

N.T. Wright and Eschatology

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I'd like to take a moment to say a few things about N.T. Wright and eschatology. Concerning the issues of supercessionism (aka., replacement theology), the millennium (he is an amillennialist), and preterism (Wright fundamentally rejects the notion of a future restored Jewish kingdom), N.T. Wright is not only wrong, his perspective is an abomination. And to be honest, it truly grieves me that he is not challenged more by theological conservatives.

N.T. Wright and His Magical Metaphors

According to Wright, all of the biblical descriptions of the coming Kingdom of God as a restored Jewish Kingdom are simply metaphors. Wright's use of "metaphor" to justify his subversion and abrogation of the promises of God throughout the Scriptures is a clear violation of responsible hermeneutics, it is a perversion of the very definition of metaphor, and is deeply circular in its reasoning.

A metaphor by definition describes one thing by using something else that is otherwise generally different. One might say for instance, that "all the world is a stage." One would not however conclude from the use of such a metaphor that the world was never actually the world at all, but was rather always a stage. To do so would be to use circular reasoning, essentially reversing the metaphor itself. We do not take the stage, which is the subject of the metaphor, and impose it back onto the original object itself. Yet when Wright radically "redefines" and "subverts" (his words) Jewish messianic hope, which itself is simply the substance of the very promises of God, this is precisely what he is doing. In fact, the covenant promises of God are not even metaphors at all, nor were they ever intended to be. The promised land is not a metaphor. The very specific boundaries of the promised land as defined by God Himself are not metaphors. The "throne of David" is not a metaphor. The title (which Jesus personally applied to Himself) "The

King of the Jews” is not a metaphor! Ezekiel chapters 40-48 do not comprise one enormous metaphor. To assert such is to pervert the very words of God. The same could be said of several other biblical subjects that Wright distorts. Consider for example Wright’s perspective concerning the actual return of Jesus.

As Jesus ascended to heaven, the Scriptures state that, “He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). But as the disciples were staring at the sky, two angels interrupted and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). It would be difficult to be more direct. In the same way that they had just watched Jesus go up into the sky and into the clouds, He is going to come back again in like manner. The angels of course were not speaking in metaphors, they were simply making a very matter of fact statement. Now hear the condescending tone and belittling words of Wright toward any who would actually believe the words of the angels. Wright speaks of:

“...the never-ending speculation about future would-be ‘apocalyptic’ figures, such as the supposed ‘heavenly son of man’ who would ‘come’ – i.e. ‘return,’ downwards to earth, on a literal cloud. This monstrosity, much beloved (though for different reasons) by both fundamentalists and would-be ‘critical’ scholars, can be left behind, appropriately enough, in the center of his mythological maze...”

Thus according to Wright, those who believe that Jesus is actually going to return from heaven, believe in a “monstrosity” and are lost in a “mythological maze.” Elsewhere, Wright says, “nobody supposes that [Paul] imagined [Jesus] would make his appearance flying downward on a cloud.” Elsewhere yet again, Wright claims that after listening to Jesus’ Olivet Discourse, the disciples had:

“...no reason, either in their own background or in a single thing that Jesus had said up to then at that point, for it even to occur to them that the true story of the world, or of Israel, or of Jesus himself, might include either the end of the space-time universe, or Jesus or anyone else floating down to earth on a cloud.”

And finally:

“[N]o interpreter ought to imagine that the ‘Son of Man’ can be interpreted ‘literally’ as a human figure floating on a cloud. The image speaks clearly, to anyone with ears attuned to the first century, of the vindication of the true Israel over her enemies.”

Thus, according to Wright, the words of the angels who said that Jesus will return in the clouds from the sky should not be taken literally. Wright interprets all of the “Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven” texts to refer to Jesus judgment against Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Essentially an invisible return to vindicate “true Israel” (the Church) against the fake Israel, (the actual Jewish nation). Again, to think otherwise is to embrace a “monstrosity” and a “myth.” From a Pauline Jewish perspective, Wright’s words here are an abomination.

When I consider the Islamic perspective concerning the return of Jesus, he is said to return to “break the cross” and abolish the Jizyah tax (the option of subjected Christians to pay a tax and live as subjected peoples). Elsewhere within Islamic apocalyptic prophecy, the Muslim Jesus will return to kill the Dajjal, false Jewish King. In essence, according to the Islamic narrative, Jesus returns to eliminate Christianity and Judaism. Its hard to describe how perverted this is. Yet when we consider Wright’s perspective on the return of Jesus, it is quite similar in its perversion. According to Wright, the various passages which speak of the son of man coming on the clouds actually refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and Israel in 70 A.D. According to Wright:

“It is from Jerusalem that the true Israel must now flee, lest they partake in her destruction. It is Jerusalem whose destruction will be the sign that the God whom Jesus has proclaimed is now indeed manifestly the king of the whole earth. According to Jesus, therefore, the real referent of Daniel 7 is the destruction of Jerusalem: the Son of Man will be vindicated but the fourth beast (Jerusalem) will be destroyed.”

Both Wright’s perspective and the Muslim perspective of the return of Jesus, “Our Blessed Hope,” are simply perverted supercessionist fantasies having no connection to actual Biblical hope whatsoever.

Perhaps it is due to sheer intimidation, perhaps it is out of general ignorance, but for some reason, rarely is Wright called out either for his arrogant and condescending demeanor towards those who embrace an orthodox eschatology, or for his fundamental distortion of the biblical testimony on these foundational and crucial matters. My appeal here, for whatever it is worth, is for all those who consider themselves to be genuine students of the Scriptures, who value humility, who value orthodoxy, to reject the admittedly “subversive” hermeneutic of N.T Wright, specifically as it pertains to the promises of God, the people of God, the Kingdom of God, and our mutual Blessed Hope. If God’s faithfulness is not fulfilled literally, then it is not faithfulness. There is no such thing as metaphorical faithfulness.