

Bible claims the justice of God and gives explanations for why it may not be visible yet, the actual justification of God is accomplished only when the necessary information is laid out before his dependents.

That said, for those who are interested in comparative studies as well as matters of theodicy and/or Adventist sanctuary studies, there is a lot of interesting material to gather from the contributions in *The Divine Courtroom*.

Berrien Springs, Michigan

VALENTIN ZYWIETZ

Middleton, J. Richard. *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014. 332 pp. Paperback, \$26.99.

When going through books on eschatology, one may find a lot of material focusing on prophetic calculations, future speculations, and bizarre imagery, which, to a certain degree, have their place in biblical studies. However, it is rare for one to find books that do not follow such pattern. J. Richard Middleton's *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* stands out as a fresh outlook on the subject. Instead of being interested in prophetic minutiae, Middleton attempts to present the big picture of the biblical narrative, especially in regard to the nature of humans and the nature of the biblical eschatological hope, namely, the bodily resurrection of God's redeemed followed by their benign rule on earth. Thus, in his work, Middleton demonstrates the extra-biblical character of the traditional Christian belief in a disembodied and heavenly eternal destiny.

Middleton, professor of biblical worldview and exegesis at Northeastern Seminary and adjunct professor of theology at Roberts Wesleyan College (Rochester, NY), divides his material into twelve chapters and an appendix, which are organized into five parts.

In the introduction (ch. 1), Middleton explains the basic problem with the traditional, otherworldly, Christian eschatological hope. He demonstrates that "heaven"—as an ultimate destination—is an idea derived from a platonic worldview, not from Scripture. The author also indicates that the lack of concern with the redemption of this world in the traditional view negatively impacts the way people live now, because "how we attempt to live in the present" (ethics) is a manifestation of "what we desire and anticipate as the culmination of salvation" (eschatology) (23–24). The appendix complements the introduction by tracing, from the first centuries of the Christian era down to the Protestant Reformation, the shift of expectation in the Christian tradition from a concrete and renewed earth to an ethereal heaven. Then, from the Great Awakenings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries down to the present, Middleton documents another shift back to what he calls "holistic eschatology." According to Middleton, the trend towards the expectation of a tangible redemption of the cosmos and of humanity has intensified since the 1960s and gained momentum in recent years both in academia and in the church. Such developments led him to conclude, "we are in the midst of a

paradigm shift” regarding biblical eschatology and to believe “the time is ripe” for “serious reflection” on this topic (312).

In part 1, “From Creation to the Eschaton” (chs. 2–3), Middleton assesses the biblical macro-structure in order to establish his argument. In chapter 2, he looks at creation texts—such as Gen 1–2 and some Psalms—to ascertain God’s original intent for humankind. From those he affirms humans were created with an “earthly,” rather than heavenly, “vocation” (39). In addition, the author explains, humans were not primarily created to worship God (a traditional assumption), but to rule the created order—excluding other humans—after God’s benevolent model. Further, he states that the biblical narrative portrays the material order as good, but also “open to improvement” (46) and expects those made in God’s image to “contribute to the developing beauty and complexity of earthly life” (51).

Chapter 3 studies the metanarrative of Scripture through narrative analysis to uncover the plot of the biblical story. He finds a chiasmic pattern which begins with the Genesis account depicting humans as created “to rule the earth” (59) and ends with Revelation describing redeemed humanity as reigning on earth (70). Thus, he points out, instead of heaven, the final destination of humanity is the renewed earth. Such destiny brings the narrative plot, after a series of complications, to its resolution, to God’s original intent for the race.

Part 2, “Holistic Salvation in the Old Testament,” explores the continual focus of the biblical text on the development of life on earth. Chapter 4 discusses the Exodus from Egypt as a model of salvation in Scripture. In such a paradigm, salvation is not limited to deliverance, but includes “restoration to wholeness” (79). In addition, Middleton characterizes the Exodus pattern as a “historical” and “concrete” type of deliverance, which “resists any ‘spiritualizing’ of salvation” (80). In chapter 5, the author continues his survey into Torah, Wisdom literature, and the Prophets. He demonstrates that God’s original intent is for humans to flourish in this world and that God’s interventions are actions aimed at restoring life and wellbeing in the created order, which includes “God’s presence among the people in the renewed land” (107).

Chapter 6 considers the issue of judgment in some OT passages. While the language used in such texts is at times harsh and cataclysmic, Middleton clarifies that the described destruction ultimately refers to sin and evil, not to creation. Destruction is not the main purpose of judgment, but transformation. Thus, the author affirms, “God’s coming [in judgment] is good news” (109). Furthermore, this OT pattern—judgment preceding salvation—is “the essential theological background to the New Testament understanding of salvation” (18).

In the following section, part 3, Middleton considers “The New Testament’s Vision of Cosmic Renewal,” and divides his material into two chapters. Chapter 7 deals with the hope of resurrection in the OT, NT, and texts of the Second Temple period. Middleton sees significant “continuity of earthly hope in both Testaments” (145). He also links resurrection to rule restoration, for resurrection implies the end of the present order and

a restoration of God's original plan for the cosmos, in which humans rule creation. In chapter 8, Middleton argues that the restoration of all things described in several NT texts is restorative—not doing something new, but “repairing something that went wrong”—and also comprehensive and holistic, redeeming all things including our bodies (163).

