

THE DISCIPLINE AND COHERENCE OF NEW TESTAMENT  
THEOLOGY

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# THE DISCIPLINE AND COHERENCE OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY

## **Introduction**

For some critical scholars, the pursuit of a single coherent NT theology is an impossible task considering the diverse historical and literary elements of the first-century canonical documents. Furthermore, such a task attempts to unite historical analyses with theological convictions in a manner that does not suit “appropriate” interpretive methods. Thus, it is problematic to speak of a NT theology as the goal for exegesis and interpretation; at most, one must conclude there are only differing NT *theologies*. Although these claims have caused Christian scholars, who trust the biblical writers’ historical assertions and the theological unity of the NT’s twenty-seven books, to refine their approach to NT theology, they have not gone unchallenged. NT scholars such as Richard Bauckham, David Wenham, and George Ladd have provided influential contributions against these challenges of critical scholarship. By observing some of their conclusions alongside the testimony of the NT authors, a more accurate and synthetic approach to NT theology emerges, one that both recognizes historical contexts and maintains theological unity in the writers’ theological diversity.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Beginning of New Testament Theology**

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 41-42.

NT theology arises first from the Church's desire to hear and heed what exactly the NT authoritatively teaches.<sup>2</sup> It is a subset of and inextricably linked with the broader discipline of biblical theology. Functioning as a Christian discipline, NT theology submits to the unique apostolic word found within the NT canon, receives the narrative testimony proclaimed there, assesses its writers' contents in their proper pastoral/situational contexts, and draws conclusions regarding its theological claims. In this way, NT theology serves the church's faith, because it helps her to know and understand what the discourse of the NT teaches about the one true God of the OT, who in these last days has spoken to us by a Son, namely, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2).

What is unique about God's revelation in the NT, therefore, is that it is primarily to be recognized in the Son whom he sent and by whom he has spoken in these final days. Thus, the NT itself demands that it be read in light of its primary focal point, Jesus. For this reason, we turn to understanding the nature of the Four Gospels and their functional role in the NT canon as the first step in developing a NT theology, since they bear witness to Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Nature and Role of the Gospels**

Addressing the nature of the Gospels has been no light task for Christian scholars considering the post-Enlightenment embrace of *the* historical-critical method.

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<sup>2</sup>Thielman, *Theology of the NT*, 29. This opening statement also stems from Bockmuehl's assessment of the nature of the NT's "implied readers". He argues that the NT is written in a way that assumes certain readers, namely, Christian readers who already accept a particular worldview. There is, therefore, "a close intellectual link between...conversion and true interpretation" (Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006], 70).

<sup>3</sup>Similarly, Leonhard Goppelt makes the "earthly Jesus" the starting place for NT theology. He argues that though "the interpretive explication of the Easter kerygma constituted the root of New Testament theology,...its base was the recounting of the earthly ministry of Jesus" (*Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Jürgen Roloff, trans. John Alsup [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 7).

This affair triggered decades of NT scholarship that presupposed the Gospels portray the historical Jesus inaccurately, since the Jesus of the Christian faith, as represented by the four Gospel traditions, cloaks him in the theological agendas attributed to anonymous communities separated from the eyewitness accounts by an extensive period of time. Consequently, scholars still find the Gospel writers' theological message about Jesus antithetical to their historical preservation of him. If correct, such claims reduce the Gospels to a mere collection of facts that have no meaningful proclamation for the world to heed. For the church, then, there is no place for NT theology, only historical reconstructions of what the Gospels *may* have *said*.

In his *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Richard Bauckham finds these assumptions misguided. He argues the Gospels represent trustworthy historiography based on the authoritative testimony of real eyewitnesses that remained the primary sources for each Gospel writer's account. Long periods of time filled with the succession of oral traditions did not delay the Gospels' composition. Instead, their final form is "much closer to the form in which the eyewitnesses" testified.<sup>4</sup> Accepted and studied on this appropriate and more natural basis, the Gospels not only provide reliable history concerning Jesus, but also grant theological access to the meaning of his life and mission. Bauckham shows the validity of such an argument on several fronts.

