnation, so the Word became text in Scripture.¹²⁷ While most admit that

¹²⁴Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 36.

¹²⁵Telford Work, summarizing Augustine, comments, “the intent of Scripture reflects the character of Scripture.” Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 36.

¹²⁶For a recent dissertation that helpfully traces the recent arguments among those calling for a doctrine of Scripture grounded by a focus on God’s Triune nature, see John Thomas English, “Thus Says the Lord: A Trinitarian Account of the Authority of Scripture” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

¹²⁷Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks (Part 1),” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 35.

the analogy has its limits,¹²⁸ and while others decry the analogy altogether,¹²⁹ what seems clear is that God has a close,¹³⁰ and even theological relationship to Scripture itself.¹³¹ Even more than just the relationship between the Son and the Bible,¹³² many in recent years have highlighted how the entire Godhead exists in relation to the Bible.¹³³

¹²⁸For example, N. T. Wright comments, “I know the analogy between the Bible and the person of Jesus is not exact, and that some have seen serious problems with it; I believe that, provided it is seen as an analogy, not as a precise two-way identity, it remains helpful.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 130. Similarly, Richard Gaffin argues, “The incarnation gives rise to inscripturation, and the latter is intrinsic to the former; the one could not exist without the other. The mystery of Scripture is its unique theanthropic character, without, however, involving any sort of hypostatic union between the divine and human elements.” Richard Gaffin, “Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 288. See also, D. A. Carson, who argues that “there is at least some hint that an analogy may be appropriate, viz., the frequency with which ‘word’ and ‘words’ refer to Scripture, on the one hand, and the fact that ‘word’ can be applied to Christ, on the other—applied both directly (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13) and by implication (Heb 1:1-4).” Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 249.

¹²⁹For key works arguing against the Analogy of the Word, see Markus Barth, *Conversation with the Bible* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964); James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). For a summary of opposition from these two, see Work, *Living and Active*, 27–31. For a summary of opposition from Lutheran theologians such as John McIntyre and G. C. Berkouwer, see Paul Ronald Wells, *James Barr and the Bible: Critique of a New Liberalism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 340–49. For different reasons, Kevin Vanhoozer also argues that “the incarnational analogy may be more trouble than it is worth.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 1),” 41.

¹³⁰Warfield notes this close relationship, adding, “According to the Scriptures, therefore, special revelation is a historic process, an organic system, a continuous divine activity directed to destroying the power of sin, to the building up of the Kingdom of God, to the restoration of the cosmos, to the summing up of all things in Christ.” B. B. Warfield, “Christianity and Revelation,” in *Benjamin B. Warfield: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), 1:29.

¹³¹John Webster argues, “the relation of human and divine speech is not a conceptual problem awaiting solution but a mystery which continues to unfold itself and which draws us toward itself. No wholly satisfactory conceptual resolution of the terms of the question is possible.” John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 12.

¹³²For an excellent analysis of the utility of the analogy of the Word, including in-depth analysis of how the analogy was put used by Athanasius, Augustine, Barth, and Balthasar, see Work, *Living and Active*, 33–122.

¹³³Though evangelical theology diverges widely from many of Karl Barth’s conclusions, his threefold treatment of the Word of God with Scripture as the analog to the Second Person of the Trinity has been widely influential in terms of twentieth-century discussions along these lines. See especially, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956).

Scripture is related to each person of the Trinity, and all three work together to bring about an eternal kingdom.¹³⁴ So fundamental is this triune character of Holy Scripture¹³⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer has argued, “The nature and function of the Bible are insufficiently grasped unless and until we see the Bible as an element in the economy of triune discourse. Those who approach the Bible as Scripture must not abstract it from the Father who ultimately authors it, the Son to whom it witnesses, and the Spirit who inspired and illuminates it.”¹³⁶ Here, Vanhoozer is in line with many others in recent years who have called for the Trinity to be the starting point for discussions about the doctrine of Scripture.¹³⁷ Ward is useful in summarizing the basic Trinitarian shape of Scripture, often sketched among those calling for a Trinitarian-focused bibliology: “The Father presents himself to us as a God who makes and keeps his covenant promise. The Son comes to us as the Word of God, knowable to us through his words. The Spirit ministers

¹³⁴To make this statement is not to deny the inseparable operations of God’s triune actions (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*), but simply to categorize and to recognize the respective ways in which Scripture shows how different persons of the Trinity seem to take priority in various divine actions. For a brief explication of this doctrine of divine appropriation, see Ward, *Words of Life*, 50.

¹³⁵“If Scripture is God’s Word, then in some sense it reflects God’s character; and if God’s character is Triune, then the Bible reflects the triunity of God in some significant way.” Work, *Living and Active*, 10.

¹³⁶Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Ten Theses on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Modern Reformation* 19 (2010): 17. Similarly, Timothy Ward argues, “We cannot properly describe the actions of the triune God in redemption and revelation without tying Scripture to God as a key part of his redemptive and revelatory activity, since that is precisely what he himself has done.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 95.

¹³⁷Such an argument is particularly common within the Theological Interpretation of Scripture movement. For a number of representative works along these lines, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?” in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19–25; idem, “Triune Discourse (Part 1),” 25–49; idem, “Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks (Part 2),” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 50–78; Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

these words to us, illuminating our minds and hearts, so that in receiving, understanding, and trusting them, we receive, know, and trust God himself.”¹³⁸

So, God reveals himself in Scripture as triune, and each person of the Godhead has a unique role to play in relation to Scripture. But there is more still to say—in Scripture, the Triune God is personally present¹³⁹ and chooses to make Scripture the location where God reveals himself to man, the grounds by which people may know him, and the means by which he draws people into the kingdom of God.¹⁴⁰ Athanasius goes so far as to speak of Scripture as “the *logos* himself, sojourning here by his teaching.”¹⁴¹ So too, Bavinck argues that Scripture “is the product of God’s incarnation in Christ and in a sense its continuation, the way by which Christ makes his home in the church, the preparation of the way to the full indwelling of God.”¹⁴² At this point, what is necessary to point out, then, is that one thing this study is trying to reclaim is the historic Christian contention that Scripture is at least two things simultaneously: (1) a unified work of the Godhead in which the promise of the Father comes through the Word of the Son by the work of the Spirit; and (2) the means by which God draws people into communion with himself delivering them from the domain of darkness and transferring them to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col 1:13).¹⁴³

¹³⁸Ward, *Words of Life*, 95.

¹³⁹How God is present, and is associated with the human words of Scripture, will be considered in the following section.

¹⁴⁰Ward carefully—and rightly—calls Scripture a “mode of God’s presence in the world” in contrast to those (particularly Barth) who would argue that Scripture is merely a witness to God’s revelation. Ward, *Words of Life*, 60–61.

¹⁴¹Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Press, 1993), sect. 29.

¹⁴²Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:380–81.

¹⁴³N. T. Wright notes that while “many theologians, not least Augustine, remained passionately committed to God’s work through scripture in bringing people to faith, to holiness and to salvation . . . we

More still will be said about the triune character of Scripture, but to put the remainder of that discussion into frame one must consider a second perspective—the *covenantal shape* of Scripture. So central is the idea of covenant to the structure and function of the Word, Scott Swain has upheld it as the twin foundation—along with the Trinity—by which one should understand Scripture.¹⁴⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer has gone so far as to ground the idea of all communicative action within the paradigm of covenant.¹⁴⁵ And to be fair, covenant does indeed perform a vital task in the unfolding drama of redemption, to the degree that one should consider why many have argued for its primacy in understanding the Bible and its interpretation.

First, covenant is important from a structural perspective. Thinking through the revelatory function of the Word, covenantal speech is the form in which God discloses himself to man. This is to say at least two things. On the one hand, it is to observe that the verbal expression of God's self-disclosure often comes within the context of a covenant: whether through the covenantal promise of one who will come in the fullness of time to crush the head of the serpent,¹⁴⁶ through the covenants cut with the patriarchs, or the

miss, in some of the developing tradition, the dynamic notion of scripture as the vehicle of God's Kingdom coming to birth in the world." Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 65.

¹⁴⁴"The central thesis of this book is that we may best appreciate the theological significance of the Bible and biblical interpretation if we understand these two themes in a trinitarian, covenantal context. The Bible is one of the preeminent means whereby the triune God communicates himself to us and holds communion with us. And biblical interpretation is one of the preeminent means whereby we draw upon the riches that God has covenanted to us in Christ and whereby we hold communion with him." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 7. Later, Swain elaborates further: "Covenant is the glue that binds this diversity of divine speech acts together in a meaningful whole." Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁵"We agree that *action*, rather than representation, should be the operative concept [of language], and that this entails certain *rights* and *responsibilities* on the part of authors and readers. In particular, we see the promise as the paradigm for what is involved in speech action (though in the present work I put forward *covenant* as an alternate)." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 162.

¹⁴⁶Some dispute whether one finds a covenant with Adam in creation itself, though this point is not engaging this debate directly but rather asserting that the *protoevangelium* is covenantal in the sense of being in line with the promissory shape of God's covenantal speech. For more on this promise, see

promise of the New Covenant itself, the idea of covenant is the framework within which God's relationship with man exists.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, it is to assert that God's revelation is not static but rather both propositional and performative. More will be said in the subsequent section along these lines, but for now suffice it to say that God not only conveys information with his words, but acts upon and in his creation with them.¹⁴⁸ Such is relevant here because it is through the covenant that one has communion with God.¹⁴⁹ At the heart of the New Covenant is the relational promise, "I will be a father to you" (2

Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15." For a recent work arguing for a covenant with creation, see Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image." For a critique of Gentry's argument, see Samuel Renihan, "Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants—A Review Article," *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies*, 2014, 153–76.

¹⁴⁷ Outlining in detail the contours of each of the biblical covenants is beyond the scope of this study, but for a very helpful, and detailed, treatment along these lines, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*.

¹⁴⁸ Vanhoozer explicates God's communicative action in terms of speech-act theory, as a discipline that helps conceptualize how God relates to man verbally: "What God does with Scripture is covenant with humanity by testifying to Jesus Christ (illocution) and by bringing about the reader's mutual indwelling with Christ (perlocution) through the Spirit's rendering Scripture efficacious." Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 200. Others have similarly highlighted the usefulness of speech-act theory in the context of biblical hermeneutics. For seminal works in the field of linguistic speech-act theory, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975); John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969); John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). For recent evangelical appropriations of speech-act theory, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 49–104; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "God's Mighty Speech Acts," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 143–81; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 216–42; Gregg R. Allison, "Speech Act Theory and Its Implications for the Doctrine of Inerrancy/Infallibility of Scripture," *Philosophia Christi* 18 (1995): 1–23. For a helpful critique of the limits of speech-act theory, especially as it relates to the richness of communication and a need for understanding the Trinitarian nature of Scripture, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Canon and Speech-Act: Limitations in Speech-Act Theory, with Implications for a Putative Theory of Canonical Speech Acts," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008): 337–54. I do not reject the utility of speech-act theory as a pedagogical help, but will not elaborate on it at length as many of the recent treatments of the work and nature of Scripture do, so as to focus instead on the categories that arise from Scripture itself. Doing so allows both the performative and the propositional aspects of God's Word to receive their due without an overemphasis on either.

¹⁴⁹ "The ultimate aim of God's covenantal self-communication—'I will be a father to you' (2 Cor 6:18)—finds its full and final 'Yes' as Jesus' Father becomes our Father (John 20:17) and its 'Amen' (cf. 2 Cor 1:20) as Jesus' Spirit enables us to participate in his own filial cry to the Father (Gal 4:6; Heb 2:12)." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 32.

Cor 6:18), and covenant is both the *means* by which God ultimately brings about this fatherly relationship and the *form* which this communion takes on in the present—communion with man through the words of the covenant.¹⁵⁰

Second, covenant is important from a temporal perspective. In other words, the covenant must be considered in its diachronic sense as God reveals the nature of redemption through the covenant across time. God does not provide a systematic theology textbook to the primeval couple just East of Eden, nor does he give a lecture on penal substitutionary atonement. Instead, he covenants with humanity, and the promise of this covenant unfolds throughout the progress of redemption, within the context of the covenantal relationships God has set in place with his people.¹⁵¹ In short, the kingdom—and our greater knowledge of the nature of the kingdom—comes through the unfolding of the covenant promise.

Third, covenant is important from a teleological perspective—because it is the words of the covenant themselves that inject the first glimmer of eschatological hope in the people of God. Swain is right to argue that the covenant itself instills hope in God's promise because in the covenant God has committed to usher in the kingdom:

By means of covenant, God binds himself to creation in a relationship of sovereign care and commitment and binds creation to himself in a relationship of obedient

¹⁵⁰Swain rightly argues, “Scripture assures us that he [God] does desire something beyond and outside of himself and, more than that, that he desires to communicate his own glorious and blessed life to us—in a manner appropriate to our creaturely status—in order that we too might have communion and fellowship with him, that we might become friends of God.” *Ibid.*, 5–6.

¹⁵¹Wellum and Gentry make the same point in greater detail: “We are emphasizing a diachronic perspective. It is *through* the biblical covenants, across time, that God chooses to reverse the disastrous effects of sin and usher in his saving reign to the world. Following the loss of Eden, redemption is linked to the election of a people—Noah and his family, the descendants of Abraham, and uniquely through the Davidic king. These people, particularly tied to the nation of Israel, are promised a land to dwell in; they will be the means of blessing to the nations. *Through* the biblical covenants these covenant promises, which ultimately stretch back to God’s initial promise in Genesis 3:15, are realized. . . . It is only through this obedient Son, God the Son incarnate, that we have God’s long-awaited kingdom inaugurated in this world (through the new covenant).” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 594–95.

service. . . . When God commanded the orders of creation into existence (day and night, the seasons, etc.) he committed himself to the preservation of those orders. God's word is his bond.¹⁵²

Thus, if the kingdom of God is the vision designed to instill hope in the people of God, then covenant is the lens through which they first take in this eschatological scene.¹⁵³

Covenant looms large in the proposals of many evangelical theologians for good reason, then. Reflecting theologically on both of these revelatory themes—Trinity and covenant—one is called to appreciate the fact that the triune nature of God and the unity of his action means that the revelation of God is a triune activity and takes a triune form.¹⁵⁴ More than that, the self-sufficiency of God implies both that communication and communion existed within the life of the Trinity *ad intra* apart from God's creation—and did so perfectly—such that God's communication to his people in Scripture and his communion with his people through the covenant do not flow from any deficiency or need internal to God himself.¹⁵⁵ Instead, this study argues, the kingdom of God provides

¹⁵²Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 19. Similarly, Work argues, “The moral authority of the Bible is conveyed not simply by the holiness or power of its human speakers (and at times these are scarce indeed), but by the holiness and power of its divine agent. In Scripture, God gives us his word—in the common sense of “one’s word” as one’s promise, backed by nothing less than the integrity of one’s own character, and putting that integrity in jeopardy until one’s word is kept.” Work, *Living and Active*, 61.

¹⁵³Hence, Wellum and Gentry are right to argue, “Kingdom and covenant are conjoined. It is primarily through the biblical covenants viewed diachronically that we learn how to saving reign of God comes to the world. In other words, the relationship between the kingdom of God and the biblical covenants is a tight one, and it is for this reason that grasping the unfolding nature of the biblical covenants is at the heart of understanding how God’s kingdom dawns in Jesus; how God’s redemptive promise is realized; and how the entire metanarrative of the Bible hangs together.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 602.

¹⁵⁴Work, *Living and Active*, 92. Similarly, Vanhoozer adds, “God’s outward work (his being *ad extra*) corresponds to or images God’s inner life (his being *ad intra*): God is as God does.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 1),” 51.

¹⁵⁵John Piper summarizes well the self-sufficiency of God: “God’s act of creation was not constrained by anything outside him, nor was the inner impulse to create owing to any deficiency or defect. . . . In God himself, the three Persons of the Trinity are fully satisfied in the joy of their fellowship. This is implied in the Bible’s statement ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8, 16). God does not need us or anything outside himself to be God or to be happy.” John Piper, “I Believe in God’s Self-Sufficiency: A Response to Thomas McCall,” *Trinity Journal* 29 (2008): 228.

the framework through which one may best incorporate both of these themes, but to do so one must examine below another aspect of the role of the Word of God in the progress of the kingdom of God—what happens when God speaks and how the words of God are related to God himself.

The Word and the Action of God

As stated above, God’s revelation of himself is purposeful, consistent with who he is and what he is planning to bring about. More than that, though, readers must consider the way that God’s revelation itself not only reveals his eschatological purposes but also participates in them.¹⁵⁶ Timothy Ward correctly asserts, “To say of God that he spoke, and to say of God that he did something, is often one and the same thing.”¹⁵⁷ The key question to consider, then: What is going on when God speaks, and how does that relate to this study’s argument about the kingdom of God? This section will consider the first half of that question.

First, one sees the power of God expressed through words. Indeed, one is greeted with such in the opening sentences of Scripture; at creation, God spoke the universe into existence—“God said, ‘Let there be’ . . . and there was” (Gen 1:3ff.).¹⁵⁸ God not only creates by his word but also effects judgment by means of speaking, at both the fall of humanity (Gen 3:14-19) and at the consummation of creation, seen as God’s

¹⁵⁶N. T. Wright helpfully asserts that Scripture offers more than just “true information about, or even an accurate running commentary upon, the work of God in salvation and new creation, but is taking an active part within that ongoing purpose. . . . Scripture is there to be a means of God’s action in and through us—which will include, but go far beyond, the mere conveyance of information.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 28.

¹⁵⁷Ward, *Words of Life*, 20.

¹⁵⁸Hence, Telford Work adds, “God’s relationship with creation has been linguistic from the beginning.” Work, *Living and Active*, 134.

enemies are “slain by the sword that came from the mouth” of Christ Jesus (Rev 19:21).¹⁵⁹ In the giving of the law, one sees the effect of the undiluted power of the voice of God, as the people beg of Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die” (Exod 20:19). In the Psalms, one sees the same power of God’s voice as “the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars” and “shakes the wilderness,” as it “makes the deer give birth and strips the forest bare” (Ps 29:5, 8, 9).¹⁶⁰ God’s action and his words are seen as conjoined with particular focus in the New Testament, preeminently in the Incarnation—as the one in whom God speaks to humanity “in these last days” (Heb 1:2) and as the Word through whom all things were created (Col 1:16; Heb 2:10; John 1:3) takes on flesh and dwells among us (John 1:14). God draws his people to himself through the voice of his Son, not only disciples who respond to Jesus’ directive to follow him (Mark 1:16), but all of God’s people who are such by virtue of the fact that they respond with obedience to the word of their king: “my sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,” Jesus declares (John 10:27). Indeed, a Christian’s own salvation is by virtue of God’s *declaring*¹⁶¹ him to be righteous¹⁶² and united to

¹⁵⁹ Ward elaborates on the point as it concerns God’s judgment in Eden: “It would have been quite possible for God to have introduced painful child-bearing into the woman’s life, and to have made the snake crawl on its belly, and made the man’s labour on the land difficult, all without speaking, by wordless acts of judgment. However, the God who is presented to us in the Bible is quite unlike that: he is a God who, by his very nature, acts by speaking.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ Indeed, the words of the Lord and his actions are equated with one another within the same verse, as the first half Ps 29 insists that “the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars” (Ps 29:5a) but then makes the agency of the act explicitly clear “the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon” (Ps 29:5b). *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶¹ For more on justification as an eschatological declaration, see Richard B. Gaffin, “*By Faith, Not By Sight*”: *Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 79–108.

¹⁶² Recent years have seen a flurry of works that seek to define justification and righteousness as, fundamentally, faithfulness to the covenant. See, for example, N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 113–33; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340–46. Over against this understanding, this study concurs with Schreiner: “The verbal form ‘justify’ in Paul almost invariably refers to God’s declaration and is used forensically. The forensic character of the verb is apparent from Rom 2:13 and 1 Cor 4:4. The law-court background of ‘justify’ is perhaps clearest in Rom

Christ by faith,¹⁶³ as is his ultimate resurrection for the dead in Christ shall rise in response to a shout (1 Thess 4:16).¹⁶⁴ Beyond that, the NT links the activity of God with his words.¹⁶⁵ Peter, for example, identifies the words of God as the source and animating cause of spiritual growth: “long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation” (1 Pet 2:2 NASB). At the same time, the writer of Hebrews grounds the believer’s perseverance on the threats of judgment and promises of eschatological peace declared by God, which are designed to elicit persevering faith (Heb 6:9-20).¹⁶⁶

8:33: ‘Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.’ On the last day, some may bring charges before God’s chosen at the divine tribunal, but all charges will be dismissed because God has declared his people to be in the right before him. As the judge, he has declared that they are innocent of all accusations brought against them.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 355.

¹⁶³Schreiner summarizes well the standard evangelical understanding of justification: “Justification refers to God’s verdict of not guilty on the day of judgment (Rom 2:13). God’s eschatological verdict has been announced in advance for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Those who have been justified by the blood of Christ will be saved from God’s wrath at the eschaton (Rom 5:9). God will announce publically to the world the verdict of not guilty on the last day, though this verdict already stands for those who belong to Christ Jesus, despite its being hidden from the eyes of the world.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 352. For an exegetical treatment along the same lines, see Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 259–63.

¹⁶⁴“The Bible makes clear that Jesus calls the dead and the living to him in the air with a *shout*. Just as God the Creator calls all things into existence by his *word* and just as Yahweh showed his sovereignty by whistling for the nations and they come to him speedily from the ends of the earth (Isa 5:26), Jesus demonstrates his regal authority by calling his people forward, even those in the graves come to him (John 5:25-29).” Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 906.

¹⁶⁵As Carson notes, the biblical writers equate God’s Word and God’s words without embarrassment or qualification (Exod 4:12; Num 22:38; Deut 18:18-20; Jer 14:14; 23:16-40; 29:31-32; Ezek 2:7; 13:1-19). “Sometimes the biblical writers refer to the words of YHWH that he spoke through his prophet (1 Kgs 16:34; 2 Kgs 9:36; 24:2; 2 Chr 29:25; Ezra 9:10-11; Neh 9:30; Jer 37:2; Zech 7:7, *passim*). Sometimes God’s words are said to be written (e.g., Exod 24:4; 34:27; Josh 24:26). Even when God is not cast as immediately being the speaker (as in a ‘Thus says the Lord’ utterance), later writers can say, ‘The Scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David’ (Acts 1:16; see the diverse formulae in Hebrews, for instance) or the like. Scripture itself can be personified (e.g., Scripture foresees, Gal 3:8), because it is a colorful way of saying that God foresees, as reported in Scripture.” Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 248–49.

¹⁶⁶With such a statement, I am arguing for a model of perseverance as outlined in Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001). For a recent dissertation that examines the function of the promises of God in Scripture as they pertain to eliciting persevering faith, see Christopher Wade Cowan, “‘Confident of Better Things’: Assurance of Salvation in the Letter to the Hebrews” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

Being created in the image of God, man shares in the capacity to speak such as God does,¹⁶⁷ and the connection between words and action are seen vividly at Babel, where God has to confuse the gift of language he has given man to curb language's power to transmit evil (Gen 11:1-9).¹⁶⁸ When God speaks, then, he acts on and within his creation: the words that go out from God's mouth, "shall not return to me empty," God declares; on the contrary, "it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa 55:10-11).

Second, Scripture links the authority of God with the words of God, such that to disobey the words of God is to disobey God himself.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps nowhere is this seen more clearly than the fall, where sin enters into creation after the following after of a word not from God but from the serpent. As Timothy Ward points out,

Following humanity's creation by means of an act of speech, it is tragically fitting that humanity's fall should also be precipitated partly by language. For that is indeed how it happens. The snake mounts his attack on humanity, and therefore on God's action in creation, by speaking. He speaks words that call into question the reality of what God had in fact commanded.¹⁷⁰

This identification with words is seen not only in humanity's fall but also throughout the

¹⁶⁷For more on an evangelical treatment of language itself, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

¹⁶⁸Along the same lines, Telford Work argues, "The divine gift of speech, no doubt a product of the human share of the *logos*, becomes distorted, used irrationally for deception and alienation (Gen 4:8-10) rather than communion. And in response, God's speech to humanity becomes a judging one, cursing and condemning (Gen 4:11-15). Before long speech itself must be confused at Babel, to check its awesome power for spreading sin (Gen 11:1-9)." Work, *Living and Active*, 38.

¹⁶⁹B. B. Warfield draws this connection by examining Rom 9:17 and Matt 19:4-5, noting, "In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if he were the Scriptures: in the two together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them." This, in turn, leads Warfield to conclude, "The two sets of passages, together, thus show an absolute identification, in the minds of these writers, of 'Scripture' with the speaking God." Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 299–300.

¹⁷⁰Ward, *Words of Life*, 21.

rest of Scripture.¹⁷¹ Through words, God reveals the provisions of the covenant to Abram (Gen 15:1-21), and he unveils the stipulations of the law to Moses (Exod 20:1-17). God has identified himself with his words such that to disobey the words is to break one's relationship with him.¹⁷² This connection is precisely why the people respond back to Moses, "All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod 24:3), and precisely the grounds upon which Saul lost his kingdom: "Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king" (1 Sam 15:13).

Even beyond instructions and commandment, one sees the linkage between the words of God and the authority of God in a unique way elsewhere in the OT. In the ark of the covenant, for example, God has so associated himself with the words of the law held within,¹⁷³ that, as Word notes, "people are regarded as having acted directly in relation to God simply by acting in relation to the inanimate ark of the covenant."¹⁷⁴ Work notes that "Israel's fortunes rise and fall according to Israel's fidelity to the Ark and what it

¹⁷¹On the disobedience of Eden, Swain points out, "Though created upright (cf. Ecc 7:29), Adam and Eve believe the serpent's lies—they trust *his* words—and act in accordance with the reality that he has projected. . . . As a result of their actions, the human family inherits the serpent's hidden agenda in disputing God's word, the severing of covenant fellowship." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 21.

¹⁷²Ward adds, "What this suggests about the relationship between God and his words seems rather obvious. To disobey the words God speaks is simply to disobey God himself, and to refuse to submit to the commands God utters is simply to break one's relationship with him. Thus (we may say) God has *invested* himself in his words, or we could say that God has so *identified* himself with his words that whatever someone does to God's words (whether it is to obey or to disobey) they do directly to God himself." Ward, *Words of Life*, 27. Elsewhere, Ward notes, "God chooses to present himself to us, and to act upon us, in and through human words that have their origin in him, and that he identifies as his own. When we encounter those words, God is acting in relation to us, supremely in his making a covenant promise to us. God identifies himself with his act of promising in such a way that for us to encounter God's promise is itself to encounter God. The supreme form in which God comes to encounter us in his covenant promise is through the words of the Bible as a whole. Therefore *to encounter the words of Scripture is to encounter God in action.*" Ibid., 48.

¹⁷³Work comments, "The stone tablets hewn from Sinai illustrate the sacramental nature of God's words. God's *dabar*, which connotes both a "word" and a "thing," is fully both: a material object, here a stone tablet, that mediates God's very address to his people. It is *in* the Ark of God and *in* the words said to reside there that the ancient Israel sees God savingly present." Work, *Living and Active*, 141–42.

¹⁷⁴Ward, *Words of Life*, 29.

represents.”¹⁷⁵ Uzzah, for example, touches the ark in a moment of irreverence and is struck dead (2 Sam 6:7), while the family who housed the ark with reverence received blessing from God (2 Sam 6:11).¹⁷⁶ At the same time, the tabernacle takes on significance in the same vein, because it is above the mercy seat—sitting atop the ark, which contains the written words of God—where God promises meet with Moses (Exod 25:17-22).¹⁷⁷ Ward rightly notes, therefore, “This spoke powerfully of the fact that God’s words were in some sense the mode in which he had chosen to be present among his people.”¹⁷⁸

Third, the Bible associates this power and authority with each person of the Godhead. The previous point focused primarily on the words of God as expressed in covenantal form in the OT, but the Bible shows how words from Father, Son, and Spirit all carry the same authority. The authority of Jesus’ teaching is one of the first things noticed by the crowds, as he taught “as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”¹⁷⁹ Moreover, at the command of Jesus’ voice waters stilled and storms ceased (Matt 8:23-27), demons were cast out (Matt 8:16; Luke 4:35; Mark 9:25), the sick were

¹⁷⁵Work, *Living and Active*, 142.

¹⁷⁶Ward, *Words of Life*, 29.

¹⁷⁷Work offers a useful elaboration on the distinction between God’s verbal and personal presence: the distinction “is not Luther’s Law/Gospel distinction, because both Law and Gospel are words. It is not Old/New, because the New Testament is just as verbal (and just as subject to abuse) as the Old. It is not time/eternity, because both words and flesh are temporal (which is not the same as mortal). It is not even promise-fulfillment, because (like Israel) the Church lives in an age ultimately of both, making do with the Bible while longing for the face-to-face reunion. It is not letter/Spirit, for that would render Paul’s flesh/Spirit dialectic unintelligible. The distinction is one of absence/presence—or more accurately, *impersonal* (i.e., verbal)/*personal* presence. Scripture’s mode of the Son’s presence is anhypostatic, mediating (like all inspired speech) the Father’s *logos* in the Spirit’s power, but in less than his full personal presence; Jesus himself is the Word not just *really*, but *fully* present.” Work, *Living and Active*, 104.

¹⁷⁸Ward, *Words of Life*, 29.

¹⁷⁹N. T. Wright highlights the exercise of the authority of God by Jesus in relation to Scripture: “The risen Jesus, at the end of Matthew’s gospel, does not say, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth is given to the books you are all going to write,’ but ‘All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me.’ This ought to tell us, precisely if we are taking the Bible itself as seriously as we should, that we need to think carefully what it might mean to think that the authority of Jesus is somehow exercised through the Bible.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, xi.

healed (Mark 2:11-12; Matt 8:3, 17), and the dead were raised (Matt 5:41-42; Luke 7:14-15; John 11:43-44). Jesus upholds his own teaching as carrying the same authority as the teaching of the OT, as seen in the repeated formula of the Sermon on the Mount, “You have heard it said . . . but I say unto you” (Matt 5:21-48). At the same time, one sees the unity of divine speech in Jesus’ own insistence that his words are part of a mission from God (“I gave them the words that you gave me [John 17:8]), flow from the authority of the Father (“I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me [John 8:28]), and that the Son himself exists in unity with the Father (“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30; cf. John 17:11).

At the same time, the Spirit is no less involved in the action effected by the words of God. The Spirit is seen himself to speak: “And the Spirit said to Philip” (Acts 8:29). His communicative work is seen in Jesus’ insistence that the Spirit will glorify him, “for he will take what it is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14). Indeed, the Spirit is identified as the author of Scripture: “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21).¹⁸⁰ This involvement is seen too in Jesus’ own insistence that the agency of the Spirit was operative in his own teaching: “It is the Spirit who gives life” and “the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63).¹⁸¹ Not only that, but as Sinclair Ferguson has noted, the Spirit acts “as the

¹⁸⁰How the authorship of the Spirit relates to the inspiration of Scripture will be discussed in the next section, but for the classic evangelical treatment on the work of the Spirit in the authorship of Scripture, see Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*.

¹⁸¹Commenting on this verse, Ward is insightful: “It is not that Jesus is saying in some metaphorical sense that his words will bring fullness of life and lead people to walk in the power of the Spirit, if they obey them, true though that may be. Instead he means what he (literally) says: because his words which God identifies as entirely his own, they are literally ‘full of the Spirit,’ who is himself God, and full of eternal life.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 39.

executive of the saving activity of God”¹⁸²—as the agent carrying out Moses’ miracles (Exod 8:19); as the one who imparts rest from God (Isa 63:14; Matt 11:28-30); and as the grieved party who executes Israel’s deliverance from (Isa 63:10). More to the point, while it is the word of God that is spoken of as the means of regeneration in Scripture (1 Pet 1:23; Jas 1:18; John 15:13), the Spirit is nonetheless everywhere tethered to the word as the efficient cause of regeneration (Rom 8:11; John 3:5-8).¹⁸³ As with the Son, so with the Spirit, too: they both speak that which they receive from the Father, “The Spirit of truth . . . will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak. . . . He will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13, 14).¹⁸⁴

Fourth, God’s authority may be attributed to human words. All throughout the Bible, God acts through utterances of human messengers.¹⁸⁵ Sometimes, these are words dictated by God to a human intermediary (e.g., “And the Lord said to Moses, write these words” [Exod 34:27]), but much more often—in fact, overwhelmingly so (Heb 1:1-2)—God speaks through the words of humans, and yet he does so in such a manner that this speech may still rightly be said to be words from God.¹⁸⁶ “This is remarkable,” comments

¹⁸²Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 23–24.

¹⁸³“Regeneration and the faith to which it gives birth are seen as taking place not by revelationless divine sovereignty, but within the matrix of the preaching of the word and the witness of the people of God (cf. Rom 10:1-15). Their instrumentality in regeneration does not impinge upon the sovereign activity of the Spirit. Word and Spirit belong together.” *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁸⁴The unity of the Trinity and the intrinsic logic of the unity of divine speech is seen in the following verse also: “All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:15).

¹⁸⁵Swain notes that God is by no means required to speak through human mediators and yet he does: “Though he infinitely transcends his creatures, the sovereign king can stoop and speak to his creatures in their language and cause himself to be understood, for he is himself the Creator of human speech and understanding (cf. Exod 4:11-12). Nevertheless, God *ordinarily* speaks to his creatures *through* the speech of other creatures (Heb 1:1-2).” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 36.

¹⁸⁶Wayne Grudem comments on the authority of the OT prophets, “It is characteristic of this kind of messenger that his words possess not merely his own personal authority but the authority of the one who sent him. So it is with the Old Testament prophets: their words carry the authority of Yahweh Himself, because He has called them as authoritative messengers who will speak for Him.” Wayne A. Grudem,

Timothy Ward, “but it is also so common in Scripture that most people familiar with the Bible have ceased to be astounded by it.”¹⁸⁷ The Old Testament prophets, for example, are portrayed as those not speaking on their own behalf but as bearers of words from God (Deut 18:18-20; Jer 14:14; Ezek 13:1-19).¹⁸⁸ In fact, these words carry the same authority as God’s own speech to the extent that—as Wayne Grudem points out—“to obey ‘the words of Haggai the prophet’ is equivalent to obeying ‘the voice of the Lord’ (Hag 1:12; cf. 1 Sam 15:3, 18).”¹⁸⁹

Nicholas Wolterstorff has categorized this kind of speech one finds in Scripture as “double agency discourse,” and in explanation of this concept argues, “To deputize to someone else some authority that one has in one’s own person is not to surrender that authority and hand it over to that other person; it is to bring it about that one exercises that authority by way of actions performed by that other person acting as one’s deputy.”¹⁹⁰ In this respect, God speaks—and acts—through human words in a similar manner as does a head of state through an ambassador.¹⁹¹ This is true of the patriarchs and prophets, as Jesus affirms (Matt 4:4; Mark 7:9-13; Luke 24:25), of the

“Scripture’s Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 21.

¹⁸⁷Ward, *Words of Life*, 34.

¹⁸⁸Swain adds, “The result of this act of authorization is not simply that the authorized agent delivers the message of the one who sent him. The result is that the sender *himself* communicates *by means of* the speech of his authorized agent.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 37.

¹⁸⁹Grudem, “Scripture’s Self-Attestation,” 23.

¹⁹⁰Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 42.

