

Review of Goldsworthy's *Gospel and Kingdom*

Goldsworthy attended Union Theological Seminary for his ThM and PhD degrees. This seminary is affiliated with the Presbyterian USA church, a liberal denomination known recently for poor theology and even poorer application of theology. However, the website *Monergism.com*, associated with the more reformed theology of the Presbyterian Church in America, advocates Goldsworthy's writings, suggesting they consider these writings to be in agreement within the Reformed tradition on at least the major doctrines.

I read and have reviewed here the first 122 pages of *Gospel and Kingdom*. The first chapters of this book are a delight, echoing my own sentiments and ideas so closely that I could wish I had written them. I will interact with a couple of things from these opening chapters that I think bear elaboration or correction, but overall I would love for my students to consider most of his thoughts in these opening chapters.

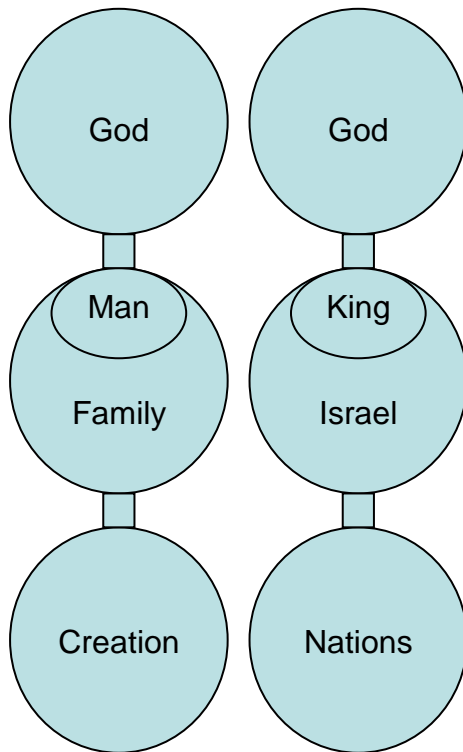
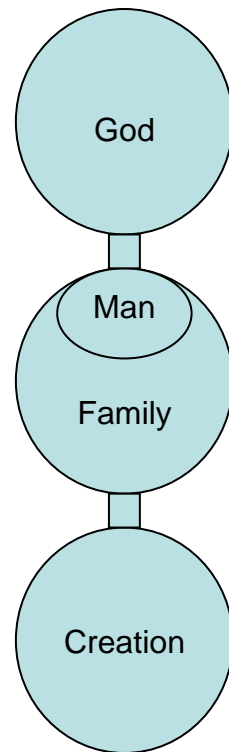
He says the New Testament provides an authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament [20], and earlier noted how important understanding the Old Testament is for understanding the thought in the New Testament [18-19]. In reality, both statements are true: the Old Testament was the basis for the New Testament faith and often the foundation for the ideas written about in the New Testament [so much so that the authors often quote from the Old Testament to make their point]; but, based on the concept of progressive revelation, the New Testament can help enlighten us as to the significance and meaning of the Old Testament as God further revealed his will in Christ and those who wrote about Christ. Classical Dispensationalism generally underemphasizes the role of the New Testament in shedding further light into the Old Testament, but Covenant Theology generally underemphasizes the role of the literal Old Testament as the basis for understanding the New Testament. In both camps, there are scholars moving toward a middle ground of recognizing the dependence of both testaments on each other [Progressive Dispensationalism and New Covenant Theology].

He makes a great point about the distinction of the content of the gospel and saving faith against the work of God in believers now which often is represented as the gospel or saving faith [20]. As he notes, it is important to understand the historicity of the Old Testament and the biblical gospels, and that what we are accepting in faith is how God delivered through Christ about two-thousand years ago. It is acceptance of the objective truth of the gospel that leads to the subjective perception of God at work in us [21].