He begins with an ancient passage written by Papias, former bishop of Hierapolis, which demonstrates a peculiar preference for a certain kind of authentic, historical practice in his day, namely, history based on oral traditions "attached to *named*

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 6.

*eyewitnesses*”.<sup>5</sup> In a word, when doing history, pride of place went to written sources that were compiled *while* eyewitnesses were present. Naturally, then, Papias trusted the Gospels since they each exhibited this superior historiography—an assertion Bauckham also proves in the remainder of the book.

In accord with Papias’ conclusion, Bauckham then reveals that since the authors based their Gospels on eyewitness testimony, they also named the very eyewitnesses in their accounts. They did so fully aware that these individuals “not only originated the traditions...but also continued to tell the stories as authoritative guarantors of their traditions.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the Gospel writers mentioned named persons intentionally to ensure the authenticity of their words. Such named individuals would still have been alive while the Gospels were written and would be able to verify the Evangelists’ words. Examples include the Twelve, the women at the cross and tomb, those healed by Jesus, and those able to testify of Jesus’ story “from the beginning.”

Next, Bauckham considers the eyewitnesses’ role in the nature of the transmission of the Synoptic Gospel traditions. He argues the eyewitnesses were not merely the sources of the Gospels, but also served as the “accessible authoritative guarantors” of them.<sup>7</sup> Form critics were wrong to assume that Christian communities were strictly oral, without written texts, and thus free to create traditions to promote their social agendas. Instead, these guarantors used deliberate means of *control* in the Gospels’ transmission, evidence to which even the Apostle Paul alludes regarding Jesus’ tradition (e.g. 1 Cor 7:10-16; 11:23). Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the result of “formal controlled

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<sup>5</sup>Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 20.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

tradition,” by means of “recollective” memorization, accompanied by written sources and access to authoritative eyewitnesses.<sup>8</sup>

The same can be said of the fourth Gospel. What is more, John’s account is not merely based on eyewitness testimony, but is itself written by an eyewitness. According to Bauckham, John employs the idiomatic “‘we’ of eyewitness testimony” (i.e. the first person plural for ‘I’) in order to demonstrate that he himself is both the primary witness for his Gospel and the author who wrote it. John’s basis is not “the official witness of the twelve,” but himself as the beloved disciple.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Bauckham asserts that since the Gospels are testimony, their very nature demands that scholars not criticize their every pericope in order to discover the real Jesus, but to receive them for what they are, testimony. The Evangelists beckon the audience to trust their testimony, one that unites reliable witness to the historical Jesus and provides theological access to him. Jesus, therefore, is the Jesus of testimony, and the Gospels as testimony are “*the* theologically appropriate, indeed necessary way of access to the history of Jesus, just as testimony is also *the* historically appropriate, indeed the historically necessary way of access to this ‘uniquely unique’ historical event.”<sup>10</sup>

The implications of Bauckham’s argument that the Gospels should be accepted as testimony are rather significant for ‘doing’ NT theology. Indeed, they establish the NT theologian on the foundation of four historically reliable Gospels, while simultaneously providing theological access to Jesus, his words, life, and mission. With testimony,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 264, 324.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 403. Naturally, this leads Bauckham to consider whether this John was even part of the twelve. In this case, and according to his understanding of Papias, Polycrates, and Irenaeus, he concludes the author of the fourth Gospel is John the Elder as distinguished from John, son of Zebedee.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 508.

historical fact and theological meaning come together. In this way, one is able to construct the beginnings of a NT theology; for the Gospels function as four distinct narratives that open the NT canon with eyewitness accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, and supply theological interpretation of his unique soteriological/eschatological mission granted him by God the Father for the sake of all nations.