¹⁹¹Swain elaborates: “An ‘ambassador’ is a good example of this form of communication. When a president sends a message to another country by means of an ambassador, the authoritative communication is *that of the president*, even though the message is delivered by the mouth of an ambassador. The ambassador may be given more or less freedom about how he phrases the message and so forth. But only to the extent that he communicates the message of his president does he faithfully execute his ambassadorial office, for his office consists in his being the voice of the president abroad. The president himself speaks *by* the ambassador’s mouth.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 38.

apostles, who were led along by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), and is seen preeminently in the perfect union of God and man in Jesus where the speech of the Son is everywhere to be received as the authoritative speech of God.¹⁹²

Fifth, with Scripture God transmits his saving power through time. Stated slightly differently, the writing of Scripture allows for God's authoritative words to reach endless generations of hearers, not just the original audience to whom those words were first directed.¹⁹³ That inscriptionation was designed to make sure God's words were effective beyond their original occasion is seen in the way the law was written down, and commanded to be read, precisely so "that their children who have not known it [the law], may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God" (Deut 31:13).¹⁹⁴ Gordon McConville convincingly makes the point that Jeremiah 36 allows for Jeremiah's words to be effective beyond its original occasion. Indeed, "The point," McConville argues, "is simply that the word once given to the prophet is living and effective beyond the moment and first circumstances of its giving and hearing. The production of a second scroll shows that this fundamental fact cannot be undone, rather the reverse. The word lives on,

¹⁹²On the notion of deputized speech, in reference to the prophet Jeremiah, Ward adds, "Jeremiah is appointed by God to have power over nations and kingdoms, but this power comes only from the divine words God has put in his mouth. Only God has this power over nations. Jeremiah, as his deputized speaker, is given the same power only in that he speaks words given him by God—words which therefore can perform what God intends them to perform. Jeremiah will speak ordinary human words in an ordinary human language; God does not put special magic formula or a previously unknown heavenly language into Jeremiah's mouth. Yet still those words will also be God's words." Ward, *Words of Life*, 35.

¹⁹³Swain adds, "The need to put God's word into writing arises from the unlimited scope of the triune God's sovereign purpose to manifest his glory through space and time coupled with the mortal limitations of God's authorized speech agents, his prophets and apostles." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 54.

¹⁹⁴Swain elaborates, "The writing of the law serves a function in the Mosaic Covenant similar to that of the rainbow in the Noahic Covenant (Gen 9:12-17) and of circumcision in the Abraham Covenant (Gen 17:11). As the rainbow and circumcision served as *symbolic* testimonies to the perpetuity of God's promise to future generations, so the written word of Moses would serve as a perpetual *verbal* testimony to God's promise (and curse!) to future generations." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 55.

mediated by and within the faithful in the community.”¹⁹⁵ Though prophets and apostles who spoke these words from God all die, the “word of our God will stand forever” (Isa 40:8)—at least in part because these words themselves were written down, preserved, and transmitted to accomplish God’s kingdom purposes down through the ages.¹⁹⁶

Indeed, the passing down of God’s words in Scripture for use as the means by which God transmits his saving power is established by Jesus himself who alludes—in his post-resurrection teaching to the apostles—to the consistent refrain of the prophets that the law would proceed forth from Jerusalem and extend to all nations across time (Luke 24:47; cf. Isa 2:2-3; 40:9; 51:4; Mic 4:1-2). Theologically, Scripture provides the church the tools through which the Spirit operates to effect newness of life, growth, and perseverance. Indeed, Charles Hill argues that the writing of the NT was “inevitable” because inscriptionation is so closely linked with God’s kingdom purposes:

The concern for preserving and passing down the apostolic teaching to succeeding generations of the church was present from the beginning, in Jesus’ own instruction. The intention of leaving the church with a *written* deposit of the Spirit-directed, apostolic witness is apparent in the very decision to publish the earliest written Gospels and Acts, in the decision to utilize writing as a major form of instruction and discipline in the accomplishment of the apostolic foundation-laying ministry, and particularly at the stage of collecting and publishing Paul’s letters, and then other didactic letters from leaders of the original apostolic mission. . . . In the canon of the NT, the church has its eschatological equipment, with the Spirit’s attending presence and power, for life in the “already/not yet.” In it the church still has the voice of the apostles, delivering the voice of the Good Shepherd himself, whose sheep hear his voice, and they know him, and they follow him.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵Gordon McConville, “Divine Speech and the Book of Jeremiah,” in *The Trustworthiness of God: Perspectives on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Paul Helm and Carl R. Trueman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 26.

¹⁹⁶On a similar note, Swain adds, “Though he [Peter] too must go the way of all flesh, the word of the Lord—which is the word of the gospel (1 Pet 1:24-25)—will abide forever, *because it is written*. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 57.

¹⁹⁷Hill, “God’s Speech in These Last Days,” 253–54.

Fittingly, then, one can say that the process of inscripturation is a recapitulation of Eden—as the world plunged into ruin through the following after a false world, so too the world is renewed by the effects of a living word from God. With the process of inscripturation, “Moses’ words cross the Jordan forbidden to him and announce the coming of one even greater.”¹⁹⁸

Sixth, humanity has communion with God through the words of God. The inverse is also true: man has no communion with God apart from God’s speech.¹⁹⁹ To make this assertion is not to say that God does not reveal himself in the created order (Rom 1:20). Nor is it to say that God does not (or worse, is not able to) communicate or act in non-verbal ways.²⁰⁰ He is, of course. In fact, *the paradigmatic moment of redemption in the Old Testament—the exodus—was an event and not a verbal communicative action.*²⁰¹ And yet, as Ward points out, “the exodus as an event would be incomprehensible as divine redemption to those experiencing it, were it not preceded and followed by explanatory words from God.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Ward, *Living and Active*, 148.

¹⁹⁹ Ward adds, “God cannot meaningfully establish his covenant with us, he cannot make his promise to us, without using words. . . . God chooses to use words as a fundamental means of relating to us, we must presume, because the kind of relationship he chooses to establish cannot be established without them.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 31.

²⁰⁰ For a helpful treatment on the “media of God’s Word,” see Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2010, 71–100.

²⁰¹ “The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is the foundational saving event in the Old Testament. The paradigmatic work of YHWH on behalf of Israel establishes a movement toward this-worldly flourishing as the goal of salvation. The exodus pattern begins when God’s original intent for his people’s well-being and blessing has been disrupted, and its epicenter is God’s intervention to deliver those in need and to restore them to a life of shalom in their concrete earthly environment.” Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 95.

²⁰² Ward, *Words of Life*, 30.

Instead, what one sees in Scripture is that relationship with God is enabled, governed, and sustained by divine discourse.²⁰³ It is enabled both in terms of God's speech that establishes the stipulations of the covenant, and by the effectual work of God in the proclamation of the gospel that brings the believer into union with Christ through faith. It is governed by words from God both in the content of the provisions listed throughout canonical revelation and by the conviction wrought and faith elicited from the work of the Spirit in the ministry of the Word in the life of the believer. It is sustained both by the promises of the kingdom it provides and the function it takes on in effecting in the believer's life conformity to Christ.²⁰⁴ In summary, as Timothy Ward notes, "When we encounter certain *human words* . . . we are in direct contact with *God's words*. This is itself a direct encounter with *God's activity* (since God's speech is one form in which he regularly acts), especially with his *covenant-making* activity. And an encounter with God's covenant-making communicative activity is *itself an encounter with God*."²⁰⁵ In what ways, though, does the kingdom of God stand as the most useful framework?

The Word and the Kingdom of God

As seen above, God's self-disclosure to man is unmistakably linguistic. And the words of God are associated both with the authority of God and the action of God. Many of the works with which this study has interacted have successfully argued

²⁰³John Owen is perhaps the one who has most extensively written on communion with God in the context of God's triune being. See John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

²⁰⁴Vanloozer is helpful in grounding communion within God's triune being: "God communicates himself in three ways: the Father is the locator who utters the word; the Son is what is communicated, the content of the Father's speech; the Spirit is the 'channel' (air) that carries the word. . . . The Father initiates communicative action, the Son executes it, and the Spirit carries it to completion." Vanloozer, "Triune Discourse (Part 2)," 61.

²⁰⁵Ward, *Words of Life*, 36.

themselves that Scripture has a role to play in the eschatological conquest of redemptive history, but this study goes a step further and upholds the kingdom as the most useful framework within which one may understand the role of Scripture and the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and the interpretation of Scripture. In light of the preceding sections, the next move will be to examine several reasons why this is the case when it comes to our understanding of Scripture and its role in God's kingdom purpose.

First, Scripture exerts itself upon its hearers, and in doing so reflects the divine initiative of the kingdom of God.²⁰⁶ God's first act in creation, as it has been pointed out above, was an irruptive speaking the world into existence *ex nihilo*.²⁰⁷ More than that, it is seen throughout Scripture that one of the defining qualities of God is that he *speaks*, and by doing so *acts*, injecting himself into the created order, revealing himself, and acting within the world²⁰⁸—as opposed to false gods who are mute and powerless (Hab 2:12; 1 Cor 12:2).²⁰⁹ More still, God graciously condescends to speak to man and gives

²⁰⁶Carl F. H. Henry captures the irruptive nature of divine speech, “Revelation occurs on God’s R-Day as an act of transcendent disclosure. It pulses with the surprise of foreign invasion, and opens before us like the suddenly parted Red Sea waters. It stirs us like the angelic hosts who appeared unscheduled to proclaim Messiah’s birth, or overawes us like the rushing mighty wind of Pentecost. The essence of revelation is that God steps out of his hiddenness to disclose what would otherwise remain secret.” Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 2:20–21.

²⁰⁷“When God first utters his word in the first chapter of Genesis, he speaks not to rational beings, but to inanimate objects. And in the first instance, he addresses that object before it exists. He says ‘Let there be light’ (Gen 1:3), and light comes into existence. Such is the power of his word that he is able to ‘call [*kalountos*] into existence the things that do not exist.’” Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2010, 50.

²⁰⁸Matthew Levering argues that a key presupposition for a faithful understanding of Scripture is the notion that “God is alive and historical realities cannot be understood outside of human relationships with him—relationships that God, not human beings, sets in motion according to his plan for salvation.” Matthew Levering, *Participatory Biblical Exegesis: A Theology of Biblical Interpretation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 77.

²⁰⁹Vanhoozer adds, “The paucity of systematic theological attention to the theme of divine speaking is surprising given Scripture’s own contrast between the speaking God of Israel and dumb pagan idols. False gods neither speak nor act; false gods tell no tales. But Yahweh talks!” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 2),” 52.

him a share in this capacity for speech, and hence rule.²¹⁰ At each point, though, God's communicative activity is tied organically to his eschatological drive to build a kingdom.

Those who privilege other themes are right to point out that Scripture is triune discourse: “something (covenantal) someone (Father, Son and Spirit) says to someone (the church) about something (life with God).”²¹¹ Those who focus on the theme of covenant are right to note how the structure of God’s revelation may never be divorced from its covenantal shape. And yet, the kingdom of God offers a framework that incorporates both of these themes and more still.

Consider first of all the way speech itself is associated with the kingdom of God in creation. It is man who is to serve as God’s viceregent—extending God’s rule and dominion throughout the created order, and part of man’s rule is seen in his naming authority (Gen 2:18).²¹² Outward from Eden Scripture repeatedly equates the power to name with authority over the one named in the context of a defined kingdom: kings and Pharaohs changing the name of those in their service (Gen 41:45; 2 Kgs 23:34; 24:17; Dan 1:7); Jesus giving new names to disciples at the inauguration of his eschatological kingdom (John 1:42; Mark 3:16-17); and Jesus bequeathing “a new name” to those who conquer in the consummation of his kingdom (Rev 2:17). More than that, even creation is tethered to the enthronement of Jesus; as Carl F. H. Henry notes, “The universe itself was

²¹⁰Swain comments on the idea of God accommodating man in speech: “Though he infinitely transcends his creatures, the sovereign king can stoop and speak to his creatures in their language and cause himself to be understood, for he is himself the Creator of human speech and understanding (cf. Exod 4:11-12). Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 36.

²¹¹Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 2),” 64.

²¹²Roy Ciampa also notes the centrality of viceregency in the redemptive purposes of God: “Humankind is created as his vice-regents who are to reflect his glory throughout his creation as they reflect the image of the Great Creator-King through their exercise of dominion over the rest of the creation.” Roy E. Ciampa, “The History of Redemption,” in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology*:

fashioned on redemption lines: Jesus Christ is the Lamb ‘slain from the foundation of the world’ (Rev 13:8 ASV).²¹³

Beyond creation, the bestowal of Scripture—as speech from God given to man—points to God’s kingdom purposes. Here, Wolterstorff is right to identify the “transivity” of revelation.²¹⁴ By that, he refers to the way Scripture is both God’s objective divine self-disclosure, and revelation transmitted from one to another—God’s revelation directed to *someone*.²¹⁵ Revelation, then, by virtue of being transitive, has a teleology, which Scripture reveals as the restoration of humanity and renewing of creation in an eternal kingdom. Additionally, a focus on the kingdom of God expands the field of vision beyond just the personal implications of Scripture for the reader himself. Take for example the way Scripture functions in the life of Jesus himself: in becoming human, incredibly, the author of Scripture subjects himself to his own words. Scripture functions in the life of Jesus both in forming his mental categories and worldview²¹⁶ and also in revealing to Jesus that he is Israel’s Messiah.²¹⁷ Additionally, Scripture functions

Mapping Unity in Diversity, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 257.

²¹³Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:32.

²¹⁴Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 65.

²¹⁵In explanation of this theme, Telford Work comments, “In the mission of Scripture we see God’s biblical Word in transitive mode, in the act of accomplishing the Father’s will by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Work, *Living and Active*, 129.

²¹⁶Telford Work elaborates helpfully, “In becoming human, the God who brings a community into being through its own canon is made a creature of that particularly community, and is subjected to his own words of blessing and cursing. . . . Incarnation, as the entire process through which God the Son becomes a particular ancient Jew, from conception through gestation, birth, childhood, and adolescence, deeply incorporates the Tanakh into the human life of God. God’s word now returns to God in a new way. It is no longer simply a word addressed to the world; now its author is also its audience.” Ibid., 170.

²¹⁷N. T. Wright identifies the baptism of Jesus as the first moment of Jesus’ messianic self-awareness: “It was at this moment that Jesus received either the call to act as Israel’s Messiah, or, supposing he had already been aware of such a call, confirmation of this vocation. Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, commonly regarded as standing behind the voice heard at Jesus’ baptism, point at least in the first instance toward Messiahship as the meaning of the whole incident. Jesus’ anointing with the divine spirit

providentially even in hermeneutical battles among first-century Jews to bring about the kingdom of God—as Telford Work has pointed out, “One of Scripture’s most important soteriological functions is constructing the competing thought-worlds that together send Jesus to the cross.”²¹⁸ Finally, even the imagery of what Scripture is—the coming down of God and entering into and operating within his own creation—is beautifully consonant with the rest of God’s saving activity: from the coming down of God in his speech, to the coming down of God in the Incarnation, to the coming down of heaven to join with earth, divine initiative resounds with appeals to the kingdom of God.

Second, Scripture functions to mediate God’s covenantal promises and bring man into communion with God, but the kingdom of God is the *telos* of these promises, the sphere in which they take on concrete form, and the means by which one may understand the shape and scope of God’s communion with man. Admittedly, one advantage that a covenantal focus brings is the way it highlights the tight textual and theological relationships between the covenants themselves and the blessings they mediate. Indeed, one cannot rightly understand the kingdom of God apart from a proper understanding of the covenantal framework of Scripture; this is because (1) the consummation of the kingdom is indeed a fulfillment of the covenant promises themselves, and (2) because the promises make the fulfillment of them an intelligible

can be read as a deliberate allusion to such passages as Isaiah 11:2 (the Messiah’s anointing with YHWH’s spirit) and 1 Samuel 16:13 (where YHWH’s spirit comes powerfully upon David after Samuel has anointed him). However much the text may have been influenced by post-Easter reflection, there is no reason historically to deny that at John’s baptism Jesus became aware in a new way of a messianic vocation.” N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 537.

²¹⁸Work, *Living and Active*, 179.

reality for readers of Scripture.²¹⁹

Even still, a covenant focus has the potential to individualize and abstract the promise of eschatological fulfillment. As one example, Swain argues, “God’s ultimate covenantal purpose, which unfolds through time and by means of various covenant administrations and which finds its fulfillment in Christ, is to communicate himself to his redeemed and renewed people in a relationship of love and fellowship.”²²⁰ Such a statement is right and biblical, as far as it goes, but a kingdom focus seems to bring a more vital and more concrete focus to these covenantal promises.

To explain, God’s intention is indeed to communicate himself in a fatherly relationship of love and fellowship (Jer 31:33-34; 2 Cor 6:18), but this relationship is ultimately and eternally designed to exist in the kingdom of God. The promises of God find their ultimate, concrete fulfillment in the form of resurrected life in a new creation in service to Christ whose rule is extended across the universe.²²¹ This is not only the ultimate state of the one in Christ but also the present state in the inauguration of this kingdom seen in Christ’s rule over the church; for it is the church as the outpost of the kingdom in the present age which serves as (1) the location from which God’s rule is

²¹⁹This is one of the reasons Gentry and Wellum argue, “The biblical covenants constitute the framework and backbone for the entire storyline of Scripture.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 603.

²²⁰Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 41.

²²¹Thus, this study argues for a model of eternity distinct from those that affirm bodily resurrection but locate the Christian hope in terms of a beatific vision, which Craig Blaising has called a “spiritual vision” model: “In the spiritual vision model of eternity, heaven is the highest level of ontological reality. It is the realm of spirit as opposed to base matter. This is the destiny of the saved, who will exist in that non-earthly, spiritual place as spiritual beings engaged eternally in spiritual activity.” This is in contrast to a “new creation” model of eternity, which this study affirms: “The key point is that whereas the spiritual vision model abstracts spirit from matter, hierachalizes it ontologically, and sees perfection in a changeless, atemporal state, the new creation model affirms a future holistic creation blessed with the perfection of righteousness and everlasting life.” Craig A. Blaising, “Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 161, 163–64.

extended through the power of the Spirit in the proclamation of the Word and (2) the source from which communion with God exists through the ministry of the Word and the fellowship of the saints.²²²

Thus, a kingdom framework allows God's promises in Scripture to function properly in the life of the believer, and in the same way they did in the life of God's people down through the ages. J. Richard Middleton points out that the covenant promises of Scripture created in the life of Israel not primarily a hope for spiritual communion with God in the afterlife, but rather, "God's purposes for blessing and shalom are expected for the faithful in this life, in the midst of history."²²³ This promise is precisely why, Middleton says,

The entire Old Testament reveals an interest in mundane matters such as the development of languages and cultures, the fertility of the land and crops, the birth of children and stable family life, justice among neighbors, and peace in international relations. The Old Testament does not spiritualize salvation but rather understands it as God's deliverance of people and land from all that destroys life and the consequent restoration of people and land to flourishing.²²⁴

In other words, the covenants cultivated within the people of God a powerful hope not just for communion in the abstract but for the tangible things God promised—land,

²²²For a helpful exploration of the kingdom of God in the context of ecclesiology, see Moore and Sagers, "The Kingdom of God and the Church."

²²³Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 24. Over against Middleton, however, this study rejects his view that "the Old Testament does not typically place any substantial hope in the afterlife" (*ibid.*, 133). Instead, it seems the OT does indeed teach that the personal consciousness continues on after death. As Russell Moore rightly points out, "This is seen in relatively mysterious passages such as King Saul's hiring of the witch of Endor to summon the dead Prophet Samuel from the beyond (1 Sam 28:8-19). Even the Preacher of Ecclesiastes ended his discourse on the shortness of life and the inevitability of death with the warning that there is a judgment coming in which God 'will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil' (Eccl 12:14). Moreover, the Old Testament Scriptures teach not only personal consciousness after death but also the resurrection of the body. Job hoped for the day when, in his flesh, he would see the Creator in whom he trusted (Job 19:25-27). The Prophet Daniel foresaw a day of cosmic tumult, followed by the judgment of humanity. On that day, he revealed, the graves will be opened, and God's people will be resurrected in honor and glory and God's enemies will be resurrected in defeat and judgment (Dan 12:1-3)." Moore, "Personal and Cosmic Eschatology," 860.

²²⁴Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 25.

victory, rest, blessing.²²⁵ These blessings are realized both in the eschatological fulfillment of Christ's kingdom and in its colony in this age, the church.

Scripture functions not only to cultivate hope for those things which God has promised in his eschatological kingdom but also to mediate judgment to those who stand against God's kingdom. Hence, a kingdom focus makes sense of—among other things—apocalyptic literature's use of foreshortening the announcement of God's eschatological judgment. Here, Work rightly shows how these declarations of judgment “explain its [Scripture's] power to induce immediate ethical change in its contemporary audiences. They truly experience God's imminent, final judgment—and sometimes the experience causes them to embrace God's imminent, final salvation.”²²⁶

A kingdom focus offers shape not only to the nature of God's promises but also to the nature of communion with God itself. It does so, first, in showing the way Scripture mediates the presence of the triune God in the progressive establishment of Christ's eschatological kingdom. Work is exactly right to comment, “Holy writ is such an effective means of God's ‘presence-in-absence’ that for centuries, biblical Israel can look forward to a prophet like Moses, a new Temple, and a restored throne, without anything but Scripture to sustain it—because in Scripture it has all three.”²²⁷ God communes with

²²⁵Alec Motyer emphasizes the animating hope of the kingdom as a physical inheritance in the Old Testament in a recent work in an intriguing way. In answer to a hypothetical question about how the Israelites under Moses would have given their “testimony” to someone who asked for it, Motyer surmises, “We were in a foreign land, in bondage, under the sentence of death. But our mediator—the one who stands between us and God—came to us with the promise of deliverance. We trusted in the promises of God, took shelter under the blood of the lamb, and he led us out. Now we are on the way to the Promised Land. We are not there yet, of course, but we have the law to guide us, and through blood sacrifice we also have his presence in our midst. So he will stay with us until we get to our true country, our everlasting home.” Alec Motyer, *A Christian's Pocket Guide to Loving The Old Testament: One Book, One God, One Story* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2015), 4.

²²⁶Work, *Living and Active*, 161.

²²⁷Work, *Living and Active*, 152. Elsewhere, Work is insightful in noting how Scripture “fills in” for God across the Old Testament: “It acts sacramentally, as a material means by which God makes

his people in Scripture by mediating himself through Scripture and giving his people a foretaste of the blessings of the kingdom they will inherit as those united by faith to the One to whom the kingdom belongs.

Not only does the kingdom ground communion within a Trinitarian economy, it also reveals the *raison d'être* for this communion, the means by which it is accomplished, and the form it takes on eternally. As Swain has argued, “God’s final kingdom design is to renew and perfect his fallen creation so that it may become a holy dwelling place of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”²²⁸ As those who will reign with Christ in this kingdom (Rev 22:5), amazingly, communion takes the form of an invitation to participate in the inner life of the triune God. Without obliterating the creator-creature distinction, God uses Scripture to unite humans by faith to the Son and conform them to his image, and then invites them to participate in the divine life of the Son—sharing his inheritance and sharing in the communion of the triune God as the people of God reign eternally in the renewed creation where God dwells with man.

Third, God acts in Scripture through human agency—both in terms of Scripture’s composition and its proclamation²²⁹—and this activity is best understood in light of God’s kingdom purposes of ruling through human viceregents. Other proposed themes speak of things true about Scripture: it is indeed triune discourse, and must be

himself savingly present to Israel. Forever preserved in the canon is evidence of the capacity of God’s words to mediate God’s presence even apart from God’s other presences to Israel: Ark, Temple, throne, and living prophets. Its power will allow rabbinical Judaism to form in exile, prosper in dispersion, regather and regroup under Nehemiah and Ezra, and eventually continue for centuries in the total absence of these other means of God’s presence.” Ibid., 151.

²²⁸Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 33.

²²⁹Both the significance of the composition of Scripture and the proclamation of Scripture will be touched on in subsequent sections of this study—the former in this chapter and the latter in chapter three.

understood in that light; it is indeed a covenantal word, and understanding how these covenants fit together is crucial to understanding the progress of redemption. But the kingdom of God provides a framework that unites (1) the objective reality of what Scripture is and (2) the subjective work that Scripture accomplishes.

To begin with the latter, the kingdom illustrates the subjective work that Scripture accomplishes in extending God's kingdom rule. This work is, in short, bringing about the restoration of God's intention for his creation. More specifically, though, as Dan McCartney has argued, the coming of the kingdom of God fundamentally involves "the reinstatement of the originally intended divine order for earth, with man properly situated as God's viceregent."²³⁰ Human viceregency is indeed, the "inner logic of resurrection,"²³¹ as resurrection rectifies "a situation in which death has impeded God's purposes for earthly blessing and shalom"²³² and results in human life being restored to that which it was meant to be.²³³ The Spirit works through Scripture to bring about the new birth, and in turn, a reign with Christ at the consummation of the kingdom, but even now redeemed humanity in this age participate in the extension of the rule of God on earth through the power of the Spirit in the proclamation of the Word of God (cf. Rom 10:14) and thus act as those with delegated (if not fully realized) authority. Moreover, the church itself is vested with authority (Matt 16:19) and is ruled by a human viceregent—because "Christ is now a man, and as man rules as human viceregent."²³⁴—and in this

²³⁰McCartney, "*Ecce Homo*," 2.

²³¹Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 132.

²³²Ibid., 153.

²³³Ibid., 154.

²³⁴McCartney, "*Ecce Homo*," 16.

age Christ's rule over the church is exercised through Scripture itself.²³⁵

Going back to the former, the kingdom frames what Scripture is, objectively—a divine Word mediated through human words. More will be said about the nature of inspiration in the following section. Here, let it be seen, simply, that inscripturation itself brims with analogies to God's kingdom rule. The human authors of Scripture write with deputized authority, as outlined above. But even this authority is connected to and reflective of God's intention to rule through human viceregents.²³⁶ Often, explanations of inscripturation are cast in strikingly philosophical terms,²³⁷ but here the internal resources of Christian theology allow one to develop an understanding of what Scripture from its own categories. In other words, the way God has chosen to reveal himself in Scripture through the discourse of an authorized humanity is not a coincidence but rather one more way God has woven the pattern of the kingdom into the tapestry of revelation.

Fourth, Scripture functions not only in conversion but also in sanctification and perseverance, and through the work of Scripture one is put in relationship with God and made friends with God. But the kingdom of God highlights the form this friendship takes on. Swain argues, “Both the means and the end of the covenant are covenantal, and

²³⁵Treat adds, along similar lines, “As God promised David, the one to establish his kingdom would be a Son of God *and* a descendent of David (2 Sam 7:12-14). As a human, a second Adam, a descendent of David, Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh with the task of restoring human viceregency over all the earth. Therefore, while Jesus *is* king as the divine Son of God, his human kingship is a process of establishing his Father’s throne on earth as it is in heaven.” Treat, *The Crucified King*, 150.

²³⁶“The kingdom of God entails the restoration of human viceregency,” Treat notes. “The kingdom is characterized primarily by *Christ’s* throne; he is ‘the ruler of the kings on earth’ (Rev 1:5). But he has also made *us* a kingdom, meaning that those who are under his reign will also reign with him on his throne (Rev 3:21; cf. Gen 1:28).” *Ibid.*, 121.

²³⁷A prime example is how often the concept of deputized speech or double agency discourse is appealed to in order to explain what is going on in Scripture. Even this study made such an appeal earlier in this chapter, for the sake of the progression of the argument. The point here, though, is that the kingdom of God provides us a conceptual analogy within Scripture’s own categories by which one can accomplish the same goal.

therefore communicative, friendship with God.”²³⁸ So too, J. I. Packer is no doubt right in arguing that “God’s purpose in revelation is to make friends with us.”²³⁹ But what form does this friendship take on? It is here where a kingdom focus allows one to see with greater clarity the fullness of the work of Scripture in the life of the believer and its function in the triumph of God’s kingdom—because a kingdom focus allows one to define the relationship as Scripture does, in terms of being fitted for rule in eternity.

As Russell Moore has insisted, the Christian life in this age is “an internship for the eschaton.”²⁴⁰ God’s providential involvement in the Christian’s life is both paternal and preparatory. Indeed, part of the function of Scripture in the life of the believer is to conform him into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 6:17; Eph 4:13), including even discipline (Heb 12:6; Prov 3:16; Rev 3:19), precisely because this conformity is the means by which man may reign with Christ in eternity.²⁴¹ The kingdom of God is an inheritance that belongs to Jesus, and believers are “fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17; cf. Gal 3:27-29) precisely because they are actually united with Christ (Gal 4:1-7). Scripture, in turn, is the instrument through which the Spirit operates to effect this union—a real, vital union which gives the believer life (John 14:19; 1 John 5:11-12), incorporates him into Christ (Eph 2:4-5; Gal 2:20; Col 2:13; Col 3:3; 1 Cor 6:17), and

²³⁸Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 20.

²³⁹J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 50.

²⁴⁰Russell Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 54. Moore continues: “In the kingdom of God, Jesus shows us the goal of our future—of our lives individually and congregationally, and of the galaxies and solar systems around us. Finding ourselves in his inheritance frees us from clamoring and fighting for our own glory or relevance. Seeing our lives now, and the universe around us, as precursors to the life to come, we’re freed from the ingratitude that turns away from God’s good gifts, from the apathy that ignores those God hears. We pour ourselves into loving, serving, and working because these things are seeds of the tasks God has for us in the next phrase.” Ibid.

²⁴¹“The church will one day be conformed to the full likeness of Christ (1 John 3:2), which will include the resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15:49) and reigning with Christ on earth (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 22:5)—that is, the restoration of their full humanity.” Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 69.

leads him to participate in Christ's life (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:10-11). The purpose of this union, though, is clear: that the believer may "reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:17). This reign has broken into this age in the life of the church by the same means—as Jesus is vitally united with his church (Eph 5:23) and both imparts a foretaste of resurrection life and exerts his rule in the context of the local church.

Friendship with God is therefore everywhere connected with preparation for eschatological rule. Indeed, the logic of the Incarnation and the logic of the resurrection are flip sides of the same coin, as Middleton has argued, for "just as Jesus has shared in the human condition (including the humiliation of death), so too all who follow him will share in his exaltation and rule."²⁴² Accordingly, a kingdom focus guards against the danger of abstracting or spiritualizing friendship with God, because it connects it to the means by which the relationship originates (union with Christ), the process of how the relationship is developed (participation in Christ), and the sphere within which the relationship exists (the kingdom of God). It balances promise "if we have died with him, we will also live with him," with participation, "if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2 Tim 2:11-12). And it speaks of friendship with God in the same terms as does Scripture, tethered everywhere to God's love and care and life with his people—those who "will reign forever and ever" (Rev 22:5).

Fifth, Scripture functions to alter the trajectory not just of human history but also the entire universe, and the kingdom of God best allows the full scope of Scripture's function and God's cosmic mission to come into a clear focus. As Telford Work points out, "the Bible operates both macroscopically, altering the trajectory of human history,

²⁴²Ibid., 150.

and microscopically, altering the person who receives its message.”²⁴³ A kingdom framework will allow both these foci to stay clearly in view. After all, God reconciles in Christ, “all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Col 1:19; cf. Rom 8:19-23). Not only that but the redemption of humanity is organically connected to the renewal of creation; indeed, the resurrection wrought by the new birth through the work of the Spirit in the proclamation of Scripture makes no sense apart from God’s intent to renew the created order, as N. T. Wright notes:

“Resurrection” was not simply a pious hope about new life for dead people. It carried with it all that was associated with the return from exile itself: forgiveness of sins, the re-establishment of Israel as the true humanity of the covenant god, and the renewal of all creation. Indeed, resurrection and the renewal of creation go hand in hand. If the space-time world were to disappear, resurrection would not make sense. Alternatively, if there was to be no resurrection, who would people the renewed cosmos?

Thus the Jews who believed in resurrection did so as one part of a larger belief in the renewal of the whole created order. Resurrection would be, in one and the same moment, the reaffirmation of the covenant and reaffirmation of creation. Israel would be restored within a restored cosmos: the world would see, at last, who had all along been the true people of the creator God.²⁴⁴

At the same time, the Scripture works through the redemption of the individual towards the renewal of the creation through the church’s mission. That is to say, in the Great Commission and the cultural mandate, the church becomes the theater of God’s renewal of creation. Indeed, it is no accident that all but one of Jesus’ miracles (the cursing of the fig tree) are miracles of restoration.²⁴⁵ This is because, on the one hand, the

²⁴³Work, *Living and Active*, 130.

²⁴⁴Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 332.

²⁴⁵Albert Wolters elaborates: “It is particularly striking that all of Jesus’ miracles (with the exception of the cursing of the fig tree) are miracles of restoration—restoration to health, restoration to life, restoration to freedom from demonic possession. Jesus’ miracles provide us with a sample of the meaning of redemption: a freeing of creation from the shackles of sin and evil and a reinstatement of creaturely living as intended by God.” Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 75.

church is the present location of the kingdom of God in this age—bringing with it the Spirit working through the Word through whom God “renews the face of the ground” (Ps 104:30). On the other hand, it is through the command of the Father declared by the Son and empowered by the Spirit through Scripture in which man is called to cultivation and workmanship, continuing the move from garden to city,²⁴⁶ in view of the day when “the kings of the earth will bring their glory” into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24; cf. Isa 60:11).²⁴⁷ Middleton rightly insists, “Those being renewed in the *imago Dei* are called to instantiate an embodied culture or social reality alternative to the violent and deathly formations and practices that dominate the world.”²⁴⁸ Thus, a full-orbed kingdom framework has the advantage of emphasizing both the individual and cosmic aspects of God’s redemptive mission, as it grounds Scripture’s role in shaping and forming lives, callings, and vocations fitted as they are for a future kingdom in a renewed creation. That said, does the utility of a kingdom framework end here, or may it also contribute in the formulation of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture?

The Kingdom, the Word, and the Doctrine of Scripture

“In Scripture,” Russell Moore argues, “the eschaton is not simply tacked on to the gospel at the end. It is instead the vision toward which all of Scripture is pointing.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶Middleton traces this move: “Given the human purpose at the start of creation, the movement from garden to city is to be expected. For what happens when humans faithfully work the primitive landscape of a garden throughout history? The complexity of a city is a natural outcome. But this city, unlike all cities we have known, will be without sin.” Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 172–73.

²⁴⁷For a treatment of Isa 60 exploring the religious transformation of culture, see Richard J. Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

²⁴⁸Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 175.

²⁴⁹Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” 858.

The previous two sections have shown (1) the centrality of the kingdom across canonical revelation as well as (2) how God’s speech in Scripture is related to his saving activity and his drive toward the establishment of an eternal kingdom—one that unites the doxological and soteriological goals of redemptive history and one that redeems man and restores creation in service to the ultimate end for which God created the universe, namely, the display of the glory of God in Christ.²⁵⁰ What remains to be seen, however, is how the centrality of eschatological consummation in the kingdom of God may be integrated into a doctrine of Scripture. This section will explore that question, albeit not comprehensively, as a kingdom framework reinforces an evangelical doctrine of Scripture at a number of points and offers of fresh insights of its own.

One should note that hovering in the background of this discussion are numerous proposals calling for a new dogmatic home for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. The call flows from concerns with the way the typical arrangement of systematic theologies—beginning with bibliology instead of theology proper—can result in a doctrine of Scripture with an exaggerated emphasis on epistemic matters.²⁵¹ Telford Work elaborates on this phenomenon in light of his own proposal for an economic Trinitarian framework to be the source from which bibliology flows:

Protestant systematic theology has traditionally placed the topics of revelation and Scripture first in its order of reflection. This arrangement has much to commend it. It solidly grounds the rest of systematic theology, and stresses the sheer divine initiative in any human knowledge and the love of God. But it tends to leave the character and work of Scripture behind, underdeveloped, as the theology moves on. By contrast, an economic Trinitarian theology of Scripture continually revisits

²⁵⁰Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 103.

