



# THE CITY OF GOD

By

Mark McGee



The City of God and the Goal of Creation (Crossway, 2018) by T. Desmond Alexander is part of a series of books about biblical theology. The editors of the series explained both the purpose and challenge –

“... one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity. This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of Short Studies in Biblical Theology is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.” Series Preface, Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt, p 11

T. Desmond Alexander is a Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Union Theological College in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Prior to that appointment he was Director of Christian Training for the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and lectured for 18 years in Semitic Studies at the Queen's University in Belfast. He has held the position of Chairman of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research since 2009.

Dr. Alexander wrote this about his purpose for writing *The City of God* –

“This book is designed to provide a succinct overview of the biblical teaching on the concept of the city of God. The subject spans both Testaments and intersects with a significant number of other important topics, beginning with the garden of Eden in Genesis and coming to ultimate fulfillment in New Jerusalem.” Preface, p 13

He begins with an insightful view of the similarities between the Garden of Eden and later Israelite sanctuaries (tabernacle and temple) and the protective roles of Adam in the Garden and Levites in the holy sanctuaries. He also points to the importance of the Tree of Life that appear in both the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem.

“These parallels between the garden of Eden and later Israelite sanctuaries are hardly coincidental. Two possible interpretations may explain this. Either Eden is a protosanctuary, and other sanctuaries are modeled upon it, or each later sanctuary is a restored garden of Eden. If this latter option is adopted, the question arises, why replicate the garden of Eden? The most likely answer is that Eden recalls a time when humanity enjoyed an especially close relationship with God in an idyllic environment. Later sanctuaries replicate something of this experience as people come to the place where God dwells on earth. As a divine residence, the sanctuary enables God to live in close proximity to people.” Introduction, p 19

God's desire to live "with" His people will be ultimately realized in the New Jerusalem –

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:1-5

As Dr. Alexander pointed out in his book, there is another way to look at this connection –

“The relationship between the garden of Eden and later sanctuaries may be approached from another direction. The Israelite tabernacle, and later the Jerusalem temple,

was considered to be a microcosm or model of the earth. In this capacity it provided a visual illustration, anticipating God's glorious presence filling the whole world. This expectation comes to fulfillment in New Jerusalem. As Revelation 21 reveals, New Jerusalem has no temple building, 'for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb' (Rev. 21:22). Viewed from the perspective of God's presence filling the whole earth, the garden of Eden represents the first stage toward the creation of New Jerusalem." Introduction, p 20

Dr. Alexander moves masterfully through the story of God and His people as Adam and Eve disobey Him and their descendant becomes the builder of the first of many cities that glorify humanity rather than the God who created them.

The first chapter of *The City of God* looks at the idea of these godless cities, beginning with Babel.

"This brief episode describes how humans set about building a city with a tower that will reach up to the heavens. They do this intentionally so that they will not be

dispersed throughout the whole earth. is reverses the divine plan, for God is interested in making the whole earth his residence by filling it with holy people. In marked contrast, the people of Babel attempt to access heaven and avoid populating the earth. Babel epitomizes the antithesis of what God desires ... At the outset, Babel has to be viewed as the prototypical Godless city. In Babel we see people uniting as one to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reaches up to heaven itself. Their ambition is clearly motivated by pride in their ability to achieve great things. While in Genesis 3 Adam and Eve aspired to become like God, the inhabitants of Babel now seek to establish themselves as supreme not only on earth but in heaven as well. With incredible arrogance they attempt to build a tower that will enable them to take control of heaven itself. The building of Babel typifies two different characteristics of humanity: (a) the capacity of people to achieve great things; (b) the arrogance of those who have turned away from God.” Chapter One, p 25



The City of God is an extraordinary read that would be helpful for every Christian to consider. Dr. Alexander tells the story of God and His people in a wonderfully engaging manner that makes for easy reading and great insight. I highly recommend the book.

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## Publisher's Description

“At the very heart of God’s plan for the world stands an extraordinary city. Beginning with the garden of Eden in Genesis and ending with the New Jerusalem in Revelation, the biblical story reveals how God has been working throughout history to establish a city filled with his glorious presence. Tracing the development of the theme of city in both testaments, T. Desmond Alexander draws on his experience as a biblical scholar to show us God’s purpose throughout Scripture to dwell with his redeemed people in a future extraordinary city on a transformed earth.”

[The City of God and the Goal of Creation](#) (Crossway, 2018, 192 pages)

[We received an electronic review copy from Crossway]

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