### **The Role of Acts of the Apostles**

Continuing and not contradicting or changing the narrative testimony of the Gospels is Acts of the Apostles. Within this narrative (also penned by the third Gospel writer, Luke), Jesus' mission carries on. It does so in a manner different from, though doubtlessly expected by the Gospels (e.g. Matt 8:11; 28:19-20; Mark 12:9-10; Luke 13:29; 20:16; 24:47-49; John 10:16; 11:52).<sup>11</sup>

If this is the case, with such obvious continuities linking these narratives together, then why the deliberate separation of Luke's second volume, Acts of the Apostles, from his first, [The Gospel] According to Luke, in the traditional canon? In one sense, this separation is thought to be meaningful. It serves not merely as an introduction to the historical figure of Paul or the post-Easter-empowered disciples, but also as an interpretive bridge between the Gospels and the epistles, especially those included in the Pauline corpus.<sup>12</sup> Acts of the Apostles provides narrative testimony to the fulfillment of

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<sup>11</sup>That Luke and Acts were possibly considered one continuing narrative in the early church is telling of the prevalent continuity they have with the Gospels' witness (see E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 377-405). Thielman treats Luke and Acts as a one volume in his *Theology of the NT*, 111-49; however, his commitments cause him to miss the canonical function of Acts purposefully following the Gospels and preceding the Pauline epistles.

<sup>12</sup>J. B. Green, "Acts of the Apostles," in *The Dictionary of the Latter New Testament & Its Developments*, eds. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 13; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 82-83.

the promises of the OT and Jesus and sets up an apostolic missionary context in which to read the remainder of the NT (e.g. Paul, Peter, James, or John).

Considering the several centuries that passed before the canon developed its final form, such a reading could arguably be anachronistic; however, for the purpose of NT theology, which seeks to explain the overall unity within the diverse testimonies of the text, this observation is astute.<sup>13</sup> That is, since the Gospels are telling one redemptive story, and Acts of the Apostles undeniably continues the events their narratives (esp. Luke's) expected, and prepares the NT reader for Paul, then let us not miss the grandeur of the theological forest for the individual (though necessary) historical trees. Yes, Luke's two-volume work should be read as a narrative unit, but this does not hinder the overarching theological message uniting the books of the first third of the NT, and anticipating the second third. Acts of the Apostles, therefore, should serve NT theology as bridge from the Evangelists' Jesus traditions to Paul's interpretive epistles.

### **The Role of Paul's Contribution**

Even if the previous conclusions regarding Acts of the Apostles are valid, critics have not been so welcoming to Paul following their journey from the Gospels' picture of Jesus. Since the days of F. C. Baur (1792-1860), who argued that significant variations existed between Paul's theology and the beliefs of the Jerusalem church, NT scholarship has been rather suspicious of any affirmations of continuity in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle to the Gentiles. Scholars arguing along the same lines as William Wrede (1859-1906) have insisted that Paul's "innovative" ideas, theological commitments, and pioneering mission work wrecked the original intentions Jesus had for

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<sup>13</sup>Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 108-14.

his followers. Consequently, today's Christianity would be better off without Paul's emphases. If the critical scholars are right, then the search for theological coherence and synthesis even within the first two-thirds of the NT is vain.

In his *Paul, Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*, David Wenham finds such claims about Paul's dissimilarity to Jesus unwarranted. On the contrary, he argues that Paul was not so much an innovator of Christianity as he was a follower of the Christ, who died and rose again on his behalf. Although his epistles make few *explicit* references to Jesus' life and ministry, Paul provides plenty of theological connections that bear witness to his own awareness and embrace of the historical traditions of Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the complicated and interrelated issues surrounding the comparative study of Paul and Jesus—e.g. Pauline authorship, the “New Perspective(s)”, the Synoptic problem, various quest(s) for the historical Jesus—Wenham maintains that a survey of the NT material, based on cautious historical and textual-linguistic analyses, produces a much larger, cohesive portrait that is often forfeited for the details. He develops and substantiates his argument with several components.