²⁵¹Even D. A. Carson, who has critiqued many of the proposals brought by those seeking to relocate the doctrine of Scripture, admits that the way some evangelical bibliographies proceed, focusing on human epistemology before focusing on God himself, “is a very post-Enlightenment thing to do.” Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 292.

bibliology in light of every other locus of theology. A systematic, Trinitarian doctrine of Scripture is necessarily circular: all the categories that describe it also emerge from it. This circularity liberates the doctrine of Scripture from its prolegomenal ghetto and appreciates the Bible as reaching into the very plan of God and the very heart of the Christian life.²⁵²

Others have called for a relocation of bibliology without going quite as far²⁵³ as insisting that the doctrine is shackled within a “prolegomenal ghetto.”²⁵⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer, for example, echoes Work’s call for a Trinitarian framework for the doctrine of Scripture.²⁵⁵ N. T. Wright is concerned with understanding Scripture primarily in terms of its function and how the authority of God is expressed in the establishment of the kingdom of God through Scripture.²⁵⁶ In perhaps the most dramatic relocation, John Webster calls for bibliology to proceed from sanctification because Scripture is a “creaturely reality” that

²⁵²Work, *Living and Active*, 9.

²⁵³Timothy Ward is somewhat more restrained: an “unfortunate consequence of a doctrine of Scripture developed apparently in isolation from other central Christian teachings, and from the shape of the narrative structure of Scripture as a whole, is that it can turn out to be a doctrine that seems impoverished and thin, lacking deep roots in the rich glories of the character and actions of God himself. This can be the case even if the doctrine, considered detail by detail, is unimpeachably orthodox and biblical. Such a doctrine can feel, even to some of those who at heart want to uphold it, more like an interesting and necessary tangent in theology than a part of the heartbeat of theology itself. It comes to look like a kind of theological throat-clearing, prior to the main business of actually talking about God, as if in articulating the doctrine of Scripture we were really saying little more than this: ‘Let’s establish the basis on which we talk about God . . . and that’s where the Bible comes in. Now that this is clear, we can get on with the business of actually talking about God.’” Ward, *Words of Life*, 16.

²⁵⁴That said, Kevin Vanhoozer indicts the Reformers quite sharply for establishing the doctrine of Scripture as an independent locus. The result of this move, he argues, was turning “the wine of the canon as a means of grace into the tasteless water of an epistemic criterion.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 1),” 28.

²⁵⁵“The supreme authority in the church is the triune God speaking in the Scriptures. The Father communicates the wisdom embodied in his Son to the authors of Scripture through the Holy Spirit and eventually to its readers as well. The doctrine of Scripture, therefore, has both its genesis and terminus in the doctrine of the Trinity.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 2),” 76.

²⁵⁶“We need to set scripture within the larger context which the biblical writers themselves insist upon: that of the authority of God himself. . . . ‘The authority of scripture’ is thus a sub-branch of several other theological topics: the mission of the church, the work of the Spirit, the ultimate future hope and the way it is anticipated in the present, and of course the nature of the church. . . . We must not confuse the idea of God speaking, in this or any other way, with the notion of *authority*. Authority, particularly when we locate it within the notion of God’s kingdom, is much more than that. It is the sovereign rule of God sweeping through creation to judge and to heal. It is the powerful love of God in Jesus Christ, putting sin to death and launching new creation.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 26, 27–28, 31.

has been “set apart by the triune God to serve his self-presence.”²⁵⁷ To be clear, this study is not calling for anything quite as dramatic as a relocation for the entire doctrine. Instead, the concern of this section is the same as the concern expressed by Timothy Ward, who argues that the attributes of Scripture traditionally affirmed in an evangelical bibliology can be seen in their full richness when “they emerge as appropriate and necessary descriptions of Scripture, in light of its dynamic and integral function within God’s actions in the history of redemption.”²⁵⁸ This section then seeks to feature a number of these attributes to demonstrate how they are not abstract philosophical categories but rather flow directly from God’s purpose to bring about the kingdom of God.²⁵⁹ Such an examination will be by no means comprehensive, but outlining the key connections points will help thicken a number of these traditional attributes.

The Authority of Scripture

In many evangelical treatments of bibliology, the authority of Scripture is most often spoken of in terms of Scripture’s reliability and its right to make authoritative demands of its hearers. “The authority of Scripture,” Wayne Grudem explains, “means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”²⁶⁰ Additionally, the authority of

²⁵⁷ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 21.

²⁵⁸ Ward, *Words of Life*, 17.

²⁵⁹ John Frame is helpful in discussing how a perspectival approach to theology allows differing themes in Scripture to enlighten other concepts. See Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 192–94. Additionally, see Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001).

²⁶⁰ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 73.

Scripture is often spoken of as a consequence of the Spirit's inspiration of Scripture.²⁶¹

Millard Erickson is representative at this point; in the structuring of his treatment of the doctrine of Scripture he begins with inspiration, proceeds to inerrancy, and then examines Scripture's authority. Here he explains this progression well:

Revelation is God's making his truth widely known to humankind. Inspiration preserves it, making it more widely accessible. Inspiration guarantees that what the Bible says is just what God would say if he were to speak directly. One other element is needed in this chain, however. For the Bible to function as if it is God speaking to us, the Bible reader needs to understand the meaning of the Scriptures and be convinced of their divine origin and authorship.²⁶²

Though evangelical theology has faithfully insisted that the Word of God is authoritative, viewing Scripture's authority in light of the centrality of the kingdom may enhance a traditional understanding of this attribute.

For one, a kingdom framework leads one to understand the authority of Scripture in light of the broad theme of kingdom conquest running through the entirety of canonical revelation. Far from being simply a theological consequence undergirding our trust in the Bible (though certainly not less than that), the authority of Scripture is meant to be understood against the backdrop of the struggle for authority that the kingdom of God resolves. After all, one of the things the kingdom of God brings is a resolution to the natural despising of authority that comes in the wake of the fall (Gen 3:16; Luke 15:11-32).²⁶³ In the kingdom, God decisively establishes his authority (Phil 2:10; Heb 1:13;

²⁶¹Swain makes this explicit: "As a consequence of inspiration, the Bible is the supreme source and unimpeachable standard for knowing and loving the triune God as he has revealed himself to us in the gospel. It is the authoritative, true, sufficient, and clear rule of covenantal faith and life as we make our way to God's eternal kingdom." Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 72.

²⁶²Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 272.

²⁶³The issue of authority is in fact the point of the parable of the prodigal son, as the rebellion comes precisely at the point of the disobedient son wanting an inheritance apart from obedience to his father's authority. I owe this insight to Russell Moore, in notes from his unpublished lectures. Indeed, the

Rev 2:27) not only in victory over death (1 Cor 15:24-26) but also in rule over his people (Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18; Eph 5:24). On the other hand, in Scripture one finds the absence of authority identified not as blessing but rather as a curse (Judg 21:25).²⁶⁴ The authority of God expressed in his rule over the kingdom, then, is seen as blessing and indeed the means by which the eschatological community may exist—as it gives order and purpose to those under its rule and mediates blessing to those in obedience to its command.

Additionally, a kingdom framework grounds the authority of Scripture by linking it to God himself.²⁶⁵ Evangelical theology is right to insist that Scripture is authoritative, but it is so precisely because Scripture *is* the voice of the King.²⁶⁶ Here I make explicit, then, a point implicit in the previous paragraph: the authority of Scripture is the authority of God exercised in and through²⁶⁷ Scripture.²⁶⁸ As seen above, the

“obedient” brother expresses his frustrations along these exact lines: “‘Look these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command’” (Luke 15:29).

²⁶⁴Swain notes that God’s authority is portrayed across Scripture as having a “liberating force” for the people of God. He elaborates: “God’s authoritative word in the gospel sets us free from the tyranny of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And it does so because it announces the truth about the fulfillment of God’s saving God pleasure in Jesus Christ. For Christianity, therefore, divine authority and human freedom are happy correlates, not hostile enemies. The former grounds and governs the latter.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 73. See also, Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

²⁶⁵Here, N. T. Wright is helpful in insisting that the authority of Scripture “can have Christian meaning only if we are referring to scripture’s authority *in a delegated or mediated sense* from that which God himself possesses and that which Jesus possesses as the risen Lord and Son of God, the Immanuel.” Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 23. John Webster argues similarly: “Whatever is said about the statutory authority of Scripture is only an extension of its primary authority, which derives from the fact that Scripture heralds the commanding presence of the *auctor*.” Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 19.

²⁶⁶Carl F. H. Henry offers an important point along the same lines: “A divinely given word mediated by the Logos of God through prophets and apostles is just as authoritative as that spoken directly by the incarnate Logos Himself.” Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:37.

²⁶⁷Swain offers a useful distinction: “Because God not only speaks through Scripture but in Scripture, Scripture bears intrinsic authority and warrants our absolute submission.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 73.

²⁶⁸Along the same lines, Timothy Ward comments, “The authority of Scripture is dependent entirely on the authority of God, and comes about only because of what God has chosen to do in the way he authored Scripture, and because of what he continues to do in presenting himself to us through Scripture as a God we can know and trust. . . . Therefore to speak of the authority of Scripture is not at heart to say

authority of God is linked with the words of God all throughout Scripture, but in the progress of redemption this authority concentrates uniquely and supremely in Jesus himself. Carl F. H. Henry elaborates on this point:

In the New Testament we face the fact that God's *exousia* is the power and authority given to Jesus Christ and under him, to his disciples. It is Christ's special *exousia* that constitutes him as sovereign over the church, and it is *exousia* bestowed by Christ that alone enables anyone to enter the kingdom of God. Christ is the determining head of the church, the Messiah who inherits all power and shares it with his followers.²⁶⁹

The authority of Scripture, then, is inextricably bound up with the promised Son to whom all authority is given (Matt 28:18). Crucially, the Son delegates this authority and entrusts "the interpretation of his whole life and work to specifically designated apostles."²⁷⁰ It is in light of this linguistic commission, then, that Jesus promises the guidance (and thus the inspiration) of the Spirit (John 16:12-15). Hence, the inspiration of Scripture may be seen as a consequence of the authority of Scripture and not the other way around.²⁷¹ A kingdom framework leads more quickly to an appreciation of the authority of Scripture, seen as authority is as central within God's saving economy, but it also provides a full-orbed vision of the authority of Scripture in that it drives one to appreciate both (1) the objective authority of Scripture itself as the reliable and everlasting Word (1 Pet 1:25; Isa 40:8) and (2) the subjective display of the authority of God in Scripture operating as a vehicle through which God brings about the redemption of his people and the renewal of

something about what Scripture is in itself. It is rather to make a claim about what Scripture is in relation to the unquestionably sovereign God." Ward, *Words of Life*, 128.

²⁶⁹Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 4:26.

²⁷⁰Ibid., 4:36.

²⁷¹Henry agrees on this point: "The first claim to be made for Scripture is not its inerrancy nor even its inspiration, but its authority. Standing at the forefront of the prophetic-apostolic proclamation is the divine authority of Scripture as the Word of God. The main emphasis of the apostolic *kerygma* in its use of Scripture is that it is divinely authoritative." Ibid., 4:27.

his creation in the eschatological kingdom of his Son.²⁷²

The Sufficiency of Scripture

At the core of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is Peter's insistence that in the Bible God "has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (1 Pet 1:3) and Paul's assurance that Scripture is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). This doctrine is one of the hallmarks of Protestantism.²⁷³ A distinction is typically made between the *material* sufficiency of Scripture (the conviction that Scripture possesses all that is needed for salvation and faithfulness in the Christian life) and the *formal* sufficiency of Scripture (the conviction that Scripture is its own interpreter and subordinate to no external authority).²⁷⁴ Wayne Grudem's definition of the sufficiency of Scripture is one that is generally illustrative of most evangelical treatments of the issue, with the emphasis on Scripture's material sufficiency: "The sufficiency of Scripture means that Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains everything we need God to tell us for salvation, for

²⁷²This vision of the authority of Scripture avoids the central charge brought against N. T. Wright's treatment of the authority of Scripture. As much as I appreciate Wright's emphasis on the centrality of the kingdom of God in the context of the authority of Scripture, Carson seems right to critique Wright for reducing the authority of Scripture to the power of God expressed in Scripture to bring about the kingdom of God. In Wright's own words, "'The authority of scripture' is . . . a sub-branch of several other theological topics: the mission of the church, the work of the Spirit, the ultimate future hope and the way it is anticipated in the present, and of course the nature of the church." Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 27. Carson, though, is right to caution against the reductionism of collapsing the distinction between what Scripture *is* and what Scripture *does* (though the authority of Scripture is relevant for both). Illustrative of his larger point, Carson asks, "Does not Scripture's authority stand, even if the church is failing in its mission, and people do not believe his word?" Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, 300.

²⁷³For a useful summary of the Reformation debate on this issue, see Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 187–98.

²⁷⁴For a helpful definition of both aspects of the sufficiency of Scripture, see Timothy Ward, "Sufficiency of Scripture," in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 730.

trusting him perfectly, and for obeying him perfectly.”²⁷⁵ Though I will save an account of the interpretation of Scripture for a later chapter, an immediate implication of this doctrine is the assurance that since the Bible is sufficient for all things related to life and godliness, it is therefore a sufficient guide in teaching believers how to read and understand Scripture.²⁷⁶ But a traditional understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture in light of the kingdom can strengthen the doctrine in other ways also.

To begin, as demonstrated above, the drive towards the kingdom best reveals the pattern of God’s authority woven throughout redemptive history, revealed uniquely in the authority of Scripture and God’s display of his authority in Scripture in bringing about his redemptive purposes. As such, the kingdom functions to connect the sufficiency of Scripture to the authority of Scripture and thereby the authority of God himself. Confessing that Scripture is sufficient, then is ultimately a confession of God’s truthfulness and his power to save:²⁷⁷ for the sufficiency of Scripture speaks both of what Scripture is objectively (the supreme authority, *norma normans non normata*) and what

²⁷⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127. Michael Allen and Scott Swain provide another useful definition: “Holy Scripture is *sufficient* for the instruction of the saints as they are conveyed by God towards eternal fellowship with himself. The prophets and apostles are not one element in a larger canvas, or even the most important element. Rather, in their words we have the fullness of what for not the Spirit says to the churches. Scripture is *enough*.” Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 35.

²⁷⁶Some evangelical scholars have argued that while the NT authors were inspired, readers of Scripture today should not follow their lead. As one example, Longenecker argues, “What then can be said to our question, ‘Can we reproduce the exegesis of the New Testament?’ I suggest that we must answer both ‘No’ and ‘Yes.’ Where that exegesis is based on a revelatory stance, or where it evidences itself to be merely cultural, or where it shows itself to be circumstantial [*sic*] or *ad hominem* in nature, ‘No.’ Where, however, it treats the Old Testament in more literal fashion, following the course of what we speak of today as historico-grammatical exegesis, ‘Yes.’ Our commitment as Christians is to the reproduction of the apostolic faith and doctrine, and not necessarily to the specific apostolical exegetical practices.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 197.

²⁷⁷Webster connects the sufficiency of Scripture to God’s saving purposes: “Scripture terminates not in being produced but in being heard; a sufficient Scripture is one which at the hands of God suffices to instruct creatures about how he will conduct them from delusion into saving knowledge.” Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 19.

Scripture is given for,²⁷⁸ redemption and consummation.²⁷⁹

Furthermore, a kingdom framework views the sufficiency of Scripture in the context of eschatological victory and thereby actually encourages the development of doctrine and theology. To explain, the sufficiency of Scripture is often understood or explained predominantly in a polemical context: over against Rome, over against false teachers and heretical sects, over against bald allegiance to confessions or creeds; this is understandable given its historical context and in light of the truth that Scripture is the authority by which all theological formulations and traditions must be measured. That said, the kingdom of God provides a richer and more biblical background that affirms the polemic importance of the doctrine but at the same time calls readers to appreciate an underdeveloped aspect of Scripture's sufficiency—one seen in light of the twin themes of authority and victory.²⁸⁰ As seen above, Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18), and at the same time exists as the one victorious over the principalities and

²⁷⁸Hence, Herman Bavinck speaks of Scripture as a means toward an end in his discussion of Scripture's sufficiency: "Scripture, after all, is only a means, not the goal. The goal is that, instructed by Scripture, the church will freely and independently make known 'the wonderful deeds of him who called it out of darkness and into its marvelous light' (1 Pet 2:9). The external word is the instrument, the internal word the aim. Scripture will have reached its destination when all have been taught by the Lord and filled with the Holy Spirit." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:494.

²⁷⁹Similarly, Timothy Ward comments, "The doctrine of scriptural sufficiency claims neither that God has ceased to prompt, guide, and direct ('speak to') disciples and the church, nor that he has told us everything about himself and every question we face. Rather, it asserts that, when responded to in trust and love by us, the revelatory, covenant-making act that God performs in and through Scripture can confidently be believed to be sufficient for salvation and for truthful, faithful discipleship of Christ." Ward, "Sufficiency of Scripture," 731.

²⁸⁰It may be said also that the sufficiency of Scripture is itself a gift of God's redemptive work in Christ. For it was in his resurrection appearances to the apostles where Jesus taught the apostles to interpret the Scripture rightly (Luke 24:44-45), and it was with this understanding of the Scripture that God commanded them to proclaim his Word to all the world (Matt 28:18-19). J. I. Packer argues that the link between the right understanding of God's Word and the proclamation of it is such that Scripture is given *for the very purpose* of proclamation. In Packer's own words, "The Bible being what it is, all true interpretation of it must take the form of preaching [because] Scripture is the God-given record, explanation, and application of God's once-for-all redemptive words and deeds on the stage of space-time history, and that its intended function is to 'instruct . . . for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim

powers of this age, triumphing over them in resurrection (Col 2:15). In terms of authority, Jesus both authoritatively declares that he will build his church (Matt 16:18) and authoritatively designates teachers to build up the body of Christ, building upon the foundation established by Scripture itself (Eph 4:12). In terms of victory, this work of building up the body is done through the power of the Spirit, who apportions gifts in the church as spoils of Jesus' eschatological victory (1 Cor 12:11).²⁸¹ To tie all this together, a kingdom framework allows one to see the way in which dogma is actually encouraged in the life of the church, as a tool by which the kingdom people are built up and made more into the image of their King.²⁸² As Michael Allen and Scott Swain add, "although the apostolic deposit cannot grow, the church's understanding of that deposit can, and indeed, must, grow."²⁸³ Therefore, theology is rightly seen as an aspect of kingdom warfare, ever subjected to the supreme authority of the sufficient Word of God but given for the purpose of preparing man for life in the kingdom of God.

The Trustworthiness of Scripture

At the core of evangelical theology is the conviction that Scripture is wholly reliable—of divine origin, entirely trustworthy,²⁸⁴ and without error.²⁸⁵ Indeed, many of

3:15)." J. I. Packer, "Preaching as Biblical Interpretation," in *Honoring the Written Word of God*, vol. 3 of *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 317.

²⁸¹On the significance of the sending of the Spirit, see Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 57–78.

²⁸²Allen and Swain refer to authorization of dogma as the "positive correlate of *sola Scriptura*": Through Holy Scripture, the church's foundational authority, the Lord who possesses all authority *authorizes the church to build* on that foundation." Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 43.

²⁸³Ibid.

²⁸⁴Though "trustworthiness" is not the traditional term used here, it is employed here to allow conceptually for both the doctrine of inspiration and the doctrine of inerrancy within the same section.

²⁸⁵Indeed, there is broad agreement on inerrancy even beyond evangelicalism: "The conviction that God communicates in Scripture a revelation of himself and of his deeds, and that this revelation is entirely truthful, has always been the common belief of most Catholics, most Protestants, most Orthodox,

the most heated theological debates of the last century have revolved precisely around this issue.²⁸⁶ To be more specific, at the forefront of most of these debates is the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. In speaking of the inspiration of Scripture, Erickson represents evangelical theology's generally agreed upon framework: the inspiration of Scripture is "that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit on the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the word of God."²⁸⁷ In speaking of the inerrancy of Scripture, Paul Feinberg provides a widely-agreed upon definition: "Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine of morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences."²⁸⁸ While affirming both these definitions in all their parts, considering these two doctrines in light of the kingdom of God can yield a number of fresh insights that can reinforce the commitment of evangelical theology to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

At the outset, a kingdom framework connects the nature of Scripture to the pattern of God's redemptive activity. As seen above, the inspiration of Scripture is a

and even most of the sects of the fringes of Christianity." A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Spiration of Scripture: Challenging Evangelical Perspectives* (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007), 85.

²⁸⁶For what is perhaps the most significant defense of the authority of Scripture in terms of its inspiration and inerrancy in the context of these debates, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²⁸⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 225. Warfield's definition of inspiration is worth including here, as influential as it was in the context of twentieth-century debates on Scripture. Warfield defines inspiration as, "that extraordinary, supernatural influence . . . exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God." Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 420.

²⁸⁸Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 294.

consequence of Jesus' authoritative designation of apostles to bear witness in written form to his life and ministry. These writings, which are now books of the New Testament, are in turn brought about by the authoritative work of the Spirit and his superintending of the production of these writings,²⁸⁹ working in a manner that did not override the human author's freedom or personality²⁹⁰ (2 Pet 1:21; 2 Tim 3:16).²⁹¹ The canon itself is indeed connected to Jesus' eschatological victory, as C. E. Hill notes:

The NT gospel message, and by extension, the ultimate emergence of a written NT canon, is an aspect of Jesus the Messiah's glory—from an OT perspective, as much a part of his glory as his defeat of death by resurrection and his exaltation to the Father's right hand. For the Messiah's mission included his work of bringing light, the message of forgiveness, to the nations. In the execution of this mission he appointed a number of apostles to represent him as his unique witnesses, to speak in his name to the people and to the Gentiles. These apostles were conscious of their commission to speak and write in Jesus' name in the fulfillment of their ministries making the word of God fully known (Rom 15:19; Col 1:25).²⁹²

Inspiration, inscription, and canon, therefore, are tethered to the pattern of God's delegation of authority seen in the kingdom of God.²⁹³ The triune God authorizes human

²⁸⁹Swain is helpful in pointing out the necessity of the Spirit not just in superintending the production of these writings but also because “God’s self-revelation through word and deed is insufficient *in and of itself* for overcoming humanity’s inherent spiritual blindness and creating spiritual understanding” as seen in the cases of Pharaoh, the Jewish authorities, and countless others. Instead, the Spirit’s power is needed to awaken faith and understanding. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 63.

²⁹⁰Vanhoozer defines this concursive process: “The Spirit’s efficient causality working through the human authors as instrumental causes without overriding their own personality or freedom of action.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 1),” 32.

²⁹¹Ward, commenting on 2 Tim 3:16 rightly notes that the verse “proclaims that the Bible’s words are entirely God’s words. It is teaching about the divine origin of the Bible, and not about the way in which humans came to cooperate with God in writing down those words.” Ward, *Words of Life*, 81.

²⁹²C. E. Hill, “God’s Speech in These Last Days: The New Testament Canon as an Eschatalogical Phenomenon,” in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service to the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 253.

²⁹³Webster notes, “Much hangs on making sure that the element of verbal inspiration is not isolated from the wider providential and sanctifying missions of Word and Spirit, because it is only in that setting that it makes sense to speak of God acting in the production of verbal forms. Wester, *The Domain of the Word*, 16.

viceregents to wield authority delegated by God, exercised in service to God, for the purpose of eternal communion with God in the eschatological kingdom.²⁹⁴

Beyond this, a kingdom framework unites the nature of Scripture with the establishment of the kingdom and in so doing demands an infallible, inerrant text. To elaborate, because God's authority is one that is exerted verbally, Scripture is both necessary²⁹⁵ and necessarily without error. Scripture is necessary, as Herman Bavinck points out, because revelation has ceased, coming to its climax in Christ [Heb 1:2], and must now be transmitted down through subsequent generations prior to Jesus' return.²⁹⁶ Scripture, in turn, must necessarily be without error because it is the word of Christ through the work of the Spirit in the process of inspiration. To unpack this statement, Jesus could not receive the inheritance of the kingdom or rule over it were his word not truthful.²⁹⁷ Instead, he would be like Satan who proves himself not to be God²⁹⁸ by

²⁹⁴Swain insightfully points out the Trinitarian foundation of the doctrine of inspiration: “to say that ‘all Scripture is God breathed’ is to say that, in and through Scripture, the Spirit who by nature shares the eternally rich and radiant fellowship of the Father and the Son in accordance with his own infinite understanding, has by his sovereign grace and power provided a way for us to share in that fellowship according to our limited understanding.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 66.

²⁹⁵One sees, then, the organic relationship between the doctrine of the necessity of Scripture and the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture. For a useful treatment of the doctrine of the necessity of Scripture, see Kevin DeYoung, *Taking God at His Word: Why the Bible is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What That Means for You and Me* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 83–91.

²⁹⁶Bavinck draws this same conclusion that Scripture is necessary because of the finality of revelation in Christ. “Granted, the church before Moses was without Scripture, and before the completion of revelation the church was never in possession of the whole Bible. But this does not prove anything for the dispensation of the church in which we now live, one in which revelation has ceased and Scripture is complete.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:471.

²⁹⁷Frame is right to point out, “Scripture is inerrant because the personal word of God cannot be anything other than true. When he gives us propositional information—and he certainly does—that information is reliable, though expressed in ordinary, not technical language. The written Word, further, is just as inerrant as the oral message of the prophets and apostles. And their word is just as inerrant as the divine voice itself.” Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 176.

²⁹⁸Treat notes that Satan’s rule is a perversion of God’s “wordly” rule: “Each of these [Satan’s] schemes is an instrument of Satan’s *words*. Satan rules through his word—his tempting, deceiving, accusing word—which leads to death. The idea of ruling by speaking is actually basic to nearly every concept of kingship: a king speaks and his will is done. . . . God rules over his kingdom of light through his

brokering in falsehoods (Gen 3:4; John 8:44; cf. Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; John 17:17)²⁹⁹ and like Adam who proves himself not to be God's faithful human viceregent by virtue of showing that his own word of pledged obedience could not be trusted. Because Scripture is the Word of Christ, the status of Jesus both as the Son of God and as the faithful human viceregent are contingent on God's Word being true—were it false at any single point, both would be forfeited, and the kingdom lost.³⁰⁰ The inerrancy of Scripture, then, is demanded by the kingship of Jesus, and secured by the Spirit as “the self-same Spirit who prepared a body for God's Son who also prepared a body of discourse for God's word.”³⁰¹

Conclusion

In summary, this examination of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the Word of God has revealed that the kingdom functions as a central theme in Scripture's story, the goal of Scripture's purpose, and an organizing criterion for an evangelical doctrine of Scripture. To touch briefly on each of these, first, the kingdom of God has been seen to be the backdrop against which the storyline of Scripture proceeds. Other themes such as covenant and Trinity loom large within canonical revelation, but these ultimately serve the overarching goal of ushering in the kingdom of God. Daniel

truthful word that brings life; Satan rules over his kingdom of darkness through his deceitful word that brings death.” Treat, *The Crucified King*, 200.

²⁹⁹ Vanhoozer speaks of Satan's inability to speak in truth: “Satan can do nothing with words but gesture vainly. Satan's communicative agency is nothing but a conjuring trick with words.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 324.

³⁰⁰ As Webster notes, “God speaks as in the Spirit Jesus Christ speaks. The eternal Word made flesh, now enthroned at the right hand of the Father, is present and eloquent,” and his “address takes the form of Holy Scripture.” Webster, *Domain of the Word*, 8.

³⁰¹ Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 70.

Treier is right to note, “How we imagine the nature and importance of human redemption influences how we understand the Bible—despite modern efforts to evade the classic Christian concept of salvation.”³⁰² Conversely, then, readers will not understand the Bible well if they do not have in view a fitting understanding of how and why God is bringing about this redemption. A proper vision of the kingdom of God will provide both, and thus allow biblical hermeneutics to proceed from the surest ground.³⁰³

Second, one of the main ways in which the kingdom of God and the Word of God are related is that the Word of God exists as an instrument through which God both brings about and rules within the kingdom of God. N. T. Wright helpfully insists that “we see the role of Scripture not simply as being to provide true information about, or even an accurate running commentary upon, the work of God in salvation and new creation, but taking an active part within that ongoing purpose.”³⁰⁴ A kingdom framework allows one to see the ways in which God as Father, Son, and Spirit performs by the power of his speech.³⁰⁵ It illustrates vividly how God associates himself with the words of his canonical revelation, mediated by his human vicergents, such that he both transmits his

³⁰²Daniel J. Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 67.

³⁰³As Richard Hays suggests, a proper understanding of Scripture’s overarching theme (which he suggests to be resurrection), “brings into focus the Old Testament’s propensity to lean forward with eager longing for God to make all things whole. . . . In light of the resurrection, the Old Testament’s narrative movement—from sterility to miraculous childbirth, from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land, from exile to return—is to be interpreted as an adumbration of the eschatological hope signified in the New Testament by the resurrection of the dead. The logic of eschatological hope is structurally fundamental to the Old Testament canon.” Richard B. Hays, “Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 234.

³⁰⁴Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 28.

³⁰⁵For a useful treatment on how God’s speech corresponds to the person of the Son in the Gospel of John, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2008), 113–16.

saving power through time and vests Scripture with the effectual power to renew man and bring him into communion with God in the context of the kingdom.

Third, the kingdom of God speaks not only to what Scripture *does* but also what Scripture *is*. As G. K. Beale has argued, “Our understanding of most of the traditional doctrines is not so much changed as radically enriched by seeing them through end-times lenses,” and such certainly holds true with respect to one’s doctrine of Scripture.³⁰⁶ This study has shown how the kingdom of God informs a number of traditional attributes of the doctrine of Scripture which all reinforce evangelical theology without radically redefining it.

How though does this effect in any tangible sense the way one interprets the Scripture in terms of exegesis and application? While this chapter has set the context and foundation for a kingdom-focused approach to biblical hermeneutics, the following chapter will examine the relationship between the kingdom of God and the interpreter of Scripture so as to consider the hindrances to faithful biblical interpretation and how the kingdom of God serves to make biblical hermeneutics possible.

³⁰⁶Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 18.

CHAPTER 3

THE KINGDOM AND THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETER: THE POSSIBILITY OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

If Scripture is one of the instruments through which God exerts his kingdom rule, as the previous chapter argued, then one would expect this to carry with it significant implications for the interpreter of Scripture himself. And yet, as evangelical theological Kevin Vanhoozer has noted, far too often biblical hermeneutics has been cast as a discipline¹ that consists of “something readers do to inert texts, as if hermeneutics were a kind of autopsy.”² Not only that, but often, even many evangelical treatments of biblical hermeneutics focus primarily if not exclusively with the rules and principles employed in the analysis of a given passage of Scripture. Such an analysis is understandable and is unmistakably necessary, but Christian theology will not allow the interpretation of Scripture to be severed from the interpreter of Scripture. Indeed, one of the very purposes of Scripture itself is the regeneration and renewal of fallen sinners, the

¹Even the language of “discipline” can seem to imply that biblical hermeneutics is in the domain of the sciences. Some have even spoken of it in these terms. Consider, for instance, the widely influential textbook by Bernard Ramm, who opens his book by saying, “Hermeneutics is the science and art of Biblical interpretation.” Bernard L. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics for Conservative Protestants*, rev. ed. (Boston: Wilde, 1950), 1; Grant Osborne likewise speaks of biblical hermeneutics as “that science which delineates principles for interpreting an individual author’s meaning.” Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 5.

²Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse: Theological Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks (Part 2),” in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 77–78.

delivering of human sinners from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Col 1:13).³ More to the point, the interpretation of Scripture and the interpreter of Scripture are necessarily connected because, as Vern Poythress has argued, interpretation itself is corrupted by sin and as such "it no less than other human activities stands in need of redemption."⁴ This is precisely why Vanhoozer has argued, "any future evangelical doctrine of Scripture ought to include an account of the reader's interpretive agency and action. Anything less is thin description only."⁵

Foundational to a full-orbed vision of biblical hermeneutics, then, is the affirmation that God's involvement with Holy Scripture is not deistic⁶—as if God's role were limited to the process of inscriptionation. As Herman Bavinck notes,

[Scripture] may not be construed deistically. . . . Holy Scripture is not an arid story or ancient chronicle but the ever-living, eternally youthful Word, which God, now and always issues to his people. It is the eternally ongoing speech of God to us. . . . Scripture is the ongoing rapport between heaven and earth, between Christ and his church, between God and his children. It does not just tie us to the past; it binds us to the living Lord in the heavens. It is the living voice of God, the letter of the omnipotent God to his creature.⁷

Instead, God is also actively involved in the "present horizon of communication," not least of which being within the interpreter himself.⁸ But as John Webster has noted, one

³As John Webster has noted, "Interpretation is necessary because Holy Scripture is an element in the economy of salvation." John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, Current Issues in Theology 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

⁴Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 305.

⁵Vanhoozer, "Triune Discourse (Part 2)," 78.

⁶For more on deistic accounts of hermeneutics, see Mark Alan Bowald, *Rendering the Word in Theological Hermeneutics* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 173.

⁷Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 1:384–85.

⁸Michael Allen and Scott Swain describe at greater length what I mean by deistic approaches to biblical hermeneutics: "Nothing remains but a divine deposit left for the pious Christian or, perhaps, the objective scholar, to unearth and appreciate. The involvement of God is entirely described in the past tense: God did reveal, God did speak, God did give us an inscripturated Word. The present tense is entirely

problem in some Christian accounts of biblical hermeneutics is that they act as if the reading of Scripture exists as a “quasi-independent theme.”⁹ A scientific pursuit of objectivity in biblical hermeneutics has problems on its own hermeneutical terms (an idea which will consider in the next chapter), but it also has serious problems on theological grounds—as virtually the entire sweep of Christian theology, from anthropology to soteriology to pneumatology, demands that a truly Christian account of biblical hermeneutics be integrated with what Scripture reveals about the effects of sin on the interpreter himself in the context of hearing and obeying Scripture.¹⁰ Indeed, Webster is right to argue that it is necessary “to try to spell out what might be involved in reading the scriptural text as a reconciled sinner, that is, as a participant in the history of reconciliation in which we come to know, love, and fear God above all things.”¹¹

Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the interpreter as Webster suggests and will seek to provide the “thick” description of interpretive agency that Vanhoozer argues is necessary. More specifically, this chapter will argue that there exists a close theological relationship between the kingdom of God and the interpreter of Scripture, which carries with it significant implications for how readers conceive of the interpretive task engaged in it as sinners in need of redemption and renewal. To do so, this chapter will make two

immanent, however, and involves only our own activities: receiving, reading, studying, questioning, critiquing, and so on. Method becomes important—whether historical or practical, hermeneutical or rhetorical. Because God is presumed not to be involved in the present horizon of communication, everything hangs on negotiating the text wisely and objectively.” Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 57.

⁹John Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology*, ed. David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 246.

¹⁰For a helpful survey of Enlightenment influences on biblical interpretation, particularly with respect to the quest for objectivity in discerning authorial intent, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 122–36.

¹¹Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 247.

basic moves. First, it will explore the effect of sin on the interpretive process so as to reveal the impossibility of biblical hermeneutics apart from the victory of Christ's kingdom. Second, it will trace the ways in which the conquest of the kingdom makes biblical hermeneutics possible. Here, it will reflect on the relationship of the kingdom to the interpreter's regeneration, obedience, and renewal, and will also consider the kingdom-oriented goal of hermeneutics for the interpreter and his situatedness within the kingdom community of the local church. In all, this chapter will seek to show how the kingdom of God supplies the framework which best reveals the way the interpreter of Scripture stands in inseparable relation to Scripture and its interpretation.