He points out that we must be careful in drawing lessons from historical narrative, because many of the characters hold distinct offices in God's paradigm, and so not all that happens to them, through them, or for them in the sense of God's interaction necessarily applies to the average believer in that dispensation or ours [28]. In his illustration of David and Goliath [27-28], one thing he neglects to mention is that David was acting in faith on God's revelation, not just acting in blind faith: he knew of God's promises in the Mosaic Covenant, which applied to him as a part of Israel under the Law, but do not apply to us today. The lesson of the story is not that we should trust God will help us conquer giants, but that we should live by God's Word, acting on the promises

and commands of Scripture. Another small point of contention with another illustration is that he sees the downfall of the united kingdom of Israel as due to Solomon being overly ambitious and supportive of unwise policies, which led to an environment ripe for rebellion [39]. I think the downfall is explained in scripture as being due to David and Solomon's sin.

The first sign of trouble appears in the fourth chapter, where he suggests we see the Old Testament as a history of redemption [46; a Covenant Theology perspective]. Redemption is an important biblical concept, and it is true that God has been redeeming [delivering] man since the Fall, but redemption is not the only theme that ties together the Old Testament or the Bible as a whole. For example, an equally important concept – and one that predates redemption in the biblical history – is that of representation. God established man on Earth to represent him, to rule in his name. Man was to be the image of God, reflecting God's character as he ruled for God. Redemption is only necessary because man tainted this image such that it no longer reflects God's character, making man an inadequate representative of God on Earth. Christ not only redeemed lost people, he also came as the one true image of God the Father, as the unique God-man, the only man who could accurately reflect God's image and thus truly represent God the Father justly as King on Earth. Christ fulfills this role for man, which was developed from the creation of man through the covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham-



Isaac-Jacob, Moses, and David-Solomon. I would argue this is the more dominant theme, because without God's desire for and command of representation, there was no need for redemption, and without Christ's fulfillment of representation, there was not means to redemption.

He sees the Abrahamic Covenant as one of grace, with God promising a people from Abraham's descendents, a land, and a relationship with God [53]. But the Abrahamic Covenant is more than this: it is also a promise of direct blessing, protection, fame, and – most significantly – a blessing through this people to the rest of the world. That last part is where Christ comes in, of course. What is most significant is that this is a reiteration of the original intention of representation. Just as God created mankind to represent God to the rest of creation, now God chose Abraham's people to

represent God to the rest of humanity. This is important for understanding Psalms 2 and 110, which are the basis for the New Testament understanding of Christ's position as

king, as the true image of God the Father, and thus as the replacement for Adam as the representative for God the Father here on Earth. Seen this way, it is possible to understand that the promises in the Abrahamic Covenant are truly to the Jews as descendents of Abraham, but the rest of us are blessed through the promise of blessing through the Jews, which is Christ. It is not that the promises are transferred to us today as a replacement of the Jews as God's people [53], but rather that God blesses us today through Christ, which was part of the original, literal, promise.

He also sees the Abrahamic Covenant as the beginning of the revelation of God's kingdom [55], but he does not realize that with regard to his theme of redemption it is a continuation of the revelation of deliverance that was begun with Genesis 3.15; and with regard to representation it is a continuation of the revelation begun with Genesis 1.27.

He uses his understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant as God's people in God's place under God's rule [54] as the basis of his theological construct, which he later uses as the basis to argue that the church replaces Israel. But this understanding itself is flawed, in that it does not incorporate all of the Abrahamic Covenant, ignores the most salient aspect of it in representation [the people are not just God's subjects, they are God's representatives!], and thus imposes an artificial interpretation on the church.

He argues that the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were fulfilled in the kingdoms of David and Solomon [54], but that cannot be so if the promise includes the blessing to the rest of the world through Christ. It is ironic that such a Christ-centric theologian as he is would miss that fact. Also, while it is true that David and even more so Solomon had the land, nation, direct blessings, fame, and protection from God, they did not live up to their role of representation. David was a man after God's own heart, and Solomon was at one point the wisest – i.e. the one most following God's revelation – but in the end they both sinned so egregiously that it brought down the kingdom altogether. Only in Christ do we get true and perfect representation, and only when Christ is on the throne will we see the other blessings come to full fruition in a permanent and world-wide manner on the New Earth.