Next, part 4, “Problem Texts for Holistic Eschatology,” deals with passages that seem to challenge the model presented in the book. Thus, in chapter 9, after evaluating some key passages from Isaiah, the Gospels, Hebrews, 2 Peter, and Revelation, the author concludes that the vivid imagery in such verses does not entail the destruction of the cosmos, but rather its transformation and cleansing. Chapter 10 extends the search in the NT to texts that could indicate heaven as a final destination. As Middleton engages them, he suggests a pattern, that “the salvation presently being prepared in heaven is followed by its unveiling on earth” (213).

Finally, in part 5, “The Ethics of the Kingdom,” Middleton discusses the significance of his findings for personal and social ethics. But first, in chapter 11, he attempts to rid the term “kingdom of God” from two misconceptions—that the kingdom is “equivalent to the church” and that it is “equivalent to heaven”—both of which, he explains, are “rooted in an unbiblical sacred/secular dualism or two-level worldview” (246–47). The author then moves to Jesus's Nazareth sermon (in Luke 4), the OT background of that passage, and finally to Jesus's interpretation of his Nazareth sermon (in Luke 7) to conclude that the kingdom of God expounded in those texts refers to a “concrete, this-worldly deliverance and restoration” (258), which does not harmonize with any “spiritual” interpretation. In chapter 12, the author further works with the Nazareth sermon to point out that God is not only concerned with his covenant people, but also wants to benefit Gentiles. Thus, Middleton argues, Jesus was challenging the “sociological dualism”—the “us/them mentality” (267)—of his audience and calling them to accept God's restoration of others as well.

As I move to the assessment of Middleton's research, I can say his material is well researched and documented (in the footnotes and appendix). In addition, the book contains figures and tables that support comprehension. As often as needed, the author gives readers the opportunity to see what the original languages have to say. Middleton also interacts with reputable scholars, and engages with background material, both the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) context and the Second Temple period.

Some issues which the author brings forth have been dealt with before by other scholars. For instance, the traditional assumption that the Bible teaches an ethereal heaven as the final destination of our immortal souls has been denounced as Greek and extra-biblical by many. In recent years, this has been pointed out in academic circles, perhaps most notably, through the works of N. T. Wright (*The Resurrection of the Son of God* [2003] and *Surprised by Hope* [2008]). However, Middleton reworks this argument from a narrative perspective looking at the Bible story as a whole. This greatly enhances the clarity of the issue for readers. I especially appreciate his invitation to compare the original creation in Genesis with the final destination in Revelation. The

picture that emerges in such a storyline immediately challenges the traditional assumption and suggests a more holistic scenario for salvation.

In many ways, Middleton's study intersects with the issue of theodicy. For example, he presents a positive view of judgment and of the Second Coming, which are often negatively perceived by many Christians. Further, in affirming the reversal of evil and death, and in fleshing out a material and this-worldly redemption, the author not only emphasizes the goodness of creation, he also highlights the goodness of the Creator-Redeemer God. This feature is also noted when he contrasts the character of the biblical God with that of ANE gods (51) or when he explains that without bodily resurrection the Creator's purposes cannot be complete (154), i.e., a reversal of the present evil state of affairs is needed for the purposes of a good Creator to come true. Finally, his positive view of God seems to lead him to conclude the wicked will eventually go through annihilation instead of eternal torment (207).

Middleton articulates his arguments persuasively and presents a coherent picture of the Bible story. I would only disagree with him in issues that are too minor to mention here. However, there is one he was not able to successfully explain: Luke 23:43. In this text, the author could not harmonize the temporal marker "today" with Jesus's resurrection on the third day and later ascension. He does make several accurate and insightful remarks in his discussion of the text, however he was not able to remain consistent to his plan there. Not finding a solution to the tension, and perhaps in exhaustion, Middleton withdraws from the discussion, saying "in the end" this point "does not matter" (236). I can understand his frustration, but hope that future scholarship might help to resolve this difficulty.

New Heavens and a New Earth is a pleasant read which has a healthy approach to biblical eschatology. Middleton's concern for holistic salvation can positively impact the way people live today. His challenge to end sociological dichotomy promotes reconciliation among people and appreciation for those who are different from us. But Middleton's most significant contribution is his broad view of the canonical story, which, applied to the issues of the bodily resurrection of humans and the restoration of the earth, led to a more convincing scenario than what previous studies had shown. Such an approach will help readers from all traditions to gain fresh perspectives on the biblical text. The book will be valuable to biblical scholars, theologians, pastors, and educated lay members who are interested in the biblical metanarrative, eschatology, and holistic living. I hope it enjoys a wide readership.

Berrien Springs, Michigan

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OakTree Software, Inc. Accordance® 10 for Windows: Original Language Collection. Altamonte Springs, FL. \$299.99.

Accordance Bible software was first released in 1994, marking 22 years of serving biblical scholars, pastors, and laypersons. Its history actually goes back to 1988 with the release of The PerfectWord, bought by Zondervan and renamed MacBible in 1989. Despite the major developments that have taken