

Book Review: *The Restoration of God's Dwelling and Kingdom: A Biblical Theology*

Nyende, Peter. 2023. *The Restoration of God's Dwelling and Kingdom: A Biblical Theology*. Carlisle: Langham Publishing. xvi, 272 pp. ISBN: 978-1-839-73735-0. Approx. 425.58 ZAR (23.58 USD). Paperback.

Peter Nyende is an Associate Professor in Biblical Studies at the School of Divinity at Uganda Christian University. In *The Restoration of God's Dwelling and Kingdom*, he presents an intriguing and comprehensive biblical theology. In the preface, Nyende recounts the genesis of this work, delayed by about 15 years. It originated in his inaugural biblical theology lecture in 2006 at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) (pp. xiii–xiv). The positive reception and encouragement from students to make the course's content accessible to a wider audience culminated in Nyende's promise of a corresponding publication, which became a reality after many years.

In the introductory section, Nyende elucidates important methodological and hermeneutical foundations of his argumentation. According to Nyende, since the introduction of academic Bible studies, those working in biblical-theological studies have operated under the assumption "that biblical literature constitutes a single cohesive book" (p. 1), and they have formulated their message based on this fundamental

conviction. Nyende's primary concern is to trace the intertextual and theological connections between various books, as well as between the Old and New Testaments, under the overarching motif of "Restoration of God's Dwelling and Kingdom" (p. 2), and to construct a coherent biblical narrative. This biblical theology aims to promote knowledge and understanding of the entire Bible by providing an overview of its content as a whole, rather than just a part of it. This is done by establishing a consistent hermeneutical framework and standpoint through which individual parts of the Bible can be illuminated. In contrast to the regular practice of specializing in small, disconnected portions of the Bible, Nyende emphasizes the importance of grasping a comprehensive view of the Bible's content (pp. 3–4).

His methodological approach can be characterized as canonical, symbolic, literary, and typological (pp. 5–11). Canonical, as Nyende reads the canon of the Bible in its current form as a uniquely cohesive book. Symbolic, due to the assumption that the content of biblical texts communicates deeper meaning indirectly. Literary, because the primary focus is on the immediate literary context of the Bible, with secondary scholarly literature sparingly used in a minimalist approach. Finally, typological, meaning that all significant elements of biblical history in the Old Testament, such as "Israel, the Davidic kings, the land, Jerusalem, the temple," are related to fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Nyende commences with the Genesis creation narrative, where God crafted the world as a dwelling for humanity and as part of his kingdom, jeopardized by Adam and Eve's disobedience (Chapter 2). This serves as the starting point of a salvation-historical restoration process, to be undertaken through the calling of Abraham and the promise of descendants, land, kings, and blessings for all nations. By examining the Pentateuch, Psalms, and related Old Testament texts, Nyende traces

God's plan to restore His dwelling and kingdom in the world through the appointment of Israel, based on its Abrahamic lineage, with Israel as God's people living according to His laws in the promised land (Chapter 3). Subsequent chapters further focus on God's intended purpose to restore the kingdom through the Davidic dynasty and its failure to rule in justice and righteousness, leading to exile from the promised land (Chapters 4 and 5). However, the destruction of Israel was not the end of the story. Nyende describes God's gracious allowance of Israel's return from exile and the restoration of the temple in Jerusalem as God's dwelling place (Chapter 6). This period initiates a paradigm shift in Israel's worldview regarding the spiritual restoration of God's kingdom and lays the groundwork for the final three chapters (Chapters 7–9), where Nyende depicts the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom in Jesus Christ, the absolute pinnacle in the New Testament and the entire biblical narrative.

Nyende's argument regarding the restoration of God's kingdom and dwelling is expressed in two interconnected sections. In the first part of the study (Chapters 1–6), Nyende takes a concrete and earthly approach, examining the narrative from Abraham onward within the geographical, socio-economic, and political context of Israel. The rebellion of Adam and Eve disrupted God's dwelling with humanity, but through Abraham's call and Israel's covenant as royal priests, God's kingdom was to be restored. However, Israel's disobedience led to their downfall and exile. God's promise of restoration hinted at a future, fail-proof establishment of Israel and the Davidic kingdom under a prophesied Davidic king, ensuring blessings and the expansion of God's kingdom.

In the second part (Chapters 7–9), Nyende shifts to a spiritual perspective, interpreting the fulfillment of God's promises through Jesus Christ. The Davidic kingship is restored in Jesus, who reigns from heaven, and the kingdom of God transcends territorial boundaries to become a

spiritual reality. Jesus's victory over spiritual enemies, rather than earthly foes, establishes God's kingdom. The new Israel is formed by believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who share Abraham's faith, making them God's special possession and royal priesthood. The restoration of God's dwelling occurs through believers as the temple of God, and the heavenly New Jerusalem signifies God's ultimate dwelling with humanity. The biblical narrative's spiritual continuation in the New Testament reaffirms and transcends the historical realities of the Old Testament, demonstrating a typological relationship between them. This holistic understanding anchors the Christian faith and experience in the historical realities of Israel, urging a deeper engagement with biblical theology to fully grasp the integrated narrative of God's kingdom and dwelling.

This is an intriguing biblically canonical and literary-focused approach, offering a comprehensive narrative of biblical history under the key motif of dwelling and kingdom. Nyende's ability to delineate the overarching theme of the biblical narrative through theological and intertextual connections, coupled with its particular pedagogical value, is commendable.

My central criticisms of Nyende's approach concern his methodological and hermeneutical assumptions, which, require much more reflection and elucidation. It is well known that the most important principle of biblical exegesis is to determine the originally intended meaning of biblical texts within their historical-cultural contexts. Nyende's critique of the academically prevalent tendency to narrowly focus on individual parts of the Bible is valid. However, his own minimalist approach, keeping scholarly sources at a minimum and concentrating on biblical literary context (p. 6), diminishes the historical-cultural dimension without fully considering its consequence.: What are the possible ramifications of such an approach? How does he

propose to determine the relationship between the historical, literary, and theological dimensions of biblical texts? Could it be that through a biblically canonical, symbolically typological approach, an overarching message is arbitrarily imposed on all passages, without adequately considering the original historical-cultural context? To what extent do we allow for ignorance and ambiguity in our engagement with the Bible, which cannot be captured by a constructed overarching narrative?

My second critique pertains to the second core step of the hermeneutical process—the mediation of the biblical message in the current, location-specific context. Right from the introduction, Nyende makes a vague and generalized assertion that African Christianity is seldom guided by the Bible but rather by indigenous African beliefs (p. 6). Nyende seems to assume that some African Christians have little genuine biblical knowledge but rather hold syncretistic beliefs, yet he does not elaborate on this accusation. He would do well to explain more specifically where traditional African beliefs clash with the biblical worldview. How might the Bible be effectively interpreted from an African perspective within a framework of contextualization hermeneutics? As an Asian living in Europe, I find Nyende’s central motif, “The Restoration of God’s Dwelling and Kingdom,” particularly intriguing. Could this selection, which Nyende does not specifically justify, also have a cultural bias? these methodological and hermeneutical assumptions of the approach need to be discussed further.

Overall, this biblical-theological textbook, which presents the entire biblical narrative under the motif of “The Restoration of God’s Dwelling and Kingdom,” offers an interesting and cohesive approach to biblical theology. As a valuable resource—it can greatly enrich scholars, pastors, and laypeople alike. The unresolved methodological and hermeneutical issues provide an opportunity for reflection and discussion that should be

considered while reading the book and pursued further in future research endeavors.

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