Another problem he has – and this almost seems like theological slight of hand – is he takes all the revelation about God's deliverance [or redemption] of man and man's representation of God and labels it revelation about “kingdom” [56-57]. While that step alone is fair enough, when he then turns away from these twin themes to focus on the use of the term “kingdom” in scripture, he subtly is misdirecting the reader away from the original themes. Even if we allow that the Bible was all about setting up a kingdom, it would not be limited to the deliverance of man to be God's subjects, but also encompass the requirement of representation and the deliverance through the one man who can truly represent God. Even his own chart [56] shows the kingdom is not consummated until Christ returns, but this chart has another problem: in trying to create a consistent filter for each stage of biblical history, he declared the deliverances of Noah in the ark and of the nation under Moses in the Exodus, along with the prophetic promises about the Messiah during the kingdom period, to be redemptive acts consistent with Christ's atoning death. God did deliver Noah and Moses, and indeed also many others along the

way, and these are referred to in scripture as redemptive in the sense that God released them from some obligation and delivered them from their bondage, but Jesus' death alone was redemptive from sin, death, and Hell. Note also it is Christ's death that is redemptive or atoning, not his life or resurrection [56]. Jesus' life and resurrection are important, but it was in his death that he took on the burden of our penalties for sin.

His confusing equating of salvation and kingdom appears again later [97], when he sees salvation as the same goal as establishing the kingdom, but I say God's original intent for man – of representation – was essentially to set up God's kingdom, and this requires salvation after the fall of Genesis 3. Covenant theologians often see redemption as the whole point of God's actions, but that is actually part of God's goal for man to represent him by ruling in the kingdom.

He continues to confuse terms when discussing Abraham's faith, saying Abraham had to receive the kingdom of God by faith alone [68]. The meaning of his statement is made clear in a footnote that refers to Paul's writing in Romans, that Abraham was justified by faith. Thus, he is now equating salvation and justification with "kingdom," which is terribly incorrect. He also misses the point of the Melchizedek episode, summarizing the theme as Abraham's contentment "to forego the opportunity to enrich himself in this land until the land is his" [69]. The point of the scene is not so humanistic [in fact, the land was already his in God's declaration!], but rather that even Abraham needed mediation. As the author of Hebrews makes clear, this episode points to Christ's eventual role as High Priest and mediator before God on our behalf; it is salvation themed, in fact.

Again, this problem arises when he equates God's physical deliverance of his people in the Old Testament with the gospel [80]. While the gospel is a deliverance, not all deliverance is salvation, and thus not all deliverance is part of the gospel. The exodus, for example, might have typological implications that point to Christ, but it was a physical deliverance, not an act of spiritual salvation as he attests [80-81]. In his footnote on that page, he begins well by noting that the gospel is the truth of what God historically did in Christ [80; note, he again makes the mistake of including the life of Christ, not just his death], but then he says, "So in the Old Testament the 'gospel' is the declaration of what God did 'out there' and 'back there' at a fixed place and time in history." No! This is amazing coming from a self-proclaimed Christ-centric theologian. No, the gospel in the Old Testament is God's promise of what he will do at a fixed place and time in future history, what he will do in Christ's death! This promise begins with Genesis 3.15, is developed in other passages such as the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants, and in the messianic prophecies, and comes to fruition in Christ, to be explained in the New Testament books. He continues this misunderstanding, saying the acts of the Judges were "mini-salvations" [82], in which God not only provides physical deliverance but also reestablishes the people in their "inheritance." It would be easy to infer from this that the people were losing their salvation in their times of sin and thus needed re-saving, a grave theological error. Again, he calls David's defeat of Goliath a "saving event" [86], once more confusing physical deliverance with spiritual, confusing typological significance with salvific equality.