The Interpreter and the Fall of Biblical Hermeneutics

Biblical interpretation is in need of a savior because all who interpret the Bible are themselves plagued by the effects of sin.¹² If this is the case, two questions naturally arise. First, in what ways is the nature of interpretation affected by sin? Second, how exactly is biblical interpretation redeemed by the conquest of Christ's kingdom? To answer these questions, this section will examine the nature and extent of sin, showing how it effects every aspect of the interpretive process—which will be followed by a subsequent section showing how only Jesus' eschatological victory on the cross can supplant the blinding, authority-rejecting influence of sin in relation to biblical hermeneutics. In short, the goal of this section is to show that biblical hermeneutics is impossible apart from Christ's work in establishing the kingdom.

To sustain the claim that biblical hermeneutics is *impossible* apart from

¹²Webster notes, “A Christian theological account of reading Holy Scripture must beg to differ, because the confession of the gospel by which it governs its life requires it to say that humankind in its

Christ's redemptive work, it must be shown that sin casts an overwhelming influence over the biblical interpreter. Below then, this section will examine the nature and extent of sin so to highlight the connections between sin and rightly hearing and understanding the Scripture in the context of biblical hermeneutics.

In thinking through what the Scripture teaches about sin, one must first consider the *origin* of sin. Sin is not simply what one does but also a characteristic of who one is, apart from Christ. That is to say, man is born into sin, the Bible says, because his forebear in the garden rebelled against God.¹³ The apostle Paul announces this to the church at Rome in explaining to them how "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Whether by standing as the representative of all humanity or by possessing all of humanity "in his loins" at the moment of Fall, the Bible teaches that in some sense all human beings sinned in Adam.¹⁴ Not only that, but Paul also speaks of Adam as man's representative. Drawing the typological links between Adam and Christ in 1 Corinthians

entirety, including reason, is enclosed within the history of sin and reconciliation. And so exegetical reason stands under the divine requirement that it be holy to the Lord its God." Ibid., 250.

¹³ Such a statement naturally assumes an historical Adam. On the theological importance of an historical Adam, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 112–17; C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

¹⁴ This also explains why so many have stressed the importance of the virginal conception of Jesus. For a number of works on the virginal conception, see J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Harper, 1930); B. B. Warfield, "The Supernatural Birth of Jesus," *The American Journal of Theology* 10 (1906): 21–30. On the mystery of sin in Adam, Hoekema comments, "We simply cannot understand *how* we sinned in Adam; the Bible does not tell us. Nor can we understand how the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us; the Bible does not question that answer either. What the Bible does tell us is *that* we sinned in Adam, and *that* the guilt of Adam's first sin is imputed to us; further than that we should not go. Sin remains a mystery, not only its commission but also in its transmission." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 157. An oft-mentioned parallel text in this discussion is Heb 7:10, which asserts that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek while "still in the loins of his ancestor."

15, Paul shows how “in Adam all die” (1 Cor 15:22).¹⁵ Thus, theologian Anthony Hoekema explains how, when Adam sinned, “he did so as our representative, and therefore we are all involved in the guilt of that sin, and in the condemnation that results from it.”¹⁶ As a result, then, mankind is born into a state of corruption and guilt.

That said, man sins not only in Adam and in identification with Adam, but also in his own willful rebellion against God.¹⁷ Hence, one must consider the *universality* of sin. Such can be seen in an array of texts across both the Old and New Testament. “Surely,” cries out Solomon, “there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Ecc 7:20). The same predicament is found in the days of Noah when God surveys all the earth only to see “that the wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). The universality of sin is such that Solomon asks rhetorically, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?’” (Prov 20:9) with the implicit answer being “No one.” In the New Testament, Paul puts the matter bluntly: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). So too does John, who states emphatically, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us . . . If we say we have not sinned, we make him [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8, 10).

Not only, though, is sin both transmitted *to* all and committed *by* all, but sin is

¹⁵For representative works stressing the federal headship of Adam, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 242–43; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 51–64; John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 36–70. Murray, though, does allow for aspects of natural headship as well.

¹⁶Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 161.

¹⁷Here, then, theologian Donald Bloesch is right to note, “Sin, in the biblical perspective, is both an act and a state. It entails separation from God as well as deliberate violation of his will.” Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 93.

also pervasive *within* all—poisoning every dimension of human life.¹⁸ Thus, one must consider the *nature and extent* of sin. Here, Jeremiah laments how “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer 17:9). Titus shows the far-reaching grasp of sin, noting how “to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled” (Titus 1:15). Paul joins the universality of sin with its pervasiveness, noting how sin works itself out in a wide array of ways: “All have turned aside,” Paul insists, and this is seen in the way “their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom 3:12-16). Elsewhere, Paul shows how sin results in mankind having “become darkened in their understanding” and “callous” (Eph 4:17, 19). Not only that, but both Jesus and Paul speak of man as being enslaved to his fallen nature (John 8:34; Eph 2:1-3). In short, these texts reveal how sin works itself through all of man like leaven works itself through bread (1 Cor 5:7), darkening every faculty and affecting every dimension of human existence. As theologian Robert Reymond has argued, sin results in a state where “all men are corrupt throughout the *totality* of their being with every part, power, and faculty of their nature—mind, intellect, emotions, will, conscience, body—being affected by the Fall.”¹⁹

¹⁸Cornelius Plantiga, Jr., speaking to the pervasive and parasitic nature of sin, states similarly: “sin is a narcotic, a tranquilizing and disorienting suppression of our spiritual central nervous system. What’s devastating about it is that when we lack an ear for wrong notes in our lives, we cannot play right ones or even recognize them in the performances of others.” Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), xiii. John Calvin adds, “We are so entirely controlled by the power of sin, that the whole mind, the whole heart, and all our actions are under its influence.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. Christopher Fetherstone (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 261.

¹⁹This is to affirm what has historically been called “total depravity.” Such a term, however, has been subject to much misunderstanding. Theologian Robert Reymond clarifies, saying that the pervasiveness of sin does not mean “that people *act* as bad as they really are by nature.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 452. Donald Bloesch likewise argues, “Total depravity does not mean that there is no natural goodness or

The pervasiveness of sin, though, must be understood in tandem with man as created in the image of God. In the opening pages of Scripture one sees how man was designed to mirror and represent God. Being made in the image of God, man is seen as the height of all the created order (Ps 8:6). Man is designed to show what God is like to the rest of creation.²⁰ As explored in the previous chapter, with this image also comes derived authority; man is designated viceregent, tasked with exercising dominion over all the created order (Gen 1:26; Heb 2:5). Not only that, but at least part of what it means to be made in the image of God seems to include those capacities given to God's image-bearers that make them distinct from the rest of the created order—most notably, the ability to reason.²¹ But with the Fall, this image becomes distorted and twisted. The very gifts and tasks given to man which God intends for good are universally used by man instead for evil. Poythress expresses this well in relation to biblical hermeneutics:

The exalted character of human beings as the image of God becomes their terrible curse when they apostatize. In a horrible way they do become like God, knowing good and evil (Gen 3:22). That is, human beings who are sinners continue to image God, but now in a horrible way. They pretend to determine good and evil by their own standards, just as God determines good and evil by the standards of his own divine being. Moreover, human beings exercise a dominion that is an exercise of God's dominion. In this dominion their own idolatrous determination rules themselves and all their works. Once they repudiate God, they have no anchorage except in the overwhelming judgment of God making them slaves to Satan. They are capable of indefinite degeneration and destruction, limited by the bounds of hell. We do not dream of what is possible for human perversity to do in interpretation.²²

freedom remaining in man. The *imago Dei* has been darkened but not destroyed. It is marred by sin, but it still exists. Man continues to reflect the glory of his Creator, even in his sin and defiance. Man, even in the state of sin, has natural talents, intelligence, and also a moral sense, though because of sin it cannot be regarded as a safe or sure guide.” Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 1:91.”

²⁰Hoekema points out that this is part of the prohibition of the second commandment: “God does not want his creatures to make images of him, since he has already created an image of himself: a living, walking, talking image.” Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 67.

²¹On the significance of reason as an expression of the *imago Dei*, see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 2:124–42.

²²Poythress, “Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation,” 309–10.

It is precisely here where it begins to become clear how sin makes inroads into hermeneutics. Man was designed to live under the authority of God, but now he recoils from this authority, seeking to establish his own. As such, he has a knee-jerk reaction to reject the truth when confronted with it in Scripture. Indeed, in his natural state, man prefers darkness; he “hates the light and does not come to light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20). Not only that, but the words of Scripture exert a different influence within man when read through the poisoned lens of sinful unbelief. Like Pharaoh, who was hardened after being confronted again and again with God’s warning,²³ so too is man in his sinfulness hardened when he hears the Word of God in unbelief (John 12:40). When coupled with sin, the commands of God work so as to “make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes” (Isa 6:10). Paul shows how, even though God’s nature and his existence are “clearly perceived” (Rom 1:20), mankind continues to “suppress the truth” (Rom 1:18), such that they “became futile in their thinking” (Rom 1:21), to the point where God gives them up “to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done” (Rom 1:28).

In light of this, the prospects for biblical hermeneutics seem grim indeed. Man apart from divine intervention continually rejects the Word of God. Telford Work, summarizing Athanasius’s *On the Incarnation of the Word*²⁴ on the extent of sin is useful in synthesizing the situation as it pertains to mankind:²⁵

With sin’s entry into the world, the gift [of the *imago Dei*] begins to vanish into

²³Exod 7:13; 7:22; 8:15; 9:7; 9:34; 10:20; 11:10; 14:8; cf. 1 Sam 6:6; Rom 9:17.

²⁴Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* (Crestwood, NY: St. Valdimir’s Seminary Press, 1993).

²⁵In Athanasius’s own words, “Man, who was created in God’s image and in the possession of reason reflected the very Word Himself, was disappearing, and the word of God was being undone.” Ibid., §6.

corruption. Knowledge ironically produces not further revelation, but hiddenness and isolation (Gen 3:8-9). The cosmic intimacy of Eden falls into secret shame of private selves. . . . The divine gift of speech, no doubt a product of the human share of the *logos*, becomes distorted, used irrationally for deception and alienation (Gen 4:8-10) rather than communion. And in response, God’s speech to humanity becomes a judging one, cursing and condemning (Gen 4:11-15). Before long, speech itself must be confused at Babel, to check its awesome power for spreading sin (Gen 11:1-9).²⁶

And yet, the coming of the kingdom of God in Christ is the establishment of God’s reign in creation over against all opposition, far as the curse is found. And part of the beauty of God’s grace is that his kingdom conquest includes the restoration of the divine image in man and the resumption of communion with God—both of these effected and sustained by the power of the very Word man in his fallenness rejects.

The Interpreter and the Redemption of Biblical Hermeneutics

Vern Poythress is right to note that, “Christ undertook to redeem people from both sin and its effects,” and additionally that “the redemption that he accomplished is comprehensive, touching on every area infected by the fall.”²⁷ As it pertains to this study, because all of those who engage in the task of biblical hermeneutics are beleaguered with the effects of sin, a prerequisite for biblical hermeneutics is a restoration of those faculties and affections spoiled by sin that make faithful reading and reception of Scripture impossible. Not only that, but the overarching contention of this study is that the kingdom of God offers the most useful framework through which one may understand the nexus between Scripture, interpreter, and interpretation. Thus, the goal of this section will be to show how exactly the interpreter is renewed in the context of

²⁶Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 38.

biblical hermeneutics and why the kingdom of God is the most beneficial framework through which one may properly and theologically conceive of the interpretive task.

Regeneration of the Interpreter

John Webster sets the scene well in terms of the need for change within the interpreter in the context of biblical hermeneutics:

Salvation is reconciliation, and as such includes the healing and restoration of communicative fellowship between God and humankind, broken by the creature's defiance and ignorance. But communicative fellowship cannot be healed on one side only; it must include the restoration of the human partner to a genuine participation in the knowledge of God.²⁸

How, though, is this restoration leading to genuine participation brought about? First, it should be seen that in order for there to be this kind of change, God must find a way to restore the image of God in man. To do that, God must roll back the curse of sin, which has resulted in the polluted image in the first place.

This process all begins with Jesus, who from eternity past has existed himself as the image of God in the truest sense. Scripture speaks to this fact repeatedly: Jesus himself tells Philip, "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Paul writes that the "god of this world" blinds the minds of unbelievers specifically so as "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4-6). Paul also calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), while the writer of Hebrews speaks of him as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb 1:3). One cannot overestimate the importance of Jesus as the perfect image of God. Indeed, it is precisely at this point where one finds the key link

²⁷Vern Sheridan Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 117.

²⁸Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 70.

between the kingdom of God and interpretive agency.

To explain, the first step in restoring the distorted image is seen in the incarnation of Jesus, the first-wave of the kingdom of God's irruption into this age. From eternity past, the Son has perfectly reflected the Father, and in the incarnation Jesus takes on humanity while continuing to reflect the image of God fully and perfectly.²⁹ Being conceived not by a sexual union but by the work of the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35),³⁰ Jesus cannot be said to have been “in the loins” of Adam at the Fall.³¹

Jesus thus wields the dominion intended for Adam and his progeny. Free of the accusation of Satan, Jesus exerts authority over the demonic realm (Luke 4:33-37).³² Free of the garden curse, Jesus walks on water (John 6:16-21) and calms storms (Matt 8:23-26), showing how the creation is not in revolt against him. In answer to the apostles's question, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?” (Matt 8:27), the Bible answers that it is the sort of man over whom sin has no hold.³³

²⁹For a number of helpful evangelical treatments of the incarnation of Jesus, see Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); Millard J. Erickson, *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

³⁰Hence, Wayne Grudem is right to point out the causal relationship in Luke between the virginal conception of Jesus and his subsequent status as being called holy: “the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 529–30.

³¹There is of course some dispute of the theological significance of the virginal conception. For a dissenting view, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. T. H. L. Parker and J. L. M. Haire (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1955), 151–55.

³²New Testament theologian Thomas R. Schreiner rightly connects Jesus healings with his authority and the kingdom: “Jesus’ exorcisms instantiate his victory over Satan and demons, indicating that the kingdom is now present and that Jesus has triumphed over the reign of evil . . . Jesus’ power over sickness and demons demonstrates that he rules over disease and the demonic.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 66–67.

³³Hoekema similarly identifies these signs as being part of Christ’s perfectly human nature: “With a word of command Jesus stilled the tempest that threatened the lives of his disciples on the Lake of Galilee. Later he walked on the water to show his mastery over nature. He was able to bring about a miraculous catch of fish. He multiplied the loaves and changed water into wine. He healed many diseases,

Not only does Jesus live his whole life apart from sin (1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5), but he shows himself to be obedient at every point where God's people have previously been faithless.³⁴ This is seen preeminently in Jesus' wilderness temptations (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Here theologian Russell Moore comments, "As he [Jesus] stood where Adam stood, he reclaimed what Adam lost. The first Adam was tested in the God-blessed garden and fell. The second Adam was tested in the God-cursed desert, and won."³⁵ Taking on every aspect of what it means to be man (Heb 2:17), Jesus bears the full force of Satan's temptations, "in every respect [having] been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).

Being sinless and having come through every temptation, Jesus is then able to "make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).³⁶ For our sake, the Father "made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). On the cross, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). Jesus undergoes death and alienation from God—surrounded by darkness and the reminder of creation's curse (Matt 27:45)—

drove out many demons, made the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, and even raised the dead . . . certain biblical statements suggest that Jesus performed these miracles in his perfect humanity, in dependence on divine power (Matt 12:28; Acts 2:22)." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 74.

³⁴For more on Jesus recapitulating the lives of Adam and Israel, see Irenaeus *Adversus Heresies* 3.18.7, trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut under the title *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Ante-Nicene Fathers, American ed., vol. 1 (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 448; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Message* (London: Tyndale, 1971).

³⁵Russell D. Moore, *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 41.

³⁶For helpful treatments of the nature of propitiation, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955); Roger R. Nicole, "C. H. Dodd and the Doctrine of Propitiation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1954): 117–57; D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 119–39; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 234–36.

so as to absorb every aspect of the curse. God then accepts this sacrifice, seen in the way he vindicates Jesus by raising him from the dead.³⁷

Here, then, the lines between the image, the curse, the kingdom, and man's regeneration may be drawn more closely. At Pentecost, Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit, by whom believers are joined to Christ through faith (Acts 2:1-11). This union is a vital union, such that what is true of Jesus is true of the one united to him in faith, like a body in union with its head (1 Cor 12:12-13).³⁸ Then, in the process of sanctification the Spirit works towards a specific end—the conformity of believers *to the image of the Son* (Rom 8:29). As seen already, Christ is himself the perfect image of God. So in uniting and conforming believers to the image of Christ, God is doing nothing less than progressively restoring the image of God in man.³⁹ Believers in Christ are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), a “new self” that Paul says is “being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:10).

The newness of life wrought by the Spirit in regeneration, then, is that which makes the impossibility of hermeneutics a possibility.⁴⁰ The Holy Spirit is sent precisely

³⁷On Jesus' resurrection as his justification, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 114–44. See also the exceptionally thorough treatment of the resurrection by N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 719–738.

³⁸“Union with Christ produces the life of Christ within believers, which bears the fruit of righteousness. This life is not simply like Christ’s life (*imatatio Christi*); it is Christ’s life.” Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 597.

³⁹On the progressive nature of the restoration of the image, and the ways salvation is both “already” and “not yet,” see George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 195–217.

⁴⁰Webster connects the theological Dotson this point: “The reader’s will needs not simply to be called to redirect itself to appropriate ends, but to be reborn. Reading Scripture is inescapably bound to regeneration; only after a drastic reworking of spiritual psychology can the language of virtue have its place. What is therefore fundamental in giving an account of hermeneutical conversion is not a theory of moral virtue or the reader’s ‘character,’ but a soteriology and a pneumatology. Through the incarnate Word, crucified and risen, we are made capable of hearing the gospel, but only as we are at one and the

so “we may understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor 2:12).⁴¹ Through the redemptive work of Christ, the blindness and authority-rejecting impulses that previously resulted in rebellion and unbelief have been crucified and replaced instead with new desires.⁴² As Abraham Kuyper has noted, “He who is deaf must first be healed from his deafness in order to be placed in true touch with the world of sounds. When the contact has been restored, the study of music can again be begun by him.”⁴³ The Word that formerly worked to condemn, harden, and pronounce judgment in man, now through the Holy Spirit creates and imparts life and faith (2 Cor 4:6).⁴⁴ The Word whose light formerly was hated (John 3:19-20) is now embraced as the Spirit makes believers alive with Christ and seats them in the light of the heavenly places in union with Christ (Eph 2:6).⁴⁵ Whereas formerly God warned “man shall not see me and live” (Exod 33:20), in redemption Christ becomes the believer’s mediator such that he “with unveiled face,”

same time put to death and raised to new life. Through the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ we are given the capacity to set mind and will on the truth of the gospel and so read as those who have been reconciled to God.” Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 89.

⁴¹Bavinck provides a useful summary of regeneration in John: “What is born of flesh is flesh (3:6) and hostile to God. Those who are born only of natural descent (1:13) are of the world (8:23; 15:19) and belong to the world (14:17; 19, 22, etc.), are from below (8:23) and from the devil (8:44), do not comprehend the light of the Logos (1:5), do not receive him (1:11), love the darkness more than the light (3:19-20), do not hear what God says (8:47), do know know God (8:19; 15:21), do not see the kingdom of God (3:3), walk in darkness (12:35), hate the light (3:20), and are slaves of sin (8:34). Neither can they see the kingdom of God (3:3), believe (5:44; 12:39), hear the Word of God (8:43), come to Christ (6:44), or receive the Holy Spirit (14:17).” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:51.

⁴²Poythress notes, “Having died and risen with Christ, we are new people whose own thoughts and impressions have been subject to death and resurrection. They are the same yet not the same, for they have been judged, what is sinful has been crucified (Gal 5:24), and they have undergone renewal by the resurrection power of Christ.” Poythress, “Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation,” 310.

⁴³Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik DeVries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 580.

⁴⁴To make this argument is not, however, to conflate effectual calling with regeneration, though the two are closely related. Such a move has been proposed by some; for representative works, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 106–110. Instead, it is best to hold to a distinction between effectual calling and regeneration.

⁴⁵Bavinck adds, “revelation in Scripture assumes that humanity is also corrupted in its religious disposition and needs re-creation.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:505.

beholds “the glory of the Lord” as he is “transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:14).⁴⁶ Finally, without the Spirit one cannot hear the Word of God (John 8:43); conversely, with the Spirit in the believer in regeneration is given a *longing* for the word of truth (1 Pet 1:22-2:3).⁴⁷ In what ways, though, does the kingdom of God serve as the framework through which readers may best see the connection points with respect to biblical hermeneutics?

First, the kingdom of God makes the best sense of Scripture’s own language as it pertains to the interpreter and his task. After all, Jesus states that the new birth of regeneration is required, and explicitly ties it to the kingdom: “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Similarly, Jesus ties both regeneration and the kingdom to the reception of God’s word as regeneration leads to the ability to “know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 13:11),⁴⁸ as such a one “hears the word and understands it” (Matt 13:23).⁴⁹ Thus, Michael Horton is right to note the ubiquitous connection between the Word, the kingdom, and new birth throughout Scripture:

The spreading of the Word is treated as synonymous with the spreading of the kingdom of God. By the Word we are legally adopted, and by the Spirit we receive the inner witness that we are the children of God (Rom 8:12-17). Through the Word of Christ the Spirit creates faith *in* Christ, and where this is present, there is the

⁴⁶Because “receiving the word of God involves receiving his [God’s] presence,” Poythress goes so far as to say that men and women “would die reading the Scripture except for the mediation of the Son.” Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Why Must Our Hermeneutics Be Trinitarian?,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 97.

⁴⁷Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 97.

⁴⁸For a useful analysis of the kingdom parables, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 52–65.

⁴⁹Simon Kistemaker elaborates on the effect of the Word in this parable: “The Word of God is proclaimed and causes divisions among those who hear; God’s people receive the Word, understand it, obediently fulfill it; others fail to listen because of a hardened heart, a basic superficiality, or a vested interest in riches and possessions.” Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 29.

church.⁵⁰

This, too, is consistent with the way Jesus likens the well-trained disciple to a scribe—with distinctively textual overtones—who has “been trained for the kingdom of heaven,” his work consisting of the bringing “out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”⁵¹ Paul similarly conjoins these themes, connecting the hearing “of the word of truth” with “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened” to the hope of “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:13, 18-19). The eschatological backdrop of James is similarly unmistakable, joining consummation with new birth and Scripture in speaking of salvation: “of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (Jas 1:18).⁵²

Second, the regeneration of the interpreter is best understood theologically in light of the kingdom of God. Here, Scott Swain and John Webster may be the most useful conversation partners, as they each privilege covenant as the most useful integrating theme when it comes to understanding the interpreter.⁵³ “The act of reading Scripture is

⁵⁰Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 754.

⁵¹Leon Morris notes, “Jesus is pointing out that there are fresh insights that are of value and that there are also teachings that have stood the test of time. . . . The new age has dawned, and it is only in the recognition of that fact that the old can be understood in its essential function of preparing the way for the new.” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 363.

⁵²Dan McCartney highlights the eschatological orientation of this text: “Firstfruits represent the beginning of God’s redemption of all creation (Rom 16:5; 2 Thess 2:13; Rev 14:4). Christ himself is the firstfruits of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:20, 23). The term therefore is eschatological as well as cultic, and James’s designation of believers as ‘firstfruits’ not only declares them to be holy, but also places them in the category of those who are already experiencing the full redemption that the rest of the creation still awaits.” Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 111.

⁵³Mentioning both Webster and Swain together is not to say that they argue in exactly the same way: Swain argues for the primacy of the twin themes of covenant and Trinity (Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 27), while Webster conceives of the interpretive task as an act of “covenant mutuality” in the context of a larger work on the ontology of Scripture. Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 70–71. That said, Swain quotes Webster on this point approvingly in his own arguments and uses “covenant mutuality” in the title of two of his chapters, so it seems fair to use them as a collective as conversation partners in this part of the discussion. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 96.

an aspect of the covenant mutuality to which humankind is restored and in which creaturely acts find their place,” Webster argues.⁵⁴ Similarly, Swain adds, “God’s work of making friends with us . . . is only complete as he awakens covenant partners from the sloth and slumber of sin, causing them to hear, grasp, and follow after his holy Word.”⁵⁵

In both cases—yes. But it seems that a kingdom focus provides a superior thematic suitcase into which one can pack more theological and conceptual garments,⁵⁶ or to change the metaphor, a kingdom focus provides the primary strand around which the other thinner strands may best be held together.⁵⁷ For one, consider the manner in which regeneration is itself an eschatological act. Webster himself admits as much:

Christian existence is eschatological in that, as existence in Christ and in the Spirit, its fundamental structure is the setting aside of the old order of sin and death and the embracing of the new creation. Holy Scripture’s place is thus not only in the natural and cultural history of humankind, in which it is certainly a visible feature, but also in the new, spiritually visible, history of the new creation. Metaphysics, ethics, and hermeneutics all stand under the same rule: “the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17).⁵⁸

In regeneration, the believer is given new spiritual organs,⁵⁹ with which comes newness

⁵⁴ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 71.

⁵⁵ Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 96.

⁵⁶ The suitcase analogy comes from N. T. Wright: “Shorthands, in other words, are useful in the same way that suitcases are. They enable us to pick up lots of complicated things and carry them around all together.” N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 23.

⁵⁷ This analogy belongs to Beale, who argues elsewhere, “It is best to see my proposed storyline not as a center of the OT but rather as the primary strand of the biblical storyline thread, around which other minor or thinner narratival and conceptual strands are woven and are held together. Thus, the other storyline threads (which some might call ‘centers’) are not competing but complementary, and some may perhaps be as thick as the primary strand for which I am contended.” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 87.

⁵⁸ Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 248.

⁵⁹ “By the Spirit we receive a fitting organ for the reception of external revelation. God can be known only by God; the light can be seen only in his light. No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal to him (Matt 11:27), and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:506.

of life, and through which the believer may have proper eyes to see and ears to hear.⁶⁰

Indeed, the newness of life of regeneration that grounds biblical hermeneutics is itself both a facet and a foretaste of the kingdom of God—a facet in that the cognitive and volitional abilities implanted by the Spirit in regeneration are given with a means to this eschatological end, and a foretaste in that this newness of life and the fellowship to which it leads in Word-driven communion is itself an inbreaking of the age to come when the saints, in their resurrection bodies, have communion not with God’s Word in text but face to face with God’s Word in flesh in the face of our Lord in his kingdom.

Beyond this, a kingdom-oriented approach to a theology of the interpreter provides a more complete vision of the restoration of the divine image. Many treatments of the image focus on its ontological qualities, associating it most closely with the renewing of cognitive faculties within man.⁶¹ “Traditionally God’s image in man has been identified centrally in terms of man’s rational and moral aptitudes,” notes Carl F. H. Henry, who goes on to argue, “it should be clear that the rational or cognitive aspect has logical priority” in any understanding of the concept.⁶² It is at this same point of renewed reason too where both Swain⁶³ and Webster devote their attention to the connection

⁶⁰Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 97.

⁶¹Telford Work offers a useful summary of Athanasius’s extensive arguments in *On the Incarnation of the Word* about the divine image: “Knowledge in Athanasius, and of course language, are soteriological goods. They are both the means and results of salvation. Knowledge of God is a means of sanctification, bringing worldly humanity back into relationship with the intended object of human worldliness. And sanctification in turn purifies human rationality, magnifying the human appreciation of God revealed in his biblical Word. The entire divine process—creation, rationality, law, prophecy, incarnation, evangelism, sanctification—accomplishes the order of salvation that Athanasius would call *theosis*: ‘For he was made that we might be made God; and he manifested himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father’ (§54).” Work, *Living and Active*, 45.

⁶²Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 2:125.

⁶³Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 98.

between regeneration and reader, and not without justification.⁶⁴ Even still, as G. K. Beale notes, Scripture does not provide an exhaustive definition of the content of the *imago Dei*, and while equating the image of God with knowledge and reason is a legitimate biblical-theological inference from Scripture in light of Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24, this is not altogether the way the image is portrayed in Genesis 1:26-27.⁶⁵ Instead, in Genesis 1, Beale argues, “the divine image is not something that humans are in themselves but rather something that humans do in reflection of what God does.” Moreover, “if there is any hint about how humanity has been created ‘in the image of God’ it is that Adam and Eve were to reflect God’s image by ‘ruling’ over the creation, apparently in reflection of God as the ultimate ruler.”⁶⁶ A kingdom focus, therefore, expands the theological field of vision and connects the interpreter’s regeneration with his command to reflect the divine image faithfully as viceregent and in turn with the domain of biblical hermeneutics as the interpreter himself is to be ruled by God’s Word.⁶⁷

Even more, a kingdom focus incorporates other theological themes with respect to regeneration that would otherwise be left free-floating. With Swain, I agree that “covenant friendship is ultimately a mutual enterprise” and that “God’s self-revelation in Holy Scripture evokes creaturely acts of reading, acts enabled and governed

⁶⁴John Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90 (2008): 733–51.

⁶⁵Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 382.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Beale connects the mark in Revelation that distinguishes the followers of the Lamb (Rev 13:16-14:1) and associates it with the divine image. “Those who bear Christ’s ‘new name’ (Rev 2:17; 3:12) show that they have entered into an eschatological marriage relationship with God through Christ, and that they become one with him and so share in the attributes of his image and reflect him. . . . Thus they regain the position that Adam lost and are escalated into an even greater closeness to God that will never be lost. They ‘will see his face’ and so reflect the glorious light of that face (cf. Rev 21:10-11; 22:4-5) and consequently reflect his image as originally intended.” Ibid., 465.

by God's Spirit.”⁶⁸ But it seems better still to conceive of the interpreter's regeneration and interpretive response in terms of kingdom cultivation rather than covenant mutuality. Such unites the themes of friendship and covenant which Swain and others are right to underscore, but adds to them the themes of sonship, dominion, and inheritance which might otherwise be left underdeveloped. Thus, with Vanhoozer I argue that there is an economy of truth in Scripture—God's revelation indeed has a *telos* and is designed to have an effect.⁶⁹ In covenant with redeemed humanity, revelation leads to response and to friendship, but more still, the interpreter's regeneration provides both a foretaste of and longing for the eschatological inheritance he will receive as a co-heir with Christ and adopted son (1 Pet 1:22-2:3). Thus, the longing for and receiving of Scripture—effected by regeneration—is itself a fundamentally eschatological reality.⁷⁰ Not only that, but regeneration is in fact part of Christ's conquest as human-mediator king, in the putting of all things under his feet—in this case, human hearts and minds estranged from his righteous rule.⁷¹ Accordingly, a kingdom-oriented vision of regeneration also leads one to see the way this kingly rule is connected in beautiful theological unity to the interpreter through the Spirit: for in regeneration, the biblical interpreter in receiving and submitting

⁶⁸Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 96.

⁶⁹“There is, I submit, an economy of truth, a divinely supervised administration of truth that required biblical interpreters not merely to push propositions around in theoretical arguments but also to embody them in concrete forms of practical reasoning.” Vanhoozer, “Triune Discourse (Part 2),” 74.

⁷⁰Webster himself picks up on these eschatological themes: “To say that the activity of reading Holy Scripture is an eschatological activity is to indicate its place in the comprehensive history of regeneration in which all human acts are caught up. To act humanly in any sphere is to act in the presence of, in response to, and under the tutelage of the new reality which has been established definitively in Jesus Christ, which is now being realized through the Holy Spirit, and which its final manifestation at the parousia.” Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 247–48.

⁷¹Here too Webster tips his hat to the dominion themes foundational to regeneration, noting that “Reading Scripture is equally part of the history of reconciliation, for God's communicative self-presence always takes its stand in the midst of the mind's estrangement from God.” Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 248.

to the inscripturated Word simultaneously becomes united with the eternal Word by the saving word Jesus speaks in our hearts through the work of his own Spirit.⁷²

Obedience of the Interpreter

A kingdom-focused theological analysis of the interpreter, of course, does not end with the impartation of new life in regeneration. Neither does it result in either a cognitive *tabula rasa* from which the reader approaches the text or an infallible understanding of every passage across canonical revelation. However, a kingdom-focused theological analysis will readily pick up the already—not yet tension in the life of the believer⁷³—in regeneration, the Spirit “breaks our natural bond to the Old Man and forms a spiritual bond to the New Man,” but the believer continues to wage war through the power of the Spirit against the indwelling sin still present in his life (Gal 5:17; Rom 8:13; Eph 4:22-24).⁷⁴ This being the case, any treatment of interpretive agency must take up the topic of the interpreter’s obedience—caught up as the believer is in a constant tension between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit, desires ultimately about whether he will follow after the Word of Christ.

As it pertains to obedience, Kevin Vanhoozer is right to argue, “God’s call is effectual precisely in bringing about a *certain kind of understanding* in and through the

⁷²Bavinck notes that regeneration is effected by “not after all the word of God in general, not his word in creation and providence, but his word in re-creation, that is, the word that in Christ he speaks in our hearts by his Spirit. In other words, the Spirit who works regeneration is specifically the Spirit of Christ, who has been acquired by Christ and, after Christ himself had completed his work on earth and ascended into heaven, was sent into the church and now lives and works and in it takes everything from him.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:79–80.

⁷³Of note, when speaking of regeneration, Swain himself locates redemption as a facet of God’s kingship, entailing the liberation from the curse of slavery: “The work of redemption is a work whereby God sets creation free from the curse of slavery for its consummation under his kingly blessing.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 22.

⁷⁴Ibid., 97–98.

Word.”⁷⁵ In explanation of this statement, I here make explicit something that has been implicit up to this point: Previous sections of this chapter have argued that sin has so distorted the image of God in man that he is unable and unwilling to “hear” the Scripture rightly. The next step in this argument is the assertion that hearing the Word rightly leads to *a believing in and following after* the calls and commands of Scripture. Stated differently, and explicitly in the context of biblical hermeneutics, what I propose here is that if one does not receive *and obey* the Scriptures, one does not understand them—at least in the way that Scripture defines understanding.

This is not to say that apart from faith in Christ, unregenerate humanity is unable to understand the propositional content of the words of Scripture. Scott Swain is helpful in providing a disclaimer and explanation counter to such:

The point is not that the “natural man” is unable to understand anything that Scripture says. The point instead is that a profitable reading of Holy Scripture, one that receives Scripture’s words as the words of God, that ponders Scripture’s words as a way of pondering God, this sort of reading is only possible where the Spirit has caused the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened (Eph 1:18; 1 Cor 2:14).⁷⁶

At the core of this discussion, then, is this “profitable reading” or what has been called the “right use” of Scripture.⁷⁷ The argument here is that Scripture everywhere joins the understanding of Scripture with belief and obedience, a following after the Word.⁷⁸

⁷⁵Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 118.

⁷⁶Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 97.

⁷⁷Webster comments on the historical definition of the “right use” of Scripture: “Fittingly obedient and faithful reading of Scripture as divine judgment and consolation, a reading of Scripture as divine judgment and consolation, a reading in which we keep company with the holy God. Behind this notion of right use there lies, of course, a dogmatic ontology of Holy Scripture, one in which the term ‘Holy Scripture’ refers not to the Church’s approbation and employment of the biblical text, but rather to that which Scripture *is*: a collection of human writings, sanctified to be the servant of God’s communicative presence.” Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 246.