First, Wenham hones in on the teachings of Paul and Jesus through a wide array of “tradition indicators,” verbal links, and similar-thought connections, paying special attention to the unifying theological elements between the two men.<sup>15</sup> Both Paul and Jesus taught that (1) Jesus' incarnation inaugurated the presence of God's eschatological kingdom on earth, promised by the OT and to reach its consummation at his Parousia; (2) Jesus, God's Son and the expected Davidic king, suffered

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<sup>14</sup>David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 11.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-29.

“redemptively” on behalf of others through his cross-death; and (3) Jesus’ mission as Israel’s Messiah included the post-Easter celebration of God’s soteriological benefits encompassing the Gentiles, and thus the ingathering of an eschatological community zealous for fulfilling the Law through love wrought by the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Wenham finds theological congruity between Paul and Jesus, a synthesis not hindered even by their differing expressions of these great truths—hence his “Paul...and Jesus” scenarios.

Second, Wenham sets out to discover whether Paul was familiar with the complete “story” of Jesus, from his birth to his resurrection, or only Jesus’ teachings. The data shows that Paul knew something of Jesus’ birth and Davidic lineage (Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4), as Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospel traditions portray.<sup>17</sup> There is a good case he knew of his baptism and connected it with entrance into the Christian community.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Paul was well aware of the disciples’ ministry under Jesus, some of Jesus’ miraculous healings, his humble lifestyle, and the nature of the transfiguration event.<sup>19</sup> Most familiar to Paul from these traditions, however, were the events surrounding the Passion and resurrection narratives, both of which played a large role in shaping Paul’s theology and mission.<sup>20</sup> Paul’s letters, then, indicate a large dependence on at least *a* Gospel tradition, if not several. Jesus’ life and ministry, therefore, was for Paul “common knowledge”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>These pregnant summary statements do not do justice to the comprehensive and detailed analyses Wenham provides in chapters 2 through 7. For some conclusions, see *Ibid.*, 70, 147, 167, 190.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 338-43.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 344-48.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 350-63.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 363-71.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 371. That at least *a* Gospel tradition influenced Paul would very likely be the case if, as Ellis argues, Luke-Acts was closely tied to the Pauline mission (*Making of NT Documents*, 400-05).

Lastly, Wenham summarizes his interconnected findings and draws all-encompassing conclusions in order to answer the question with which he began his quest: Did Paul found Christianity, or follow Jesus? The evidence of the Jesus tradition(s) in Paul's teachings surely points to the latter. Many differences do remain between Paul and Jesus; and the very few explicit references to Jesus' life and ministry could cause disbelief in any unity at all. This, however, makes perfect sense for Wenham since Paul ministered post-Easter, following the commencement of the Gentile mission and the birth of many churches struggling to understand and live out Jesus' teachings.<sup>22</sup> Paul, therefore, presupposes the Jesus traditions in his letters and writes "to clarify what was unclear or disputed".<sup>23</sup> For Wenham, Paul was faithful to explain the truth of Jesus in new contexts with which he was involved.<sup>24</sup> Without question, this identifies Paul as he would like to be remembered, "a slave of Jesus Christ, not the founder of Christianity".<sup>25</sup>

Wenham's argument allows NT theologians, therefore, to link closely the teachings of Paul with those of Jesus instead of pitting them against one another. The Gospels' testimony concerning Jesus is primarily foundational and assumed among the believing communities, while Paul's epistles then become primarily instructive for the outworking of Gospel-truth within those communities. The people need to understand the soteriological and ecclesiological implications of Jesus' life, cross-death, resurrection, and glorification. The testimony of Jesus, therefore, continues to be passed on within the Christian communities as Paul consciously writes Scripture to expound the Jesus

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 378-80.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 405.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 409.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 410.

tradition, clarify what may have been disputed, or rebuke those undermining its message. For NT theology, then, Paul's epistles are explanatory.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Role of Hebrews and the General Epistles**

The remaining NT epistles, Hebrews and the seven "general" epistles, seem to function in the same manner. Their *explicit* references to the Jesus traditions are also nonexistent, with the exception of Peter's "Transfiguration" experience (2 Pet 1:17-18). This, however, does not mean the traditions were unknown to them or their audiences. Textual evidence supports that they at least presupposed the Jesus traditions in their letters, especially the testimony passed on by the apostles (e.g. Heb 2:3; 13:7; Jam 1:19; 1 Pet 1:12; 2 Pet 1:16-18; 3:2; 1 John 2:24; 3:23; Jude 3, 17). Thus, they too interpreted Jesus for the people in the believing communities spread abroad. For the purposes of theology, then, they function primarily as explanatory or instructive epistles.