The worst example of this might be when discussing the prophets and the experience of the nation of Israel [92-93; I was so upset by what he wrote there, that I wrote “yikes!” in my notes]. He again sees Israel’s “salvation” as based on God’s grace in saving the people out of Egypt, but then says the law binds them to God so those who refuse to live by the law are removed from the land. He describes this as a “conditional nature of blessing” [93]. It is true that the Mosaic Covenant had conditional promises in it, and that some of the New Covenant promises as expressed in the New Testament are conditional, but salvation is never conditional as he seems to imply [see his footnote too]. Not only was the exodus not a salvation in the same sense as Jesus’ death on the cross, his analysis erroneously suggests the Israelites’ salvation was based on something other than believing in the covenant promises of the coming deliverer in Jesus. Further, in contrast to what he implies [93], God puts no condition of works on the believer with regard to salvation! Good works are a fruit of sanctification, which will follow salvation, and so are an expectation of God for all believers, but they do not make or break one’s salvation, and with Christ as our mediator we can never be thrown out of God’s people for our sins. Even when Israel sinned and so was exiled, this was not a loss of salvation, just the loss of a covenant blessing: they were still under the covenant, just not enjoying it to the fullest extent possible. The same is true for the believer today who sins grievously: he/she is still under the New Covenant – and still saved! – but will suffer consequences for the sin that reduce the full enjoyment of the covenant.

Later, he turns his argument around and says Jesus’ focus on preaching the kingdom must really mean the gospel, that the gospel must fulfill the Old Testament hope of the coming of the Kingdom of God [108]. Christ will fulfill the Old Testament hope of kingdom, but this is not the gospel. The gospel is an act of atonement, whereas the kingdom is an act of representation. There must be atonement for there to be representation, but they are not the same thing. Also, Jesus will reign as king, setting up his kingdom at the second advent, and this is not the same thing as the gospel. Christ will literally fulfill these promises of God. It is sadly amusing that he admits to some literalness in prophetic fulfillment, but just not the parts that inconveniently don’t agree with his theology [110 footnote]. Later, he said the gospel is equated with the New Covenant [116], but that seems to contradict what he said earlier about the gospel being what Christ has done at the cross instead of what he is doing in believers today [20]. The gospel is the good news of the atonement, of our justification, which Christ accomplished on the cross; the New Covenant requires the gospel truth for its fruition, but otherwise is largely about the process after salvation.

While it is true that judgment of man’s sin in general and judgment of Israel as a nation for its sins is related, he is wrong to say they are equated [96]. Chastisement by exile is not the same as eternal condemnation. Therefore, deliverance from exile is not the same as deliverance to eternal salvation. The Jews and their prophets saw the relationship between physical deliverance and spiritual deliverance as both were expected in the Messiah, but that does not mean they confused the two issues [96].

Once he has established his motif of God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule, he then uses that to go back and reinterpret the same Old Testament scriptures [60ff].

Again, he wholly leaves out how God's desire for representation plays in these situations, portraying God's people merely as subjects under God's rule. In fact, the requirement for representation in these scenarios is as important for them pointing to Christ as the things he includes. His lack of interest in representation creates an omission in his discussion of how the Gentiles would be blessed [68], as he does not see that not only should the nations be blessed through Israel because of Christ, but also because of Israel's representation of God as his people. Salvation was available to Gentiles even then, through grace inspired faith just like today, and there are biblical examples such as Ruth. I believe his prior assumptions and conclusions again misled him in interpreting the exile to Egypt [70-71], about which he assumed the people of Israel played no part in causing their suffering. Perhaps the famine and exile was due to Jacob's family's failure to represent God, especially in their selling of Joseph into slavery.

I also take exception with his interpretation of Paul's discussion of the Mosaic Law. Paul did not merely criticize the perverted use of the Law [74], but also reliance on the Law in the New Covenant era. Paul's point is that there is no experiential righteousness to be gained from following the Law in this dispensation [or time period], because there is a new covenant which we are under, and which Christ inaugurated. Again, in talking about the establishment of a king, he said that kingship was "a permitted possibility" by Deuteronomy 17.14-20 [84]. Actually, this passage is in the form of a command about what they are to do when this situation arises. Kingship is not a permitted possibility in this passage, it is an inevitability, and so God is laying down the guidelines.