⁷⁸Following after a different word is indeed the paradigmatic expression of sin. On the relation of obedience to hermeneutics, Graeme Goldsworthy comments, saying the first sin was due not to,

Biblical hermeneutics is about hearing the Word of God rightly, and this hearing is not simply a cognitive understanding of nouns and verbs.⁷⁹ As Telford Work notes, “knowledge in the biblical sense is much more than cognition.”⁸⁰

As evidence of this, consider all the times the Bible speaks of sin as being unable to *hear* rightly. Time and again, throughout the Gospels, Jesus bookends his parables with the invitation: “he who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9; cf., Matt 13:9; Luke 8:8).⁸¹ The one who trusts in Christ, John shows, is the one who listens and follows after the voice of Christ: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).⁸² This, in turn, is contrasted with those who, in sinful unbelief, “may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand” (Mark 4:12). James joins hearing and understanding, seen in his insistence to “be doers of the word,

“finitude, ignorance, or lack of experience, but with moral revolt against the Word of the Creator . . . it indicates that there is an ethical dimension to interpretation. In Genesis 3 the essence of ‘snake-think’ is the assumption that God’s word is not self-authenticating, and that it can and must be assessed as to its truth claims by a supposedly autonomous human reason. The assumption of autonomy is a false assumption and so can only be adopted by suppressing the truth in wickedness (Rom 1:18). This new condition is described as death and alienation from the source of truth, a separation from God.” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 72.

⁷⁹“Evangelical hermeneutics can at least be described as gospel-driven. God has spoken by his Word, the Word who became a man for us. He knows us and we know his voice so that we follow him. Any hermeneutics that loses this plot has ceased to be evangelical and is out of touch with the biblical truth.” Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰Work, *Living and Active*, 37.

⁸¹Leon Morris notes, “Matthew repeats these words in 13:9, 43, and there are similar expressions in Mark and Luke. The command recurs in each of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. In the Synoptic Gospels the words are always on the lips of Jesus, and in Revelation on those of the ascended Lord. The thought in all these passages is that the physical act of hearing is not sufficient. It is more important to take in what is heard, to comprehend it, and to assimilate it.” Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 284.

⁸²“What then can explain the obtuseness of so many hearers? It is that they do not belong to Jesus’ sheep. It is not just that his own sheep *do* hear his voice, that he knows them, and that they follow him (points made in vv. 1-18 and here repeated), but that those who are *not* his sheep *do not* hear his voice, that he does *not* know them, and that therefore they *do not* follow him. Neither Jesus nor John means to reduce the moral responsibility of the opponents in the slightest.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 393.

and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (Jas 1:22).⁸³ So too does Samuel as he pleads to God for forgiveness of his sin which came, “because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (1 Sam 15:24). Indeed, the handing over of Jesus to be crucified came as a result of following after the sinful cries of the crowd. With horrifying brevity, Luke says of the indicting throng, simply, “their voices prevailed” (Luke 23:23). Jesus links Nicodemus’s failure to understand the new birth with sin, saying it flows from the fact that Nicodemus does “not receive our testimony” (John 3:11).⁸⁴ And Paul faults the zeal of the Pharisees because it is “not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2), as does Jesus who indicts them saying “my word finds no place in you” (John 8:37).

Hence, the Bible has no category for “knowledge” of Scripture in the abstract. At its core, the Scripture is a word from God to be heard and followed after. This is precisely why Jesus explains to the Pharisees: “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (John 8:44). Apart from Christ, man is driven by a nature in rebellion against God. He may possess a vast knowledge of the content of the Scripture, but his fallen nature will work tirelessly to evade the force of what the Scripture actually teaches. “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,” Paul says, “for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). In other

⁸³Douglas Moo notes on this verse in James, “James insists listening to God’s word must lead to ‘doing’ it. Only then are we truly ‘accepting’ the word. . . . God’s Word cannot be divided into parts. If one wants the benefits of its saving power, one must also embrace it as a guide for life. The person who fails to do the word, James therefore suggests (in an anticipation of his argument in 2:14-26), is a person who has not truly accepted God’s word at all.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 89–90.

⁸⁴“Nicodemus has found Jesus’ teaching hard to understand, but Jesus turns that incredulity into a fundamentally Christological question. . . . Nicodemus’s failure was not a failure of intellect but a failure to believe Jesus’ witness: you people do not accept our testimony. The failure to believe was more reprehensible than the failure to understand, since it betrayed a fundamentally inadequate appreciation of who Jesus is.” Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 199.

words, apart from the redemptive work of Christ *no one* will rightly hear and follow after this voice. Sin deafens the interpretive ears.⁸⁵

That said, the kingdom of God provides the native theological tongue with which the interpreter may discuss the obedience of the interpreter, as it most naturally locates the category in the overarching struggle for authority that stretches from Eden to the New Jerusalem. As John Webster notes, “reading Scripture is an episode in the history of sin and its overcoming; and overcoming sin is the sole work of Christ and the Spirit. The once-for-all abolition and the constant checking of our perverse desire to hold the text in thrall and to employ it as an extension of our will can only be achieved through an act which is not our own.”⁸⁶ Telford Work joins conquest and obedience even more explicitly, insisting that “prevenient, pneumatic grace is a prerequisite for both receiving (1 Thess 1:5) and speaking (1 Cor 12:3) God’s words in power. . . . God’s triumph over humanity’s epistemological depravity involves talking on and defeating the linguistic powers that darken human minds.”⁸⁷

Not only that, but the kingdom of God supplies both the motivation and the mechanism by which believers act in obedience to God’s Word. To explain, consider first

⁸⁵Though this paper is dealing only with the interpretation of Scripture, such is not to say that sin has no effect on the interpretation of other literary works. Here again, Poythress is helpful: “Communication is still finite, and since the Fall it is marred by sin. Authors bungle, they lie, they misperceive the implications of what they say, they deny the knowledge of God that they simultaneously presuppose, they suppress the knowledge of their evil intentions, they violate the standards of God for truthfulness, sincerity, respect, and love at the same time that they simultaneously endorse them (Rom 1:32). Readers are sinners as well. They bungle, they twist, they pervert, they slander, they distort what is plain, they too disobey God’s standards. Language and discourse become instruments of sin.” Vern Sheridan Poythress, “God’s Lordship in Interpretation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 44–45.

⁸⁶Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 249. Similarly, elsewhere Webster adds, “Through the incarnate Word, crucified and risen, we are made capable of hearing the gospel, but only as we are at one and the same time put to death and raised to new life. Through the Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ we are given the capacity to set mind and will on the truth of the gospel and so read as those who have been reconciled to God” Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 89.

⁸⁷Work, *Living and Active*, 183.

the alternative. Assuredly, the vision of covenantal friendship with God is a beautiful (and biblical) one indeed. Yet, when it is put forward as a controlling theme for the interpreter it seems to tend towards abstraction—with the latent capacity to overplay the personal and isolate the friendship from its eschatological environment. Even more, it seems to miss the mark even if only slightly in terms of identifying the locus of the motivation provided believers in Scripture.

By way of contrast, a focus on the kingdom of God grounds the interpreter’s obedience, tethering it to the believer’s justification, calling, and resurrection. There is both a negative correlate and a positive correlate to this argument. First, the negative correlate: a kingdom focus drives the interpreter quickly to the realization that without the eschatological power of the Spirit, obedience and ultimately salvation itself is impossible. Next, the positive correlate: a kingdom focus allows the interpreter to see his obedience as directly related to his resurrection—and as consistent with the already—not yet fabric of God’s redemptive plan, I might add.

To be precise, evangelical theology has maintained a theological distinction between the believer’s initial justification and his final justification;⁸⁸ Beale is right to note that those in Christ “have been already declared as completely righteous by God before their death and their resurrection,” but that their resurrection at the *parousia* “will vindicate that their prior justified status was in fact true.”⁸⁹ Obedience to the Word, therefore, is enabled by the eschatological Spirit, declared by God in the believer’s justification, and demonstrated in the believer’s submission to the Word in acts of

⁸⁸See, for example, Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013), 86.

⁸⁹Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 498.

obedience.⁹⁰ For believers, then, at the end of the age, “physical resurrection will be undeniable proof of the validity of their faith, which had already declared them righteous in their past life.”⁹¹ Thus, a longing for the kingdom, instilled by the Spirit, is indeed the motivation for the interpreter’s obedience.

At the same time, the believer’s obedience is the mechanism by which God prepares those in union with him for ruling authority with him in the kingdom. More than that, the commands of God in Scripture are the means God uses “to unlock the power of regenerate people so that they may live a righteous life,” Beale notes. “God continually confronts his people with commands in Scripture in order to unlock their regenerate ability for obedience and to cause their growth as new-creational people.”⁹²

Renewal of the Interpreter

Not only does the victory of Christ’s kingdom have significance in the initial embrace of Scripture and its call for obedience, it is also foundational for understanding how the Spirit works both in illumination and in sanctification with respect to our communion with God through his Word.⁹³ As Russell Moore notes, “The focal point of Christ’s reign in the present era on the church makes sense of our own lives. God’s

⁹⁰Beale elaborates further, arguing that the “not yet” aspect of justification “is that believers in this age are declared both not guilty because of Christ’s substitutionary punishment and fully righteous because of the transferal of his perfect righteousness to them; then at the end of the age, the good works of the saints (which are imperfect) justify/vindicate that they were truly justified by Christ in the past. . . . Good works are the badge that vindicates the saints in the sense of declarative proof that they have been truly already justified by Christ. The good works demonstrate not only the prior true justified status of a person but probably also the injustice of the world’s verdict in rejecting such works as a witness to Christ, often resulting in political persecution.” *Ibid.*, 524.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 498.

⁹²Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 863.

⁹³Webster comments, “What grace creates *ex nihilo* is not a mere empty space, an absence, for then there would be no creaturely counterpart to the self-gift of God. Grace establishes fellowship; and consequently the economy of revelatory grace includes the sanctification of the human knower, so that through the Spirit his or her knowledge is oriented towards God.” Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 71.

purpose is to conform us into the image of Christ. So, like him, we do not arrive fully formed.”⁹⁴ Often, however, evangelical treatments of biblical hermeneutics can overlook the noetic elements at play within the life of the interpreter and the process of formation and transformation in which the interpreter participates. Jonathan Pennington makes this point well: “Rather than emphasizing a separation and distance between us and the texts of Scripture—a distance that can be transcended only by an elaborate set of exegetical tools—we must come to see that the biggest difference is our lack of knowing and loving God; the real divide is between us and God in the text.”⁹⁵

John Webster makes a similar point, highlighting the areas of need for the interpreter of Scripture, grounding it in an eschatological context:

If we are to read well, we have to be made into certain kinds of readers. This “making” of the reader occurs as we and our acts of reading are taken up into the eschatological history of reconciliation. Like all our mortal and rational activity, reading, too, must be regenerated if it is to attain its end. Reading Holy Scripture is an eschatological activity because it is part of reason’s regeneration; the founding condition for good reading of Scripture is reason’s separation by God and its being taken by God into its service. Like all other aspects of human life, reason is a field of God’s reconciling and sanctifying work.⁹⁶

Evangelical theology has typically treated renewal in the context of the Spirit’s illumination of the reader. Here, as a first principle it must be seen that the Spirit’s illuminating work is a facet of Jesus’ eschatological victory—as it is the purpose of the Spirit to “bear witness” to Jesus (John 15:27).⁹⁷ As such, whatever roles the Spirit has, they are inextricably united to the redemptive work of Christ. Specifically, though, in relation to Scripture, the New Testament speaks of the Spirit as the one who “searches

⁹⁴Moore, *Onward*, 63.

⁹⁵Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 137.

⁹⁶Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 49.

⁹⁷Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6:368–69.

everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10). John presents the Spirit as the “divine hearer” of Scripture, the one “who will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak” (John 16:13).⁹⁸ Thus, while the Spirit is, on the one hand, weaning the believer off the seductive false promises of sin, he is, at the same time, standing with the believer leading him to understand those things that are “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). More broadly, the Spirit works within the believer throughout his sanctification to conform him increasingly into the image of Christ as well as to illumine the message of Scripture to him.⁹⁹ The Spirit, then, buttresses the “possibility” of biblical hermeneutics. The process of illumination and sanctification does not lead to infallible human interpreters, but the Spirit moves within the believer such that he is transformed by the renewing of his mind (Rom 12:2) and creates within the believer a yearning (Rom 8:15), precisely a seeing and longing for the redemption and inheritance that is to come with the kingdom of God (Eph 1:17-19).

At this point, too, one sees the kingdom of God as the framework that pulls together the most important aspects of the reader’s renewal. First, a kingdom focus conceives of the interpreter’s renewal as *battle*. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has secured the means by which he may renew of the image of God in man. Through Christ’s defeat of the powers and payment for sin, the Spirit is sent to earth where he unites men to Christ through faith.¹⁰⁰ Through this union, the power of sin is

⁹⁸Poythress, “God’s Lordship in Interpretation,” 44.

⁹⁹For a useful overview of evangelical understandings of the illuminating role of the Holy Spirit, see Douglas Kennard, “Evangelical Views on Illumination of Scripture and Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49 (2006): 797–806.

¹⁰⁰On the defeat of the powers, see Henri A. G. Blocher, “*Agnus Victor*: The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment,” in *What Does It Mean to Be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 67–91; Sinclair B. Ferguson, “*Christus Victor et Propitiator*: The Death of Christ, Substitute and Conqueror,” in *For the*

weakened such that the Word of God is not rejected but rather embraced.¹⁰¹ Thus, the Spirit works within the believer, such that he does not stand alone in the interpretive process.¹⁰²

More still can be said, however, as the battle continues to be waged in the life of the believer; in the “not yet” of the kingdom in this age the believer, though justified, must be restored gradually,¹⁰³ made into that which God in Christ has already declared him to be—and in his obedience demonstrate the character of the one whose image he bears.¹⁰⁴ This restoration also includes mortification of sin through the power of the Spirit all throughout the Christian life, including the renewing of reason and the mind. Such is consistent with this study’s arguments on the tight relationship between understanding and obedience, and in line especially with the patristic understanding of faithful interpretation arising from holy readers.¹⁰⁵ As Webster notes, “Reason’s conformity to

Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper, ed. Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 171–89.

¹⁰¹On the relation of Scripture to perseverance, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance & Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001).

¹⁰²Timothy Ward adds, “The Spirit who dwells in the people also stands outside them, speaking through the Scriptures he has previously authored, in order to call them to be faithful to the work he has begun in them.” Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 169.

¹⁰³“Though Christians have been *declared* not guilty of sin (both spiritual and physical), they have not yet been *delivered* from the physical death penalty of sin that has been carried out upon them, the decaying effects of which they live under. What this means is that their physical resurrection is the final overturning of the death penalty—the actual verdict from which they had already been declared as having been justified.” G. K. Beale, “The Role of Resurrection in the Already-and-Not-Yet Phases of Justification,” in *For the Fame of God’s Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. Sam Storms, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 203.

¹⁰⁴Beale notes that the functional demonstration of character is foundational to a proper understanding of the divine image in its proper redemptive-historical context. For detailed analysis on this point, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 254–64.

¹⁰⁵For a more thorough analysis on the patristic assertion that the most holy life leads to a faithful reading of Scripture, see John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 114–39.

the matter of the gospel which is announced in Holy Scripture therefore entails both a brokenness, a relinquishment of willed mastery in the encounter with God of which the text is an auxiliary, and also a renewal of the office of exegetical reason, its reintegration into the divine service.”¹⁰⁶

Additionally, the renewal of the interpreter itself has a goal—perfect fellowship and restoration in the context of Christ’s kingdom. As such, part of the interpreter’s renewal is the cultivation of virtues and habits that mirror the ethics of the kingdom. This is seen in the overarching ontology of Scripture, with its commands, promises, and warnings, and the Spirit’s work in effecting this in the lives of those in union with Christ—the one who indeed is the manifestation of every virtue. Not only that, but this is evident in some respects even in the structure of canonical revelation. As Pennington notes, with respect to the Gospels,

Ancient biographies, such as the Gospels, very consciously present their character *as one to be emulated*. . . . If the goal of the evangelists is (at least in part) to present Jesus as a model of God-ward virtue, then we should receive them as such, keeping this goal as an important part of what it means to interpret the Gospels and to read them well.¹⁰⁷

While not every genre within Scripture has virtue-formation baked into its DNA in such a way, what is clear is that Scripture itself is *telic*. That is, the storyline of Scripture reveals that it has an interest—to attest to and be utilized in God’s redemptive purposes in magnifying his glory in Christ through the establishment of the kingdom. A kingdom focus therefore ably brings all these elements related to the conquest of the kingdom in

¹⁰⁶ Webster, “Reading Scripture Eschatologically,” 251.

¹⁰⁷ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 33. Pennington continues, “The Gospels make it clear that their mega-purpose is to elicit believing response (especially seen in the programmatic statement of John 20:31). This is the foundation of following and cannot be neglected. But many readers today understand this aspect without appreciating the disciple-making, virtue-forming emphasis that is a function of the Gospels as *bioi*.” Ibid., 33–34.

the life of the believer into view as he approaches the text in interpretation.

Second, a kingdom focus portrays the interpreter's renewal as *restorative*. On this point, Pennington, speaking of the Gospels, speaks something true of the entire storyline of Scripture:

This message concerning God's kingdom is both *good news* and *restorative* in nature. To proclaim the arrival of God's reign in Jesus is to announce that the favorable day of the Lord has come . . . a time wherein the brokenness and injustice and death of this fallen world are overturned. Thus to read the Gospels in line with their purpose is to hear them with a focus on the restorative, Jesus-centered, kingdom-oriented message of God's work in the world.¹⁰⁸

The drive towards the kingdom is perhaps most clearly seen at this point, as one of the central features of the new-creational kingdom is that it is creation restored, both the universe and the redeemed humanity that populates it. Believers are indeed given a vision of the kingdom in its fullness from afar (Heb 11:13; Rev 21), but they are at the same time "the actual beginning of the end-time new creation"¹⁰⁹ who are bound together in "a kingdom we see assembling itself all around us in miniature, in these little outposts of the future called the church," even as the believer himself is being renewed and hence fitted for life in this kingdom.¹¹⁰

Third, a kingdom focus grounds the interpreter's renewal within the context of *authority*. As Jeremy Treat notes, "Jesus' death is not a defeat that needs to be made right by the resurrection, but a victory that needs to be revealed and implemented in the resurrection. Likewise, Christ's session is not the beginning of his reign but the

¹⁰⁸Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 144.

¹⁰⁹Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 303.

¹¹⁰Moore, *Onward*, 69.

completion of his earthly task and the continuation of his reign through the Spirit.”¹¹¹ As sovereign King, Jesus’ reign is exercised through his Word and thus demands by its very nature a particular orientation towards the text from the interpreter. That is, alongside the believer’s active exegetical sweat in the act of interpretation there exists a demand by virtue of our Lord’s authority in Scripture that the interpreter’s main disposition in reading be one of *reception*.¹¹² Once again, Pennington is useful in describing this need: “Our goal in reading is not merely to *understand* what God is saying (via helpful exegetical tools) but to *stand under* his Word.”¹¹³

Similarly, the authority exerted in Scripture has implications for the interpreter in the posture required before Scripture.¹¹⁴ As Joel Green notes, “More necessary than familiarity with ancient peoples and their cultures, more basic than learning the biblical languages, and more essential than good technique in interpretation are such dispositions and postures and gestures as acceptance, devotion, attention, and trust.”¹¹⁵ In other words, because with Scripture one is brought into the communicative presence of the triune Lord, interpreters must approach the text not just in pursuit of information but also in pursuit of renewal, approaching Scripture as an instrument of transformation.¹¹⁶ Indeed,

¹¹¹ Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 152.

¹¹² As Swain notes, “Within the context of this ‘ordered friendship between God and human creatures,’ reason plays what is first and foremost a receptive role. Reason is not the fountain of saving wisdom. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 98. On the “ordered friendship” Swain mentions, see Webster, “Biblical Reasoning,” 742–43.

¹¹³ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 137.

¹¹⁴ Swain adds, “The more our minds, wills, and affections are conformed to the love of God, through the gospel and within the context of a well-ordered Christian community, the better we will be able to recognize and heed God’s voice in Holy Scripture (cf. Rom 12:1–2; Phil 1:9–11).” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 116.

¹¹⁵ Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 138.

¹¹⁶ Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 34.

as Pennington notes, “the most determinative aspect of reading Holy Scripture well is not our method or theory but our posture and our goal.”¹¹⁷ Both of these are found with a kingdom-oriented focus on the interpreter. In all, O’Keefe and Reno are right to insist, “vision must be sanctified if one is to see rather than be blinded by the mystery of God.”¹¹⁸ And the renewal of this vision is best understood in light of Christ’s victory and eschatological drive—one that transforms us in the present as it pulls us to the future.

The Interpreter and the Church

A vision of the kingdom carries with it significant implications for the interpreter not just in terms his own personal regeneration and transformation, but also within the context of the church. As Swain is right to note, “When God reconciles individuals believers to himself, he also binds those individuals to one another, creating a new humanity and an interdependent body (Eph 2:16; 1 Cor 12:12ff).”¹¹⁹ This body is the church, which is itself the locus of the kingdom of God in this age. Russell Moore explains this well:

The righteousness and justice of the messianic order cannot be found, in the present age, in the arenas of the political, social, economic, or academic orders. Instead, the reign of Christ is focused in this age solely on His reign as Messiah over the people called into the Kingdom, namely, those who make up the church. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus are presented in the New Testament Scriptures as indeed granting to Jesus the cosmic ruling authority promised to the Son of David (Eph 1:20-21), but this ruling authority is only visible, indeed in one sense only “already” fulfilled, in the context of the regenerate community of those in voluntary submission to the Kingdom of God in Christ (Eph 1:22).¹²⁰

The church’s existence as the present location of the kingdom of God in this age,

¹¹⁷Ibid., 137.

¹¹⁸O’Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 139.

¹¹⁹Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 100.

therefore, informs both the interpreter and his task in a number of ways.

First, a kingdom focus grounds the interpreter's reading within the authority of the church itself. As Michael Allen and Scott Swain note, "The fact that the Lord alone possesses all authority in the church does not mean that he is the only authority in the church. As Matthew 28:18-20 demonstrates, the exalted Lord exercises his unique authority by *authorizing* the church to make disciples."¹²¹ This authority, however, is located within the church itself. What then, it may be asked, does this mean for interpreters?

For one, it means the judgments and interpretations of the individual may not be divorced from the authority and mission of the church itself. This is not by any means to deny the priesthood of all believers—which Baptist theology in particular has rightly upheld—but rather to affirm it wholeheartedly.¹²² In fact, a focus on the kingdom of God leads directly to such an affirmation. This because, the priesthood of all believers properly conceived is not a doctrine that renders the interpretations of every individual as equally valid, but rather, a doctrine that insists that every believer possesses the capacity to judge between true and false doctrine (Jer 31:34; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 John 2:27).¹²³ Indeed, the promise of the New Covenant "foresees a time of no mediators, because the entire covenant community under this new covenant will have a personal knowledge of

¹²⁰Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 152–53.

¹²¹Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 104.

¹²²For a useful work tracing the historical background of the priesthood of all believers, see Timothy George, "The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity," *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 283–94.

¹²³Jonathan Leeman, "Can Women Teach Under the Authority of Elders?" 9Marks [on-line]; accessed 12 July 2015; available from <http://9marks.org/article/can-women-teach-under-the-authority-of-elders/>.

God.”¹²⁴ In the New Testament, this interpretive capacity to judge between true and false doctrine is itself *telic*—designed to function in the assembly for the purposes of marking out the kingdom community in membership and discipline. Indeed, the power the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:19-20) is given to the church and not the individual.¹²⁵ Admittedly, the vast majority of instances in which the individual approaches the text are not likely occasioned directly by a question of membership or discipline, but what this does mean for the interpreter is that his disposition in the task of interpretation is not fundamentally an individual act but a corporate one.¹²⁶ In the reading of Scripture, the interpreter is participating as one in “a band of faithful believers united in a common confession as a local, visible *cogregatio sanctorum*.¹²⁷

Additionally, a kingdom focus not only insists that the interpreter should see his task as one grounded in the context of the church, but also reveals that biblical hermeneutics *cannot* be undertaken in isolation from the church. On the one hand, Scripture reveals that “the strength to comprehend” is given in the context of “all the saints” (Eph 3:18). Not only that, but the church itself is explicitly tasked with proclaiming and administering the Word in the context of the New Testament kingdom community, and hence is given as an aid to the believer in the act of interpretation. Hence, Allen and Swain are right to argue, “The Bible cannot be read by itself, for it

¹²⁴D. A. Carson, “Evangelicals, Ecumenism, and the Church,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 359–60.

¹²⁵In the aforementioned article, Leeman helpfully defines the authority of the keys as “the authority of collectively rendering judgments upon doctrine and membership.”

¹²⁶Abraham Kuyper spoke vividly of the Christian as “not an isolated worker” but as an “organ of restored humanity.” Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik DeVries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 581.

¹²⁷George, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity,” 392.

warrants or mandates the functioning of other ecclesial authorities.”¹²⁸ Undergirding this argument is both the command for the corporate proclamation of the Word of God, and also its administration through the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Table, coupled with the promise that in the assembly (Matt 18:20) the believer is confronted with the voice of Christ in a uniquely authoritative way.¹²⁹

Not only that, but a kingdom focus readily picks up on both the function and locus of the gifts given as spoils of Christ’s eschatological conquest. In terms of locus, the gifts of the Spirit are given to the church rather than the individual, and in terms of function, the gifts are given for the purpose both of the equipping of the saints as part of the restoration of the divine image in preparation for kingdom rule, and also for the advance of the gospel as part of the kingdom’s conquest in this age. The upshot for the interpreter is related especially to these gifts, because those with the gift of teaching are divinely appointed to train the body in doctrine and the right handling of the word of truth.¹³⁰ To conceive of the interpretive task entirely in isolation would be to cut oneself from the taproot designed to give and sustain life to the entire hermeneutical enterprise.

Second, a kingdom focus locates the interpreter within the commission given to the church. Simply stated, the interpreter needs the community of the local church.

¹²⁸ Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 84.

¹²⁹Hence, James Bannerman is right to insist, “When the Church through its appointed organs declares the truth, it is to be heard not only because it is truth, and because it is in accordance with the Word of God as revealed in the Bible, but also because the Church is an ordinance of God appointed to declare it.” James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church* (New Work: Westminster, 2002 [1869]), 1:282, cited in Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 104.

¹³⁰“Just as the Spirit sent Philip to help the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah (Acts 8:30-35), and just as Paul charged Timothy to teach those who would be able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2), similarly God has provided his church not only with a supreme standard for faith and life *in* Holy Scripture, he has also *through* Holy Scripture generated an authorized sphere of ecclesial reality that is charged to assist us in reading the scriptures.” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 105.

This is perhaps seen most clearly in the life of the disciples themselves. As Richard Hays notes, “even Jesus’ definitive peripatetic Bible study on the road to Emmaus does not produce understanding and recognition in the Emmaus disciples. . . . The moment of recognition comes only as they sit at the table at Jesus breaks bread with them. . . . We come to understand Scripture only as we participate in the shared life of community.”¹³¹

Not only that, but the community of the kingdom participates in the warfare of the kingdom, and while part of this warfare is conquest, another part of this warfare is described as defense. To be more specific, consider the charge to Timothy that he is to “guard the good deposit entrusted” to him (2 Tim 1:14). The church is called not only to proclaim Scripture but also to be its guardian, and this includes guarding it against those who would distort its teaching and truth. More to the point, if the gospel is “the faith once for all delivered to the saints,” (Jude 3) then the interpreter needs the community of the church because it is here where he is put in contact with these saints and this task.

To restate this somewhat differently, and at the same time introduce an additional element, the interpreter needs the community of the church because it is the church in all of its ordinances and activities that continually proclaims the basic contours of the faith that assists interpretation and equips believers to guard the good deposit. To make this claim is to say a number of things bundled together. To unpack them, for one, it should be seen that it is the kingdom of God and not primarily other proposed theological centers (such as Trinity or covenant) that is the best descriptor for what is continually proclaimed and portrayed in the life of the church. In the preaching of the church, it is “the gospel of the kingdom” that is given as the church’s proclamation; it is

¹³¹Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 14–15.

the age to come anticipated in the Lord’s Table, with signs of the broken flesh and spilled blood of Jesus taken in remembrance to “proclaim the Lord’s death *until he comes*” (1 Cor 11:26);¹³² and it is the resurrection anticipated in baptism as those in Christ proclaim him and are raised from watery death. Moreover, this repetition of the kingdom in Word and sign in the life of the community trains the believer to see the overarching contours of Scripture’s teaching, further supplying him with Spirit-bequeathed interpretive aids.

As the church rehearses the kingdom in its proclamation through sermon, sign, and song, and as the church guards the faith handed down to the saints, it does so in continuity with generations of interpretive forebears, and both relies on and builds upon their labor. And in doing so believers are engaging in exactly the task Jesus commanded. As Allen and Swain note, “Through the Holy Scripture, the church’s foundational authority, the Lord who possesses all authority *authorizes the church to build* on that foundation.”¹³³ This foundation is built “on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” and yet this foundation “grows” and continues to “be joined together” (Eph 2:20). What this supplies the interpreter with is one more variation on a theme: namely, the principle that the teaching ministry of the church in its broadest forms—both its theologizing and even its creedal formulations may serve as divinely-sanctioned tools by which one may render interpretive judgments.

In making such an argument, I am signaling openness to a rule of faith¹³⁴ in the sphere of biblical hermeneutics precisely because such theological formulations—so long

¹³²For a helpful treatment on the Lord’s Table with specific reference to the kingdom of God, see Russell D. Moore, “Baptist View: Christ’s Presence as Memorial,” in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord’s Supper*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 29–44.

¹³³Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 42.

¹³⁴Swain notes, “In the broadest sense, ‘the rule of faith’ refers to any shorthand summary of ‘the faith once for all delivered to the saints’ (Jude 3).” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 106–107.

as they are faithful to Scripture—are *products* of Christ’s eschatological victory and sanctioned by our Lord’s own command.¹³⁵ Indeed, “to the extent that the church’s dogmatic deliverances are indeed faithful summaries of the scope, shape, and substance of scriptural teaching, their use in interpretation does not constitute the imposition of an external burden or alien standard upon the interpreter of Scripture.” They provide instead “a divinely authorized interpretive key for unlocking the treasures of God’s word, a blessed pathway into Holy Scripture.”¹³⁶ With Wright, I agree that, “it is vital that we understand Scripture, and our relation to it, in terms of some kind of overarching narrative which makes sense of the texts.”¹³⁷ To do such, it must be said, is not in any sense to deny *sola Scriptura*—to be clear, any theological summary or grid by which one interprets Scripture must show itself to be consistent with and subordinate to Scripture’s teaching. Rather, such is instead a full affirmation of *sola Scriptura* in that it affirms Scripture as the sole norming authority *and* engages in the activities Scripture itself commissions. More to the point, seeing the interpreter’s task in line with this commission given to the church authorizes the very kind of argument made in this dissertation—that readers may be enriched by and interpret according to that which Scripture reveals as its central storyline thread around which everything else is sewn together.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Allen and Swain elaborate further, “We believe that the activities and artifacts of ecclesial tradition—that is, both the processes of traditioning, such as preaching and teaching, receiving the sacraments and engaging in schooling, as well as the products of traditioning, such as biblical commentaries, theological tracts, disputations, *loci communes*, creeds, and confessions—should be regarded as *natural signs* and *instruments* of the Spirit’s illuminating presence.” Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 45.

¹³⁶ Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 111.

¹³⁷ Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 123.

¹³⁸ “The question for the Christian interpreter therefore is not whether or not to read Holy Scripture in light of the rule of faith. The question is whether to read Holy Scripture with a right faith (i.e., orthodox), oriented toward the Triune God, drawn from the main contours of biblical teaching, and confessed by Scripture’s faithful servant the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:15), or whether to read Holy Scripture

Third, a kingdom focus reveals that the interpreter’s task is designed to be exercised in a life of service within the church. God as triune exists in eternal community and those in union with him and destined for life in his eternal kingdom are likewise meant for life and service within the context of a community, and not isolation. Indeed, hell is, among many other things, eschatological alienation—the removal of all external presence and grace and the giving over of someone to his own depravity in judgment.¹³⁹

Instead, as those being made increasingly into the divine image and mandated to reflect that image in the world, what this means for the interpreter is, as viceregents, one’s entire life, including one’s interpretive judgments, should reflect God’s character and be animated by a desire to serve within the context of the kingdom community. “A person who is deficient in skills—and who is not?—but seeks to read with an openness to learn from the otherness of the text (and the God behind it) can be a better reader than a methodologically skilled exegete who reads without posture and disposition of humble teach-ability, the greatest of the intellectual virtues,” Pennington is right to note.¹⁴⁰

Not only that, but with a kingdom focus one readily sees that the church, within which the interpreter is called to live in community, is designed to be both a workshop and a window—cultivating and displaying love and virtue and the ethics of the kingdom to the outside world. This being the case, the interpreter’s handling of the text cannot be disentangled from this calling but instead must be engaged within the believer’s call to love God and neighbor. Such a command thereby takes an axe to

with a wrong faith (i.e., heterodoxy), drawn from some other purported source of wisdom and knowledge, and governed by the ends of some other community.” Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 113.

¹³⁹C. S. Lewis portrays hell in such a manner, vividly, in *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 110; see also Russell D. Moore, “Personal and Cosmic Eschatology,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 897.

¹⁴⁰Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 138.

interpretive pride, stripping readers of the idea that the Bible is given fundamentally for the building up and bettering of one's own life, or that the interpretive task consists primarily of the exertion of one's own mental faculties. Instead, beyond whatever exegetical rigor that goes into a given hermeneutical judgment, every moment of interpretation must also be measured by Scripture's command to be outward-focused and driven by love, both for God and neighbor. After all, as Augustine asks, "What other end do we propose ourselves, than to attain the kingdom of which there is no end?"¹⁴¹

Conclusion

In a recent essay on the nature of divine revelation, evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer insisted, "To read Scripture in the church is not to operate on a dead text but rather to be caught up in a moment of triune life."¹⁴² What this chapter has sought to show is that not only is Scripture not some static reality to be excavated, but also that the interpreter himself is not a neutral participant in the task of interpretation.

Instead, the chapter began by exploring the "impossibility" of biblical hermeneutics in the sense of man's sin being an insurmountable hindrance to hearing and obeying God apart from divine intervention. Next, the chapter showed how the kingdom of God serves as the most useful framework with which one may best understand the ways in which hermeneutics is made possible through Jesus' making of those in union with him by faith the actual beginning of the eschatological kingdom through the restoration of the divine image. In this context, this chapter explored the interpreter's regeneration, obedience, renewal, and location within the kingdom community of the

¹⁴¹Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1993), 867.

¹⁴²Vanhoozer, "Triune Discourse (Part 2)," 77–78.

church. Throughout, it was shown that the interpreter is to act in relation to Scripture from the context as a reconciled sinner caught up in the conquest of the kingdom and commissioned to reflect the character of the king and submit to the authority of his word.

In many respects, this chapter functioned to show that the kingdom is the central storyline thread that explains the constitutional reworking needed and the subsequent posture required by the interpreter. How, though, is the act of interpretation in any sense effected by a kingdom focus? While up to this point chapters have examined the relationship between the kingdom of God and both Scripture and the interpreter, the following chapter will examine the relationship between the kingdom of God and the process of biblical interpretation so as to consider the ways in which a kingdom focus can enrich and transform our actual engagement with the text of Holy Scripture.