The question of whether or not these writers agreed in interpretation of the Gospels' testimony for their communities should not be a large concern either, considering the noticeable agreement among them and in their teaching. For example, despite their disagreement at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14), Paul still shows that he and Peter (and the other apostles) are "servants of Christ" for the common cause of stewarding the "mysteries of God" (1 Cor 1:10-4:21). Furthermore, Peter readily speaks of Paul as a "beloved brother", and affirms his writings as Christian Scripture (2 Pet 3:15-16). On an even larger scale, Markus Bockmuehl keenly points out that the mere decision of the "implied interpreter" to bind together into a single canon "writings in the name of Paul

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<sup>26</sup>In this sense, Ladd agrees with the implications of Wenham's argument for NT theology (George Eldon, Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament, rev.*, ed. Donald Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974], 398, 412, 423, 425).

and the Jerusalem ‘pillars’ Peter, James, and John” surely highlights their was a common subject among them, namely, the Gospel.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, not only do these latter letters function like Paul’s, but they also do so in union *with* him. This leaves us with one more book to consider, the Revelation.

### **The Role of the Revelation**

Though this final canonical book is distinct when compared to other NT genres, the Revelation still continues much of the central theological concerns of the NT. It testifies of the same Jesus foretold in the OT, revealed in the Gospels, and explained in the epistles. Yet, it does something more that all of them do not; that is, it brings all of their Gospel-testimony, theological argumentation, and practical application to their appropriate climax in Jesus. It gives the final declaration that the sovereign Lord of history directs all reality of the present age and will bring all things to their proper place under the feet of the slain-though-standing Lamb (Rev 5:6). Revelation plays the unique role, therefore, of wrapping up the NT canon and bringing its theological agenda to its expected consummation.

### **The Coherence of the New Testament’s Theology**

If the NT’s twenty-seven books interrelate with one another in the respective roles mentioned above, then theological synthesis becomes possible while simultaneously valuing the uniqueness of each book’s historical situation. From this approach, NT theology honors the historical nature of *and* theological proclamation in the apostolic word. With respect to the writers’ corporate unity in their individual diversity, the

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<sup>27</sup>Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 132.

following is an attempt to summarize the theology of the NT using the aforementioned conclusions and some guidance from Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament*.

The testimony of the NT did not emerge in a vacuum; in a sense, its authors picked up the pen the Chronicler laid down and continued the Gospel-narrative set forth by the OT. Thus, Matthew opens his Gospel with the intriguing phrase βίβλος γενέσεως (lit. "book of genesis"), which introduces a genealogy identifying Jesus with the expected Messiah from David's royal line and Abraham's progeny. Part of Matthew's aim, then, is to acknowledge Jesus as the "climax of history"—hence his repeated fulfillment motif (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9).<sup>28</sup> The other Gospels are not shy about such emphases either. They too see Jesus as the fulfillment of, doubtless the one exceeding, Israel's hopes and longings, and around whom all salvation history revolves (e.g. Mark 1:1-3, 14, 24; 11:10; Luke 2:29-32; 4:21; John 1:41; 4:26; 6:12-14).<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, under such umbrellas all the Gospels tell their readers about Jesus, his life, teachings, ministries, obedience, cross-death, and resurrection. Still more, they explain with unique testimony the theological meaning of these historical events. In unison they proclaim Jesus' unswerving allegiance to his *father's* will (Matt 11:27; 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 5:17; 8:28-29), his atoning cross-death in light of the Isaianic Suffering Servant (Matt 8:17; Mark 9:12; 14:49; Luke 22:37; John 12:38), his triumph over evil in the ushering in of God's kingdom (Matt 12:28; Mark 1:1-14; Luke 4:18-19 [Isa 61:1-2]; 10:9; 11:20; John 3:5), his victory over death in the Christ-exalting resurrection (Matt 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21), and the forgiveness and bounty he bestows on his followers (Matt 26:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 1:77; 24:47; John 10:7-18).