When assessing David, he says, "Indeed if it were not for the prophetic assessments of David made after his death, in which the ideals of God's rule through human kingship are stressed, we might wonder at times if David is much of an improvement upon Saul [87]. This misses the point of the book of 1 Samuel. David sinned in the flesh as much as Saul, but David had a heart after God while Saul was willfully sinning, willfully asserting autonomy from God's will. More importantly, he misses the point of the Davidic Covenant [88]. David's son is not the true Israel in this covenant, it is not referring to Christ, but rather it refers to Solomon [he makes this mistake again on 112], and the word "son" means the true representative of God, God's image [see three circles for role of king]. Solomon at the beginning of his reign came as close as any other man other than Jesus at representing God well. About Solomon's wisdom, he says it was such that could be compared with that of the pagans [89], implying it was mere human wisdom, but in biblical context, wisdom is acting on God's revelation, and that is exactly what Solomon did at the beginning of his reign. But the emphasis of the Davidic Covenant is that God promises to establish David's and Solomon's kingdoms forever, in that Jesus will come from their lineage and thus be the rightful heir to the throne of Israel. He does not seem to notice that the Davidic Covenant is an extension through progressive revelation of the Abrahamic Covenant [88].

In discussing prophets, he defines them as essentially those called to communicate revelation to men [92], but actually [as he draws out a little on the same page], most of what the prophets said referred back to the covenants, prior revelation. What God revealed through the prophets was his intention to uphold these covenants and his

exhortation that the people do likewise. Thus, what the prophets really revealed was how dedicated and focused God is on his covenants. He sees the post-exilic prophets as explaining why the return from exile failed to produce the kingdom, with the cause being sin [98]. I think he is missing the point: their ultimate sin is their failure to represent God to the nations as specified under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. The point of these scriptures is to provide the context for Jesus' first advent, to explain the self-orientation of even the most religious of the land when Jesus arrives. In Jesus, we not only have the deliverer for salvation from sin, but also the ultimate Davidic King who will finally represent God the Father well [beginning in the first advent], and thus establish his rule [in the second advent]. In his discussion of the "kingdom pattern in prophecy" [99], he fails to mention that they prophesied that the New Covenant would replace the Mosaic Covenant! Actually, he gets this outright wrong as he continues his discussion by saying the Mosaic Covenant is to be renewed in the New Covenant [100-101; 116-117]. The Mosaic Law is not necessary in the New Covenant, because we become the image of God with our rebirth and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. If the Mosaic law is still in force then how do you explain the arguments of the Jerusalem Council in Acts or the arguments of Paul in Galatians or Philippians?

We do have a New Covenant today, and even Gentiles are allowed the blessings of it as adopted sons, grafted onto the vine. That does not mean what he says, that we are a new race with Christ as the head [116]. Rather, we are becoming what we always were intended to be: people reflecting God's image, representing him by representing our king who truly can be the image of God, Jesus Christ. However, it is wrong to assert that at the cross or resurrection all the prophecies were fulfilled [117]; rather, Christ is anointed as king and proven worthy to be king, but he is not yet on his throne reigning [recall the lessons of Psalms 2 & 110]. It is true as he says that the first advent resolved the question of salvation from sin, completed the action needed for the gospel [119], but that does not negate the fact that there is more to God's plan than this! All along, there has been in scripture God's desire for a representative kingdom, even before there was a need for salvation, and so it is foolish to think this is now not important because of the cross. The work of the cross is done, yes, but God is continually at work in the world today and will continue until he completes the setting up of his kingdom and representative rule under Christ, fulfilling all the prophecies [not just some].

In summary, while he espouses some admirable philosophy about seeing prevalent themes, valuing the historicity of the Old Testament, and the like, I think his theological preconceptions severely taint his hermeneutical investigations, such that his conclusions are not only in error but also somewhat dangerous in their implications, and his methods of persuasion are practically underhanded at times [though I am willing to believe this is self-deception, not intentional deception of the reader].