CHAPTER 4

THE KINGDOM AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

“The eschatological atmosphere of the ‘already/not yet’ pervades every action and thought,” argues Thomas Finger. “Ultimately it does not matter whether the consummation is near or far off. In either case the hope of Christ’s return puts all things in new perspective.”¹ Such has been the argument throughout this study—more specifically, this dissertation has put forward the idea that the kingdom of God in Christ—as an already inaugurated and yet to be consummated reality—provides a framework that supplies a unified theological vision of the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and biblical interpretation. Scripture, it has been argued, possesses not just an ontology but also a teleology—it is designed to be an instrument through which God establishes his kingdom and exerts his kingly rule. Moreover, the interpreter—as the previous chapter established—approaches Scripture in interpretation not as some neutral participant but rather as one marred by sin and being renewed for life in the kingdom; more still, the Christian interpreter, made in the divine image, is commissioned to reflect the character of the king and submit to the authority of his word.²

¹Thomas N. Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1987), 1:102.

²For a helpful treatment of the divine image as it relates to God’s kingdom purposes, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 381–465.

Turning now from the interpreter to the task of interpretation itself, it remains to be seen in what ways the kingdom shapes one's view of the interpretive act itself. At a foundational level, this study has put forward the idea that doctrinal pre-understanding is indeed essential for biblical hermeneutics. That is, a vision of the centrality of the kingdom of Christ across canonical revelation is the lens through which one is able to see the connection points between Scripture, the interpreter, and the act of interpretation.³ As G. K. Beale rightly insists on the centrality of the kingdom,

Since the resurrection and ascension are the climax of each of the four Gospels and the launching pad of Acts, I also propose that Christ's resurrection as the beginning of the new-creational kingdom is not only the goal of the Gospels and Acts but also the dominant theological framework within which the other major theological concepts of these NT books are to be understood. To put it another way: the resurrection as the expression of the already—not yet new-creational kingdom is the crucial strand of the thread of the Bible's redemptive-historical storyline as it is being woven into the NT witness.⁴

The key question for this section, then, is one related to the act of interpretation itself. At the outset, it should be stated once more that this dissertation does not seek to show that the kingdom of God supplies a comprehensive method by which every text of Scripture may be accurately read.⁵ Instead, this dissertation instead argues that the kingdom of God provides the framework that reveals the network of theological connections between Scripture, interpreter, and interpretation, and thereby provides a theological foundation for biblical hermeneutics. Thus, the question this chapter will seek to explore is not, "What is the precise method by which one evaluates and explicates

³For an analysis of doctrinal pre-understanding in light of the use of the rule of faith in biblical hermeneutics, see Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 112–113.

⁴Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 248.

⁵At the same time, I am not denying that the kingdom could function in such a manner, simply that such is not what this dissertation is trying to establish.

every passage of Scripture?” but rather “In light of what Scripture is and is designed to be, and in light of who the Christian is as a reconciled reader, how should the interpreter conceive of the task of the interpretation of Scripture?” Stated slightly differently, this chapter will seek to answer the question, “What role does the interpretation of Scripture play in the unfolding and establishment of the kingdom of God?”

In answer to these questions, this chapter will argue that there exists a close theological relationship between the kingdom of God and the interpretation of Scripture, which carries with it significant implications for how one conceives of the interpretive task—designed as it is to be a participation in the establishment of the kingdom of God. To do so, this chapter will take two basic steps. First, it will sketch and briefly evaluate a number of the predominant evangelical approaches to biblical hermeneutics to show where there is room for development and enhancement. Second, it will explore the ways in which the kingdom of God transforms our understanding of the process and purpose of the interpretation of Scripture. Here, this chapter will reflect on the way the kingdom of God reveals the shape of biblical hermeneutics and frames the act of biblical hermeneutics as warfare. In all, this chapter will seek to show how the kingdom of God supplies the framework from which a theologically grounded vision of biblical interpretation may be established.

The Neglect of the Kingdom in Biblical Interpretation

To see how a kingdom focus has the potential to enrich our understanding of interpretation, it will be helpful to sketch the basic contours of a number of approaches prominent within evangelicism. Not only will this set the stage for reflection on the role interpretation is designed to play in the life of the Christian, but it will allow one to see

the way the kingdom of God has been employed—or not—with each approach and thereby see what positive developments stand to be gained by a thoroughgoing interaction with a kingdom-focused approach.⁶

Author-Oriented Interpretation

Over the last several decades, the regnant approach to evangelical biblical hermeneutics is one wherein the meaning of the text is discerned by identifying the intention of the original human author.⁷ Such an approach is arguably commonsensical,⁸ for as Robert Plummer rightly argues, “any act of communication can progress only on the assumption that someone is trying to convey meaning to us and we then respond to

⁶I should note again that I am tracing development within *evangelical* biblical hermeneutics, and neither interpretive theory in general, nor biblical hermeneutics broadly defined. In each of these camps there have been significant developments in recent decades, the reader-oriented perspective developed especially by Hans-Georg Gadamer, the text-oriented approach spearheaded by Paul Ricoeur, and the concerns brought forward from within postmodernity. For a number of representative works, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1975); Stanley Eugene Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Gerhard Ebeling, *Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language* (London: Collins, 1973); Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

⁷For representative works, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994); Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard Duane Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

⁸Robert Stein makes such an argument that the author-oriented approach is the most commonsensical approach to interpretation: “Not only is the author-oriented approach to meaning the common sense approach to interpreting the Bible, I believe it is also the one that best fits an evangelical view of the Bible’s inspiration. If we believe that the ‘meaning’ of the Bible is inspired, where is this meaning to be found? Surely it is not found in the ink and paper used to convey that meaning. As stated earlier, these inanimate materials cannot think and therefore cannot will a meaning. If we, on the other hand, give to the reader the authority to determine or create the meaning (note we are not saying ‘to ascertain or learn’ but ‘to determine or create’ the meaning), what do we do with the diverse and contradictory ‘meanings’ that readers find in the Scriptures? Are they all inspired?” Robert H. Stein, “The Benefits of an Author-Oriented Approach to Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 3 (2001): 456.

that meaning intended by the speaker or writer.”⁹ An author-oriented approach insists on paying careful attention to grammatical-historical exegesis. Such an approach attempts to uncover a text’s meaning, by “furnishing the original” setting, context, and reception of the message, because these in turn help one to discern the intention of the author, which is the locus of meaning.¹⁰

As one step in the interpretive process, the author-oriented approach to hermeneutics is right, and even vital. Some interpreters, though, have taken the approach to an ultimately unhelpful extreme. As one example, OT scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., denies the possibility that the divine author of Scripture could have intended more than did the original human author.¹¹ Scripture should be read in the same way as should any other written work,¹² Kaiser demands, and “only the doctrine and the theology prior to the time of the writer’s composition of his revelation . . . may be legitimately used in the task of theological exegesis.”¹³

In analysis, then, consider the author-oriented approach on two levels. First, one may think through the approach at the broader level of those who locate meaning in

⁹Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 130.

¹⁰The language of “furnish the original” comes from an influential article in support of an author-oriented approach: Krister Stendahl, “Contemporary Biblical Theology,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 418–32.

¹¹“A literary work like the Bible can have one and only one correct interpretation and that meaning must be determined by the human author’s truth-intention; otherwise, all alleged meanings would be accorded the same degree of seriousness, plausibility, and correctness with no one meaning being more valid or true than the others.” Walter C. Kaiser, “A Response to Authorial Intention and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984), 441.

¹²Walter C. Kaiser, “Legitimate Hermeneutics,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 119.

¹³Walter C. Kaiser, “The Single Intent of Scripture,” in *Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilber Smith*, ed. Kenneth C. Kantzer (Nashville: Thomas, 1978), 140.

the intention of the human author.¹⁴ Here God’s purposes in eschatological consummation are often overlooked because of an interpretive tunnel vision that considers meaning primarily in relation to the immediate, atomistic context. Though the kingdom of God, Jesus insists, begins like “the smallest of all seeds” it grows to become “larger than all the garden plants and become a tree” (Matt 13:32). Yet it seems the author-oriented approach tends to shut itself off from this progressive development and expanse of the kingdom—ever missing the forest for the seeds. Second, consider Kaiser’s more strident insistence that the human and divine author’s intentions be coextensive.¹⁵ Such an approach ultimately ignores the kingdom as it was anticipated throughout the OT, seen in Paul’s insistence that he “proclaimed the kingdom” from “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:25, 26). Moreover, Kaiser’s method has the potential to ignore the thrust of the biblical storyline.¹⁶ Ultimately, evangelical theologian Millard Erickson is

¹⁴Admittedly, many proponents of an author-oriented approach allow for an appeal to the divine authorship of Scripture. For a helpful overview, see David S. Dockery, “The Divine-Human Authorship of Inspired Scripture,” in *Authority and Interpretation*, ed. Duane A. Garrett and Richard R. Melick, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 13–43. The great majority of these interpreters, though, rarely allow for divine intention at the level of meaning, preferring rather to speak of it as an implication of the text in light of later canonical development. Such an insistence follows from the seminal work of literary scholar E. D. Hirsch, Jr., whose primary works include E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); idem, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967). As Jonathan Pennington is helpful to point out, though, “It seems that Hirsch is neither as guilty as some charge him or as flat-footedly supportive of those who have often depended on him. Even more problematic, the discussion of Hirsch does not typically take into account the ways that he revisited and shifted toward his opponents in later writing. Significant moves away from the entrenched ideas of *Validity in Interpretation* can be found in his later articles.” Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 123n3. For the later works of Hirsch which Pennington references, see especially E. D. Hirsch, “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 2 (1984): 202–25; idem, “Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory” *New Literary History* 25, no. 3 (1994): 549–67.

¹⁵For a helpful, point-by-point disputation of Kaiser on this point, see Jared M. Compton, “Shared Intentions? Reflections on Inspiration and Interpretation in Light of Scripture’s Dual Authorship,” *Themelios* 33, no. 3 (2008): 23–33.

¹⁶Kaiser’s approach has been thoroughly critiqued elsewhere. For a handful of significant works in this vein, see Phillip B. Payne, “The Fallacy of Equating Meaning with the Human Author’s Intention,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 243–52; Douglas A. Oss, “Canon as Context: The Function of *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics,” *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (1988): 105–27; Vern Sheridan Poythress, “The Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *Westminster Theological*

right to note that an approach that insists on the divine author's intention being exhausted in the intent of the human author "excludes effectively any role for the Holy Spirit"¹⁷ and as such nullifies the already of the kingdom in the Spirit's eschatological forming of the canon.¹⁸

Theological Interpretation

A second, more recent development within evangelical hermeneutics has been the emergence of a disparate ecumenical movement known as theological interpretation of Scripture, commonly referred to as TIS.¹⁹ In a helpful overview of the movement, NT theologian D. A. Carson has summarized its most significant emphases.²⁰ Theological interpretation, he argues, attempts to:

1. Transcend the barren exegesis generated by historical-critical methods;

Journal 48 (1986): 241–79; idem, "What Does God Say Through Human Authors?," in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 81–99; Douglas Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986), 179–211.

¹⁷Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 31.

¹⁸On the formation of the canon as an eschatological act of the Spirit, see C. E. Hill, "God's Speech in These Last Days: The New Testament Canon as an Eschatological Phenomenon," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service to the Church*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 203–54.

¹⁹For seminal works within the TIS movement, see Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Stephen E. Fowl, ed., *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, Blackwell Readings in Modern Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997); Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

²⁰I request some leniency here in defining the movement by a sympathetic critic of the movement rather than one of its proponents. In defense of this move, it should be noted that one of the noticeable deficiencies of the movement itself is the lack of a clear definition. Here, TIS proponent Kevin Vanhoozer admits, "it is easier to say what theological interpretation of the Bible is *not* rather than what it is." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What Is Theological Interpretation of the Bible," in *Dictionary for the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19. For confirmation's sake, one may note that Carson's definition is very similar to the previous summary given in Gregg R. Allison, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 2 (2010): 28–36.

2. Bring biblical studies and theology closer together;
3. Accord greater credibility to pre-critical exegesis;
4. Utilize a God-centered as opposed to human-centered approach;
5. Read Scripture through Trinitarian lenses;
6. See Scripture less as a set of propositions disclosing God than as the story of God and his saving plan of redemption.²¹

Some have argued along similar lines, without formally identifying with the specific movement itself.²² Others still have engaged within the movement while varying some of the emphases mentioned above.²³

Analysis of this approach is difficult because the movement is still young.²⁴ That said, my attempt here is simply to explain the approach and analyze its use of the kingdom in its methodology.²⁵ Here, a few areas stand out. First, the ecumenical nature of the movement tends to leave the movement somewhat groundless and lacking

²¹D. A. Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . .,” in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 187–207. The enumerated points are practically verbatim from Carson’s wording in the article. I have adjusted the tense here and there just slightly for the sake of the reader, and hence have not put them in quotes. Carson’s individual propositions may found on pages, 188, 192, 196, 202, 204, and 205, respectively. In addition, extensive bibliography could be cited for each of these individual emphases. So as not to needlessly choke the body of this essay, I have chosen not to document each individual point. Carson, however, has expanded each of these emphases in the body of his article, wherein one may find more thorough citation and interaction with the various works and arguments.

²²See for example, Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009); Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*.

²³See, for example, John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For works elaborating on the drama metaphor, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

²⁴For an analysis of theological approaches to Scripture and hermeneutics within modern theology, see Daniel J. Treier, “Scripture and Hermeneutics,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 67–96.

²⁵Daniel Trier provides a multi-layered definition of TIS which is useful: “‘Theological hermeneutics’ is fast becoming a terms with its own history, which may designate at least two projects for Christians to undertake. First, Christians may believe that they need to develop an account of text interpretation or even human understanding in interaction with Christian doctrine(s). Second, Christians need to develop an account of how biblical interpretation should shape, and be shaped by, Christian theology. For the first project, the adjective ‘theological’ designates the mode in which we pursue *general* hermeneutics. For the second project, ‘theological’ also designates the material content involved in *special*

interpretive teeth. In several instances, the Trinity has been invoked as a hermeneutical lodestar, but usually with little justification.²⁶ Generally, there is scant attention devoted explicitly to the kingdom in most of these proposals.²⁷ One happy exception here is Scott Swain's work, which insists that before moving to theological reflection one must ask, "Where does this stand in relation to the unfolding drama of the kingdom?" Following this question, Swain goes on to offer eight different vantage points from which one may trace eschatological development. Even here, though, Swain subordinates the kingdom to the overarching controlling theme of covenant and Trinity.²⁸ At this point with the emphasis on covenant and Trinity, Swain is more representative of the broader TIS movement, and it is here where the movement tends to abstract both the aim of the covenants themselves and the mission of the triune God, as discussed in chapter two.²⁹

hermeneutics. The two projects can occur simultaneously, or distinctly, or even separately, on without the other." Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 136.

²⁶Here, Carson speculates, "Why is the Trinity as a, or even the, lens through which to read Scripture? Why not something else? It may be because the doctrine of the Trinity was central to debates in the patristic period, and we have already observed how much stress TIS supporters place on the church fathers." Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . .," 205.

²⁷Daniel Treier notes this potential danger: "If potential danger lurks on this treasure hunt, it is probably the opportunity to obscure the scriptural economy of salvation itself with abstract 'trinitarian' fancies that continue the modern trend of Christians bowing to alien authorities. Treier, "Scripture and Hermeneutics," 95.

²⁸In analyzing an OT text, Swain suggests the interpreter should ask whether the text's subject concerns: (1) *The pattern of the kingdom*: God's good design for creation in the beginning; (2) *The perished kingdom*: Humanity's revolt and God's curse; (3) *The promised kingdom*: God's promise in the *protoevangelium* and the extension of that promise to the patriarch; (4) *The partial kingdom*: The initial fulfillment of God's redemptive promises in the exodus, wilderness wanderings, conquest, and kingdom under David and Solomon; or (5) *The prophesied kingdom*: The history of decline in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, exile, and return; visions of Israel's restoration and the fulfillment of God's promised kingdom. In analysis of NT texts, Swain offers the following: (1) *The present kingdom*: The Father fulfills and establishes his kingdom through the incarnation, death, resurrection, and enthronement of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ; (2) *The proclaimed kingdom*: Following the outpouring of the promised Spirit, the apostles announce the fulfillment of God's kingdom in Christ, gather and build the church, and anticipate Christ's return; and (3) *The perfected kingdom*: The consummation of the kingdom in a new heaven and new earth. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 130–31.

²⁹Graeme Goldsworthy likewise finds the drama metaphor lacking in concreteness: "It is here that I think the drama scheme fails. Biblical theology consists in more than simply relating the events of the

Second, many have critiqued theological hermeneutics for a failure to move past the theoretical, and where it has, for failing to give due diligence to exegetical labor.³⁰ John Webster says of the movement, “We do not need much more by way of prolegomena to exegesis; we do need more exegesis.”³¹ Similarly, Carson argues that the reason why so many evangelicals have balked at the offerings in the Brazos Theological Commentary is “because readers could not forge actual connections between text and theology ostensibly derived from a *commentary* on the text.”³² Theological reflection is good and necessary, but before any theological construct may serve a larger hermeneutical purpose, its hermeneutical centrality must be warranted by Scripture itself. Over against this approach, a kingdom-focused approach is grounded in the organic development of the kingdom from creation to new creation.³³

Christocentric Interpretation

If an author-oriented approach is the reigning evangelical interpretive method, a Christocentric approach is at least a close second. In recent years, there has been a

story in order, even if accompanied in the process by theological comment of the kind the authors provide. It needs to be analytical of the theological dynamics within the story. Theological analysis and synthesis are not the sole property of dogmatics. I also miss some theological reflection that would help us see the great recurring themes, both in their unity and diversity. I miss the sense that the prophets deliberately recapitulate the earlier history of redemption in their eschatological projections. I miss the analysis of the nature of the theological transition between the several Acts of the Drama.” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 98.

³⁰As an example, see Allison, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Introduction and Preliminary Evaluation,” 32–33; Charlie Trimm, “Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20 (2010): 311–30.

³¹John Webster, “Editorial,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (2010): 116.

³²Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But . . .,” 207.

³³For perhaps the most helpful work on the organic development of the kingdom, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1981).

flurry of publications insisting that Scripture be read through the lens of Christ.³⁴ Some of the most thoughtful contributions advocating a Christocentric hermeneutic have come from the realm of homiletics. One of the great pioneers of Christocentric interpretation in the modern era is Edmund Clowney. His seminal work *Preaching and Biblical Theology* sounded the siren song for many in the evangelical world to recognize the need for Christ-centered preaching.³⁵ Herein, Clowney—in line with Geerhardus Vos³⁶—points the interpreter to the biblical-theological storyline that coheres around Christ as the entryway into faithful, Christocentric proclamation.³⁷

There are a number of more recent homiletics who are similarly located on Clowney’s hermeneutical family tree. Two examples are especially prominent. First, Bryan Chapell, author of the widely-utilized *Christ-Centered Preaching*, argues, “Scripture presents one, consistent, organic message. It tells us how we must seek Christ, who alone is our Savior and source of strength, to be and do what God requires.”³⁸ Chapell’s work centers on the interpretive and homiletic necessity of identifying the “Fallen Condition Focus” of a text, for “every passage was written to bring glory to God

³⁴Some even use this precise language, see the recent work, Michael Williams, *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens: A Guide to Christ-Focused Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

³⁵Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961).

³⁶See especially, Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948).

³⁷“The Bible does not have the form of a textbook, and the witness to Christ unfolds with the progressive epochs of revelation which in turn are grounded in the successive periods of redemption. Biblical theology recognizes both the unity and the epochal structure of redemptive history. . . . In no other way can we make our preaching genuinely theological and Christocentric.” Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 75.

³⁸Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 277.

by addressing some aspect(s) of our fallen condition.”³⁹ Second, Dennis Johnson’s recent work, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from all the Scriptures*, calls for the normativity of apostolic hermeneutics.⁴⁰ “We must follow the apostles’ example,” Johnson insists, “to show our hearers the One who is the End (*telos*) of the Story, and the Solution to all the riddles.”⁴¹ Following the apostles, Johnson maintains, will lend to Christocentrism a sharper cutting edge, precluding moralism and bare exemplarism.⁴²

Other offerings have come from the realm of biblical studies. Two additional scholars come to mind in this vein. First, Sidney Greidanus has written extensively on Christ-centeredness in hermeneutics.⁴³ His unique contribution to the discussion is the delineation of seven distinct ways to interpret the text in a Christocentric fashion,⁴⁴ based on his overarching methodological insistence that “many roads lead from the Old Testament to Christ.”⁴⁵ Second, Graeme Goldsworthy has catapulted the discussion forward with a bevy of publications related to the Christocentric nature of the biblical

³⁹Ibid., 271.

⁴⁰Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007).

⁴¹Ibid., 160.

⁴²“One might ask why the homiletic approach presented in this book is called ‘apostolic’ rather than ‘Christ-centered’ . . . apostolic preaching must be *Christ-centered*. . . . Yet, Christ centeredness in preaching must not be reduced to portraying Jesus as example, to the neglect of the good news . . . To focus on Jesus as example is to reduce him from sovereign Savior to ethical coach, and to transform his gospel into law.” Ibid., 15.

⁴³Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 8. This work is an updated form of his earlier book, Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

⁴⁴Greidanus identifies the seven ways as, (1) redemptive-historical progression; (2) promise-fulfillment; (3) typology; (4) analogy; (5) longitudinal themes; (6) contrast; and (7) NT reference. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 203–69.

⁴⁵Ibid., 203.

storyline.⁴⁶ Unique to Goldsworthy's approach is his continual return to the centrality of the kingdom of God: "The kingdom functions as a hermeneutical grid for the whole of Scripture. It must do this since it is the hermeneutical reference point for the universe and its destiny as Scripture portrays it . . . the kingdom of God is the way God reveals and interprets his being, his doing, and his purposes for all reality."⁴⁷ Goldsworthy additionally posits a macro-typological approach—insisting on a correspondence between epochs of revelation in Scripture—based on the idea that "all texts bear a discernable relationship to Christ."⁴⁸ For Goldsworthy, the kingdom forms the backdrop for all of biblical history, as he organizes redemptive history under three categories: (1) the kingdom revealed in OT history; (2) the kingdom revealed by the prophets; and (3) the kingdom revealed in Christ. Ultimately, Goldsworthy maintains that the kingdom focus in Scripture "is all-encompassing in the sense that, while there is a reality outside of the kingdom, all reality is understood in relationship to the kingdom."⁴⁹

⁴⁶For some of the more prominent of Goldsworthy's works in this vein, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); idem, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); idem, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

⁴⁷Graeme Goldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God as a Hermeneutical Grid," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 14. Goldsworthy highlights the centrality of the kingdom elsewhere as "the focus of both creation and redemption: God's plan of redemption is to bring in a new creation. The entire biblical story, despite its great diversity of forms and foci, is consistent in its emphasis on the reign of God over his people in the environment he creates for them. The kingdom depicted in Eden is lost to humankind at the beginning of the biblical account. The history of redemption begins immediately after the kingdom is lost, and tells of the way the kingdom of God will finally be established as a new people of God in fellowship with him in a new Eden, a new Jerusalem, a new heaven and a new earth." Graeme Goldsworthy, "Kingdom of God," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 620.

⁴⁸Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 113.

⁴⁹Ibid., 52. On the epochs of redemptive history, see Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 26. See also Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, 138.

In analysis, what might be said with respect to these above approaches, largely representative of the best and most thoughtful advocates of Christocentric hermeneutics? To begin, notice that not everything done under the sun of Christocentric hermeneutics is actually *Christocentric*. For example, as helpful as is his comprehensive primer to expositional preaching, one may wonder if Chapell’s exaltation of the fallen condition focus does not open the door to making interpretation more anthropocentric than Christocentric in terms of its purpose. Yes, Christ is the means by which sinners are healed, but when the driving force in Chapell’s hermeneutical approach is to discern how humanity is served and made whole by Christ, despite the best of hermeneutical intentions one may wonder where the accent actually lies.⁵⁰ Moving on, elsewhere one finds within many approaches a one-sided Christocentricity. What I mean here is that while many proponents of Christocentric hermeneutics argue—rightly—from the storyline of redemptive history, they nonetheless tend to “find Christ” more often than not only in the ways Jesus typologically exists as the “new and better x.”⁵¹ Such a privileging of one type of Christocentricity slouches toward predictability.⁵² Yet,

⁵⁰David Prince offers a similar critique: “While claiming that *Christ-Centered Preaching* is in the tradition of Vos and Clowney, Chapell’s text lacks any overarching eschatological focus. What drives Chapell’s Christocentric method is the commitment to finding the Fallen Condition Focus of the passage, only subsequently discerning the Christ-focus of the text. When one reads in Chapell that our ‘hope resides in the assurance that all Scripture has a Fallen Condition Focus (FCF),’ one might conclude that a depravity hermeneutic is central to Chapell’s approach. The danger in this is a methodological transformation from eschatologically oriented Christocentricity to anthropocentricity. Chapell does not advocate or discuss the two-age eschatology that is central to the Christocentric method of Geerhardus Vos and is reflected in Clowney’s work as well.” Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 110.

⁵¹Goldsworthy faults Clowney—and ostensibly others in the same Vosian trajectory—for his “clear preference for one kind of link between the Old Testament and Christ. The predominant link is through explicit biblical typology. . . . My overall impression is that Clowney is careful to avoid overstepping the mark in identifying the Christian significance of Old Testament people and events. It also seems to me that he does not really use his epochal structure as a way to understand the full potentials of his chosen Old Testament texts.” Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 87–88.

⁵²Here, then, is where many have faulted Christocentric models, locating its distinctiveness in

summing up Israel's history in his person is only half the goal of the Incarnation. Like a magnet, Jesus draws to himself all of Israel's history, yet at the same time he pulls into the present God's eschatological future.⁵³ A full-orbed approach, therefore, will pay attention to both sides of the Christocentric equation.

How, though, might one fault some approaches, like Goldsworthy's, that strives so mightily to posit a biblical theology united around the concept of the kingdom of God? Here, Prince rightly speaks of Goldsworthy's appeals to the kingdom as being correct as far as they go. The theme of the kingdom of God is a good starting point for thinking about the theological center of Scripture. Nevertheless, it is inadequate, not because of what it says but because of what it does not say. The phrase itself lacks eschatological orientation grounded in the concept of the kingdom of Christ. What unifies the entire biblical canon is not a static notion of the kingdom as such but an eschatological realization that the kingdom of God was inaugurated in Christ and will be consummated in him. . . . Likewise, saying that Jesus Christ is the central theme of the Bible is fully accurate only when it is understood in the context of what Jesus has done and will do.⁵⁴

the “predictable Jesus bit” at the end. “Such predictability,” writes Goldsworthy, “is, hopefully, a bit of a caricature. Yet, at a more sophisticated level it can exist. Some of the students that I teach at Moore Theological College discussed their concerns with me about listening to preachers who deal with the Old Testament in such a way that the students were moved to think, in the course of the sermon, ‘Ho hum! Now here comes the Jesus bit.’ These preachers were attempting to avoid an exposition of the Old Testament without Christ, which so often leads to a moralizing approach. Obviously a preacher needs to have a clear sense of the relationship of Old Testament texts to the person and work of Jesus, but that preacher also needs to be able to communicate this relationship in ways that avoid such stereotyping. It is also obvious that something is very wrong if the preacher’s way of relating the text to Jesus is felt to be boring and predictable.” Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, xi. See also, Jay E. Adams, “Proper Use of Biblical Theology in Preaching,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9 (1987): 47–49.

⁵³Jürgen Moltmann especially has utilized the imagery of the kingdom of God as a magnet, albeit for slightly different purposes. For his uses, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 325.

⁵⁴Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 48–49. Later in the same work, Prince offers as a refrain, “While noting that Goldsworthy rightly identifies a relationship between Christ and his gospel and the Kingdom of God, one must also note one of the weaknesses of his treatment: lack of eschatological focus. He tends to treat redemptive history in a linear way that focuses on understanding the progressive nature of the kingdom of God horizontally, but not vertically. And, although Goldsworthy does acknowledge the hermeneutical primacy of eschatology, his method does not adequately reflect it. While championing the kingdom of God as the organizing principle and unifying theme of the Bible, Goldsworthy’s treatment of the kingdom does not reflect the eschatological intrusion that drapes the entire Scripture with the shadow of the kingdom.” Ibid., 117.

In short, a kingdom focus will do more than posit “kingdom” as an organizing principle. Rather, a robust kingdom focus will find its concrete expression in Christ—who rules over and ushers in the kingdom. Accordingly, a thoroughly Christocentric approach to hermeneutics will highlight not only typological fulfillment, but also how the glory of a Christ-centered kingdom has broken into the present age, how still it will be manifested in fullness in the age to come, and how it has immediate implications for the reader in understanding what Scripture is, who he as a reconciled reader is, and how he ought to conceive of the interpretive task—a subject to which this chapter now turns.

The Promise of the Kingdom for Biblical Interpretation

Having seen the neglect of a kingdom focus in much of contemporary evangelical hermeneutics, what may be said in favor of a kingdom focus with respect to how the believer should approach the text in interpretation and what role interpretation plays in the unfolding and establishment of the kingdom of God? This section will explore these questions, seeking to show that the kingdom of God has implications for the way one conceives of both the process and the purpose of the interpretive task.

The Kingdom Shape of Biblical Interpretation

“The Christian act of biblical interpretation has a characteristic shape,” Scott Swain is right to insist. “That shape is determined by the nature of the God who speaks to us through Christ and covenant, the nature of Holy Scripture, and the nature of Christian renewal in the church.”⁵⁵ Not only that, but Scripture has both an intrinsic shape and explicit purpose. What I argue here is that these two assertions are interrelated, and they

⁵⁵Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 119.

cohere in the kingdom of God. That is, the shape of Scripture is one that is structured by the kingdom of God; the purpose of Scripture is to witness to and usher in the kingdom of God; and the act of biblical interpretation is fundamentally an act of the Christian's participation in this expansion and establishment of the kingdom. Flowing from this, then, is the idea that intrinsic to the interpretation of Scripture is the recognition of this kingdom shape, understanding its content in light of its central storyline, and understanding one's own relation to Scripture's as being a part of this kingdom conquest.

To expand out particularly on the first element of this assertion, consider first the centrality of the kingdom of God in Scripture.⁵⁶ Throughout the Gospels,⁵⁷ Jesus' constant refrain was the kingdom of God:⁵⁸ "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God," Jesus insists, "for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).⁵⁹ The kingdom of God crowds the landscape of the fourfold witness, providing a catalyst for repentance, "the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15; cf. Mark

⁵⁶For brevity's sake, this survey highlights only the NT data on the kingdom. This is not to say the concept is absent in the OT. Russell Moore rightly asserts, "The Kingdom is not seen in the Old Testament as simply the general sovereignty of God, although such divine kingship is everywhere affirmed (Psalm 103:19, for example). The Kingdom of God is instead the reign of God through his human mediator-king over a world in submission to his righteous rule. This envisions the restoration of the Edenic order when God ruled through a human vice-regent, Adam, and put 'all things under his feet' (Ps 8:5-8). This human rule is now disrupted, as the king and queen of the cosmos listened to a beast (over whom they were to rule) rather than to the Word of God." Moore, "Personal and Eschatology," 862.

⁵⁷For a helpful analysis of the kingdom parables in the Gospels, see George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

⁵⁸For a useful summary of the centrality of the kingdom in Jesus' teaching, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 45–64.

⁵⁹That the kingdom was central to Jesus' ministry is a notion widely held, even by those on the theological left. Though they conceive of it far differently than evangelicals, both Walter Rauschenbusch and Rudolf Bultmann write extensively on the kingdom. For representative works, see Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1922); Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951).

9:47; Matt 4:17; 10:7; Luke 8:10, 9:11; John 3:3-5);⁶⁰ spurring on righteousness, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt 6:32-34; cf. Matt 5:20); generating hope and bringing blessing (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27, 13:29, 14:15); offering warning (Matt 21:43; Mark 10:23-25); revealing some mysteries while concealing others (Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 17:20); reorienting the present order (Matt 5:19, 18:4; Mark 10:14; Luke 7:28); and revealing the Messiah (Matt 12:28; Luke 6:20, 11:20), among other things. So structurally foundational is the kingdom of God to Scripture’s message it is used as shorthand, summarizing the sum total of God’s revelation, which is why Jesus commissions his emissaries to go out and preach the message *of the kingdom* (Luke 9:60, 10:9). Indeed, the content of the early church’s *kerygma* is inseparable from Christ and the kingdom. Phillip, for instance, preaches “good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Paul’s preaching is characterized by “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31). It is “him we proclaim” (Col 1:28), and our preaching is to “know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), and yet the mandate to which this Christocentric proclamation acts in obedience is Jesus’ own commission to the apostles, that they “be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth,” in advance of the day at which he will

⁶⁰Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, reference is made to “the kingdom of heaven.” Traditionally, this has been read as a reverential circumlocution used in place of “kingdom of God,” as Jews often avoided using God’s name. For representative works supporting this view, see Gustaf Hermann Dalman, *The Words of Jesus: Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902); C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (London: Nisbet, 1936); John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message and Miracles*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1991). For a recent evangelical reconsideration of this widespread view, see Jonathan T. Pennington, *Heaven and Earth in the Gospel of Matthew*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, v. 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

“restore the kingdom” (Acts 1:6-7).⁶¹

The kingdom-shape of Scripture’s story is seen too in the Christocentricity of the Godhead and redemptive history.⁶² As many have pointed out, Christ is himself the epistemic ground of the Trinity; that is to say, it is only through the person and work of Jesus that one even comes to know God as Triune.⁶³ As Dane Ortlund notes, “The distinction-between-yet-divine-unity-among multiple persons within the Godhead can only be perceived because one of the Triune God took on flesh and blood.”⁶⁴ Indeed, “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:26). Beyond that, Ortlund also rightly calls attention to the asymmetrical nature of the Trinity, that is, the other-directedness of the Father and Spirit who each take pains

⁶¹Richard Gaffin highlights the centrality of the kingdom, showing how, “In the overall presentations of the teaching of Jesus in Luke, as well as the other Synoptic Gospels, the kingdom of God/heaven is the theme that is both central and all-encompassing. From this we may infer in verse 44 that the comprehensive focus of the teaching of Jesus, pre- as well as post-resurrection, concerned the necessary fulfillment of the whole Old Testament that has been inaugurated in the arrival of the kingdom in his person and work. For his post-resurrection teaching this inference is made explicit in the passage that overlaps Luke 24:44-52 at the beginning of part two to Theophilus, Acts 1:3-11. What characterized the forty days between the resurrection and ascension in terms of teaching was that, all told, to the apostles (v.2) Jesus was ‘speaking about the kingdom of God’ . . . To speak of the necessary fulfillment of everything written in Scripture about him is to speak about the kingdom of God.” Richard B. Gaffin, “For Our Sakes Also: Christ in the Old Testament in the New Testament,” in *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson*, ed. Robert L. Penny (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 66.

⁶²Karl Barth perhaps makes the most of this argument of Christ as the ground of humanity’s knowledge of the Trinity. See especially, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 6, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 1, trans. T. H. L. Parker et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 202–10. Barth is often similarly credited as the pioneer of Christocentric theology. For a work propagating this claim, see George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). For evangelical analyses of Barth’s Christocentrism, see Henri Blocher, “Karl Barth’s Christocentric Method,” in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 21–54; Marc Cortez, “What Does It Mean to Call Karl Barth a ‘Christocentric’ Theologian?,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 2 (2007): 127–43.