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<sup>28</sup>Ladd, *A Theology of the NT*, 219.

<sup>29</sup>For Ladd and the place of *Heilsgeschichte* in NT theology, see *Ibid.*, 20-26, 238-39.

Acts of the Apostles shares the Gospels' testimony. In this book, Luke portrays the extended ministry of Jesus, *post-Easter*. His and the apostles' concerns are not with new doctrine, but new emphases of eschatological proportions.<sup>30</sup> Jesus is both Christ and Lord by the resurrection and now ministers by the Holy Spirit through his apostles and his rapidly growing church. Furthermore, he shows the promises of the OT and Jesus regarding the Gentile's soteriological participation in God's covenant people to be true. By the preached word, "the ends of the earth" become the primary participants in "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:36-48). Therefore, in the apostolic ministry there is a swift unfolding of redemptive history that can only be explained by the supernatural work of the Gospel of the kingdom of God.

With Acts of the Apostles, the missionary journeys have taken their course and communities of believers now gather all over the Mediterranean. Without question, these sinners-turned-saints are in need of great instruction. They need Jesus (i.e. all that they have received in the Gospel traditions) explained for their varying situations.<sup>31</sup> Paul's epistles, Hebrews, and the general epistles, serve these ends with pastoral care and urgency. By interpreting the person and work of Jesus, they all agree that Christ is the exalted and reigning king; justification is by faith in his finished work; holiness accompanied by good works should characterize the church; the nature of this age demands perseverance through suffering, yet is promised by God; and the new age has dawned, yet awaits its consummation. In sum, the letters inform their recipients of the

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 353. Ladd explains these emphases more thoroughly in what he calls the apostles' "eschatological kerygma" (Ibid., 364-78).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Ibid., 415.

present reality and meaning of Christ's kingdom and further exhort them in how they must live until its consummation.<sup>32</sup>

Revelation, then, asserts to be “the revelation of Jesus Christ”. Its central concern is Jesus, who existed before history, entered history, and will bring history to its designed end (Rev 1:4, 8, 17, 18). He is the slain Lamb (5:6; 13:8), the root of David (22:16), the King of kings and Lord of lords (19:16). Essentially, therefore, it is Christological in its focus as are the previous twenty-six books. Nevertheless, largely accompanying its testimony about Jesus are also the severe and glorious events he will cause to transpire for the final establishment of the kingdom of God.<sup>33</sup> This apocalypse explains more thoroughly, what was more so implicit in the rest of the NT; that is, redemptive history is not merely a matter of prophecy-fulfillment, but a matter of God's sovereign control and omniscient guidance of all history. Nothing will thwart his purpose in Christ to set up his reign among his redeemed society in the New Jerusalem forever free from evil (21:1-22:5). With regard to NT theology, therefore, what Gospel-narrative beginnings the Evangelists articulated, Acts of the Apostles continued, and the epistles interpreted, Revelation concludes.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the observations above show that the NT's historical narrative about God's revelation in Jesus is also a theological one; and despite the critics' claims, these two are not at odds. Furthermore, all twenty-seven books of the NT, though unique in their own right, do provide its readers with one unified proclamation. Undoubtedly, this is

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<sup>32</sup>See Ladd here for how he interprets Christian living in the “already-not-yet” period of the kingdom of God (Ibid., 521-37, 630-33, 637-38, 648, 663-65).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 678-83.

because the main character in their authors' lives is the one crucified, resurrected, and coming Lord and Christ, Jesus. In this Jesus, NT theology finds its beginning and end, and thus the church her master and head, for whom she lives, about whom she sings.

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