⁶³The grounding of Trinitarian theology in Christology is also prominent in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 74–75. See also, B. B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 143–65.

⁶⁴Dane C. Ortlund, “Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?,” *Themelios* 34 (2009): 315. Ortlund provides a useful list of scholars including the Fathers, the Reformation, and theologians as varied as Warfield, Barth, and Schillebeeckx who have argued along these lines putting forward Jesus as the means by which one comes to know of God as Triune. *Ibid.*, 315–16.

to direct their glory-bestowing attention upon the Son.⁶⁵ Jesus' notes that "it is the father who glorifies me" (John 8:54) and indeed prays, "Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed" (John 17:5). Only of the Son is it said, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:9). Indeed, "the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him" (John 13:31). In addition to the Father, the Spirit likewise works to honor the Son.⁶⁶ Jesus says the Spirit will "glorify me" (John 16:14), and Paul recognizes the Spirit as the means by which believers may themselves "glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3). In addition, Ortlund rightly points to places in Scripture that speak of the Son "where reference to the Triune God may seem to have been just as (or even more) appropriate. In Acts, for instance, Jesus sends his apostles out with the simple instruction, 'You will be my witnesses' (Acts 1:8). Philip, we learn, does precisely this in Samaria, where he 'proclaimed to them the Christ' (Acts 8:5). Why are the Father and/or the Spirit not equally proclaimed?"⁶⁷ The glorification of the Son in no way supplants the glory of the

⁶⁵Ortlund, "Christocentrism," 316–17. I am thankful also for the extensive assembly of NT texts illustrating the respective glorifying roles of the Father and the Spirit with respect to Christ. I lean on his organization of these texts slightly in the section above.

⁶⁶On the glorification of the Son by the Spirit, see Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1984).

⁶⁷Ortlund, "Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?," 314. Ortlund's elaboration on this theme is worth quoting at length: "Paul's statement to the Corinthians—'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified'—may seem similarly reductionistic (1 Cor 2:2; cf. 1:22–23; 2 Cor 2:12; Eph 3:8). In the opening verses of 1 Cor 15, too, 'the gospel,' that which is 'of first importance,' is defined in strikingly christological terms (vv. 1–8; cf. Rom 1:1–6). Toward the opening of 2 Corinthians, Paul reiterates that Silvanus, Timothy, and he simply proclaimed 'the son of God, Jesus Christ' (1:19). Later in that epistle, Paul surprises us by speaking of our inevitable appearance 'before the judgment seat of Christ' (2 Cor 5:10). The trinitarian benediction that closes 2 Corinthians places Christ first (cf. Heb 9:14), and many epistles close with an exclusively christological blessing: Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Jude, and 2 Peter. In Galatians, Paul's boast consists simply in 'the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (6:14). The closing of Ephesians, a letter rife with implicit trinitarianism, speaks of peace and love coming 'from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,' yet immediately speaks of the love of believers simply as love for 'our Lord Jesus Christ' (6:23–24). And three times in the first chapter of Philippians, Paul speaks of the content of what is preached (whether from false motives or true) as simply 'Christ' (1:15, 17, 18)—the one, we might add, at whose name all creatures will

Father and Spirit—instead it testifies to both their other-directedness and the end for which God created the world.⁶⁸ In other words, the Christocentricity of the Trinity points to the Christocentricity of redemptive history—and identifies the summing up of all things in Christ in the new-creational kingdom as the ultimate expression of the Trinity’s Christ-centered focus. It is right, therefore, to speak of Jesus as “the focal point that gathers all the rays of light that issue from Scripture.”⁶⁹ More than that, though, one sees that Christ gathers the light issued not only from Scripture but also from the inner-life of the Trinity as the goal of redemptive history.

Thus, Scripture and its interpretation takes its shape from both Christocentricity and that to which it points—the glory of God seen in the triumph of Christ’s kingdom. It is at this point where the centrality of the kingdom and the preeminence of Christ coalesce across the storyline of canonical revelation and in the formation of a kingdom-focused approach. Locating the defining theme of Scripture as

one day bow (2:9–11). In Colossians, Paul says of Christ, ‘Him we proclaim’ (1:27–28). Paul exhorts Timothy, ‘Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel’ (2 Tim 2:8). Is the triune God slighted by not being equally represented in such preaching?’ Ibid.

⁶⁸One may point to the final handing over of the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor 15:28) as evidence against this argument, but, as David McLeod has pointed out, the other-directed nature of the Father and the Spirit is not portrayed as being in tension but rather as in concert: “Paul did not think of the exalted Christ as displacing or rivaling God the Father. As the apostle’s hymn makes clear, the authority of the exalted Jesus is a derived authority—God [the Father] exalted Him. . . . God conferred on Him the superlative [name]; God purposed that created beings worship and obey Him. Hence, only God the Father has ultimate authority and sovereignty . . . (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Rev 3:21; John 13:31). So when the universe confesses that ‘Jesus Christ is Lord,’ God the Father will be pleased for His purposes will be fulfilled and His plans realized. The lordship of Christ glorifies the Father for in His earthly ministry Christ accomplished the Father’s will and work (Rom 15:7–9; 2 Cor 1:20).” David J. MacLeod, “The Exaltation of Christ: An Exposition of Philippians 2:9–11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 449. Ortlund rightly insists, “We must maintain balance in our treatment of the NT’s Christocentrism; for not only does the Father glorify the Son, but the Son also glorifies the Father. Time and again the glory of both the Father and the Son are intimately coordinated, particularly in John (1:14; 5:19–23; 8:49–50; 11:4; 13:31–32; cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 2:10–11). Indeed, the NT oscillates so frequently between the Son and the Father as the more immediate object of glorification that it becomes unthinkable to envision one person of the Trinity being glorified and not the other persons.” Ortlund, “Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?,” 316.

⁶⁹Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 58.

the glory of God in Christ and his kingdom “puts the emphasis where Scripture does on the *telos* of the program of redemption,” writes Russell Moore, “not on God’s glory in the abstract or on justification of the individual sinner, but in the glory of God in the exaltation of Jesus as the triumphant Final Adam and the mediatorial Warrior-King (Rom 8:29; Eph 1:10; Eph 3:21; Col 1:18).”⁷⁰ Indeed, the omega point to which Scripture is directed is seen in the handing over of an inheritance, a redeemed creation teeming with life “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:2). God moves throughout Scripture to bring about an eternal state in which he will lavish glory and honor on the Son. Here, God’s glory will shine forth, but preeminently through his Son, who is crowned with glory and honor (Heb 2:7) as he rules with all things under his feet (1 Cor 15:27). Hence, it is the glory of God in Christ that serves as the *telos* of all God’s redemptive purposes.⁷¹ This is perhaps most evident in the way that Paul identifies the mystery of the Father’s redemptive purposes as “set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him” (Eph 1:9-10). And it is precisely at this point where one may understand most fully God’s ultimate purposes in revealing himself to humanity in Scripture and how one is to engage with his canonical revelation.

Here, then, one can see how other proposed centers coalesce in this theme: the glory of God⁷² finds its expression in Christ and his triumphant reign in a consummated

⁷⁰Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 107.

⁷¹For a helpful work defending the centrality of God’s glory in Christ, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

⁷²Moore shows how even Jonathan Edwards’s vision of the centrality of God’s glory in biblical theology tips its hat to “this Christocentric and Kingdom-oriented definition of God’s self-glorification. . . . Edwards, for instance, defines the doxological purpose of history thusly: ‘The end of God’s creating the world, was to prepare a kingdom for His Son, (for He is appointed heir of the world), which should remain to all eternity.’” Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 237n138. Jonathan Edwards, “A History of the Work of

new creation;⁷³ the covenant promises⁷⁴ find their fulfillment in a Christocratic kingdom where the people of God rest safely in the land of promise;⁷⁵ God's glory in salvation finds ultimate expression in the holistic redemption of his people as they reign eternally as viceregents over a subdued and fruitful land in Christ's kingdom.⁷⁶ Moving from

Redemption (1773)," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1975), 584.

⁷³Goldsworthy critiques approaches that highlight a generic theocentric vision as the unifying theme of Scripture as being overly abstract: "Some have proposed the doctrine of God or the concept of the sovereignty of God as the real center of Scripture. But these are abstractions and belong in the realm of dogmatics. To explain what they mean we need to allow Scripture to clothe the abstractions in the garments of salvation history and the related theology of all the biblical texts." Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 75. Moore comments similarly, "The glory of God, and not redemption *qua* redemption is indeed at the heart of the purposes of God in creation, redemption, and consummation. Nonetheless, the New Testament does not present the glory of God as abstracted from the mission of Jesus, but instead presents it as finding its expression in His incarnation, atonement, and exaltation. The entire sweep of redemptive history therefore finds its goal in the glory of God *in Christ*. Jesus therefore points to the glory of the Father, but affirms that 'the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him' (John 13:31). This means that the doxological and soteriological goals are not in conflict. Instead both find their purpose and fulfillment in Jesus' inheritance of the Kingdom." Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 103.

⁷⁴Here again, Goldsworthy rightly faults approaches that locate "covenant" as the organizing principle of biblical theology for being too abstract and failing to observe the directedness of the covenants: "Some would prefer covenant as a central theme rather than that of kingdom. But the covenant is the formalizing of a relationship which conveys membership in the kingdom. A covenant theology sets out the promises of God as the basis of the acts of God in establishing his kingdom." Goldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God as a Hermeneutical Grid," 11.

⁷⁵The term "Christocratic" is used as early as 1846 in relation to Baptist polity: "The form of government instituted by Christ for his churches, is, as we have seen, a Christocracy. By the term I mean that the form of government of which Christ is the *head*, and under which he requires his people to receive *all* their principles of actions from, and to frame *all* their doings according to, his laws and precepts contained in the Bible. . . . They are, therefore, gathered together in the church relation by his *sole authority*." W. B. Johnson, "The Gospel Developed," in *Polity: A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents*, ed. Mark Dever (Washington. DC: Center for Church Reform, 2000), 232. Through the lens of an inaugurated eschatology, one sees that the Christocracy under which the church—as the initial manifestation of the kingdom—exists will one day extend over the entire cosmos.

⁷⁶For a useful article on the theme of viceregency in Scripture, see Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994): 1–21. On the theme of holistic redemption and human viceregency, Abraham Kuyper is right to show how God "placed the spiritual center of this cosmos on our planet, and caused all the divisions of the kingdoms of nature, on this earth, to culminate in man, upon whom, as the bearer of His image He called to consecrate the cosmos to His glory. In God's creation, therefore, man stands as the prophet, priest, and king, and although sin has disturbed these high designs, yet God pushes them onward. He so loves His world that He has given Himself to it, in the person of His Son, and thus He has again brought our race, and through our race, His whole cosmos, into a renewed contact with eternal life. To be sure, many branches and leaves fell off the tree of the human race, yet the tree itself shall be saved; on its new root in Christ, it shall once more blossom gloriously. For regeneration does not save a few isolated individuals, finally to be joined together mechanically as an aggregate heap." Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 59.

theological synthesis to hermeneutical proposal, Prince rightly notes how one of “the most underemphasized aspects in the contemporary models . . . is the eschatological orientation of a Christocentric approach to interpretation and preaching. The world was created for a Christocentric τέλος (Gen 1:1, Eph 1:10, Col 1:16). The eschatological pull of redemptive history revolves around the triumph of the consummated kingdom of Christ.”⁷⁷ A responsible Christian hermeneutic, therefore, must take account not only of the One whom God glorifies, but also the direction of redemptive history—how the glory of God is concretized in Christ’s kingdom, and how the inauguration of this kingdom has implications for those living between the two ages. With this kingdom shape of Scripture in view, though, what are the functional implications for the interpretation of Scripture?

To begin, the kingdom shape of Scripture reveals one of its purposes—namely, the notion that Scripture was given in part to train interpreters to see the kingdom of God and to participate within its eschatological conquest. To tease out the logic behind this argument one step further, if Scripture was given as a divinely-inspired pedagogue, training the believer to perceive the kingdom of God, then it follows theologically that Scripture itself may be an aid to the believer in training him to interpret the Scripture—since the kingdom is itself the integrating storyline plot. But as Jonathan Pennington notes, “one of the most ironic turns in human thought,” has developed within the domain of modern biblical hermeneutics, namely the notion “that even when studying Scripture we must employ a nontheological method to assure that we read the Bible properly, free from dogmatic constraints.”⁷⁸ Along these lines, evangelical scholar Richard

⁷⁷Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 184.

⁷⁸Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 137.

Longenecker has famously argued that one should not allow the apostles's hermeneutical methods to be normative in our approach to biblical hermeneutics:

What then can be said to our question, “Can we reproduce the exegesis of the New Testament?” I suggest that we must answer both “No” and “Yes.” Where that exegesis is based on a revelatory stance, or where it evidences itself to be merely cultural, or where it shows itself to be circumstantial [*sic*] or *ad hominem* in nature, “No.” Where, however, it treats the Old Testament in more literal fashion, following the course of what we speak of today as historico-grammatical exegesis, “Yes.” Our commitment as Christians is to the reproduction of the apostolic faith and doctrine, and not necessarily to the specific apostolic exegetical practices.⁷⁹

Over against this idea, David Prince rightly responds, “It would be eccentric to claim to be a disciple of Christ, to be under his Lordship, and to be submitted to the authority of the word of Christ, and at the same time to argue that Jesus had a faulty or fanciful view of revelation, interpretation, and proclamation that should not be followed by his disciples.”⁸⁰ What a kingdom-focused approach yields, then, is another line of argument that grounds the theological reasoning as to why it is appropriate (and even necessary) to allow Scripture to inform the way one interprets Scripture.⁸¹ To refuse to allow Scripture to act in such a manner both creates considerable theological problems as it calls into

⁷⁹Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 197. Longenecker writes elsewhere, “It is my contention that, unless we are ‘reconstructionists’ in our attitude towards hermeneutics, Christians today are committed to the apostolic faith and doctrine of the New Testament, but not necessarily to the apostolic practices as detailed for us in the New Testament.” Richard N. Longenecker, “Who is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament Use of the Old,” *Themelios* 13 (1987): 4.

⁸⁰Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 34–35. Elsewhere, Prince points to a useful quote from Douglas Wilson who similarly argues against Longenecker’s view, “How is this approach of Longenecker distinguished from saying that we will let Scripture teach us anything but how to handle Scripture? This is what this amounts to. We will let God tell us He is Triune. We will let God tell us Jesus is God. We will let God tell us Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We will not let God tell us how to interpret the book of Psalms.” Douglas Wilson, “Reading the Old Testament with New Testament Eyes: The Necessity of Typology” (Christ Church Ministerial Conference, *Type and Antitype: Seeing Christ in All of Scripture*, September 27–29, 2004), CD; cited in Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 14.

⁸¹Earle Ellis identifies the apostles’s “eschatological orientation” as the key feature which explains the NT use of the OT. E. Earl Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 94.

question the sufficiency of Scripture at a key point and also ignores the pedagogical role Scripture asserts for itself in the life of the believer.⁸²

Along these same lines, if Scripture was given in order to train readers to see the kingdom of God, then a kingdom focus recognizes the need to transcend the atomism of an exclusively historical-grammatical method and the allowing of only antecedent theology to inform one's reading and calls instead for a Christocentric, canonical *sensus plenior*.⁸³ This is, on one hand, because of the complications of an approach that demands the intentions of the human and divine authors be coextensive—critiques of which are legion.⁸⁴ But on the other hand, the kingdom shape of Scripture is one that is so central and widespread that it may indeed be impossible to read faithfully in any other manner. On this point David Prince explains well:⁸⁵

It is questionable whether it is even possible to read the entire Biblical witness and then inform a text only with chronologically precedent theology. Even unconsciously, later revelation will shape one's conclusions about the text. To

⁸²As Telford Work notes, “The trouble with approaches like these [Longenecker’s] is that they treat the New Testament writers as if they are working syllogistically, using exegetical techniques as their foundational hermeneutical assumptions. In fact, their most powerful hermeneutical assumptions are the events of Jesus’ own life and their own kerygmatic traditions. Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 204–205.

⁸³For one of the most helpful treatments of a canonical *sensus plenior*, see Moo, “The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*.” In addition, other helpful treatments include, Vern S. Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999); idem, “What Does God Say Through Human Authors?,” in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, a Challenge, a Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 81–99.

⁸⁴A number of the more substantive critiques were listed above in note 17.

⁸⁵Douglas Oss similarly uses the analogy of a painting: “The dynamics of the process are similar to those involved in viewing a master painting. If the painting were viewed from the perspective of its component parts (e.g., brush strokes, figures, and shades of colors), it would not have the same impact as it does when viewed as a whole. When viewed in its entirety, the integration of the colors, figures, and brush strokes constitute a structure with properties not derivable from its parts. Each component of the painting takes on even more meaning when viewed in the light of the entire structure. Yet each of the three components also has intrinsic value: brush strokes reveal the artist’s level of competency with brush techniques, figures reveal his ability to express dimensions and spatial relationships, and colors express his penchant for selecting aesthetically pleasing or provocative combinations of hues. A single brush stroke thus has multiple dimensions, none of which is separable from the single brush stroke. The same phenomenon of understanding occurs when biblical discourses are integrated into the larger canonical context.” Oss, “Canon as Context,” 112.

actually expect this operation to be performed would be akin to showing someone a completed painting, then asking him or her to evaluate particular sections of it without reference to the whole. The mind would automatically recall the completed painting. So it is with Scripture. Every verse is meant to be interpreted in relation to the canonical whole, which centers on Christ and eschatological fulfillment in him.⁸⁶

The interpretation of Scripture thus flows from the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit who produced a unified Bible that is both consonant with God's redemptive purposes and designed to be read in light of them. Thus, to read in light of a Christocentric, canonical *sensus plenior* is not an arbitrary hermeneutical choice; neither is it the imposition of an alien theological construct.⁸⁷ Instead, it is the unavoidable consequence of the recognition of the kingdom shape of Scripture.⁸⁸ It recognizes the finality and totality of God's self-revelation in the person of Christ (Heb 1:1-4), but also recognizes Christ as the center of Trinitarian glory, and the end toward which every text is directed.⁸⁹ Accordingly, it both expands the field of vision wherein one sees Christ in Scripture all the while focusing the

⁸⁶Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 39–40.

⁸⁷The secondary literature on the Christocentric instincts of Christian interpreters throughout church history is indeed relevant here. On the methodology of patristic exegesis, see John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 24–113; David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980): 27–38. For helpful treatments on the hermeneutical approaches on the Reformers, see Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011); David Lee Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); David S. Dockery, "Martin Luther's Christological Hermeneutics," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983): 189–203; James S. Preus, "Luther on Christ and the Old Testament," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 488–97.

⁸⁸As Beale argues, "It follows that the latter parts of biblical history function as broader context for interpreting earlier parts because they all have the same, ultimate divine author who inspires the various human authors. One deduction from this premise is that Christ, as the goal toward which the OT pointed and the end-time center of redemptive history, is the *key to interpreting the earlier portions of the OT and its promises.*" G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 285.

⁸⁹Swain asserts, "Jesus Christ is the goal of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44-47; John 5:39; Rom 1:1-3) and the substance of the New (Mark 1:1; John 20:31; 2 Cor 4:5). He fulfills every biblical promise (2 Cor 1:20), awakens obedience to every biblical command (Rom 6:1-14) and leads his people in singing every scriptural song (cf. Ps 22; Heb 2:12), even as he is the shared object of every singer's delight

clarity of that vision on the exalted Warrior-King ruling over the cosmos.⁹⁰ Indeed, if the postmodern critique of hermeneutics has taught evangelical theology anything, it is that the reader does not and cannot approach the text in a vacuum.⁹¹ The reading of the text of Scripture, by necessity, will be informed by something outside of the text,⁹² and a kingdom-focused approach insists broadly that interpreters be cognizant of the grid through which they are reading the text and insists specifically that the kingdom be the grid through which this reading should be conducted—precisely because this grid is derived from Scripture itself and is not alien but is instead commissioned for the reader’s use by Scripture itself.⁹³

(cf. Ps 45). He is ‘the word of life,’ who was with the Father in the beginning and was made manifest in the fullness of time (1 John 1:1).” Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 60.

⁹⁰On Christ as Warrior King, see Tremper Longman and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Russell D. Moore, “Theology Bleeds: Why Theological Vision Matters for the Great Commission, and Vice Versa,” in *The Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, ed. Chuck Lawless and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 103–20.

⁹¹For perhaps the most thorough analysis calling readers to understand the way their “situatedness” and presuppositions inform reading, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

⁹²N. T. Wright offers a reminder to readers, that they “[must] do justice . . . to the fact that the author intended certain things, *and* that the text may well contain in addition other things—echoes, evocations, structures, and the like—which were not [explicitly] present to the author’s mind, and of course may well not be present to the reader’s mind. . . . Similarly, we need a theory which will do justice . . . *both* to the fact that texts . . . do not normally represent the whole of the author’s mind, even that bit to which they come closest, *and* to the fact that they nevertheless do normally tell us, and in principle tell truly, quite a bit about him or her. Finally, we need to recognize . . . both that authors do not write without a point of view (they are humans, and look at things in particular ways and from particular angles) *and* that they really can speak and write about events and objects . . . which are not reducible to terms of their own state of mind.” N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 62–63.

⁹³David Steinmetz argues similarly for the necessity of the “second narrative” of biblical theology to inform one’s reading of Scripture: “I am inclined to think that biblical scholars who are also Christian theologians should worry less about anachronism and more about the quality of the second narratives they have constructed.” David C. Steinmetz, “Uncovering a Second Narrative: Detective Fiction and the Construction of Historical Method,” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 65. Additionally, Donald Fairbairn comments, “The Fathers had no qualms whatsoever about reading preconceived theological ideas into a given passage, as long as they got those ideas from elsewhere in the Bible. In fact, they regarded any attempt to avoid such a reading to be un-Christian. The Fathers believed that the entire Bible was a book about Christ, and therefore they were determined to read every passage of Scripture as being directly or indirectly about Christ, the Christian’s relationship to Christ or the church’s relationship to Christ.” Donald Fairbairn, *Life*

Finally, the kingdom shape of Scripture drives readers to the church, because the church is the vision of the kingdom already present in this age and the locus of Jesus' inaugurated rule. This has at least two major implications for Christian interpretation of Scripture. To begin, a kingdom focus binds one to two thousand years of Christian interpretation. God has sent his Spirit to awaken hearts and illumine the minds and wills of Christian readers not just in this age but in every generation of this Last Day, and God's providential care to preserve the Word of truth extends from Pentecost to the *Parousia*.⁹⁴ What this means for the interpreter is that he is not first to conceive of himself as an interpreter on a hermeneutical island but as part of a long line of Christian interpreters who stand as helps and checks on how he approaches the text. Timothy Ward offers wise counsel on this front:

Scripture has been read, prayed over, wrestled with, talked about, and taught for two millennia before any of us were born. Those millennia have produced settled convictions about the Bible's most significant teachings, as well as reliable practices of interpretation. Our primary attitude towards these things ought humbly to be that of a learner, not a critic.⁹⁵

Additionally, a kingdom focus understands the proper relation between public and private reading of Scripture. Too often, particularly in American evangelicalism, a commitment to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers has degenerated to a "me and Jesus" approach to biblical interpretation where the focus is on either one's right to private

in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 110.

⁹⁴Richard Gaffin notes that Christian interpreters today share the same interpretive vantage point as did Paul: "The continuity between Paul and his interpreters is clear. Specifically, they are related in terms of a common redemptive-historical index. Moreover, in view of the correlation between redemptive act and revelatory word, that is, Scripture's own focus on the history of redemption, the pointedly theological nature of this continuity is also apparent." Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 23.

⁹⁵Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 175.

interpretation or a privileging of one’s own personal reading of Scripture as the supreme expression of biblical spirituality.⁹⁶ Here, a kingdom focus reorients the reader’s priorities as it recognizes the church rather than the individual as location of God’s present rule. Specifically, a kingdom focus will allow one to see the way in which one’s personal reading of Scripture is to be “derivative of, and dependent on, the corporate reading and proclamation of Scripture in the Christian assembly.”⁹⁷ Such is not to deny that the Spirit dwells within and illumines individual believers; neither is to downplay the importance of one’s individual reading of Scripture. Rather, such is to locate the personal reading of Scripture within the ministry of the Word which has been given to the church—shaping, equipping, and teaching believers how they should read the Bible and providing the context and environment in which they appropriate Scripture’s message. More than that, it is to recognize that it is with the public ministry of the Word where there is special authority in the context of the assembly, this being the voice of Christ through his Spirit who rules over his kingdom colonies through the proclamation of the Word “wherever two or three are gathered” (Matt 18:20). Swain is right to note too that it is in the context of the church that “our horizons of biblical understanding are broadened beyond the limitations that characterize a merely individual reading of the Bible.”⁹⁸

The Kingdom Warfare of Biblical Interpretation

Scripture has both a shape and a purpose, as mentioned above. Scripture is

⁹⁶For a useful article on the priesthood of all believers in historical context, see Timothy George, “The Priesthood of All Believers and the Quest for Theological Integrity,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989): 283–94.

⁹⁷Ward, *Words of Life*, 171.

⁹⁸Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*, 122.

given its shape by the kingdom of God, and the purpose of Scripture is to witness to and usher in the kingdom of God, as discussed at length in chapter two. It is also asserted, though, that the act of biblical interpretation is fundamentally an act of the Christian's participation in this expansion and establishment of the kingdom. Here, then, one may see that a kingdom focus defines this "act" principally as one of warfare. Flowing from this, then, is the idea that intrinsic to the interpretation of Scripture is the recognition of what this warfare entails and how it relates to the believer's approach to the text in interpretation.

Warfare and kingdom go hand in hand thematically throughout the storyline of Scripture, such that Russell Moore has argued the two are joined to form together what is "perhaps the defining theme of canonical revelation—the triumph of Christ as divine-human warrior in the restoration of a fallen cosmos."⁹⁹ Central to this warfare in this time between the times is an overarching tension: John was given a vision of the day in which Christ will rule over the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:7), while the writer of Hebrews notes, "at present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him" (Heb 2:8). Consonant with a vision of the kingdom as both already and not yet, Christ rules now over his church (Eph 1:22), but this rule will one day extend over all the cosmos. This rule will extend at the *parousia* in Christ's conquest over all his enemies (1 Cor 15:27), who will be slain by the word of his power (Rev 19:15). But this rule extends now in the church as Christ triumphs over the rebellious human heart by his effectual word through

⁹⁹Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ*, 107.

the work of the Spirit in the proclamation of the church (Rom 8:30; John 10:27).¹⁰⁰ The positioning, therefore, of the Christian in the already of the kingdom means he participates now in kingdom warfare.¹⁰¹ Every Christian act of interpretation is, in and of itself, first, an act of warfare on the interpreter's own sinful heart (Mark 9:24).¹⁰² More than that, every act of interpretation is an act of listening to "the orders for the king's conquest of the world."¹⁰³ The position of the Christian in the already of the kingdom means therefore that every act of interpretation is an eschatological act.¹⁰⁴ Illustrative of this, Prince is right to argue,

The apostles were conscious of the fact that they were living in the "last days." In him, they had entered the eschatological age (Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:1; Heb 1:1-2, 6:5; 2 Pet 3:3). We live and preach in the same age as the apostles, the already-but-not-yet of the kingdom of Christ, the overlap of the present evil age and the age to come. Faithful preaching is not only eschatologically oriented; it is itself an eschatological event.¹⁰⁵

A kingdom focus thus triangulates the Christian's existence between the already and the

¹⁰⁰For helpful treatments of the effectual work of the Spirit in redemption, see John Murray, *Redemption, Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 95–105; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 942–46.

¹⁰¹For a useful treatment of the warfare themes in Scripture, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997). For a more recent, thoroughly evangelical treatment of the divine warrior theme in Christology, see Phillip Ross Bethancourt, "Christ the Warrior King: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Analysis of the Divine Warrior Theme in Christology" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

¹⁰²It is here where many of the recent treatments of a Christian posture within hermeneutics are helpful. For interpretation is ultimately an act of hearing the voice of the shepherd, and obeying that voice (John 10:25–27), as discussed in chapter three. Indeed, a pair of recent authors point out the "crucial role of personal sanctity and spiritual discipline in the project of patristic exegesis." O'Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 132. Likewise, it seems this idea of holiness as a ground for and handmaiden to hermeneutics is being recovered by many today. As one example, see Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 121.

¹⁰³Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 165.

¹⁰⁴For a helpful treatment of how the believer stands with Paul redemptive-historically and its implication for hermeneutics, see Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, 17–31.

¹⁰⁵Prince, "The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 180.

not yet, calling the interpreter to recognize how every text witnesses to the life of the age to come, and calls the interpreter to participate in *kerygmatic* kingdom warfare.

Broadly speaking, a kingdom focus creates within the interpreter the realization that in engaging the text he is fundamentally engaging in kingdom warfare. Specifically, though, this warfare orientation helps clarify a number of traditional elements otherwise treated abstractly within the context of biblical hermeneutics.

Exegesis, for one, is seen properly in the light of kingdom of warfare. To begin, a kingdom focus demands rigorous attention to the text, for it sees the way that every text of Scripture bears witness to Christ. By insisting that *every* text bears witness, a kingdom hermeneutic guards against the reductionism of some Christocentric approaches that privilege the epochal seams of the biblical storyline. These important figures, moments, and epochal shifts, of course, do point to Christ and his kingdom, but a kingdom focus will insist that the interpreter examine every text of Scripture in light of its witness to Christ, not just those where the intertextual connections seem especially obvious or significant. At the same time, recognizing both that *every* text bears witness to Christ and his kingdom while simultaneously recognizing that the *manner* of each text's witness is not equally apparent¹⁰⁶ demands the interpreter use the full array of tools and

¹⁰⁶D. A. Carson has memorably commented on the richness and ubiquity of the Christ-centeredness of the OT, showing how “God hid things in plain view.” Commenting on the actual witness of Christ in every text, Carson frames the discussion through the lens of Paul’s treatment of the OT: “Paul’s handling of the Scriptures, as penetrating as it is, can never partake of scholarly one-upsmanship. He is never saying to his Jewish peers, ‘You silly twits! Can’t you see that my exegesis is correct? I used to read the Bible as you do, but I understand things better now. Can’t you see I’m right?’ Rather, while insisting that his exegesis of the old covenant Scriptures is plain and true and textually grounded, he marvels at God’s wisdom in hiding so much in it, to bring about the unthinkable: a crucified Messiah, whose coming and mission shatters all human arrogance, including his own . . . this re-reading of Scripture by focusing on the story-line, this unveiling of material that is actually there in the text (even if it was long hidden), is precisely what makes coherent the shattering event of the cross. Unless one simultaneously preserves mystery and fulfillment, then both the sheer Godhood of God and the despoiling of human pretensions are inexcusably diluted.” D. A Carson, “Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of

careful analysis provided by the best of grammatical-historical approaches.¹⁰⁷ By extension, a kingdom focus also provides an additional support in favor of an expositional style of preaching—for every text of Scripture is designed to witness to Christ and his kingdom and is therefore profitable for proclamation, as “each sermon reminds the congregation of its position in the kingdom of God.”¹⁰⁸

Not only that, but precision and rigorous attention are demanded in interpretation precisely because the text of Scripture is often used as a weapon against the believer by the principalities and powers of this age. From the third chapter of Genesis onward, Satan uses the Word of God as a weapon—telling lies with the truth. As Russell Moore notes,

Throughout the rest of the canon he [Satan] does the same, implicitly or explicitly. Throughout the Old Testament, he preaches peace—just like the angels of Bethlehem do—except he does so when there is no peace. He points God’s people to the particulars of worship commanded by God—sacrifices and offerings and feast-days—just without the preeminent mandates of love, justice, and mercy. Satan even preaches to God—about the proper motives needed for godly discipleship on the part of God’s servants. In the New Testament, the satanic deception leads the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees to pore endlessly over biblical texts, just missing the point of Christ Jesus therein. They come to conclusions that have partially biblical foundations—the devil’s messages are always expository; they just intentionally avoid Jesus.¹⁰⁹

Paul’s Understanding of the Old and the New,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 427, 433.

¹⁰⁷For a helpful work advocating the careful analysis on both the macro and micro levels of Scripture, see Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993). For a recent work, useful in its analysis of grammatical-historical methods, see Köstenberger and Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*.

¹⁰⁸Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 165. Such an approach stands as a corrective to much Christocentric and redemptive-historical preaching, which, as Jay Adams points out, suffers from turning into “journeys through the Bible that follow the trail of a word, metaphor, theme, or concept from Genesis to Revelation. . . . That means that little justice is given to particular passages. The big picture is constantly held before a congregation; the emphasis is on the forest, not on the trees. Such preaching tends to bypass the *telos* of these passages in favor of a few, great concerns.” Adams, “Proper Use of Biblical Theology in Preaching,” 47.

¹⁰⁹Russell D. Moore, “Preaching Like the Devil,” *Touchstone* 23 (2010): 1.

This being the case, the interpreter is called to rigorous exposition, but, crucially, this exposition can never be abstracted from God's kingdom purposes revealed in Christ.

Bare exposition is, literally, Satanic. After all, such is exactly what Satan did in our Lord's wilderness temptations. "Satan quotes Scripture and he doesn't misquote the promises: God wants his children to eat bread, not starves before stone; God will protect his anointed One with the angels of heaven; God will give His Messiah all the kingdoms of the earth. All this is true," Moore notes.¹¹⁰ "What is satanic about all of this, though, is that Satan wanted our Lord to grasp these things apart from the cross and the empty tomb. These promises could not be abstracted from the gospel."¹¹¹ These promises can neither be abstracted from the kingdom, to which the gospel is pointed.

Application, similarly, is seen in light of kingdom warfare. Too often, evangelical application functionally abstracts Christ from the text, as application moves directly from the text of Scripture to the individual interpreter,¹¹² resulting not infrequently in abstraction, exemplarism, or moralism.¹¹³ Instead, a kingdom focus recognizes that "the work of Christ should be the magnet that draws our interpretive

¹¹⁰Russell D. Moore, "Beyond a Veggie Tales Gospel: Preaching Christ from Every Text," *The Tie* 76, no. 1 (2008): 15.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Millard Erickson notes this tendency in the author-oriented approach of Kaiser: "The sermon outlines that Kaiser offers are not contextualized to our time or situation or to any particular time or situation. There really is nothing in these outlines that could not have been preached in just that way two hundred or one thousand years ago. The outlines that he offers differ from the outlines of the text, but not to a radical degree. They are not really sufficiently removed from the exegetical outlines to qualify as homiletical outlines." Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation*, 24–25. Prince devotes a considerable amount of analysis to this point in "The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching," 126–72.

¹¹³One recent work positing a Christocentric approach to hermeneutics—though helpfully locating many of the ways Jesus fulfills OT persons and events—seems to be guilty of this abstraction. Each chapter offers application questions after instructing the reader how to read each book of the Bible "through the Jesus lens," but in many of these applications one is hard pressed to find how Jesus is in any way informing the application of the text. For example, the question for the book of Exodus is "Does the

applications of all texts to the gospel.”¹¹⁴ A kingdom focus, therefore, will recognize the way that Scripture was designed to attest to Christ and be summed up in him (Eph 1:10), and will conceive of application as locating the believer in the storyline of Christ’s kingdom rather than simply moving from text to reader.¹¹⁵ Understanding hermeneutics in light of God’s redemptive work in Christ and the progression toward his eschatological kingdom will therefore pave the way for gospel-centered application. Ethical commands—as but one example—take on new light in Christ because in union with him the believer’s own identity is found in Christ and is indeed being transformed into the image of the one who was himself perfectly obedient.

Not only that, but application is seen for what it is designed to be: the final stepping-stone to the ultimate goal of transformation.¹¹⁶ Grant Osborne has argued that “the actual purpose of Scripture is not explanation but exposition, not description but proclamation.”¹¹⁷ This is precisely why a kingdom focus will not limit the meaning of a given text to only what can be objectively ascertained to be the original truth-intention of the human author.¹¹⁸ Instead, a kingdom focus supplies the conviction that Scripture has

fact that you are a Christian feel like a burden?” (20), while a question for Colossians is “What is the most important thing in your life?” (209). Williams, *How to Read the Bible Through the Jesus Lens*.

¹¹⁴ Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics*, 304.

¹¹⁵ Telford Work is helpful in arguing that a theological foundation for biblical hermeneutics is needed to avoid the interpretive instinct of “Christians who have learned to make *themselves* the thing to be enjoyed, and God the sacramental thing to be used in the service of their own adoration.” Work, *Living and Active*, 317.

¹¹⁶ This is why some, such as Kevin Vanhoozer, have argued that application of a text is not something that comes after determining the meaning of a text but is instead “constitutive of understanding itself.” Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 327.

¹¹⁷ Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Pennington notes that the sharp distinction between meaning and significance “cannot account for the vast variety of meanings or interpretations that are constantly produced by contemporary readers, even those with similar backgrounds and methods. That is, if meaning is supposedly stable and objectifiable from a text, obtained by using certain methods, then why does one rarely if ever find two interpreters that who agree with each other—even contemporary interpreters with similar convictions, let

both a Divine Author which can inform a text's meaning as well as a divinely-inspired effect the text is to have on the interpreter—and these are not to be excluded from a text's meaning. That is to say, biblical hermeneutics is given to those in Christ not primarily for the sake of education but for the sake of transformation—for the sake of conformity to the image of Christ as preparation for kingdom rule. Jonathan Pennington utilizes speech-act theory categories to make the same point:

The point here for our reading of the Bible is that understanding Scripture must be more than understanding its *locution*; just as important, we must understand its illocutionary point, and to truly “understand” it is to let it have its perlocutionary effect on us (namely, faith in God and all its effects). Thus, to make a sharp distinction between what the text “meant” and what it “means” is mistaken because the meaning of the text cannot be reduced to a set of abstract propositions about it. The meaning of a text is the locution, illocution, and perlocution of God speaking to us *now* in Holy Scripture.¹¹⁹

Such an approach does not allow a text to mean anything;¹²⁰ instead it insists, “there are bad readings or applications that do not cohere with its thrust”¹²¹ which are to be rejected and at the same time demands that interpreters pay close (even primary) attention to intent of the original human author¹²² but not allow for meaning to be exhausted at that

alone diverse ones? Additionally, if the ‘objective’ meaning of the text according to authorial intent could be discerned once and for all, then certainly we would have done so by now, wouldn’t we?” Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 132.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 133.

¹²⁰The charge of subjectivity is precisely that which those calling for a sharp distinction between meaning and application contend against. And yet, John Frame notes the irony that subjectivity is exactly what such a distinction results in: “If someone wishes to define meaning as the text itself, then I can accept a distinction between meaning and application. Meaning is the text, and application is the use of the text. Those definitions are, however, entirely contrary to normal usage, and that is why I shun them. What we must categorically reject, however, is some mysterious, intermediary thing called ‘the meaning’ that stands *between* the text and its application. Instead of increasing the objectivity of our knowledge, such an intermediary is a subjective construct inevitably clouds our understanding of the text itself.” John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 98.

¹²¹Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 135.

¹²²Beale argues that the OT and NT authors themselves *intend* more than what they explicitly write: “I have argued in this article that when OT or even NT authors make direct statements with an explicit meaning, there is always a related secondary range of meaning that appropriately is an expansion of the explicit meaning. All speakers and writers, including ancient writers, are aware of more than what they

level.¹²³ Understanding the warfare of the kingdom means that our goal in the interpretation of Scripture is not primarily the accrual of information but is instead to be brought in line with and engaged within the kingdom of God; readers are seeking to be acted on by God's revelation for use in his kingdom in this age. Language—especially divinely inspired language—has a purpose, and a major part of the task of interpretation is discerning that purpose.¹²⁴ Hence, one cannot apply a text without reference to Christ's kingdom purposes, and one must not bifurcate a text's meaning from its application. With respect to meaning and application, what God has joined together let no interpreter put asunder.

To summarize, all of this is related directly to warfare in that this transformation comes about by the power of the Spirit in the context of the war being waged against the flesh in this age. Because the kingdom is one where Christ is preeminent, a kingdom focus guards against application being overly individualistic or abstract.¹²⁵ In short, a kingdom focus recognizes that the life of the age to come has

are directly saying in their speech act. New Testament authors may interpret OT speech acts not directly in line with their explicit meaning but may draw meaning from their cognitive peripheral vision. It may seem like speculation to try to formulate what that latent peripheral meaning was, but, at the least, we can try to show the viable possibility that there was a wider meaning and that the NT writer may have well been aware of that meaning in interpreting the OT passage." Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," 287.

¹²³Several works in recent years have highlighted the emphasis on authorial intention and the *sensus literalis* in patristic exegesis. For a useful overview, see Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Church Fathers* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

¹²⁴This is not to argue that language is merely performative. It is indeed propositional also, which D. A. Carson is helpful in pointing out: "It is certainly true that God's word is often described in performative categories, to use a term much loved by speech-act theorists: God's word *accomplishes* things, and these things are regularly bound up with God's redemptive purposes, and thus with the kingdom. But God's word is also described in truth categories (which of course are also allowed by speech-act theorists), which inform, instruct, reform, teach, and so forth, and this word is true and reliable (as God himself is, for God discloses himself by this means) whether people accept it or not." D. A. Carson, *Collected Writings on Scripture*, ed. Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 301.

¹²⁵Indeed, Prince is right to argue of the preacher (and by extension the interpreter engaging in application), "The preacher's responsibility is not simply to apply the biblical story to the lives of his

broken into the present age in the church, and much of biblical hermeneutics is recognizing how this life is showing itself in the “already” of the kingdom, calling the interpreter to find himself united to Christ in faith and wage war against the powers and principalities of this age through the power of the Spirit in the Word.

Conclusion

John Webster is right to argue that “Scripture is not simply a text through which God has spoken but which is now delivered as it were inert and defenseless into our hands as raw material for our ‘use’; God speaks in Holy Scripture, and through the operation of the illuminating Spirit God orders and enables its reception.”¹²⁶ Far from being some inert text on which interpreters operate, this chapter has argued is that Scripture has both a proportion and a purpose, and both of these are integrally related to the kingdom of God and how it informs the way one conceives of the interpretive task.

Fundamental to understanding what role interpretation plays in the life of the individual believer is the recognition of the centrality of the kingdom across Scripture, and how it colors everything the interpreter confronts. As Peter Leithart comments,

The Bible tells one story. It is a long and complicated story about events that took place over several thousand years, but even so it is one story. Like most good stories, the most exciting and important points come toward the end. In this case, the most important part comes when Jesus is born, lives, dies on the cross, rises again, and ascends to heaven. But to know why Jesus comes and what He is doing when he dies and rises again, we need to know the story that goes before. A man kisses a sleeping woman in a wood and she awakes. That’s a nice ending to a story, but if we don’t know the woman is Sleeping Beauty and the man is Prince Philip, then we

hearers but to apply the lives of his hearers to the biblical story and call them to find themselves in the story of Jesus.” Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” 119.

¹²⁶John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 20.

don't know the story very well. A beginning is nothing without an ending, but an ending without a beginning isn't worth much either.¹²⁷

Understanding Scripture's story and its shape inevitably informs the way one understands individual texts all across God's progressive, canonical revelation. In other words, recognizing Scripture's overarching shape will lead one to understand all of its content in light of that shape. Understanding interpretation in light of the kingdom of God allows Scripture to be our hermeneutical guide, since its very purpose is to make us fit for the kingdom. Additionally, a thoroughgoing interaction with the kingdom of God leads the interpreter to employ a Christocentric, canonical *sensus plenior* since it is Christ to whom all of Scripture is directed and in whom all things will be summed up. Not only that, but because God has gifted his church not just in this age but down through the millennia a kingdom focus will supply an appreciation for the history of interpretation of a given text, fostering an interpretive humility that looks to our interpretive forebears not as infallible teachers, but as reliable helps and as those who also have been led by the Spirit and fit for the kingdom.

Most of all, understanding interpretation in light of the kingdom allows the interpreter to see the way in which interpretation is designed to function in his life in this age—as an act of warfare. Scripture is given for the purpose of transformation, and every act of interpretation—from exposition to proclamation to application—is an act of warfare against the sinful unbelief in the interpreter's own heart and against the powers and principalities of this age. Biblical interpretation is given to those in Christ as a gift of grace to prepare them for a new day, one in which those in Christ will no longer see

¹²⁷Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2000), 43.

through a textual glass darkly but will instead see our Lord face to face in his eternal kingdom.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

“Hermeneutics is a loose and baggy monster, or anyhow a less than fully disciplined body of thinking whose inventory of topics spreads out over many different historical, cultural, and intellectual contexts,” writes Gerald Bruns.¹ This dissertation has addressed this “body of thinking” that is hermeneutics, but has done so in a manner that runs the risk of making it an even looser and baggier monster—focusing not just on biblical hermeneutics in the traditional sense of the methods involved in the interpretation of Scripture but broadening the entire concept of biblical hermeneutics to include Scripture and the interpreter within it. Specifically, this dissertation has put forward the kingdom of God—existing as the central, integrative storyline plot thrust across canonical revelation—as an integrating theme for biblical hermeneutics, establishing a framework within which one may best understand the way in which biblical hermeneutics is not just an excavation of texts but is instead a rich interplay between Scripture, the interpreter, and the process of interpretation.² This chapter will seek to distill the arguments of the key findings of this study and consider a number of implications flowing from them while also noting a number of areas where further research would be valuable.

¹Gerald Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern*, Yale Studies in Hermeneutics (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 17.

²For the most comprehensive exegetical treatment arguing for the kingdom as the central storyline plot, see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

Summary of Arguments

This dissertation has built on a number of previous works, ones that have previously (1) identified the centrality of the kingdom of God across canonical revelation and (2) upheld its theological utility in terms of implications it carries for evangelical theology.³ The contribution of this study is showing the way the kingdom of God has the explanatory power to inform and enrich our understanding of biblical hermeneutics. More specifically, this study has argued that a faithful understanding of God's eschatological purposes reveals that biblical hermeneutics is not just a discipline consisting of the distillation and application of interpretive methods and processes but is inescapably bound up with both Scripture and the interpreter of Scripture. More still, this study has argued that the kingdom of God reveals the network of theological connections by which one may best understand the relationship between Scripture, interpreter, and interpretation in the context of biblical hermeneutics.

Chapter 1 introduced the need for this study grounded in the context of its recent works.⁴ Recent generations of evangelical theology have produced much on the

³One significant work in this regard is Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

⁴Particularly, a number of works foundational to various aspects of this study include Scott R. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading: A Theological Introduction to the Bible and Its Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); idem, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); idem, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994); Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007); Vern S. Poythress, *God Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999); Vern Sheridan Poythress, "Christ the Only Savior of Interpretation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 50 (1988): 305–21; Telford Work, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

discipline of biblical hermeneutics, on the doctrine of Scripture, and on the nature kingdom of God, but rarely have these been considered together. This chapter argued that such a consideration is warranted in light of the emerging consensus on the nature of the kingdom of God and the implications it has for other areas of theology. From here, this chapter put forward this study's central argument: the idea that the kingdom of God should function as a central organizing principle in the area of biblical hermeneutics as it offers a unified theological vision of the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and interpretation and has the explanatory power to inform and enrich evangelical theology at several key points. Along the way, it evaluated a number of works central to the arguments this study would put forward.

Chapter 2 showed that understanding Scripture in light of the kingdom of God with respect to biblical hermeneutics has implications both for biblical hermeneutics and for one's doctrine of Scripture. Not only is the kingdom of God the central storyline thrust that ties together canonical revelation, but a kingdom focus also sheds fresh light on the way that Scripture is designed to function to bring about God's eschatological purposes. Not only that, but understanding both of these together reveals the way in which a kingdom focus reinforces evangelical theology's historic affirmations of Scripture's authority, sufficiency, and trustworthiness. In all, this chapter shows that a kingdom focus will help the interpreter see not only the centrality of the kingdom across the storyline of Scripture, but will both reveal the way that Scripture itself is designed to play a role in God's redemptive purposes and also provide additional lines of theological reinforcement on key aspects of an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

Chapter 3 demonstrated the way in which a kingdom focus will inject the interpreter into a consideration of biblical hermeneutics, standing in need as he is of redemption and renewal. Because both the discipline of hermeneutics and the interpreter of Scripture are marred by sin, the redemption wrought through the victory of the kingdom has distinct implications for how one approaches the Bible in interpretation. This chapter revealed how a proper understanding of the kingdom shapes one's understanding of the impact of sin on the hermeneutic process, the nature of obedience in the interpretation of Scripture, the renewal of the interpreter, and the ecclesial context of interpretation.⁵

Chapter 4 discussed the relationship between the kingdom and the act of interpretation itself. It began by showing the ways in which the kingdom has or has not been employed in a number of prominent interpretive methods so as to highlight the ways a kingdom focus could enhance current approaches to biblical hermeneutics. Then, the chapter went on to note the way in which the kingdom of God reveals both the shape and the warfare of biblical hermeneutics. That is, first, the chapter argued that Scripture is designed to train people to see and participate in the kingdom of God; the shape of Scripture and the shape of the interpretive act correspond with and inform one another.⁶

⁵Michael Allen and Scott Swain offer a useful summary of the church's authority and formative role in guiding biblical hermeneutics: "The church is that community created and authorized by the Word of God in order that it might obediently guard, discern, proclaim, and interpret the Word of God." Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 102.

⁶If so, then the kingdom of God helps contribute to a rule of faith of sorts for biblical hermeneutics insofar as it provides the basic shape and framework in light of which all of Scripture is designed to be read. As argued in a previous chapter, such does not constitute an imposition of some external grid placed over Scripture because this "grid" and its use is both provided by and authorized for precisely such an act. Allen and Swain are right to argue, "The question for the Christian interpreter therefore is not whether or not to read Holy Scripture in light of the rule of faith. The question is whether to read Holy Scripture with a right faith (i.e., orthodox), oriented toward the Triune God, drawn from the main contours of biblical teaching, and confessed by Scripture's faithful servant the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:15), or

Second, a kingdom focus reveals how the interpretive act is to be conceived of not fundamentally as an intellectual discipline but as an act of warfare; it calls the interpreter to a rigorous exegetical approach that recognizes the kingdom-focused, Christ-centered storyline of Scripture over against the powers and principalities who seek to distort or question God's Word, and it calls the interpreter a particular kind of application, realizing that the goal of Scripture is not information but transformation and preparation for eternal rule in the kingdom of Christ.⁷

In all, this dissertation has sought to contribute to the field of biblical hermeneutics at a foundational level. This study has been a constructive theological proposal showing the ways in which biblical hermeneutics can be enriched by understanding the ways in which other areas of theology are organically connected to it. Others have argued for one aspect or another of what has been advanced in this study,

whether to read Holy Scripture with a wrong faith (i.e., heterodoxy), drawn from some other purported source of wisdom and knowledge, and governed by the ends of some other community." Allen and Swain, *Reformed Catholicity*, 81.

⁷This study has argued that the sharp distinction made between meaning and application, or in some cases meaning and significance or implication, is not as tidy as some portray it. Beale adds a useful qualification too in noting that the authors of those books which make up the canon had a "cognitive peripheral vision" from which one is compelled to take into account more than just the explicit intention of the written text: "When a NT writer cites and interprets an OT text, he may not explicitly state the presupposition that underlies his interpretation, but it is nevertheless present in his subsidiary or tacit understanding and is, indeed, crucial for understanding how the author formulated his interpretation. In fact, without understanding the underlying presupposition, the interpretation may seem far-fetched and wrongheaded. For example, I have written elsewhere that the NT writers sometimes, perhaps often, interpret OT texts through presuppositional lenses, of which they may be explicitly conscious or such lenses may be tacit to the writers. These presuppositions are all rooted in the OT itself, so that they are part of what Wright would call the OT story of Israel. These presuppositions are the following: (1) There is the assumption of *corporate solidarity* or *representation*. (2) Following from the first presupposition, Christ is viewed as representing the true Israel of the OT and *true Israel*, the church, in the NT. (3) *History is unified* by a wise and sovereign plan so that the earlier parts are designed to correspond with and point to the latter parts (cf. Matt 11:13-14). (4) The age of *eschatological fulfillment* has been launched in Christ. (5) As a consequence of the preceding presupposition, it follows that the latter parts of biblical history function as the broader context for interpreting earlier parts because they all have the same, ultimate divine author who inspires the various human authors. One deduction from this premise is that Christ, as the goal toward which the OT pointed and the end-time center of redemptive history, is the *key to interpreting the earlier portions of the OT and its promises.*" G. K. Beale, "The Cognitive Peripheral Vision of Biblical Authors," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 285.

whether it be the centrality of the kingdom⁸ or the interconnectedness of the loci that form the structure of this study,⁹ but this work has wed and refined these to show how the kingdom of God, above other proposed themes, has the theological explanatory power to inform, expand, and enrich biblical hermeneutics in a way that makes it a more fully Christian exercise—integrated into God’s revealed purposes for his creation and his creatures. And yet, this study was in many respects merely an introduction to what may be said of the way a kingdom focus may contribute, and therefore it will be useful to consider a number of areas where further research may be beneficial.

Areas for Further Research

This dissertation has attempted to consider the way in which the kingdom of God is related to Scripture, the interpreter, and the process of biblical interpretation. In doing so, it has touched on bibliology, biblical theology, theology proper, soteriology, pneumatology, eschatology, interpretive theory, and a number of sub-disciplines beneath each of these various disciplines and loci. As such, this study has been focused in the theme it has considered but necessarily broad in the areas it has discussed because of the way in which the kingdom of God informs all of these areas. This being the case, there are a number of areas where future study could enhance the kingdom-focused approach put forward by this dissertation.

⁸One recent dissertation which stands in particularly close proximity to the central arguments put forward in this study, especially as they relate to the centrality of the kingdom across Scripture, is David E. Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric, Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching,” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

⁹Scott Swain’s work has been a valuable conversation partner at this point. Though he upholds the twin themes of Trinity and covenant as those which best structure a Christian reading of Scripture, he shows the way interpretation of Scripture must be considered in light of Scripture and interpretive agency. Swain, *Trinity, Revelation, and Reading*.

First, additional research on the nature of the kingdom in the context of the local church could enhance this study’s arguments about the way in which biblical interpretation is designed to function.¹⁰ If the present location of Jesus’ kingdom rule in this age is indeed the local church, then it stands to reason that the kingdom of God should weigh into the formation of one’s ecclesiology. Could the kingdom of God have the potential to drive consensus on questions of polity? Could it help frame the significance of the church’s gathering, of its discipline, of an understanding of its mission?¹¹ At the very least, it seems that a thoroughgoing treatment of the church in light of the kingdom of God could shed additional light on the ways in which the interpreter is called to operate within the church and under the authority of its king.

Second, further work on the nature of the kingdom with respect to wisdom and meaning could enhance the field of biblical hermeneutics. If language and meaning are both grounded in and summed up in Christ, then what implications could this have for biblical hermeneutics? Could the significance of the kingdom help resolve long-held disputes over the nature of meaning, and over the proper understanding of biblical typology? Few areas reveal the methodological lines of demarcation between approaches

¹⁰For one work that has engaged in such a study in article form, see Russell D. Moore and Robert E. Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 68–86.

¹¹To elaborate slightly, and from a decidedly Baptist ecclesiological starting point, I have argued elsewhere that the representative nature of the kingdom—seen in both baptism and the Supper—thoroughly disinclines one from a paedobaptist understanding of baptism, as the church is to model the coming regenerate kingdom in the makeup and marking out of its members. Further, the proclamation-driven nature of the kingdom calls one to reorient his understanding of the ordinances around what Christ is proclaiming in these signs. This focus, in turn, informs the mode in which these signs are to be administered and the nature of the signs themselves, all the while accenting a vision of Christ’s presence most consonant with a Baptist ecclesiology. Finally, the anticipatory nature of the kingdom directs one’s vision to the coming kingdom in the ordinances, relocating them to a context of eschatological conquest and thereby calling the church simultaneously to increased gravity and increased joy in its observance of the ordinances. This dissertation did not have occasion to explore these themes at length, but much more could be done along these lines.

quite as clearly as the way in which one handles meaning and typology, and if the kingdom-focused nature of Scripture were considered in light of these specific areas it could provide solid theological footing for potential consensus in this area.¹²

Third, additional consideration of the far-reaching implications of the nature of the kingdom of God could inform an approach to general hermeneutics. Such a project has been carried out by several theologians in recent years, Kevin Vanhoozer at the forefront proposing a dramatic model through which both general and biblical hermeneutics may be productively considered.¹³ The focus of this study has been the way in which the kingdom of God expands our theological vision to see the way in which biblical hermeneutics is necessarily bound together with both Scripture and the interpreter, but could these same insights about the kingdom of God similarly yield benefits beyond the study of Scripture and in the consideration of text, language, and understanding in general?¹⁴ If so, kingdom theology could provide an apparatus that has the potential to inform a wide array of intellectual disciplines.

¹²For a number of foundational works on typology in recent years, see Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos, the Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical TUPOS Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI.: Andrews University Press, 1981); Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

¹³Vanhoozer details his theological project accordingly, “It would be a mistake to conclude that I argue for reading the Bible ‘like any other book.’ . . . The reading of Scripture is similar to the reading of books in general but is ultimately marked by an even greater dissimilarity due to its character as the Word of God. Stated differently: what makes the Bible *like* other books is the fact that it has authors; what makes the Bible *unlike* other books is that its primary author is God. What I sketch in this book are actually two closely related blueprints: a theological *general* hermeneutics for understanding texts in general and a theological *special* hermeneutic for biblical interpretation in particular. The confusion arises when readers connect the two projects too quickly and conclude that I am simply arguing that the Bible should be read like any other book. While it is true that beliefs about God affect one’s beliefs about meaning, truth, and interpretation, it is also true that God is involved in the production and reception of the Bible in a way that is so qualitatively different that it makes biblical interpretation a special case. *Is There a Meaning?* emphasizes the continuity between general and special hermeneutics, perhaps to the detriment of the latter.” Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, 4.

¹⁴For a useful work on a God-centered approach to linguistics, see Vern Sheridan Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

Fourth, further research on an eschatologically-oriented, integrated approach to biblical hermeneutics could study hermeneutical, exegetical, and homiletical works from previous eras of church history in order to position this study more firmly in its historical context.¹⁵ Though some of the consensus on the nature of the kingdom of God has been a modern theological development, an integrative understanding of Scripture and its interpretation in light of God's revealed purposes for the created order has deep roots in church history,¹⁶ and such an evaluation could help reveal the fundamental continuity the hermeneutical instinct this dissertation proposes has in the history of the church.¹⁷

¹⁵One of the most useful works in tracing the way in which the Fathers read Scripture is John J. O'Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

¹⁶Harry Gamble describes the use of a framework in the interpretive methods of the church fathers: "It was the ideational substance of Scripture—its central message as distinct from its exact textual scope—that determined the approach of patristic exegetes. This basic thrust of the Scriptures, the plot that gave coherence and continuity to the whole, was called by Irenaeus the *hypothesis* ('governing sense,' or 'subject matter') of Scripture (*Against Heresies* 1.9–10 and passim; Hefner 1964; Norris 1994). Latin writers such as Tertullian spoke of it as Scripture's *ratio* (*De praescriptione* 9), while Athanasius called it Scripture's *skopos* (*Contra Arianos* 1.44, 53). The *hypothesis* or *skopos* of Scripture provided the interpretive framework and was in all essentials identified with the rule of faith, that which was articulated in the baptismal creeds and which stressed the creative activity of the one God and the redemptive work of the incarnate Christ. This rule of faith, like the Scriptures themselves, as held to be received from the apostles, and transmitted through the disciplines and successors, and preserved in the episcopate (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.10.1; 3.3.3; Tertullian, *De praescriptione* 19–22). This is not to say that the fathers merely found what they sought in Scripture; rather, they believed that the Scriptures and the tradition of faith were in ultimate accord and that a proper interpretation of Scripture could be gained only within the believing community under the leadership of apostolic successors." Harry Gamble, "The Formation of the New Testament Canon and Its Significance for the History of Biblical Interpretation," in *A History of Biblical Interpretation: Volume 1, The Ancient Period*, ed. Alec J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 420.

¹⁷As Jason Byassee notes, "While the fathers have their exegetical faults, they also have much to teach us. Most importantly, their *telos* in exegesis is often right, precisely where ours is frequently wrong. They see exegesis as one of the tasks the church undertakes as part of its pilgrimage to the heavenly city, to use Augustinian language. Certainly the patristic tradition makes mistakes in its steps toward this goal, often severe ones. Yet its attempt to progress toward a specifically Christian goal, to conduct exegesis with this *telos* in mind is a great improvement on exegesis done with no such eschatological orientation. Augustine does exegesis as though Jesus is head of the body of the church, and we who are doing exegesis are members of the body united under this head. Christians should be hard-pressed to disagree." Jason Byassee, *Praise Seeking Understanding: Reading the Psalms with Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 3.

Fifth, further work on the nature of the kingdom of God could inform personal Christian ethics. For example, how could it help Christians and churches were they to consider the ethics of the kingdom of God described in Scripture and how these are designed to inform and govern the Christian life? How does the reality of a coming kingdom reframe obedience and ethical decision making this age? The tight theological connection between understanding and obedience put forward by this dissertation could be explored to show how the kingdom of God both integrates and animates the role Scripture and its interpretation plays in the life of the believer, his decisions, and his personal holiness.

Sixth, and finally, additional work on a kingdom-focused biblical hermeneutic could yield benefits in the context of biblical spirituality. Specifically, it could help evangelical theology see more clearly the manner in which both Scripture and its interpretation are gifts of grace designed to prepare those in Christ for eternal rule in an eschatological kingdom. The warfare of biblical hermeneutics could help frame the seriousness with which Christian interpreters are to approach Scripture, as a means of kingdom conquest working in their own sinful hearts to prepare them for eschatological joy and service.¹⁸ Accordingly, it could enrich the approaches to spiritual disciplines connecting many of these disciplines explicitly and theologically with Scripture's central theme and revealed *telos* even as it generates within the Christian interpreter hope in the task of biblical hermeneutics, realizing as he does that in it he is being confronted by the voice and transformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸Telford Work notes, “The Bible is theologically indispensable to the Christian faith” and that “the doctrine of Scripture [is] to norm, inform, enhance, and ground the Church’s entire biblical practice (here referring centrally to preaching, but comprehensively to the entire range of practices in which the Church uses Scripture).” Work, *Living and Active*, 2.

The Possibility of Kingdom-Focused Biblical Hermeneutics

“Any coherent account of the capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God’s presence,”¹⁹ writes literary critic George Steiner.²⁰ What this dissertation has sought to explore is not so much the way God’s presence grounds linguistics but how both his presence and his revealed purposes for the created order inform the way Christians should conceive of Scripture and its interpretation.²¹ As N. T. Wright has argued,

We urgently need an *integrated* view of the dense and complex phrase “the authority of scripture.” Such an integrated view needs to highlight the role of the Spirit as the powerful, transformative agent. It needs to keep as its central focus the goal of God’s kingdom, inaugurated by Jesus on earth as in heaven and one day to be completed under that same rubric. It must envisage the church as characterized, at the very heart of its life, by prayerful listening to, strenuous wrestling with, humble obedience before, and powerful proclamation of scripture.²²

Thus, the need for an integrated approach flows from the organic unity of God’s revelation. J. I. Packer reminds us that Christian theology is “a seamless robe, a circle within which everything links up with everything else through its common grounding in God.”²³ If the nature of Christian theology has an organic unity to it, one area of theology

¹⁹George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

²⁰Kevin Vanhoozer notes the irony that it has often been “nontheologians” such as Steiner who were among the first and most vocal calling for a theological ground for understanding language. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 212.

²¹Hence, Vanhoozer adds, “Interpretation is theological if it is based on the belief that there is something that ‘transcends’ the play of language in writing. Barthes and Jacques Derrida are *countertheologians*: there is nothing outside the play of writing, nothing that guarantees that our words refer to the world. The loss of a transcendent signifier—Logos—thus follows hard upon the death of the author. The result is a textual Gnosticism that refuses to locate determinate meaning in the literal sense. Hermeneutics has become the prodigal discipline, rejecting both the authority of the Father and the rationality of the Logos, squandering its heritage in riotous and rebellious reading.” Ibid., 211.

²²N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God: How to Read the Bible Today* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 115.

²³J. I. Packer, “Encountering Present Day Views of Scripture,” in *The Foundations of Biblical Authority*, ed. James M. Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 61.

naturally has implications for and is related to other areas of theology. It seems this is the case all the more when one considers Scripture's theme and ultimate theological end—the kingdom of God.

What has animated this dissertation has been the drive not so much to provide a comprehensive method, but rather to establish a theological foundation for a full-orbed approach to biblical hermeneutics.²⁴ To state things slightly differently, the goal of this dissertation has been not to provide a list of rules for interpretation but instead to cultivate a particular sensibility with respect to what the act of reading Scripture is and is designed to effect. If one does not read Scripture in line with what it is and what it is designed to produce in our own lives and in the world, then one reads Scripture against the grain of that for which it was given.

This study has proposed the kingdom of God as the preeminent biblical and theological concept that casts the broadest array of light over all of Scripture's storyline and theology's conclusions. With Beale, this study has argued, further, that "the new creational reign is the NT's hermeneutical and eschatological center of gravity."²⁵ In giving theological and hermeneutical preeminence to the kingdom of God the goal is certainly not to denigrate other proposed centers or enhancements other models have provided.²⁶ Indeed, Karl Barth is right that "theology confronts in Holy Scriptures an

²⁴As N. T. Wright notes, "A fully Christian view of the Bible includes the idea of God's self-revelation but, by setting it in a larger context, transforms it. Precisely because the God who reveals himself is the world's lover and judge, rather than its absentee landlord, that self-revelation is always to be understood within the category of God's mission to the world, God's saving sovereignty let loose through Jesus and the Spirit and aimed at the healing and renewal of all creation." Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 29.

²⁵Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 180.

²⁶For a useful section on understanding how central themes may relate to one another, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 191–93.

extremely polyphonic, not a monotonous, testimony to the word and work of God” and many others have attempted to synthesize this testimony.²⁷ Instead, this dissertation recognizes the usefulness of other proposed themes, and recognizes that they are often perspectively related to and largely complementary with the insights put forward by this dissertation. At the same time, it proposes a focus and a framework developed in concert with the kingdom of God, as such seems to incorporate the best of other approaches. At the same time, it provides fresh insights and a “doctrinally thematic skeleton” which gives shape to the body that is biblical hermeneutics—ordering and revealing the interrelation of the organs of Scripture, interpreter, and interpretation in this body in the most full and faithful way.²⁸

The promise, therefore, of a kingdom-focused model of biblical hermeneutics is that it expands the field of vision for the biblical interpreter, showing him how interpretation is not merely an intellectual exercise but is inescapably bound up with Scripture, with his own fallenness and call to obedience, with his existence within the kingdom community of the church, and with a whole host of other theological issues. In other words, the potential of a kingdom-focused approach to biblical hermeneutics is that it provides a theologically-grounded pathway into Scripture, fosters a Christ-centered motivation for reading Scripture, and engenders Christian hope in the interpreter by instilling in him the eschatological promise that both defines Scripture’s content and grounds its purpose.

²⁷Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963), 33.

²⁸Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 182.

This dissertation does not attempt to resolve every hermeneutical or exegetical disagreement—no study of any length could accomplish such an end. But what this dissertation does try to do is reveal the “why” and the “how” of biblical hermeneutics. That is, the goal has been to show *why* God has given us a Bible and made it central to the Christian life, and to show *how* Scripture and its interpretation are designed to function—the kingdom of God being both the *end* Scripture is designed to bring about and the *lens* through which readers are to understand God’s canonical revelation. In doing so, a kingdom focus reinforces the promise that as important as biblical interpretation is, it is “marginal in the eternal life of the church.”²⁹ In the age to come, biblical hermeneutics in its present form will not be necessary—because the saints will have fellowship with the triune God not through the text of a canon, but in the face of a Christ, reigning with him in his eternal kingdom. After all, the kingdom of God is not just a matter of words, but of power (1 Cor 4:20).

²⁹Work, *Living and Active*, 256.

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ABSTRACT

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A FRAMEWORK FOR EVANGELICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Daniel Lane Patterson, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
Chairman: Dr. Russell D. Moore

This dissertation explores the theological relationship between the Word of God and the kingdom of God as it relates to biblical hermeneutics, arguing that the kingdom of God should function as a central organizing principle in the area of evangelical biblical hermeneutics—as it offers a unified theological vision of the relationship between the Bible, the interpreter, and biblical interpretation and has the explanatory power to inform and enrich evangelical theology at several key points.

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of kingdom-focused biblical hermeneutics in the context of its emergence from the evangelical consensus on the kingdom of God. It offers the thesis of this study and highlights the uniqueness of the study—showing how, though much work has been done on the nature of the kingdom, the doctrine of Scripture, and the discipline of biblical hermeneutics, this project joins all three showing how each are interrelated and enriched by a thoroughgoing interaction with the kingdom of God.

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between kingdom and Scripture. It explores the way in which the kingdom of God is a central theme in Scripture, the way in which Scripture functions to bring about the kingdom, and how integrating kingdom thought can enrich an evangelical doctrine of Scripture, especially with respect to Scripture’s authority, sufficiency, and trustworthiness.

Chapter 3 considers the impact of the kingdom of God on the interpreter, standing in need as he is of redemption and renewal. Because both interpretation and the interpreter of Scripture are marred by sin, the redemption wrought through the victory of the kingdom has distinct implications for how one approaches the Bible in interpretation, especially with respect to one's understanding of the impact of sin on the hermeneutic process, the nature of obedience in the interpretation of Scripture, the renewal of the interpreter, and the ecclesial context of interpretation.

Chapter 4 discusses the relationship between the kingdom and the process of interpretation itself. It explores and evaluates a number of current approaches to biblical hermeneutics so as to show how a kingdom focus can inform and enhance these models. Additionally, this chapter argues that the kingdom forms the shape of Scripture and the act of interpretation, and also conceives of the interpretive task as an act of kingdom warfare. As such, it carries implications for the way the interpreter conceives of authorial intention, meaning, public and private reading, exegesis, and application.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing the arguments of the dissertation and offering possibilities for future study. It reaffirms the importance of the kingdom focus this study proposes and suggests ways that biblical hermeneutics and evangelical theology can benefit from further research on the centrality of the kingdom of God in biblical and systematic theology.

VITA

Daniel Lane Patterson

EDUCATION

Diploma, Clarksville High School, Clarksville, Tennessee, 2002
B.S., Middle Tennessee State University, 2006
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010

ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

ACADEMIC

Research Intern to the Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007-2011
Garrett Teaching Fellow in Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009-2011
Assistant Editor, *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 2010-2013
Associate Director for Research Doctoral Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011
Executive Assistant to the Senior Vice President for Academic Administration, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011-2013
Associate Research Fellow, Research Institute of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2013-Present

MINISTERIAL

Ministerial Assistant to College Students, Belle Aire Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 2002-2004